

Free Blocking Zone In Spread/Shotgun GHSAA Interpretation

WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT: There continues to be disagreement among officials, coaches and the on-field working combination between the two groups as to what is legal below the waist blocking in the spread or shotgun formation. For the official's part this has led to inconsistent officiating generating reasonable coaching complaints. For the coach's part their own misunderstanding of legal contact has led to constant sideline complaints for crews who are actually applying the GHSAA interpretation properly.

In multiple films reviewed last year from disparate regions complete games were officiated allowing cut blocking with delay, running back lead blocking below the waist, chop blocks and illegal cutting of lead blockers by defenders.

WHAT IS TAUGHT TO OFFICIALS: This has evolved over nearly fifteen years originating with Dr. Swearngin's administration.

1. **STANCE:** Blocking below the waist in the spread formation is limited to three or four point stance.
Rationale: It is felt there would be a physical required delay to reset at the snap and originate a charge towards an opponent using the two point stance. During this delay the ball would have already left the zone- a critical element of the NFHS rule.
2. **TARGET:** The target of the block **MUST** be a defensive lineman as defined by NFHS rule 2-17-2a. The salient requirements of this definition are being within one yard of the LOS and in the zone at the snap. The target may in fact not be a defensive lineman in the traditional sense but a linebacker or even a defensive back who has moved towards the LOS in a defensive maneuver. The blocker **MUST** be an offensive lineman on the LOS and in the zone at the snap. "In the zone" by rule requires part of the body be in the zone. The latter

is not as simple as described due to wide splits and the use of tight ends who may in fact have their entire body outside the four yard width of the zone. In all instances the ball must still be in the zone at the time of contact. It is this latter requirement that is difficult to judge as an official. The ball leaves quite quickly.

The target must be **“head up”**. The problem we have is that this term has- until now- never been defined.

PROBLEMS AND HOW THE GHSA IS ADDRESSING:

OFFICIALS

1. Older officials never played with such restrictions.
2. During a game they may officiate one team in the spread and the opponent with quarterback under center. With some teams this may also vary series to series or down to down.
3. Mechanics impede observation of the tackles. The wings are off the field and cannot determine location of defender easily. As lines of scrimmage converge vision of keys is obstructed.
4. Some offensive teams have linemen in three point stances with others in two point stances on the same play.

COACHES

1. They neither understand limitations or broad allowances the rules provide.
2. They push the technique knowing officiating inconsistency. “Do it till they call it”.
3. Difficulty teaching linemen dual techniques and student athletes have difficulty understanding what is legal for QB under center and not legal for spread.
4. Coaches fail to recognize this rule PREVENTS all non-defensive linemen from initiating ANY contact below the waist.
EXAMPLE: a defensive back coming off the edge taking out a lead blocker. It also prevents any defensive lineman from initiating contact below the waist after the ball has left the zone. An example is a

defensive end taking out lead blocker below the waist. This is illegal.

SUMMARY OF GHSA SPREAD FORMATION INTERPRETATION:

1. **The definition of head up:** The defensive lineman as a blocking target must be clearly heads up or in the gap either side of the offensive lineman. With this definition a tackle cannot block a defender head up on the guard but could block a defender below the waist in the gap. A guard cannot block a nose tackle below the waist. This definition clearly sets limits that previously had not been set.
2. **Offensive lineman stance:** Offensive linemen must be in either a three of four point stance. Blocking below the waist from a two point stance in the spread formation is illegal.
3. Only defensive linemen may be blocked below the waist. This requires they be within one yard of the line of scrimmage. Linebackers in usual depth cannot be blocked below the waist by offensive linemen.
4. **Stunting defensive lineman:** This creates problems of initial versus ending position. It is possible a stunting defender may be in the gap between the right guard and right tackle and stunt to a position as a nose tackle. It is the **ending position** that defines his eligibility to be blocked below the waist. Moreover, stunting always creates delay in contact as the ball likely has left the zone. Most stunts seen on film involve going from a heads up position to a gap or a gap to adjacent gap. Contact, if in or beyond the neutral zone, would be legal.
5. Contact must be initiated in or beyond the neutral zone. Initial contact behind the line of scrimmage indicates delay and is illegal.
6. Caveats for coaches and officials:
 - A. An offensive back or receiver cannot block below the waist anywhere on the field.
 - B. Defenders that are not on the line of scrimmage and in the zone at the snap- defensive backs or linebackers as example- **CANNOT** initiate contact on blockers below the waist anywhere on the field.

GHSA IMPLEMENTATION PLANS:

1. Written definition to all associations and coaches with examples.

2. Review in all officials camps
3. Make part of the Fall Football On Line clinic with film examples.
To balance this emphasis also review the chop block- common technique use by QB under center teams.
4. Emphasize to coaches that equally efficient and safer techniques are available to avoid contact below the waist.
5. Emphasize to officials that the decision as legality involves stance of offensive linemen, where and on whom contact occurs and **ANY** perceived delay.

Respectfully Submitted

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APPROVED:

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