



Doc's Guide to Better Basketball (a.k.a. Da Rules)



The No-Call or Held Whistle

Team A has the ball when their point-forward dribbles it off his foot. The ball goes rolling across the court and one player from Team A and another from Team B goes after the ball on the floor. As they collide near the ball their heads make the sound of two halves of a coconut being slammed together. The result is that they're both out cold. Has a foul occurred? The answer is that it depends.....

How can that be!?! They're out cold?! Read on.

To understand this situation we need to know more. Also one has to both know the rules on contact fouls but also a keen understanding of the "spirit and intent" of the rules before trying to understand what is truly a foul and what is "incidental contact" and not a foul.

So what is "incidental contact?"

Rule 4, Section 27 makes is very clear that there is a lot of contact in the game of basketball that must be considered "incidental contact" and is not to be considered a foul. This rule states in part.."The mere fact that contact occurs does not constitute a foul. When 10 players are moving rapidly in a limited area, some contact is certain to occur." It further says, "contact which does not hinder the movement of the opponent from participating in normal defensive or offensive movements should be considered incidental".

This rule is the basis of the "non-call" when you see contact and the official holds the whistle and does not call a foul. Also experienced official understands the concept of "advantage/disadvantage" when making any ruling regarding contact.

The advantage/disadvantage concept as has been taught to basketball officials for many years. Anyone can blow a whistle and call a foul if an opponent makes *any* contact with another.

Experienced officials see the contact and then make an immediate judgment as to whether or not the contact caused the receiving party to be put at a disadvantage. If so, a foul should be called, if not, then the official should let it go. Remember a "Non Call" can be at times the "Right Call." Officials there on the court to make split second judgments!

Advantage/disadvantage concept is also known as the "Tower Philosophy" and it sets the basis for using good judgment when officiating. In part the Tower Philosophy is as follows: "It is the purpose of the rules to penalize a player who by reason of an illegal act has placed his/her opponent and a disadvantage. It is not the intent that the rules shall be interpreted literally, rather they should be applied in relation to the effect which the action of the players has upon their opponents. If they are unfairly affected as a result of a violation of the rules then the transgressor shall be penalized. If there has been no appreciable effect on the progress of the game, then the game shall not be interrupted. The act should be ignored, as it is incidental and not vital. Realistically and practically, no violation has occurred." This provides all officials with a great foundation from which to work from.

Back to the loose ball coconuts from Team A and B. If both players are going for the ball and by their actions (no pushing, holding, tripping, etc.) do not put the other at a disadvantage, and thus gain an advantage, it's correctly officiated as a no-call. It can look at times like a rugby match out there, but Advantage/Disadvantage is the key to if and whom a foul is on.

Note that beginning officials should call any and all contact fouls they see. They often miss quite a bit till they learn more. As they learn and become better with experience "incidental contact" can come into their games.