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Girls lacrosse preview: Yellow cards have some seeing red

Cards, carrying stiffer penalties, to be assessed more frequently; some seeing red over change

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Yellow probably won't be a very popular color in girls lacrosse this season.

In an attempt to rein in what some believe has become overly aggressive play and preserve the integrity of the women's game, officials will be calling it more tightly.

That has already resulted in more yellow cards in college games and high school scrimmages - and now they bring stiffer penalties.

Each yellow card takes the offending player off the field for three minutes with no substitution. Last season, teams substituted for the offending player through the first three yellow cards, then lost one for each yellow thereafter.

"We are very sincerely concerned about the physicality of the game, and we want to clean that up," said Sue Diffenderffer, a longtime official and the public schools rules interpreter.

"Because there are more yellow cards, now they've got to alter their behavior. [The cards] are almost all for pushing with the stick, and usually from behind. A player gets by, they're frustrated and they give her a shove in the back. That's a card now because it's deliberate."

Many high school coaches have mixed feelings about the rule change, which was initiated by college coaches. Some think the penalty has little impact.

"I don't think it's necessarily going to affect the game because you can still play seven-on-seven on the ends," John Carroll coach Krystin Porcella said. "The only thing would be in transition if the defense had three back and you had four attackers."

Some coaches said it is confusing for their players to keep the correct number of girls on each side of the restraining line, especially when the penalized player comes back in.



All coaches agreed having two players out at once creates a big problem.

Many coaches, however, are concerned about the inherent subjectivity of the calls and how consistent officials will be, especially with varied levels of experience among highschool officials.

"I think now kids are going to stop being aggressive because they're so fearful they are going to get a yellow card," Mount Hebron coach Brooke Kuhl-McClelland said. "We've told the kids, 'You're going to have to see who your officials are and know what they like and what they don't like and play your game based on that.'"

Veteran official Fran Trumbo said she talks about the tighter officiating in the pre-game captains meeting.

"I tell them the first five minutes is going to determine what I have to do the rest of the game: 'You know how to play, and I know how to ref,'" Trumbo said.


For the safety of the game and to keep it from becoming more like the men's game and requiring further protective equipment, most coaches see value in tighter calls.

"I think it's great," Notre Dame Prep coach Mary Bartel said. "I think it's gotten a little out of control, and it's really on us coaches more than anyone else, so I like it because it's not a brain stretch for our kids and I think it's going to save the game."

Severna Park coach Carin Peterson, however, said it's an overreaction.

"Sometimes I think they're changing the game so they can keep up with the kids," Peterson said. "The game has evolved. ... Sometimes I think some of these rules are put in to slow it down, to tell them to quit being that fast, quit being that aggressive - and not aggressive where they're dirty, but aggressive where it's nice, strong play. Women can play that way."

Diffenderffer said: "I agree kids are bigger, stronger, faster. The problem is they're not always smarter because they're still trying to use their stick on the body. Contrary to what everybody is screaming, it is still a noncontact sport ... so I think this will clean that up if coaches become aware that their players are sitting because of it."

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