

Not Blowing the Whistle – BSRFUR August2014

Extracted from IRBOfficiating.com

Application of the Laws of the Game is far more important than knowledge of the Laws.

This statement is especially applicable to issues surrounding the Advantage Law. It is essential for all referees to learn and recall all of the Laws. It is paramount for the referee to develop an understanding and application of the Advantage Law as merely knowing and recalling the wording of the Law is insufficient. It is equally important for players, coaches and spectators to appreciate the reasons for a referee blowing the whistle or not blowing the whistle.

If a referee applies the Laws in a wise and astute manner, he/she has the potential to lift a game to a higher tenor. Appropriate application draws upon two basic principles:

- A referee only blows the whistle for issues that have impact upon the game.
- Often it is not what the referee calls with his whistle, but what the referee does not call, that is important.

It should be the aim of a referee to let the teams play the game in a continuous manner. Unfortunately, there are times when the referee simply has to blow the whistle and cause play to stop. It should be the objective of all referees to keep the whistle blowing, and therefore the stoppages, to a minimum.

How should a referee minimise the use of the whistle?

Continually ask the question "Has there been an offence?"

- An answer of "yes" does not mean that the whistle should be blown.
- It means the referee must take over rather than the players remaining in control, and therefore the referee must "manage" the situation. The referee must eventually (at times instantaneously) make a decision, based upon the principles of SAFETY, EQUITY and LAW to either "play on" or to stop play.

This raises the question of when within a game does an issue arise but a referee should not blow the whistle? There are two different occasions:

- when the referee decides to apply Law 8 (Advantage Law)
- when the referee applies discretion to ask himself/herself the question, "although an offence occurred did the issue have any material impact upon the game or upon player safety, and therefore need to be penalised?" (Materiality)

In summary, a referee is in a position of game management and player management to blow the whistle to stop play quite frequently to stop play. However, given that a major principle of the game is for a team "to maintain continuity of possession" as stated in the Playing Charter there are many instances in a game where the referee has a right to blow the whistle but decides to allow play to proceed.

Observing the CLEAR & OBVIOUS

When any person watches a game of Rugby, they observe many incidents that are clear for all to see. At other times however, an incident that one observer views may be quite different to the way another person interprets what has just occurred on the field. This becomes evident in a public manner when television broadcasters commentating upon a game interpret incidents in a different way to each other even after it is replayed many times, from many different camera angles and at times witnessed by them both (and all of the viewers) in slow motion.

It also becomes quite evident when a referee calls upon a Television Match Official (TMO) when the referee's decision simply cannot be based upon a clear and obvious interpretation of what he (or she) had just observed from their one, and only one, angle of view. There are even times when the TMO with multiple angle replays and slow motion replays cannot interpret a situation to make an absolutely certain "clear and obvious" decision.

Despite these circumstances, it is important for referees to make decisions upon their observation of the "clear and obvious". At other times, when "clear and obvious" is not evident, they must call upon their understanding of the game and their application of the Laws of the Game to make decisions to support their decision-making.

All match observers should always be able to identify "clear and obvious" infringements. However, given the Advantage Law, this does not automatically require a whistle to be blown by the referee to stop play. This does not prevent the referee from dealing with an infringement "on the run" during play or at the next stoppage in play.

All of these processes are simply tools to assist in observing and managing infringements so that issues that are not necessarily immediately "clear and obvious" become more evident in the on field decision-making.

Extracted from IRFU Referee Manual

Throughout a game there are many offences that may occur. However if the referee was to penalise every offence then it would be a very stop start affair and not an enjoyable experience for the referee or the players.

On the other hand if the referee was to let every offence go unsanctioned then the game would quickly deteriorate and this in turn would potentially lead to control and safety issues. So it is finding the correct balance between what to penalise and what not to penalise that is one of the key skills a referee needs to understand and develop.

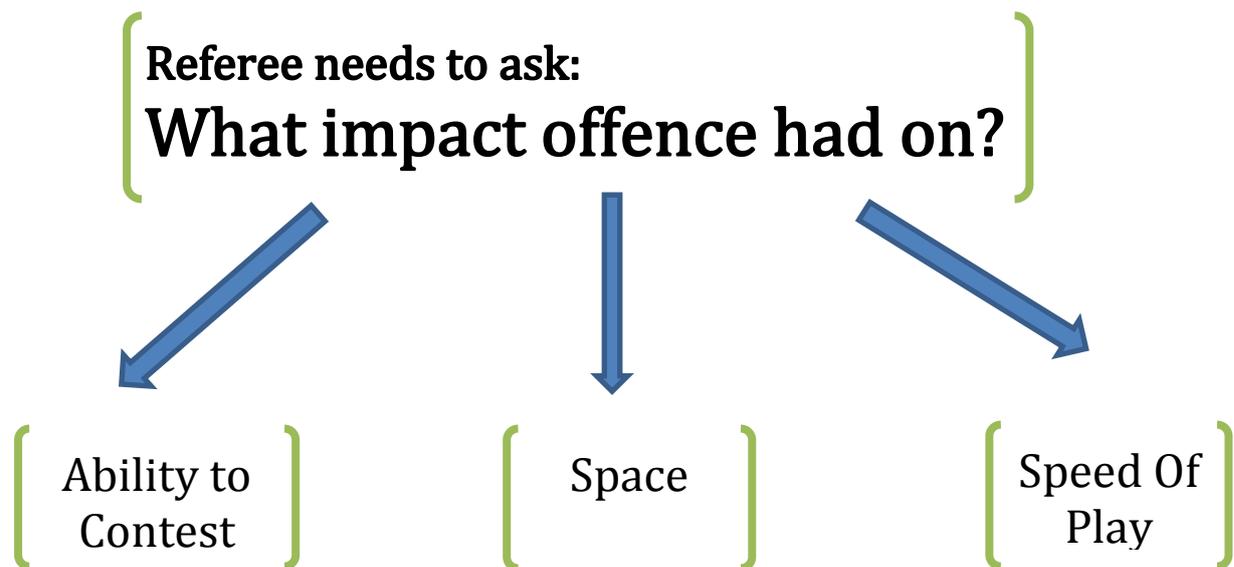
This balance is often referred to as the framework for penalising.

There are three key rules to awarding a penalty:

- 1) You saw the offence
- 2) It is clear and obvious
- 3) It has a material impact on play

Materiality of offences.

As already mentioned there are lots of offences committed throughout a game of rugby. The referee should look to penalise offences that have an impact on play. For offences that have no impact on play then the referee should use downtime to let the players know that the offence was spotted and that they should be careful not to do it again or they will be penalised.



Note:

If offence has no impact on play then the referee should play on but speak to offender at downtime.

The above framework for penalising does not apply to foul play offences. Foul play offences are judged independently and almost always result in at least a penalty.

Extracted from BSRFUR Discipline Document

It is inevitable that tensions will surface from time to time and the referee then has to take appropriate action. Sometimes that will be apparently ignoring an offence, which can upset the team that has been offended against, but the lack of action by the referee may be because the offence was considered trivial and did not materially affect play, or advantage was played. At the next stoppage the guilty player should be spoken to, loudly and clearly, so that all persons within earshot are aware that the "offence" has been seen and why no sanction was imposed.

No transgression should be considered to be too trivial to take some action and the action needs to be commensurate not only with the actual offence, but also with the previous conduct of the player, of his team and the general temper of the game.

John Ford
STO
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