



To: **Secretaries / Chief Executive Officers of Unions and Regional Associations in Membership of the IRB**

From: **David Carrigy  
Head of External & Member Relations**

Date: August 4, 2011

Re: **IRB memorandum re Dangerous Tackles**

Please find attached a recently circulated IRB memorandum re Dangerous Tackles. The memorandum is provided in English with a French and Spanish version to be circulated in the coming days.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'David Carrigy', with a small horizontal line at the end.

**David Carrigy  
Head of External & Member Relations**

**AMENDED**  
**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:** 4 August 2011

**SUBJECT:** (i) **DANGEROUS TACKLES (HIGH TACKLES) and**  
(ii) **DANGEROUS GRASPING OF NECK AND/OR HEAD AREA**  
**OF PLAYER NOT IN POSSESSION OF THE BALL**

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***NOTE: THIS MEMORANDUM REPLACES THE MEMORANDUM OF  
21 JANUARY 2011 RELATING TO DANGEROUS TACKLES (HIGH TACKLES)***

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This is a further memorandum in relation to Dangerous Tackles and the illegal taking out of players who are not in possession of the ball.

Law 10.4(e) in relation to Dangerous Tackles provides as follows:

**A player must not tackle an opponent early, late or dangerously.**

**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.**

**Playing a player without the ball is dangerous play.**

**A player must not tackle an opponent whose feet are off the ground.**

***High Tackles:***

At an IRB Medical Seminar held in November 2010 at Lensbury the results of studies by the Rugby Football Union and New Zealand Rugby Football Union concluded that most injuries in Rugby in the elite Game are now occurring as a result of high tackles. The participants 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 adequately sanctioned.<sup>1</sup>

***Dangerous Grasping:***

A further trend has recently emerged in the Game whereby players not in possession of the ball are being grasped and/or grabbed by an opponent in and around the neck and/or head area, principally in an effort to clear out players from the breakdown. While such behaviour does not come under the definition of a tackle, as no ball carrier is involved nevertheless, it is dangerous play under Law 10.4(e) and/or Law 10.4(f) (playing an opponent without the ball).

The purpose of this revised Memorandum is to emphasise that as with tip tackles, (see Memorandum of 8 June 2009) this type of dangerous play must be dealt with severely by Referees and all those involved in the off-field disciplinary process. As with other types of Illegal and/or Foul Play, depending on the circumstances of the high tackle or the illegal and dangerous taking out of players not in possession of the ball, the range of sanctions can extend from a penalty kick to the player receiving a red card.

An illegal high tackle to the head and/or neck area of the opponent (in particular involving a 'stiff arm' or swinging arm), bears all the hallmarks of an action which should result in a yellow card or a red card being seriously considered.

The grasping and twisting of the neck and/or head area of a player to effect either a tackle or to clear out a player not in possession of the ball should also be regarded as constituting serious Illegal and/or Foul Play and Match Officials and Judicial Personnel have a responsibility to ensure that the appropriate action is taken by them.

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) and Law 10.4(f)) of the overall circumstances of the tackle or the clear out.

Paddy O'Brien  
Tim Gresson

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<sup>1</sup> This was the subject of the earlier Memorandum of 21 January 2011, now replaced by this Memorandum of 4 August 2011.