

Basketball Points of Emphasis - 2025-26

Contact on the Ball Handler

Continued emphasis is placed on the consistent enforcement of illegal contact involving the ball handler. While hand-checking remains a known concern, other forms of illegal contact must also be recognized and penalized. Defenders often use their hips, torsos, or other parts of the body to displace, redirect, or impede a ball handler's freedom of movement. These tactics must be identified and addressed in accordance with the rules.

Particular attention is required during late-game scenarios. Not all fouls committed in the closing moments of a contest are necessarily intentional. Determinations regarding intentional fouls must be based on the act itself, rather than on the intent or verbal instructions from coaching staff. The presence of directives such as "foul," "red," or "scramble" does not automatically classify the resulting contact as intentional.

If the contact constitutes a legitimate attempt to play the ball or to defend an opponent — either on the ball or away from it — it should be adjudicated as a common foul. Standards for evaluating contact must remain consistent throughout the game, including in its final moments. The strategic intent of one team to stop the clock must be weighed against the opposing team's interest in allowing the clock to run.

Conversely, contact that is excessive, clearly removes an opponent's apparent advantage, or does not constitute a legitimate basketball play should be classified as an intentional foul. Instructional emphasis must be placed on teaching players how to commit fouls within the parameters of the rules.

Bench Decorum, Communication, and Player Altercations

Ongoing concerns have been noted regarding bench decorum, improper communication with officials, and incidents involving player altercations. All team personnel, including coaching staff and bench players, are expected to uphold a standard of sportsmanship through disciplined behavior, clear expectations and structured preparation.

Bench Decorum and Communication

Bench decorum remains a significant point of emphasis. Officials are expected to take a proactive role in managing coach and bench behavior, particularly regarding the conduct of head and assistant coaches. Rule 4-48 (Warning for Coach/Team Conduct) should be applied early and consistently to prevent escalation and maintain game control.

Effective communication between coaches and officials should be established prior to the contest and maintained throughout. A professional and respectful tone is expected. When reasonable rules-based inquiries are made by coaches (e.g., "Can you watch the screening?"), a simple verbal acknowledgment or nonverbal gesture such as a nod is generally sufficient.

Rules-based questions—such as, “What did my player do wrong on that illegal screen?”—are appropriate and should receive a clear and informative response. These interactions support the educational purpose of the game. In contrast, rhetorical questions or comments not seeking clarification (e.g., “What’s it going to take to get a foul called?” or “It’s getting rough out there”) do not require a response.

Coach on the Floor

Rule 10-5 delineates the privileges and restrictions for head coaches and bench personnel. Only the head coach is permitted to stand and provide instructions to players during live ball play. This communication must be carried out in a professional and sportsmanlike manner. All other personnel, including assistant coaches and team members not actively participating in play, must remain seated except during rule-allowed situations (e.g., during time-outs or spontaneous reactions to exceptional play).

This emphasis seeks not to restrict enthusiasm but to preserve order and promote respect for the game. Adherence to coaching box boundaries is essential to maintaining safety and fairness. An increasing number of incidents have been observed involving coaches stepping onto the court during live play. Such behavior introduces potential safety concerns and must be addressed through rule enforcement.

Coach Responsibilities Before and During a Fight

The head coach holds primary responsibility for the prevention and de-escalation of potential altercations. Proactive planning is expected, including the designation of specific duties for assistant coaches in the event of a fight. One assistant coach may be tasked with managing on-court players, while others may be assigned to control bench personnel. Such role assignments serve to prevent mass disqualifications and maintain order during disruptive incidents.

Faking Being Fouled

In the previous season, the NFHS Basketball Rules Committee adopted Rule 4-49, Warning for Faking Being Fouled, to address unsporting acts where players simulate illegal contact in an attempt to deceive officials and gain a competitive advantage. These actions include embellishing contact on block/charge plays, simulating impact during shooting attempts, or using movements such as a 'head bob' to draw a foul. Such conduct compromises the integrity of the game and places undue influence on officiating decisions. A corresponding signal (#15) was also introduced to assist with enforcement.

For the 2025–26 season, this point of emphasis is reaffirmed, with renewed focus on consistent adjudication across all levels of play. Faking being fouled may occur by offensive or defensive players, and must be addressed in accordance with approved procedures and NFHS guidelines.

Types of Faking Being Fouled

Three primary categories of Faking Being Fouled have been identified:

Head Bob

This infraction occurs when a player in control of the ball simulates contact by quickly snapping the head backward. In this case, the faking signal (#15) should be displayed immediately, and the whistle should be sounded concurrently. If this is the first offense for the team, a team warning is reported. Since the infraction occurs while in player control, the offending team retains possession and is awarded a throw-in at one of the four designated spots in either the frontcourt or backcourt, depending on the location of the warning.

In the Act of Shooting

If a shooter simulates being fouled—typically by falling to the floor without contact—after releasing the ball, the faking signal (#15) should be displayed immediately; however, the whistle should be withheld. Play should be stopped upon the occurrence of any of the following:

- The try is successful;
- The defensive team gains control of the ball;
- The offensive team secures a rebound but does not immediately attempt to score;
- A dead ball situation occurs for any other reason.

While on Defense

If a defensive player simulates being fouled (e.g., by falling to the floor without contact), the faking signal (#15) should be displayed immediately, with no whistle sounded. Play should be stopped under the same conditions listed above for shooters.

Conclusion

When correctly and consistently applied, Rule 4-49 serves as an effective deterrent. Proper adjudication ensures that players, coaches, and spectators clearly understand how violations will be addressed and reinforces the importance of integrity in game play.