



VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

MEMORANDUM

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TO: Head Football Coaches] -- of NCAA Member
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FROM: Rogers Redding, secretary-rules editor
 NCAA Football Rules Committee.

SUBJECT: Blocking Below the Waist Interpretations.

Several coaches and conference coordinators have requested clarification regarding the new rules that govern blocking below the waist. After consultation with the NCAA Football Rules Committee, the following interpretations are being made to assist with the understanding and intent of these rules:

- Restrictions on the Defense.** Clarification is needed to Rule 9-1-6-Exception 2(c) on FR-85. The committee approved the following wording:

“Players of the defensive team may block below the waist until the ball has gone more than five yards beyond the neutral zone. However, they may not block below the waist against a Team A player in position to receive a backward pass. They also may not block below the waist against an eligible Team A receiver beyond the neutral zone unless attempting to get to the ball or the ball carrier.”

RATIONALE. This interpretation preserves intent of the rule change that makes blocking below the waist illegal to enhance the safety of the student-athlete while providing specific exceptions that are more nearly comparable for both the offense and the defense.

EXAMPLE 1. First and 10 at the A-40. A12 receives the snap at the A-35 and starts on a sweep to his right. Guard A66 pulls and leads the play. At the A-39 defensive end B88 blocks A66 from the front at the knees and cornerback B33 makes the tackle at the A-42. **RULING:** The block by B88 is legal because the ball has not gone more than five yards beyond the neutral zone. Second and eight at the A-42.

EXAMPLE 2. First and 10 at the A-40. A12 receives the snap at the A-35 and starts on a sweep to his right. Guard A66 pulls and leads the play. At the snap linebacker B55 is positioned at the A-42. As the play develops A12 has carried the ball to the A-47 when B55 at the A-44 blocks A66 from the side at the thigh. A12 is driven out of bounds at the A-48. **RULING:** Foul by B55, blocking below the waist after the ball is more than five yards beyond the neutral zone. Fifteen-yard penalty enforced at the end of the run. First and 10 for Team A at the B-37.

EXAMPLE 3. First and 20 at the A-40. QB A12 takes the direct snap from center and takes a shallow drop to the A-42. Back A22 is at the A-44 in position to receive a backward pass when he is blocked from the front at the knees by defensive end B99. A12 is sacked at the A-35. **RULING:** Foul by B99, blocking below the waist against a player in position to receive a backward pass. Fifteen-yard penalty at the previous spot and automatic first down. First and 10 for Team A at the B-45.

EXAMPLE 4. First and 20 at the A-40. QB A12 takes the direct snap from center and drops back to pass. Flanker A25 runs a down-and-out pattern and is blocked from the front at the thigh by cornerback B17. A12 is sacked at the A-35. **RULING:** Foul by B17, blocking below the waist against an eligible receiver beyond the neutral zone. Fifteen-yard penalty at the previous spot and automatic first down. First and 10 for Team A at the B-45.

EXAMPLE 5. First and 10 at the A-40. A12 receives the snap at the A-35 and starts on a sweep to his right. He turns the corner and heads up the field. End A88 is ahead of the play, and safety B33 blocks him below the waist from the front at the 50. The back judge throws a flag as he believes that A12 has carried the ball just beyond the A-45 when B33 makes his block, but he is not certain. **RULING:** Foul by B33, blocking below the waist. Because the default position is that blocking below the waist is illegal, if there is a question in any given situation about it being a foul, it is a foul.

2. **Interpretation of Adjacent Sideline.** The rule passed by the committee uses some new terminology and several questions were raised with how the “adjacent sideline” would be administered. The examples and guidance below are intended to assist with the understanding of this rule.

- a. *Player Stationary At The Snap.* The **adjacent sideline** is the sideline to the player’s outside. This is the case no matter where the ball is located when it is snapped.
- For a player on the left side of the formation, this will be the sideline to the left.
 - For a player on the right side of the formation, this will be the sideline to the right.

EXAMPLE 1. The ball is at the right hash mark. Back A22 is one foot outside the tackle box to the left of the formation and he is stationary when the ball is snapped. **RULING:** The left sideline is to A22’s outside so it is his adjacent sideline, even though technically he is closer to the sideline to his right, which is “across the formation” from him. A22 is 25 yards and one foot from the right sideline and is slightly more than 28 yards from the left sideline. The clear intent of the rule is for the adjacent sideline to be to his left, i. e., to his outside.

- a. *Player In Motion At The Snap.* For a player who is moving at the snap, the **adjacent sideline** is determined the same as for a player who is stationary at the snap. That is, it is the sideline to the outside of his position at the snap. Note that his adjacent sideline will “flip” if his motion takes him beyond the snapper before the ball is snapped.

EXAMPLE 1. The ball is at the left hash mark. Back A33 is split far to the right. After all eleven Team A players have been set for at least one second A33 starts in motion to his left. When the ball is snapped he is just behind the *right tackle* and still moving laterally to the left. **RULING:** The adjacent sideline for A33 is the right sideline, since he started from that side and is still to the right of the snapper when the ball is snapped. Thus he may legally block below the waist north-and-south or toward his right sideline.

EXAMPLE 2. The ball is at the left hash mark. Back A33 is split far to the right. After all eleven Team A players have been set for at least one second A33 starts in motion to his left. He continues beyond the snapper, and when the ball is snapped he is just behind the *left guard* and is “running in place” rather than moving laterally. **RULING:** The adjacent sideline for A33 is the left sideline; that is now the sideline to his outside since his motion has taken him behind the snapper and to the opposite side of the formation from which he started. Thus he may legally block below the waist north-and-south or toward his left sideline.

- b. *Player in Motion Directly Behind the Snapper.* When a back in motion is almost directly behind the snapper when the ball is snapped, it may be difficult to determine which side of the formation he is on to establish his adjacent sideline. In this case, the adjacent sideline is interpreted to be the sideline toward which he is moving. Thus he will be able to block below the waist legally north-and-south or toward the sideline in front of him.

EXAMPLE 1. Back A44 lines up to the left of the formation, either inside or outside the tackle box. He starts in motion laterally to his right. At the snap he appears to be directly behind the snapper as he continues moving laterally to the right. **RULING:** The adjacent sideline for A44 is the sideline to the right. Thus he may legally block below the waist north-and-south or toward the sideline to the right of the formation.

Thank you for taking the time to review this guidance memorandum and good luck as you prepare for the upcoming season.

RR:nb

cc: NCAA Football Rules Committee
Selected Staff Members