



MEMORANDUM

TO: Referees
Citing Commissioners
Judicial Officers
Non legal Judicial Committee Members

FROM: Paddy O'Brien, IRB Referee Manager
Tim Gresson, IRB Judicial Panel Chairman

DATE: 21 January 2011

SUBJECT: DANGEROUS TACKLES (HIGH TACKLES)

This is a further¹ memorandum in relation to Dangerous Tackles.

The specific provisions of Law 10.4(e) in relation to High Tackles are as follows:

A player must not tackle (or try to tackle) an opponent above the line of the shoulders even if the tackle starts below the line of the shoulders. A tackle around the opponent's neck or head is dangerous play.

A stiff-arm tackle is dangerous play. A player makes a stiff-arm tackle when using a stiff-arm to strike an opponent.

At an IRB Medical Conference held in November 2010 at Lensbury the results of studies related to injuries sustained as a result of tackles were outlined. A study in England concluded that *"stricter implementation of the Laws of Rugby relating to collisions and tackles above the line of the shoulder may reduce the number of head/neck injuries"*. A separate study in New Zealand concluded that *"ball carriers were at highest risk from tackles to the head and neck region"*.

The participants at the Medical Conference generally recognised that tackles above the line of the shoulders have the potential to cause serious injury and noted that a trend had emerged whereby players responsible for such tackles were not being suitably sanctioned.

The purpose of this Memorandum is to emphasise that as with tip tackles, they must be dealt with severely by Referees and all those involved in the off-field disciplinary process.

It is recognised of course, as with other types of illegal and/or foul play, depending on the circumstances of the high tackle, the range of sanctions extends from a penalty kick to the player receiving a red card. An illegal high tackle involving a stiff arm or swinging arm to the head of the opponent, with no regard to the player's safety, bears all the hallmarks of an action which should result in a red card or a yellow card being seriously considered.

Referees and Citing Commissioners should not make their decisions based on what they consider was the intention of the offending player. Their decision should be based on an objective assessment (as per Law 10.4(e)) of the overall circumstances of the tackle.

¹ Refer memorandum on Dangerous Tackles dated 8 June 2009 in relation to tackles involving a player being lifted off the ground, tipped horizontally and is then either forced or dropped to the ground.