

Pass Interference Overview

By far, pass interference is most difficult and most subjective call to make (and remain consistent) when officiating a football game. Some people think that if there is any contact on or by a receiver while a pass is being thrown to him you have... pass interference. **Not true.** The defensive player has as much right to catch the ball, as the offensive player.

Offensive pass interference (OPI)

Defined as *any* contact upon a defensive player initiated by an offensive player legally beyond the *line of scrimmage* (LOS) during a forward pass play in which a forward pass crosses the LOS. It is the responsibility of the offensive player to avoid the opponents. In other words, the offense knows it's going to throw a pass. Therefore, on pass plays when the pass is going to be thrown beyond the LOS, all offensive players are restricted. They are restricted from initiating any contact on a defensive player who is beyond the LOS from the time the ball is snapped until the pass is touched by any player or game official. If the pass does not cross the LOS (e.g., screen pass behind the LOS, blocked pass at or behind the LOS, etc.), an official should not enforce pass interference.

There are four classifications of OPI:

- 1) Blocking downfield (or pick plays)--** Blocking downfield is the most common type of OPI called. This foul most often occurs when two receivers cross during their pass patterns allowing one of the receivers to block (or pick) for the other receiver's defender. This leaves the second receiver open to receive the pass. For the "pick" to be a foul it must be obvious that the offensive player "initiated" the contact.
- 2) Shoving or pushing off--** This occurs when the receiver will run downfield at or by the defender, and then as he is about to make his cut or the ball approaches, the receiver will push off the defender creating enough separation to complete the catch. The rule of common sense officiating concerning the push off is whether the defender is knocked off stride or out of position enough to restrict him from making the play.
- 3) Driving through a defender --** This is the simplest OPI call to make. This occurs when the receiver drives through a defender who has established position on the field. This is the equivalent to the "charge" in basketball.
- 4) Receiver turning into a defender--** This occurs when the pass is thrown so the defender has a better position than the receiver to complete the catch, and the receiver becomes the defender to prevent the defensive back from making the interception. How the offensive receiver can commit OPI in this scenario is covered under the types of defensive pass interference below.

Defensive Pass Interference (or DPI)

Is defined as "contact beyond the neutral zone (or LOS) by defensive player whose intent to impede an eligible opponent is obvious and it could prevent the opponent the opportunity of receiving a catchable forward pass." Unlike the offense, the defense does not know before the ball is snapped whether a pass will be thrown. Therefore, DPI can not be called on a defender until after the pass is thrown. This does not mean that other illegal actions cannot be called (e.g., holding, blocking below the waist, illegal block in the back, clipping, personal fouls, etc.). This is why holding (and not DPI) is sometimes called on the defender during a play in which the

pass was thrown to the receiver who was held. More than likely, the holding occurred before the pass was thrown.

On many plays, defender and/or receiver will have their hands on their opponent as they run down field primarily to keep track of where the opponent is while looking for the ball. This action is referred to as "chicken fighting" and is ignored if they do not obviously restrict the opponent's ability to complete catch. Tangled feet is not Pass Interference, it is incidental contact.

There are six types of DPI and they must all involve contact that obviously impedes (or restricts) the receiver's ability to complete the catch.

1) Contact by defender not playing the ball--- most common type of DPI is contact by defender not playing ball, or in other words, defender is not looking back for the pass and makes restricting contact with receiver before the ball arrives. Defenders will try to deceive officials on this play by grabbing the receivers arm as they look back for the ball just before it arrives.

2) Defender playing through the back-- This most commonly occurs on a short crossing pattern where the defender will come up from behind and drive through the back of the receiver before the pass gets to the receiver.

3) Defender grabs the receiver's arm-- This can occur whether or not the defender is playing the ball or not. The defender will usually be looking for the ball, reach up with one hand to bat the pass, and at the same time, grab the receiver's arm preventing the receiver from catching the pass with two hands. This foul can be obvious when the official sees a receiver unnaturally raise only one hand to complete the catch.

4) Defender "arm bars" the receiver-- This usually occurs on fly patterns straight down the field. The defender realizes he is going to be beaten to ball, so he sticks his arm across receiver's chest to either slow him down or prevent him from raising his arms to complete the catch. Clues to this infraction are the receiver breaking stride or not raising one or both arms to make the catch.

5) Defender cuts off the receiver-- The type is somewhat similar to arm bar in that it almost always occurs on fly patterns straight down the field. Instead of slowing receiver down with arm bar, the defender merely crosses into the receiver's path slowing down the receiver. There must be contact for a cut off foul to be called.

6) Defender "hooks and turns" the receiver--This type of foul usually occurs on a crossing pattern when the defender (from behind the receiver) will have one hand on the receiver's shoulder or arm with the other arm reaching around or over the receiver to knock the pass down. The key to the hook and turn is the "turn". It is not illegal to have your hand on the receiver, but if it turns him back away from the pass... DPI.

There are five major questions for an official to ask himself before throwing a flag for pass interference.

- 1) Was there contact that demonstrated obvious restriction of either opponent from making the catch?
- 2) If there was enough restriction demonstrated, was the person initiating the contact making a genuine attempt to catch the ball?
- 3) Was the pass catchable?
- 4) Did the pass cross the LOS?
- 5) Did the pass touch another player or official before the contact was made? (Tipped ball)

CAN YOU ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS WHEN YOU CALL PASS INTEREFERENCE??