

Law Suite

A friend of ours who is a coach came over for dinner. He is a bachelor needs a good home cooked meal and my wife is a great cook. He mentioned that he had been asked to be an expert witness in a law suite where a player was seriously injured by a tackle. The player was a fourth year medical student and the resulting surgery required her to lose an entire semester. A very expensive proposition.

I asked about the basis of the suit since to collect negligent or intentional bad behavior must be proved. He said the injury resulted from a tackle from behind. I noted that the law does not specify that tackles from behind are foul and some are clearly not. I asked what the referee did and was told no foul was called. The plaintiff maintains that the indoor arena (and they hired the referee) was at fault. I asked about a video and there was none. I suggested that she save the lawyer's fee because the case would be nearly impossible to prove.

No doubt the referee will be called by the defense and say that he did not see any foul committed and he probably will say what he saw and why he thought it was fair. He may have been right or wrong, but it is unlikely the judge and jury will reverse the person who was in the best position to be accurate without a definitive video. All other testimony will cancel itself.

The rule concerning tackles from behind entered the rule book because to many good attacking players such as Marco van Basten were injured when opponents crashed into the back of their knees. Losing good attacking players takes the excitement and some of the revenue from the game. The rule banned "tackles from behind that endangered the safety of the opponent"; not all tackles from behind. The rules makers had in mind cleats up tackles, tackles well above the ground and those with excessive force. The rule now bans all "tackles which endanger the safety of the opponent.

Depending on one's definition of such tackles many tackles from behind are perfectly legal. A defender who slides at an angle from the rear taking the ball first has not committed a foul even if the player trips over the out stretched leg. It is just a fall without great force exerted on the legs. It is not likely to result in injury and is not a foul..

In between we have a tackle from behind that gets the legs first but with only moderate force and at ground level.. The rules define tackles which get the player first as a foul but requires no card and often no card is needed. There is only a low level of danger.

Between the red card foul and the no call would be tackles were the player has little or no chance of getting to the ball. The player may be low to the ground and have cleats down but misses the ball by a wide margin and probably has a good head of steam. Many of these are tactical fouls by a player who has been beaten. There is no chance that the ball will be taken fairly and there is moderate risk of injury. Enough for a caution.

A very skilled player can sometimes dispossess his opponent with a tackle between the opponents legs. Even for a very skilled player this is difficult. If the ball is touched first and the defender crashes into the back of the opponents legs this is a foul a possibly misconduct. The risk

for injury is too high to allow these tackles.

Don't get too hung up on the direction the tackle comes from. If the tackler hits his opponents legs the tackle is probably foul. If the player falls over an outstretched leg after the ball is played away the tackle is likely fair. Direction is not important. If there is little chance to play the ball it is at least a caution and with great force it is a send off.

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