

When to Call Holding and When to Hold Off

By Tony Michalek

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A tough call to make on any level, holding is "one of the most difficult areas for officials to master."

Even though we've all heard coaches and fans say that holding could be called on every play, there's very little - if any - truth to that statement. Holding is one of the most difficult areas for officials to master.

Holding is extremely tough to judge because it is called in accordance to the degree it happens and the kind of affect it has on the play. Because of its subjective nature, so many questions cloud this rule - even the way you would call a hold changes from one competition level to another.

Those enthusiastic about the game, whether you're a player, coach, official or fan, always wonder what constitutes as holding in lower-level games and why the same stipulations may or may not result as a holding penalty in high school, college or the NFL. They also wonder what would happen if we called holding on every play until the players quit holding.

Well, the truth is players wouldn't be able to play, the coaches wouldn't be able to coach and the fans would quit watching, leaving behind a mess that would hardly resemble anything close to the game of football.

When discerning if a player is holding, I use the following philosophies: call **any major take down** that would embarrass you or your crew if it weren't called and even if it is not a take down, **call holding at the point of attack**.

When it comes to making a decision on whether or not I should call a hold, I ask myself these questions:

- *Did the blocker gain an unfair advantage from the hold?*
- *Did the defender have his jersey stretched or have to reach for the ball carrier with one arm?*
- *Was the disengagement between the holder and the person who was being held legal?*
- *Was he taken in a direction by the hold to an undesired location?*
- *Did the defender give up on his pursuit by having a step taken away from him as the result of a hold?*

All of these factors can help you make your decision. If you decide it's a hold and throw the flag, be able to place the foul into one of the following categories: **takedown, tackle, hook and restrict, jersey stretch and twist and turn.** If you can't put it into one of those five holding categories, then it probably wasn't a foul.

When you're officiating line play with your head on a swivel, look for the blocker whose feet are beat, as we have a saying that goes, "When their feet are beat, they're going to cheat." Offensive linemen with slow feet are the ones to focus on.

Remember to look for one of the five categories when observing sluggish-footed blockers, especially takedowns and tackles from behind.

Lastly, don't neglect the quick feet of a skilled offensive lineman by not allowing yourself to see the entire block. **If you don't see the whole block, keep your flag in your pocket.**

Tony Michalek is USA Football's director of officiating and has worked as an NFL umpire since 2002. Among the best at his craft, Michalek was a member of the Super Bowl XLII officiating crew. USA Football officiating members gain an edge and learn from the best.