



## MEMORANDUM

To: All USA Hockey Officials, and District Referees-in-Chief  
From: Dave LaBuda – USA Hockey National Referee-in-Chief  
Matt Leaf – Director, USA Hockey Officiating Education Program  
BJ Ringrose - Coordinator, USA Hockey Officiating Education Program  
Date: September 30, 2011  
Re: Rule 615(c) - Fighting

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There has been a lot of discussion regarding the new rule change to Rule 615 in regards to Fighting and removal of the helmet. This memorandum serves to clarify any misconceptions and misinterpretations our 26,000 USA Hockey Officials may have. Please note this memorandum is a product of the USA Hockey Rules Interpretation Committee and should supersede any contradictory presentation or interpretation given by any member of USA Hockey (volunteer or staff).

To start, Fighting is a strict Point of Emphasis among the USA Hockey Board of Directors (the governing body of USA Hockey) this season. The general message that should be understood by all players, coaches, and officials is that under no circumstances should fighting be tolerated at any level of our game. The act of fighting threatens the safety of all players and the integrity of our game, and it should not be condoned by any official, coach, or parent.

The official interpretation of Rule 615(c) is as follows,

**Paragraph 1:** *“A game misconduct penalty shall be assessed to any player whose helmet/facemask comes off their head during an altercation.”* – This means that a player is responsible for wearing his helmet properly during a game. If his helmet is removed during an altercation (whether deliberate or not) and the officials deem that the helmet was not worn properly by the player (straps too loose, unfastened, or missing, etc.) then that player shall receive a Game Misconduct in addition to all other penalties he incurs during the altercation.

**Paragraph 2:** *“A match penalty shall be assessed to any player who deliberately removes his (or opponent’s) helmet/facemask prior to or during an altercation.”* – This rule states that anytime a helmet is removed deliberately by a player (either his own or an opponent’s) during an altercation, a Match Penalty must be assessed under Rule 615(c). A deliberate attempt to remove a helmet can be defined as holding, pushing, or punching the helmet or facemask of the opponent.

### **The purpose of this rule is to,**

- Hold all players accountable for wearing the mandatory equipment properly
- Prevent all types of contact that targets the head
- Prevent all types of altercations in general
- Prevent any deliberate removal of head protection during the game

The judgment is very limited and restricted to whether the removal of the helmet is deliberate and was the helmet worn properly? To help with the understanding of these rules and interpretations, we have provided several scenarios beyond the ones contained in the 2011-13 USA Hockey Playing Rules Casebook.

## **Playing Rule Interpretations Specific to this Rule**

### ***Currently Existing in Casebook***

#### **Situation 12**

Opposing players are involved in an altercation and their helmet(s) come off during the altercation. It cannot be determined how the player's helmets came off. Does this constitute a rule violation?

Yes. Rule Reference 615(c).

All players are responsible for properly wearing their helmet and facemask at all times. If a player participates in an altercation without their helmet properly worn then they should be assessed a game misconduct penalty along with any other penalties they may have incurred as a result of the altercation.

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#### **Situation 13**

Two players are involved in an altercation and during the altercation one player reaches over and deliberately removes the helmet/facemask of the opponent. What penalty is assessed?

A match penalty. Rule Reference 615(c).

A match penalty must be assessed to any player who deliberately removes his, or opponent's, helmet prior to or during an altercation.

The Linesmen should be prepared to step in and separate the players as soon as any helmet/facemask has been removed in order to protect the players from serious injury.

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### ***Additional Interpretations (to what is published in the 2011-13 Casebook)***

#### **Situation 22**

During play, opposing players are battling for position and their actions escalate to be considered an altercation. When play is stopped, both players remove their own helmets with the clear intention of fighting. What penalties, if any, should be assessed?

Match Penalty to each player. Rule Reference 615(c).

Once it has been determined that an altercation (see Glossary) has occurred, anytime a player involved in that altercation deliberately removes their own helmet, a match penalty must be assessed to that player in addition to any other penalties being assessed as a result of that altercation. Fighting penalties do not have to be assessed when applying Rule 615(c). In all instances where a helmet has been removed, the Linesman should work quickly to separate the players and minimize the continuation of the altercation.

