



## Applying Impact Penalties in Games with Body Checking

### Part 1: Introducing Impact Penalties and their Application in Body Checking Hockey

The goal of this document is to help referees understand how to use impact penalties to manage body checking games.

#### *What are Impact Penalties?*

Every penalty called needs to be an impact penalty. There are two questions that define an impact penalty:

1. Does this penalty set a clear standard for what is and is not allowed?
2. Can the guilty player do something different next time to avoid getting this penalty?

There are three possible outcomes for these two questions:

- Both are answered 'yes'.
- Both are answered 'no'.
- One is 'yes' and one is 'no'.

The first two are easy. If both are 'yes' then call the impact penalty. If both are 'no' then do not call the penalty as it is not impactful. The third option is yes/no or no/yes, in which case whether to call a penalty or not would depend on the needs of the game<sup>1</sup>.

#### *The Need for a Clear Boundary*

Players are coached to do everything they can to win, therefore, they will push the rules as far as possible to gain an advantage over the other team. This is not a negative thing, it is just the nature of competition. Referees need to ensure that all penalties are impact penalties to set a clear boundary between legal and illegal play.

Body checking is a particularly important area when considering that line between legal and illegal. When a player pushes the legal limits of a body check, the game becomes more unsafe than if a player pushes the legal limits of obstruction.

#### *The Difference between Body Checking and Non-Body Checking Hockey*

It's easy to say "the difference is whether I call body checking penalties". Unfortunately, it is not that simple. Legal body checking affects games in three ways:

1. A body check can change the momentum and nature of the game.
2. Any given hit, clean or not, has the potential to excite half the arena while angering the other half leading to increased emotions in the entire arena.
3. When the competitive intensity increases<sup>2</sup>, players in body checking games have a legal method to inflict physical pain on the other team.

These three effects simply do not exist without body checking, which is why referees need to understand how to keep body checks fair and safe. The challenge for that younger referee relates to

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<sup>1</sup> To learn more about impact penalties please see "Focus on Impact Penalties" and "Impact Penalties" documents or the 6 video series about Game Management; all available on [wpgrefs.com](http://wpgrefs.com).

<sup>2</sup> There is nothing wrong with "competitive intensity". Competition makes a game fun and the referee should not seek to limit it. Rather, the referee needs to ensure that body checks remain legal to avoid unsafe and unfair play.

a lack of knowledge about body checking. They develop referee skills in several non-body checking leagues then are asked to referee body checking for the first time. The best way to understand body checking is covered in the next two sections.

### **Part Two: Legal Body Checks and Impact Non-Calls**

Part Two and Three contrast legal and illegal body checks. To start, understand that it is not enough to only call penalties to punish illegal checks. As a referee, you also want to encourage legal checks by understanding what is legal and using impact non-calls.

#### *Defining a legal body check*

A legal body check is defined by five characteristics:

1. **Hands down:** The player making the check has his hands at his sides or making contact with the other player's chest (not to the head).
2. **Target the body:** the checker makes contact with his body to the front or the side of the other player (not low to the legs or to the numbers).
3. **In control:** the checking player is in control of his body and uses an appropriate amount of force to remove the other player from the puck (rather than hitting with enough force to injure the opponent).
4. **During play:** the check occurs during the game (rather than after the whistle).
5. **With the puck:** the player receiving the check has possession of the puck (rather than not having the puck).

Checks that fail to meet any one of these criteria likely require a penalty. However, your goal cannot only be "call a penalty if the body check is illegal". Instead, you need to use Impact Non-Calls to encourage legal body checks and to contrast Impact Penalties.

#### *What are Impact Non-Calls?*

There are two types of Impact Non-Calls. The first type is a non-verbal Impact Non-Call. This occurs when a body check is so obviously legal that you do not need to call anything and the very act of not raising your hand<sup>3</sup> tells the arena "do more of that kind of hit".

The second type of Impact Non-Call involves a body check that is less obviously legal but you see it as being legal. In these circumstances, you need to:

- use an assertive voice loudly enough for the players on the ice to hear you (this volume will make you sound confident but not angry loud).
- explain what the checker did to make a legal play (explaining what was done well will encourage other players to do that same thing in the future)<sup>4</sup>

Examples of Impact Non-Call using your voice include:

- "Hands are down, good hit" (implies a player avoiding checking to the head).
- "Feet stayed on the ice, well done" (implies a player avoiding a charge).

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<sup>3</sup> This is not to say that you aren't communicating. Your body language is doing all the work as you're confident and assertive in how you carry yourself during a non-verbal Impact Non-Call.

<sup>4</sup> When considering verbal Impact Non-Calls, the most important part of the phrasing is that you tell players what to do, rather than what not to do. For example, telling a player "way not to hit him from behind" is not as effective as saying "good curl away when you saw his numbers." The second phrasing gives the checking play an action (curl away) to replace the undesired action (check from behind). This positive phrasing is more effective in helping that player, as well as other players, remember what to do in during intense future CFB situations.

- “Way to curl away when you saw those numbers, 7 white” (implies 7 is avoiding a check from behind).
- “Good stop that body check at the whistle 9 black” (implies 9 is avoiding Roughing after the Whistle).

