

Rule 16... Common Sense?!



Following the rules review in 2016, many of the slightly more pedantic rules of the game were either amended or removed altogether. What remained was a set of rules that brought the game kicking and screaming into the 21st century, allowed play to be faster and showcased the skill of all involved.

The majority of netball played in England is at grassroots or local level and the largest group of umpires that England Netball has are Netball Europe C Awards. To help umpires understand where the line is drawn between common sense and the written word umpires must always keep in mind the intent of a player and also the safety and welfare of players.

At local league level many players just want to go out and play and enjoy themselves and aren't interested in gaining an unfair advantage by either bending or breaking the rules intentionally. From time to time a scenario will unfold where an umpire must consider if a player is deliberately trying to gain an unfair advantage over an opponent or if they are just trying to get on with playing the game they love...

- *What is the intent of a player that goes into an offside area to collect a ball (following a sanction)?*
- *Is a player that has their hair suitably tied back in a ponytail going to cause any more 'interference' to an opponent than if they had it tied up in a bun?*
- *Is a GA that is awarded a penalty pass really breaking the short pass rule if they put the ball down on the ground and it is picked up by her GS?*



Or are they just letting a player take a penalty pass that they think has a better chance of scoring?

- *Is a player that takes a free or penalty pass in an incorrect position really trying to gain an unfair advantage or did they just not hear your instruction? Were you clear enough in the first instance?*
- *Is a player that is seriously injured trying to violate the 30-second injury stoppage rule or is she unable to leave the court due to her injury?*

At grassroots or local league level all of these scenarios are likely to occur, but if an umpire uses their common sense and has empathy with the players then there will be no need for an infringement to be blown. An umpire should never use the rules against a player, but should apply them in a way that supports a player to get the best out of their game and promote enjoyment for everyone involved.

In the scenario where a player does not place their foot up to the line within 15 centimetres, would a quick reminder of "up to the line please" avoid an unnecessary turnover? Or would a call of "on side quickly please" deal with a player that is late to get back on side for the centre pass after a goal is scored? An umpire must consider if the player is really trying to delay

play or if they are just trying to catch their breath. Umpires that frequently use a quiet word or give players informal advice when the ball is in their co-umpire's area of control will have fewer of these issues occurring.

Umpires should always keep in mind that as the game rises up through the levels there will be a growing need for umpires to be less lenient with their application of the rules, and the responsibility will be weighted more toward the players and coaches knowing what they can and cannot do within the rules.

As a word of caution, when watching matches on television umpires should avoid copying everything they see. Often, elite umpires at this level do not have time to deliver full terminology or could be dealing with advanced Game Management issues, and may use shortcuts.

There is always much debate on the rules and different interpretations of how they could or should be applied. With an ever-increasing social media presence this can often lead to misinterpretations. If umpires have any queries, they should contact England Netball's Officiating Department at officiating@englandnetball.co.uk, who will be pleased to give a concise clarification, often with the support of the England Netball and International Netball Federation Rules Panels.

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