

# FOOTBALL

2022 PRESEASON GUIDE

## Intentional Grounding Exception Added

A player wishing to avoid a loss of yardage may intentionally throw an incomplete pass if certain criteria are met. Under Rule 7-5-2d EXCEPTION 2, the passer must have been outside the lateral boundary of the free-blocking zone as established at the snap. The pass must reach the neutral zone or the extension of the neutral zone beyond the sideline. The pass must be thrown from behind the neutral zone.

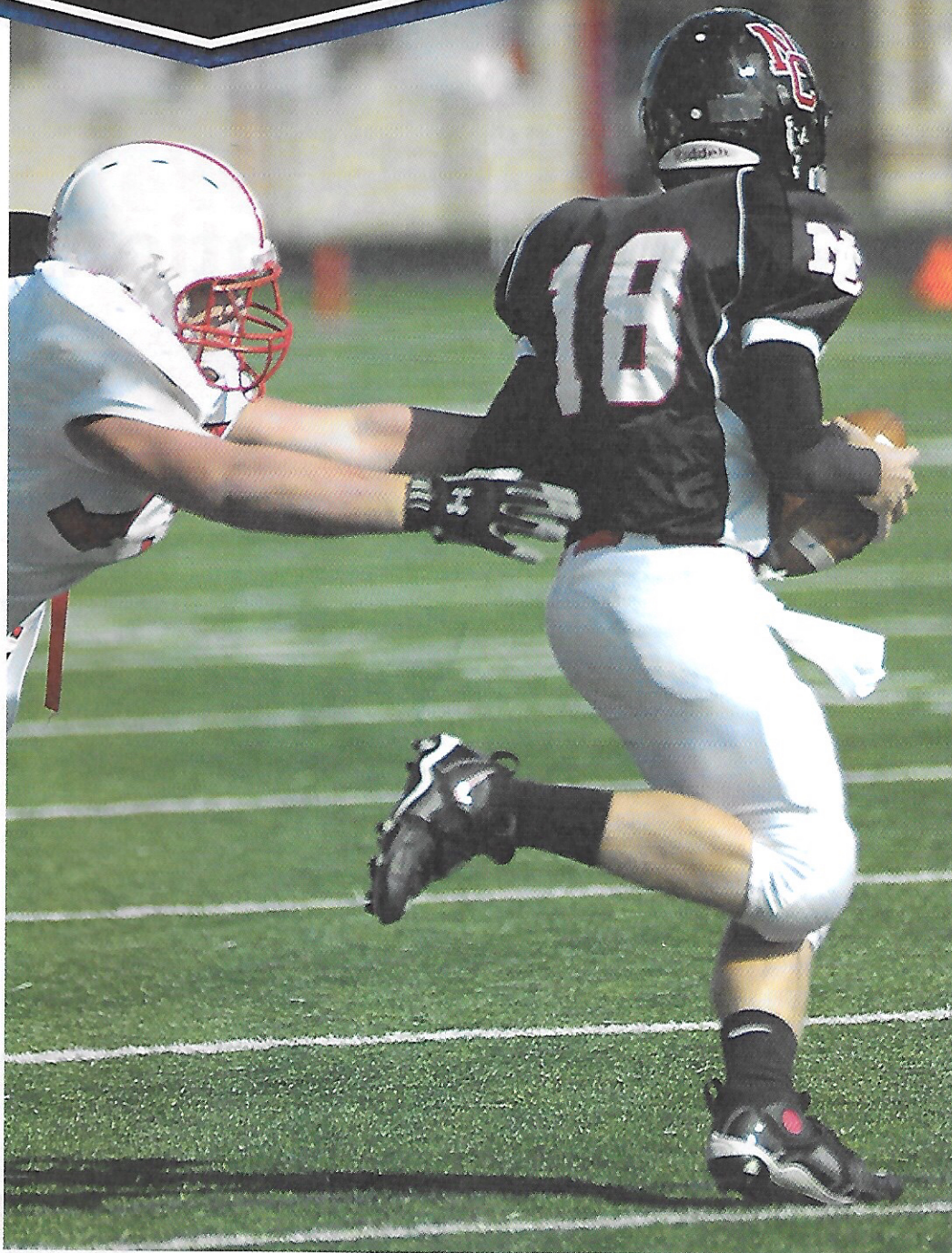
The player throwing such a pass need not be the one who took the snap.

"The question (with this rule) has always been, 'If the defense makes a good play, are we bailing out the offense by letting the quarterback throw the ball away?'" said Richard McWhirter, Chair of the NFHS Football Rules Committee and Assistant Executive Director of the Tennessee Secondary School Athletic Association. "This year, I think the committee felt the wellbeing of the passers and not subjecting them to extra hits was worth changing the rule."

The referee can use the following guidelines to judge whether the passer has been beyond the lateral boundary of the free-blocking zone:

If passers move at least three full steps laterally, they have likely left the free-blocking zone. In normal splits, the tight end's inside foot is in the free-blocking zone. The distance between a hash mark and the nearest goal post upright is five yards. The uprights are almost four yards from the center of the field.

By keeping those distances in mind, ►



A player hoping to avoid a loss of yardage may take advantage of a change in NFHS rules. Under an exception to Rule 7-5-2d, a player who has been outside the lateral boundary of the free-blocking zone as established at the snap may intentionally throw an incomplete pass if the pass reaches the neutral zone or the extension of the neutral zone beyond the sideline.



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- ▶ the referee may be better able to judge whether a passer has been beyond the lateral boundary of the free-blocking zone. Additionally, should the ball be spotted on the hash mark, on an upright or in the center of the field, those become convenient points of reference.

**PLAY:** Quarterback A1 drops back to pass and whether or not under

defensive pressure, throws the ball forward: (a) at the feet of two onrushing defensive linemen; or (b) inbounds or out of bounds to an area not occupied by an eligible receiver. **RULING:** Illegal forward pass in (a). In (b), the game officials must determine if (1) the passer has been beyond the lateral boundary of the free-blocking zone as established at

the snap, and (2) if the pass went beyond the neutral zone extended including the extension beyond the sideline. In (b), if both (1) and (2) were true, the pass is legal under 7-5-2d EXCEPTION 2, the down counts and there is no foul. In (b), if either (1) or (2) were not true, it is an illegal forward pass as it does not meet 7-5-2d EXCEPTION 2. □

# Fouls Affect Play, Game Clock Options

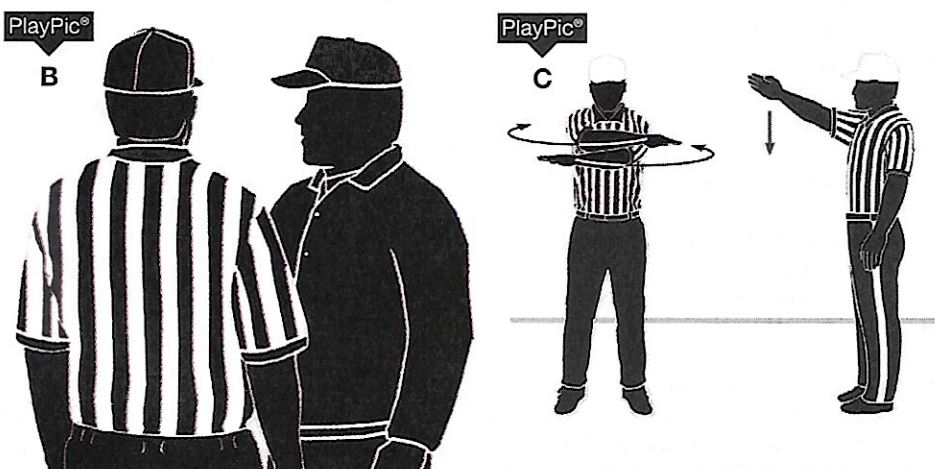
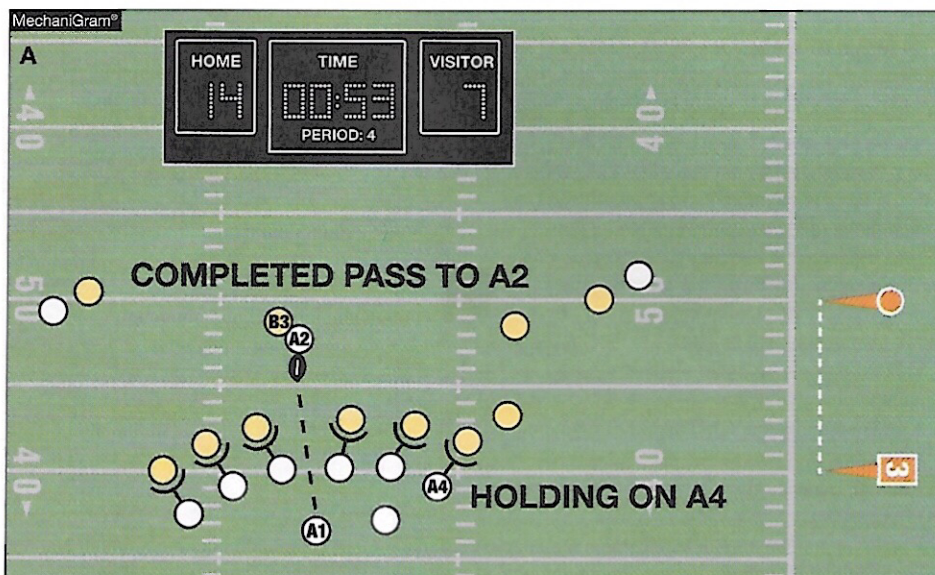
Two changes involving game clock and play clock procedures were made to Rules 3-4-7 and 3-6-1a(1)e EXCEPTION 2, respectively.

