**2016 NFHS FOOTBALL RULES CHANGES**

1-5-1d(5)a  Completely clear or completely white tooth and mouth protectors are no longer prohibited.

1-5 NOTE; 1-5-2b  Football gloves are now required to meet either the new SFIA specification or the existing NOCSAE test standard at the time of manufacture.

2-17; 9-3-6; 9-3 PENALTY  Clipping in the free-blocking zone is now illegal.

**2016 EDITORIAL CHANGES**

Diagram NOTE; 1-5-1b(1); 1-5-1b(2)a, (3)a; 1-5-3a(1)a; 2-38; 4-3-2; 5-1-1b; 7-5 PENALTY; 9-3-5; 9-4-3h; 9-5-1a; 9-8-1a; 10-2-5; 10-5-1a; PENALTY SUMMARY.

**2016 POINTS OF EMPHASIS**

1. Risk Minimization
2. Legal and Illegal Blocks
3. Legal Jerseys, Pants and Pads
4. Unfair Acts
COLOR RESTRICTIONS REMOVED FROM TOOTH AND MOUTH PROTECTORS (1-5-1d(5)a): Completely clear or completely white tooth and mouth protectors are no longer prohibited. Tooth and mouth protectors shall include an occlusal (protecting and separating the biting surfaces) portion and include a labial (protecting the teeth and supporting structures) portion.

NEW SFIA FOOTBALL GLOVE SPECIFICATION (1-5 NOTE; 1-5-2b): Football gloves are now required to meet either the new SFIA specification or the existing NOCSAE test standard at the time of manufacture.

LEGAL CLIPPING ELIMINATED WITHIN THE FREE-BLOCKING ZONE (2-17; 9-3-6; 9-3 PENALTY): In a continued effort to minimize risk, the Committee made clipping in the free-blocking zone illegal.
2016 FOOTBALL POINTS OF EMPHASIS

RISK MINIMIZATION

Concussions
Concussions continue to be a focus of attention in football at all levels of competition. The NFHS has been at the forefront of national sports organizations in emphasizing the importance of concussion education, recognition and proper management.

Discussion of proper concussion management at all levels of play in all sports has led to the adoption of rules changes and concussion-specific policies by multiple athletic organizations, state associations and school districts. Coaches and game officials need to become familiar with the signs and symptoms of concussed athletes so that appropriate steps can be taken to safeguard the health and safety of participants.

There continues to be concern from the NFHS Sports Medicine Advisory Committee (SMAC) about the cumulative effects of non-concussive blows to the head and body in practice and games. Research data is showing that there are significant impacts to the head during "non-contact" practice (such as “control”), and even in practices when players wear only helmets for protective gear. Therefore, the NFHS SMAC recommends that coaches consider holding their non-contact practices without helmets and pads for the purpose of reducing the number of blows to the head and body.

Impact Sensors
Impact sensor technology continues to advance and improve. These sensors can now be used to look at impact forces in real-time, while the players are actively participating in a sport. While these sensors are valuable as a research tool, they still cannot be used to diagnose a concussion. Players, parents, coaches and administrators need to be careful not to rely primarily on unproven technology to diagnose a concussion, or even as a tool to decide if a concussion should or should not be suspected.

Heat Illness
The NFHS SMAC continues to encourage athletic trainers, coaches, players and parents to be vigilant about heat illness. The pre-season is the time of greatest risk. An important component of heat illness awareness and preparation is to have in place a well-rehearsed Emergency Action Plan. This includes protocols for treating heat illness, including strategies for rapid cooling of at-risk athletes and guidelines for practice/game modification when indicated by Wet Bulb Globe Temperature (WBGT) monitoring. Coaches need to remain open and flexible to change practice and game plans if environmental conditions are such that their players are at risk for heat illness. This is especially true during the heat-acclimation period at the start of pre-season training.

LEGAL AND ILLEGAL BLOCKS
Blocking is obstructing an opponent by contacting the opponent with any part of the blocker’s body. Illegal blocking includes kick-catching interference, forward-pass interference, personal fouls and any other contact
which is specifically prohibited such as targeting, blocking below the waist or in the back, chop blocking or clipping. Blocking can involve significant personal contact between a player and an opponent. When proper blocking techniques are taught by coaches and executed by players, risks of injury are minimized. Remember, a player may attempt to take an opponent out of a play, but it is **NOT** legal to attempt to take an opponent out of a game.

A 2016 NFHS football rules change prohibits clipping anywhere on the field at any time, other than against a runner. Clipping is defined as a block against an opponent (other than a runner or pretended runner) when the initial contact is from behind and is at or below the waist. This action, under certain circumstances, was previously legal in the free blocking zone. Such is no longer the case. Coaches are encouraged to teach blocking techniques that do not include contact from the rear at or below the waist.

