



If a defensive player must leave the field due to injury or an equipment-related issue, the play clock will be set to 40 seconds. That was one of the rule changes adopted in January by the NFHS Football Rules Committee at its annual meeting in Indianapolis.

NFHS Clarifies Play Clock Situations

Two rules regarding the play clock were approved by the NFHS Football Rules Committee during its meeting in Indianapolis Jan. 12-14. The changes were subsequently approved by the NFHS Board of Directors.

To prevent a potential timing advantage, Rule 3-6-1a(1) e EXCEPTIONS 2 and 3 (NEW) regarding the play clock was adopted.

If a defensive player must leave the field due to injury or an equipment-related issue as in 3-5-7e or 3-5-10, the play clock will be set to 40 seconds.

In the event both an offensive and defensive player are involved, the game officials will determine for which player the game officials' time-out was initially taken.

If the offensive player was noticed first, the play clock is set to 25 seconds; otherwise, it is set to 40 seconds.

"The rules committee was provided situations in which the defensive team was gaining a timing advantage late in games with a defensive injury or an equipment issue with the defense," said Todd Tharp, assistant director of the Iowa High School Athletic Association and chair of the NFHS Football Rules Committee.

"Under the current rule, if a play ended with less than 40 seconds left in the game and a defensive player was injured which resulted in an game official's time-out, the play clock would reset to 25 seconds and another play would need to be run. With the new rule change, another play would not need to be run."

Also, Rule 3-6-1a(1)f (NEW) was amended to correct an omission. The play clock is set to 25 seconds when a new series is awarded after a legal free kick or scrimmage kick. □



NATIONAL FEDERATION
OF STATE HIGH SCHOOL
ASSOCIATIONS

2020 PRESEASON GUIDE FOOTBALL

Decisions, Decisions

Head Coaches Designate Team Representative to Accept or Decline Penalties

Football penalty acceptance or declination has become more and more complex due to rule changes that continue to occur. As a result, it has become common practice for game officials to obtain penalty acceptance or declination decisions from the head coach or his designated representative rather than by consulting the team captains. Implementing changes to Rules 1-4-1, 1-4-4 (NEW), 2-32-5, 3-5-2, 10-1-1, 10-1-2 and 10-2-4 provides rule support that conforms to the practice used by nearly every game official and will allow the head coaches the opportunity to

designate and identify the individual who will make decisions for the team on penalty acceptance or declination. The designation will occur during the pre-game meeting with the game officials.

In case of emergency or other reason that prevents the designated representative from continuing in that role, the head coach may appoint someone else to take over those duties.

The designated representative may or may not also be the coach's designee who can request charged team time-outs as in Rule 1-4-4.

PLAY: Team A's captain requests

a time-out prior to: (a) the designated representative making a penalty decision; or (b) deciding whether A will snap or free kick following a fair catch; or (c) designating where the ball is to be spotted on the 3-yard line for a try. **RULING:** Not allowed in (a), but permissible in (b) and (c). **COMMENT:** In the case of considering an awarded fair catch, the designated representative would have to make his decision on the penalty prior to requesting a time-out. After accepting the penalty via an awarded catch, a timeout can be taken to consider whether to snap or free kick □

Another Option to Legally Ground a Forward Pass

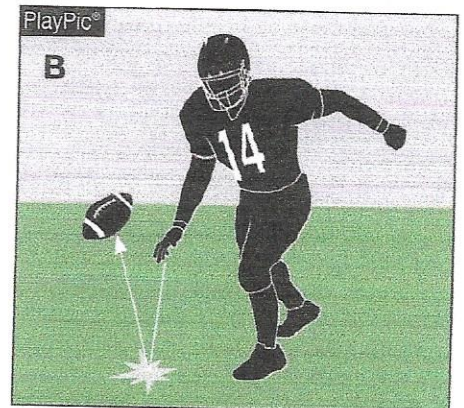
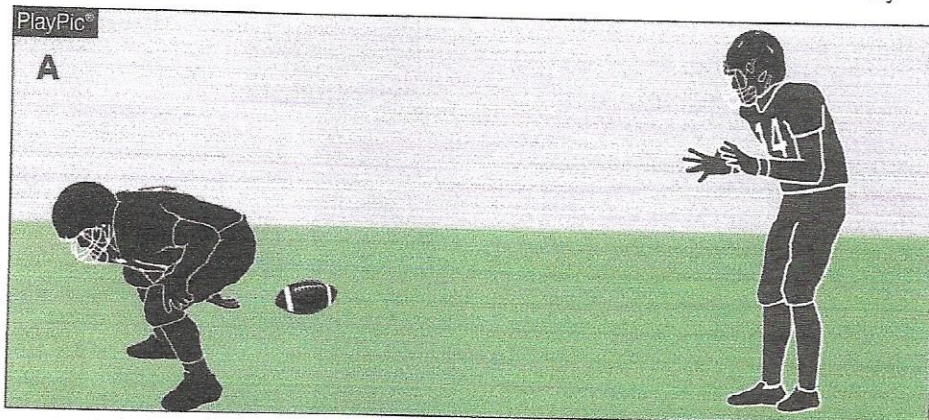
The NFHS Football Rules Committee adopted an exception to the rule regarding illegal forward passes that gives teams an additional option to legally conserve time.

A player positioned directly behind the snapper (PlayPic A) who receives a snap that has neither been muffed nor has touched the ground may immediately throw the ball forward to the ground to conserve time (PlayPic B). That was previously legal only

if the passer took a direct hand-to-hand snap. The affected rules are 7-5-2e EXCEPTION, TABLE 7-5-2e EXCEPTION, TABLE 7-5-5e EXCEPTION.

PLAY: Quarterback A1 is positioned directly behind the snapper. (a) A1 muffs the snap, but is able to take the ball from the ground and spike it forward; or (b) A1 receives the snap, but his spike attempt hits snapper A2's leg and ricochets into the air. A1 catches the ball and immediately

spikes it forward. **RULING:** An illegal forward pass in both (a) and (b). Once the ball touches the ground, a player or a spike attempt is unsuccessful, it may not be grounded legally thereafter using this exception. In order to be a "direct snap" and therefore meet the allowance within the exception, the ball must go immediately from the snapper to the person in position to take the snap without being muffed, fumbled or otherwise mishandled. □

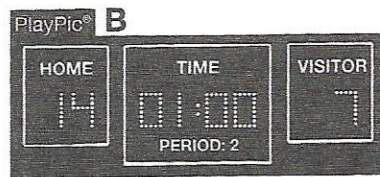
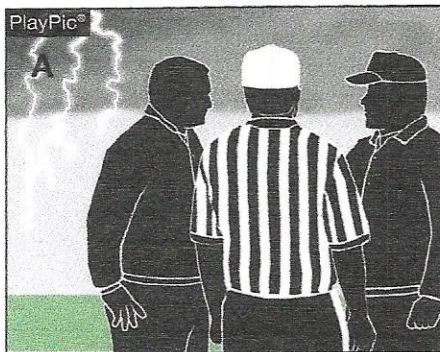
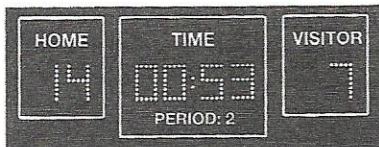


Halftime Intermission May be Shortened Due to Weather

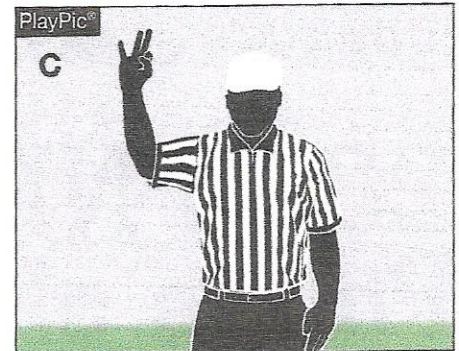
Under a change to Rule 3-1-6c EXCEPTION (NEW), if the game is interrupted due to weather during the last three minutes of the second period, and the delay is at least 30 minutes (PlayPic A), the opposing coaches can mutually agree to shorten the halftime intermission, provided there is at least a one-minute intermission (PlayPic B) (not including the three-minute warm-up period) (PlayPic C).

