

NEW

APPENDIX VI

The following interpretations are specific to USA Hockey's Standard of Play Initiative. Many of these situations may apply to more than one rule reference. Please refer to the standard of play language found in the Preface and those rules pertaining to the standard of play for specific rules language and additional information.

Question – The first principle of the Standard of Play is "the use of the stick will be limited to only playing the puck." Does this mean that anytime a player uses his stick and makes contact with the opponent, a penalty must be called?

Answer - No. Even though the principle encourages players to only play the puck with the stick, an actual rule must still have been violated in order for a penalty to be assessed. There may be instances where the stick may contact the opponent's body or stick, but no competitive advantage had been gained by an act that is in violation of the rules.

It is important to recognize that, in essence, stick to lower stick contact that prevents the opponent from playing the puck could be considered to be making an effort to play the puck.

Question – Can a player lift the opponent's stick without being penalized under the Standard of Play guidelines?

Answer – Yes. A player may lift the opponent's stick at anytime provided they do not impede their progress. This is most often done in an effort to prevent the opponent from playing the puck and is considered a good defensive play.

Question – Just prior to the puck being received by an attacking player, the defensive player chops down on top of the stick and prevents him from being able to play the puck. Should this be penalized under the Standard of Play Guidelines? Does it make any difference as to the angle of the stick blade when done?

Answer - The use of the stick to check an opponent's stick, or press the opponent's stick to the ice or the boards, is a good defensive play as long as it is done on the lower portion of the stick shaft and the intended purpose is to dislodge the puck or prevent the opponent from playing the puck. The angle of the stick blade (inverted or parallel to the ice), would not make a difference in this determination.

However, anytime this action is done higher up on the stick or clearly impedes the opponent with no reasonable effort to play the puck, a penalty for slashing, holding or hooking should be called.

Question – What degree of force is necessary for either a hooking or slashing penalty to be assessed under the Standard of Play guidelines?

Answer – For hooking, any use of the stick against an opponent's body that allows the player to gain a positional advantage should be penalized. Examples include a tug or pull that allows space between the opponent's to be diminished, impeding the opponent's progress or causes a loss of balance or a subtle push or tug on the hand/arm that prevents the opponent from being able to pass or shoot the puck with normal force.

In the case of slashing, any slashing motion that makes contact with the hands, arms or body of the opponent must be penalized. In addition, any hard slashes to the upper portion of the stick (just below the hands of the opponent), with no attempt to legally play the puck, shall also be penalized.

Question – I am a defensive player that is responsible for patrolling the front of my goal. What am I allowed and not allowed to do in playing the attacking player before the puck arrives?

Answer – Establishing a favorable body position is probably the key and this may involve considerable body contact, especially when the attacking player may be trying to establish the same advantageous body position. To do so, you can use size, strength and balance to lean on your opponent and put yourself in better position. The stick, or forearm, can also be used to steer the opponent as long as the arm(s) are not extended. Finally, a stick lift or stick press is a good defensive play when the puck is in the vicinity.

What you can't do is fairly clear. You cannot use a free arm to grab onto or impede your opponent. You cannot use the stick or arm(s) in an extended manner that "pushes off" the opponent and creates space between you. And, you cannot place your stick in an area that impedes the opponent's ability to move in a desired direction.

Question – Is it acceptable for a player to take one hand off of the stick and use it as a shield to maintain space between the two players?

Answer - A player who is in possession and control of the puck is allowed to use a free hand to maintain body position that they legally established. An example of this is when two players are skating shoulder to shoulder, or the defensive player is slightly behind, and the player with the puck uses the free arm to fend off the opponent and maintain their body position. Naturally, though, if they grab the stick, sweater or arm of the opponent, or use the free arm to push off and create space, a penalty should be assessed.

Question – Is it acceptable for a player to take one hand off the stick and use it to steer an opponent when battling in the corner or in front of the goal?

