

Dallas vs. Green Bay: A Lesson in Point of View

After watching footage of the Dez Bryant catch, read the following sources and analyze their point and point of view. Footage can be found at: <http://www.nfl.com/videos/nfl-game-highlights/0ap3000000456759/Did-Dez-catch-it>

Dez Bryant, Cowboys Wide Receiver involved in the catch, postgame comments from the locker room, January 11th

"All I know is I had possession on the ball coming down. That's possession, right? You extend, you bring it in, you reach for the goal line ...

"What am I supposed to do? I'm just reaching for the goal line... as I went to the ground I rolled over and I tipped the ball to gain better control.. I don't understand.

"If I hear during the week that was a catch, that would bother me more than anything else."

Point	Point of View

Jerry Jones, owner of the Dallas Cowboys, postgame press conference, January 11th

"I do think he made it, yes, and we had the opportunity to look at several angles up there, where I was sitting, and the answer is I do... But we've had a lot — certainly we had the call last week in our game with Detroit, we had the ruling on [the NFL reversing the suspension of Detroit's Ndamukong] Suh before that, so we've had a lot of re-looks at things around here, sometimes they go for you and sometimes they don't."

"I'm not so much into talking about the judgment — it was judgment — the judgment of the officials. It was just a bad time for us to have a play like that. To Green Bay's credit, they were in a position to win the game and we had to make a play like that. In my opinion, we made the play."

Point	Point of View

Mark Cuban, owner of the NBA's Dallas Mavericks and outspoken critic of NBA referees and the National Football League, interview with the *Dallas Morning News*, January 12th

"They're trying to define a catch. What I give them credit for is that, unlike the NBA, they defined the rule so that it's easy to call under replay. There's no room for discretion. None. Hands hit the ground, ball came loose, that was part of the completion of the play. Zero discussion.

"If you want to change the rule, that's a different discussion and I'm sure they will. But they wrote the rule so that there's no room for interpretation. Unlike the NBA, where there is interpretation of everything, even afterward."

"It's a rule that needs to change, but it was a call by the rule, right? Up in the air, you're coming down, it's like stumbling when you're falling. If it had been a running play, he'd have been down. Who's going to force the change? Who's the Mark Cuban of the NFL?"

"But I give the NFL credit, which I rarely do, because their goal was to make a bright line so that there's no discretion by the officials, which I really wish we would do here."

Point	Point of View

John Mara, owner of the New York Giants (a rival of the Dallas Cowboys), and member of the NFL’s Competition Committee, interview with ESPN Radio, January 12th

“We have to look at that. That was very uncomfortable for me watching that play and having it ruled as an incomplete pass. I think it was probably the right call technically, according to the language that was in the rule book, but I really think we need to look at that. We had this discussion a few years ago with the Calvin Johnson catch and decided not to make any changes, but I really think we need to discuss that again because I was not happy watching that, because it just didn’t look right. It looked like it was a catch. But if you go back and look at the language of the rule and read the part about having to control the ball all the way to the ground, you realize that it was probably the right call.”

Point	Point of View

National Football League Rulebook, adopted by league officials and approved by team owners before the 2014 football season

Article 3 Completed or Intercepted Pass. A player who makes a catch may advance the ball. A forward pass is complete (by the offense) or intercepted (by the defense) if a player, who is inbounds:
 (a) secures control of the ball in his hands or arms prior to the ball touching the ground; and
 (b) touches the ground inbounds with both feet or with any part of his body other than his hands; and
 (c) maintains control of the ball long enough, after (a) and (b) have been fulfilled, to enable him to perform any act common to the game (i.e., maintaining control long enough to pitch it, pass it, advance with it, or avoid or ward off an opponent, etc.).

Item 1: Player Going to the Ground. If a player goes to the ground in the act of catching a pass (with or without contact by an opponent), he must maintain control of the ball throughout the process of contacting the ground, whether in the field of play or the end zone. If he loses control of the ball, and the ball touches the ground before he regains control, the pass is incomplete. If he regains control prior to the ball touching the ground, the pass is complete.

Point	Point of View

Eric Macramalla, legal analyst for The Sports Network (Canada’s ESPN) and host of TSN’s *Offside*, a show about the business and law of sports, reporting in *Forbes* magazine on January 13th

There’s a pretty good argument that according to this rule, Bryant made the catch. He secured the ball in his hands, fell in bounds and maintained control of the ball long enough to advance with it. You could also argue the opposite, namely, that the ball came loose because he didn’t have control of the ball. But that is the weaker argument. In any event, this part of the rule isn’t the issue. If it was, in all likelihood Bryant would have been credited with a catch. The issue is Rule 8.3’s Item 1:

Based upon Item 1, it was not a catch. That is the most reasonable interpretation. A catch is seen as a process, and a player must maintain control of the ball throughout, including if he goes to the ground in the act of catching the pass. So there is a good argument the rule was properly applied. Although, it could of course be argued that Bryant completed the process when he caught the ball, and then in an attempt to reach for the goal line, initiated a different process. The Rule needs to be simplified to align itself with common sense. After all, if it looks like a catch, it is a catch.

Point	Point of View