In Rule 3-4-7, any foul committed within the last two minutes of either half will automatically result in the offended team's option to start the game clock on the snap. Prior to this change, the offended team was required to accept its opponent's penalty in order to gain control of the game clock.

The committee edited the exceptions to Rule 3-6-1a(1)e, which clarify the necessary conditions for an abbreviated 25-second play clock after a stoppage in play. This rule now includes an exception for Rule 3-5-7i, mandating that a 40-second play clock be employed following a foul committed only by the defensive team.

**PLAY 1:** With time expiring inside the last two minutes in the second or fourth period and A behind in the score, A1 intentionally throws the ball forward to the ground in order to stop the game clock. A1's action took place: (a) immediately after receiving the snap while A1 was lined up 3 yards deep; or (b) immediately after receiving the snap; or (c) after A1 delayed and throws an illegal ▶

**When a foul is committed with less than two minutes remaining in either half, the offended team has the option to start the game clock on the snap. In MechaniGram A, Team B trails when Team A fouls. Team B's coach is consulted (PlayPic B), choosing to decline the penalty and have the clock started on the snap (PlayPic C).**



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► forward pass. **RULING:** In (a) and (b), the grounding is legal and the game clock remains stopped until the subsequent snap. Illegal forward pass in (c), and the game clock shall be started on the ready-for-play signal unless Team B chooses to start the game clock on the snap.

**PLAY 2:** With less than a minute remaining in the game, Team B trails 21-20. B1 commits a holding foul

during the down. Following the play, A2 commits an unsportsmanlike conduct foul. **RULING:** The fouls are administered separately and in order of occurrence. In addition, Team A is given the choice of starting the game clock on the snap. If Team A declines to start the game clock on the snap, Team B is then given the option of starting the game clock on the snap. With Team B trailing,

Team B will likely choose to start the game clock on the snap.

**PLAY 3:** Team B is trailing with less than two minutes remaining in the game. On third down, A53 commits a holding foul and Team A is stopped short of the line to gain inbounds.

**RULING:** Whether or not B accepts A's foul for holding, B may choose to start the clock on the snap. □

## Chop Block Redefined

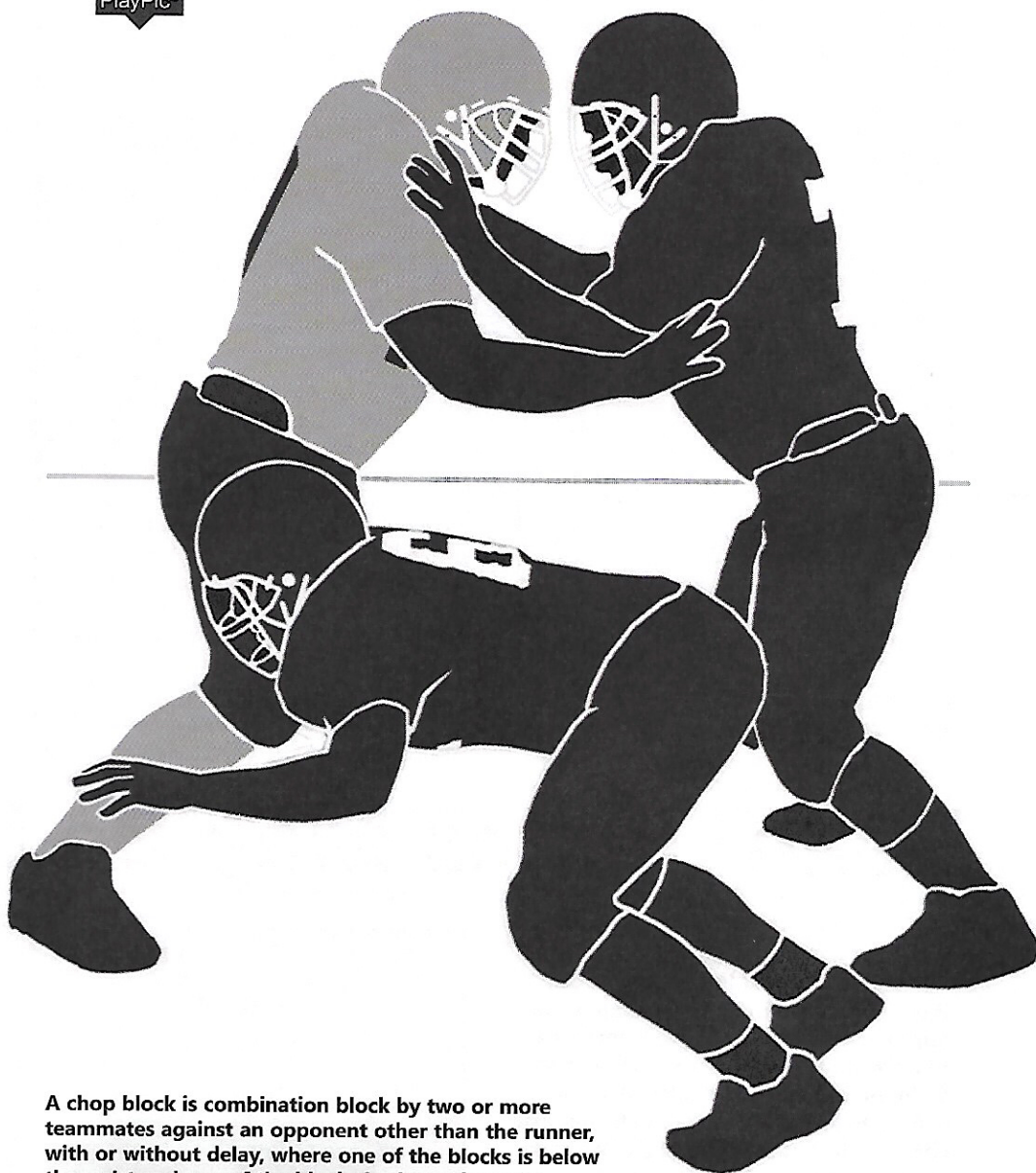
An alteration to Rule 2-3-8 addresses the new definition of a chop block. It is now described as "a combination block by two or more teammates against an opponent other than the runner, with or without delay, where one of the blocks is below the waist and one of the blocks is above the waist."

Previously, the defensive player's knee was used to determine the high and low components of a chop block.

"This is going to strengthen the rule and it's also going to help the game officials," said Richard McWhirter, Chair of the NFHS Football Rules Committee and Assistant Executive Director of the Tennessee Secondary School Athletic Association. "I think they're going to be able to enforce this rule better than they have in the past because determining 'below the knee' and 'above the knee' is tough to do. I think it's really going to improve the game."

**PLAY:** A1 and A2 combine in blocking B1 as follows: (a) both block B1 downfield with A1 making contact above the waist and A2 simultaneously making contact below the waist but above the knees; or (b) both block B1 in the free-blocking zone with A1's block above the waist and A2's block below the waist; or (c) A1 blocks B1 above the waist as part of immediate, initial action following the snap and at the same time, A2 blocks B1 below the waist and above the knees; or (d) both A1 and A2 block B1 below the knees from the front of B1 while in the free-blocking zone. **RULING:** In (a), (b) and (c) illegal chop block by A2. In (d) this combination or multiple block is legal if the block and both blockers were in the free-blocking zone at the snap and the block was part of the immediate, initial action following the snap. □

PlayPic®



A chop block is combination block by two or more teammates against an opponent other than the runner, with or without delay, where one of the blocks is below the waist and one of the blocks is above the waist.



# Change Affects Game Balls

In a change to Rule 1-3-3, any game official may determine when the ball may be changed between downs. Under the old verbiage, only the referee could make that determination and only if the ball became wet. It has long been the practice that game officials other than the referee toss in a different ball when the one used in the previous play wound up out of play due to a long incomplete pass, kick or other occurrence.

