

A close-up photograph of a referee's hand holding a black whistle. The referee is wearing a black and white vertically striped shirt. The background is a blurred green field. The text 'BLOCKING' is written in large, bold, orange letters across the top right. Below it, 'INSIDE THE FREE BLOCKING ZONE' is written in blue letters. At the bottom right, 'By: Joel Barnes' is written in purple letters.

BLOCKING

INSIDE THE FREE BLOCKING ZONE

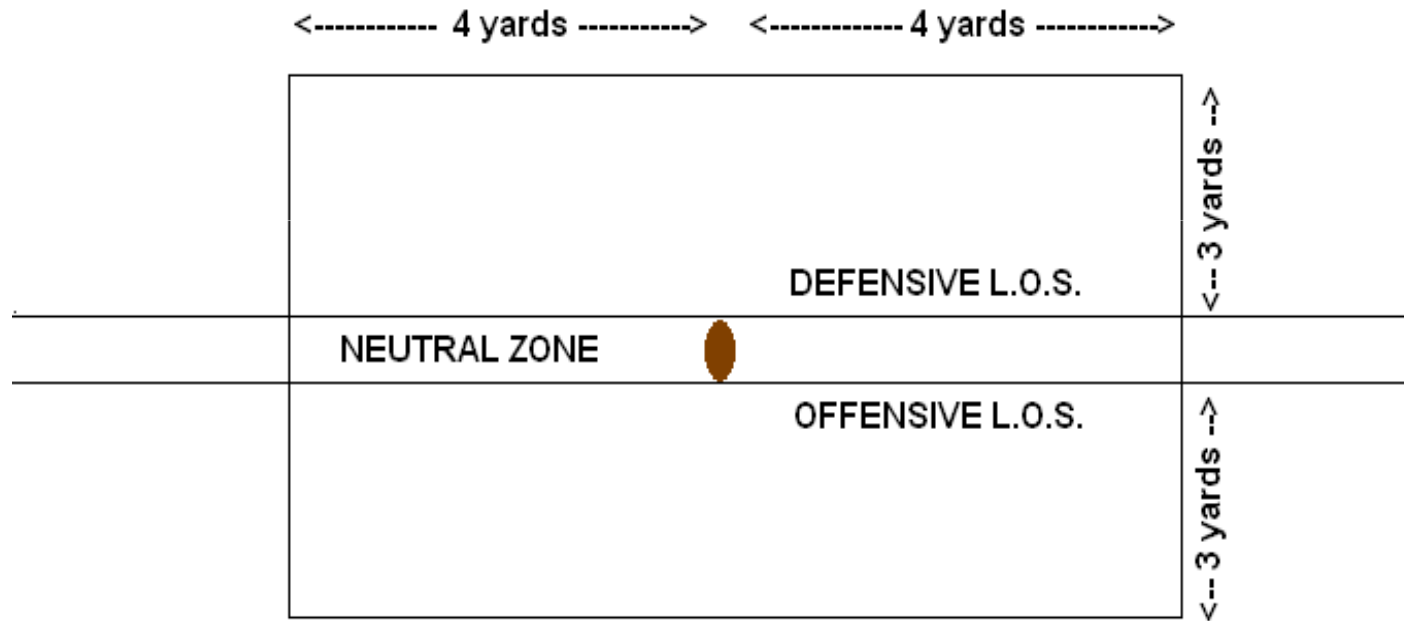
By: Joel Barnes



Rule 2-17-1

- The Free Blocking zone **ONLY** exists during a scrimmage down.
- The Free Blocking zone is a rectangular area extending 4 yards to either side of the ball and 3 yards behind each teams line of scrimmage.
- A player is considered in the zone if any part of his body is in the zone at the snap.

