

Football Behind the Whistle

By Dick Pendleton, '26law

FOOTBALL from behind the whistle furnishes a great opportunity to see the game as no one else can see it. It isn't exactly the best place from which to view the game, but many interesting and amusing things happen on the playing field and many situations arise that challenge the expert knowledge of the officials.

Frequently things happen that are not thoroughly understood by the crowd, and sometimes the complications get too deep for the officials. They have to make a ruling immediately, and they have no chance to think things over or look it up in the rule book.

Not so many years ago in one of the major games in this state, the offensive team was using a "criss-cross." On this play three of the backs lined up parallel to the line of scrimmage and about five yards back. The ball was snapped directly to the quarterback who immediately turned to face the other backs. These would charge to the opposite sides of the line, crossing in turn in front of the quarterback who would fake the ball to two of them and pass it to the third. The team had used this offensive tactic very successfully, taking the ball down to the opponents' thirty-yard line. On each of these plays the referee would follow in closely and leap in the pile to uncover the ball.

At this position in the field the quarterback faked the ball to *all three* of the backs and then passed to an end coming around who immediately was off to a touchdown. The referee was completely fooled on the play. He leaped into the pile of humanity on the line of scrimmage and blew his whistle loudly and you can imagine his chagrin when he discovered that the ball was not there but was back of the goal line, some thirty yards away.

Under the rules, the whistle kills the ball and it is dead and no further advance can be made after the whistle is blown.

So the touchdown could not be allowed, and in this particular game the ball was brought back and played over again. The correct ruling would have been to allow the ball carrier all the ground gained up to the time the whistle sounded, and in this game the ball carrier had gained about five yards when the whistle was blown.

The coach of this unlucky team is usually very charitable with officials, but he still maintains that the referee that day was one of the poorest he ever engaged to handle a game for him.

OFFICIALS find football fans are always willing to help make decisions—in favor of their own team.

Sometimes violations of the rules escape the notice of both the fans and the officials. In a crucial game played here in the state with a record crowd on hand to witness the contest, one of the teams took an early lead by scoring a touchdown and kicking goal.

The other team fought hard and finally in the last quarter of the game it tried a pass that was thrown hard to one of the ends. It was too difficult for him to handle and was deflected up in air and over the reach of the defensive halfback, but was then caught by another member of the passing team who was eligible and he ran about fifteen yards to the goal line. The officials called it a touchdown and the kick was good and the game ended in a tie.

The fans registered no protest, the coaches couldn't, and only a few persons who knew that a pass is incomplete under such circumstances, realized that a mistake had been made. The rule is simply that a second originally eligible man cannot catch the ball legally unless it has been touched by the defense.

In a certain game last year the fans did not know what had happened to them and

the officials at the time did not realize that they had made a mistake. It was a college game in another state. The offensive team had the ball on the opponents' four-yard line and it was fourth down and goal to go. On the following play the offensive team was offside and defensive team was guilty of a disqualifying foul.

The referee disqualified the offending player and penalized his team half the distance to the goal line or two yards, and called it a first down and goal to go. The offensive team tried four times and went over on the fourth down for a touchdown that won the ball game.

But the rule is that the down must be played over in the above situation unless the distance penalty put the ball in advance of the point to be gained; so the down should have still been the fourth, and the offensive team would have had one down in which to score instead of three. The crowd still doesn't know what happened on the play.

An amusing story comes out of Texas about a high school game that was played there last year. The coach reports that it was one of the toughest contests that his team played all season. The game went scoreless up until only seconds remained to play. Then his team was able to score a touchdown and they attempted to score the extra point by a kick.

The kick was blocked and recovered by the opponents who ran the length of the field to the goal line and the officials allowed the touchdown and the opponents kicked goal for the extra point and beat them by one point! I do not vouch for the verity of that story.

Sometimes players and coaches find a weakness in the rules and begin to take advantage of it. The rules committee has changed the rules to cure these defects

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from time to time as they have been discovered.