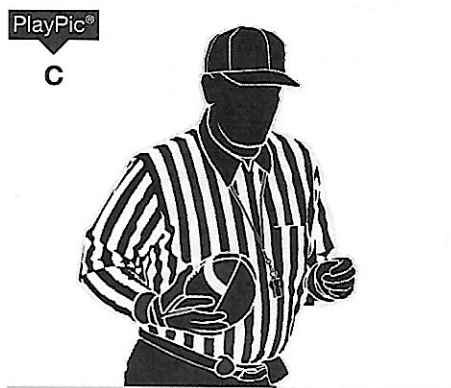
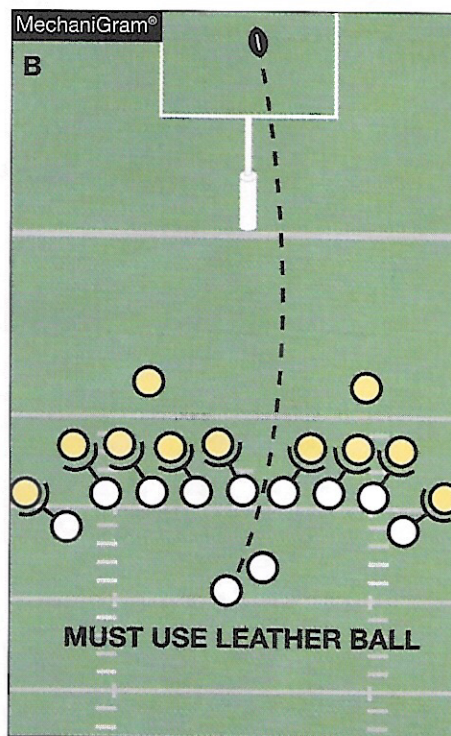
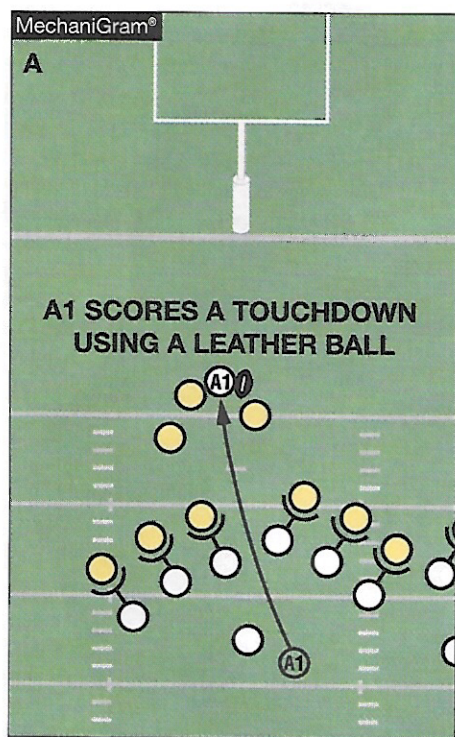
A team scoring an offensive touchdown with one type of ball may not request a different type of ball for

the try but may use a different type of ball for the ensuing free kick. In all cases, only approved balls may be used per Rule 1-3-2.

**PLAY 1:** Team A: (a) requests a rubber ball on second down after using a leather ball on first down; or (b) on a dry day, requests a different leather ball on fourth down; or (c) after a score and before the try, requests a different leather ball than used during the touchdown play; or (d) recovers on the kickoff and requests a new ball. **RULING:** The Team A request is denied in (a), (b) and (c),

unless the change in balls is ordered by the referee or other game official for reasons other than the Team A request. The Team A request is approved in (d).

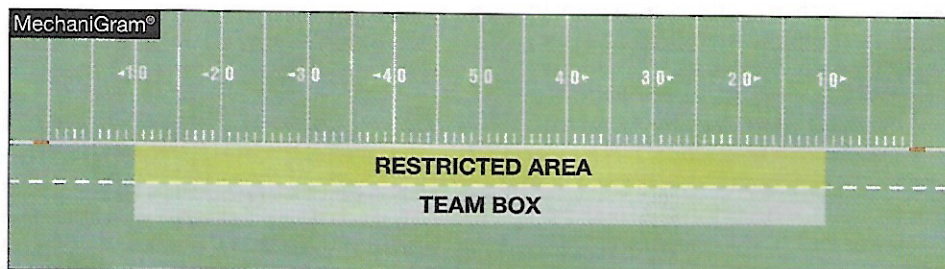
**PLAY 2:** During play in the fourth period, the quarterback of A (Visitor) informs the referee that their ball is losing air pressure and is no longer usable. A does not have another legal ball. The home-team coach complains when the referee secures the Team B ball from the ball person for use by Team A. **RULING:** The visiting team may use the home-team ball if it wishes. □



Any game official may order the ball changed between downs. Unless the ball is ordered changed by the referee or another game official, Team A scoring a touchdown with one ball (MechaniGram A) may not request a different ball for the try (MechaniGram B) but may use a different approved ball for the ensuing free kick (PlayPic C).

# Team Boxes May Be Larger

Under a change approved by the NFHS Football Rules Committee, it is permissible for state associations to approve an extension of the team box and to determine the individuals who may be in the extended area, provided such extension is the same for both teams. The change affects Table 1-7 (3.) (NEW) and Rule 1-2-3g Notes 3 (NEW). □





# 2022 Points of Emphasis

The NFHS Football Rules Committee has identified the following as Points of Emphasis for 2022.

## Sportsmanship

Good sporting behavior is one of the fundamental ingredients to the continued success and enjoyment of education-based high school sports and activities. In fact, in the 103-year history of organized high school sports in the United States, good sportsmanship has been one of the most important outcomes of high school activity programs.

NFHS playing rules are written to encourage sportsmanship.

Participation in these programs should promote respect, integrity and sportsmanship. However, for these ideals to occur, everyone involved in these programs must be doing their part.

The NFHS is concerned that unsporting behavior in education-based athletics has increased across all sports. As a result, the NFHS has made sportsmanship the No. 1 Point of Emphasis for the 2022-23 school year.

Sportsmanship, or good sporting behavior, is about treating one another with respect and exhibiting appropriate behavior. It is about being fair, honest and caring. When these types of appropriate behavior occur, competitive play is more enjoyable for everyone.

Coaches set the tone during football games with their display of sportsmanship. If these individuals act in a sportsmanlike manner, their behavior sets the tone for players, spectators and others. If coaches, however, are complaining constantly about the decision of game officials, spectators are more likely to do the same.

There must be a collaborative, working relationship between game officials and game administration to promote good sportsmanship and safely conduct the game. Everyone has their roles to play in creating a positive, sportsmanlike atmosphere at games.

Game officials should focus on the actions of players, coaches and other sideline personnel. A positive, open line of communication between game officials and coaches ultimately results in



Coaches who display good sportsmanship toward game officials set a positive tone for others. Shawn Chamberlain (left), Woodland Hills, Calif., and David Musso, Lake Balboa, Calif., conduct a pre-game meeting with a coach.

a better game for everyone involved.

Game officials, however, should never engage with spectators who are exhibiting unsporting behavior. Once the game begins, school administration is responsible for dealing with unruly spectators. A proactive approach by school administration includes monitoring the behavior of spectators and intervening as needed.

If spectators are using demeaning or profane language at game officials – or at others in the stands – those individuals should be removed from the game by school administration.

In recent years, a heightened level of unsportsmanlike behavior has been occurring by spectators at high school football games, and it must be stopped. The use of demeaning language, or hate speech, by students, parents and other fans must cease.

High school football and other activities exist to lift people up, not

demean or tear people down. The goal is to treat everyone fairly and treat each other with respect. Any speech or harassment that is insulting, demeaning or hurtful will not be tolerated.

High schools must establish a culture that values the worth of every single person – both players on the school's team and players on the opposing team. There must be a no-tolerance policy regarding behavior that shows disrespect for another individual.

Good sports win with humility, lose with grace and do both with dignity.

It takes the efforts of everyone every day to ensure that sportsmanship remains one of the top priorities in education-based activity programs.

In providing an optimal experience to players, fans, coaches and game officials, the NFHS has continually made sportsmanship a priority. Players and coaches are the most visible exhibitors of good sportsmanship. The behavior ►



► of coaches and players sets the tone for fans, game officials and others. There is no place in scholastic sports for language that defames, demeans, abuses or bullies another competitor, teammate, game official or fan. Language of this nature should not be tolerated in the school building, at games or at practice. Education-based athletics, and specifically high school football, should serve as an example of how intense competition and civility can coexist.

Coaches and players must represent their schools and communities as ambassadors of good sporting behavior beginning with pregame activities and concluding with end-of-game procedures. Game officials are charged with enforcing NFHS football rules and penalizing unsportsmanlike behavior.

Communities are often defined by their treatment of, and interaction with, visiting teams and their fans. Foul language and inflammatory speech are not acceptable displays of sportsmanship and good sporting behavior.

Sportsmanship is a basic, vital component of education-based athletics. The lessons learned, humility, respect and integrity are the cornerstones of sportsmanship. Those lessons do not include the acceptance of profane or foul language. Those same lessons are forged and exhibited long before they are on display in the spotlight of the athletic arena. More importantly, they remain in place long after the final whistle of athletic competition. Good sports make sportsmanship a priority.

### Targeting/Defenseless Players

The NFHS Football Rules Committee feels coaches, game officials and players have all worked together to recognize and remove most targeting fouls from the game, but considerable work still needs to be done understanding/penalizing illegal defenseless player contact. As stakeholders in the game, removing needless contact from football should be prioritized by coaches, game officials and players.