Answer - In regards to two players battling in the corner or in front of the goal, it is unrealistic to expect both players to keep both hands on the stick at all times. In this instance, it is legal for a player to take one hand off the stick when reaching for the puck and using the free arm to steer the opponent or maintain position. Where the line is crossed and the player should be penalized is when the free arm is used to impede the opponent pushes off with enough force to knock the opponent off of the puck or create space. This is a situation where officials need to use good judgment and allow battling for the puck, or body position, to take place, and be able to recognize when a player has gained a competitive advantage with an illegal tactic and penalize accordingly.

Question – Is there a difference in what is allowed in a checking classification versus a non-checking classification when it comes to battling for the puck and body position?

Answer – Body contact and body position are very important parts of both the checking and non-check games. Although there will be some differences in the amount of force that may be allowed at the younger or lower levels (Please see the Body Contact – Playing Within the Rules Video), the same principle of establishing body position exists in both and the methods used are the same. The only exception is the use of a body check, which is illegal in the non-checking classifications.

Question – Is a different standard applied to a player who is back checking the puck carrier versus a non-puck carrier?

Answer – Essentially, no. Anytime a player gains a competitive advantage by the use of an illegal tactic, it should be penalized. This is regardless as to whether the action takes place on the puck carrier or non-puck carrier. It also emphasizes the importance of officials maintaining their maximum field of vision at all times by being in the proper position.

Question – The attacking player chips the puck off the boards and is going to go around the defensive player. At what point can a body check, or any contact, still be legally initiated by the defending player?

Answer – The general rule of thumb is that a body check can be finished as long as the defending player is an arm's length plus stick length away from the opponent when the puck was dumped and the check that is delivered is unavoidable – meaning it was in the process of being delivered when control of the puck was relinquished. It is not acceptable to skate one or two more strides after the puck is gone and decide to deliver the check.

Contact may also be legal provided the defending player maintains their normal skating lane and reasonable foot speed. In this instance, the obligation is on the attacking player to go around the defender. However, if the defender initiates contact by stopping or changing their skating lane to cut off the opponent, an interference penalty would be the correct call.

Question – What are some guidelines to be considered when assessing interference penalties to the centers during face-offs?

Answer - Whereas any illegal tactic must be penalized, we also must recognize that two players may be battling for the puck and the normal body position principles must be applied. As long as the two centers are attempting to play the puck, have established body position and are simply trying to maintain it, the battle should be allowed to continue. However, if one center intentionally plays the body of the opponent with no effort to play the puck, or impedes the opponent in any way other than maintaining proper body position, a penalty for interference would be warranted.

Question – What are some guidelines to be considered when assessing interference penalties to players other than the centers during face-offs?

Answer – Any time the stick or arm is used to impede the opponent, it is pretty obvious that a penalty should be called. Where the inconsistency comes into play is the use of the body and not properly applying the body position principles. Once a player, defending or attacking, has established their space and is simply trying to occupy that space, they are doing so legally and the onus is on the opponent to try to move around them. Interference occurs when one of the players changes their established space for the sole purpose of impeding the opponent by setting a pick or a block that prevents the opponent from continuing on in their established skating lane or prevents them from occupying the space they are entitled to.

Question – My local assignor supported the Standard of Play Initiative early in the season, but as the season has gone on has suggested that we should back off some and let the kids decide the game. This was especially true during league play and playoffs. What is USA Hockey's philosophy on this?

Answer – First off, let's make it perfectly clear that USA Hockey's objective here is not to call penalties – it is to encourage players to play within the rules and not allow lesser skilled players/teams to gain a competitive advantage using illegal tactics. All officials should only call those infractions that are clear violations of the actual rules.

With that being said, the same standard and expectations of the players must be maintained throughout the course of the season. In many cases, the players do adjust to the expectations and fewer infractions are committed. But league or playoff games should not make any difference as the penalty standard as players must be held accountable for playing within the rules and more skilled players allowed to play the game without unfair practices used by the opponent.

The role of the official is to enforce the rules of the game and USA Hockey expects the officials to do the best they can every time they step on the ice, and regardless of the circumstances involved in the game.