A few years ago in a Missouri Valley game one of the teams had a seven-point lead and in the last half its opponent began to cause plenty of trouble with driving offensive play that came near scoring several times.

The team in the lead got possession of the ball when the last quarter was about half over, and tried three times at the line of scrimmage without making much gain. On the fourth down the astute quarterback deliberately ran back of the goal line that he was defending and placed the ball down for a safety, scoring two points for the other team. Crazy? Wait a minute and see.

The ball was brought out to his twenty-yard line where his team kept the ball for three more downs. Then he again ran back of his goal line for another safety. Given the ball on the twenty-yard line, he repeated this procedure once more, and in all, deliberately scored six points for his opponents.

All that time the quarterback was able to keep his team in possession of the ball while precious moments of the time were slipping away. The game ended without the other team ever getting possession of the ball, and the final score was 7 to 6. One team had done all of the scoring for both teams!

The rules committee changed the rule the next year and now when a team has a safety scored against it, it must put the ball in play from its twenty-yard line by a free kick. Already this year in one of our high school games after a safety had been scored against a team, that team was permitted to put the ball in play by a scrimmage, thus erroneously depriving the other team of the ball and the run-back of the kick.

About three years ago in a Sooner home game one of the Sooner ends went down under a punt and attempted to stop the ball on the one-yard line. The field was wet and slick and in falling upon the ball he slipped across the goal line with the ball.

The officials ruled that it was a touchback. The decision was correct but very unpopular. The rule is that members of the kicking team are prohibited from touching the ball on a kick from scrimmage after it has crossed the line of scrimmage until it is touched by some member of the defensive team. The penalty for touching the ball is the loss of the ball at the spot of the illegal touching. The ball is not dead when a member of the kicking team touches the ball, and is not dead until declared dead by the referee.

When a ball is touched on the one-yard line and then carried across the goal line

and declared dead back of the goal line, the receiving team has an option. It may either take the ball where it was declared dead and therefore a touchback, or it may take the ball at the spot of the illegal touching. Certainly the captain would take the touchback in the above case.

A few years ago in one of the Big Six games a big tackle of the kicking team had come down fast under a punt and caught the ball on the first bounce and immediately laid it down. The safety man of the opponents, seeing the situation and knowing the rule, deliberately picked up the ball.

The tackle thereupon told the safety man that he could not run with the ball and the safety man replied, "Just watch me." The result was that he was harder to catch than a scared deer and was finally run out of bounds after a return of some forty yards.

The safety man's captain was a nice fellow and he declined the penalty for the illegal touching of the ball by the big tackle and took the gain.

In a game this year the safety man caught a kick from scrimmage in his own end zone and raced out down the field all the way to the other goal line. The crowd urged him on, but after the beautiful run was finished, the official recovered the ball and brought it back to the safety man's twenty-yard line where it was put in play.

The decision was not very popular with the home crowd but it was absolutely correct. The rule is that a kick from scrimmage that crosses the goal line before being touched in the field of play is a touchback and is dead, and of course any attempt to play the ball after such a situation is wasted effort.

However, don't confuse a kick from scrimmage with a free kick or kickoff as the Sooners did at Nebraska a few years ago. Those touchdowns come easy when all you have to do is to fall on the ball back of the goal line. The receiving team must recover the ball to protect itself if the ball stays in the field of play or end zone after a free kick or kickoff.

On a kickoff that goes out of bounds the receiving team has the option of putting the ball in play by a scrimmage fifteen yards in from where it crossed the side line between the goal lines, or may put the ball in play at any point on its own thirty-five-yard line. The rule with reference to kick is interpreted to mean that a kicked ball is still a kicked ball until declared dead by the referee.

In a game last year one of the players of the receiving team was standing near the side line and deep in his own territory. The kickoff came sailing through the air toward him and he had to back up to about his five-yard line. When the ball hit the ground, he deliberately batted it backward and out of bounds on about the five-yard line. The captain of his team exercised his option and took the ball on his own thirty-five yard line.

