

Offensive Pass Interference - Federation

This work represents the opinions of the author and possibly others. The principles expressed have been arrived at through years of experience and interviews with other officials. They represent how the rules of football are applied at various levels and in various regions. Each reader must filter this work through the philosophies and standards established by his/her own local associations and /or conferences.

What exactly constitutes offensive pass interference?

Blocking beyond the expanded neutral zone. An eligible receiver or an ineligible illegally downfield may not block an opponent beyond the expanded neutral before a legal forward pass which crosses the neutral zone is touched by B.

Push Off. A receiver pushes off a defender in such a way that he creates “separation” between the defender and himself. Don’t flag the little touches and taps that create no material advantage for the receiver. Look for the separation created by a genuine shove.

Receiver drives through the back of a defender. Just like a defender who drives through the back of an eligible receiver, this is a foul. In general, offensive pass interference is a distinct possibility whenever the receiver is put in the position of becoming the defender. Example: Receiver has defender beat on a long sideline pattern. Ball is thrown short so that the defender now has the advantage. Watch for the receiver coming back to break up the play.

Ineligible touches pass beyond the ENZ. In Federation rules, an ineligible receiver touching a legal forward pass beyond the expanded neutral zone before an opponent has touched it constitutes offensive pass interference. This touching beyond the ENZ also includes a situation where the ineligible is touched by the pass. Note that this restriction is different from illegal touching behind the neutral zone where such touching must be intentional (catch, bat, and muff). You typically see this when a wide out “covers” the player intended to be the tight end who then catches a forward pass downfield.

Receiver physically “picks” a defender. This must be an intentional act by the receiver. He must be “hunting” for the defender and initiate contact with him for the sole purpose of knocking him off his defensive coverage. Don’t flag this unless you see the whole play. If the receiver is standing still looking back for the ball, and the defender runs into him, it’s not an illegal pick. It might just be defensive pass interference. If the receiver is running a legitimate pattern looking back at the QB when the contact occurs, chances are pretty good that you don’t have a pick. Also, if the defender swerves to avoid the oncoming pick and no contact occurs, there is no foul. You must have contact to even consider a pick.

Where might you see this tactic? It’s often a “red zone” play, occurring close to the opponent’s goal line. Typically it happens out of a “trips” formation or out of a formation where there are two receivers set up away from the tackle or tight end when the defense is in man-to-man coverage. The pick may come from the inside attempting to free up the widest receiver running an “in” pattern. It can also be run from the outside where the pick frees up the inside receiver (probably a TE) for a pass into the flats. Be looking for it out of spread formations down in the “red zone,” especially if the offense audibles after seeing man-to-man coverage. HL, LJ, and BJ must know their keys and watch for this type of activity. Not a bad idea to have a signal to remind each other to look for picks in this type of situation. We use a fist into an open hand at chest level as our “reminder.”

Philosophy

- Both offensive receiver and defender have equal rights to the ball.
- Players must play the ball and not their opponent. A player playing his opponent rather than the ball (where's his head?) is much more liable for PI if contact occurs. Catchability is not a factor in Federation rules, but...use common sense.

Restrictions

- Begin for Team A at the snap and end when B touches the forward pass
- Begin for Team B when the pass is in flight and end when the forward pass is touched by either A or B.