

Play-on Primer

Author: Gordon Corsetti

Reviewed by the Men's Officials Training Group (MOTG)

July 10, 2015

The play-on may be the most vexing concept for new lacrosse officials to understand because there are many questions to answer before putting your hand into the air and shouting "Play-on!"

- Is the ball loose or in possession? What if I'm not sure?
 - Is the violation a personal or technical foul?
 - If a technical foul, was the player disadvantaged?
 - How do I tell if he was disadvantaged?
 - Did the player step on a boundary/crease line because of the technical foul?

This list could go on and on which is why the play-on is tough to get right starting off, but there are a few ways to speed up the learning curve if this mechanic is difficult for you.

You must first understand the play-on sequence.

1. See the loose-ball technical violation **and** judge the offended team was disadvantaged.
2. Put one arm straight into the air with an open palm and shout "Play-on!"
3. Give the offended team the chance to pick up the loose ball if they have a clear opportunity.
4. If the offended team picks up the ball:
 - a. Point in the direction the team is attacking and shout the team color, e.g. "blue!"*
 - i. ***NOTE** - This is not consistent with the 2015 mechanics manual. However, this is what the 2016 mechanics manual will read for ending a play-on when the offended team gains possession of the loose ball.
5. If the offended team does not pick up the loose ball, the loose ball goes out of bounds, the offending team picks up the loose ball, or any other action requiring the officials to blow the whistle occurs:
 - a. Whistle while signaling dead ball.
 - b. Signal while loudly stating the violation: "Hold" or "Holding".
 - c. Signal the direction of play and loudly state the team color + ball, e.g. "Blue ball!"*
 - i. ***NOTE** – Saying "ball" let's everyone know it is blue's ball. If you say "Holding, blue" some will confuse that to mean that blue was guilty of holding.
 - d. Place arm back into the air to signal dead ball and be ready to restart play correctly according to the rules.

Visual Guide

Play-on and the offended team gains possession

“Play-on!”



“Blue!”



Play-on and the offended team does not gain possession

Whistle While Signaling Dead Ball



“Holding!”



“Blue Ball!”



That is the how, which is easy to memorize but very difficult to put into practice. You need to practice the motions on your own when you are not in a game so that they are second nature to you during a game.

When I first started officiating there wasn't a loose ball where I didn't call a play-on. Slight contact on the back - push! Player gets barely held up - hold! I had lots of whistles and the players didn't have much lacrosse. I kept doing this for a while until a more experienced official told me to not call a play-on unless there was an **obvious push** or an **obvious hold**.

Obvious for me was a player getting pushed to the ground squarely from behind or a player held so strongly that he couldn't move in either direction. Anything below that standard of obviousness I didn't call. By doing this I found that I called less, but the games had so much more flow to them because there were less whistles for loose ball technical fouls that caused no disadvantage, and the calls I made were clear to everyone at the game.

One question trainers hear often is, "How long do you keep the play-on going for? Three seconds? Two seconds? One second?" **There is no cut-and-dry answer.** The one that works for me is giving the offended team long enough to cleanly pick up the ball and push it in transition. That could be as long as four seconds if we're out in the open field and there's a loose ball offside and the offending team has a player near the ball with no one anywhere close to that player.

Contrasting that example, let's say that you call play-on for a crease violation and you let it go for three seconds hoping the goalkeeper picks up the loose ball in the crease. But while you hold your arm up an offensive player picks the ball up out of the crease, shoots, and scores. Now you have to wipe the goal, call the crease violation, and award the ball to the defense after the offensive team thought they scored.

For those of you looking for times here some approximate ranges to use as a guide. These ranges assume the offended team has a player who has a clear play on a loose ball. I define a clear play on a loose ball as it **would take a miracle for the player to NOT pick up the ball.**

- Open field, play is moving North/South (towards a goal) - 2-3 seconds.
- Open field, play is moving East/West (towards a sideline) - 1-2 seconds.
- Near any boundary line - Immediate whistle. Offended team may pick it up, but will have no opportunity to run after picking it up.
- Near the crease - "Play-whistle." Get the hand in the air so everyone knows your play-on is indeed on, but kill the play. Nothing good will come from a long play-on around the crease.

Finally, consider the following perspective from Eric Evans:



"After a loose ball violation the **WORST** that can happen to the offended team is a clean restart with no other player within 5 yards. That is the bare minimum advantage they are entitled to. The offended team should not be presented with a situation that is **WORSE** than this. Now flip this...

The **BEST** situation that can happen to the offended team is that they get a nice clean pickup with no one hassling them and they embark on a fast break toward the opponent's goal. This best situation also keeps the game moving without interruption."