

**Block in the Back... IBW**  
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One of the most common penalties called on kickoff and punt returns is the block in back foul, commonly called an IBW. Probably as common as the call itself is an inconsistency on the accuracy of this call. Let's take a look at some key factors to consider when observing blocks on kickoff and punt returns.

First of all, officials need to understand the frame of the body. By rule the frame of the body includes the front and the side of the player. A side block is legal and many times is mistaken for a block in the back because officials don't see the entire block from the approach through the contact. The block looks "ugly" and the official doesn't understand the frame of the body or they "knee jerk" react to how the block finishes. If you don't see the entire block from start to finish, the official needs to lay off and pass on calling this a foul.

In order to have an IBW the blocker will approach the defender from behind. The blocker is in what we call a chase mode. The defender has beaten the blocker and as he sets up for a potential tackle, the player in chase mode pushes him from behind. When the blocker gets even with the defender or approaches from the side, it is nearly impossible to make the initial contact in the back. These are the situations that are too often called illegal when they are "suspect" but good blocks.

Two types of IBW's are most common, the easy one that puts the defender down on the field face first. The second IBW is the hands in the back that may not be severe or drop the defender by cause the defender to miss his opportunity to make a tackle. These can be subtle pushes that have a huge effect on a play. Remember it's not the severity of the block, it's the effect it has on the defender.

When in doubt the official should pass on this call. A key on a tight IBW/side block situation is a little patience by the covering official. Watch to see how the defender falls. If he lands on his side and/or rolls over on his back, the odds are pretty good that the block came from the side. Watch to see where the blocker's feet are when contact occurs. If he is side by side or ahead of the defender, the block is going to be legal.

Seeing illegal blocks and other fouls is an obvious responsibility for officials. Equally important is each member of the crew taking responsibility for seeing the legal blocks on each play. When you see a good, tight side block, note the number of the player who made the block. Then when a crewmate has a flag down and calls an IBW on this same player, you have the tools to step in and get the call right. Talking about it at halftime or after the game is too late. Emphasize to your crew to raise their game by taking responsibility for all the blocks, legal and illegal. Getting the call right on the field is the important thing. You'll not only earn some trust and a thank you from your crew, you also earn the respect of the coaches and players for a job well done.

Understand the rule and the philosophies of the game and you and your crew will be right on target when it comes time to call or pass on an IBW situation.