The Free Blocking Zone





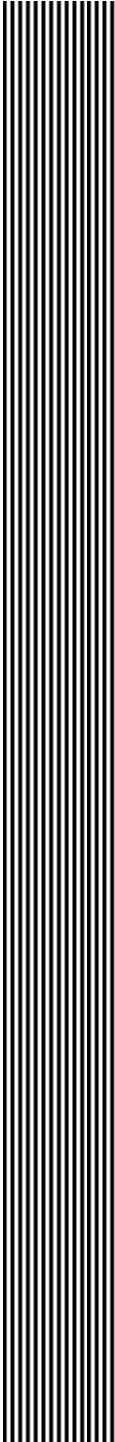
What blocking rule exceptions may exist in this zone ?

- Blocking below the waist.
- Clipping.
- Blocking in the back.



What conditions allow for the blocking rule exceptions ?

- The contact must occur in the zone.
- The ball must be present in the zone.
- Rule 2-17-5 states “the free blocking zone disintegrates when the ball leaves the zone and the exception for players to block below the waist, clip, or block in the back **IS NOT** to continue.”



Which players are allowed to take advantage of these exceptions ?

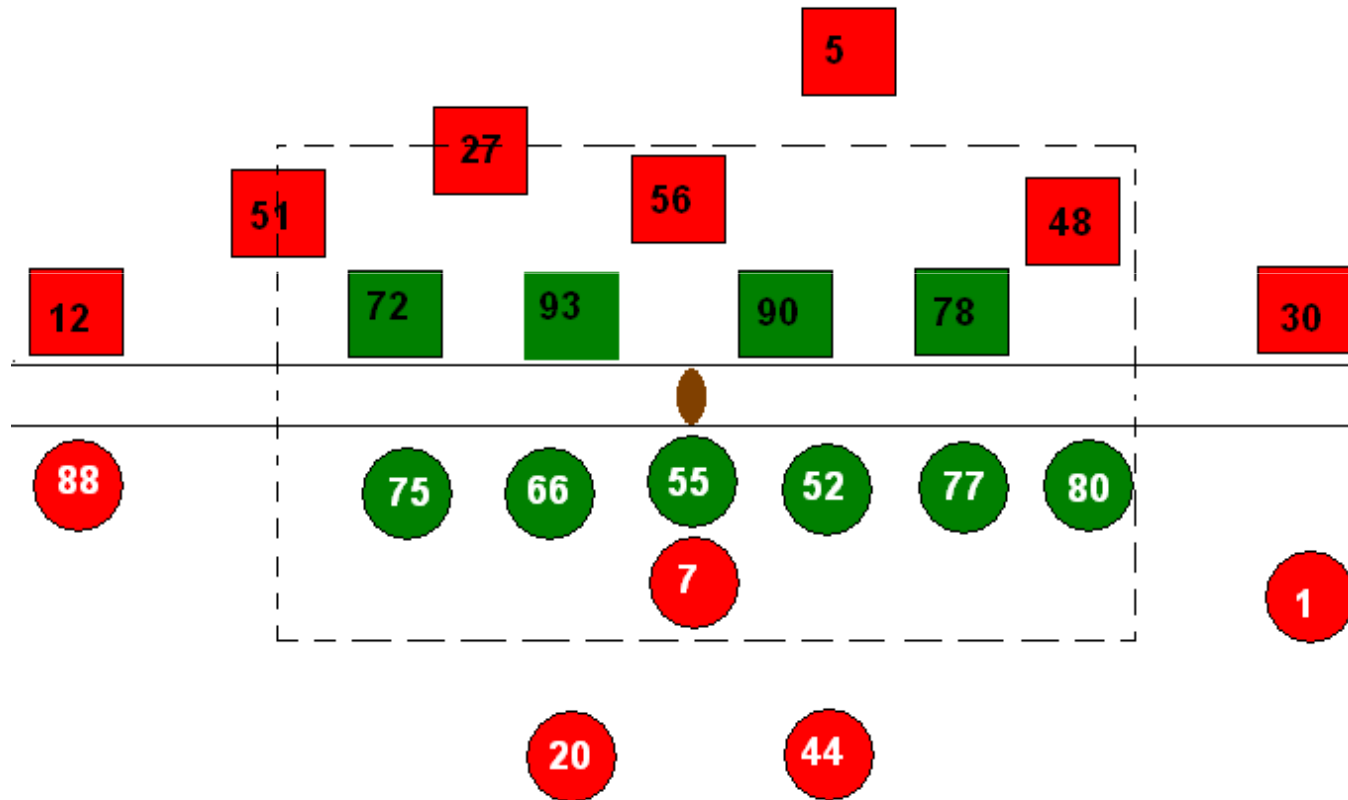
- Any Offensive player that is on his line of scrimmage and inside the zone at the snap may block below the waist, clip, or block in the back.
- Any Defensive player that is on his line of scrimmage and inside the zone at the snap may block below the waist. (Rule 2-25-3: A defensive player is considered on the line if he is within 1 yard of his LOS at the snap).