PLAY: Prior to the game, the participating schools have agreed to a 20-minute halftime intermission: (a) After 20 minutes have been placed on the game clock, planned band performances are canceled because of cold weather. Both teams arrive on the field with six minutes remaining on the game clock. Both coaches tell the game officials they have agreed to shorten the halftime intermission and want the game to start as soon as they have both had three minutes to warm up; or (b) As the teams leave the field, the timer places 20 minutes on the game clock and upon reaching 0:00, places three additional minutes on the game clock. **RULING:** In (a), mutual agreement

of coaches to shorten the halftime intermission is permitted. They may not, however, shorten it to less than 10 minutes unless there has been a delay of at least 30 minutes due to weather in the last three minutes of the second period. Regardless of what it is shortened to, the three-minute warm-up time always must be added to whatever is agreed to for the halftime intermission. In (b), the time has been posted properly. □



HALFTIME INTERMISSION



Penalty for Disconcerting Acts Now 5 Yards

Previously, a defensive player who used words or actions in an attempt to disrupt team A's signals was charged with a 15-yard penalty for unsportsmanlike conduct. The NFHS Football Rules Committee voted to create Rule 7-1-9 (NEW) and 7-1-9 PENALTY (NEW), making disconcerting act a separate foul with a five-yard penalty.

"Coaches and game officials shared

concerns that this was too harsh a penalty for this act, comparing this act to a five-yard encroachment penalty on the defense," said Todd Tharp, assistant director of the Iowa High School Athletic Association and chair of the NFHS Football Rules Committee.

After giving the signal for a dead-ball foul, signal 23, one hand behind the head, formerly used for failure to wear

required equipment, is to be used.

PLAY 1: On third and 10 from A's 40-yard line, all team A players are set. While quarterback A1 is calling signals, defensive back B1, starting from a position eight yards behind his line of scrimmage, runs toward the neutral zone (PlayPic A). B1 stops directly in front of tackle A4 but does not enter the neutral zone. In response to B1's charge,

SEE "DISCONCERTING" P. 4

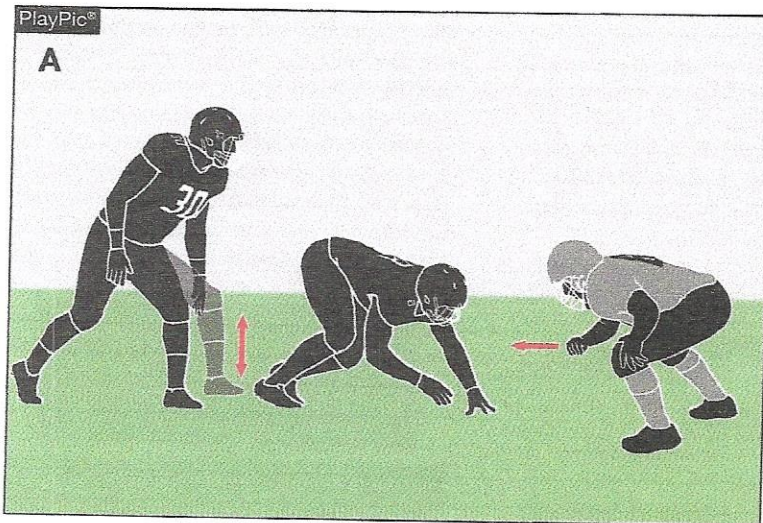
Disconcerting CONT. FROM P.3

A4 (a) does not move, or (b) flinches. **RULING:** No foul in (a). In (b), A4 is guilty of a dead-ball foul for false start. If in the covering official's judgment the action by B1 was for the purpose of disconcerting or hindering A, it is a foul for a disconcerting act. In this case,

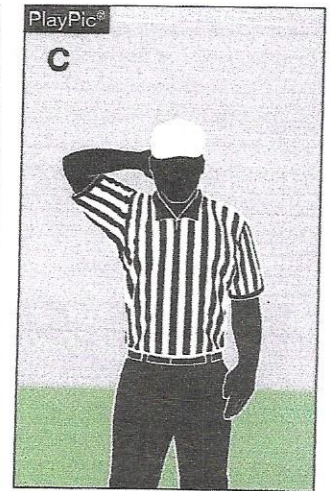
the covering official should sound the whistle before the snap. The referee would give the dead-ball foul signal (PlayPic B) followed by the signal for disconcerting act (PlayPic C).

PLAY 2: B1 calls defensive signals loudly: (a) before A takes its set position; or (b) during the time A1 is giving his cadence count; or (c) while

A1 is using audibles. **RULING:** Legal in (a). In (b) and (c), if in the covering official's judgment the action by B1 was for the purpose of disconcerting or hindering A, it is a foul for a disconcerting act. In this case, the covering official should sound his whistle before the snap. □



Dead-Ball Foul



Disconcerting Act

2020 NFHS Football Points of Emphasis

The following topics have been identified by the NFHS Football Rules Committee as Points of Emphasis for 2020.

SPORTSMANSHIP

When considering sportsmanship, many may first think only of the game participants (athletes and coaches) within the timeframe of the game. However, proper sportsmanship also includes the pregame warm-up period, postgame handshake activity, spectator behavior (both students and adults), parents of athletes, public-address announcements and announcers, and bands. All of the above constituents have a role in promoting good sportsmanship.

Players and coaches are the most visible in their displays of

sportsmanship. Their behavior sets the tone for fans, game officials and others. As recognizable personalities, it is an expectation that coaches model good behavior. Players must represent their schools and communities as ambassadors of good sporting behavior beginning with pregame activities and concluding with end-of-game activities.

Game officials generally do not assume control until taking the field approximately 30 minutes prior to the scheduled kickoff. Therefore, coaching staffs and game administrators must be vigilant and responsible for ensuring proper sportsmanship during this time. Once the contest begins, school administrators are responsible for the proper conduct of all spectators. This may take the form of reading a sportsmanship

public-address announcement prior to the contest (PlayPic A) and remaining vigilant for possible issues during the contest. Student bodies and spectators in general (PlayPic B) should be reminded that any behaviors conducted at the expense of the opponents is unacceptable and will be addressed accordingly.

Public-address announcers are responsible for delivering pertinent game-related information – not to be a play-by-play person or cheerleader. Taking liberties with biased and/or inflammatory announcements must not be tolerated. Their purpose is not to editorialize the quality of play or incite the home crowd in any way.

Working with the band/music director, the school administration must set proper guidelines and ensure ▶

► compliance regarding when live or recorded music may be utilized (PlayPic C). Good sportsmanship does not occur on its own. Only with specific planning and coordination by all constituents is good sportsmanship achievable. Good sportsmanship is about respect. Good sports win with humility, lose with grace and do both with dignity.

INTENTIONAL GROUNDING

Due to the growing prevalence of televised football, one of the most misunderstood rules at the high school level is intentional grounding. Under NFHS rules, intentional grounding is a foul whenever a legal forward pass is thrown into an area not occupied by an eligible receiver, or when a pass is thrown to prevent a loss of yardage or to conserve time. The only exception to this rule is when the passer intentionally throws the ball forward to the ground immediately after receiving the snap.

Under NFHS rules, it is a foul if there was no eligible receiver in the area of the pass, regardless of the passer's position on the field. Across the country, we are seeing more high school quarterbacks throw the ball away to avoid a sack when outside the pocket, thinking this is legal based on what is seen on television. High school referees need to be aware of these situations and, with the help of the line judge and linesman, make the correct call under NFHS football rules. This is a foul that should be called after the game officials have gathered and discussed the play. When a foul does occur, the penalty flag needs to be thrown by the referee. The penalty is 5 yards from the spot of the foul and a loss of down.

