

## LAW “ODDBALLS”

(or, Can I use the law to my advantage?)

By  
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If the game of rugby sometimes mystifies insiders, how must it appear to an outsider – unfathomable perhaps? So often the whistle blows, the game is stopped, and only one person, apparently, knows why. Usually, the referee is right, and the great majority recognise this almost immediately; you only hear the minority that don’t. However, odd situations occur which no one comprehends, apart from the “prat” with the whistle; it is in these circumstances that the really knowledgeable law-buff amongst the players, or even coaches, has an advantage. That player, or coach, may identify what his team did wrong and take steps to prevent it happening again, thereby reducing the team’s penalty count. If the stoppage were a penalty against the opposition, he may try to get his team to pressurise the opposition into a similar position, so that they give away another penalty. This knowledge could mean the difference between winning and losing, which, in turn, could even decide promotion, or non-relegation.

Despite popular opinion, referees are human (honestly) and there are occasions when they do make mistakes. Most of the time, they realise that they have erred and it can play on their mind; again, they are human and do have a conscience. The worst consequence can be when players then harangue them for it which, naturally, causes further pressure and possibly further mistakes. This is a scenario which reduces the enjoyment level for all referees and, usually, the players, coaches and spectators as well. Our knowledgeable player/coach may be in a position to understand why the mistake was made and empathise with the ref which, in turn, could prevent the downturn in everyone’s enjoyment.

Sometimes, events which look all wrong are, in fact, correct in law. One of the problems within our game that causes many of these misunderstandings is that it is now too complicated. Are you sometimes bemused when the whistle goes when you were not expecting it, or, on other occasions, are you expecting the ref to blow, yet play continues?

Put yourself in the following game situations and see how you would expect the referee to act.

1. You are at full back. The opposition kicks from their 22 and the ball sails into touch on the half way line. It then hits an advertising hoarding and rolls towards you. By now you are standing in touch near your own 22. You pick it up and take a quick throw in.
2. You are a hooker at a line-out near the opposition's line. They win bad ball and the ball lands six inches over the goal line and six inches from the touch-in-goal line. You run round their hooker and dive for the ball. You flatten the corner post and get a hand on top of the ball with the rest of your body, from your elbow up, lying on the ground in touch-in-goal.
3. Your 10 kicks off from the centre. The opposition's 4 catches the ball and their 1, 3 and 5 bind in a perfect wedge on him. You are the first of your team to arrive and you go round their side of the wedge and get your hands on the ball.
4. The opposition is awarded a penalty try. As their kicker starts his run to kick the conversion, your 14 runs out from behind your goal line and charges down the kick.
5. You are carrying the ball near the opposition's goal posts. You are tackled and you realise that you will not now make the goal line. You ground the ball against the base of the post protector, which is about 25 cm short of the goal line. A defender then kicks the ball dead.
6. The ball is thrown to you in a line-out. You mis-time your jump completely and finish up deliberately heading the ball forward through the line-out.
7. A team mate passes you the ball. It is a flat pass but too low for you to reach. It bounces forward five metres from the ground and over your opponents' goal line, where you dive on it.
8. Your 10 kicks off from the centre. The ball comes down short of the 10-metre line, where it is knocked on by an opponent. You catch the knock on and start a passing movement.
9. You attempt to catch a kick but do not time it properly. You get two hands to the ball but it slips through them onto your chest and goes to ground in front of you.
10. You tackle an opponent and land nearer his goal line than he does. You release him quickly, get to your feet on "his" side of the tackle and pass the ball to a team mate.
11. You are the back player in your team at an opposition line-out. On the throw, their back pod goes beyond the 15-metre line and the jumper catches the ball. You follow them, come round between them and their 9 and take the ball from the jumper.
12. The opposition kicks ahead from their 10-metre line. You can see the ball will come down close to the touch line and not land in touch. Before you catch it, you place one foot on the touch line and catch it a metre inside the touch line.

These are the answers. Don't have a look before you finish having a go at the above, you will only be depriving yourself.

1. Play on. When the ball hits an inanimate object in touch, a quick throw can be taken with it from anywhere behind where it went into touch. However, if it touches a person other than the thrower, a quick throw is not allowed.
2. Try awarded. As the ball was not being carried when the corner post was flattened or when it was grounded, it is not touch or touch-in-goal.
3. Play on. The opposition has not created a maul. A maul needs the ball carrier to be joined by at least one player from each team. This was not a maul before you arrived, therefore you were not offside.
4. Charging a conversion kick after a penalty try is allowed.
5. Try awarded. The goal posts and the padding are part of in-goal. Therefore, grounding the ball against the base is the same as grounding it in in-goal.
6. Play on. Heading the ball, in any direction, is not an infringement.
7. Try awarded. A flat pass is not a throw-forward (forward pass) and the bounce forward is irrelevant.
8. Play on, if you gain an advantage. If not, a scrum down at the place of the knock on, your throw in. The kick off should go ten metres, unless the ball is first played by an opponent. Once this occurs, the kick off requirement is completed and the first infringement here is the knock on.
9. Play on. It is not a knock on because the ball has not gone forward from your hands. It came back from your hands and then forward from your chest.
10. Play on. You have released the ball carrier quickly and got to your feet before you played the ball. All O.K. It is only players who are not involved in the tackle who have to come from "their side" to play the ball.
11. Play on. The line-out is over and the opposition has not created a maul (see 3 above), therefore you are not offside.
12. The touch judge (or referee) should award a throw in to your team, level with where it was kicked. Because your foot was on the touch line (therefore, it was in touch), you were deemed to be in touch and therefore, the kick has technically gone directly into touch.

How did you do? You can see that there are occasions when odd game situations look like infringements but are not so. If one of these were to happen near you, or to you, and you were to stop playing, or even hesitate, thinking that there had been an infringement, you might lose the opportunity to play on, even to score.

Remember the old adage and play on to the whistle, because it may not go at all.

If you were correct with ten or more of the above, you would be an asset to your team in one of these situations.

If were correct with three or less, I would suggest you leave the refereeing to the whistle carrier and resist the temptation to call his parentage into dispute.