

A REFEREE ON THE RAFFERTY RULES

George Bradley Discusses Rugby Worries

Coincidental with the publication of "The Listener's" article on "The Rafferty Rules of Rugby," came two talks by George Bradley over Station 2YA. Unfortunately, they were not given any preliminary announcement, so some listeners may have missed hearing interpretations of rules by the Chairman of the Executive of the New Zealand Rugby Referees' Association. His material is summarised in this discussion.

FIRST point made by Mr. Bradley was the necessity for tolerance among spectators, and tolerance especially among spectators whose knowledge of the rules is insufficient to warrant criticism of the referees' administration of the game. He argued that players themselves were shockingly ignorant of the rules, and compared New Zealanders unfavourably with recent visitors, such as the English and South African touring sides.

To illustrate his arguments he gave hypothetical cases of the application of the off-side rule, along lines similar to those discussed on this page two weeks ago. Argument about the points raised in the talks decided a group of bush-lawyers that the whole question could be clarified in the statement that "no player can be put off-side by an opponent."

His Own Fault

A good deal can be read into this statement, but it means, simply, exactly what it says: a player can only be put off-side by a wrong action on his own part, or by the actions of other members of his team. There is a duty on the player to place himself on-side if he finds himself where he should not be, but, assuming that for some reason he is justifiably behind his opponent's field of play, and some action by those opponents gives him the ball; then he can accept it and play it.

For example, a player may accept or intercept a pass back by an opponent, provided that nothing his own side has done has put him off-side. Extreme cases in the application of this rule sometimes make it seem to spectators that a player standing yards ahead of his own team, and playing the ball, is off-side and should be penalised. He may have run up with a kick and over-run the bounce. If the ball is accepted intentionally by an opponent and then comes to him as a pass or a mis-kick, then he seems to be standing off-side but in reality can accept the ball and score from his advantageous position if he wishes, or can.

Getting On-Side

While an opponent cannot place a player off-side, he can in several ways put him on-side. Mr. Bradley listed these methods:

- By carrying the ball five yards in any direction.
- By kicking the ball.
- By intentionally touching the ball, but without catching or gathering it.

Players who are off-side may approach within 10 yards of the opponent who receives the ball without penalty, and are on-side to play the ball or tackle the opponent as soon as he has done any one of these things. But these circumstances do not apply to a player who has wilfully remained within the 10-yard limit. Players outside the 10-yard circle may run up to it, and should do so in the event of a member of their own team kicking over their heads. By doing so they place themselves in a better position to defend when the opponent's action has placed them on-side, and the fact that they do not approach more closely gives the opponent sufficient time to make his defensive play. Whether they are in front of or behind the opponent they may still approach to within 10 yards of him, and may still be put on-side by him when he runs 5 yards or kicks the ball.

If the opponent accepts the ball, kicked, say by the player's full back while the player is even actually behind the opponent; and if the opponent muffs his catch so that the ball rolls away to the player, then the player can accept this ball and play it without penalty.

Only the man in his own team whose actions have put him off-side can place a player on-side. Mr. Bradley was careful to stress this point. He gave as an example the case of a wing three-quarter who runs up with the centre, and carries on when the centre kicks downfield. The centre, perhaps, satisfied with his kick, wrongly rests on his laurels. The wing follows the ball. But only the wing (or any other player who has been behind the centre when the ball was kicked) is on-side. Any other player who is in front of the kick is wrong if he assumes himself on-side when the wing has run up to him.

Mr. Bradley's version of our statement that no player can be put off-side by an action of his opponents, was this: "Except as regards the 10-yard rule, no player can be off-side if an opponent has possession of the ball, or was the last to play it."

No Scrums in Goal

In his second talk Mr. Bradley raised an interesting point about the application of the off-side rule behind the goal line. It was quite wrong, he said, to believe that a defending player behind his own goal line had special privileges. If he knocked-on, or passed forward, a scrum would be ordered 5 yards inside the field of play, opposite the place. If he obstructed, a penalty would be awarded between the goal posts. If the referee believed that the obstruction prevented a try being

scored, then he might award a penalty try, instead of this penalty kick.