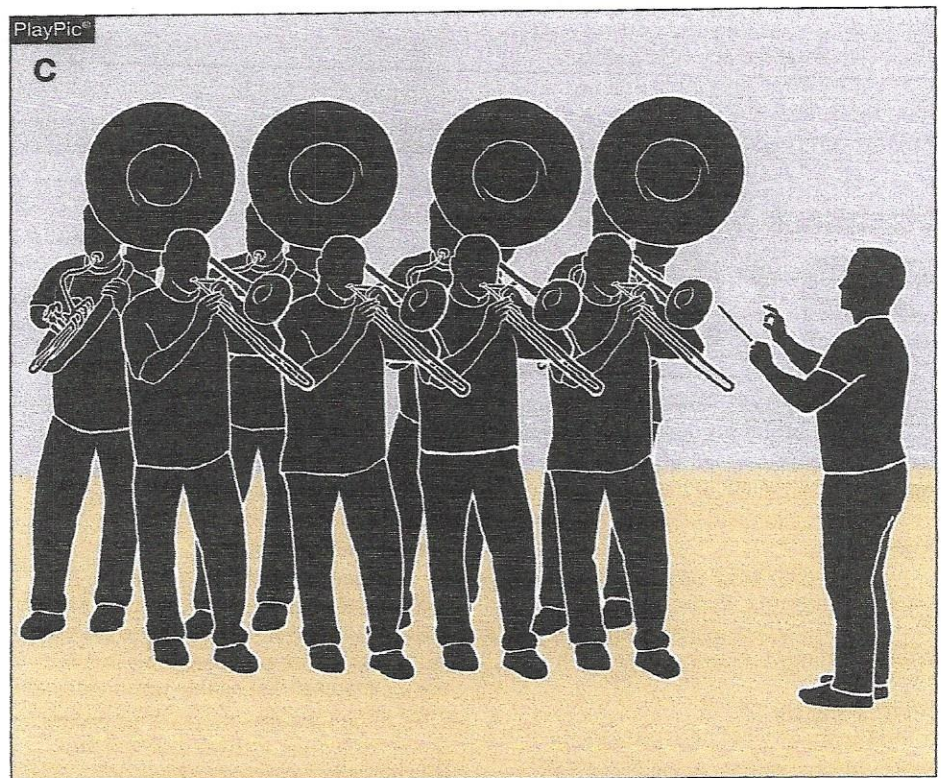
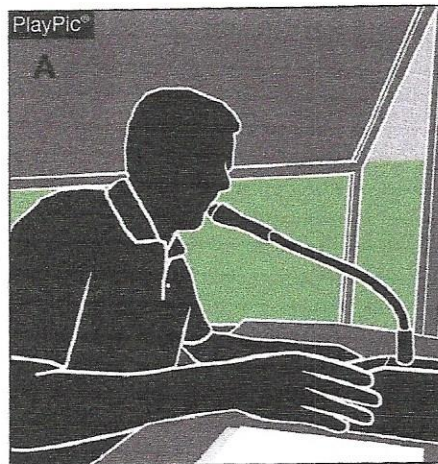
INELIGIBLE DOWNFIELD AND LINE OF SCRIMMAGE FORMATION

In order for the offensive team to have a legal scrimmage formation at the snap (assuming the numbering exception is not being used), at least five Team A players, numbered 50-79, must be on the line of scrimmage. Also, no more than four Team A players may be backs. Only one player may not be on the line but still penetrate the vertical plane through the waistline of his nearest teammate who is on the line. This player must be in position to receive a hand-to-hand snap, but does not have to actually receive it. By rule, he is the only player allowed to be positioned in "no man's land" at the snap. All other

players not on the line must be clearly positioned as backs.

Some clarification was recently provided in identifying when an ineligible Team A player is illegally downfield on a pass play. By rule, ineligible Team A players may not advance beyond the expanded neutral zone on a legal forward pass that crosses the neutral zone is in flight. The neutral zone expands 2 yards behind the defensive line of scrimmage following the snap. The position of the ineligible Team A player at the moment of the legal pass

is the only factor in determining if the player is illegally downfield. When identifying Team A players who are illegally downfield, it is important to make sure that the Team A player is clearly beyond the expanded neutral zone (2 yards) at the moment that the pass is in flight. Players can travel multiple yards in a quick period of time. These players can be legally within the expanded neutral zone when the pass is thrown but beyond as the pass moves downfield. If B touches the pass in or behind the neutral zone, this restriction is terminated. □



Rule Regarding Ineligible Receivers Clarified

Confusing language in Rule 7-5-12 regarding ineligible receivers has been eliminated through an editorial change.

Ineligible team A players may advance into but not beyond the expanded neutral zone on a legal forward pass play before a legal forward pass that crosses the neutral zone is in flight.

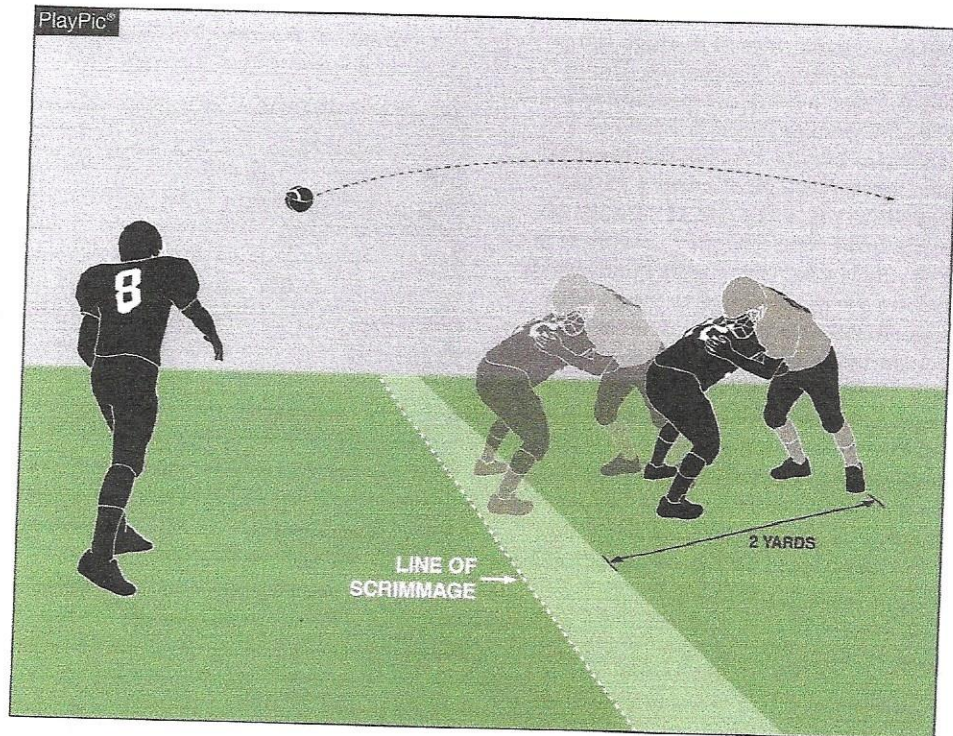
The old rule indicated a team A ineligible was required to contact a team B lineman at the snap in order to enter the expanded neutral zone.

As before, if team B touches the pass in or behind the neutral zone, restrictions against ineligible downfield are terminated.

PLAY: B1 is on his defensive line of scrimmage when he is contacted by ineligible lineman A1 and driven about 2 yards downfield. **RULING:** A1 is not illegally downfield, nor has he committed pass interference if a forward pass crosses the neutral zone, since he contacted B1 in or behind the neutral zone and after driving him downfield did not go beyond the neutral zone expanded. If it is a low

scrimmage kick and B1 touches it, the touching is ignored. B1 is considered to be on his line when he is within 1 yard

of his line of scrimmage at the snap. The neutral zone may not be expanded into the end zone. □



Flashback

2019 Rule Changes

Here is a review of changes approved by the NFHS Football Rules Committee during its 2019 meeting.

Play Clock

A 40-second play clock was added to the long-standing 25-second play clock. The rules detail situations describing when each clock is to be used.

Instant Replay

State associations are allowed to create instant replay procedures that

permit game or replay officials to use a replay monitor during state postseason contests to determine if a decision by the on-field game officials is incorrect.

Horse-Collar Tackle

The area directly below the back collar of the jersey, known as the name plate, has been added to the horse-collar rule. No player shall grab the inside back or side collar or the name plate of either the shoulder pads or the jersey of the runner and subsequently pull (backward or sideward) that opponent

to the ground. It is a foul even if possession is lost. The penalty is 15 yards and is enforced as a live-ball foul.

The change makes it easier for game officials who won't have to decide if the collar or the area just below it was grabbed.

Tripping

The exception that made it legal to trip the runner has been eliminated. Tripping the runner is the same as tripping any other player and carries a 15-yard penalty. Tripping is defined as ▶

▶ using the lower leg or foot to obstruct an opponent below the knee.

Illegal Batting and Kicking Penalty

The penalties for illegal batting and kicking have been reduced from 15 to 10 yards. The committee decided those fouls are not as severe as illegal personal contact fouls and should not carry the same penalty.

Formation

Team A needs only five players on its line at the snap but cannot have more than four in the backfield (see MechaniGram). That is a departure from the old rule in which team A fouled by not having seven players on its line at the snap. In a related editorial change, the foul is now considered illegal formation rather than illegal numbering.

Uniform Numbers

One jersey rule went into effect in 2019 and another will be in force starting in 2024.

The numbers, inclusive of any borders, shall be centered horizontally at least 8 inches and 10 inches high on front and back, respectively. The phrase “inclusive of any borders” was added.

