

Dangerous tackles

At the society meeting on 18th October we discussed many aspects of the incident leading to the red card issued to Sam Warburton in the Wales v France match the previous weekend.

Notwithstanding issues – some extraneous – about whether or not the referee over-reacted, should have considered more the interests of the spectators, and whether or not Warburton was malicious, the following are facts:

- a. Law 10.4(j), amended in this year's law book, states what is considered a dangerous tackle.
- b. The IRB issued a memorandum in June 2009, and reissued it to World Cup referees, stating that in deciding the sanction for such a tackle the referee should start at a red card and work backwards.
- c. The IRB memorandum also described some scenarios that should be a red card.

Whether we like it or not, the issue of "lift" tackles is now firmly in the public mind and we cannot ignore it.

The society meeting felt that because of the skill levels, technique and strength of players that we are involved with, strict application of the IRB guidelines for the professional game would be inappropriate. The following is what was agreed for a lift tackle (wherein the tackled player is lifted from the ground and then dropped):

- a. Such a tackle is a matter of fact and not intent and must be penalized. This brings it in line with what we have been applying for high tackles for three seasons.
- b. In deciding whether or not a further sanction, i.e. card, is appropriate, the guidelines suggested at our March meeting (amended in light of suggestions from the October meeting) were deemed still appropriate, these being:
 - If the tackled player was taken beyond the horizontal and dropped so that he landed on his head and/or upper body Yellow card
 - If the tackled player was taken beyond the horizontal and is then forced or "speared" into the ground, or taken to the vertical and dropped Red card

It was also suggested that before a game the referee should advise players and, at junior levels coaches, that if a tackler takes the player off the ground he is responsible for returning him safely, and that dropping him will be regarded as dangerous play.

John Ford
19th October 2011