But, and this is important, one concession is made to a defending player in his own in-goal. He is not off-side if he is in front of a player of his own team who has the ball or was the last to play it. He may, however, place himself off-side by standing in front of a player taking a free kick or a penalty kick.

While he was talking about the application of the rules, generally, inside the in-goal area, in his second talk, Mr. Bradley came to the point which very often gives rise to confusion, both among players and spectators. It is impossible to hold a scrum inside the in-goal. If a scrum is pushed back over the goal line then it ceases to be a scrum. Mr. Bradley pointed out that in these circumstances any player could drop on the ball to score or force-down. A back could even enter the scrum to score or force, immediately the ball reached the goal line. Players might even advance in front of the ball. But he warned players who are not in the scrum when the ball crosses the line: if it is knocked back into the field of play they immediately become off-side, and should accordingly be sure in all circumstances that they can get back.

Ruling the Scrum

Referees who weakly order a second scrum if the rules are not observed in the first, were censured by Mr. Bradley in his review of the scrumming rules. He clarified the rules by dividing them into two sections: those concerned with getting the ball into the scrum, and those concerned with the hooking of it.

To get the ball in, he said, the player must:

- Stand not less than three feet from the scrum.
- Propel the ball by both hands from below the knee at a moderate speed.
- Propel the ball so that it does not touch the ground until it has passed one foot of a player in each team.
- Propel it straight and midway between the opposing players.

To hook the ball, the hooker must:

- Keep his feet on the ground until the ball has touched the ground in the scrum according to the rules governing putting it in.
- When the ball has touched, any foot may be lifted to hook it.

The rule also provides that the ball is not fairly in if it comes out again at either side between the lines of feet of the front row, or between the feet of the first player on the side on which it is put in.

That last is a point which spectators should note very carefully. It allows the half-back and the hookers quite a lot of latitude—too much, in the opinion

of many followers of the game. But since it does allow that latitude, spectators should be careful to know that they really have seen an infringement before they boo the referee for allowing play to continue. Often, under this rule, the ball can go into the scrum and seem to shoot straight back out again, although in reality, it has gone in according to specifications and been hooked back by, say, the middle hooker, behind both feet of the first man on the side on which it was put in.

Revision Necessary

The rule seems to be faulty. In the quick action of scrumming these days, it is often difficult for even the referee to see just what has happened to the ball. With the scrum wheeling and often in the last stages of collapse, he has to count feet on both sides, watch a half back who is usually doing his best to make it difficult for anyone to pick what he is doing, and keep an eye open to the rear for inside backs who are bound to be creeping up as close to off-side as they can get without being seen. With all the feet moving and bodies crumpling it is a lucky referee who can be sure ten times out of ten between which feet the ball has been hooked.

However, the rule is there for observance. What can't be mended must be tolerated.

Encouraging Risks

Mr. Bradley's argument was with the referee who sees an infringement of the rules of the scrumming and orders another scrum in the hope that this will put things right. He said most emphatically that no referee should show his weakness in this fashion. This was not only wrong according to rule, it encouraged players to take more and more risks. He appealed to referees to be consistent and inflict the penalty where deserved. A scrum may be put down again if some infringement has occurred accidentally; but players are so adept at making infringements occur "accidentally," most will agree that Mr. Bradley's appeal is timely. There is not a major ground, or a minor ground in New Zealand, that has not during the last few seasons seen referees hopelessly trying to persuade players to scrum down properly by making them go down again and again, to break the rule in the same way each time.

While it is an excellent thing that authorities such as Mr. Bradley should discuss these points publicly, and excellent, too, that Referees' Associations should invite club officers and players to join in their meetings, it is still obvious that rules which need so much explaining need much more amending. It is not enough to add a rule to cover each question as it arises, just as Parliament adds a law every time it thinks of something on which it can busy itself legislating. The prime need is for simplification.