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MEDIA RELEASE

A phone hook up between NRL refereeing officials and Telstra Premiership club coaches has recommended that referees continue to strongly police the issue of 'decoy runners' but that there should be changes to the 'interpretations' used to adjudicate 'obstructions' in the Telstra Premiership.

The conference call was unanimous in the view that 'obstruction' remained a challenging area for the game and one that would inevitably leave referees having to make subjective calls in determining whether defending teams are unfairly disadvantaged by the use of decoy runners.

It was accepted that the referees needed to remain strong in monitoring the use of decoy runners, rather than risk opening a flood gate that would allow 'blocking plays' to become a feature of the game.

Concerns around this area in the game last year led to a change in the interpretation of the rule which included situations in which players did not necessarily have to have made contact with the defensive line.

Referees will now place greater emphasis on whether they believe a defender has been impeded or not.

The coaches have in turn agreed that they need to accept the referee needs to be respected for having to make judgment calls in this area.

"There was genuine attempt from all parties last year to be more prescriptive and to provide clearer guidelines about the mechanics of what could and could not lead to an obstruction call," Referees Coach Robert Finch said today.

"What we've agreed is that you can't try and be too prescriptive and that coaches, players and fans have to accept that some things need to come down to the judgment of the referee or the video referee.

“There may still be some debate in this area, but for referees the deciding factor will be whether they believe a player who was in a position to make a tackle was impeded.”

The following amendments will be made to the 2007 Key Indicators:

KEY INDICATOR DEFINITION CHANGES 2007 – OBSTRUCTION

Point 1

Current interpretation:

“The ball carrier cannot run behind a decoy runner and gain an advantage regardless of any contact between the decoy and the defence”

This interpretation has been eliminated and the current interpretation as per the Laws of the Game will be enforced:

Section 2 Glossary –

“Obstruction is an illegal act of impeding an opponent who does not have the ball.”

Point 2

Current interpretation

“It is the responsibility of the decoy runner/s NOT to interfere with the defending team.”

This interpretation remains with the following understanding:

“Any attacking player/s who is in front of the ball must make every endeavour not to interfere with the defending team.”

All other points set out in the 2007 Key Indicators remain unchanged.

Important Note:

In assessing whether obstruction has occurred the referee or video referee will make a judgment call as to whether any defender or defenders were prevented from getting to the ball carrier by the player or players from the attacking team who are in front of the ball.

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