### **Part 3: Illegal Body Checks and Impact Penalties**

Hockey is an emotional and competitive game; that’s what makes it great. However, referees want to ensure that emotions remain at a safe level rather than escalating to an emotionally violent level. Illegal-unpenalized body checks can lead to an unsafe style of play that can lead to long lasting injuries. Therefore, the following penalties are useful for ensuring that body checks remain legal.

#### *Boarding (Rule 7.2)*

- *When it is applied:* A player should always be safe when checked on the boards and it is the responsibility of the checker to ensure that his opponent is safe when he hits his opponent.
  - *Extra Credit:* A player can be penalized for boarding with or without doing something on purpose. Therefore, it is true that a person can purposefully run a player into the boards and be penalized. It is also true that a checker can be penalized after accidentally causing an opponent to fall unsafely into the boards.
- *What a guilty player learns:* A boarding penalty tells the player making the check that he must always be in control of his body and that he needs to be thinking about how his check affects his opponent on the boards. The checker needs to be able to not make a check if his opponent is vulnerable along the boards.
- *Impression on the arena:* A boarding penalty tells the arena that players battling on the boards or making checks are responsible for the outcome of their checks and collisions.
- *What happens if not called:* When boarding is not called, players will push the boundaries during battles on the boards. Rather than playing to pin their opponent and battle for the puck, they try to make a body check with a player in an awkward position. Without proper application of boarding, unconscious split-second decisions are more likely to be boarding.

#### *Charging (Rule 7.4)*

- *When it is applied:* The Hockey Canada Rule Book says that a player may not: Jump into a check, take 2+ steps immediately prior to the check to increase intensity of hit, travel an excessive distance to make a hit, violently/unnecessarily check another player, delivers a body check from the blind side of an opponent.
  - *Extra Credit:* A blind side hit is defined as an open ice hit delivered from outside the peripheral vision of the player being checked. A common, but not necessary, outcome of a blind side hit is the player experiencing an out-of-control spin because the check came from outside the player’s peripheral vision.
- *What a guilty player can learn:* Body checks need to be delivered in a controlled manner and as part of the play to knock an opponent off a puck. Excess force in a body check is not an option.
- *Impression on the arena:* Body checking is part of the game but the player making the hit must be in control and have a primary goal of making a play not blowing up an opponent.
- *What happens if not called:* If players are allowed to take runs at each other without being penalized, a frustration builds because it is hard to know where the next hit is coming from. It creates a fear in players. Fear leads to a player being on edge which leads to more illegal body checks as players seek to ensure the perception of fairness.

### *Checking From Behind (Rule 7.5)*

- *When it is applied:* Players who make a check into the numbers of an opponent are assessed a penalty that includes an ejection.
  - *Extra Credit:* There are circumstances where a checker realizes his error right before the hit and is unable to avoid it. However, he finds a way to protect his opponent by slowing down and briefly bear hugging him to keep safe. This player may avoid a penalty, however, the preferred outcome is to avoid the check and the referee should remind the checker of a need to avoid that situation.
- *What a guilty player can learn:* See numbers; avoid the hit.
- *Impression on the arena:* Players need to avoid hits that cause their opponent to fall forwards due to contact from behind.
- *What happens if not called:* Checking from Behind has been a priority for Hockey Canada since the 1990s and everyone knows it is not acceptable. If it is not called, the emotions of the entire arena will become embroiled with fear which leads to unpredictability.

### *Checking to the Head (Rule 7.6)*

- *When it is applied:* A checker making any contact with his opponent's head is penalized.
  - *Extra Credit:* Checking to the Head became a focus in the early 2010s as a way to improve safety by reducing concussions. One question that occurs is "should I call a penalty if the checker makes only a little contact with the head?" You need to call the penalty because even minimal head contact can quickly lead to an escalation to moderate head contact or worse. Better to stop head contact at minimal contact than have to deal with it at moderate or severe.
- *What a guilty player can learn:* The guilty player can avoid a penalty in the future by ensuring that the hands stay at their side or makes contact with the opponent's torso.
- *Impression on the arena:* When you assess a penalty for Checking to the Head, you are telling the arena that body checks are called body checks because they are body-to-body not body-to head. In non-body checking leagues, the arena is told body contact does not include head contact.
- *What happens if not called:* Escalation. A little head contact leads to more serious head contact and the referee will be forced to deal with increased violence.

### *Kneeing (Rule 7.8)*

- *When it is applied:* Body checks are body to body. Kneeing is the targeting of another player's leg with one's own leg. This is not a body check and can be penalized.
  - *Extra Credit:* Where the puck carrier and the checker both have their legs extended, it is the responsibility of the checker to find a way to avoid the knee-on-knee collision. It is rarely possible to explain away a kneeing penalty by saying "both players had their legs out" because the checker is responsible the same way the checker is responsible for avoiding a check from behind.
- *What a guilty player can learn:* The guilty player learns that, when making a check, his legs need to be in a position to not make primary contact with the other player. If the checker is going to miss the check then the checker needs to accept the missed hit.
- *Impression on the arena:* The knee-on-knee check tells the arena that the player making the hit was trying to make contact when there was not contact to be made. It often looks bad because it is bad. An impact penalty for kneeing tells the arena that a missed body check is a missed hit and that players need to avoid reaching with the leg to make contact
- *What happens if not called:* Missed kneeing calls lead to more negative emotions because it is one player going out of his way to violently contact another player. Missing a kneeing

penalty can create situations where the team that feels wronged seeks out vengeance through legal or illegal body checks.

