

...OPINION: WE SHOULD FORMALIZE "SIDE OF THE BOX" TO BE NEXT TO YOUR TEAM

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General Officiating... ×



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1. OPINION: WE SHOULD FORMALIZE "SIDE OF THE BOX" TO BE NEXT TO YOUR TEAM

Posted 08-27-2023 07:25 PM



Danger

Muffin

In today's sport and ruleset, there is no implied or actual policy regarding which team's penalized skaters sit on which side of the box, or whether they switch, or why. The current most common practice is to keep skaters away from their teams as best as possible, and to always switch sides at halftime. I believe that this causes unnecessary hassle and suggest that we standardize advice on this matter, and that we also change it.

Case 1: The box is far from the benches. I.e., on the other side of the track. Because skaters can now enter the box from either side, there is no meaningful advantage to having the right side of the box. So switching at halftime adds confusion for skaters who sit in the wrong seat, and also adds confusion for PBMs and PBTs who direct skaters to the wrong seat. I can't think of any benefit to practice or gameplay that forced switching implies. **There used to be a benefit -- but no longer.** Skaters used to have to enter the box counter-clockwise, which meant the team on the left had an

advantage. That's why many leagues switch today -- they're used to it, because it used to have a benefit. But today, the confusion persists and the benefit is gone.

Case 2: The box is between the benches. Long ago, **there was a benefit to keeping skaters further from their teams.** It used to be illegal to talk to a penalized teammate! However, it is no longer illegal. Keeping the skaters in the box on the "far" side from their teammates and bench staff leads those bench staff and teammates to walk through the OPR lane and sometimes even into their opponents' bench area, to stand in front of the box which can positionally impede the exit of a skater, and more. For this reason, I suggest that we standardize that, **when the box is between the benches, penalized skaters should be placed on the same side of their box as their own team.** Can anybody think of a downside to this? I'm not asking "how else can we fix the problem of how communication currently happens," I'm asking if there is a theoretical or philosophical or pragmatic reason not to do this. **Switch sides only if the teams switch sides.**

As a note, we implemented my suggestion at Winston-Salem Playoffs in 2019, and it worked fine, nobody was confused.

Whenever I pitch this to someone, they have often gotten *uncomfortable* in a way that I can't put a finger on. Can folks help me understand whether there is a downside here besides "change makes me nervous"?

#GeneralOfficiatingDiscussion

Bay Area Derby: Head Referee & Officiating Committee

Manager

WFTDA: Certification Oversight (Chair)

Certified Official: Level 3 On and Off Skates

2. RE: OPINION: WE SHOULD FORMALIZE "SIDE OF THE BOX" TO BE NEXT TO YOUR TEAM

Posted 08-28-2023 01:45 PM



Case 3: One bench is close to the box, the other isn't.

Here, having them on the far side reduces the imbalance introduced by the layout.

Speedy

Convalesce

> It used to be illegal to talk to a penalized teammate!

I can't find that in any old ruleset. I only find the rule introduced in 2010 that makes it illegal to enter the box in order to communicate with a penalized skater. And that has not changed to this day.

I always understood the aim of this to be that you can only communicate with a penalized skater in a way

that can be overheard by members of the other team. Especially during a jam, where allowing covert communication would introduce an advantageous aspect to a penalty, which feels wrong. Having the penalized skaters sit close to their team's bench area would subvert that.

And a secondary aspect is that for any communication that is not shouting over some distance, someone has to approach the area where their team's skaters are seated, giving box officials a cue to check that things are happening legally. With skaters sitting right next to their bench they'd have to constantly have an eye out for that.

And if bench area and corresponding box area are right next to each other there's a higher risk of misreading where a given skater is sitting when glancing over.

3. RE: OPINION: WE SHOULD FORMALIZE "SIDE OF THE BOX" TO BE NEXT TO YOUR TEAM

Posted 08-28-2023 02:22 PM



Thanks for this, great points.

