

Degree of Contact

As noted in the Comments on the Rules in the NBA Rulebook, the mere fact that contact occurs does not necessarily constitute a foul. Contact that is simply incidental to an effort by a player to play an opponent (on offense or defense) should not be considered illegal.

In determining the degree of contact that constitutes a foul, referees take into account a few factors:

- In open areas like the perimeter, where players are often making large movements (e.g., cuts/drives), referees consider whether contact interrupts an opponent's rhythm, speed, balance or quickness (or "RSBQ"). For example, if a defender makes contact with a driving offensive player such that the contact affects the offensive player's RSBQ, the contact is considered illegal and a foul is assessed. If the defender makes contact, but the offensive player continues his drive essentially unchanged, there is no foul.
- In close areas like the post, where players are often making tighter moves in close proximity (e.g., backdowns/box-outs), referees consider whether the contact was enough to dislodge, reroute or impede an opponent. For example, if an offensive player backs into a defensive player who is in a legal guarding position and dislodges him, an offensive foul has occurred. Or if a defender delivers a blow with his forearm or shoulder to the offensive player as he attempts to backdown, a defensive foul has occurred.