#### *Pushing After the Whistle (Rule 7.9 Interpretation 1)*

- *When it is applied:* 7.9, Interpretation 1 says that pushing after the whistle should not happen. Penalize pushing after the whistle.
  - *Extra Credit:* Think about this. If the person who pushes first never does so, then the retaliation never happens. Interpretation 1 says the referee needs to make the team that starts the pushing kill a penalty because it discourages both teams from starting anything in the future. In contrast, if the referee calls coincidentals, both teams forget about the coincidentals quickly which reduces the impact of the penalty.
- *What a guilty player can learn:* Avoid a penalty by not starting stuff after the whistle.
- *Impression on the arena:* The whistle goes. The play stops. The players make a line change. No where does that sequence of events say “push each other”.
- *What happens if not called:* The first push leads to a second which leads to a third. The pushing continues at the next whistle. Players start throwing body checks that border on or become illegal.

#### *Interference Related to Late Body Checks (Rule 8.3)*

- *When it is applied:* A player who has released the puck is no longer eligible to be checked. A checker who makes a check after his opponent has released the puck should be penalized unless the check is occurring simultaneously to the puck being released.
  - *Extra Credit:* The rule book says that a checker who is within an arm and stick length may make the check when his opponent releases the puck. Given the fast speed of hockey, what this really means is that the body check is occurring immediately to the puck being released. It does not mean that a player less than a stick and arm length can start his check after his opponent has released the puck.
- *What a guilty player can learn:* When your opponent releases the puck, you should find a way to not finish the check. Remember, the point of a body check is to separate a player from the puck. By that definition, if the puck is gone...the body check is no longer needed.
- *Impression on the arena:* Players need to be in control of their body and use a body check to remove your opponent from the puck.
- *What happens if not called:* Missed interference calls are not the most dangerous penalty to miss because generally it is an otherwise legal check that is late. That said, if the referee misses too many late hits then “the other team” will start taking the same opportunities for late hits which leads to an escalation of more violent checks.

#### *Goalie Interference related to Body Checking (Rule 8.5 & 7.4b Interpretation 2)*

- *When it is applied:* 8.5 is about interference of the goalie while 7.4b Interpretation 2 is about charging the goalie. The goaltender is never allowed to be the recipient of a body check whether in or out of the goal crease. Therefore, if a goalie is checked then you likely have a penalty.<sup>5</sup>
  - *Extra Credit:* There is a regular excuse for not penalizing the checker because “he was pushed into the goalie. However, the question is not “was the checker pushed into the goalie?”. Rather, it is “did the player do everything in their power to avoid the goalie?” if the answer to the second question is ‘no’ you have a penalty to call.

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<sup>5</sup> Goalies are permitted to throw a body check. However, it needs to be a legal check. For example, if the goalie checks an opposition player to create time for his teammate carrying the puck then the goalie is guilty of interference. Goalies who throw body checks are governed by all the rules discussed elsewhere in this document.

- *What a guilty player can learn:* The player penalized for checking a goalie can learn that they either need to completely avoid checking the goalie or make every attempt possible to avoid contact with the goalie.
- *Impression on the arena:* The arena sees the goalie as different because they wear different equipment and do a job different from everyone else. When the referee calls a goalie interference penalty to protect the goalie the arena knows that the referee “has got this...we have to protect the goalie...”
- *What happens if not called:* Everyone (rather than only one team) becomes on edge because the goalie’s team is angry about the contact and the checker’s team is concerned that the no call could lead to running their goalie. The fear can lead to more violent checks.

#### **Part 4: When you miss a Call**

Here are the strategies you may take to reduce its negative impact on a game. Remember they are different choices not steps. In any given situation you may only use one of them or multiple.

- *Own the mistake.* By owning the mistake you can create an impact on the game by saying that should have been call.
  - “You know captain, I missed that call. I think about it, 7 white could have tried harder to avoid your goalie even while engaged with your defender.”
- *Reminder of your limits.* You can’t be looking at everything all the time. By using this reminder, you are telling others that you missed a call but that doesn’t mean it was legal...just that you weren’t looking at the right place...so make the players know that a non-call there doesn’t mean it was legal or not...just hat you didn’t see it.
  - “Sorry captain, that sounded bad and what you are telling me may be true. However, I just wasn’t looking there. I will keep my head on a swivel to try to catch that next time.”
- *Refocus on the basic skills.* During times of stress refocus on your position and procedures to ensure you are setting yourself up to see as much as possible to give yourself the opportunity for success. Focus on making the next call or non-call correct.
  - “You know coach, I missed that one. I am going to keep hustling and keep my head on swivel. I can’t promise you I will see everything but I will do my best to see as much as possible.”