Targeting is 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 shoulders. A defenseless player is a player, who, because of his physical position and focus of concentration, is especially vulnerable to injury. For

added defenseless player clarification, please refer to 2.32.16 COMMENT in the 2022 NFHS Football Case Book.

Since defenseless players are especially vulnerable to potential injury, coaches should use video, on-field demonstrations, and establish zero tolerance of this illegal contact during practice and games to help players realize the importance of contacting players legally.

Game officials must have a clear understanding of the guidelines for defenseless player contact (Rule 9-4-3g). They must diligently observe all action and watch for illegal contact against players who are deemed defenseless. Any player contacting a defenseless player is responsible to make legal contact. Game officials must draw a distinction between contact necessary to make a legal block or tackle and that which is excessive. When there is a question in the game officials' mind about the severity of contact, the contact should be deemed excessive.

Legal contact is required by players at all times. It is imperative that players have a clear understanding of what contact is acceptable and be able to recognize when players are considered defenseless. Players must realize that when contacting any player the responsibility for making legal contact resides with the person making the contact. Forceful contact that is avoidable should be considered unnecessary.

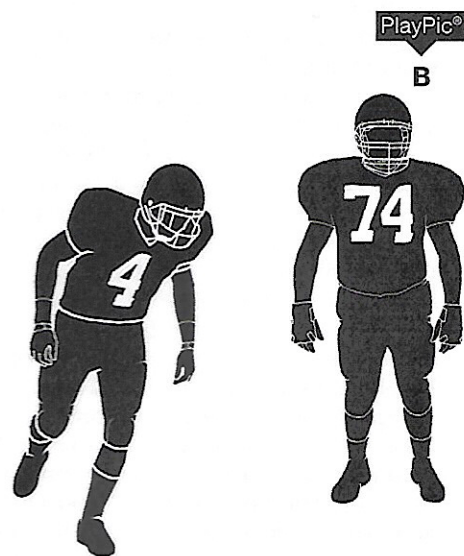
To ensure the long-term success of high school football, risk minimization must remain a priority for all stakeholders of the game.

Coaches, game officials and players must understand the importance of removing unnecessary contact from the game. A concerted effort must be made by all to eliminate targeting and illegal defenseless player contact from football.

### Legal Uniforms And Equipment

The purpose of the NFHS Football Equipment Rules is to ensure the safety and protection of both the player wearing the equipment and their opponent. Due to the potential for injury, it is essential that game officials strictly enforce equipment rules and that coaches support that enforcement.

The head coach is primarily responsible for the legality of a team's equipment. Prior to the start of each



Players who fail to wear required equipment during a down (PlayPic A) must be replaced for one down (PlayPic B).

game, the head coach must verify to the referee and another game official that all players are legally equipped in compliance with the rules and that no illegal equipment will be used. Most equipment violations can be prevented by the coaching staff communicating the equipment rules to players prior to the teams arriving at the game.

During pregame duties, game officials should take time to spot-check players for illegal or improperly worn equipment and alert players and coaching staffs of any potential ►



► violations. Game officials should not allow any players to participate until all equipment issues have been resolved.

Prior to the ball becoming live, game officials through normal observations should verify that each player is properly and legally equipped. If a player is observed to not meet proper equipment rules, the play clock should be stopped and the equipment violation addressed.

Different rules will apply to enforcement depending if the stoppage was for illegal, improperly worn or missing equipment.

Unless halftime or overtime intermission occurs, any time the play

clock is interrupted for improperly worn or missing equipment by a player, the player is to be removed from the game for at least one play. Examples of improperly worn equipment include but are not limited to: Knee pads that do not cover the player's knees; shoulder pads that are not fully covered by the jersey; undershirts not tucked in that extend below the top of the waistline of the pants; and failure to wear a tooth or mouth protector. If any equipment becomes improperly worn during play, correction must be made before continued player participation is allowed. The player would not be required to be removed from the game

if the repair can be made promptly and does not delay the ready for play by more than 25 seconds.

Any time a player is found participating with illegal equipment, the player is to be removed from the game and the head coach should be penalized for unsportsmanlike conduct. Examples of illegal equipment include but are not limited to: Eye shade that is not a solid stroke or includes words, numbers, logos or other symbols; eye shields that are not clear (without the presence of any tint); play cards not worn on the wrist or arm; and uniform adornments (exemptions are legal towels and sweatbands properly worn). □

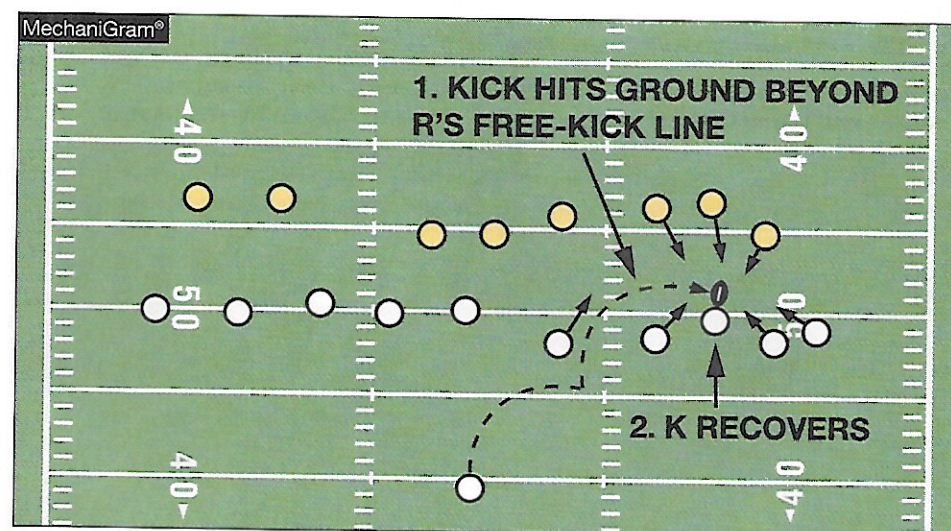
## Free Kick Reminders

One thing is certain: there will be at least two free kicks in every football game. Usually there will be several more. As a result, it is wise to refresh our memories on some rules relating to that important segment of the game.

**Formation for K.** After the ball is marked ready for play and until the ball is kicked, the following formation requirements must be met: No player, other than the kicker and the holder for a place kick, may be beyond his free-kick line; and no K players, other than the kicker, may be more than five yards behind the kicking team's free-kick line. A player satisfies this rule when no foot is on or beyond the line 5 yards behind K's free kick line. If one K player is more than 5 yards behind the restraining line and any other player kicks the ball, it is a foul (2-14-3a through b, 6-1-3a through c). At the time the ball is kicked, at least four K players must be on each side of the kicker (6-1-4).

**Illegal kick.** Rules 2-24-10, 6-1-11 and 6-1 PENALTY address a pop-up kick, a free kick in which the kicker drives the ball immediately into the ground, the ball strikes the ground once and goes into the air in the manner of a ball kicked directly off the tee. Such kicks are illegal and will be penalized as a dead-ball foul with a five-yard penalty.

A pop-up kick is not to be confused with a pooch kick (a kick designed to hit the ground in the open area between the forward-most players on team R's



If the free kick has gone beyond the plane of the receiver's free-kick line and has touched the ground, any K player may then recover. Both conditions must be met — has touched the ground and has gone beyond the plane. The order of occurrence has no bearing on the fact that K may then recover. However K may not advance a recovered kick.

free-kick line and those in the next group); a "kangaroo" kick (in which the kicker drives the ball into the ground to create two or three low bounces then one high, arching bounce); and a drop kick, in which the ball is allowed to hit the ground and kicked as it is rising. The pooch, kangaroo and drop kicks are legal.

**Blocking by K.** No member of the kicking team shall initiate contact to (block) an opponent on a free kick until

the legal kick has traveled 10 yards; the kicking team is eligible to recover a free-kicked ball; or the receiving team initiates a block within the neutral zone (9-3-7a through c).

**Recovery or catch by K.** If any K player recovers or catches a free kick, the ball becomes dead. It belongs to him unless it is kick-catching interference and R chooses an awarded fair catch or unless it is first touching. Any K player may recover the ball before it goes ►



► beyond R's free-kick line if it is touched first by any receiver. Such touching in the neutral zone by R is ignored if it is caused by K pushing or blocking R into contact with the ball or if any K player muffs or bats the ball into contact with R. Any K player may recover a free kick if it has both touched the ground and goes beyond the plane of R's free-kick

line. The two requirements may occur in any order. If a free kick becomes dead inbounds between the goal lines while no player is in possession, or inbounds anywhere while opponents are in joint possession, the ball is awarded to R (6-1-6).

