



Oregon School Activities Association
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Blindside Blocks – Background and Philosophy

The NFHS revised Rule 9-4-3g in 2015 to state, *“No player or non-player shall make any contact with an opponent, **including a defenseless player**, which is deemed unnecessary **or excessive** and which incites roughness.”*

Believing that further restrictions are necessary on the type of contact players may use when committing a Blindside Block, the OSAA/OAOA applied to, and were approved by the NFHS to create and implement an experimental rule which is more restrictive than NFHS Rule 9-4-3g. The experimental rule will be in effect for the 2015 season, after which, the data collected will be shared with the OSAA Executive Board and the NFHS Football Rules Committee for review prior to requesting that the experiment be extended for an additional year. Noting that...

- Blocking is an integral part of football.
- A block from an angle that is timed to create or maintain an opening for the runner, such as a trap block, is an effective block.
- Downfield blocks are difficult blocks to execute because the blocker is usually attempting to legally block a “moving target.”

The experimental rule further protects the player receiving a blindside block as even if the block is neither “unnecessary” nor “excessive,” a player receiving a “blindside block” may only be blocked with “open hands” and may not be blocked with the shoulder, forearm, chest, etc.

All blocks must continue to be executed within the context of current safety rules; officials must note:

- Whether the block is below the waist
- Whether the block is from behind
- Whether the block is to the head
- Whether to a defenseless player

There is no change as to who is a defenseless player – just an ongoing commitment to eliminate potentially dangerous blocks that may lead to injury, particularly concussions, with the goal of minimizing risk with the game of football. Legal blindside blocks shall consist of the blockers’ head being up and initial contact being made with the hands - Examples would include:

- Stalk Blocking Techniques.” (Note that the point of a “Stalk Block” is to engage a defender early and then maintain contact with him)
- Open Hand Blocking Techniques

Suspect Illegal Blindside Blocking techniques would include any block leading with the shoulder or head. Examples would include:

- Shoulder Dip
- Shoulder Drive
- Shoulder Thrust
- Shoulder Launch or
- Any contact initiated with the Blockers’ Head

Remember:

- When in doubt, the blocker must initiate contact with his/her hands!
- When in question, it is a foul.
- While future experiments or Rules changes may perhaps evolve into limiting contact to other defenseless player as defined in 9.4.3 COMMENT, the current Oregon experiment only restricts the blocker when he/she is initiating a Blindside Block



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2016 OREGON / NFHS Experimental Football Rule BLINDSIDE BLOCK

The OSAA recognizes as players get bigger, faster and stronger, BLINDSIDE BLOCKS have become excessive and in some cases dangerous. In an effort to minimize risk, the OSAA, in partnership with the OAOA, shall conduct all OSAA contests with the following experimental rules and interpretations for the 2016 season.

RULE 2, SECTION 3 – BLOCKING

(NEW) ART. 10... Blindside Block...A blindside block is any block against an opponent who because of his physical positioning and focus of concentration is especially vulnerable to injury. A blindside block is illegal unless it is initiated with open hands.

RULE 9, SECTION 4 - ILLEGAL CONTACT:

ART. 3...No player or non-player shall:

(NEW) n. Initiate an illegal blindside block. (15 yards, (S38 - 48), Personal Foul / Blindside Block)

RATIONALE

With the emphasis on player safety, concerns continue to be expressed about dangerous “blindside blocks” in the open field. Blindside blocks include, but are not limited to:

- (1) blocks by a player on offense who initiates a “peel back” or “crack back” block toward his own end line;
- (2) blocks by an R player during a free kick or scrimmage kick play where the R player is running toward his end line and blocks an opponent who has either just turned to pursue the runner or is running roughly parallel to the end line in pursuit of the runner;
- (3) any open field block against an opponent whose primary focus is on the runner or the ball and who does not see the block coming.

These blocks become dangerous when the blocker initiates a forceful block with his shoulder at the level of the opponent’s shoulders or chest. This contact is often against an opponent who because of physical positioning and focus of concentration is especially vulnerable to injury. Crack back and peel back shoulder blocks and shoulder blocks during kick plays are particularly dangerous because the blocker is often running at full speed while the opponent may be in the process of turning to pursue the runner. On the other hand, blocks initiated with open hands are significantly less dangerous because the blocker cannot typically generate the same amount of force with an open hands block. This proposal defines blindside blocks and limits legal blindside blocks to those initiated with open hands.

Officials have been directed to scrutinize contact to the head and neck area of any opponent – in particular any opponent who because of his physical positioning and focus of concentration is especially vulnerable to injury. NFHS Football rules allow for disqualification of any player who in the officials’ judgement has committed a “flagrant” and/or intentional act. If situations arise where a blindside block and targeting foul occur simultaneously then officials have been directed to penalize the offending team with the greater foul and seriously consider disqualification of the offending player. Players whose actions are meant to intentionally punish an opponent given other blocking strategies and techniques are available should result in ejection.

PLAY SITUATION 1

First and 10 at the A-40. Quarterback A12 throws a screen pass to A22 at the A-38 yard line. A22 is at the A-42 yard line and linebacker B55 is pursuing across field. A80 has gone five yards downfield, reverses direction and blocks B55 at the A-43 yard line with (a) his shoulder, or (b) open hands, knocking B55 to the ground.

RULING: Illegal blindside block in (a) and legal block in (b).

NOTE: by rule, a block initiated with open hands cannot be an illegal blindside block, regardless if the player is knocked to the ground.

COMMENT: It is critical that officials observe the entire blocking action before ruling on illegal contact fouls. Just because the blocked player ends up on the ground is NOT a factor in determining if the block was legal. Additionally, contact away from the play may still be judged as unnecessary or excessive if the action is not near the point of attack. **(2-3-10, 9-4-3n)**

PLAY SITUATION 2

First and 10 at the A-40 yard line. Quarterback A12 throws a screen pass to A22 at the A-38 yard line. A22 advances to the A-42 yard line and linebacker B55 is pursuing him across the field. A80 has gone five yards downfield, comes back and blocks B55 at the A-43 yard line with open hands, then compresses into a shoulder block, which slides down below the waist while contact is maintained.

RULING: Legal block. The block was initiated with open hands. **(2-3-10, 9-4-3n)**

PLAY SITUATION 3

B30 is pursuing runner A22 at the B-40 yard line. A80 runs roughly parallel to the 40-yard line, blocks B30 with his shoulder. At the time of the block B30 (a) was focused on A22 and did not see the block coming, or (b) saw the block coming and tried to ward it off.

RULING: Illegal blindside block in (a) because B30's focus was on the runner, making him vulnerable to injury. Legal block in (b).

COMMENT: This is an illegal blindside block only if B30 was focused on the runner and was especially vulnerable to injury because he could not see the contact coming and attempt to ward off the block. If a player can see the contact coming he can prepare for the contact. **(2-3-10, 9-4-3n)**

PLAY SITUATION 4

During a run by A35, B22 is one step behind and has one hand on A35's shoulder pad attempting to make the tackle when he is blindsided from the side by A60. The contact was: (a) a shoulder-leading block; or (b) an open hand block.

RULING: In (a) Illegal Blindside Block; in (b) Legal Block

COMMENT: Even though B22 was in the process of making the tackle the block by A60 must still be an open hand block. There is no exception if the player who is blocked is in the process of making a tackle. **(2-3-10, 9-4-3n)**