

# Commentary on the Dribble

(By Dr. Ed Bilik, NCAA Men's Rules Editor)

Naismith's original 13 rules allowed players to bat the ball in any direction with one or both hands but never the fist. As the game evolved, the art of dribbling was refined and became an offensive skill. Today, the dribble, penetration to the basket and finish and the dribble and kickout to the 3-point line are dominating offensive play. Palming, however, or carrying the basketball, has infected the skill of dribbling the ball. As a point of emphasis for 2005–06, it was stressed that palming or carrying the ball is an illegal maneuver.

This indefensible violation affords the offensive player a significant advantage and at the same time places the defensive player at a distinct disadvantage. When the ball comes to rest in the dribbler's hand, by rule, the dribble has ended and a violation has been committed when another dribble is started.

Palming or carrying the ball brings to light other infractions associated with dribbling the basketball. A complete understanding of when the dribble starts and ends is essential in adjudicating the dribble rule correctly. By rule, the dribble may be started by a player *in control* who bats, pushes, or taps the ball to the playing court either once or several times.

Hence, a player cannot start a dribble without control of the ball. In most cases, a player will start a dribble after establishing a pivot foot. That player is required to release the ball from his/her hand before lifting his/her pivot foot from the playing floor. However, it is also possible to start a dribble without a pivot foot as illustrated by a player who catches the ball while airborne. When that airborne player throws the ball and that ball touches the playing court, he/she has started a dribble.

When a ball thrown into the air is touched by a player other than the dribbler, it then becomes a pass. A pass is movement of a thrown ball (batted, rolled) from a player to another player. In order for a pass to occur it must be touched by another player. When the thrown ball is not touched by another player, the player in control has started a dribble. After a player has previously dribbled, comes to a stop and throws the ball into the air as a pass; if he/she is the first to touch the ball he/she has executed a second dribble and has committed a violation.

Because of the prevalent use of the dribble in today's game, the adjudication of the dribbling rule correctly is necessary to maintain equitable balance between offensive and defensive play.

**Play 1:** Player A–1 receives a pass from A–2. A–1 leaves the playing floor in an attempt to try for goal. While airborne, his/her try is contested by B–1. A–1 throws the ball to the playing court. A–1 returns to the playing floor and recovers the ball. Is this legal?

**Ruling:** No. To go airborne A–1 picked up his/her pivot foot. When he threw the ball to the playing court and was the first to touch the ball, he/she committed a violation since he/she picked up his/her pivot foot before releasing the ball to start his/her dribble.

**Play 2:** A–1, after (a) receiving a pass, or (b) ending his/her dribble, jumps into the air on a try for goal. A–1 is contested by B–1 and since he/she could not get his/her try for goal off, he/she voluntarily throws the ball to the playing court. In both (a) and (b), A–1 is the first to touch the ball.

**Ruling:** In (a), A-1 has committed a violation because he/she did not release the ball before picking up his/her pivot foot. In (b), A-1's release of the ball, after being airborne, was the start of a second dribble. When A-1 touched the ball, he/she committed a violation.

**Play 3:** A-1, while airborne, catches the ball in an attempt to prevent a live ball from going out of bounds. A-1 throws the ball to the floor as his/her momentum causes him/her to land out of bounds. A-1 returns to the playing court where he/she (a) recovers the ball, or (b) continues to dribble. The official calls a traveling violation. Is the official correct?

**Ruling:** In (a) and (b) the official was incorrect in calling a traveling violation because when A-1 caught the ball while airborne, he/she had no established pivot foot. When he/she throws the ball to the floor, returned to the floor after being legally out of bounds and was the first to touch the ball, it became a dribble. In (a), when A-1 recovered the ball, he/she ended his/her dribble. In (b), A-1 is permitted to continue his/her dribble.

**Play 4:** During an attempt to rebound the ball, A-1 while airborne, taps the ball to the floor. A-1 returns to the floor, recovers the ball and starts a dribble. Is this legal?

**Ruling:** Yes. When tapping the ball during a rebound (not a try for goal) there is no player control. When A-1 returned to the floor, recovered the ball and established player control, he/she is entitled to start a dribble.

**Play 5:** A-1, after (a) receiving a pass, or (b) ending his/her dribble, passes the ball to A-2. A-2 leaves the area on a cut to the basket. A-1 goes to the area vacated by A-2 and recovers the ball.

**Ruling:** In order for a pass to occur, the thrown ball must be touched by another player. This did not occur in (a) or (b). In (a) A-1's attempted pass was the start of his/her dribble. When he/she recovered the ball, he/she ended his/her dribble and did not commit a violation. Had he/she recovered the ball and started another dribble, he/she would have committed a violation. (Had A-1, after releasing his/her pass, which was the start of his/her dribble, not recovered the ball but rather continued his/her dribble, he/she would not have violated.) In (b), A-1 had previously ended a dribble before his/her attempted pass to A-2. A-1's release of the ball on his/her attempted pass to A-2 was the start of a second dribble. When A-1 recovered the ball he/she ended his/her dribble. A-1 committed a violation after he/she touched the ball.

**Play 6:** After ending a dribble, A-1 leaves the playing court to attempt a try for goal. While airborne, A-1 fumbles the ball. A-1 (a) recovers the fumble while airborne, or (b) recovers the fumble after returning to the floor. A-1 dribbles the ball. The official calls a violation. Is the official correct?

**Ruling:** Yes. In (a) and (b). A-1 is permitted to recover the ball but after recovering the ball, A-1 started a second dribble. However, if a fumble is touched by another player and then recovered by A-1, while airborne or after a return to the floor, A-1 is allowed to start another dribble. If A-1 had not previously dribbled the ball, and while airborne fumbled and recovered the ball (while airborne or after a return to the floor), he/she is permitted to start a dribble.