**PLAY:** A kickoff by K1 from K's 40 is muffed by R1 near his 20-yard line. The

muff is caught by K2 at the 18 and he advances into R's end zone. **RULING:** It will be K's ball first and 10 from R's 18. K2 may catch or recover the muffed kick, but may not advance. The ball is dead when K gains possession. The covering game official should sound the whistle to stop play immediately when the ball becomes dead. □

# 2022 NFHS Game Officials Manual Points of Emphasis

The NFHS Football Game Officials Manual Committee has identified the following as Points of Emphasis for 2022-2023.

## Communication Between Coaches and Game Officials

Football is an emotional game, due not only to the amount of physical contact between players but also to the

competitive spirit ingrained in most players and coaches. Game officials and coaches must recognize the passion and intensity inherent in the game and manage their interactions in a way that avoids stoking the fire of emotional response to game situations.

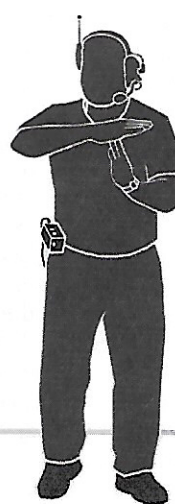
Game officials must recognize their role in the game: to provide a service to the coaches and players in an unemotional and impartial manner.

Game officials must always be respectful and maintain a calm demeanor in their comments to coaches, especially when tension is high. Game officials must avoid the urge to respond in kind to coaches who are vocal in their disagreement of the judgment of game officials. The game official's job is to de-escalate the tension and explain the decision in a concise and matter-of-fact manner. This is difficult to do, ►

PlayPic®  
A



PlayPic®  
B



Late in the second or fourth period, game officials should be aware of situations in which coaches may wish to request time-outs. Factors impacting the time remaining in a game include score, field position, available time-outs, injury and penalty timing. A quick glance to the sideline in those situations (PlayPic A) can save valuable seconds before a time-out is requested (PlayPic B).



► especially when a coach is screaming at a game official. In those cases, the game official must actively listen to what the coach is saying and then respond factually and unemotionally. Game officials must anticipate game situations where coaches will be upset and preemptively diffuse the situation. This requires strong communications skills and empathy and understanding of the coach's perspective. A game official should never threaten the coach with consequences for their behavior, nor should a game official become defensive. If a coach crosses the line, then the game official's option is to flag the coach for unsportsmanlike conduct. However, throwing a flag should be a last resort. A better approach is to clearly and calmly tell the coach that the comments or behavior are unacceptable, and that it's difficult to focus on the action on the field if the coach is repeatedly distracting the game official.

Coaches must understand that their behavior has a profound impact on their players. Players tend to behave the way their coaches behave. If coaches show little respect for game officials and make derogatory comments, players will likely treat game officials similarly. Coaches should win gracefully and lose with dignity. Coaches must also understand that the football field is an extension of the classroom and must set a strong example for their players to follow. This includes respecting the decisions of game officials even when they disagree, and handling disagreements in a civil and dignified manner. This doesn't mean that coaches must accept everything that occurs during the game without emotion. Rather, it means that if there is a disagreement, any discussion with game officials regarding that disagreement should be constructive and respectful, not confrontational. Handling any disagreement in a business-like manner teaches players good sportsmanship, which is a perennial focus of the NFHS.

By communicating respectfully, both game officials and coaches will leave with a positive experience. Neither game officials nor coaches do their jobs for the money; rather, they do it because of their love of the game. Through coaches' and game officials' behavior toward each other, players will learn a valuable life lesson regarding how to handle conflict. ►

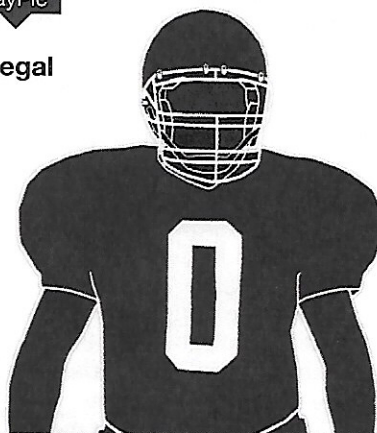
## Zero is a Legal Number

Zero is now a legal uniform number. However, it may not precede another number. Such uniform numbers

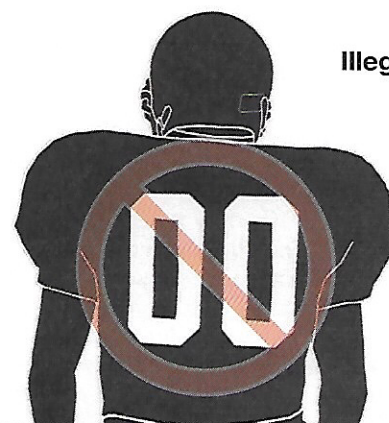
as 00 or 01 are illegal. The change affects Rules 1-4-3, Figure 1-4-2, 1-5-1c(1), 7-2-5b EXCEPTIONS and 7-5-6a.

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Legal



Illegal



Each player shall be numbered 0 through 99 inclusive. Any number preceded by the digit zero such as "00" is illegal.

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## ► Officiating Intentional Grounding

A new, second exception to the intentional grounding rule has been added effective with the 2022 season.

Intentional grounding is a foul when a forward pass is thrown into an area not occupied by an eligible receiver, or, when a forward pass is intentionally thrown incomplete to save loss of yardage or to conserve time. These acts are fouls in NFHS play with two exceptions:

- NFHS Rule 7-5-2 EXCEPTION 1 — It is legal for a player positioned directly behind the snapper to conserve time by intentionally throwing the ball forward to the ground immediately after receiving the snap that has neither been muffed nor touched the ground.

- NFHS Rule 7-5-2 EXCEPTION 2 (NEW) — It is legal for a player to conserve yardage by intentionally throwing an incomplete forward pass if:

- a) The passer has been beyond the lateral boundary of the free-blocking zone as established at the snap; and
- b) The pass reaches the neutral zone including the extension beyond the sideline.

The free-blocking zone, as determined at the snap, is 4 yards on each side of the football (3 yards in 6-, 8-, and 9-player). The referee can use the following guidelines to judge whether the passer has been beyond the lateral boundary of the free-blocking zone:

- If a passer moves at least three full steps laterally they have likely left the free-blocking zone.
- In normal splits, the inside foot of the tight end is in the free-blocking zone.
- The distance between a hash mark and the nearest goal post upright is 5 yards.
- The goal post uprights are almost 4 yards from the center of the field.
- By keeping these distances in mind, the referee may be better able to judge whether a passer has been beyond the lateral boundary of the free-blocking zone. Additionally, if the ball is spotted on a hash mark, on a goal post upright, or in the center of the field, then these become very convenient points of reference to assist in determining whether the passer was beyond the lateral boundary of the free-blocking zone.

Remember, if the passer has not met both requirements in EXCEPTION 2, it remains a foul if there was no eligible

receiver in the area, or, if a receiver in the area cannot make a bona-fide attempt to catch the forward pass (e.g., the pass is intentionally thrown to the ground short of an eligible receiver, or the pass is intentionally thrown over an eligible receiver's head). Many game officials choose to ignore this foul if there is a receiver in the general area of the pass. However, if the referee judges the pass was intentionally thrown incomplete, it is a foul. This is a foul that requires good crew communication and could be called after the game officials have gathered and discussed the play, or could result in the referee rescinding a flag that was dropped at the time the pass was thrown should a game official have additional information to provide to the referee that could alter the ruling.

Knowledgeable game officials recognize that some passes are incomplete or do not arrive in the immediate vicinity of the receiver because of the lack of skill on the part of the passer, a broken pattern on the part of the intended receiver, or because the passer's accuracy was affected by the action of the defense. These game officials can also recognize an intentional and purposeful act and they can consistently and judiciously administer the rules so that the team whose passer purposely incompletes a pass is penalized as required. 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 loss of down.

### Guides For "When In Question"

- Passer in or outside of free-blocking zone — the passer is outside of the free-blocking zone.
- Forward pass crossed the line of scrimmage or the line of scrimmage extended— forward pass has crossed the line of scrimmage or the line of scrimmage extended.

### Time-Sensitive Situations — End of Second and Fourth Periods

Why is this important? One minute at the beginning of the game and one minute at the end of the game are both 60 seconds. Factors impacting the time remaining in a game include: score, field position, available time-outs, injury and penalty timing, and an early season game against a state championship. When one

or a number of these situations occur, the game can become time-sensitive and the number of seconds in a minute carry great importance. Not only will the game be on the line, but everyone will be watching the clock.

NFHS football rules have been put in place to protect the integrity of the game timing. These rules are designed to prevent a team from either using an excessive amount of time or unfairly conserving time. The key to working time-sensitive situations is to understand the environment, and communicate that understanding to the game officials, coaches and players.

Working in a time-sensitive environment requires a heightened sense of awareness. When there are natural breaks in the game, game officials should remind each other when these conditions may exist. Game officials should discuss special clock rules relating to game time, fouls and injuries. Coaches should be reminded of the number of remaining time-outs, and that the game officials will be looking to them for their use. Game officials should also keep both teams informed of when the game clock will be starting (on the ready-for-play or on the snap). Game officials must know when to hustle to get the ball spotted, and referees should maintain a consistent tempo when winding the clock after an awarded first down, usually six to eight seconds into the play clock. If time may expire during live play, the off-game official (first to complete dead ball officiating) should check the game clock to determine if time remains in the half. If there is a penalty or other clock stopping event, game officials need to know whether the half is over, there is time remaining on the game clock or whether there will be an untimed down.

