

## **DISPELLING THE MYTH: Over and back!**

**By Tony Haire**

Most call it the "time line," or "the half-court line."

Whatever name you may use, its presence often drives coaches, players, and fans crazy. "That's over and back!" is a common refrain, anytime a player with the ball steps into his front court and then back again. But back-court violations involve much more than just where a player takes his next step.

In order to have a back-court violation, four things must happen. Team A must establish control of the ball with a player holding or dribbling the ball inbounds. Next, the ball must attain front-court status, either by touching a person or the floor in the front court. A player from Team A must be the last to touch the ball before it attains back court status, and finally - a player from Team A must be the first to touch the ball after it attains back court status.

With those requirements in place, let's look at some commonly misunderstood plays.

Player A1 has the ball for a throw-in under his basket. He tosses the ball to A2 who first touches the ball in his front court. But he's unable to control the ball. It goes off his hand and into the back court where he retrieves it. Contrary to popular belief, this is a legal play. One key element of the four requirements is missing: The ball was not controlled by A2 before going into the back court. Therefore, this is not a back-court violation.

Another aspect of the rule is player positioning while airborne. A player who jumps has the same front- or back-court status that he did when he left the floor. How does that relate to back-court violations? A player who leaps from the back court still has back court status until he touches the floor in the front court. So, if a player jumps from the back court but catches a pass before he lands in the front court, it is a violation. Many fans confuse this, saying that the ball was never in the back court. But there's no requirement that the ball enter the backcourt, only that the ball attain back-court status.

Since we're discussing throw-ins and airborne players, let's discuss some rule exceptions that many people believe are violations. As we said above, there is no team control during a throw-in, because a player has not yet held or dribbled the ball inbounds. The rule allows a player who is catching a throw-in pass to leap from his front court, catch the pass and land in his back court. Any other time, this would result in a violation. In this case, the catch establishes possession but the exception allows him a normal landing. It makes no difference if he straddles the line on his landing or which foot lands first.

In another fairly common case, player A1 is dribbling the ball in his back court. He steps across the division line with one foot and then steps back with the same foot. This is not a violation. A player who is dribbling the ball is not in the front court until both feet and the basketball are no longer touching the back court.

The rule applies differently to a player who is holding the ball while straddling the half-court line. This is the one that gives a coach nightmares. Let's say a player's right foot is in the front court, his left foot is in the back court and neither has been used as a pivot. What can and can't the player do? First, since one foot is in the back court, he has back-court status. He can now use either foot as a pivot. But if he lifts his left foot from the floor, his right foot is now the pivot and he has attained front court status. If he steps with his left and puts it back down in the back court, he has committed a violation. Based on the same principle, if he lifts his right foot, his left is his pivot but he still has back-court status. He can step into the back court or step again into the front court. But there is no violation because he never lost his back-court status.

Finally, a back-court violation can occur without any players entering the back court. Obviously, a dribbler in the front court who dribbles the ball on the time line has committed a violation. For example, players A1 and A2 are standing in their front court. A1 throws a bounce pass to A2. The ball bounces on the division line. When A2 catches the ball, it's a violation. Even if the pass were to bounce a second time in the front court, it would still result in a violation based on the fact that A2 has touched the ball after it had back-court status.

Confusing? Yes, it can be confusing to officials as well. That's why we're constantly studying these and other rules.

I understand why there are so many myths and misconceptions regarding the back court rule. But now you're empowered to explain the rule to the fan sitting beside you the next time a mythical back-court violation isn't called.