

BasketCases: How Youth Basketball Parents Can Lower Their Blood Pressure and Keep Their Sanity

Chapter 17

“Over the Back”

At least one BasketCase utters this phrase at every weekend tournament game in the country. I’m sure of it. You may want to take this phrase, put it in the vault, and never bring it out.

What the Rule Book Says

I could not find the phrase “over the back” listed in the latest edition of the rule book. Rule 4-37, Article 2, in the definitions section, under Rebounding says, “To obtain or maintain legal rebounding position, a player may not: Displace, charge or push an opponent . . .extend shoulders, hips or knees . . . bend his/her body in an abnormal position to hold or displace an opponent.”

What the Case Book Clarifies

Nothing! In this case, there is nothing to clarify. Like the rule book, there is no mention of “over the back” in any of its pages.

The Whistleblower Reality

“Over the back” is, depending on the gym’s location, an urban or suburban myth. [We do not penalize players who are either taller or are more athletic than their opponents for reaching, jumping, or grabbing the ball above another player.] Although each player has a right to the principle of verticality, it is not an opponent’s fault if your son or daughter fails to secure the air space above their head.

It is a foul, however, if the player displaces his/her opponent, usually through contact in the back—to gain possession of the basketball regardless of location. The key word is “displaces,” which means pushes a player out of the way. On most rebounds, especially at older levels, incidental contact occurs at all five positions if everyone is blocking out. A foul occurs only when a player is displaced. Many veteran refs will ignore displacement if it is away from the ball and does not create an advantage. This is a judgment call that comes with experience.

Generally, I will call a foul if a player aggressively pushes another with two hands in the back, regardless of where the ball is. The reason is simple: If you don’t call that foul, you will often see a retaliatory foul on the other end. Preventative officiating can defuse that situation before it escalates.

What BasketCases Need to Know

First and foremost, the phrase “over the back” does not exist in the rule book. If you feel compelled to say something, “through the back” is more accurate, but sounds a little clunky. If you are a coach and you didn’t get the call, tell the referee your player got “displaced” and he will respect you more, because he knows you have read the rule book or this book.

A couple of other related notes on blocking out for a rebound:

- When blocking out, a player’s job is to keep the opponent away from the basketball, not, as taught by many coaches, to drive them back four feet. That constitutes displacement, and a foul should be called, particularly when it involves a vulnerable shooter who is not prepared to protect herself.
- Speaking of airborne shooters, if an opponent makes enough contact to commit a foul before the shooter returns to the floor, it is a shooting foul. If the contact occurs after the shooter returns to the floor, the foul occurs after the shot. The ball will be taken out of bounds by the team in control (unless it is a bonus situation), and the basket will count if it went in.

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