

SACRAMENTO YOUTH FOOTBALL

OFFICIATING PHILOSOPHIES

Basic Premises

(1) This game is for youth to learn and experience the greatest game in the world. No one is paying to watch the officials throw flags. As guardians of the game officials help make the contest fair accepting the inherent nature of physical contact which creates risks of injury.

(2) SLOW flag; SLOW whistle; See Leather; See your keys, the whole play / proper angles.

(3) Think SAFETY first, then SYF Code of Conduct / Sportsmanship and respect, if not one of these then think Advantage / Disadvantage (which favors no flag, less flags the better).

(4) SAFETY: (Illegal Helmet Contact, Blindside Blocks, Defenseless Players, Low Blocks).

(5) SYF CODE OF CONDUCT / SPORTSMANSHIP / RESPECT. Zero tolerance on cursing and language which is disrespectful recognizing the inherent emotional nature of the game. Head Coach (HC) is responsible for all coaches/staff on their sideline, only HC talks to official (if they want to discuss with the Crew Chief they must take a time out). Disrespectfully addressing an official is the standard (if in doubt all language penalties go against HC). After first uns. penalty disengage get play clock moving. Two Uns. penalties for coach to disqualify themselves unless flagrant (3 min. to leave stadium or team forfeits).

Get The Big One or the "Big Fish" means giving less attention to fouls that don't matter than those that actually affect the game. While the focus is not on ignoring the rules, the idea is to be sure that fouls that give one player or team an advantage over an opponent are penalized. For instance, it's better to adopt a "when in doubt, it's a foul" attitude when dealing with an illegal helmet contact foul than a uniform number which is not proper.

Make It Be There, avoid phantom calls. If you think you saw a foul, do not throw a flag, there is little place for guess work. Officials will miss fouls and are under greater scrutiny today with everything being recorded by somebody; in the greater scope it is easier to accept missing a foul versus defending a foul not there.

Specific Principles. These are subject to change depending on game circumstances, playoff games, game management, and team / field conditions--recognizing that consistency on game day is important, second consistency week to week, third consistency during the season.

(1) *Illegal Helmet Contact Targeting.* The biggest challenge in protecting the game of youth football and reducing injuries is eliminating direct helmet-to-helmet contact and any other contact both with and to the helmet. Included as illegal are butt-blocking, face tackling, and spearing. Targeting is an act by any player (includes runner) who takes aim and initiates contact

against an opponent above the shoulders with the helmet, forearm, hand, fist, elbow or shoulders (NFHS Rule 2-20). Two players can commit targeting at the same time. For many reasons, in youth football officials and everyone else expect to see more flags for illegal helmet contact than in high school and higher levels. Targeting considerations are as follows: could the contact have been avoided, was it to punish, did the opponent see it coming to protect themselves or avoid it (defenseless player?). If such contact occurred consider if player has a symptom of a concussion (if so or in doubt player is out of game for medical evaluation).

(2) *Blindside Blocks*. A blindside block is a block outside of the free-blocking zone against an opponent other than the runner who does not have a reasonable opportunity to see the blocker approaching (whether he should have seen the blocker is not relevant). A blindside block with forceful contact initiated with open hands is legal, inside or outside of the free-blocking zone. Hence, 3 requirements for penalty: (i) forceful block, (ii) not initiated with open hands, (iii) occurs outside the free blocking zone); if in doubt it is illegal and a penalty (safety).

(3) *Defenseless Players*. This includes but is not limited to passers, receivers, sliding runners, runners whose forward progress is stopped. Includes a player obviously out of the play or not in the immediate vicinity of the runner and a player who receives a blind-side block with forceful contact not initiated with open hands. If in doubt it is a penalty (safety).

(4) *No Low or Cut Blocks* anywhere at any time (contact below the waist – if in doubt it is a penalty-safety). This is a strict SYF safety rule at all levels (includes no bear-crawling).

(5) *Counting Players / Substitutions*. If subst. are running off the field within 5 yd. of sideline no major advantage. If 12 players on field with no player attempting to subst. best to penalize as illegal subst. 5 yd. v. participation 15 yds. More leeway is given to 8U then older players.

(6) *False Starts v Illegal Motion or Illegal Shifts*. If it could be a false then treat it as such; better to treat as a false start and hence a dead ball foul than a live-ball foul.

(7) *Formations*. Put the players where they should be (on and off the LOS is not a major advantage); more leeway given (a) to younger players, (b) when players check with the official, (c) when it is a running play v passing play. For lining up in the neutral zone as possible encroachment, be lenient with 8U (warn/ advise HC) and stricter with older players.

(8) *Holding*. Must be a take-down or material restriction at the point of attack. See the whole action, pay attention to the one being “held” who needs to work through the “hold” (watch the feet), if dancing then a no-call; talk to players (for every 1 you flag you hold-off on 5).

(9) *Blocks in the Back*. These are not safety fouls, if it is serious or flagrant then treat as a personal foul not BB. See the whole action otherwise a no-call.

(10) *Pass Interference*. This is not a safety penalty so make it BIG. Both A and B have a right to go for the ball; if one is not playing the ball then less physical contact is allowed.

(11) *Ineligible Downfield*. On passing plays beyond the LOS expand the neutral zone up to 5 yds for major advantage. Focus on busted plays or fake kick plays when linemen move downfield.

(12) *Numbering*. No major advantage; report numbering issues to opposing HC before game.

(13) *Communications shall be through Head Coach*. Provide short explanations unless time out is taken. Be professional at all times; if emotional silence is the best response; have empathy.

(14) *Miscellaneous*. Good officials know the rules; great officials understand intent and focus on applying the rules correctly based upon a feel for the game. Good officials hustle; great officials know you can hustle out of the play and instead focus on the ability to read a play and be in the best still position to see their keys and rule on a play. Great officials are great dead ball officials. Great officials keep in top physical condition since your look sends a message as to competence.

For officiating mechanics see SYF 4-person mechanics on SYF website.