Game officials are reminded to maintain the integrity of the game and uphold their responsibilities to officiate blocking within the spirit and intent of the rules. Player safety and risk minimization are central objectives of officiating. Efforts by the NFHS rules committee, NFHS member state associations and school administrators should be supported by coaches and appropriate rules enforced by game officials to minimize risks to student-athletes.

**LEGAL JERSEYS, PANTS AND PADS**

In order to provide for the safety and protection of all participants, players are required to wear equipment and uniforms which are properly fitted and worn in the manner intended by the manufacturer. Jerseys are required to completely cover the shoulder pads and any auxiliary pads, such as rib pads or back pads. Pants must completely cover the knees and knee pads, and knee pads must be worn over the knee.

It is becoming more common to see the sleeves of jerseys slide up over the top of the shoulder pad, thus exposing a portion of the pad or untucked jerseys that do not cover the back pads. Additionally, many players wear pants that slide up during use, thus exposing the knee pad or the knee.

Due to the potential for injury to either the player wearing such jersey, pants or pads, or to an opponent, it is essential that players not be permitted to participate unless their jerseys and pants fully comply with the rules. A player whose jersey or pants slide up during game action must immediately make an adjustment to the garment to ensure that it covers all pads and protective equipment or, in the case of pants, fully covers the knees and knee pads. If adjustment to the jersey or pants during a dead-ball period cannot be made, the player should not be permitted to continue as a participant on the field of play. Game officials should not permit the ball to become live when they observe any player whose jersey or pants fail to comply with the rules.

**UNFAIR ACTS**

Rule 9-10 states that a player or non-player or person(s) not subject to the rules shall not hinder play by an unfair act that has no specific rule coverage. Teams shall not commit any act which, in the opinion of the referee, tends to make a travesty of the game.

The spirit of the game of football lives in effective blocking, fundamental tackling, tireless pursuit, skillful running, passing and kicking, and well-planned game strategy. This positive atmosphere cannot be maintained unless both the spirit and intent of the NFHS football rules are observed. If the potential values of the game experience are to be attained, that the action of the players must conform with the rules, which specifically prohibit unfair tactics and unsportsmanlike conduct. Unfair tactics detract from the positive atmosphere and the values of interscholastic athletics, and have no place in the game of football.

The prohibition of unfair tactics will encourage sportsmanship, which permeates every aspect of our game. Coaches should exemplify the highest moral character, behavior, integrity and leadership, adhering to strong ethical standards, and abiding by and teaching the rules of the game in both spirit and intent.
Student-athletes should understand the seriousness of their responsibility to teammates and opponents and the privilege of representing their school and community.

As leaders, we must recommit ourselves to the preservation of fair play, which includes eliminating illegal, unfair or dangerous acts both on the practice field and on the field of play.

The NFHS Football Rules Book specifically prohibits unfair acts. Rule 9-10 lists some examples of unfair acts, including hiding the football under a jersey or using an illegal kicking tee. Other unfair acts are prohibited by the spirit and intent of other rules, include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. Uniforms which do not conform to specified standards or which have a foreign substance on them;
2. Use of disconcerting acts or words prior to the snap in an attempt to interfere with the offensive team’s signals or movements; and
3. “Hide-Out” plays, including those that use a substitution or pretended substitution in order to deceive opponents at or immediately before the snap or free kick.

Of course, it is impossible to list every unfair act that could take place. Deliberately violating the rules in the hope or expectation of not being detected is deplorable and indefensible, and should be penalized.

To this end, the referee is given great discretion in penalizing unfair acts and may enforce any penalty he or she considers equitable, including the awarding of a score. If an unfair-act foul occurs and the foul already has a penalty associated with it, the referee may invoke another equitable penalty if the foul is so unfair that its normal penalty would be insufficient. For example, a substitute coming off the sideline to tackle the runner has committed illegal participation, which normally carries a 15-yard penalty. The normal penalty may be sufficient if this happens while the runner is surrounded by other defensive players and would likely be tackled anyway. However, the normal penalty would be insufficient, and enforcing it would make a travesty of the game, if the act occurred on the last play of the game while a runner was heading to the opponent’s end zone well beyond the reach of any other defender. In such a case, the awarding of a score would be more equitable.