Who may legally block Below the Waist ?

- Rule 2-17-2
- By a player (Offense or Defense) who was on his LOS and in the zone at the snap.
(Against an opponent who was on his LOS and in the zone at the snap.)
- The contact was in the zone and prior to the ball leaving the zone.

**Players shown in Green may block
the opponents shown in Green
below the waist.**





Cut Block vs. Chop Block

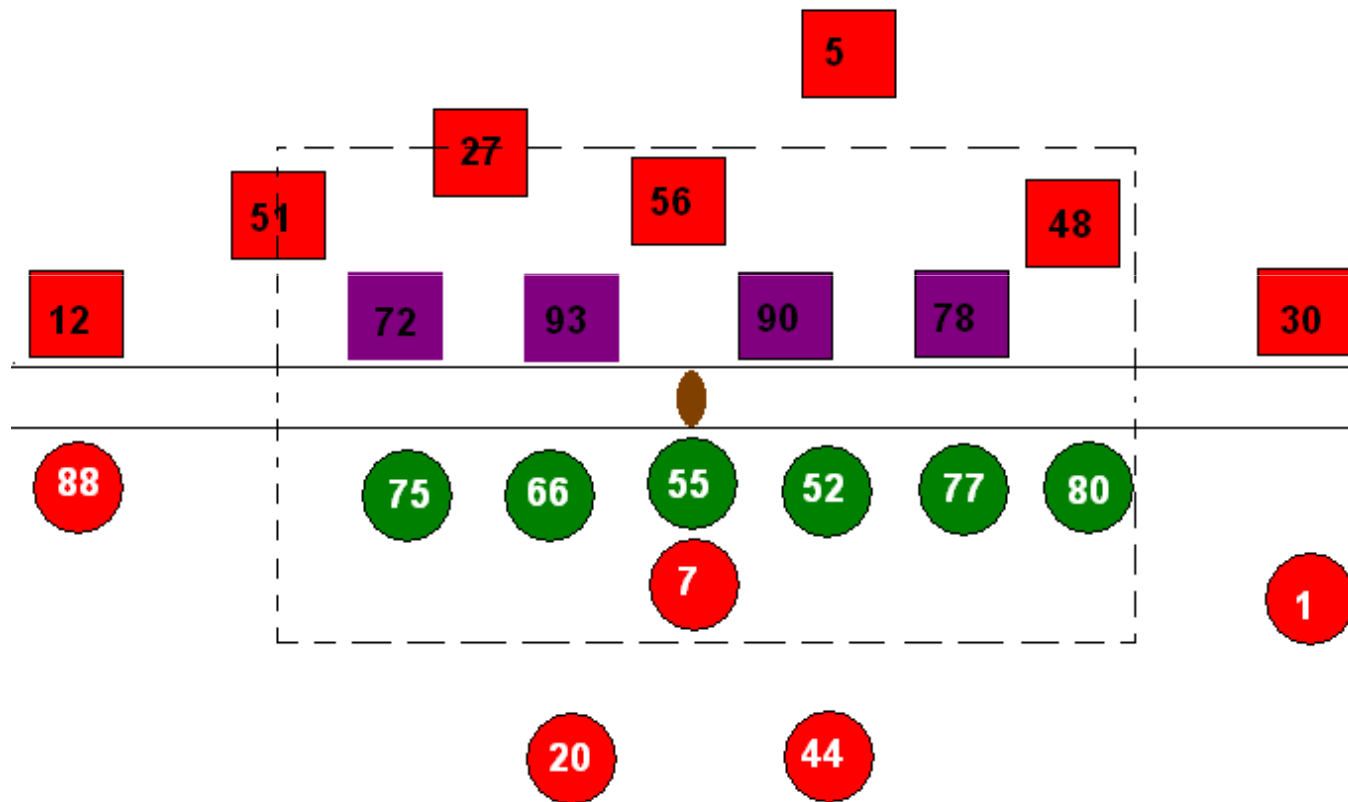
- A block below the waist from the front or side is often referred to as a “Cut Block”.
- A Chop Block is a completely different situation. **Rule 2-3-8:** it is a delayed block at or below the knees of an opponent who is in contact with a teammate of the player who is delivering the delayed low block in the free blocking zone.
- Penalty for a chop block is 15 yards.