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The crowd and the radio announcer did not understand the play, but the ruling was correct. The receiving team had a net gain of about thirty-yards on the play without ever getting possession and control of the ball.

One of our successful young coaches was asked a few years ago why the National Rules Committee changed the rules so often. His answer was, "if they didn't change them, the fans and coaches might find out what the game is all about."

In recent years, there have not been so many changes in the rules. Most of the changes have been made to make the game safer for the players and to prevent injuries. The National Rules Committee should be commended for the fine work it has been doing in this respect.

Football today is a long way from that of a few years ago when players were permitted to tape their hands and wear leather braces on their hands and wrists, and after downs half of the players were punch-drunk from the effects of the battering they took on the line of scrimmage.

We have one change this year that will be noticed as the season progresses. That is the new rule requiring the ineligible players to remain on their own side of the line of scrimmage until the pass is made. They cannot advance across the line of scrimmage and if they do, they are called for interference and their team penalized fifteen yards and the loss of a down. However, if the initial charge of the linemen against their opponents carries them across the line of scrimmage this is not a violation of the rule.

You may have come to the conclusion, after reading about some of the mistakes that officials make, that the officials are an inefficient and incapable group of men. That would be incorrect. I know that in the Big Six, the Missouri Valley and the Southwest Conferences we have some of the finest officials in the nation. The most famous of them all is probably E. C. Quigley who lives in the neighboring state of Kansas, and his work has been an inspiration for a lot of younger men who officiate.

In our own state we have several that in my opinion are top flight officials and they can call anybody's ball game.

Behind the whistle in almost every major ball game is an official with years of experience as a player, who strives to be letter perfect in his knowledge of the rules of the game, who has officiated in hundreds of football games, a person who knows all or nearly all the possible situations that might arise in any ball game, and who can instantly and correctly give a correct ruling thereon.

He is a person physically fit and mentally alert and one who possesses a keen and unerring sense of judgment, who can instantly, decisively and correctly apply the proper ruling to the actual situation

If he makes a slip once in a great while, don't be too critical. It's a tough job.

O.U.'s Employment Problem

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hind the fountain, waiting tables, doing janitor work, running the elevator, supervising the main lounge and recreation room, and so on.

Almost all of these are "meal jobs," which means that the students work three hours a day and receive meal tickets at the rate of 30 cents for an hour's work.

The Union management receives far more applications for jobs than it can possibly handle. During the spring and summer months of 1939, a total of 312 applications were received. Only 116 of these applicants could be employed this fall.

In general, all student jobs in the Union are filled six months in advance of the opening of any particular semester.

George Wadsack, registrar and former head of the committee that selects NYA workers, has been observing student employment on this campus since 1919, and he says it is much harder now for a boy or girl to get a job than it was in earlier days.

In his office, he employs a few students and puts on only one or two new ones, usually sophomores, each year. These are selected on the basis of their ability from a large group of temporary employes Mr. Wadsack hires for registration. He calls the more efficient workers back for a day or two during busy times later in the year. Eventually the best become regular employes. In the registry office, students who live in Norman are preferred because they do not leave town during vacations when experienced student help is needed.

Mr. Wadsack prefers to employ students who do need the money and who are above the average in scholastic ability. He cannot employ students whose grades suffer when they are required to work over time.

About two hundred applications are sent to Mr. Wadsack each summer and fall.

Mr. Wadsack has occasion to advise hundreds of students bothered with the money problem. He says a boy coming to Norman should remember that jobs are just as hard to find here as they are in his own home, and that many of them are sewed up in advance. If there happens to be an opening at one of the Corner drug stores, probably the fellow who expects to graduate has brought a friend in to call on the manager long before school is out in the spring, and the friend gets the job.

The University has little or no control over employment off the campus. If an alumnus has a protege who needs work, he cannot expect the University to guarantee to find him a place in a store or office. The best thing for a prospective freshman to do, Mr. Wadsack advises, is to stay at home until he has saved enough money for a semester. Then he should come to school, devote his first semester

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