



Contact Above the Shoulder
2009 Referee Department Directives
February 2, 2009

General Guidelines

Guidance is provided for two (2) types of “Contact Above the Shoulder:”

1. Ball In Play

Contact made between opponents most often during aerial challenges and during attempts by players to create space when they have possession of the ball. Contact is generally initiated with the forearm or elbow and, at times, with the palm of the hand to an opponent’s face as the player with the ball attempts to create space between himself and the opponent. Examples include but are not limited to:

- Aerial challenges: players jumping up and often into opponents to win headers.
- An attacker being held from behind while in possession of the ball: the attacker swings his arm/elbow/hand back into the opponent’s face to attempt to disengage him.
- An attacker has picked up speed and has pushed the ball by the defender and will pass the defender on his run with the ball: the defender uses his elbow/arm/hand in the facial region of the opponent to stop their progress.

2. Dead Ball Situations

Deliberate and intentional contact to the face of an opponent while the ball is out of play. Most likely to occur during instances of game disrepute or mass confrontation. Contact is generally made with a part of the hand.

Contact Above the Shoulder: Ball In Play

The acronym F-I-R-E should be used to assist officials with identifying elbows (in the run of play/ball in play) that should be dealt with by showing a red card for either serious foul play (if committed while competing for the ball) or violent conduct (any time other than while competing for the ball):

- Frustration
- Intimidation
- Retaliation (payback)
- Establish Territory or Space

Aerial Challenges: When evaluating aerial challenges referees should consider the following:

- **Does the player lead with the forearm and/or is the arm extended from the jumper's body?**

Does the player lead with the forearm and/or elbow as he jumps at or toward the opponent instead of straight up? An arm extended from the jumper's body is like a battering ram (solid, hard and unforgiving). Think "up and in" toward the opponent. Generally speaking the following guidelines can be applied:

- Up, Not In: A player who jumps straight up, with the arm in, is generally attempting a fair challenge.
- Up and In: A player who jumps toward the opponent, landing a far distance from where they initiated their jump with their arm extended thereby initiating contact above the opponent's shoulders is generally attempting an unfair challenge and the referee should consider misconduct.

- **Is the safety of the opponent endangered?**

Is the aerial challenge done in such a manner whereby there is disregard to the safety of the opponent? When a solid, extended arm makes contact with a player's face (soft tissue) or neck region, the player's safety is endangered. The referee needs to take into consideration the safety or well being of the opponent. The fact that the facial/head region is involved should be a signal to the referee that the safety of the opponent is jeopardized.

- **The result of the contact**

The result of the forearm and/or elbow contact, not just whether the player swung his arm/elbow to make contact. The consequences of a solid object (forearm, palm of the hand, elbow) connecting with a soft object often results in injury, broken jaw, broken nose, blackened eye.

Do not focus solely on the swinging of the arm. Referees need to modify their approach and consider the three factors above. By including these factors in the decision, officials will be better prepared to take the appropriate action.

Think before you act: A good officiating technique to aid in recognizing the severity of the "contact above the shoulder" involves delaying the ultimate decision a second or two in order to give the referee time to visualize and process the information.

After considering these factors, if the referee believes the safety of the opponent is endangered or would have been endangered, then a red card is mandated.

The idea of "excessive force" is important. **Contact with a solid object (forearm or hand) with a soft object (the face) often should be interpreted**

as “excessive force,” as the amount of force necessary to injure the opponent is significantly less. Also, consider that when contact above the shoulder is initiated, players do not have the opportunity to defend themselves; as a result, the player receiving the contact is extremely vulnerable.

Contact Above the Shoulder: Dead Ball Situations

The following involves premeditated and deliberate contact with an opponent’s face during dead ball situations – a stoppage in play. Key is “contact above the shoulder.”

Intentional and deliberate contact in the area of the face is not permitted with any part of the hand. Deliberate facial contact cannot be tolerated. Players who intentionally make contact with an opponent’s face **must be issued a red card** for violent conduct.

Actions aimed at the face of an opponent must be dealt with severely REGARDLESS OF THE FORCE USED if the actions are:

- Deliberate
- Intended to intimidate
- Endangering the safety of an opponent
- Insulting and/or offensive in nature
- Potentially inciting further action on the part of opponents
- Done in a provocative, inciteful manner

The above is not intended to address friendly contact that is not confrontational.

The following lists some specific (but not all) examples of the manner in which the contact can be initiated:

- Use of the backhand
- Open handed slap
- A push/slap to the face
- The jabbing of a finger(s) to the face
- Grabbing hair
- Use of a fist

Contact with the back of the head: When applying the aforementioned examples, the use of force becomes increasingly important when it involves contact with the back of the player’s head. Although the likelihood for injury is somewhat lessened as compared to contact with the face, referees must be aware of the danger to injure that “excessive force” to the back of the neck may cause. Depending upon the intent and the force used to the back of the head, referees may exercise reasonable discretion/tolerance in the selection of the most appropriate sanction.

Contact Above the Shoulder: SUMMARY

Consider the following tool vs. weapon comparison as “contact above the shoulder” occurs.

- **Tool:** consider a foul or yellow card if contact made
- **Weapon:** a red card is mandated

| TOOL | WEAPON |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Arm used for balance• Normal body movement• No swing of the arm INTO the opponent• Opponent into arm/elbow/hand – not arm/elbow/hand into opponent• Arm/elbow was out <i>before</i> the challenge was initiated• Not UP and IN – just UP | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Excessive force used• Safety of the player is endangered• Hard surface (forearm/elbow/hand) contacting soft surface (facial and neck region)• Arm/elbow UP and IN to opponent• Arm/elbow/hand is swung toward opponent’s facial region• UP and IN – arm used as a “battering ram”• Injury results |