



National Rugby League Limited
Fox Studios Development
Lang Road, Moore Park NSW 1363
Postal Address:
GPO Box 3498 Sydney NSW 2001
ABN 23 082 088 962
Internet: www.nrl.com
Telephone: (02) 9339 8500
Facsimile: (02) 9339 8508

Memorandum

To:	ARLRA Referees' Coaches
From:	Michael Stone
Date:	27 May 2014
Subject:	MS 009/04

BRONCOS POINTS

There appears to be much discussion about this topic. Intractable views either way. Whilst not strictly a refereeing issue, I'm sure that you would like to know the reasons for the Appeals Committee's findings.

"The Broncos have appealed to this Committee against the penalty of two competition points imposed on them by the Chief Executive Officer of the NRL in consequence of non-compliance with a number of related provisions in the Match Operations & Facilities – Replacements (Interchange) Rules. Leave was sought by the Broncos and was granted by the President to bring this Appeal.

The relevant Rules are:

1.35.2

"Only thirteen (13) players from each team may be on the field of play at any one time."

1.35.6

"A replaced Player must have left the field of play prior to the interchange Player taking his place on the field."

1.35.12 (k)

"An interchange Player must enter the field of play in an on-side position after reporting to the Interchange Official and after receiving the approval of the Interchange Official to enter the field of play and after the replaced player has left the field of play."

It is also relevant to quote

1.35.11

“Each Club will be responsible for ensuring compliance with these Replacement/ Interchange provisions at all times.”

The circumstances leading up to the imposition of the penalty are summarised in the formal Particulars of Breach set out in the Breach Notice

“On Sunday, 28 March 2004, Brisbane Broncos Corporation Pty Ltd (“the Club”) fielded the Brisbane Broncos team in an NRL Competition match against the West Tigers at Campbelltown Stadium.

At approximately the 58th minute of that match, Brisbane Broncos Player Shane Webcke was injured in a tackle, in consequence of which it was necessary for the Brisbane Broncos to replace Mr Webcke.

In order to effect that replacement, Brisbane Broncos Player Corey Parker reported to the Interchange Official and requested permission to enter the field of play. The Interchange Official directed Mr Parker not to do so until Mr Webcke had left the field. Shortly thereafter, Mr Parker again requested permission to enter the field of play but, again, the Interchange Official directed Mr Parker to wait until Mr Webcke had left the field. Despite those directions, and contrary to the requirements of NRL Operations Manual Rules 1.35.6 and 1.35.12 (k), Mr Parker entered the field of play before Mr Webcke had left the field and, almost immediately, Mr Parker joined an attacking movement by the Brisbane Broncos team that culminated in him scoring a Try.

In consequence of Mr Parker entering the field of play before Mr Webcke had left the field of play, the Brisbane Broncos had fourteen players on the field at one time in contravention of NRL Operations Manual Rule 1.35.2.”

The Committee’s finding is that these particulars are substantiated by the evidence before it.

The evidence also establishes that the high tackle incident in which Mr Webcke was injured led to the Western Tigers player being placed by the referee on report with a penalty being awarded to the Broncos. After a short interval and while Mr Webcke was still on the field the referee directed that play be resumed. Mr Webcke was assisted from the field by two trainers. He was about 40-50 meters back from the play and less than 10 meters from the touchline at the time Mr Parker, after two knock-backs from the Interchange Official, Mr Castle, ran on to the field.

It is relevant to quote the version of events as claimed by the Bronco's set out in their formal written submissions to this Committee:

“4.9 Parker has never suggested that the official told him he could go on the field. Parker has at all times stated that because he had pointed out where Webcke was, entirely out of play and near the sideline, and, therefore, in accordance with the usual practice, an appropriate time for the interchange to be made, he expected that the official would have no problem with his running on to the field at that time.

4.10 Parker ran on to the field only because he believed he had the tacit approval of the official. He even looked back at the official as he ran on to see that there was no problem, having been twice earlier told to wait.

4.11 At no stage did Parker hear the official call him back nor did he see any motion suggesting that he was calling him back.”

And again in paragraph 4.13(b):

“4.13(b) Parker ran on to the field at the time when it was accepted practice to do so. Webcke was well back and entirely out of play. Consequently, there was no logical reason why the interchange official would not permit Parker to run on to the field at the time that he did. This is especially so because the interchange official knew that the Broncos were playing with only 12 men after Webcke had been fouled. Why on this occasion, out of all the occasions when players are permitted to interchange whilst the player to be replaced is still on the field, would this official tell Parker that he had to wait until Webcke had actually left the field?”

Both Mr Parker and Mr Castle were cross examined before the Committee. Mr Castle said that when Mr Parker ran on on the third occasion he called out to him “you can't go on yet”. He believed that Mr Parker heard him. Mr Parker denied that he heard this call. He believed that after the second knock-back when he pointed out to Mr Castle how far away and how close to the sideline Mr Webcke was, Mr Castle had tacitly assented to his running on.