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### Situation 23

During an altercation, Player A deliberately targets the helmet, or head area, of the opposing player who **is properly wearing** his helmet. As a direct result of the actions of Player A, the opposing player's helmet comes off. What penalties are assessed to either player?

A match penalty is assessed to Player A. Rule Reference 615(c).

The helmet being removed during the altercation is the result of a deliberate action by Player A. In this instance, the opposing player is wearing his helmet and chin strap in the proper manner and the only way the helmet is removed is a direct result of the actions of Player A. The player whose helmet comes off should not be penalized under this rule since his/her helmet was being properly worn and the helmet coming off was not a result of his actions.

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### Situation 24

Opposing players are involved in an altercation. Player A's helmet chin strap **is not properly fastened** and his helmet comes off of his head during the normal course of the altercation. The Referee determines that the helmet was not removed as a direct result of any deliberate action committed by the opposing player. What penalties, if any, should be assessed?

A game misconduct penalty to Player A. Rule Reference 615(c).

All players are responsible for properly wearing their helmet and facemask at all times. If a player participates in an altercation without their helmet properly worn then they should be assessed a game misconduct penalty along with any other penalties they may have incurred as a result of the altercation.

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### Situation 25

Opposing players are involved in an altercation. Player B removes his own helmet and proceeds to continue the altercation. Player A's helmet chin strap is not properly fastened and his helmet comes off of his head during the normal course of the altercation. The Referee determines that A's helmet was not removed as a direct result of any deliberate action committed by the opposing player. What penalties, if any, should be assessed?

A match penalty to Player B and game misconduct to Player A.

The match penalty is assessed to Player B for deliberately removing his own helmet. The game misconduct penalty is assessed to Player A because he was **not properly wearing** his helmet and it came off during the altercation. Both penalties are assessed in addition to any other penalties incurred during the altercation.

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**Situation 26**

Player A gets involved in an altercation and removes his own helmet. He then deliberately removes his opponent's helmet. What penalties should be assessed?

Two match penalties are assessed to Player A. Rule Reference 615(c).

In this instance, one match penalty is assessed for removing his own helmet and a second match penalty is assessed for removing the opponent's helmet. For the purpose of this rule, these actions are considered two separate actions that each call for a match penalty to be assessed.

*Note 1: If more than one Match penalty is assessed to the same player or coach, the hearing period of 30 days (as noted in Rule 405c) remains at 30 days and is not extended beyond that period of time regardless of the number of Match penalties assessed.*

*Note 2: The Referee is provided some latitude in the penalties he may impose under Rule 615(c). This is done intentionally to enable him to differentiate between the obvious degrees of responsibility of the participants for either deliberately removing their own (or opponent's) helmet and/or improper wearing of their helmets. In either instance, USA Hockey strongly discourages fighting and the safety of the players must be the first priority in enforcing these rules to prevent serious injury. The onus is on the player to properly wear all protective equipment in the manner it was intended and to not commit any actions that compromises the safety of their opponent*

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**Situation 27**

What guideline should be used when determining if a chin strap is being properly worn?

If the space between the player's lower jaw and the chin strap allows for two or more of the player's fingers to be inserted into that space, then the chin strap is not being properly worn.

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**Situation 28**

Team 'A' player is assessed a major penalty plus a game misconduct for fighting (Rule 615a). He is also assessed a Match penalty for removing his helmet during that altercation (Rule 615c). Should the Team 'A' player also be assessed a game misconduct under Rule 403b (Major Penalties/Two Majors in a Game)?

No. Match penalties should not used to satisfy Rule 403b (Major Penalties/Two Majors in a Game).

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All officials should remember that an altercation does not need to be considered a fight for Rule 615(c) to be assessed. This rule would apply in an altercation where at least one player will receive a penalty (see Altercation in USA Hockey Rulebook Glossary).

Furthermore, with proper execution of judgment and excellent hustle to separate players after the whistle, these types of situations can be prevented by the officials. That being stated, all players are responsible for their actions and will be held accountable for wearing all mandatory equipment properly and avoiding altercations before, during, and after the game.