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NFHS Field Hockey Weekly Rule Interpretations

Rule References: 1-6-5 PENALTIES 1, 8-2-1 PENALTIES 1

Wire-Caged Face Masks Outside the 25-Yard Line

Purpose

This interpretation explains when a player may wear a smooth, rounded wire-caged face mask and what must happen when the player continues to wear it after a penalty corner has ended. The wire-caged face mask is allowed for protection during the penalty corner because defenders are close to the goal and may be exposed to hard shots or deflections. However, the wire-caged mask is not intended to be worn all over the field during normal play. In simple terms, the wire-caged face mask is special protective equipment for a specific situation, not regular playing equipment for open-field play.

Rule Language

A player may wear a smooth, rounded wire-caged face mask while defending a penalty corner. Once the penalty corner is completed, the player is expected to remove the mask as soon as there is a suitable opportunity. If there is no safe opportunity to remove it immediately, the player may continue to wear it only while remaining within the 25-yard area. If the player crosses the 25-yard line while still wearing the wire-caged face mask and becomes involved in play, the official must stop play, award a free hit to the opponent at the 25-yard line and assess a misconduct penalty for the violation. If the player is not involved in play, the official should wait until the first stoppage of play and assess a misconduct penalty for the violation. (1-6-5 PENALTIES 1, 8-2-1 PENALTIES 1)

Interpretation

Officials should focus on safety, participation and location. Safety means the player should remove the wire-caged face mask only when it is reasonable and safe to do so. Participation means the official should determine whether the player is actively involved in play. Location means the official should know whether the player has crossed the 25-yard line while still wearing the wire-caged face mask. Coaches should teach defenders to remove the wire-caged face mask quickly after the penalty corner, but not in a way that creates danger or distracts from immediate play. Players should understand that if they keep the wire-caged face mask on and move beyond the 25-yard line, they create a violation that results in misconduct and, if involved in play, a free hit for the opponent.

Game Scenario

SITUATION 1: Team A takes a penalty corner. B2 wears a legal wire-caged face mask while defending. The

penalty corner is completed, and play continues. B2 keeps the wire caged face mask on and carries the ball beyond the 25-yard line. **RULING:** This is a violation. The official must stop play immediately, award a free hit to Team A at the 25-yard line and issue a card for misconduct to B2. **COMMENT:** B2 was allowed to wear the wire-caged face mask during the penalty corner, but once the penalty corner ended, B2 needed to remove it at the first suitable opportunity or remain within the 25-yard area while still wearing it. The free hit is awarded at the 25-yard line since this is within playing distance of the spot where the violation occurred. Rule 9.1

SITUATION 2: B2 has the wire-caged face mask on after the penalty corner ends and runs to the 40-yard line but does not become involved in the play. **RULING:** The player shall be assessed a misconduct penalty at the first stoppage of play following the discovery of the violation. No free hit is awarded unless the stoppage of play was because of a foul by the offensive team. **COMMENT:** Because B2 was not involved in play, the official does not need to stop a live attacking opportunity immediately unless safety requires it.

SITUATION 3: B2 has the wire-caged face mask on after the penalty corner and runs up the field where she receives a pass from her teammate at the 50 yard-line. **RULING:** The official will immediately stop play when B2 receives the pass and assess a misconduct penalty for the violation and award a free hit to the opponent at the 50-yard line. **COMMENT:** Because B2 became involved in the play the official **MUST** stop play immediately, assess misconduct and award a free hit to the opponent at the spot closest to the violation.

Points of Emphasis for Officials and Coaches

Officials should not treat every moment after a penalty corner the same way. The correct response depends on whether the player is involved in play and whether the player has worn the wire-caged face mask beyond the 25-yard line. Coaches should train defenders to remove wire caged face masks quickly and safely after the penalty corner. Players should be taught this simple rule: wear the wire-caged face mask for the penalty corner, remove it as soon as safe after the corner, and do not continue playing beyond the 25-yard line while wearing it. Officials should use calm, clear communication so players understand the violation and the reason for enforcement.

Officials and coaches must recognize the difference between the wire-cage face mask, goggles and a face mask that is smooth, rounded, preferably transparent or single-colored and is not attached to any hard unyielding headgear (even if padded). Face masks and goggles may be worn by any player throughout the game, while the wire-caged face mask is limited to be worn while defending a penalty corner and within the 25-yard line.

All players are responsible for removing any goggles, face mask or wire-caged face mask in a manner that is not dangerous or intimidating. (Rule 8-1a.) Goggles, face masks or wire-caged face masks that become loose equipment in the field of play that affects play or results in dangerous play is a foul and should be penalized. (Rule 8-1w; 8-1 PENALTIES)

Defenders on the Penalty corner are not required to wear any face protection described in Rule 1-6-5; however, if worn officials, coaches and players should be cognizant of the rule provisions for the wearing of the wire caged face mask that have been discussed in this Rule Interpretation, as well as the rule provisions that apply to goggles and face masks.