Who may legally Clip ?

- Rule 2-17-3
- By any offensive player who was on his LOS and in the zone at the snap. (Against a defensive player who was on his LOS and in the zone at the snap).
- The contact was in the zone and prior to the ball leaving the zone.

**Players shown in Green may Clip
the opponents shown in Purple.**

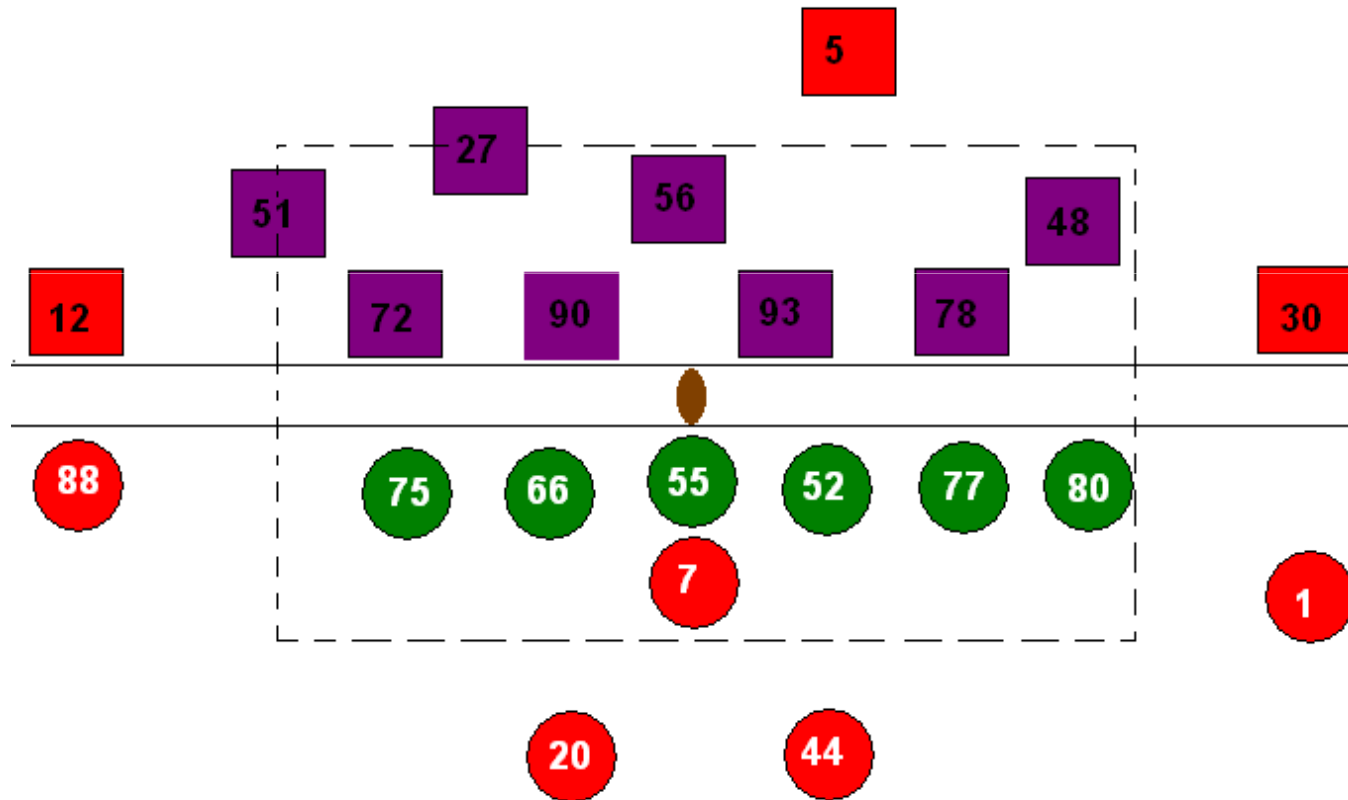




Who may legally Block in the Back ?

- Rule 2-17-4
- By any offensive player who was on his LOS and in the zone at the snap. (Against any defensive player who was in the zone at the snap).
- The contact was in the zone and prior to the ball leaving the zone.

Players shown in Green may legally block the opponents shown in Purple, in the Back.





Shotgun or Scrimmage Kick Formations

- In order for the blocking rule exceptions to be legal in these situations, the blocks must occur immediately at the snap while the ball is still passing through the zone.

NOTE: Delayed blocks that are covered by the blocking rule exceptions would now be illegal blocks, as the ball will have left the zone prior to the block.



NOTES FOR UMPIRES

- Know where BOTH the offensive and defensive men are lining up prior to and at the snap.
(4 yards to each side of the ball)
- Remember that if any part of the player is in the zone he is considered to be in the zone.
- Except for Blocking in the back, the defensive player must have been on his LOS and in the zone for the block to be legal.



NOTES FOR WING OFFICIALS

- If the team is taking wide splits, the TE may or may not be inside the zone.
- Wide Receivers, Split Ends, Slot Backs or Flankers are never eligible for blocking rule exceptions, since they are either Not inside the zone or they are Not on the LOS at the snap.



