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## MEDIA RELEASE

National Rugby League Referees Coach Robert Finch has predicted that the obstruction rule will remain one of the more challenging areas for referees, players and fans.

He said that referees would continue to follow the key indicators endorsed by coaches and players for 2007 and that it was an area of the game that would continue to be monitored going forward.

“As long as we have defences as organized and effective as we do at the moment, the use of decoy runners will remain,” Mr Finch predicted.

“Referees in Rugby League have to interpret any number of aspects of play in which they have to make subjective interpretations throughout a game.

“When players and coaches from time to time test an area of the rules, we can do no more than put forward the guidelines we will follow, discuss these in advance with the coaches and players then enforce them.”

The current indicators on the obstruction rule were first put forward by the referees, were modified and endorsed at the Annual Coaches and Player Conference and then circulated among all clubs.

The only major interpretation change for 2007 has been the recognition that a decoy runner can impede a defensive line without initiating actual contact.

The key indicators issued are aspects of play that will assist a referee in deciding a penalty or otherwise.

“The main things to look for are whether the decoy runner is in a position to take the ball, whether he runs to space, whether he initiates collisions that will in effect take defenders out or whether he impedes the defensive line.

“In terms of all obstruction issues, it comes down to whether the referee believes that an advantage has been gained as a result of the obstruction.

“Ultimately, no matter how many indicators we develop, that judgment call is the final decider.

“That has been the case throughout the game’s history and has been spelt out clearly to coaches and clubs for each of the last four years in particular.

“If you take that away you could find yourself penalising a fullback who receives a kick from deep in his own territory because he will invariably have run behind a team-mate.

“We know that players from time to time will try and ‘milk’ a penalty using the obstruction rule, players from time to time will test every rule in the same fashion. Again it comes down to the judgment call of the referee.”

Mr Finch today re-issued the key indicators for the Obstruction rule and some explanatory quotes on each of the indicators:

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

*“The key word here is that there has to be an advantage. For the purpose of this rule an advantage means improving the run, the kick or the pass. The defensive line therefore has to be in a position to effect a tackle and therefore in a close proximity to the event for a penalty to be awarded under this indicator. This is the only indicator that has changed from previous years. Previously there had to be contact to judge that a defence had been impeded. There was a strong view at last year’s meeting that you could obstruct the line without contact and examples were cited where it was believed this was happening.”*

**- It is the responsibility of the decoy runner/s not to interfere with the defending team.**

*“The decoy runner must be in a position to receive the football and he must run at space and not at the defender. He cannot instigate the collision with a defender; otherwise he is simply taking someone out of play. It is his job to entice defenders to him, not to run into defenders.*

*Willie Mason in the second half of Friday night’s Test was penalised for exactly this outcome.*

*Ultimately it is the referee who must decide whether an attacking player ran directly at the defender or whether it was the defender who created the collision by committing to the wrong man. Like all calls it can be a hard decision to make but it’s important to note that this interpretation has never changed. It is something referees have been deciding for decades.”*

**-There is to be no advantage to the attacking team.**

*“The benefit from a using decoy runner is restricted to that of a player enticing the defending team into making incorrect defensive decisions through the proper course of play.*

*You can’t gain an advantage by initiating a physical collision or by physically obstructing a defensive line’s lateral movement by loitering after the initial run. “*

**- Defensive decisions committing defenders to decoy runners will not be considered obstruction.**

*“Where a team has successfully enticed the defence into making an incorrect decision and where the defender initiates the collision as a result, it is clearly not a penalty.”*

**- Attacking players who loiter next to the play the ball can be interpreted as obstructing the defending team.**

*“This refers to players coming back on-side who can be used either as shields for the ball runner or whose simple presence can impede the defensive line’s options.”*

**- If in the process of scoring a try an attacking player dives through or into the legs of the player who has played the ball a penalty will be awarded to the defending team. This action will be interpreted as obstruction.**

*“This interpretation has been in place for several years and stops the dummy half using the player who has played the ball as a shield.”*

**- A defending player shielding a catcher from attacking chasers must position himself early. It will be interpreted as obstruction if the defender:**

**i Arrives at the same time as the attacking chasers and deliberately obstructs the catching of the high ball.**

**ii Deliberately runs the attacking chasers off the football.**

*“This interpretation has been in place for several years, it recognises that defenders will support the ball catcher but that they can’t seek to do so by colliding with or shepherding away the attacking team members.”*

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