

Keys to Contact

(By Felix Addeo, Bd. 33 NJ)

Basketball is a contact sport. Legal contact is incidental and should be ignored; illegal contact is a foul and must be called. To understand contact and its impact on the game, the official must become familiar with the “Tower Philosophy.” Oswald Tower was a member of the basketball rules committee for 50 years. The four major points of his philosophy are:

- The mere fact that contact occurs does not constitute a foul.
- Contact which does not hinder the movement of the opponent from participating in normal defensive or offensive movements should be considered incidental.
- It is the purpose of the rules to penalize a player who by reason of an illegal act has placed an opponent at a disadvantage.
- It is not the intent that the rules shall be interpreted literally rather they should be applied in relation of the effect that the action of the players has upon their opponents.

Accordingly, a good official must not only know the rules and mechanics but must have an understanding of the spirit and intent of the rules before trying to apply them. A good official understands the concept of advantage/disadvantage when making any ruling regarding contact.

Employing this philosophy is no excuse for allowing an all-out rumble on the floor. It serves as guidelines for making calls that require good judgment. Contact occurs in the following situations:

Guarding

Guarding is the act of legally placing the body in the path of an offensive opponent. No minimum distance is required but the maximum distance is 6 feet when closely guarded. To obtain an initial guarding position, the guard must have both feet touching the playing court inbounds and must be facing the opponent. After the initial legal guarding position is obtained, the guard: (a) is *not* required to

have either or both feet on the playing court or continue facing an opponent; (b) may move laterally or obliquely but not toward an opponent when contact occurs; (c) may raise hands or jump within a vertical plane; and (d) may turn or duck to absorb contact.

Rebounding

Rebounding is an attempt by any player to secure possession of the ball following a try or tap for a goal. In a rebounding situation there is no player or team control. To obtain or maintain legal rebounding position a player may not: (a) displace, charge or push an opponent; (b) extend shoulders, hips, knees or extend arms or elbows fully or partially so that freedom of movement of an opponent is hindered when contact occurs; (c) bend the body in an abnormal position to hold or displace an opponent; and (d) violate the principle of verticality.

Blocking

Blocking is illegal personal contact which impedes the progress of an opponent with or without the ball. Blocking occurs in illegal guarding and screening situations. Many occurrences of blocking are not properly penalized because action leading to the block is not seen.

Charging

Blocking is illegal personal contact caused by pushing or moving into an opponent's torso. A player who is moving with the ball is required to stop or change direction to avoid contact if a defensive player has obtained legal guarding position in the path. The player must get head and shoulders past the torso of the defensive player to avoid charging.

In summary, every player is entitled to a spot on the playing court provided the player gets there first without illegally contacting an opponent. The keys are to locate the defender, see the whole play and make the call based on advantage/disadvantage. With these guidelines your chances for getting the “call” or the “no-call” correct when contact occurs are greatly enhanced.