CRACK BACK BLOCKS

- Although not a formal definition, this term is used to describe a block delivered by an offensive player coming back towards the the spot of the snap.

Comment: Since the player was not inside the zone at the snap, the contact must be made above the waist and in the front or from the side.



NOTES FOR REFEREES

- Running Backs and Quarter Backs are never eligible for blocking rule exceptions, since they are Not on their LOS at the snap.
- Know where the ball is- has it left the zone prior to the block?



ALL OFFICIALS

- **First-** need to see where the initial contact with the opponent is. (above/below the waist, in front/on the side/ from behind.)
- **Second-** determine if the contact is inside the free blocking zone.
- **Third-** determine if the free blocking zone still exists or has it disintegrated.



POINTS OF EMPHASIS

CHOP BLOCKS

- Chop blocking is a very dangerous and illegal blocking technique in the free blocking zone.
- It does not matter whether the ball has left the zone or not.
- Officials simply need to know that there was a delayed second block at or below the knees, of a player that is already engaged by another blocker.
- Do not split hairs if the first blocker has just disengaged---this will still be a foul.



POINTS OF EMPHASIS

BLOCKS BELOW THE WAIST

- Only players (Offense or Defense) who are on their LOS and in the zone at the snap are eligible to block and be blocked below the waist.
- Officials should watch for backs, especially while in a scrimmage kick or shotgun formation, that may be blocking below the waist.
- Officials should also watch for defensive players “cutting” the lead blockers coming out of the backfield.