So, why is all of this important? Being prepared for time-sensitive situations can be the difference between a good night's sleep and multiple restless nights.

### Free-Kick Mechanics

Except for the kickoffs starting each half, all others follow success or failure of teams on the previous series and are an opportunity to improve their position for subsequent play. During a kickoff, all 22 players are briefly moving the same direction (no kickoff shall start with more or less than 22 players), then heading toward each other at full speed ►



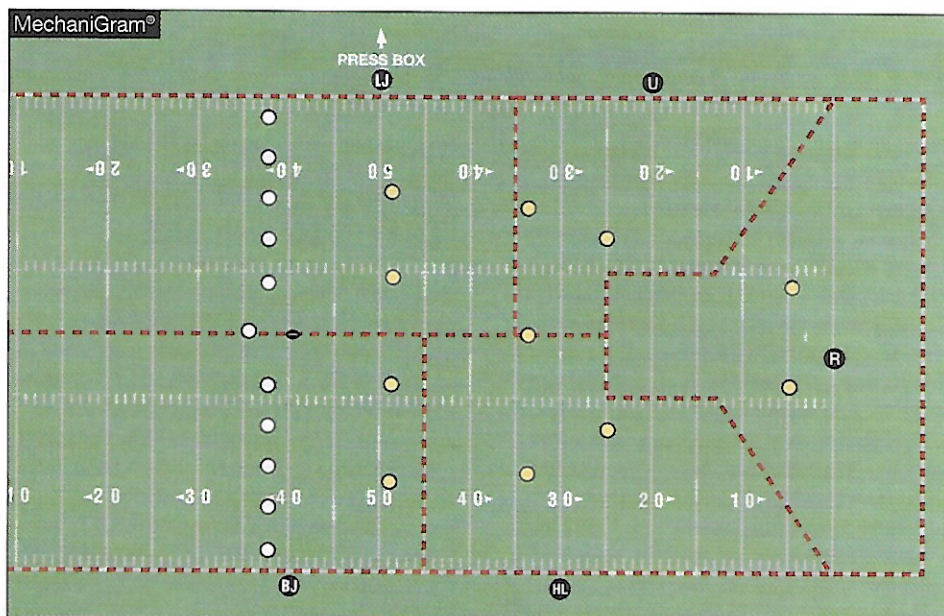
- eventually merging at a point of attack. Contact must be observed over the entire field while game officials themselves are moving - a challenging task whether four-, five- or seven-crew members are present.

Successful coverage of kickoffs rests on a thorough pregame discussion. Depending on the number of crew members used, specific assignments of free-kick lines, the legality of the kick, downfield areas or numbered kicking team members must be acknowledged. For the traditional deep kick, coverage of the goal line and pylons, downfield movement, return in or away from the game official's position, clock starting and likely areas of illegal contact must be covered. Teams may prefer a shorter kick (referred to as a "pooch" kick) or they may execute a squib kick. Both types of kicks limit return options. A fair catch is a possible outcome of a pooch kick. Understanding of which game official has responsibility for the catch versus contact around the receiver must be discussed. The squib kick is quickly grounded and maintains the status of a kick and the officiating challenges of a loose ball. Illegal contact, first touching and ultimate possession require precise crew actions.


The onside kick is a unique challenge. Responsibility for the kick legality, free kick lines, first touching by Team K, contact - both who initiated and if legal - must be discussed because contact will occur quickly. Possession will be aggressively fought for. Quick and decisive movement, determination of possession and restraining of extra participants are needed.

Fouls on free kicks range from the dead ball (encroachment and illegal kicking formation), live-ball fouls where it is critical to determine if the foul occurred during the kick or after change of possession to correctly enforce and the most common - the free kick out of bounds untouched by Team R. Careful explanations of options to the offended sideline requires precise crew communication in offering possible enforcement scenarios.

With a thorough pregame discussion of free kick mechanics, rules and different kick scenarios, the crew will be better equipped to handle unusual circumstances that may arise. □



Successful coverage of free kicks depends on game officials observing players in their assigned coverage zones. For the traditional deep kick, coverage of the goal line and pylons, downfield movement, return in or away from the game official's position, starting the game clock and likely areas of illegal contact must be covered in the pre-game conference.



## LEARNING CENTER

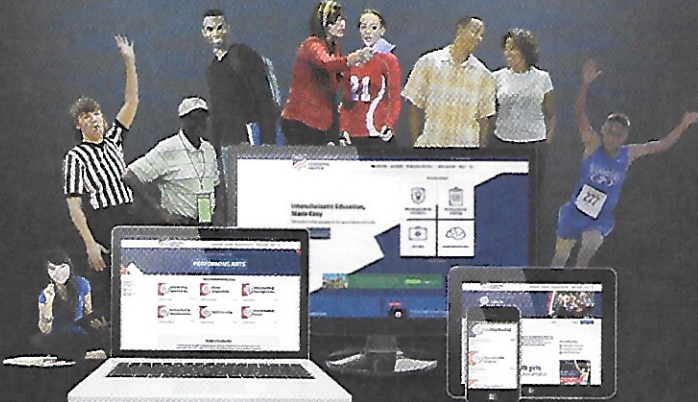
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# Football Injury Surveillance Study

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 17th year of sports exposure and injury data.

Football continues to have the highest injury rate of all sports currently included in the High School RIO study (note, COVID-19 may have affected these results). Among the nine sports included in the original sample of High School RIO for which national estimates are constructed (i.e. football, boys' and girls' soccer, girls' volleyball, boys' and girls' basketball, wrestling, baseball, and softball), the 2020/21

## RIO REPORTING INFORMATION ONLINE

data show concussions to be the most common injury in football (14.6% of all injuries) followed by ankle strains/sprains (12.4%) and knee strains/sprains (9.0%). Football had the highest rate of concussion, and the rate of concussion remains higher in competition than in practice. Despite a recent decline in concussion rates from 2017/18 through 2020/21, concussion rates have increased over the entire study period. Practice-related concussions were most commonly sustained while blocking, tackling, and being tackled. Among all 20 sports included in the High School RIO study, football had the highest rate of ACL injury in competition and the second highest overall rate of ACL injury after girls' lacrosse. Football also had a higher rate of surgery compared to other

sports, and the rate of injuries in football that required surgery has increased over time.

The COVID-19 Pandemic remains a challenge for all high school sports due to extended absences and altered training schedules. In addition, each year, football rule changes are implemented in an effort to minimize the risk of injury. Through diligent injury surveillance, the risk of injury in football as well as the effectiveness of injury prevention efforts can be measured.

If you are interested in more information about the High School RIO study or you are a certified athletic trainer who is interested in becoming a reporter for football, please email the High School RIO team at [highschoolrio@datalyscenter.org](mailto:highschoolrio@datalyscenter.org). Please visit <https://www.datalyscenter.org/rio-annual-reports/> to access the annual summary report. □

## Flashback: 2021 Rule Change

A rule change approved by the NFHS Football Rules Committee for the 2021 season is still in effect for 2022.

Blocking below the waist (2-17-2). A legal block below the waist occurs when:

- All players involved in the

blocking are on the line of scrimmage and in the zone at the snap.

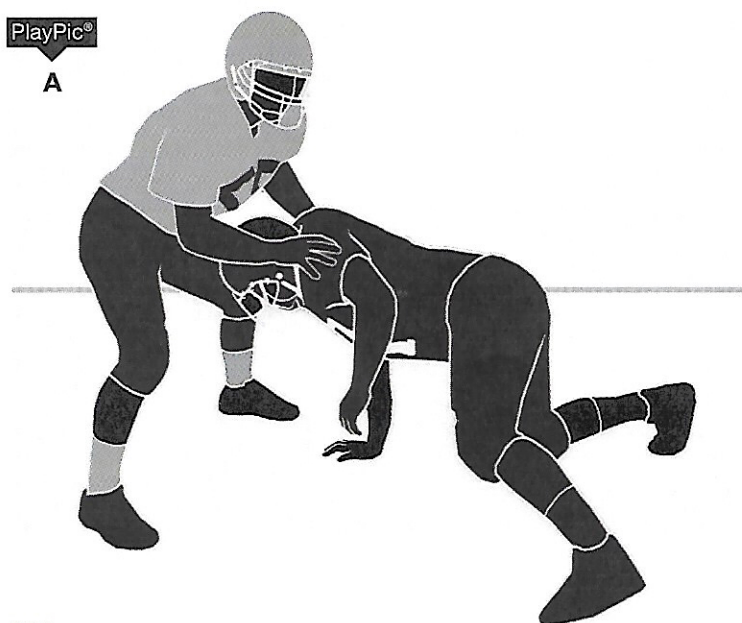
- The contact is in the zone.
- The block is an immediate, initial action following the snap.