The Committee takes the view that the two accounts are reconcilable and is prepared to accept both assertions as established by the evidence. That, however, is by no means the end of the matter.

It is of serious concern to the Committee that there appears to have grown up a wholly unfounded and erroneous assumption on the part of some Clubs, players and Interchange Officials that the Interchange Official has authority to grant a dispensation from strict compliance with Rule 1.35.2 – “Only thirteen (13) players from each team may be on the field of play at any one time”. This was plainly the assumption of Mr Parker, Mr Castle and the Broncos. The Broncos in paragraph 4.9 state, with astonishing disregard of Rule 1.35.2 and their own express responsibility under Rule 1.35.11, that Webcke was out of play and near the sideline “and therefore, in accordance with the usual practice, (it was) it was an appropriate time for the interchange to be made”. The Committee thinks it necessary to state categorically that the Official’s task is to ensure compliance with the Rule – not to allow it to be ignored. He has absolutely no authority to grant any dispensation.

It is extraordinary that this unfounded assumption has developed to the point at which it seems to be fairly commonly accepted. The words of the Rule allow no elasticity. They are clear, specific and direct. The development of the assumption is all the more extraordinary in the context that on 19 April 2000 in its reasons for upholding a two competition points penalty on the North Queensland Cowboys for having 14 players on the field, this Committee said:

“Before leaving the matter we should perhaps emphasise the importance of clubs, players and ground officials being meticulous in observing the requirement of the replacement rule. Breaches are not frequent, but they always involve a degree of acrimony.

We accordingly make the formal recommendation that there be a greater degree of attention paid by clubs, players and ground officials to be meticulous in the observance of the replacement rule.”

In their approach to this appeal the Broncos have disregarded the absolute terms of the “only 13 players” limitation rule and sought to justify Mr Parker’s conduct by the context of the relatively widespread assumption that Mr Castle could have allowed them to infringe with impunity.

Mr Castle’s belief in his authority to grant a dispensation from strict compliance with the “only 13 players” rule is clearly apparent in his formal written statement to the Committee:

“25. ...I am of course aware that in the case of some interchanges in the past there have been occasions when an interchanging player has entered the field of play before the player being replaced has actually made it off the field. But such “crossovers” are always controlled by the interchange official in that

the interchange takes place with that official's approval, the player being replaced is almost off the field and he is usually in close proximity to the replaced player.

26. *In such situations, there is no potential for trouble because the interchanging players are under the control of the interchange official who would not permit the "crossover" to occur if there was any chance of the opposing team being disadvantaged."*

The view of the NRL as expressed in an official Media Release dated 14 April 2004, is also relevant on the present challenge to the penalty:

"In reviewing submissions from the Broncos the NRL accepts that 'cross-overs' in terms of interchange do occur from time to time with the full approval of interchange officials.

"Cross-overs" refer to one player entering the field as another injured player is still making his way off.

It remains the task of the interchange officials to determine if such an event can take place without advantaging or disadvantaging a team as a result.

The NRL believes that it is critical to this decision that the interchange official determined that it was not an appropriate time in play in which to allow such a "cross-over" and that he instructed the player not to go on because of this belief."

The Committee is not aware of, and has not been referred to, any provision in the Rules allowing "cross-overs" to take place if they result, as they have in this case, in a breach in the "only 13 players" Rule.

The foregoing quotations are indications of the erroneous assumption regarding the flexibility of the Rule on the part of the player (Mr Parker), the Club, the Interchange Official and the NRL itself. The Committee accepts that this erroneous assumption is comparatively widespread. Its present relevance is two-fold: first it bears directly on the question of penalty; and secondly it calls for a re-iteration in even stronger terms of the clear statement of this Committee in the Cowboys case.

Turning, then, to the actual penalty, two competition points has become what might be described as standard for breach of this Rule. Some cases may call for a higher or lower or different penalty and the discretion of the Chief Executive Officer in this regard is not to be arbitrarily constrained.

In the present case it is contended by the Broncos that, accepting that there was a breach, it did no more than restore the equality of 13-a-side

after one of their players had been incapacitated by a foul. That may well be so, but it is not an excuse that is open in the face of the clear terms of Rule 1.35.2 – the “only 13 players” rule. Of greater relevance is the effect on the Broncos of a two competition points penalty. In this regard we quote from the written statement to this Committee of the Managing Director of the Broncos:

- “1) The deduction of the two points has a very real potential to cost the club the minor premiership, a top four position or a top eight position. The minor premiership is worth \$100,000.00 and there are cash prizes down to 8th position of \$20,000.00 and more. A top four position guarantees a home semi-final which is a double bonus. Firstly we assist with the running of the game and sales for the match which result in financial rewards in commissions and the like and could be \$50,000.00 plus. Secondly it is well recognized that to win the title a top four finish is almost essential. Winning the title brings huge financial rewards.*
- 2) We have sponsorship arrangements which carry incentives for premierships, minor premierships and semi final appearances. These alone are worth up to \$50,000.00 but obviously that can be enhanced considerably in further sponsorships and corporate sales as a result of where the club finishes the season.”*