Case 3: I think I agree with you, but had one additional thought. If you have the box accessible to

Danger

Red team but not to Blue team, then "making it a little more difficult for Red team" doesn't functionally change the fact that Red team can and will communicate and Blue team can't and won't. So to me the decision here will not meaningfully impact team communication, so we should not switch because the cost of switching occurs for both teams. And, teams can choose to switch benches at halftime, so it is just one more consideration of what it means to have one bench be more "advantaged." I do not feel strongly about this.

On the idea that communication with skaters in the box should be "overheard by an opponent," I have never heard of this and it doesn't seem justified by any theory or practice I know of. But also, I don't think it is meaningfully impacted by my suggested change. Today it is so common for a bench staff to just walk straight up to the box and speak quietly to a skater on one side. If there is no formalization of this intent, I don't think we should optimize for it.

For "always have an eye out for that," in my opinion, if the box line is also the team bench line, we need to worry about it anyway bc bench staff will yell from there to the "other side" of the box which is not only unneeded volume but it is yelling "through" opponents which is disrespectful, and then we have to worry about the line anyway. And, if the box line is not also the bench line, there's a "no man's land" that, today, box staff already watch. No extra work to keep watching it, when someone comes in too

close.

Please push back on these if you feel strongly. But also, do these considerations, in your estimation, outweigh the confusion of "where should someone sit" and "where should you point"?

Bay Area Derby: Head Referee & Officiating
Committee Manager
WFTDA: Certification Oversight (Chair)
Certified Official: Level 3 On and Off Skates

4. RE: OPINION: WE SHOULD FORMALIZE "SIDE OF THE BOX" TO BE NEXT TO YOUR TEAM



Reverend

Riot

Posted 08-29-2023 03:17 PM

"And, if the box line is not also the bench line, there's a "no man's land" that, today, box staff already watch. No extra work to keep watching it, when someone comes in too close."

But don't you think that they're cued to keep an eye on it automatically *because* it involves walking around or behind or wherever else they

walk?

In my memory though the big driver for standardizing opposite sides was the visibility and "legibility" as it were of being able to discern bench vs. box skater. And the amount of time a JR will often not have to figure that out is enough for me to push back on this. It might also account for the dis-ease with which you say people react - they don't want to admit that it would negatively affect them. Especially not to the head of Certification ;)

Gotham Roller Derby

5. RE: OPINION: WE SHOULD FORMALIZE "SIDE OF THE BOX" TO BE NEXT TO YOUR TEAM

Posted 08-29-2023 04:22 PM



Speedy

Convalesce

> But also, do these considerations, in your estimation, outweigh the confusion of "where should someone sit" and "where should you point"?

We have three options - always far, always near, and don't swap sides. (If teams don't swap benches, the latter would coincide with one of the former ones. But at least around here that is extremely rare.)

In case 1, don't swap is clearly superior as far and near side don't make a meaningful difference. In cases 2 and 3 the considerations to me are well sufficient to make always far superior to always near. For case 2 always far vs. never swap feels like a close call. (It may be difficult to get an objective judgement as the tradeoff is between separate groups of people - far side helps SOs and (P)LTs, no switch helps PB* and skaters.) In case 3 if teams swap benches, I'd say we should swap the box as well so both teams have the same situation when they are at the near bench. (Having it differ could be perceived as an advantage for one of the teams.)

**6. RE: OPINION: WE SHOULD FORMALIZE
"SIDE OF THE BOX" TO BE NEXT TO YOUR
TEAM**



Danger

Muffin

Riot, great comments all around, thank you!
Speedy, what do you think about the idea that "inconsistent swapping leads to confusion?" I.e. if we sometimes swap and sometimes don't, skaters and officials will continue to get confused about which one when. Versus, standardizing "always swap" which is not necessarily a problem.

"Always swap" if teams DON'T swap, could mean that a single team has an advantage, but in my opinion if we standardize "always swap" then that becomes part of a team's calculation on whether to swap. What do you think?

