

## Targeting and Defenseless Player Review

Let's review this new rule and the illegal personal contact rule as it applies to a defenseless player in order to get an understanding of what's expected of you as an official in the game. When the definitions are broken down and analyzed, you can get a better understanding of **flagrant contact** which is at the core of this entire discussion.

A review of the targeting definition: **2-20-2....Targeting is an act of taking aim and initiating contact to an opponent above the shoulders with the helmet, forearm, hand, fist, elbow or shoulders.**

A review of the flagrant foul definition: **2-16-2c: Flagrant – a foul so severe or extreme that it places an opponent in danger of serious injury, and/or involves violations that are extremely or persistently vulgar or abusive conduct.**

A review of the illegal personal contact definition regarding defenseless players: **9-4-3b: Charge into or throw an opponent to the ground after he is obviously out of the play, or after the ball is clearly dead either in or out of bounds.**

If an official keeps these three rules in mind when observing illegal action during a down and after the play is over, he can penalize illegal contact properly. The key factor with any rule interpretation is understanding the language and the intent of the rule.

Here are some things keep in mind when applying these rules:

1. Was the action that you witnessed a football related play or action with the intent to injure? An example would be a defender trying to bat away a pass by the quarterback. He jumps up, misses the pass as he tries to bat it away, then his hands land on the QB's head. Did he deliver a blow to the QB's head with the intent of injury or was the play football related? Sure, there can be roughing the passer if the Referee rules it late or unnecessary, but the question that you ask yourself in this case is, "Did he "take aim" at the head or was it a football related play?"
2. A defenseless player, out of the play entirely, is violently broadsided by an opponent but the contact is not above the shoulder. Is this targeting? By definition, no it's not. But does this action deserve a penalty and an ejection? Absolutely, under rules 9-4-3b and 2-16-2c.
3. Can you target someone without being ejected? If the action is not deemed flagrant, yes. If a player took aim, launched himself at the opponent with no football related intent, he should be ejected no question. If a defender however lowered his head to make a tackle and his helmet made initial contact with the runner's lowered helmet, is this targeting? If you deem it so, the next question is whether it was flagrant or not. Did the defender attempt to make a tackle with his arms extended, hoping to wrap the player up and their helmets collided, or did he "take aim" at the runner? Your football insight and experience must guide you here.

All of these are difficult decisions that you must make as an official of the game. They are difficult because no official enjoys ejecting a player or a coach from a contest. If a game was only sprinkled with false starts and encroachments, what a wonderful world it would be. But it's not. There is no free pass when it comes to a player's safety. As an official you must determine the legality of everything that you witness on the field. The prevailing rule of thumb regarding flagrant contact, whether it's targeting or illegal personal contact should be this, when in doubt, eject the offending player from the game. If his actions are that close to the line of acceptability, he needs to be removed from the contest. Remember, flagrant contact is an ejection, not a disqualification. Your ejection report should reflect "Flagrant Contact" as the cause when you submit it. If a video review shows otherwise, the NCHSAA can reinstate the player before his next game. Regardless of final outcome, you will have ruled on the side of safety.

This is a difficult rule for an official because you have to determine "intent" which means that you have to get inside the player's head. But if you weigh the action of the play as either football related or not, it should make your job easier to administer.