

Obstruction

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Introduction

Rule 13.1.4 Obstruction. Players shall not: a. obstruct an opponent from attempting to play the ball by: moving or interposing themselves or their sticks shielding the ball with their sticks or any part of their bodies physically interfering with the sticks or bodies of opponents

It is worth reminding ourselves that obstruction can take place only if the player possessing the ball prevents an opponent from attempting to gain possession by moving the stick and/or body between that opponent and the ball. But part of the bargain has to be that the tackler must first try to play the ball from a legitimate position. The tackler's **POSITION** must be correct, proper **INTENT** to tackle must be displayed, i.e. the stick on or near the ground, where the ball is, and the tackle must be **TIMED** correctly. If any one of **P I T - Position, Intent, Timing** - is missing, then the player in possession of the ball is free to move in any (safe) direction.

POSITION becomes significant when the tackler is intent on moving from behind the player in possession of the ball. Two situations arise, therefore: the stationary player, where the opponent is in fact waiting to receive a ball, probably in a set piece situation, with the potential tackler also stationary but behind, and the moving one, where the tackler is running behind, and probably slightly to the side of, the player having or about to gain possession.

INTENT The ball is played on the ground. Any ball hit or played whilst it is in the air is likely either to be dangerous play or to lead to danger. It follows, therefore, that the sticks both of the possessor and of the tackler must each be on the ground (or very near it) at the moment that the tackle is made. If either player's stick is substantially in the air at the moment that the tackle is made, there is no clear intent to execute or resist the tackle correctly, so a breach of the Rule is likely to occur. It follows from this that

TIMING is very important. Not only must a tackler reach a position from which it is possible safely and legitimately to execute a tackle, but the movement of the stick towards the ball must be carefully timed. Equally, this is the moment at which the possessor's stick must also be kept on or near the ground and neither body nor stick moved so as to shield the ball from the tackling opponent. The **SPEED** at which either or both players/sticks move governs **TIMING**. Concentration by the umpire on the movement and positioning of the sticks relative to the ball is therefore vital.

Stationary Player

When a stationary player is about to receive the ball no other player of the opposing team should be permitted to stand so close, either to the side or behind, as to cause physical contact. At a free hit it is normally possible for the umpire to intervene to separate the players before the hit is taken.

When a potential tackler moves behind an opponent, it should be noted that it is the **TACKLER** who moves, not the opponent, thus effectively to leave the ball on the other side of the opponent. There is no reason why that movement should not be to one side or the other, where there will be a clearer view of the approaching ball and, perhaps, a better opportunity to attempt to play it.

A stationary player may face in any direction when receiving the ball and cannot initially obstruct an opponent who is standing behind. The receiving player is free either to deflect or pass the ball elsewhere immediately or to retain possession and move with it in any direction - forwards, sideways, or backwards (but not so as to interfere with the other player), without shielding the ball. If the player behind moves in a genuine attempt to tackle an open ball from a proper position, obstruction is possible when the possessor moves his feet and/or stick. It is movement by the possessor that causes obstruction.

The situation outlined underlines the need for the tackler's stick to be on or near the ground if the ball is on the ground. If the stick is substantially in the air, and the ball is on the ground, that is not a proper attempt to play the ball. There is also a risk of the stick's pushing or striking the opponent in the back. This therefore highlights the need for umpires to be aware of the possibility of a potential tackler's standing so close to and behind an opponent as to

cause a breach, not necessarily intentionally, by handling or pushing the opponent in some way.

Summary

If a player moves behind an opponent who is receiving the ball, either in open play or from a set piece then, no matter which way the opponent is facing, there is NO obstruction. It can be said that the would-be tackler has moved to place the ball on the other side of the opponent, rather than that the opponent has moved between the tackler and the ball. The opponent, having received the ball, should then either pass it away immediately or move with it forwards, sideways or backwards relative to the tackler, though not actually to touch the tackler or force the tackler to move. If there is likely to be an offence, it is quite likely to be by the would-be tackler for leaning on or pushing the ball's receiver.

Moving Players

When both the possessor or potential possessor of the ball and the tackler are running, provided the P I T rules are observed, there should be no difficulty for the players or the umpires in interpreting the Rule for tackles executed from the front of the possessor. Problems can arise, however, when the tackler is attempting to play from behind and/or from the side of the possessor.

REVERSE SIDE TACKLE

Appendix B: Rules Interpretations.

"A reverse-side tackle or one from behind the player with the ball is not permitted if there is any body or stick contact between the players concerned before the ball is played by the tackler."

Be clear that there may be NO physical contact, either of stick or body, between the tackler and the possessor until the tackler on the left-hand side of the possessor has first touched the ball with the face of the stick. But having touched the ball legitimately, physical contact should still be avoided if possible.

POSITION, therefore, is vital. Unless and until the tackler reaches a position normally at least level with, if not slightly ahead of, the possessor, the tackle cannot even begin unless the ball is to the possessor's left. Until the proper position is reached, therefore, the player in possession is free to move in any direction, including turning away to the right. It is up to the would-be tackler to use speed and skill first to get into the correct tackling position.

Once that tackling position is reached, the possessor must be on guard not to cause obstruction either by a turn of the body or, more frequently, allowing the ball to "trail" behind to the right hand side. It is now simply a matter for the would-be tackler, being in the correct position, to execute the tackle. This should be done with the stick usually held in the LEFT hand and brought in towards the possessor from the front; any attempt to slide the stick across the front of the possessor, or to use the tackling stick in the right hand, is likely to lead to premature body or stick contact.

It should be noted that a player may make a diving tackle from the left. This may be made from a position somewhat behind the possessor provided it is safe to do so, but the requirement for the ball first to be played legitimately before there is any other physical contact remains.

Whatever form of reverse-side tackle is employed, the players involved must continue to try to avoid physical contact with each other or their sticks even after the ball has been played legitimately by the tackler.

Summary

There must be no body or stick contact between the players until the ball has first been touched legitimately by the stick of the tackler. The possessor can move in any direction until the tackler is in position but, once that position has been achieved, must not allow body or stick to come between the ball and the tackler. Even after the ball has been legitimately played, the players must try to avoid physical contact between their bodies and/or sticks.

OPEN SIDE TACKLE

The usual problem that arises in a tackle from the right-hand side of the possessor is that the would-be tackler starts to tackle too early, i.e. from the wrong POSITION. This is almost invariably from behind and often accompanied by a lunging or slashing movement of the stick. If the slash connects with either the stick or body of the possessor then there is likely to be an injury. Such conduct must be penalised firmly and quickly.

Again, until the would-be tackler achieves a good position from which to execute a legitimate tackle, and this, unlike the reverse-side tackle, need not necessarily be level with the possessor, then the possessor is free to move in any direction. It is the tackler's responsibility get into the right POSITION. Once there, then INTENT and TIMING enter the equation, as already described.

Summary

The Open-Stick Tackle (from the right-hand side of the possessor) is easier for the umpire to read. Slashing movements of the tackling stick caused by attempts to tackle before the correct position is achieved should be dealt with firmly and quickly. Umpires should watch carefully that, once the proper tackling position is achieved, the players concerned keep their sticks down and the possessor does not shield the ball with the stick or lift the tackler's stick at the moment that the tackling stick is moved to touch the ball. Deliberate physical contact by either player should be penalised.

Hockey is essentially a non-contact game. Players should always try to avoid unnecessary physical contact with each other.

POSITION INTENT TIMING

P I T