The Committee considers that these disclose significant penal consequences on the Broncos for a breach committed in the context of a not uncommon failure to understand that the “only 13 players” rule is absolute and inflexible. We have formed the view that the Appeal against the penalty of 2 points should, in the very special context of this widely held mistaken assumption, be upheld. We take the view that the penalty should be decreased to a monetary penalty. We note the Bronco’s submissions in respect of financial penalties should they not be included in the top 4 or top 8 positions as a result of the deduction of the 2 competition points. These submissions make it clear that the 2 point reduction could result in loss of opportunity of winning the minor premiership. The minor premiership carries a prize of \$100,000.00 with up to \$50,000.00 in addition from ticket sales and commissions.

In the circumstances we think that a fine of \$75,000.00 would be reasonable in lieu of a 2 point deduction.

Before parting with this Appeal this Committee re-states in even more direct terms than were used in the Cowboys Appeal that Rule 1.35.2 is absolute in its operation. It is clearly expressed:

1.35.2

“Only thirteen (13) players from each team may be on the field of play at any one time.”

All connected or involved with Rugby League must accept and meticulously observe that rule. There are no extenuating circumstances, nor does any official of the NRL have authority to allow any departure from the requirement of that Rule.

DECISION

Appeal upheld; two competition points penalty decreased to a fine of \$75,000.00.”

So now you know.

VIDEO PRODUCTION (The Meeting)

Richard Johnston reports:-

“A meeting was held at NRL Referee headquarters at Telstra Stadium on Saturday 22 May. The objectives of the gathering being to produce two tapes to assist referees in their week to week efforts. The focus of the tapes being relevant communication for ‘The Meetings’ and incidents and their clarification to bring credibility in the Decision Making Process.

The tapes should be with Associations in a few months and with the addition of a worksheet proforma it is hoped consistency will be the outcome of the production.

The following dot points encapsulate the feelings of those who participated in the exercise.

*Better officiating
Assist retention rates through satisfaction
Consistency in review during interchanges
A coaching panel tool
Reinforcing practical refereeing
Provide examples of best model”*

RULINGS

Chris Bettiol wants to know:-

“Q 1 - A defender enters the field of play from an offside position and tackles an attacking player who in the opinion of the Referee is set to score a try.

Q 2 - An attacking player is in the Referees opinion set to score a try but is knocked down by a spectator/first aid attendant.”

I said:-

“Q1 It is within the referee's right to award a penalty try if he so wishes. There has been unfair play by the defending team (ie entering the field from an offside position, presumably without touch judge approval), and the referee is of the opinion that a try would have been scored but for that unfair play.

Q2 If the incident occurred in the in goal area, award the try. (Section 6, Law 3 (e)). Otherwise, if play is irregularly effected, scrum, loose head and feed to the attacking team. The **League** needs to deal with the offending person. You cannot award a penalty try because the transgression was not perpetrated by a member of the defending team.”

From Frank Samyia:-

“A Red player in possession of the ball grubber kicks into Blue's in goal area. A Blue defender makes a play at the ball by attempting to knock it dead with his hands and knocks the ball over the junction of the dead ball line and the touch in goal line. The touch judge sees the touch by the blue defender and gives a figure 8 signal to the referee and points to the centre of the goal line indicating a Blue goal line drop out. The referee does not see the touch, rules that the ball has been made dead in goal by Red and heads out for a Blue 20m optional restart. The questions are: Is the ball considered dead in goal or touch in goal when it crosses the junction in question and who has jurisdiction over this ruling? The rules state that the touch judge is in charge of the touch and touch in goal line, the referee is in charge of the dead ball line.”

By saying that the touch judge is “in charge” of touch and touch in goal, Frank means “The Referee shall accept the decision of an official Touch Judge relating to touch and touch in goal play...”. That simply means that he accepts that the ball has gone out if the touch judge says so. How it got there is the Referee’s prerogative. So if he rules a 20 metre tap, so be it.

APPLICATION OF THE NEW HELD UP RULE

David Cook writes:-

“Can I ask why are we blowing time-off when a player is held up in the in-goal and cannot ground the ball and then taking play out 10 metres to play the ball, then blowing time back on, when we never did this when the previous rule was "scrum", when you consider that it took a lot longer to pack a scrum than it does to "play" the ball.”

When we first introduced the new Law, players were confused about it (to say the least) and in an effort to control the restart, the Referees decided that they needed to create time for themselves by signaling "time off". When everyone gets used to it, they may revert to not blowing time off. See Memo MS 003/04 dated 26 February for details.

MICHAEL STONE
ARLRA PARTICIPATION COMMITTEE CONSULTANT
NRL REFEREES' CO-ORDINATOR