The initial contact in PlayPic A is

with the hands below the waist. When the blocker finishes the block below the waist as in PlayPic B, it is not a foul only if it satisfies all three conditions. □

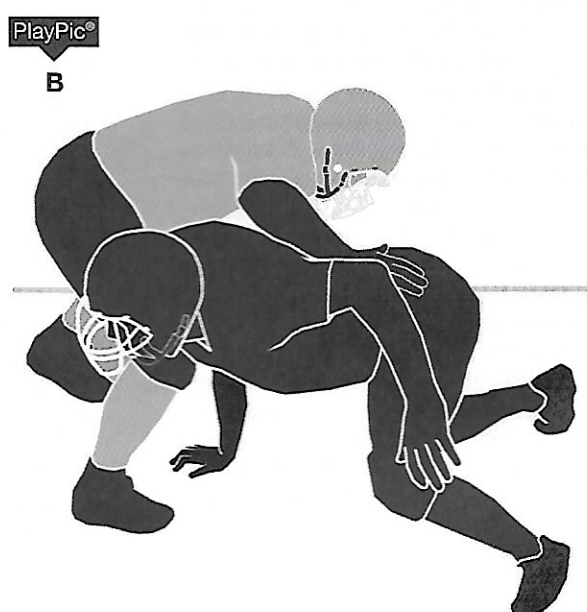
PlayPic®

A



PlayPic®

B





# What's the Catch? A Guide to Complete and Incomplete Passes

A catch is the act of establishing player possession of a live ball which is in flight, and first contacting the ground inbounds while maintaining possession of the ball, or having the forward progress of the player in possession stopped while the opponent is carrying the player in possession and inbounds.

An airborne player who has forward progress stopped inbounds and is carried out of bounds by an opponent before contacting the ground is awarded a catch at the spot of forward progress.

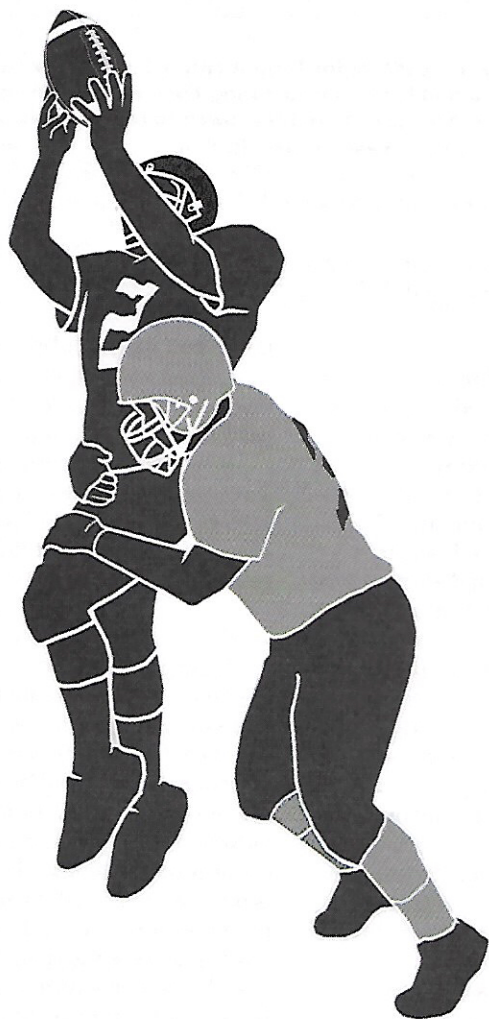
**PLAY 1:** As seen in PlayPic A, A1 leaps near the sideline to attempt to catch a pass near B's 30-yard line. A1 is airborne when he controls the ball attempting to complete the catch. In PlayPic B, A1 is carried off the field by B2 landing out of bounds. **RULING:** That is a catch.

**PLAY 2:** A pass from A1 is thrown near the intersection of the sideline and the goal line. A2, running toward the goal line, leaps and possesses the pass at the 3-yard line and is forcibly:

(a) contacted from the front by B1 (not carried) so that A2 contacts the ground out of bounds opposite B's 4-yard line; or (b) contacted from the side by B1 and A2 first contacts the ground out of bounds opposite the 3-yard line; or (c) grasped from behind and carried by B1 so that first contact with the ground by A2 is out of bounds 1 yard beyond the goal line; or (d) tackled from behind by B1 so that A2 first contacts the ground in the end zone. **RULING:** In (a) and (b), it is an incomplete pass. In (c) and (d), it is a touchdown. □

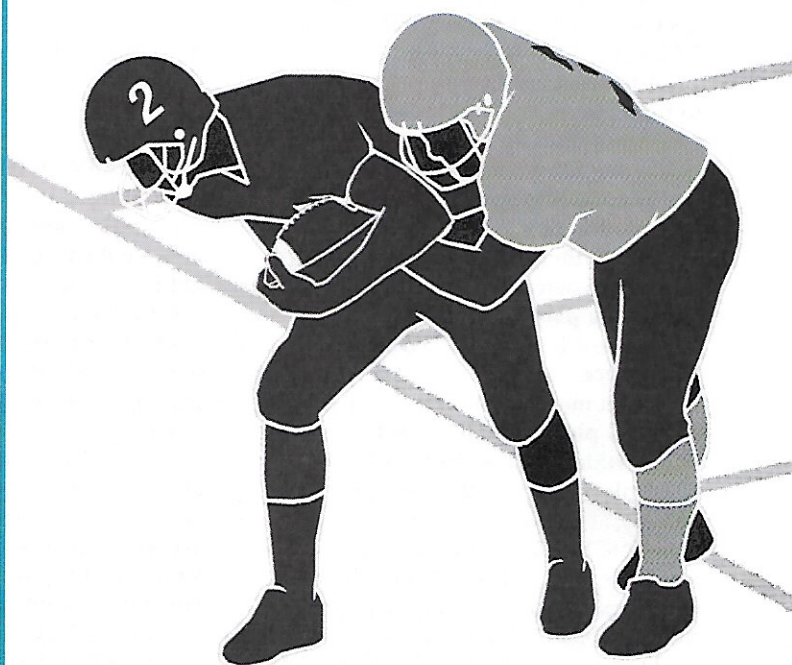
PlayPic®

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# Sub Sightings

## The Rules Regarding Live- and Dead-Ball Substitutions

Substitution rules have undergone many changes over the years. In the early years of football, teams were limited in the number of substitutions they could employ during a period. Today, teams may freely substitute but they must do it within the confines of the rules.

Here is a review of the rules, including the differences between live-ball and dead-ball fouls for illegal substitution.

### Definitions

A substitute is a team member who may replace a player or fill a player vacancy. A substitute becomes a player when he enters the field and communicates with a teammate or a game official, enters the huddle, is positioned in a formation or participates in the play. An entering substitute is not considered to be a player for encroachment restrictions until he is on his team's side of the neutral zone (2-8, 2-32-15).

A team member entering the field to fill a player vacancy remains a substitute until he is on his team's side of the neutral zone (2-32-15).

A replaced player is one who has been notified by a substitute that he is to leave the field. A player is also replaced when the entering substitute becomes a player (2-32-12).

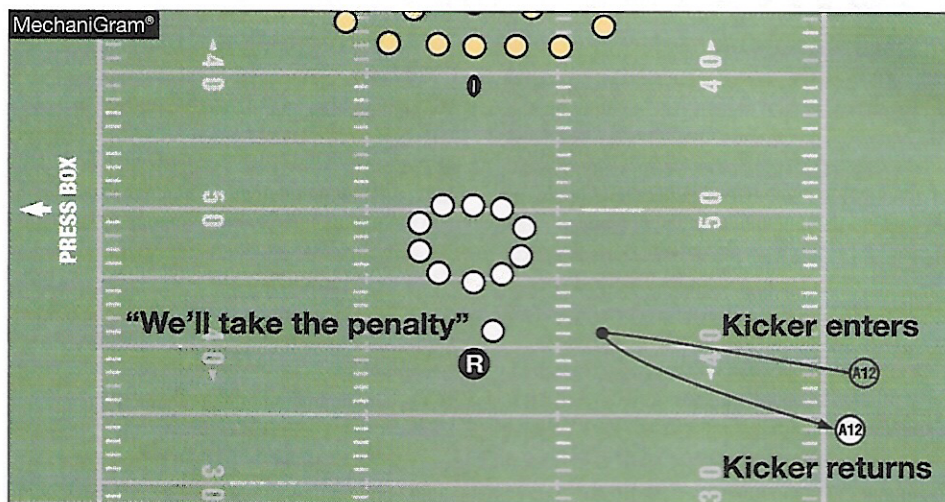
### Procedure

Upon meeting the criteria of 2-32-12, replaced players shall begin to leave the field within three seconds (3-7-1).

A player, replaced player or a substitute who has been unable to complete the substitution, is required to leave the field at the side on which his team box is located and go directly to his team box (3-7-2).