Bay Area Derby: Head Referee & Officiating
Committee Manager
WFTDA: Certification Oversight (Chair)
Certified Official: Level 3 On and Off Skates

7. RE: OPINION: WE SHOULD FORMALIZE "SIDE OF THE BOX" TO BE NEXT TO YOUR TEAM

Posted 08-28-2023 02:10 PM



Bruise
Almighty

"I suggest that we standardize that, **when the box is between the benches, penalized skaters should be placed on the same side of their box as their own team.** Can anybody think of a downside to this?"

I find opposite sides helpful for being able to see more easily who's in the box and who's just standing around at the edge of their bench area, especially from across the track and especially when the benches are very close to the box. One red jersey next to a clump of black stands out better than one black jersey that's slightly farther away from their team.

Bay Area Derby

8. RE: OPINION: WE SHOULD FORMALIZE "SIDE OF THE BOX" TO BE NEXT TO YOUR TEAM

Posted 08-28-2023 02:23 PM



Danger

This is a good point. It could affect PLTs, refs ensuring correct box counts, and JRs counting box points.

Bay Area Derby: Head Referee & Officiating
Committee Manager

WFTDA: Certification Oversight (Chair)

Certified Official: Level 3 On and Off Skates

9. RE: OPINION: WE SHOULD FORMALIZE "SIDE OF THE BOX" TO BE NEXT TO YOUR TEAM

Posted 08-29-2023 07:28 AM



**Wishbone
Breaker**

When the box is set up with the team located further from their bench, I absolutely find it's easier to glance at the box from the middle and understand faster things like how many from each team is in the box. At the start of a jam when you're checking for too many skaters/too many jammers. JR for NOPs. PLTs.

Laura "Wishbone" Carr

10. RE: OPINION: WE SHOULD FORMALIZE "SIDE OF THE BOX" TO BE NEXT TO YOUR TEAM



Adam

Smasher

Posted 08-30-2023 05:15 PM

I agree with Bruise and Wishbone - it is preferable to have the box seats away from the corresponding team benches so one can quickly differentiate between penalized skaters and skaters on the bench.

That said, I also think this is a very low severity issue, and there's a lot of OTHER things it would be better to worry about ahead of formalizing this.

Adam Smasher (He/him)
Independent Official - Rules Application Member
L2 Ref / L3 NSO

11. RE: OPINION: WE SHOULD FORMALIZE "SIDE OF THE BOX" TO BE NEXT TO YOUR TEAM



Danger

Muffin

OK, I'm convinced that there are significant benefits to "skaters opposite their team" when the bench is between teams, mostly due to ability to detect who is in the box for each team. I also think that the benefit of standardization kinda falls apart if there is no cohesive story for when it is a good idea to do so, and we're up to three cases with different pro's and cons.

So I think that at this time it's right to not standardize, and to continue the common practice of seating people further from their teams, despite the slight confusion of directing skaters into the box, and despite the awkwardness of bench staff walking back and forth.

Thanks all for your thoughts!

Bay Area Derby: Head Referee & Officiating Committee
Manager

WFTDA: Certification Oversight (Chair)

Certified Official: Level 3 On and Off Skates

THE BOX" TO BE NEXT TO YOUR TEAM



Reverend
Riot

Posted 08-31-2023 09:32 AM

Just to add; this might be more clear if we standardized other things around the penalty box and teams. Like, for instance, the location of the benches. Even just to some specific options. Or how benches are determined (I know that this appears to be standardized for WFTDA Playoffs and Champs, but I'm also not clear on *how* that was determined, and frankly if it's an important component of advantage, is weighted far too heavily to the choosing team's favor, but it's also not at all standardized for anything below Playoffs, leading to a lot of variation, and thus, confusion about how things should be arranged as a result).

Gotham Roller Derby

13. RE: OPINION: WE SHOULD FORMALIZE "SIDE OF THE BOX" TO BE NEXT TO YOUR TEAM

Posted 01-02-2024 04:08 AM



**Sofia
Lization**

thanks a lot for this thread, even if i'm a bit late to the party. I ask for the penalty box seats to be on the same side as the team bench for every game, and I couldn't understand why we were still doing this.