The committee approved a change requiring that the entire body of the number (the continuous horizontal bars and vertical strokes) exclusive of any border(s) shall be approximately 1-1/2 inches wide.

Through the 2023 season, the body of the number shall be a continuous color contrasting with the jersey color or the same solid color(s) as the jersey with a minimum of one border that is at least 3/4 inches in width of a single solid contrasting color.

Effective with the 2024 season, the entire body of the number shall be a single solid color that clearly contrasts with the body color of the jersey.

Editorial Changes

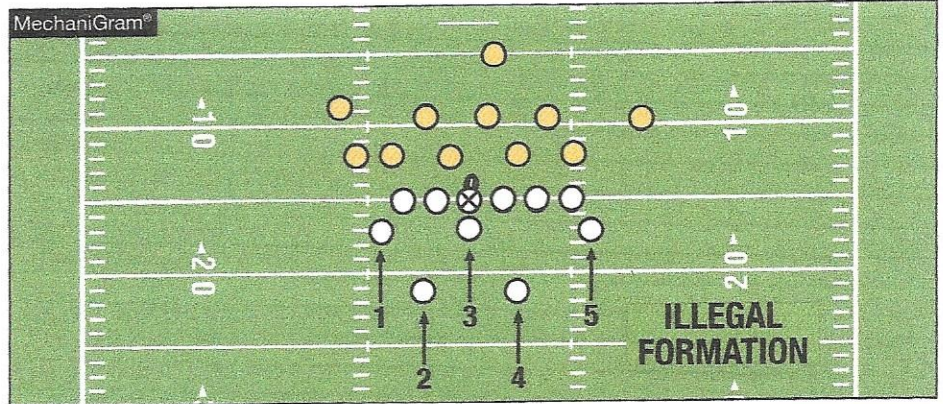
If team K fouls from the start of a kick down until the kick ends, and the foul is not kick-catching interference, team R may choose to have the penalty enforced from the succeeding spot. Whether team K’s foul occurs at the snap (e.g. illegal formation, illegal motion) or before the kick ends, team R has the option of succeeding spot

enforcement if team K is not next to snap the ball.

The momentum exception was edited. The ball must remain in the end zone in order for the exception to be in force. Previous language indicated that the ball only needed to become dead in the end zone.

The location for one of the two

charged conferences was clarified. The between-the-nine-yard-mark conference must take place between the nine-yard marks, known in football parlance as the numbers. The previous rule language indicated a between-nine-yard-mark conference was to take place between the hashmarks. □



National Federation of State High School Associations



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Football Injury Surveillance Study



Although the number of athletes participating in high school football decreased in 2018/19, the number of high schools offering the sport remains steady. Sports injuries sustained by high school football players will remain a concern until effective injury prevention programs are implemented. The NFHS Sports Medicine Advisory Committee (SMAC) and the NFHS Sport Rules Committees use information from National High School Sports-Related Injury Surveillance Study (High School RIO™) to monitor rates and patterns of sports injuries among high school athletes. High School RIO™ is currently collecting the 15th year of sports exposure and injury data.

Football continues to have the highest injury rates of all sports included in High School RIO™. The 2018/19 High

School RIO™ data show concussions continue to be the most common injury in football (24.7% of all injuries) followed by ankle strains/sprains (12.4%). Rates of concussion have increased over the past ten years. However, the proportion of football players returning to activity the same day or within a week of sustaining a concussion has decreased dramatically over the last several years. The rate of concussion in football remains higher in competitions than in practices. Approximately three-quarters of concussions sustained in practice are related to contact with another player.

Data from High School RIO™ shows a statistically significant decrease in practice related concussion rates in the three-year time period after the NFHS contact practice limitation recommendations were made. Practice

related concussion rates in the three-year time period post NFHS recommendation (2015/16-2017/18) was nearly 20% lower compared to rates in the three-year time period prior to the recommendation (2012/13-2014/15). This finding supports the NFHS recommendations regarding limiting full contact activities in football practice. Understanding such patterns of injury is one important tool in the efforts to keep football players as safe as possible.

If you are interested in more information on the High School RIO™ Study or a certified athletic trainer is interested in becoming a reporter for football, please visit <http://www.ucdenver.edu/academics/colleges/PublicHealth/research/ResearchProjects/piper/projects/RIO/Pages/Study-Reports.aspx> for summary reports. □

Editorial Changes

Formations, Ineligibles Downfield Addressed

Rules language needing clarification or that was considered potentially confusing was addressed by the NFHS Football Rules Committee.

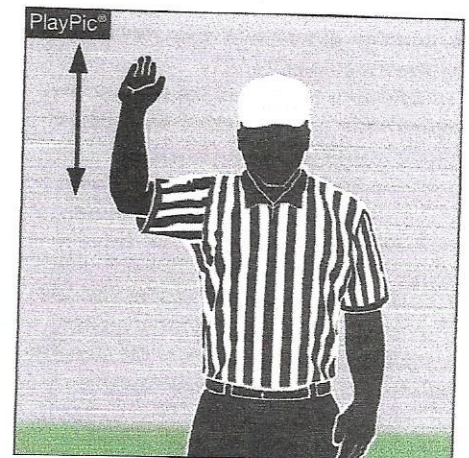
Rule 3-4-9 was added to give the referee authority to correct obvious errors in timing by the play clock if discovery is prior to the snap. The rule previously addressed only corrections regarding the game clock. To indicate a reset to 25 seconds, the referee pushes one open palm skyward as seen in the PlayPic. Using both arms in that manner indicates a reset to 40 seconds.

Ineligible A players were addressed in an editorial change to Rule 7-5-12. Ineligible A players may not advance

beyond the expanded neutral zone on a legal forward pass play before a legal forward pass that crosses the neutral zone is in flight. The neutral zone expands two yards behind the defensive line of scrimmage following the snap.

When identifying A players who are illegally downfield it is important to make sure that the A player is clearly beyond the expanded neutral zone (2 yards) at the moment that the pass occurs. Previous language regarding blocking by ineligible as far as the expanded neutral zone was removed.

In Rule 7-2-5a, it was made clear ▶



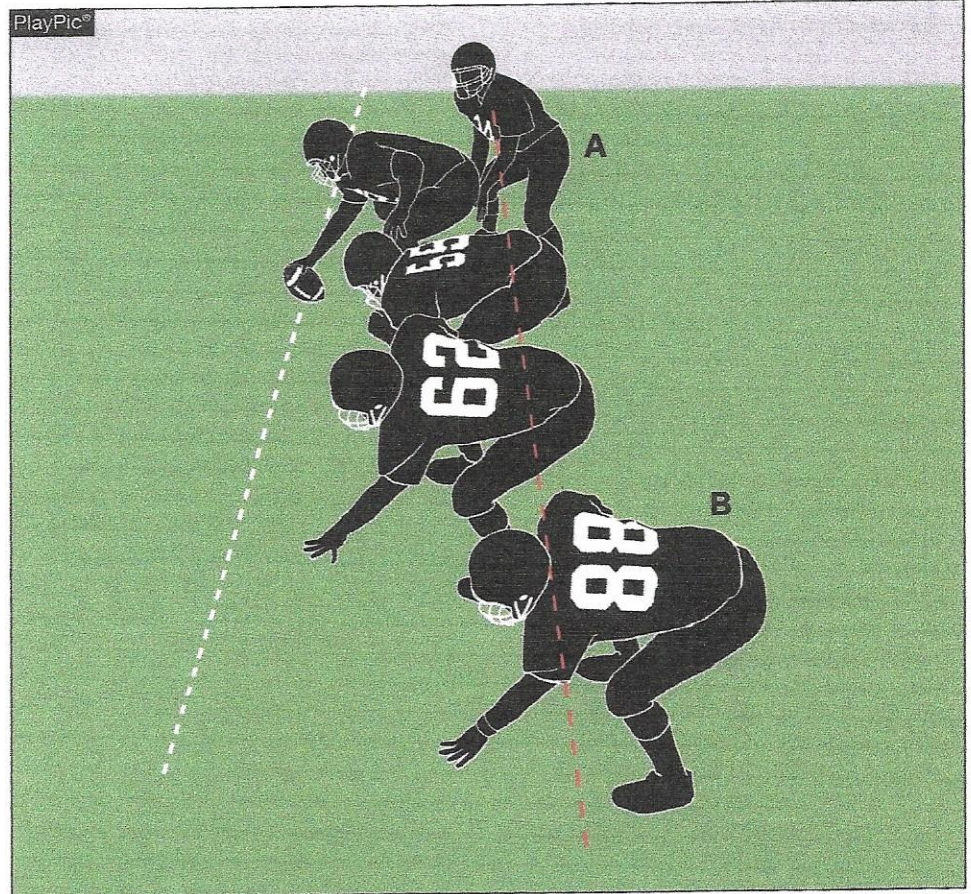
Pump the Clock

- ▶ only one player may not be on the line but still penetrate the vertical plane through the waistline of his nearest teammate who is on the line, as in Rule 7-2-3.

