

How It's Coached and How It's Called: Basketball Guarding

BY Steve Evans and Jenni Malsam ON January 14, 2015 | BASKETBALL STORY, OFFICIALS, FEATURES

The 2014-15 Basketball Rules Book added Rule 10-6-12, which reads:

The following acts constitute a foul when committed against a ball handler/dribbler:

- a. Placing two hands on the player.*
- b. Placing an extended arm bar on the player.*
- c. Placing and keeping a hand on the player.*
- d. Contacting the player more than once with the same hand or alternating hands.*

The following authors explain how they coach and officiate various closely guarded situations, respectively.

How it's Coached

Rule 4 Section 23 Guarding

Art. 1 ... Guarding is the act of legally placing the body in the path of an offensive opponent. There is no minimum distance required between the guard and opponent, but the maximum is 6 feet when closely guarded. Every player is entitled to a spot on the playing court provided such player gets there first without illegally contacting an opponent. A player who extends an arm, shoulder, hip or leg into the path of an opponent is not considered to have a legal position if contact occurs.

Dribble:

We are implementing action that causes the offensive player to have discomfort. We do this by overplaying the ball on the side of the dribble. Example, if the player is dribbling with the right hand to the right, our defensive player would play with the left foot as the lead with the left right hand down in the crossover area. The dribble to the opposite direction would be vice-versa. The visual would have the defensive player completely overplaying the side that the dribble is being made on. We teach no contact in this guarding position. The distance we consider acceptable would be within the 6 feet to ensure the closely guarded count and as close as possible to cause discomfort for the offensive dribbler without creating illegal contact.

Drills – Full court pressure, slide, and swing.

Defensive players work on over playing the dribbler while they bring the ball up the floor. When the player reaches designated marks on the floor, they cross over and the defensive player swings, slides, and pressures again.

Pass:

On the pass, if a player catches the ball that is not quickly taken to the triple-threat position, or as we call it, not “in the pocket,” we straddle the pivot foot to not allow the player the opportunity to drive or shoot. We hold the position in a way that will allow the offensive player only one option, and that would be to clear the defensive player away with a charge. There may be incidental contact on the straddle of the player on the pass, but our players are taught to play and adjust to the judgment of the officials that are working the game.

If the pass is caught in a good triple-threat position, we play an arm’s distance away, one hand up in the passing lane, one down in the dribbling area, and forcing to the weak-hand side. Our players are instructed to be within the 6-foot closely guarded area to cause a count. No contact is taught in this situation. We teach to have a hand out in the natural flow area of the ball, so that a quick shot or pass is not completed.

Drills – Cross court pass with a close out.

Players are aligned in a help-side position off their guarded player as another player makes a pass to the guarded player. The defensive player makes a judgment call as to how the pass is caught to determine the straddle or a solid close out.

Rule 4, Section 24 Hands and Arms, Legal and Illegal Use

Art. 1 ... It is legal to extend the arms vertically above the shoulders and need not be lowered to avoid contact with an opponent when the action of the opponent causes contact. This legal use of the arms and hands usually occurs when guarding the player making a throw-in, the player with the ball in pressing tactics and a player with the ball who is maneuvering to try for goal by pivoting, jumping, etc.

We coach our players to play vertical and to try to always show their hands. It makes it very difficult for an official to make the call against the defensive player when the official sees hands up and arms not out stopping the movement of the offensive player. This is more of our off-the-ball defense. On the ball, with a live dribble available, we play with one hand down in the dribbling area.

Drills:

To develop this skill, we use our towel drill, where the defensive player keeps a towel over the neck and grasped by both hands. This prevents the defensive player from using hand or arm bars to restrict the defensive player.

For the most part, we are a hands-free team — meaning no hands on! Hopefully, the game presents itself as one that will be played in that way. Our players adjust to the calls being made and how the game is being called in the moment.

The one situation that we do teach our players to use arms is to create space on screens in order to slip the screen. But, we do not cause the offensive player to not be able to move to any position if not for the arm bar. As the offensive player goes over screen, the defensive player will arm-bar the offensive player as he/she moves over the screen in order to create room to get over the screen.

Rule 4, Section 26 Holding

Holding is illegal personal contact with an opponent which interferes with his/her freedom of movement.

