



Focus on Impact Penalties-Head Contact

A General Reminder about Impact Penalties and Non-Calls

The goal of each of these “Focus on Impact Penalties” is to illustrate how officials can use both penalties and non-calls to clearly communicate what is allowed and what is not allowed.

Here are the two questions that defines impact penalties from non-calls:

- 1. Would this penalty send a very clear message to the players, coaches and the entire arena about the type of play that will be permitted?**
- 2. Would this penalty provide teachable information about how the “guilty player” can change their play to avoid a penalty in the future?**

If the answer to both of these is “Yes” then the referee has an opportunity to make an impact penalty call. Ultimately, every penalty should be an impact penalty.

If the answer to both of these questions is “No” then the referee does not call a penalty; if one of the questions is “No” then the referee needs to decide if calling the penalty makes sense (it probably does not make sense if the answer is “No” to either question).

The referee then needs to decide if this is a standard no-call or if it needs to become an impact non-call. Generally, to create an impact non-call, the referee will add a verbal statement that has three goals: (1) draws attention to a non-call (2) is phrased to tell the players what was done to avoid a penalty, and (3) encourage more of this behaviour based on not receiving a penalty and the officials’ praise of the player.

What the Rule Book Says

Rule 7.6 Highlights:

- Assess a minor penalty if a player accidentally contacts an opponent’s head.
- Assess a double minor, major + game misconduct, or Match penalty depending on the intent and violence of head contact.
- Assess a Game Ejection if a player has 3 Head Contact penalties in a game.

Why It Matters

Hockey is a game and is not real life. The players are not millionaire professionals, but children with developing brains and full lives ahead of them. As such, head contact has a direct link to concussions and officials can have the best effect on the game by calling head contact penalties strictly and consistently.

Example of an Impact Call and Non-Call

- 1) No Call: A17 body checks B8. A17's shoulder makes contact with B8's upper chest but B8's head does not receive contact with any part of A17's body. No penalty.
- 2) Impact Penalty in game with body checking: B91 body checks A7. B91's hands make contact with A7's chest then follow-up into A7's chin with minimal violence and intent. Call a minor penalty.
- 3) Impact Penalty in game with body checking: A77 body checks B6. A77 begins with his hands high and follows through on his body check into B6's head. Call a 2+2, major + game misconduct or match penalty.
- 4) Impact Penalty in either body checking or no-body-checking: B66 and A2 are battling in the corner with A2's back to B66. As they battle, A2 accidentally elbows B66 in the head while trying to gain body position with no intent and minimal impact. Call a minor penalty for head contact.
- 5) Impact Penalty in either body checking or no-body checking: The goalie covers the puck, A6 and B8 are battling for body position as the whistle goes. A6 gives B8 a face-wash. Assess, at minimum, a 2+2 for head contact.

How to make Head Contact an impact penalty

Creating impact penalties for head contact is not dependent on whether a level of hockey allows body checking or not. The approach is simple. As soon as there is contact with the head of the other player, call a penalty. Take a look at the "Rule 6.5 Highlights" again and note that nothing says "light contact with the head is ok." Call a head contact penalty as soon as the lightest head contact occurs; make head contact go away.

How to make a non-call into an impact non-call for body checking hockey

Players may engage each other by body checking, playing the puck/stick, or gaining body position. In body-checking hockey, the goal is to keep the player's hands down when they engage other players, but especially when body checking another player. During the play, there will be contact or checks where the player making the check comes close to making head contact but not. In these cases, the referee may create an impact non-call by saying, "Nice Hit B52...hands were down" or "hands are down...nice hit..."

How to make a non-call into an impact non-call in non-body checking hockey

In non-body checking hockey, the goal is to limit body checking, which will also limit head contact. Instead of body checking, players have two options when they engage each other that referees want to encourage: (1) players should try to obtain body position or (2) play the puck/stick. In the course of doing these two actions, body contact may occur, and fans or players/coaches may want a body-checking or head-contact penalty. If the referee wants to create an impact non-call then she may say "play was on the puck...good battle" or "way to find body position Black 17."