The prohibition of unfair acts is not a prohibition of special or “trick” plays. Such plays are permissible, but they must be run within the spirit and intent of the rules. Game time and circumstance are factors to consider as to the legality of any such play. Teams attempting to run trick plays must follow all NFHS football rules precisely without any leeway. Coaches are encouraged to discuss any such plays, including the time they are likely to run such plays, with the referee in the pre-game conference.

It is imperative that coaches, players and game officials make an extra effort to model the type of behavior that illustrates the educational values of interscholastic athletics in general, and football in particular. No true sportsman will violate any of the unwritten rules which exist for the good of the game. The spirit of good sportsmanship depends on conformance to a rule’s intent as well as to the letter of a given rule.
TARGETING
The NFHS Football Rules Committee continues to focus on player safety and risk minimization. It is the responsibility of coaches, game officials and players to know and understand not only the rule concerning targeting, but the risk involved when players engage in targeting. In most cases, this contact poses a risk to both players. It is especially risky when the offending player uses the crown of his helmet to contact an opponent.

Targeting is defined in Rule 2-20-2 as: "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." The key words in the definition are "who takes aim." This phrase clearly indicates that targeting is an intentional act. Targeting usually takes place in the open field against a player who is defenseless. Examples would include but not be limited to: A receiver who has no opportunity to complete a catch, a player who is making no effort to participate in the play, an R player attempting to catch a kick, a passer or a kicker. It is important for game officials to know that targeting can take place anywhere on the field and is not limited to players who are directly involved in the play. The penalty for targeting is 15 yards, and if deemed flagrant, carries disqualification.

RESTRICTED AREA
Application of rules for the restricted area has improved over the past few years; the following points of clarification are intended to resolve remaining misconceptions and aid in the consistent and correct application for sideline management.

The restricted area is the 2-yard belt that runs from the 25-yard line to the 25-yard line. It is an extension of the restraining line (Rule 1-2-3d) that is marked around the playing field. Misconceptions exist about the restricted area from both game officials and coaches. Game officials consider the restricted area their area; coaches will consider the restricted area as their area. And, depending on the status of the ball, both are correct. In reality, the restricted area belongs to both the game officials and the coaches and with the correct application of rules, allows both to do their jobs effectively and safely.

Rule 1-2-3g states: “Team boxes shall be marked on each side of the field outside the coaches’ area between the 25-yard lines for use of coaches, substitutes, athletic trainers etc., affiliated with the team. The coaches’ area is a minimum of a 2-yard belt between the front of the team box and the sideline, and becomes a restricted area when the ball is live.”

The restricted area is provided for the safety of players, nonplayers, coaches and game officials. The application of the restricted-area rules should be understood by both coaches and game officials and should be applied in all aspects of the game. While the ball is dead, the restricted area is the coaches’ box, where a
maximum of three coaches and substitutions are allowed. Although there is no specific statement as to when the restricted area should be cleared, a good point of reference is when the snap is imminent. While the ball is live, this is the restricted area and should be clear between the 25-yard lines.

Rule 9-8-3 states: “A nonplayer shall not be outside his team box unless to become a player or to return as a replaced player. A maximum of three coaches may be in the restricted area. No player, nonplayer or coach shall be in the restricted area when the ball is live.”

Substituting, coaching and officiating in the restricted area are not to be ignored at any time during the game. Game officials need to focus on two areas: 1. Red zone application. When the line of scrimmage is in the red zone, and the wing official is downfield beyond the end of the team box, the restricted area can become occupied with nonplayers and coaches. 2. “Up-field” situations. When the line of scrimmage is within the restricted area, nonplayers and coaches stand in the restricted area up-field, behind the line of scrimmage. Game situations can change quickly and may create a safety situation. During live-ball action, no coach, substitute, athletic trainer, anyone affiliated with the team or any other person is allowed in the restricted area regardless of where the line of scrimmage is on the field of play.

Pregame is an opportunity for the wing official to communicate with the head coach and identify who can assist him/her if he/she needs help with the restricted area. Communication between game officials and coaches that brings a possible resolution and support to defuse a potential issue before it occurs benefits both parties. Remember that a game official has a process supported by rule in dealing with the restricted area. Game officials can prevent a negative situation with proactive, positive communication and by applying the restricted-area rules early in the game.

**DOWN-MARKER INDICATOR MECHANICS**

The NFHS Football Case Book notes situations with the proper procedures to be used when a play is run with the incorrect down on the down-marker indicator. These situations and procedures should be reviewed and should give game officials a heightened awareness of the importance of making sure the down on the down-marker indicator is correct prior to the ball being marked ready for play. It is important to note that when an error is discovered, in other than a fifth-down situation, the procedure calls for the replay of that down. There is no option to continue play with the results of the play that was run with the incorrect down on the down-marker indicator. Mechanics currently exist to prevent this type of error from occurring.

