



# PLAY SITUATIONS: INTERPRETATING CONTACT



by Alan Richardson



by Clifford Luyk

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**Clifford Luyk had an excellent playing career, at Florida University then - after being selected at the NBA draft's first round in 1962 - in 17 seasons with Real Madrid, winning 14 Spanish leagues and 6 European Championships, and then playing 150 games with the Spanish national team. As a coach, he has been coaching Real Madrid's Junior teams and has been Real Madrid's assistant coach, before coaching ACB teams like Villalba, Murcia, and also Real Madrid. He has been the creator of Contact Work Shop for referees and coaches.**

From the beginning of an official's career, it is constantly stated that when 10 players are moving at speed within the parameters of a basketball court, CONTACT IS INEVITABLE, but not all contact is illegal. Determining what is legal and illegal contact is part of the official's development and knowledge building process. The ability to recognise and judge the consequences of contact further determines which officials will progress to higher levels.

There must always be a balance between penalising the obvious, clear illegal contact that places opponents at a disadvantage and the small innocuous, sometimes incidental contact that does not interfere with the flow of the game.

Basketball played at speed by skilful players is a beautiful aesthetic experience;

therefore we cannot allow the image of the game to be tarnished by those players and coaches, who resort to illegal actions and behaviour. There have been many training videos produced to assist referees in fulfilling their responsibilities on and off the court.

Because the official has the power to stop the game, it is essential that he KNOWS and can actually SEE what happens, rather than THINKS that he knows what happens, which in reality is GUESSING. There is a great difference between the two. The ability to remember the constant supply of numerous forms of information (documents, videos, personal experiences), that are provided to enable referees to learn and grow and apply them correctly to the present situation is what determines an excellent official. RECALL DETERMINES PERFORMANCE.

Officials do NOT have the authority to change interpretations or rules, especially in situations related to the score, intensity or time remaining in the game. The game should always be decided by the LEGAL actions of players and coaches, NOT by the ILLEGAL actions that officials choose to ignore. It is UNACCEPTABLE for an official to tell a player or coach that he did not penalise an illegal contact or violation, which he clearly saw, because it happened outside his primary area of responsibility. Abdicating responsibility to another official shows a lack of courage to make a tough or "unpopular" call and also undermines the respect within the officials' team.

There are many potential situations that can occur at the end of a period, end of a game and also during a game, that need to

be viewed within the context of that particular game, between those two particular teams on that particular day. Many of us call it FEEL FOR THE GAME; others call it COMMON SENSE, but, whatever you call it, officials must be prepared for and UNDERSTAND all the possible situations that could arise and know how best to deal with them. Do not be influenced by GAMESMANSHIP. Players and coaches will try to influence officials by verbal and/or physical demonstration, flopping, grunting and other sounds when contact (however slight) occurs and also even feigning injury in crucial situations.

It is apparent that many officials do not understand basic basketball terminology and that they lack the ability to recognise fundamental play situations on the court during games. It's essential that the training of officials incorporates the knowledge and experience of coaches. In order to further enhance the professional relationship between players, coaches and officials it is important that each recognises and understands the others' roles. There is much to be learnt from each other in this respect. Practical workshops for players, coaches and officials are the key to better understanding and performance.

## ANALYSIS

With all CONTACT that is determined as ILLEGAL, the officials must address it from the beginning of the game and call it consistently throughout the whole game. Players and coaches will adjust if the officiating is consistent.

## HAND-CHECKING

Hand-checking is the "illegal" use of the hand(s)/arm(s) to impede/influence the



movement/progress of an opponent with or without the ball.

A defensive player may not place his hand/forearm upon an opponent with the intention of holding or pushing (steering) that player. To momentarily place a hand/forearm upon an opponent is not necessarily illegal unless the action is constantly repeated. A verbal warning should always be given in order to prevent the illegal action from taking place.

Under no circumstances may the defensive player place two hands upon an opponent, even within his cylinder.

A defensive player **FACING** his opponent has no legal reason to place his hand/forearm upon an opponent, as defense is played with the feet. A post player may place a forearm (within his own cylinder) on the back of an opponent, but the first and only contact must be with the forearm or the chest/stomach. This also applies to a player defending a dribbler who is backing into (not facing)

the basket, the first and only contact must be with the forearm or the chest/stomach.

The use of the forearm or chest/stomach must not dislodge or push the opposing player from his position. Similarly, an offensive player dribbling the ball is not permitted to use a hand/forearm to prevent his defensive opponent from legally "stealing" the ball. If hand-checking is not penalised then players will react aggressively thereby creating loss of game control, even momentarily. Under no circumstances may the defensive player place two hands upon an opponent even within his own cylinder.

