

SUBJECT: Legal Body Contact

APPLICABILITY: grades K-1; 2-4; and 5-6.

Coaches and Refs:

This is the time of the season, as it is every season, where we the adults in the room need to refocus our attention to the phrase “limited body contact” as it relates to every age group below grades 7/8. We strive for consistency, and nothing like a few weeks on the field to remind us that goal is aspirational. But we can get closer to the ideal by focusing on a couple of key elements. Coaches need to focus on teaching good fundamentals. “What the refs will allow” isn’t a standard. Reinforcing footwork and body position over running at people will help. Officials, we need to do a better job of consistently enforcing, and sanctioning, these age-appropriate contact rules.

So, let’s review what is legal, what is not and what to do about it when we find it. No need to focus here on the big stuff that are penalties at every age level like targeting, or defenseless players. This is about the line between legal and illegal contact for younger players. So here goes.

Rule 4.15 from the USA Lacrosse Youth Rules Guide for all ages below grades 7/8 tells us what is legal and here it is.

4.15 - LEGAL BODY CONTACT Examples of permitted body contact are:

1. Legal holds – Holding is permitted under the following conditions

- a. An opponent with possession of the ball or within 3 yards of a loose ball may be held from the front or side, as long as both hands of the holder remains [sic] on his crosse.
- b. An opponent in possession of the ball may be played with a hold check from the rear if the hold exerts no more than equal pressure.

[For (a) and (b), a hold check shall be done with closed hand, shoulder, or forearm, and both hands shall be on the crosse. ]

c. A player may hold the crosse of an opponent with his crosse when that opponent has possession of the ball.

d. A player within 3 yards of a loose ball may hold the crosse of his opponent with his own crosse.

2. Legal pushes – A legal push is exerting pressure **after contact is made** and is not a violent blow.

Pushing is permitted from the front or side when an opponent has possession of the ball or is within 3 yards of a loose ball. In this case, pushing shall be done with either closed hands, shoulder, or forearm, and both hands shall be on the crosse.

3. Positioning yourself against an opponent to gain possession of a loose ball (boxing out an opponent).

4. Defensive positioning to redirect an opponent in possession of the ball (riding a player). [think about it, this is a hold, right?]

5. Incidental contact

They can do all these things, but they cannot “Body Check” and opponent. The rules define what a body check is in Appendix 1, as “Overt or obvious body contact made to an opponent.”

So, in the age groups below 7-8 grade, we should have no “overt or obvious body contact to an

opponent” that is not otherwise allowed as legal body contact in rule 4.15.

WE PATROL THE LINE BETWEEN A “PUSH/HOLD” AND A “CHECK.”

Articulating where that line is can be difficult, but here is some guidance.

If we slightly rephrase the definition of a cross check we get: Running forcibly into an opponent and making body contact with an opponent with a shoulder, or gloved hands or forearm while both hands are on the crosse with the arms extended away from the body, ” and you have a pretty good definition of where a push becomes a check.

Remember, a push is defined as exerting pressure “after contact is made.” Not exerting pressure AT THE TIME OF the contact.

Let’s also address incidental or “accidental” or “inadvertent” contact. What can appear to be some intense collisions on a youth lacrosse field are cases where both boys were not paying attention to their surroundings and ran into each other. In all but the most reckless of circumstances, that isn’t going to be a penalty.

As we move into the discussion of how to sanction illegal body contact, let’s also talk about about size. Specifically, the issue of relative size of the players. The cry from the coach is something like “hey my big player ‘just pushed’ the little player, it isn’t his fault.” Yes, it is. The player applying the force is responsible for the carnage. If the player he is pushing is much smaller, use less force. Because too much force is “unnecessary.”

The sanction for excessive illegal body contact in the age groups below 7/8 should usually be an “Unnecessary Roughness” penalty. I don’t like using the “illegal body check” penalty in youth because there is no legal “body check” for these kids.

Plus, the UR rule at youth specifically covers all these situations we have talked about.

Here it is:

**UNNECESSARY ROUGHNESS:**

- (1) An excessively violent infraction of the rules against holding and pushing.
- (2) Deliberate and excessively violent contact made by a defensive player against an offensive player who has established a screening position.
- (3) Any avoidable act on the part of a player that is deliberate and excessively violent, whether it be with the body or crosse. This may include a legal body check.
- (4) A check with the gloved hand or hands delivered using a punching blow.
- (5) A take-out check. [ An excessive body check in which the player lowers his head or shoulder with the force and intent to put the other player on the ground.]

PENALTY: Penalty for unnecessary roughness fouls are a One-, Two-, or Three-minute foul, at the official's discretion. An excessively violent violation of this rule may result in an ejection.

This covers all these situations and reinforces that "limited" body contact is only "necessary" contact that isn't overtly physical to the opposing player. Call it what is. Never use the phrase "that's a legal 'hit'." There are no legal "hits." There are legal pushes, and contact, but "hitting" comes later.

Hopefully, better articulation on the officials' part will help the coaches know what was the problem and how to enforce error correction with the kids.

Good luck the rest of the season.