There are no situations that we hold an opponent. We do not coach a situation that would promote this possible opportunity for a holding foul. We do teach our players to slide and hold an area when posting up on the block with arms up to prevent a possible holding foul.

We coach shaping-up on the block. This is where a player is in a squatted stance, hands up. The player must move the feet to secure the area for a pass. The offensive player will not inhibit the movement of the defensive player. We suggest that our players post to secure the position for no more than two to three seconds when the ball is in passing position. This also helps to prevent the player from the possibility of picking up the personal foul.

Rule 4, Section 27 Incidental Contact

Incidental contact is contact with an opponent which is permitted and which does not constitute a foul

Incidental contact is what it is — incidental and that is how we communicate it to our players. Our practice scenario is designed to prepare our players for this type of contact. We do not call fouls in practice, but make them aware that when they do foul to keep playing through it in the case where an official might consider the contact as incidental.

We teach our players that officials will vary on this rule based on many different styles and human attributes. Our players are taught that many things take place on the floor that officials won't or don't see — this would be incidental. We do not teach our players to be aggressive in a manner that is intentional contact to abuse circumvent the incidental contact interpretation, but we try to set up scenarios where our players understand how to keep a position advantage over the opponent.

Rule 4, Section 45 Verticality

Verticality applies to legal position. Following are the basic components of the principle of verticality:

Art. 1 ... Legal guarding position must be obtained initially and movement thereafter must be legal.

Art. 2 ... From this position, the defender may rise or jump vertically and occupy the space within his/her vertical plane.

Art. 3 ... The hands and arms of the defender may be raised within his/her vertical plane while on the floor or in the air.

Teachings in reference to the rule of verticality, we instruct our players to jump straight up and to keep all parts of their body going straight up while returning straight down. We do not teach a lot on this because we feel that it only occurs on a drive to the basket when our players will try to block a shot. The extension out of the plane is what generally causes the foul. We emphasize the wood plank or 2 by 4 concept, where the defensive player extends nothing at all and goes straight up and down, arms straight in the air just like a straight piece of wood.

Rule 4, Section 7 Blocking, Charging

Art. 1 ... Blocking is illegal personal contact which impedes the progress of the opponent with or without the ball.

Art. 2 ... Charging is illegal personal contact caused by pushing or moving into an opponent's torso.

We teach our players to understand that if they are not in a balanced position to force a player one way or another, then they are not in proper position and will be called for a block if they attempt to take a charge.

To teach this, we work on examples of what it feels like out of position to take a charge. Your head and feet need to be centered slightly in front of your feet with bent knees. Our players are given a situation where they can not make the distance up to take the charge in order to simulate the block. We as a team believe in safety of every player and will not attempt to take the charge unless the player knows the position can be established. If the defensive position cannot be established, then a defense is deployed to change the shot. We also emphasize attempting to establish our defensive position at least 6'-10" (minimum) from the basket.

How it's Called

Rule 4, Section 23 Guarding

Art. 1 ... Guarding is the act of legally placing the body in the path of an offensive opponent. There is no minimum distance required between the guard and opponent, but the maximum is 6 feet when closely guarded. Every player is entitled to a spot on the playing court provided such player gets there first without illegally contacting an opponent. A player who extends an arm, shoulder, hip or leg into the path of an opponent is not considered to have a legal position if contact occurs.

The guarding rule is not complicated. All officials can read and understand this rule. The challenge comes in training officials to have consistent judgment with regard to understanding and determining what is **LEGAL** contact. Everyone accepts that there is contact during a basketball contest. An acceptable amount of contact is part of the game. But, how do officials determine what is acceptable and legal contact and what is unacceptable contact that needs to be called as a foul or infraction of the rule as it is written?

Officials are often told to use their judgment. But, how do different officials apply different levels of judgment, rules knowledge and experience and still end up with a level of consistency and interpretation that is acceptable to their partners and the players, coaches and fans?

One way for officials to learn to be consistent is to study the rules and to take in all helpful information that is available on interpretation of those rules. Rule 10, Section 6, Articles 1, 2 and 3 all have to do with contact. Many state associations condense this information to a single sheet of reference that is sent to officials along with the rules book, case book, handbook or manual. This reference sheet includes guidelines for teaching and officiating the following:

- Handchecking
- Screening
- Post Play
- Rebounding
- Block/Charge

Handchecking:

Any tactic using the hands, arms or body that allows a player on offense or defense to control, hold, impede, push, divert, slow or prevent the movement of an opposing player is a foul.