Officials should be aware of situations when hand-checking could take place:

1. At moments in the game when aggressive and/or pressing defense is applied.
2. When players are tired and "cheat" on defense by using hands instead of moving their feet.
3. In defensive mismatch situations where the offensive player is clearly quicker,

taller and stronger than the defensive player, especially during initial moments of the start of a dribble.

4. During "isolation" plays (one v one) as above and on any drive to the basket.

#### **POST PLAY**

Offensive and defensive players have equal rights to any position that they have legally established on the court. Post play should be viewed and anticipated as a physical (not rough) match-up between two opponents, especially big players.

Incidental contact between post players is to be expected, but the use of hands, arms and/or legs/knees to push and dislodge opponents is not permitted. A defensive post player may place his leg/knee in between the legs of a stationary opponent in order to maintain position, but if that leg/knee is raised off the floor, or impedes the movement of, or dislodges the opponent then a foul should be called.

A defensive post player may place a forearm or chest/stomach on the back of his oppo-

nent. At no time may a hand or both hands be placed upon an opponent. Once the defensive post player has established a legal guarding position, he cannot be dislodged from that position by the actions of the offensive player in lowering his body and "bumping" his opponent towards the basket.

Neither can the offensive player grab an opponent's leg or "hook" his body whilst turning, either to shoot or receive a pass under the basket. Excessive physical play to dislodge a player from a legally established position must not be allowed. Pay attention to players who interlock arms when jostling for position. Warn the player, who initiates the arm-locking and if there is no response, call the foul. Watch the whole play from the beginning in order to determine who created the illegal contact, otherwise call a double foul. There can be no "let them play" attitude when the contact is excessive or rough.

Rough play in post play situations is likely to occur when:

1. The offensive player has dislodged the defensive player from a legal position on the floor.
2. The offensive player has the ball and his opponent is allowed to use his hands, extended forearm, knees or upraised leg into the buttocks.
3. The offensive player lowers his buttocks and pushes backwards, also using his hands and arms to dislodge his opponent.
4. The offensive player signals to receive a pass or lob pass and then uses his arms in a "swim-stroke" to push the defenders arms away or by using his elbow or extended forearm to "pin" and dislodge his opponent.
5. The offensive player may not use his elbow to push away the defensive player's hand(s) in order to protect a shooting attempt.

Be aware of any situations that may create potential violence between opponents or attempts to deceive officials by 'flopping', either by the defensive player or a shooting player.

### SCREENING

The purpose of screening is to prevent an opponent from reaching a desired position on the court. For screening to be legal the player setting the screen must be STATIONARY with both feet on the floor. Understand the purpose of screening. Not every contact with a screen is illegal. If the screen is set legally then the contact, irre-

spective of the level, should be considered incidental. Contact, which occurs because the player setting the screen is moving is illegal. CONTACT must occur for an illegal screen to exist.

If the screen is set within the field of vision (OPEN) of a stationary opponent, the screener may stand as close as possible to his opponent without causing contact, either to the FRONT or SIDE.

If the screen is set outside the field of vision (BLIND) of a stationary opponent, the screener must take a position which allows his opponent to make a normal movement (1 step) to avoid the contact.

If the opponent of the screener is moving (MOTION), the screen must be set with regard to elements of time and distance. The screener must allow sufficient space (1 - 2 normal steps) for the opponent to avoid contact by stopping or changing direction.

The player setting the screen is not allowed to extend any body parts (knees, legs, elbows, forearms, buttocks etc.) outside his normal cylinder in order to ensure that the screen is effective, especially in the case of any misjudgement by the screener. It is essential that officials see the play from start to finish.

Be aware of the actions of the player being screened. He is not permitted to push his way through the screen or dislodge the screen, if it has been legally set, by illegal use of the hand(s), arm(s), hip(s) or shoulder(s).

Be aware of actions related to the use of "pick-and-roll" plays:

Understand and be able to recognise pick-and-roll plays during a game. Be ready to interpret the legal or illegal actions of both offensive and defensive players when the offensive team is running the pick-and-roll play.

### OFFENSIVE PLAYERS:

1. Watch for the illegal use of hands just after the impact of the screen and before the roll to the basket.
2. Watch for illegal use of the body, hips and legs by the screener, taking a step into the defensive player as his team-mate is clearing the area.
3. Watch for illegal contact by the screener when he pushes the defender before he starts his roll to the basket.

Be careful not to interpret such illegal actions as incidental contact, because such actions put the defensive player at a distinct disadvantage.