This clears it up, even though I still don't like it.

Nantes Roller Derby

14. RE: OPINION: WE SHOULD FORMALIZE "SIDE OF THE BOX" TO BE NEXT TO YOUR TEAM

Posted 03-03-2024 04:10 PM



**Jeneral
Pain**

I'm also super late to the party, I think there are a couple of interesting points:

Case 1 - "otherside of the track - too far"

Correct me if I'm wrong here, but realistically this only applies outside of Sanctioned Games. I've only ever seen this in APAC as "no space to put it on the same side", or they change things up because "audience to see more".

Case 2 - "Same Side"

I think the point here is, there is currently no defined rules on "who sits where", its always been the PBM from the teachings and the ruleset I've read.

Honestly, I don't see changing it being beneficial but I think its important we clarify and tidy up that section of the rules. I've only ever entered the "OPR" space to speak to a blocker/jammer penalised quickly during the first 10secs of a line up to make sure I got any detail needed before calling an OR (when I was benching during a broken ankle recovery period). And most benchies are more than appreciative of the OPR needing space so I don't see it as much of an issue as it appears to be.

Though I strongly think we need to "define" this in the rules to remove any ambiguity.

=====

Jeneral Pain
Kingston City Rollers
CRG Development Team
LI Ref

=====

15. RE: OPINION: WE SHOULD FORMALIZE "SIDE OF THE BOX" TO BE NEXT TO YOUR TEAM



Adam

Smasher

Posted 03-03-2024 04:25 PM

I don't believe there are any differences with respect to Sanctioned games - since there's no official written policy on this anywhere, there is ALSO not an official written policy when the game is Sanctioned.

If this were to be defined anywhere, it would probably be best handled in the Officiating Practices, which in theory are handled by OffCom.

Adam Smasher (He/him)
Independent Official - Rules Application Member
L2 Ref / L3 NSO

16. RE: OPINION: WE SHOULD FORMALIZE "SIDE OF THE BOX" TO BE NEXT TO YOUR TEAM

Posted 03-03-2024 06:41 PM



I am referring to:

<https://static.wftda.com/resources/wftda-tournament-track-setup-requirements.pdf>

**Jeneral
Pain**

Perhaps with my mind I'm not liking "it can change" and expect things to be very granular which doesn't work well all the time. In AU we currently "Swap benches" at half time but I'd be curious to hear how you did that in Germany Speedy?

Often the changes I see in AU are more "jam/pivot" on opposite of track to allow the audience a closer look to jam start.

I think the challenge in AU will be "many teams" will consider it an advantage to get the jam line for their bench. So it'd be how to change that thinking.

=====
Jeneral Pain
Kingston City Rollers
CRG Development Team
LI Ref
=====

17. RE: OPINION: WE SHOULD FORMALIZE "SIDE OF THE BOX" TO BE NEXT TO YOUR TEAM



Adam

Smasher

Posted 03-03-2024 06:53 PM

That document is only for setting up WFTDA post season events. It's not required for sanctioned play.

Adam Smasher (He/him)
Independent Official - Rules Application
Member
L2 Ref / L3 NSO

18. RE: OPINION: WE SHOULD FORMALIZE "SIDE OF THE BOX" TO BE NEXT TO YOUR TEAM

Posted 03-03-2024 05:28 PM



Box on the far side of the benches is a pretty common setup in Germany, including in sanctioned games.

Speedy

Convalesce And following this discussion I have put forward the idea of not switching sides at halftime when we have this setup. It took no more than a month for this to become standard practice around the country with all feedback I heard being positive, both from Officials and Skaters. (We continue to run "far side" when at least one team bench is near the box and switching procedure between venues does not appear to be a problem - it's just part of adjusting to the venue as you already do in terms of box and bench location..)

Speedy Convalesce (he/him)

WFTDA Rankings Chair

Roller Derby Germany Head of Games

CRG Scoreboard Maintainer