When an offensive player uses his/her hands or body to push off for spacing or for getting open to receive a pass, or to move the ball via pass or dribble it is a foul.

“Hooking” by the offensive players should be presumed a definite advantage. This is not a judgment call, or a tactic worthy of warning. It is a foul and should be called without hesitation.

Any act or tactic of illegal use of hands, arms or body (offense or defense) that intentionally slows, prevents, impedes the progress or displaces an opposing player due to the contact, is a foul and must be called.

Regardless of where it takes place on the floor, when a player continuously places a hand on the opposing player, it is a foul.

When a player places both hands on an opposing player, it is a foul.

When a player jabs a hand or forearm on an opponent, it is a foul.

The new 2014-2015 NFHS Rule changes address the contact by the defense of the ball handler, and actually reinforces the call and sets some definitive guidelines. From the NFHS preseason guide:

In an effort to eliminate excessive contact on ballhandlers outside of the lane area, the NFHS Rules Committee added Article 12 to Rule 10.6 on contact. As a result, the following acts will constitute a personal foul when committed against a ballhandler/dribbler:

- 1. Placing two hands on the player**
- 2. Placing an extended armbar on the player**
- 3. Placing and keeping a hand on the player**
- 4. Contacting the player more than once with the same hand or alternating hands.**

Screening:

A legal screen must be stationary with hands and arms close to the body prior to contact. When these two requirements are not met, and when there is sufficient contact delivered by the screener to bump, slow or displace, it is a foul on the screener.

When a screen is blind, or a rear screen, it is only legal when the screened player is allowed a normal step backward. The screened player must then make a legitimate attempt to get around a legal screen without forcing rough or “displacing” contact. This type of contact must result in a foul on the screened player.

When a screen is set in view of an opposing player, the screener can get as close as he/she wishes in a legal stationary position. The burden is on the screened player to avoid contact that may result in a foul.

Post Play:

The offense can “shape up” to receive a pass or to force the defense to deploy or assume a legal guarding position at the side, in front or behind the offensive post player. When the offensive player then uses the “swim stroke,” pushes, pins, elbows, forearms, holds, clears with the body, or just generally demonstrates rough physical movements or tactics, this is a foul on the offensive player and must be called without warning.

The defense can assume a legal, vertical stance or position on the side, front or behind the offensive post player. When the defense undercuts (initiates lower body nonverticality), slaps, pushes, holds, elbows, forearms, or just generally demonstrates rough, physical movements or tactics, this is a foul on the defense and must be called without warning.

When a player pushes a leg or knee into the rear of an opponent, it is a foul.

When a player dislodges an opponent from an established position by pushing or “backing in,” it is a foul.

When a player uses hands, forearms or elbows to prevent an opponent from maintaining a legal position, it is a foul.

Rebounding:

A player has the right to any spot on the floor he/she may get to legally. To obtain or maintain a legal rebounding position a player may not:

Displace, charge or push an opponent.

Extend shoulders, hips, knees or extend the arms or elbows fully or partially in a position other than vertical, so that the freedom of movement of the opponent is hindered when the contact with the arms or elbows occurs.

Bend his/her body in an abnormal position to hold or displace an opponent.

Violate the principle of verticality.

Better his/her position by other than legal means.

Block/Charge:

A real concern is when players get knocked to the floor and no call is made. Two factors used to determine the responsibility of contact are:

1. Who was at the spot first?

2. Guard must face the player with the ball with two feet on the floor. Guard may then move feet and stay within the dribbler’s path and should be rewarded for good defense.

Contact in front, upper torso, initiated by the offensive player should be a “charge.”

Contact initiated by the defense (on or off the ball) that involves lower body, nonverticality, and defending a perimeter player or an airborne player should be a “block.”

When a block or charge occurs anywhere on the court, it is a foul and should be called.

Summary Every illegal contact, which is not called, encourages and leads to rough play! Officials need to study and comprehend these tips in order to determine how much contact is acceptable and is part of the game and how much contact crosses the line and becomes a foul. Fully understanding these tips will help all officials to recognize how contact should be called.