Working Together to Achieve a Legal Ball Holder
By Kevin Bowie, Technical Commission Representative and IWRF Referee

As of the publishing of this article, two zone qualification tournaments have been completed. Over the course of each event officials have been working hand in hand with team staff, manufacturers and athletes to find legal solutions that support the ball. As a Technical Commission we have been extremely impressed with how collaborative this process has been. Thank you to all of the team staff and athletes who have made yourselves available and worked with us to make adjustments that have resulted in legal ball holders that work for athletes as well as officials.

On a personal note I would like to thank Mike Turner at Melrose for his efforts at the European Championship. Working hand in hand with manufacturers is so important to the process. Collaboration and creative ideas are instrumental to ensuring athletes have functional and achievable solutions. In this article our goal is to share some of the solutions we have implemented, what level of support the officials are looking for in the chair check and the process we undertook to find solutions. We believe that a key element in the process is ongoing transparency and open dialog with all stakeholders.

Solutions and Before and After Shots

The athlete pictured below started with an illegal device. Prior to these photos, the ball floated on the lap behind the device and occasionally fell into the gap between the device and his residual femur. This allowed the device to act as a ball stop. After trying a closed device option, which all parties agreed was not effective for the athlete, we decided to make two key modifications; 1. We filled the space in front of the residual femur to create a level lap, 2. By lowering the device it allowed the ball to roll forward and rest on the device, creating the support we are looking for. When firm pressure is applied to the ball in the chair check the official can clearly feel the device supporting the ball. This works well for athletes who have seating with negative dump. This solution would not work for an athlete with flat or dumped seating, as it would not allow the ball to rest on the device. At the end of the day we worked with the manufacturer to make adjustments that resulted in a solution that worked for the athlete and the officiating crew.

In the case of this athlete, the ball sat behind the device and acted as a ball stop. The ball fit snugly as well. The support was 100% on the lap. If the device was removed the ball would remain on the lap. Removing the device was considered but the athlete wanted to retain the use of a device. The solution was to add a bar and affix it to the existing device. This was made to be rigid and allowed the ball to rest on the device, making it legal.
I thought it might be helpful to provide a little more explanation around expectations in the check process. The goal is to establish best practice in the check for officials to best evaluate the ball holder.

- The Athlete must be in the chair and fully strapped, and seated in a neutral position. The official may ask the athlete to push a little or move in the upholstery and before rechecking the device with the athlete sitting in a neutral position. Trying to simulate where the ball may end up during game play or how the upholstery might shift should be part of the check.

- When the ball is placed on the lap the official should visibly see that the ball comes to rest against the device. Further confirmation can be made by press down on the ball to establish that the ball has some contact with the device. The device must partially support the ball to remain on the lap. ie. If the device was removed the ball would immediately roll of the lap. If the official feels like the ball would remain on the lap without the device, they may request the device be removed or adapted to insure the ball is supported by the device.

- The official should check that the ball does not; pressure fit within the device: that it is rigid and fixed in place; no mechanical advantage exists; it is adhesive free.
• 75% of the ball is visible above the height of the ball holder

• The ball does not rest inside the seat frame

• If several replacements are available for removable ball holders, all must be checked at the chair check

The Technical Commission is looking to be as proactive as possible. If you are not sure if your ball holder is legal, please send photo’s to the Technical Commission via your Zone Head Official, The Technical Commissioner, Darren Roberts droberts@iwrf.com or Myself kbowie@iwrf.com.

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