As seen in the PlayPic, player (A) must be in position to receive a hand-to-hand snap but does not have to actually receive it. By rule, he is the only player allowed to be positioned in "no man's land" at the snap. All other players not on the line must be clearly positioned as backs. The player marked (B) is in an illegal position. □

QUICK TIP

When a game official knows a flag has been thrown, a different whistle tone helps to inform those who haven't seen it. Instead of a longer, sharp blast, several staccato bursts should be used. That's especially helpful to the referee, who often doesn't see the result of a play and a flag downfield or in the side zone.



Manual Committee

Signal, Pregame Duties, Among Manual Changes

The NFHS Football Game Officials Manual Committee made the following changes for 2020-21.

Signals. The pumping motion of one arm overhead to reset the play clock to 25 seconds was added as Signal 17. Both arms are used if the play clock must be reset to 40 seconds.

Signal 23 is used to indicate a disconcerting act foul.

Game officials' uniforms. The committee addressed game officials' uniforms, two of which came in the form of recommendations: In areas where shorts are allowed, it is recommended they are only worn for games below the

varsity level; and the use of jackets is not recommended.

A minimal amount of white accents is allowed on game officials' shoes. The mandate that bean bags be either white or blue has been eliminated, since game officials in some areas participate in events such as cancer awareness week, when pink or other colored beanbags are used.

Communication with coaches. During the pregame meeting with head coaches, the referee is to be notified of each team's designated representative who will make decisions regarding penalty acceptance or declination. It is

recommended that the head linesman and line judge obtain second-half choices from head coaches as teams leave the field at the conclusion of the first half. The choices are then communicated to the referee.

Pregame duties. The referee should escort the team captains to the center of the field for the coin toss about three to five minutes before game time. The previous mechanic was five minutes. Again, state association policies may prevail.

Line-to-gain crew. It is strongly recommended line-to-gain crew be adults. Also, responsibility for fastening

SEE "COMMITTEE" P. 10

► Committee CONT. FROM P.9

clip on the line-to-gain equipment at the back edge of the yard line closest to the rear line-to-gain rod shifted from the head linesman to a chain crew member.

Game-related. The remaining changes affect game officials carrying out duties during the game. The referee indicates the team taking a charged team timeout with two “chucks” of the arm in the direction of that team’s goal line. It was previously three such motions.

Responsibility for checking numbering requirements of offensive linemen now falls on the referee as well as the umpire.

When the bean bag is needed, such as to mark the spot of a fumble or the spot where a kick ends, it is to be dropped, not thrown.

Previously, the manual determined the referee should have the ball marked ready for play in three seconds. The new dictate is three to five seconds following the placement of the ball. Additionally, it is suggested that the umpire place the ball and then quickly move to his position. From there, be prepared to use the stop sign and the snapper’s first name (acquired during pregame either from the snapper himself or from a member of the coaching staff) if the ready-for-play is delayed. If a quick snap is possible, the referee should also check to see if the umpire is in position before giving the ready-for-play signal.

In crews of five, the line judge now times the game. That job was formerly held by the back judge. But the committee does not want one game official handling both clocks.

2020-2021 Game Officials Manual Points of Emphasis

Clock Management Communication

Accurate and effective communication during the game is critically important for the game officials, coaches, players and the press box personnel. Recent NFHS football rules change(s) that impact clock management issues call for careful consideration of the changes that are necessary in order for the game officials to correctly communicate important information throughout the contest and especially during critical game situations when the clock issues are so very important. Game officials must utilize sound and effective mechanics throughout the entire game to ensure that

they are adequately prepared when the game situations call for critical decisions to be made by the coaches and players.

One very important change that is a result of the new 40/25-second play clock is that the covering official(s) must utilize a physical signal that is clearly visible at the end of every down. The most common signals that are necessary when the ball becomes dead include signal #7 (dead ball with one arm straight up) or signal #3 (stops the game clock) or signal #10 (incomplete forward pass). A down that involves a score would involve another appropriate signal as well. Please note that the result of any down only calls for one signal to be used. Coaches, players, clock operators and the other game officials depend on this important information to make critical decisions that sometimes must be made very quickly. A game officials crew who has developed effective and consistent habits to clearly communicate this important information throughout the contest are thoroughly prepared when critical game situations call for quick decisions. Effective clock management becomes a shared crew responsibility when each member of the crew learns the correct signals to use and is prepared to utilize them in an accurate and consistent manner.

Game official crews who are assigned to work a game where visible play clocks are not available on occasion or all of the time are likely to be familiar with the local association/state mechanic that is recommended for use when the play clock has reached the 10-second mark and then the 5-second mark. It is the recommendation of the NFHS Football Game Officials Manual Committee that a clearly visible physical signal must occur when the play clock reaches 10 seconds and that an additional signal is necessary at the 5-second mark to count down the final seconds prior to the possibility of a delay of game foul. The game official who is responsible for this signal might choose to visit with both quarterbacks prior to the game to allow them to clarify any questions or information they may have concerning this mechanic.

Respectful Communication Between Coaches and Game Officials

If the primary mission of high school football were to win state championships then, by design, 99% of all teams would never fulfill the goal. If winning games

were the primary goal then, for sure, 50% of teams would never be fulfilling the goal. Every NFHS rules book for every sport include a “Mission Statement” (as Appendix A in the NFHS Football Rules Book) that clearly states the primary goals as promoting “leadership, respect, integrity, and sportsmanship”.

To that end, coaches and game officials should always be communicating with each other in a manner that models such behaviors for the student athletes. Guidelines to model such communication is always included as Appendix F (for Coaches) and Appendix G (for Officials) in the NFHS Football Rules Book.

NFHS Football Rule 9-8-1 states that it is unsportsmanlike conduct and thereby clearly illegal for any non-player (coach) to “attempt to influence a decision by a game official” such as screaming for holding by a defensive coach over and over, or consistently asking for a pass interference call by an offensive coach.

The rule further defines that it is unsportsmanlike conduct to “indicate an objection to a game official’s decision.” While it is likely not appropriate to be calling such a foul unless it is an extreme case, game officials and coaches need to keep in mind that young student athletes are watching their every move. If a coach disagrees with a decision, they should be requesting a “conference time-out” and respectfully presenting their case. Note that this procedure calls for both coach and game officials to discuss any disagreement specifically “in front of the team bench” (as a learning opportunity for players to see how adults respectfully speak with other adults) as opposed to some secret screaming session in the middle of the field. If they are not sure enough about their position to risk a time-out then they need to abide by NFHS Football Rule 9-8-1.

Preventing Inequities Due to Illegal Substitution and/or Illegal Formation

After the ready-for-play, each player of A who participated in the previous down and each substitute for A must have been, momentarily, between the 9-yard marks before the snap. (Rule 7-2-1).

With the newly revised definition for the “ready-for-play”, a “wide out” type substitute can gain the advantage of being unnoticed and uncovered or even in illegal position if game officials do not consistently recognize whether or not ►

► the players are all abiding by this NFHS football rule.

The ready-for-play may be a signal given by the referee. However, with the new rule it may also be initiated by the umpire placing the ball on the ground and moving into position. It only takes one instance for a receiver to go uncovered for A to gain the advantage of a long reception or even a score. Game officials need to be especially conscious of the position of outside substitutes when either type ready for play occurs. Wing officials should be especially alert for substitution issues.

Responsibility for Minimizing Risk in the Game

It is so very important to understand that the school administrators, coaches, players and non-players, and game officials are equally responsible for minimizing the risk in the game of football! It is quite clear that there have been many NFHS football rules changes recently that directly address risk minimization of the participants. The purpose of this Point of Emphasis is to encourage all game officials to carefully study these NFHS rules of the game for football and prepare yourself to make appropriate decisions throughout the game that addresses this area of concern. It is so very important to always remember that a decision to not throw a flag for a risk minimization related foul sends a very clear message that you approve of the action by the player(s) and you are likely to see the same foul repeated. Please take the time to carefully study the items listed below and prepare yourself to react appropriately in each and every game. Every game official must take responsibility for minimizing the risk of all participants in high school football.

