



2014-2015 GAME OFFICIALS MANUAL **FOOTBALL POINTS OF EMPHASIS**

TARGETING/PLAYER SAFETY/ILLEGAL PERSONAL CONTACT

A primary goal of the NFHS Football Rules Committee continues to be keeping the game of scholastic football as safe as possible. In doing such, a more diligent approach to player safety must be adhered to by all game officials, players, coaches and administrators in order to achieve this goal.

Unsafe acts and techniques cannot be tolerated by those administering and participating in the game of football. Coaches and game officials must act proactively and decisively to eliminate, to the greatest extent possible, threats to the welfare of the student-athletes playing football. Fundamental adherence to current and newly-adopted rules is absolutely required to eliminate negative effects that committing unsafe acts and techniques has placed on our game. Participants must be made aware of unsafe techniques and refrain from their use. Those responsible for the administration of high school football need to exercise leadership and active supervision of the player safety aspects of the game.

We must recommit ourselves to the preservation of fair play which includes admonishing illegal acts both on the practice field and the field of play. Unwarranted and unnecessary “punishing” of an opponent has become a style of play which is specifically condemned. Illegal helmet contact is an act of initiating contact with the helmet against an opponent and remains a major safety concern in our sport.

The No.1 responsibility for game officials must be player safety. Any initiation of contact with the helmet is illegal; therefore, it must be penalized consistently and without warning. An enhanced approach to player safety is really a matter of attitude, technique, attention and supervision.

Some examples of fouls that merit our extra attention are launching, fouls against players obviously out of the play, helmet-to-helmet contact and fouls against defenseless players. No player shall target and initiate contact against an opponent with the crown (top) of his helmet, and no player shall target and initiate contact to the area above the shoulders of a defenseless opponent with the helmet, forearm, elbow or shoulder. The launch occurs when a player takes a running start, leaves his feet and uses the helmet to strike the opponent or by crouching and using an upward and forward thrust of the body to make contact above the shoulders of an opponent. It is an extremely dangerous maneuver to both players involved and deserves strict penalty and possible disqualification enforcement if flagrant. The game official must draw distinction between contact necessary to make a legal block or tackle, and that which targets a defenseless player.

The NFHS Game Officials Manual Committee believes that renewed emphasis on getting illegal acts out of the game will greatly improve player safety and preserve the great game of football.

ILLEGAL BLOCKING BELOW THE WAIST

Blocking below the waist is an occurrence that is governed by very specific rules and definitions. It is vital that game officials understand when a block below the waist is legal as noted in the definition of the free-blocking zone. The free-blocking zone is defined as a rectangular area extending 4 yards to either side of the spot of the snap and 3 yards behind each line of scrimmage. The following must occur in order for a player to legally block an opponent below the waist:

1. Both players must be lined up in the free-blocking zone at the snap.
2. Both players must be on the line of scrimmage at the snap.
3. The block must occur in the free-blocking zone.
4. The ball must remain in the free-blocking zone.

It is important for game officials and coaches to remember these requirements in a variety of situations and apply them equally to both the offense and the defense. Any player may block below the waist as long as the above requirements are met.

Due to the prevalence of the shotgun formation, more and more quarterbacks are positioned outside the free-blocking zone. In this formation the ball can leave the free-blocking zone very quickly. In order for any player to legally block below the waist when the offense is in this formation, the block must be initiated immediately following the snap and without hesitation. If the offensive player sets or pauses for any period of time, the opportunity to legally block below the waist has been eliminated.

PACING AND TEMPO

Football is a game of rhythm. Referees can do a lot to facilitate a game's rhythm by being consistent with the ready-for-play signal. This is called "Pace" or "Tempo." If an officiating crew is consistent in the way it gets the ball in play, the game flow will be enhanced.

Pace or tempo should be consistent throughout the game from the opening play until the final whistle. Teams may want to play a "hurry-up" offense or do a two-minute drill. That should not affect the pace or tempo set by the referee and their crew. Teams have to work within the established pace. Doing something different in the last two minutes can be unfair to a team's opponent. If a team wants to get more snaps, it has to work within the established pace of the game.

On regular scrimmage plays, the general recommendation is to sound the ready 3-5 seconds after the ball is placed. This does two things: keeps the game moving and gets teams thinking about their strategy. On change-of-possession plays, the signal should be delayed until substitutions are moving into position, but this, too, should be consistent. Referees should not wait to determine if offenses are huddled on a sideline, but sound the ready when the crew is set for the next play. Many times the teams are waiting for the whistle in order to come onto the field.

Referees are encouraged to give the ready while standing in full sight of clock operators at a distance of 10-12 yards from the ball.

The best rule for ready for play consistency is whether the crew is ready to officiate. Once a referee gets into a rhythm, so does the rest of the crew – and so do the teams.

Officiating crews can be a positive factor in the flow of the game by keeping a consistent pace.

KICKOFF MECHANICS AND COVERAGE

The NFHS Game Officials Manual Committee has again decided to readjust kickoff mechanics. With the implementation of new rules regarding free kick alignment restrictions by K, Rules 6-1-3b and 6-1-3c, the committee has decided to reemphasize game officials' positioning. The committee felt that reverting back to the 2010-2011 kickoff mechanics is better for overall field coverage. More kickoffs are long rather than short. With the application of these new rules, repositioning game officials on kickoffs should help with a better view and field coverage.

The referee will need to be positioned at the goal line, somewhere between the center of the field and the hash mark, toward the head linesman's side of the field. This allows the referee to be able to observe and determine the free kick alignment of K at the time of the kick (6-1-3b). The umpire is positioned at the 20-yard line, outside the field of play opposite the referee. The head linesman is positioned at the 30-yard line on his respective sideline outside the field of play. The line judge is on his particular sideline at the 50-yard line, outside the field of play, being aware of encroachment by R and watching for illegal blocks following the kick. During the interval, when the back judge hands the ball to K, the back judge may assist the kicking team with their alignment restrictions. This includes making sure there are at least four K players on each side of the ball and making sure K players are not more than 5 yards behind the 5 yard belt area from where the ball is being kicked (6-1-3c). The back judge will then be positioned at the K free-kick line on the head linesman's side of the field, outside the field of play. The back judge will need to be aware of illegal formation and encroachment by K (Dead Ball) as well as blocking restrictions by K following the kick. If an onside kick is anticipated, the head linesman and umpire move up to R's free-kick line. The back judge and line judge cover K's free-kick line. The referee still has deep coverage.