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NFHS Football Weekly Rule Interpretations

Illegal Helmet Contact

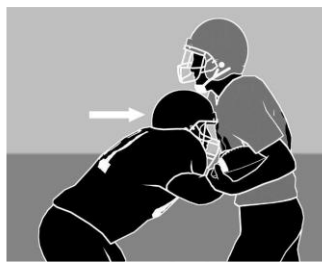
Rules References: 2-20, 9-4-3i, 9-4-3i NOTE, 9-4 PENALTY

Illegal helmet contact is an act of initiating contact with the helmet against an opponent. There are several types of illegal helmet contact:

- a. Butt Blocking is an act by any player who initiates contact against an opponent who is not a runner with the front of his helmet.
- b. Face Tackling is an act by a defensive player who initiates contact against a runner with the front of his helmet.
- c. Spearing is an act by any player who initiates contact against an opponent at the shoulders or below with the crown (top portion) of his helmet.



Butt Blocking



Face Tackling



Spearing

SITUATION 1: From a four-point stance on the offensive line, interior lineman A1: (a) initially contacts an opponent by driving his face mask directly into the opponent's chest who is not the runner; or (b) contacts an opponent with his shoulder so that his head is to the side of the opponent's body and the helmet does not make initial contact; or (c) attempts to block an opponent with a shoulder, but because of a defensive slant, primary contact with the opponent is made with A1's helmet. **RULING:** The block in (a) is illegal butt blocking. In (b), even though there was some contact with the helmet, the block is legal because the helmet or face mask was not used to deliver the blow. In (c), the covering official will have to judge whether or not it is a foul. Because of defensive slants and stunts, there will be instances in which the blocker attempts to make a legal shoulder block, but inadvertently contacts an opponent with either his face mask or helmet. When this is the case, contact does not result in a direct blow and is legal. (9-4-3i)

SITUATION 2: A1 is a flanker outside the free-blocking zone. Immediately following the snap, he comes back toward the ball and contacts B1 from the front above the waist in delivering a blow with his face mask. **RULING:** Even though the contact with B1 was above the waist, it is butt blocking because the front of the helmet was used to make initial contact. (9-3-2, 9-4-3i)

SITUATION 3: During a running play beyond the neutral zone, A1 is momentarily in the clear and B1 comes up to make the tackle. B1 keeps his head in an upright position with his eyes on the numbers of A1 and: (a) moves his head at the last moment so that he contacts A1 with his shoulder; or (b) moves his head to attempt a shoulder tackle, but because of a sharp cut by A1, there is some contact with the side of the helmet of B1. **RULING:** A legal tackle in both (a) and (b). (2-42)

SITUATION 4: Wide receiver A1 goes downfield 15 yards, cuts sharply to the outside and stops near the sideline and catches the pass. B1 drives the crown (top portion) of his helmet into A1. **RULING:** This use of the helmet is spearing by B1. **COMMENT:** Face tackling, butt blocking and spearing are somewhat related fouls. All are illegal and each carries a 15-yard penalty. Butt blocking is initiating contact with front of the helmet against an opponent who is not the runner. It may be committed by any player. Face tackling is the same act against the runner and can only be committed by the defense. Both fouls may result from inadvertent acts. Spearing is initiating contact at the shoulders or below against an opponent with the crown (top portion) of the helmet and may be committed by any player. Any tactic which involves the illegal use of the helmet is condemned by all who are concerned with the well-being of players and the perpetuation of the game. (2-20-1c)

SITUATION 5: Runner A1 breaks free beyond the neutral zone. (a) As B1 and B2 are closing in to tackle him, A1 veers into B1 and deliberately drives the crown (top portion) of his helmet into B1's chest; or (b) as B1 and B2 attempt to bring him down, A1 lowers his head and drives forward for yardage and he contacts B1 and/or B2 with his helmet. **RULING:** Spearing by A1 in (a) as he uses the crown (top portion) of his helmet to punish B1. It is a 15-yard penalty. If the spearing is judged by the game official to be flagrant, A1 must be disqualified. In (b), the lowering of the head to pick up additional yardage is not illegal unless it is done to punish an opponent, if he uses his helmet to butt or ram, or the runner commits spearing or butt blocking or targeting. The runner's normal reaction is to attempt to gain yardage when being tackled. The reason for including the runner in the illegal helmet contact and targeting prohibition is to prevent him from using his helmet to abuse an opponent as well as protection of the player. The illegal helmet contact rules apply equally to all players. (2-20-1, 2-20-2)