During the same dead-ball interval, no substitute shall become a player and then withdraw and no player shall withdraw and re-enter as a substitute unless a penalty is accepted, a dead-ball foul occurs, there is a charged time-out or the period ends (3-7-3).

An entering substitute shall be on



Following a third-down play, a substitute for Team A enters the field for an apparent punting situation. However, a foul has occurred during the down and Team A accepts the penalty. The substitute who previously entered is allowed to return to his team box since the penalty acceptance cancels the unwanted substitution.

his team's side of the neutral zone when the ball is snapped or free kicked (3-7-5).

### Live-ball illegal substitution

During a down a replaced player or substitute who attempts unsuccessfully to leave the field and who does not participate in or affect the play, constitutes an illegal substitution (3-7-4).

During a down a replaced player or substitute who enters but does not participate constitutes illegal substitution (3-7-6).

If a replaced player or substitute attempts to leave the field, but does not get off prior to the snap, the foul is considered as having occurred simultaneously with the snap and the penalty is enforced from the previous spot (3-7-4, 10-4-2a).

It is a live-ball illegal substitution foul if a replaced player or substitute goes off the field on the wrong side of the field during the down (10-4-2a).

If a replaced player or substitute enters the field during the down, but does not participate, it is a foul for illegal substitution by a nonplayer, a 5-yard

penalty from the succeeding spot (3-7-5, 9-6-4a).

### Dead-ball illegal substitution

If a replaced player does not leave the field within three seconds, it is a dead-ball, illegal substitution foul (2-7-1).

When a replaced player or substitute leaves on the wrong side of the field or goes across the end line prior to the snap, it is a dead-ball foul for illegal substitution (3-7-2, 10-4-5b).

### Advice for game officials

If the covering game official's count of players has determined there are more than 11 prior to the snap, a dead-ball illegal substitution foul should be charged since a replaced player(s) did not leave within three seconds. However, if the covering game official's count is not completed before the snap is imminent or if the substitution has not been monitored, it becomes illegal participation at the snap if there are more than 11 are in the formation. Each team is responsible for substituting legally and for replaced players to leave within three seconds as required (3-7-4, 9-6-4c). □



# It's the Whole Tooth: That Protector is Important

Tooth and mouth protectors are included on the list of required player equipment according to Rule 1-5-1d(5)a. They may must be worn throughout a down.

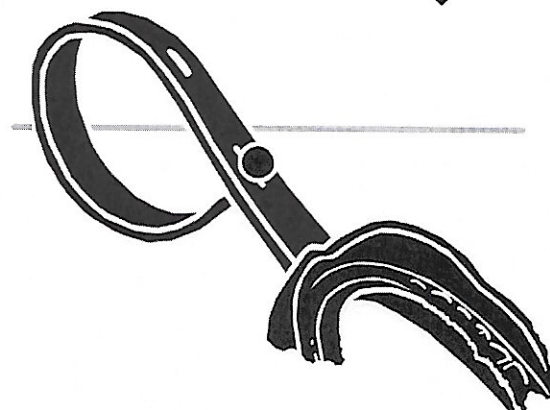
Other rules pertaining to tooth and mouth protectors:

- They must include an occlusal (protecting and separating the biting surfaces) portion.
- They must include a labial (protecting the teeth and supporting structures) portion.
- They must cover the posterior teeth with adequate thickness.
- It is recommended the protector be properly fitted, protecting the

anterior (leading) dental arch and: constructed from a model made from an impression of the individual's teeth, or constructed and fitted to the individual by impressing the teeth into the tooth and mouth protector itself.

Tooth and mouth protectors that have been altered from the manufacturer's original design/production or have been chewed to the point they no longer provide the required protection, such as seen in the PlayPic, must be replaced before the athlete may participate in the game. □

PlayPic®



## Review of Pass Interference Enforcement

Besides holding, pass interference is probably the most subjective foul called during a football game. Whether it's defensive pass interference or offensive pass interference, you have to enforce the penalty properly.

Offensive pass interference results in a 15-yard penalty from the previous spot with no loss of 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:** The penalty is declined by rule. 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.

**PLAY 3:** Same as play 2 except B1 is downed at B's 30-yard line. **RULING:** Team B must decline the penalty to keep the ball.

Defensive pass interference results in a 15-yard penalty from the previous spot. There is no loss of down.

**PLAY 4:** 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 5:** 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 6:** During a two-point try, B1 is flagged for defensive pass interference in B's end zone.

**RULING:** The try is repeated from the one and a half-yard line. □

### QUICK TIP

**Check the line-to-gain equipment thoroughly before each game.**

Don't assume the chain is 10 yards long. Start at the goal line and stretch the chain to the 10-yard line, then move to the 5-yard line and stretch it to the 15-yard line. You may find out that either the chain is messed up or the field is improperly marked.



# Fine Lines: How the Boundaries Affect the Game

Passes can be thrown from a spot near the goal line or the sideline. If the pass is legal (not grounding), it doesn't matter whether the passer was in the end zone or the field of play. Near the sideline, a common issue is whether the passer was inbounds when he released the ball, especially when he is rolling out at full speed.

When it comes to catching a forward pass near a boundary line, there are many more variables. When the receiver is near a sideline, the questions are whether the play has been completed inbounds and had the player previously gone out-of-bounds. Receptions near the goal line may involve determining if a touchdown was scored, if the pass was intercepted, whether a safety or touchback occurred, or does the momentum exception apply.

## Passes at the sideline

To complete a catch, the receiver must contact the ground inbounds with the ball in his possession prior to touching out-of-bounds unless he is caught and carried out-of-bounds by a defender so that his forward progress is stopped in the field of play. If the receiver is simply knocked out-of-bounds (regardless of direction), the pass is incomplete. When in question, the pass is incomplete (2-4-1).

Eligible pass receivers must stay inbounds. If an originally eligible receiver is blocked out-of-bounds, he must return at the first opportunity (9-6-1). In a practical sense those words mean the same thing. In those cases, it's as if the receiver never went out at all. Players are not allowed to take advantage of being blocked out-of-bounds by "hiding" and then returning inbounds later to catch the pass.

A player who goes out-of-bounds without being blocked out may not return to the field of play (9-6-1). If he comes back before a change of possession, it is a foul for illegal participation and the 15-yard penalty is enforced under the all-but-one principle.

If a receiver touches a pass while



**It would seem unlikely there will be a touchdown on this play. The defender's body position is such that it would seem to prevent the receiver from stretching the ball so that it would break the plane of the goal line. The receiver's main concern is (or should be) maintaining control of the ball when he contacts the ground. If he does so, it will be a catch and the ball will be placed at the spot of forward progress.**

he is out-of-bounds, it is simply an incomplete pass. A player is out-of-bounds when any part of his body touches anything other than another player or a game official on or outside a boundary line. If a player is not touching out-of-bounds, he is inbounds (2-29-1).

**PLAY 1:** A1 runs along the sideline and, after inadvertently stepping on the sideline, jumps. While in the air he (a) controls the ball and lands inbounds, or (b) bats the ball to A2, who catches the ball. A1 then lands out-of-bounds. **RULING:** In (a) and (b), the pass is complete, but A1 is guilty of illegal participation in (a) because he returned inbounds.

## Passes near the goal line

Possession of a live ball in the opponent's end zone is a touchdown (8-2-1). When an airborne player gains

control of a pass in the end zone (or anywhere else on the field), the ball is not immediately dead because the process of completing the catch is not finished.

An airborne player is a player not in contact with the ground because he leaps, jumps, dives, launches, etc., in other than normal running action. If he is airborne when he secures the ball, he must also return to the ground inbounds with any part of his body while maintaining possession of the ball. Any such player who strikes a pylon on his way to the ground has touched out-of-bounds and the pass is incomplete (1-2-4, 2-29-1).

When an airborne player over the end zone is contacted by a defender and comes to the ground in the field of play, the catch is completed. The ball is dead when he completes the catch by touching the ground; thus, a touchdown is scored.

**PLAY 2:** Fourth and goal on team B's 10-yard line. A1 throws forward to A2, who jumps straight up. A2 gets a firm grip on the ball about one yard deep in team B's end zone. A2 is airborne when shoved by B3 and lands on his feet at team B's 1-yard line. After A2 regains his balance, he runs and is downed at team B's 5-yard line. **RULING:** That's a touchdown. A2's forward progress is in the end zone and the ball is dead when he comes to the ground (2.15.1).

If the ball becomes dead in team B's end zone in possession of team B, it is a safety or a touchback depending upon which team supplied the force that put the ball into the end zone. Here is an illustrative play.

**PLAY 3:** A1's pass is intercepted by B2 (a) in team B's end zone, or (b) at team B's 2-yard line. In either case, B2 retreats (no momentum) near the end line and is tackled there. **RULING:** In (a), it is a touchback. The force that caused the ball to go into the end zone was the pass. In (b), it is a safety as the force or impetus belongs to B2, who voluntarily carried the ball into the end zone. □