

TIME FOR CHANGES

NFHS Adjusts Rules Regarding Play Clock, Halftime



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.

By Jeffrey Stern

Time took center stage when the NFHS Football Rules Committee met for its annual meeting in Indianapolis from Jan. 12-14. The committee amended two rules regarding

The caseplays in this column are presented by Referee to explain the changes but are unofficial. Check NFHS publications for official interpretations. The changes are presented in approximate order of importance.

Play Clock 3-6-1a(1)e Excs. 2 and 3

To prevent a potential timing advantage, rules regarding the play clock were 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.

“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 official’s timeout, 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.”

In the event both an offensive and defensive player are involved, the officials will determine for which player the officials’ timeout 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.

Play 1: Third and 10 from team A’s 20 yardline. Team B trails by four points and is granted its last charged team timeout with 41 seconds remaining in the game. When play resumes, A1 takes the snap and kneels, thinking that will end the game because 39 seconds are on the game clock, which is running. B2 appears to be injured and an officials’ timeout is declared with 36 seconds remaining on the game clock. **Ruling 1:** B2 must leave the game due to the apparent injury. The play clock will be set to 40 seconds due to the injury to a team B player. The play and game clocks will begin on the ready-for-play signal. Team A will not have to snap the ball.

Also, rule 3-6-1a(1)f 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.

Play 2: Fourth and 10 from team K's 20 yardline. K1's punt is muffed by R2 at team K's 45 yardline. Prone K3 recovers at the 50 yardline. **Ruling 2:** Team K is awarded a new series at the 50 yardline. The play clock will be set to 25 seconds and will start on the ready for play. The game clock starts on the snap.

Play 3: Third and 10 from team K's 20 yardline. K1's punt is blocked. The ball remains behind the line and is recovered by K2 at his own 18 yardline. **Ruling 3:** The game clock should continue to run. It will be team K's ball, fourth and 12 from its own 18 yardline. The play clock should be set to 40 seconds and will start when the ball is placed on the ground and the official has stepped away from the ball.

Modified Halftime 3-1-6d

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, the opposing coaches can mutually agree to shorten the halftime intermission, provided there is at least a one-minute intermission (not including the three-minute warmup period).

Play 4: With 1:02 left in the second period, a storm causes the game to be halted. After a one hour, 15-minute delay, it is safe to resume play. The remaining 1:02 is played to finish the second period. The opposing head coaches agree (a) to start the third period immediately, (b) to a 10-minute halftime intermission, or (c) a one-minute halftime intermission. **Ruling 4:** Incorrect in (a). A halftime of at least one minute must follow completion of the second period. Legal in (b) and (c). The third period may begin after the agreed upon halftime intermission and the mandatory three-minute warmup is concluded.

Ineligible Receivers 7-5-12

Contradictory language in the ineligible-receivers rule was eliminated. 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 ineligibles downfield are terminated.

Coaches Designate Team Representative for Penalty Decisions 1-4-1, 1-4-4, 2-32-5, 3-5-2, 10-1-1, 10-1-2, 10-2-4

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 officials to obtain penalty acceptance or declination decisions from the head coach or his designated representative rather than by consulting the team captains.

Implementing the rule changes 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 pregame meeting with the 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 timeouts as in rule 1-4-1.

'Spiking' a Pass 7-5-2e Exc., Table 7-5-2e Exc., Table 7-5e Exc.

A player positioned directly behind the snapper 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. That act, known as "spiking" the ball, was previously legal only if the passer took a direct hand-to-hand snap.

Play 5: Late in the fourth quarter with the clock running, quarterback A1 is in shotgun formation. He takes the snap and surveys the defense. Seeing linebacker B2 starting

to blitz, he throws the ball forward to the ground. Ruling 5: Foul for intentional grounding. In order to legally ground the ball to conserve time, the ball must be thrown immediately after receiving the snap.

Play 6: A1 is in shotgun formation. The snap (a) flies over A1's head and hits the ground behind him, or (b) bounces off A1's chest. A1 recovers the errant snap, then throws the ball forward to the ground. Ruling 6: Foul for intentional grounding in (a) and (b). The ball cannot be spiked after it has been muffed or has hit the ground.

Disconcerting Acts 7-1-9 Pen., 9-5-1d

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. Conversely, if team A committed any act clearly intended to cause team B to encroach, the penalty was five yards for a false start. The committee eliminated that imbalance by making a disconcerting act a separate foul with a five-yard penalty.

“Coaches and 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,” Tharp said.

Signal 23, one hand behind the head, formerly used for failure to wear required equipment, is to be used. That signal became moot when that penalty was eliminated in 2018.

Play 7: Linebacker B1 is in a two-point stance across from offensive tackle A2 along their respective lines of scrimmage. While the quarterback is calling signals, B1 (a) claps his hands repeatedly, (b) stomps his foot repeatedly, or (c) yells indiscernible verbiage into his opponent's face. Ruling 7: In (a), (b) and (c), B1's acts were designed to cause team A to commit a false start. Team B should be penalized five yards for a disconcerting act. That is a dead-ball foul and a penalty is assessed whether or not team A reacts.

Points of Emphasis

Sportsmanship, intentional grounding, ineligible receivers downfield and offensive formations were identified as points of emphasis.

Sportsmanship

When considering sportsmanship, many may first think only of the athletes and coaches. Proper sportsmanship also includes: the pregame warmup period, postgame handshake, spectator behavior (students and adults), public address announcements, and announcers and bands.

The behavior of coaches and players 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.

Officials generally do not assume control until taking the field approximately 30 minutes prior to the scheduled kickoff. Once the contest begins, school administrators are then responsible for the proper conduct of all spectators. That may take the form of reading a sportsmanship public address announcement prior to the contest and keen vigilance for possible issues during the contest.

Intentional Grounding

One of the most misunderstood rules at the high school level is intentional grounding. It is a foul whenever a forward pass is thrown in 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 is when the passer intentionally throws the ball forward to the ground immediately after receiving the snap.

At the college and NFL level, throwing the ball away when the quarterback is outside the pocket is legal as long as the ball reaches the line of scrimmage extended. High school quarterbacks are throwing the ball away to avoid a sack when outside the pocket, thinking it is legal based on what is seen on Saturdays and Sundays. High school referees need to be aware of those situations and, with the help of the line

judge and head linesman, make the correct call.

Ineligible Downfield

Some clarification was gained this year in regard to identifying when an ineligible team A player is illegally downfield on a pass play. The position of the ineligible 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 (two yards) at the moment the pass occurs. If B touches the pass in or behind the neutral zone, this restriction is terminated.

Scrimmage Formation

In order for team A 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. That 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.

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