### DEFENSIVE PLAYERS:

1. Watch for illegal hand and/or body checking, which restricts the path of the offensive player, who is attempting to set the screen.
2. Watch for illegal contact with an opponent designed to interrupt the rhythm of the play, by pushing the opponent into his own team-mate.
3. Watch for illegal use of the hand(s) at the point of the screen.
4. Watch for defenders pushing out with knee(s)/forearm(s), when posting up away from the basket or defending 3 point goal attempts

Be careful not to interpret such illegal actions as incidental contact, because such actions put the offensive player at a distinct disadvantage.

Incidental body contact is a part of the game, but the deliberate use of the hand(s), arm(s) and body to gain an advantage is not part of the game.

### CHARGE - BLOCK

75% of all charge-block calls will be challenged by the team penalised. The official must know what a legal guarding position is and what are the rights of the player with and without the ball.

A legal guarding position requires the defender to be on the spot first, with two feet on the floor, upright, stationary and facing his opponent. Having established a legal guarding position the defender is allowed to move laterally or backwards in order to maintain his position in front of a moving opponent. He is NOT allowed to step FORWARDS to the player/ball.

It is important that referees watch the whole play from beginning to end with specific reference to the actions of the defensive player prior to any contact that may occur. Be alert to 'flopping' by players.

Note the point of contact. If a legal guarding position has been achieved, contact by the offensive player should be on the front of the torso, between the shoulders -chest- of the defensive player. If contact is on the shoulder, hip or leg of the defender then responsibility lies with the defender.

Once the offensive player has succeeded

in establishing his head and shoulders past the torso of his opponent (usually by speed of movement) responsibility for contact lies with the defensive player.

Ensure that CONTACT has actually occurred and that you are not influenced by the actions of defensive players "flopping" or offensive players making a "theatrical reaction". It is essential that officials are in an excellent position in order to have a clear view of any contact.

Protect the rights of the airborne player. If the offensive player has left the floor BEFORE the defensive player establishes his position, however late, he has the right to land in a pre-determined spot on the floor. Timing and movement are the keys to this play.

Referees should be aware of charge-block situations when:

1. A transition or fast break occurs.
2. An offensive player beats his defender in a one-on-one play.
3. Defenders switch positions to give defensive help.
4. Double team pressing defense occurs.
5. "Pass-and-crash" situations occur on a drive to the middle of the key (the dribbler passes off and crashes into a stationary defender).
6. "Blind" block on high pass near to the basket or during a 'press'.

#### UNSPORTSMANLIKE FOULS

Any illegal action that is not a legitimate attempt to play the ball or an opponent should be considered as unsportsmanlike.

Wrapping the arms around an opponent, grabbing a player with one or both hands, grabbing the shirt or shorts of an opponent are all unsportsmanlike actions. Grabbing a player's arm or body whilst initially trying to play the ball is also an illegal action.

Grabbing, holding or pushing a player AWAY from the ball is an unsportsmanlike foul by rule.

Committing clear fouls in order to prevent an opponent close to the basket from scoring 2 points is in many cases an unsportsmanlike foul.

Excessive contact, undue roughness against an opponent (especially airborne), even when trying to play the ball is considered an unsportsmanlike foul by rule.

All these situations must be interpreted within the spirit and intent of the unsportsmanlike foul rule. What is an unsportsmanlike foul must apply at any time of the game, in the first minute and the last minute. Do not be influ-



enced by the intensity, score and time remaining in the game.

#### PLAYER AND COACH BEHAVIOUR

The proper conduct of the game demands full and loyal cooperation of the members of both teams (players, coaches, assistant coaches, and team followers) with the officials, table officials and commissioner. Officials have been encouraged to communicate fully with players and coaches during the game and have also received much information by way of documents, videos and personal training in order to understand the roles and behaviour of players and coaches during emotional encounters. Cooperation is a two way system and must be based upon mutual respect and normal behaviour.

#### IT IS NOT ACCEPTABLE:

1. For a coach or player to make an objectionable reaction by words or gestures to an official's call.
2. For a coach or player to direct audible personal remarks of an abusive or vulgar nature to the officials.
3. For a coach or player to excessively demonstrate by the use of referees

signals (travelling, holding, verticality etc.) or gestures that could indicate displeasure with the officiating.

4. For a coach, assistant coach, player or team follower to incite the crowd by means of gestures showing their disagreement with the officials.
5. For a coach to leave the coaching box and enter the court to remonstrate with an official.

In such situations, it is essential that a technical foul is not given immediately, but that a clear definitive warning is given to the offending person(s). Dealing with such incidents should be progressive, but firm and not an emotional reaction. Such behaviour should not be tolerated on a continuous basis. Any further misbehaviour after the warning must be dealt with in a calm professional manner.

We do not wish officials to inflame the situations by overreacting, but we cannot accept that the integrity of the officials is continually called into question by players, coaches and bench personnel. Take care of business before business takes care of you.