

For many officials still struggling to understand the FIBA rule governing interference and goal tending (Article 31), the inevitable outcome falls somewhere between simple confusion and profound mystery. This is often the case where a relatively detailed, multiple-situation article is involved, especially for those still struggling to grasp the “letter” of the rule versus the same rule’s “intent”. A part of the difficulty for some could be that they might complicate such articles by approaching them as single, rambling restrictions rather than a sequence of simpler situations, each carrying a less complicated caveat as to what players may (or may not) do in actual game situations. To help take the mystery out of interference and goal tending, consider the following approach.

Goal Tending/Interference during a shot for goal

During a normal shot for a goal, the ball potentially moves through five easily recognizable stages:

Stage 1: begins with the release of the ball on the shot and ends when the ball reaches its highest point on the shot or touches the backboard while still in its upward flight.

Stage 2: begins when the ball begins its downward flight and ends when it touches the ring or enters the basket.

Stage 3: sees the ball bouncing above the ring, with a reasonable chance of eventually entering the basket.

Stage 4: occurs if the ball is touching the ring, but has not yet entered the basket.

Stage 5: is when the ball is within the basket.

Possible violations involving interference or goal tending are more easily understood if one asks oneself: **“Who can touch what?” through each of these five stages.**

Let’s examine each stage for the answer that key question.

Please bear in mind that contacting the backboard or ring in such a manner as to cause excessive vibration is a separate issue. It is valid for all stages and it will be addressed later in this article.

Stage 1

During stage 1, when the ball is in its upward flight (or until it touches the backboard, while still in its upward flight), the answer is very simple: anyone can touch anything! A player, offensive or defensive, can touch the ball, the basket ring, the net or the backboard without committing a violation.

Stage 2

During stage 2, while the ball is in its downward flight, including after the ball has touched the backboard and continuing until it touches the ring or backboard, the restriction is still easy to remember: nobody can touch the ball!

Stage 3

During stage 3, after the ball has touched the ring and while the ball is bouncing above it, independent of a chance of entering the basket, anybody can touch anything! If it happens that a player contacts the ball, basket ring, net or backboard, accidentally or intentionally, no violation occurs.

Stage 4

During stage 4, when the ball is in contact with the basket ring, the only thing anybody can touch is the ball itself! To touch the basket or backboard while the ball is in contact with the ring would be a violation. It must be noted, however, that contact with the basket or backboard while the ball is in contact with the basket ring is not a violation unless the contact places the opponents at a disadvantage by its influence on the success or failure of the shot (see note on vibration later in this article). Naturally, stage 3 could very well be repeated any number of times after the ball touches the ring. This would occur

if the ball were to again bounce above the ring and then return to touch it again.

Stage 5

During stage 5, while the ball is within the basket, only the defence can commit a violation! They would do so by touching the ball, basket ring, or net in such a way as to cause the goal to be unsuccessful. There would be no violation, however, for touching the backboard (see note on vibration below).

Interferences caused by excessive vibration of backboard or basket ring

Sometimes a player will accidentally, or even deliberately, contact the backboard or grasp the basket ring. Often the contact is with such force as to cause the backboard/ring to vibrate, thus affecting whether or not the ball passes through the basket. If it is the judgment of the official that the vibration or ring-grasping does cause the ball to pass through (or not to pass through) the basket, an interference violation has occurred. If, however, the vibration/grasping has not influenced whether or not the ball passes through the basket, no violation has occurred and the contact with the backboard or ring is ignored no matter how forceful that contact might have been.

Reaching through the basket from below

A less frequent violation occurs when a player reaches through the basket from below and contacts the ball while it is above the ring, whether on a shot for a goal, free throw or a pass. Such an action also constitutes interference.

Penalties for Goal Tending/Interference

If the violation is committed by an offensive player, no points are awarded and the ball is awarded to the opponents for a throw-in at the free-throw line extended, unless otherwise stated in the rules. If the violation is committed by a defensive player, the offensive team is awarded 1, 2 or 3 points, depending on the nature of the shot for goal. If the violation is committed during a last or only free-throw, a technical foul is also charged against the defensive player.

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