NFHS Football Rule 9, clearly addresses the conduct of all participants and Sections 3 and 4 specifically deal with physical contact between players that may result in these risk concerns. Let's look at several specific examples. Please note that this list is not all-inclusive:

Targeting is defined as "an act by any player who takes aim and initiates contact against an opponent above the shoulders with the helmet, forearm, hand, fist, elbow or shoulder(s)." Any player who is in complete control of himself (not fighting off a block) must be held to a very high standard when making this contact against an opponent. We simply cannot miss or pass on this type of foul in an effort to

protect both players. Remember that a targeting foul does not result in automatic disqualification, but that certainly can be a consideration.

Blindside Block is defined as "a block against an opponent other than the runner, who is not able to see the blocker approaching." This action that includes forceful contact clearly results in a foul unless the block outside of the free-blocking zone is initiated with open hands (open palms to the opponent).

Tripping is defined as "the intentional use of the lower leg or foot to obstruct an opponent below the knee." It must be noted here that a player may not trip any opponent (includes the runner). It is also important to note here that an injury to both players is certainly possible.

Defenseless Player is defined as "a player who, because of his physical position and focus of concentration, is especially vulnerable to injury." It must be noted here that physical contact against a defenseless player may very well be

perfectly legal, but any player must take extreme care to make certain that the contact is legal by rule to avoid a foul. Game officials must carefully observe any defenseless player to determine that the contact by an opponent is legal. It is also necessary to note here that unnecessary or excessive contact may very well occur.

Illegal Helmet Contact is defined as "an act of initiating contact with the helmet against any opponent." It is important to note here that a helmet is to be used for protection and not to be used as a weapon.

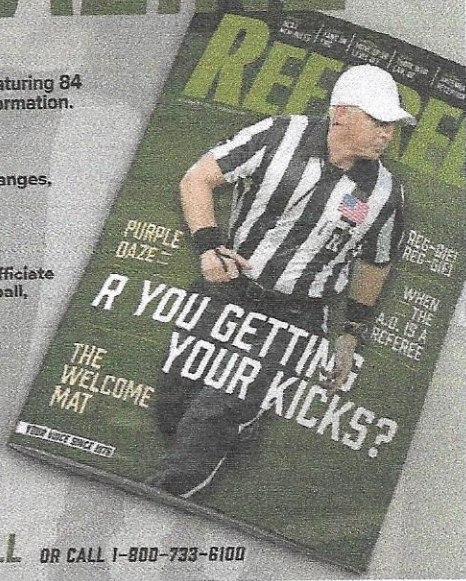
Spearing is "an act by any player who initiates contact against an opponent at the shoulders or below with the crown (top portion) of his helmet," and is likely to be the most common example of illegal helmet contact.

Roughing an opponent may include action against a passer, a kicker, a holder or a snapper. Each of these players are certainly in a vulnerable position at a critical moment and clearly must be protected. □

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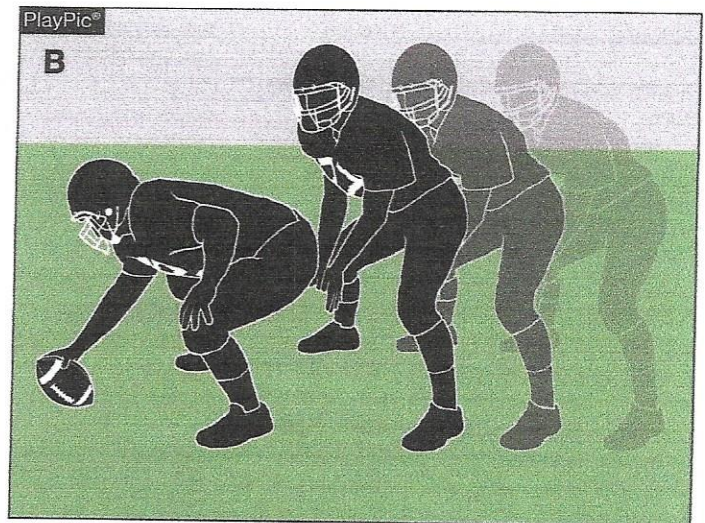
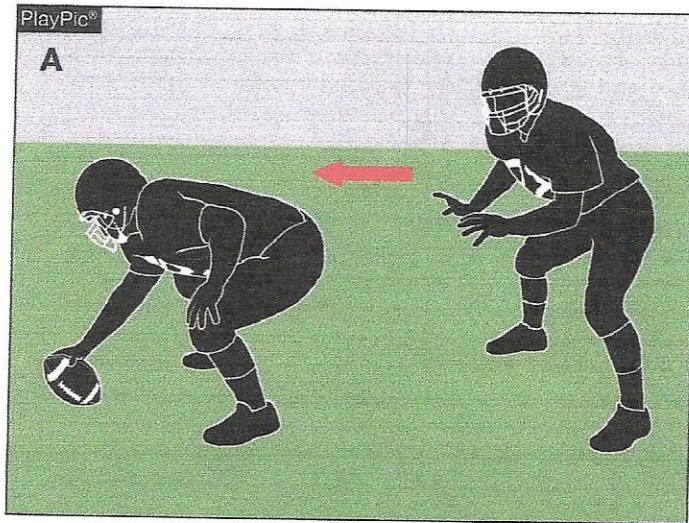
Beware of 'Rolling Starts'

In short-yardage situations it is not unusual for team A to snap the ball on the first sound or even a silent count in order to catch the defense by surprise.

The quarterback will sometimes walk up behind the center while the snapper has his hand or hands on the ball and

the offensive linemen are getting set (PlayPic A). Either on the first sound or upon feeling the quarterback's hands on his rump (PlayPic B), the center snaps the ball. In team A's haste to snap the ball quickly, it is not unusual for the snap to occur before everyone has had

a chance to take the required pause. Also be prepared for the quarterback to employ a "rolling start." That occurs when he approaches the snapper but never stops moving forward before taking the snap. Because it simulates action at the snap, it is a false start. □



Rare Rulings Well Done

No one has ever attempted to rank fouls in the order of the difficulty in calling them. However, it's clear there is a pecking order. For example, encroachment is easier to call than holding. There are some fouls that are called inconsistently, primarily because it's often difficult for one game official to see everything that transpired. Arguably targeting and pass interference would be headliners.

There is another group of fouls that often do not receive a lot of attention, probably because they don't happen very often. Some game officials, who are conscious of advantage/disadvantage, struggle to call these fouls because their impact on the play is seemingly indiscernible. It is no surprise the codes do not agree on these subjects.

Incidental face mask. Although pulling the face mask did not become a foul until several years after helmets were made with face masks, there is now unanimity on the severe injury that can be caused by a tug or twist on any portion of the helmet. Touching the face mask or the helmet is not a foul. Therein lies the challenge with the incidental face mask foul, which is the mere grasping of the face mask. Did the opponent actually grasp or did he merely touch it?

Invalid fair catch signal. There are very specific requirements for a valid fair catch signal. The reality is anything bearing some resemblance to a valid signal is likely to be interpreted as a signal. Players are taught that when a receiver signals, don't question it and don't hit him.

A valid fair-catch signal is the extending and lateral waving of one arm at full arm's length above the head at full arm's length. The foul carries a five-yard penalty.

Very few prep receivers meet the established standard. First, it's very difficult to wave an arm without bending the elbow and one swing of the arm is technically not a wave. Nonetheless, any movement of the arm with the hand held above the head is going to be interpreted as a fair-catch signal and the covering official should respect it as such.

The most important part of that call is to recognize that once any signal is given, the ball should be whistled dead as soon as any player gets possession. If team K possesses the ball, a different rule applies, but the ball is still dead. □

Review of Pass Interference Penalty Enforcement

Besides holding, pass interference is probably the most subjective foul called during a football game. Offensive pass interference results in a 15-yard penalty from the previous spot. There is no automatic first down.

Unless otherwise stated, the pass in each of the following plays is incomplete.

PLAY 1: A1 is called for offensive pass interference at A's 35-yard line. At the snap, it was (a) second and five, or (b) second and 20. **RULING:** In both cases the penalty moves the ball to A's 20-yard line. In (a), it will be second and 20; in (b), it will be second and 35. It's a simple enforcement in those cases, 15 yards

from the previous spot and repeat the down.

