

Rough Play

All of us realize that there is going to be contact in the game of basketball. One of the major responsibilities of a basketball official is to make rulings as to whether or not the contact is within the spirit and intent of the rules. The rule book does a nice job in explaining allowable contact, better known as incidental contact (Rule 4, Section 27). To become successful, a basketball official must develop the skill of knowing when the fine line that separates incidental and illegal (rough) contact has been crossed. The dividing line between the two centers on advantage/disadvantage. We know the rules allow us to penalize a player that has placed an opponent at a disadvantage due to illegal contact. Much emphasis has been placed on this over the past few years through such theories as the Tower Philosophy and others. Unfortunately, too many of us have stretched the definition of incidental contact and misused the Tower Philosophy to not call fouls when the rules really warrant one. The emphasis needs to be examined closely in light of the fact that some type of rough play has been a point of emphasis in nine of the last twelve years at the National Federation level.

Why have we as a group, officials and supervisors, allowed such lack of enforcement? Have we got caught up in all the hype, espoused at other levels and promoted by the media, to "let 'em play", "no harm, no foul", "we didn't pay to come watch a foul shooting contest", etc.? Perhaps we should turn our focus back to Rule 10, Section 6 (Contact) and reacquaint ourselves with what the game wants, via its rules. In addition to the disadvantage aspect, an equally important purpose of the rules is keep players from committing acts that might lead to roughness. Quite frequently we see action, especially off ball, that may appear to have no affect on the immediate play, but leads to further roughness if not addressed.

Following are some of the acts that lead to roughness, and thus need to be addressed by all of us. We can no longer afford to have some of us "subscribing" to one version of the rules on contact and the rest of us to another. Some guidelines are also offered in hopes of getting us back to the spirit and intent of the rules - a game that places emphasis on finesse and athleticism along with insuring equal opportunity between offense and defense, the small player and the big player.

Hand Checking

Hand checking is not incidental contact. There are numerous advantages gained by a player that is allowed to use their hands in an excessive manner - quicker starts or stops, stopping/slowing or altering the movement of a player, displacing a player, controlling or anticipating an opponent's next move. These pertain to both offense or defense, on or off the ball. Guidelines:

1. Address these at the beginning of the game and stay consistent throughout.
2. If a player puts a hand on his/her opponent and leaves it there - IT IS A FOUL!!
3. If a player puts both hands on an opponent - IT IS A FOUL!!
4. If a player continually "jabs" an opponent - IT IS A FOUL!!
5. If a player uses hands or forearms to guide or direct an opponent - IT IS A FOUL!!

Swimstroke

This is another use of the hand that allow players to gain an advantage not permitted by rule. This occurs when a player legally extends an arm into a space and an opponent reaches out and pulls that arm down (or up) in order to place their arm into that space. Defensively this occurs an offensive player wants to give a "target" for a possible pass and the defense wants to replace this "target" with an arm to cut of the passing lane. Offensively this occurs when a defensive player legally places an arm in the passing lane and the offensive player "knocks" this arm down (or up) in order to open up the passing lane. This is not incidental contact. Our guidelines:

1. Officiate in your primary coverage area. Don't watch the ball when it is not in your area.
2. Observe the entire play. Officiate the defense.
3. Know who made the first contact, don't be satisfied with just getting the retaliation. If you don't know who started it and now both players are taking turns doing this then a double foul might be in order.
4. If a player uses the "swim stroke" arm movement to lower (or raise) the arm of an opponent - IT IS A FOUL!!

Low Post Play

Quite frequently the cause for "rising temperatures" in a game is due to undue physical contact in the low post area. We need recognize deteriorating conditions and jump on them immediately. The rules do not want this area to be one in which "only the strongest shall survive". Some tactics that leads to the unraveling of the status quo include: bumping an opponent to get control over a certain spot on the floor, using the knee as a "wedge" to subtly move a player. These situations can be controlled by:

1. Officiating in your primary coverage area. Don't watch the ball when it is not in your area.
2. Observing the entire play. Officiate the defense.
3. Anticipating the play, but not the call.
4. Knowing that when the defensive player wedges a leg or knee into the rear of an offensive player, and subsequently displaces that player - IS A FOUL!!
5. Knowing that when an offensive player dislodges a defensive player by bumping, pushing or "backing in" - IS A FOUL!!
6. Calling a DOUBLE FOUL when both offensive and defensive players get into a "tug-of-war" as they resist each others' pressure.
7. Knowing that a push-off by an offensive player in an effort to catch a lob pass - IS A FOUL!! Also knowing that defensive support on this type of play must be legal.

Loose Ball

Over the past few years loose balls and players diving to recover them has led to contact that is not allowed by the rules. The incidental rule definition (see below) on dealing with loose ball situations is very clear. However, many coaches and players seem to think that it is "open season" on the ball, and that all the rules regarding contact are temporarily suspended. In some of these situations the officials should be issued flags to be used for "piling-on" purposes as the play more resembles football than basketball. There is great potential for injury here and thus we need to become more diligent in our rulings concerning illegal contact. Guidelines include:

1. Knowing what the rules say about contact in these situations - "Contact which occurs unintentionally in an effort by an opponent to reach a loose ball, or such contact which may result when opponents are in an equally favorable positions, should not be considered illegal, even though the contact may be severe."
2. If contact occurs because a player tried to "go through" or "piled-on" an opponent -IT IS A FOUL!!

Rebounding

Some of us have adopted an "anything goes" attitude during rebounding situations. As a result much more illegal contact is permitted. Granted when there five or six big, strong bodies in close proximity to one another there is going to be contact. However, with the "anything goes" philosophy players are now "moving" opponents out of legally obtained positions near the basket in anticipation of securing a rebound. Players from behind are using the "knee wedge" to push an opponent under the basket. Players on the inside are dislodging opponents behind them by leaning into them and then pushing them backwards to get them away from the basket. in order to make the proper rulings in these situations we officials need to:

1. As trail (and center), be sure to step toward the endline to obtain a better angle so as to see if the player is "over the back" (NO FOUL) or "on the back" (FOUL)
2. Know how a player got "on the back". Was he/she "put" on the back as a result of a player "backing into" an opponent, or did he/she "put" themselves on the back of a player that had obtained a legal position on the floor first?
3. Know that when a player wedges a leg or knee into the rear of an opponent, and subsequently displaces that player - IT IS A FOUL!!

We all must take a serious look at affect roughness is having on the game of basketball. Will "brushing off" more and more contact situations as incidental help or hurt the game? The answer can be found in the rule book. If the game wasn't concerned about the affect contact would play it wouldn't have devoted so much detail in its rules in helping officials to establish the line between incidental contact and illegal contact. If rough play is ignored we have only ourselves to blame if (and when) the game of basketball suffers a serious "illness". The remedy is simple - Let's not "Let'em play", but rather "Let'em both play"!!