PLAY 2: B1 runs for a touchdown after intercepting a pass. Before the change of possession, A2 commits offensive pass interference. **RULING:** Team B will decline the penalty. There is no enforcement on the try down or the next kickoff. Live-ball fouls do not carry over after a touchdown if they occur before a change of possession (8-2-3).

Defensive pass interference results in a 15-yard penalty from the previous spot. There is no automatic first down (7-5-10 PENALTY).

PLAY 3: B1 is called for defensive pass interference at A's 20-yard line.

At the snap, it was (a) second and five, or (b) second and 20. **RULING:** In both cases, the penalty puts the ball at A's 35-yard line. In (a), the penalty yields first and 10. In (b), it will be second and five.

PLAY 4: Fourth and 16 from B's 26-yard line. B1 is flagged for defensive pass interference (a) in B's end zone, or (b) at B's 19-yard line. **RULING:** In both cases, it will be A's ball, fourth and three from B's 13-yard line.

PLAY 5: Fourth and five at B's 10-yard line. B1 is flagged for defensive pass interference in B's end zone. **RULING:** It will be first and goal from B's 5-yard line. □

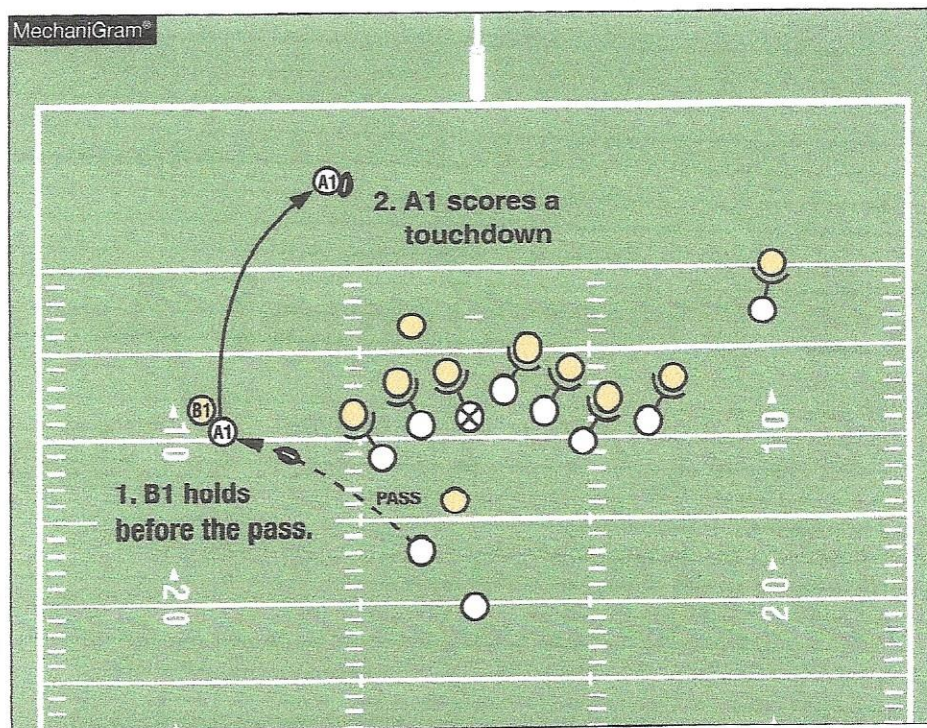
Team B Fouls on a Touchdown

A scoring team may or may not have an enforcement option if the opponent commits a foul during the down. In the MechaniGram, B1 held the receiver before the pass. A1 made the catch and scored despite the foul.

Team A could have the penalty enforced half-the-distance on the try or have the 10-yard penalty applied on the succeeding free kick. The option is available for live-ball fouls other than unsportsmanlike or nonplayer. □

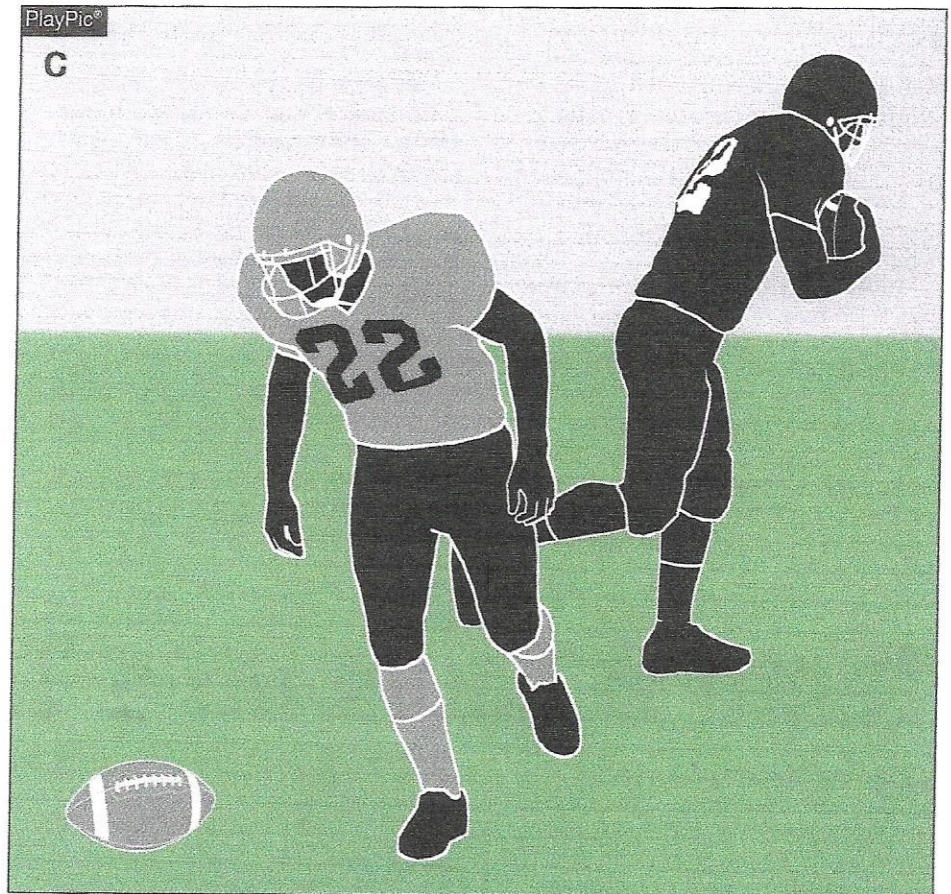
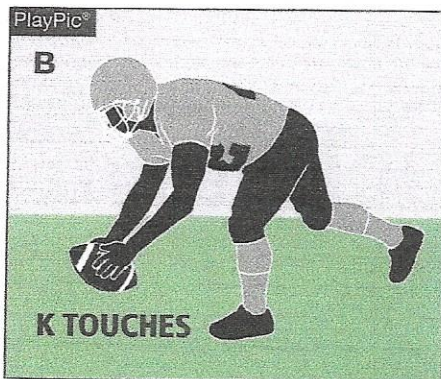
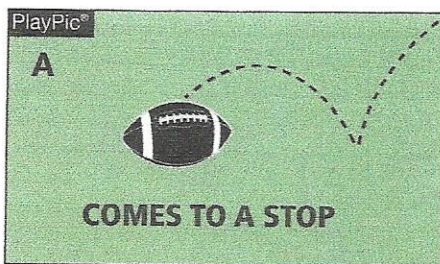
QUICK TIP

Avoid "happy feet," the tendency to start going somewhere with a lot of footwork. Happy feet is false hustle. If you move your feet in that manner, your head and eyes move as well. That will impair the ability to see and digest the action.



You Can Keep a Good Kick Down

A free kick or scrimmage kick becomes dead when it comes to rest and no player attempts to secure it (PlayPic A). In order to down such a kick, a team K player must simply touch the kick (PlayPic B). The team R player in PlayPic C is advancing a dead ball. □



15 Intentional Acts Deserve Your Consideration

When the word “intentional” is mentioned, the first thing that springs to the mind of most football game officials is intentional grounding. However, intent plays a role in many more acts than that. There are roughly 15 acts in which intent is a factor at least to some extent.

Intentional is an adjective which means done on purpose or deliberately. Some of the synonyms that may apply to football players include calculated, conscious, intended, planned, meant, purposeful and thought-out-in-advance.

Any rule that requires an game

official to determine “intent” is prone to inconsistent enforcement. Because game officials are not mind readers, intent must be judged by default; examples are provided as appropriate.

Kicks. A kick is an intentional act. It’s important to distinguish between an illegal kick and illegally kicking the ball. ▶

► They are not the same. An illegal kick is a kick made in a perfectly legal manner but is not allowed because of when or where it is made. Illegally kicking the ball means kicking it in a manner not allowed by the rules — how the ball is kicked. An illegal kick is a foul, but whether or not illegally kicking the ball is a foul depends on intent.

Consider a ball rolling along the ground that is kicked by a player. If it is intentional, such as a punter who muffs the snap and kicks the ball while it is on the ground to prevent the defense from recovering it, it is a foul for illegally kicking the ball. However, if such a punter is swarmed by the defense while the ball is loose and the ball is inadvertently kicked in an attempt to obtain possession, it is a muff and not a foul.

Passing the ball. A pass is of course an intentional act and there is no such thing as an accidental or inadvertent pass. The word “intentional” plays a significant role in determining whether a forward pass or a fumble has occurred.

When a team A player is holding the ball to pass it forward toward the neutral zone, any intentional forward movement of his hand with the ball firmly in his control starts the forward pass. If a team B player contacts the passer or ball after forward movement begins and the ball leaves the passer’s hand, a forward pass is ruled regardless of where the ball strikes the ground or a player. That means a seemingly backward pass is a forward pass.

Illegal participation. That occurs when a player goes out of bounds and subsequently returns to the field to make a play. If a player is blocked or pushed out of bounds, he may legally participate during the down as long as he immediately re-enters the field. There are also restrictions on players of team K or team A who go out of bounds and return. A player who intentionally goes out of bounds cannot intentionally touch the ball, subsequently return to the field, influence the play or otherwise participate.

Illegal touching. That foul occurs

when an ineligible team A receiver touches a forward pass. Intent is very important because if an ineligible receiver is inadvertently struck by a forward pass, there is no foul for illegal touching. It may be intentional grounding, however. For a foul to occur, the ineligible player must “bat, muff or catch” the ball; those are intentional acts.

Tripping. Tripping is the intentional use of the lower leg or foot to obstruct an opponent below the knee. The vast majority of tripping situations involve intent. Here’s a rare one that doesn’t.

Play: As runner A1 runs through a hole in the line, blocker A3 moves his leg to improve his footing. In the process, charging B4 trips over A3’s leg. **Ruling:** A3’s action was not intended to impede B4. There is no foul.

Batting. Batting the ball is intentionally slapping or striking the ball with a hand or arm. Such inadvertent contact in an unsuccessful attempt to secure possession is a muff and not a foul. The key is an attempt to gain possession. □

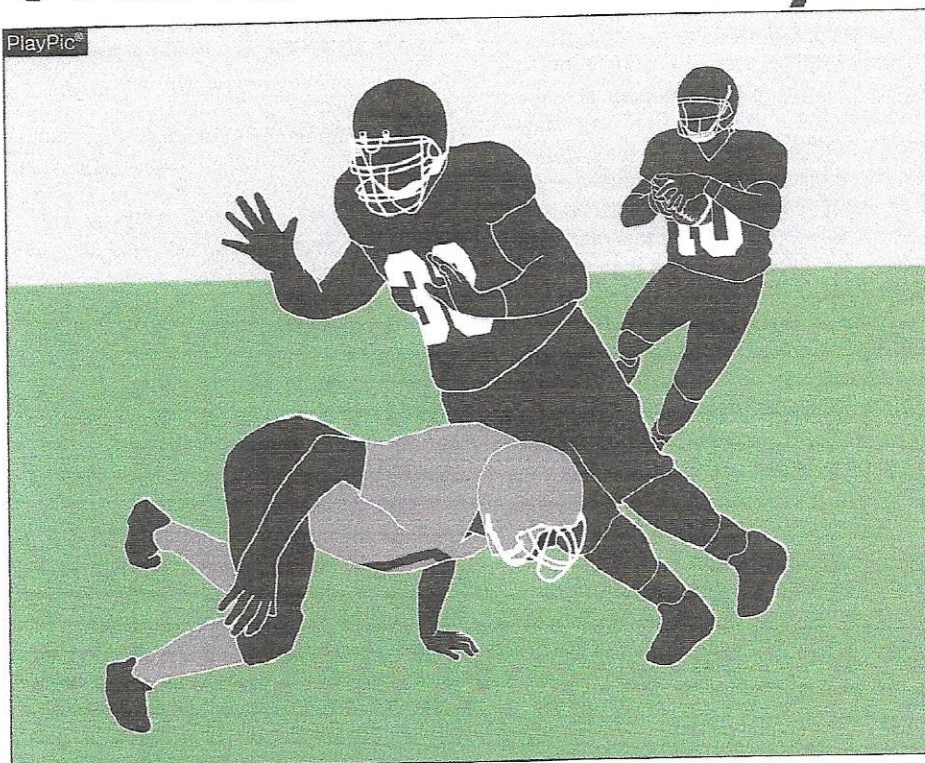
The Rule Works Both Ways

Although most of us think of team A when the subject is blocking below the waist, team B players do not have carte blanche. The PlayPic depicts a situation in which team B tries to take out the lead blocker on a sweep.

Blocking below the waist is permitted in the free-blocking zone (which extends laterally four yards either side of the spot of the snap and three yards behind each line of scrimmage) when all players involved are on the line of scrimmage and in the zone at the snap, and the contact is in the zone. The block shown would be a foul if it were outside the zone. □

QUICK TIP

Dead-ball officiating separates average game officials from great ones. Observe action after the play is over to maintain game control.



True Blue Crew Will Pull Through With No Miscue

Game officials are the third team on the field. That's an apt description if the game officials are fully functioning as a team, which is a group of people working together to achieve a common goal. Sometimes that doesn't happen. Game officials can get so locked in on their initial key (players the game officials are supposed to watch) that they stay on him when he's no longer part of the play and don't shift their focus elsewhere. Game officials can be ball-watchers who watch the runner, not what's going on around him. Or game officials may just think it's safer to stay in their own lane at all times.

Yes, game officials can go overboard in working outside their area of responsibility, but if they don't help their crewmates when they can, the odds that they'll achieve their goal of working a great game will diminish greatly.

Take umpires. They can be a vital cog in pass-play machinery by making trap-catch calls on passes over the middle, when wing and deep game officials get screened off because a receiver turns his back to them or a defender gets in the way. To do that, umpires must have the quarterback in focus as they watch the line play and spin around when the pass is thrown. Holding can no longer affect the play, so why look for it? The referee can clean up as the play moves downfield.

Say a sweep goes to the sideline, forcing the wing official to back up so the runner can pass. With the commotion the wing can end up yards behind the dead-ball spot. Or the runner is driven back, so progress is an issue. Using crossfield mechanics the line judge can, while moving downfield, glance at the head linesman for help on spotting the ball. The head linesman glides down, cleaning up by watching for fouls behind the play, and stops at the proper spot. The official may not be dead-on accurate but will be close enough to be useful.

Unless the ball is spotted so the line-to-gain is at issue, the line judge can



Oklahoma high school game officials David Hammons (clockwise from lower left), Kerry Sanders, Gary Lewis, Danny Choate and Jeff Murray get ready to take the field. Murray and Choate are from Edmond; the others are from Oklahoma City.

keep the game moving by giving the referee an unobtrusive, chest-high, point downfield to indicate a first down was made. The referee can then signal and wind the clock, maybe from far back in the backfield, instead of having to run up to the dead-ball spot to do that.

Tight sideline catches can be a bear. If there is a wing official and a deep sideline official, they can communicate, non-verbally or verbally if need be, about whether the receiver got a body part down inbounds and kept control throughout the catch process. In a four- or five-official crew, the wings have to piece everything together on their own. But an alert back judge who has shifted focus with the pass can help there is a bobble or the ball comes loose. Go to the calling official (get away from players), report what was seen, and let the calling official make the final ruling.

A great example of working together

is if, instead of relaxing as a play moves away, game officials keep their heads on a swivel to pick up off-the-ball action that may go undetected by the game officials working the end of the play. If they do that, they will fulfill one of the commandments of great officiating: be great dead-ball game officials.

Everyone can help the referee by being calm, clear, concise and complete in reporting fouls. "Holding, 66 offense, at the line. The pass was incomplete." If a crew looks confused in penalty enforcement, it's usually because someone reported a foul in a confusing or incomplete way, so the referee has to chase people down to get the necessary information.

There are myriad other ways crew members can help each other. The point is that a crew can't achieve its goal of working a great game unless each person does that when necessary. □