An increased awareness, including pregame discussion and crew coordination of pre-snap mechanics, will help keep errors to a minimum. If a game official thinks the down-marker indicator is incorrect, blowing the whistle and making sure it is correct is preferable to letting the play go and having to replay the down because the down-marker indicator was incorrect. While the Referee and the Head Linesman may have primary responsibility, it is imperative that the entire crew know the down is correct when the ball is marked ready for play.
NFHS GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS
FOR FOOTBALL CLOCK OPERATORS

A. The clock operator should report to the game officials at the stadium at least 30 minutes before game time for the following purposes:

1. To synchronize timer’s watch with official game time as established by the game official responsible for timing.
2. To advise game officials whether the clock operator will be in the press box or on the sideline. Determine procedure for communication with timer and check this procedure prior to the game.
3. To discuss coordination of starting, stopping and adjusting the clock in accordance with the playing rules.
4. To discuss if the game clock horn (mechanical signal) can be turned off. Preference is for the game clock horn (mechanical signal) to be turned off for the duration of the game.

B. The field clock is normally started 30 minutes before game time. The halftime intermission will start on the referee’s signal when the players and game officials leave the field. All pregame and halftime activities will be synchronized with the official game clock. The mandatory three-minute warm-up period will be put on the clock after the intermission time has elapsed and shall be started immediately.

C. The clock operator shall have an extra stopwatch available. In case of failure of the game clock, the clock operator shall immediately contact the game officials, giving them the correct data regarding the official time. The game official responsible for timing will then pick up the correct game time on the stopwatch. If the field clock becomes inoperative and is subsequently repaired, it will not be used again until the next period or when the referee determines it is operational. The public-address announcer will indicate the field clock will not be official until the malfunction is corrected and a subsequent announcement is made on the public-address system.

D. Game Procedures:

1. The clock operator is an integral member of the officiating crew and game administration. Unfair advantages occur when the game clock is not started or stopped correctly by rule. Great care must be exercised to see that no time lag occurs in starting or stopping the clock.
2. On all free kicks, the nearest game official(s) will signal the legal touching of the ball by indicating that the clock should start.
3. Any game official may signal a time-out; therefore, the operator should be alert to stop the clock.
4. The incompletion signal will stop the clock.
5. The clock operator will automatically stop the clock following a touchdown, field goal, touchback or safety after the appropriate scoring signal has been made.
6. After the clock has been stopped, the referee will start it again on the referee’s start-the-clock signal and if no such signal is given, the operator will start the clock on the snap without the signal from the referee.
7. The referee may start the clock again in certain instances before the ready-for-play signal.
8. The try is not a timed down.
9. There are instances when a period shall be extended by an untimed down. During these extensions, leave the clock at :00. Do not reset the clock for the next period until the referee declares the period over by facing the press box and holding the ball overhead.
10. Each state association may decide whether or not to utilize a running clock in certain situations, and the procedures for those situations.
NFHS GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS
FOR FOOTBALL LINE-TO-GAIN CREWS

The typical line-to-gain crew consists of at least three individuals – a down-marker indicator operator and two to hold the rods. Unless otherwise possible by use of a fourth crew member, the down-marker indicator operator will attach the clip as specified. In some cases where a fourth crew member is present, that member may also be requested to record penalties on a chart provided by the game officials. It is recommended that the members of the crew wear distinctive vests or jackets furnished by home or game management. Remind crew members that they are assistant officials, not fans.

PREGAME DUTIES

1. The line-to-gain crew shall meet the HEAD LINESMAN on the sideline opposite the press box at least 15 minutes before game time and also five minutes prior to the second-half kickoff. If an auxiliary down-marker indicator is used, the operator shall meet the LINE JUDGE on the press-box side at the same time.

2. The HEAD LINESMAN shall make certain that the official line-to-gain and down-marker indicators have been placed opposite the press box or on the designated sideline and that all are in good working order and conform to the rules. The LINE JUDGE shall make certain that the auxiliary down-marker indicator is in good working order and is placed on the opposite side of the field from the line-to-gain crew.

3. The complete concentration of the crew is absolutely necessary if crew members are to discharge their duties efficiently. The crew must refrain from showing any partisan reaction to the events taking place on the playing field. The crew must be prepared to act immediately on instructions from the HEAD LINESMAN so that teams and all concerned will know the exact situation concerning the down and yards to be gained. The crew shall not move or change the number of the down until signaled to do so by the HEAD LINESMAN. The auxiliary down-marker indicator operator shall act only on instructions from the LINE JUDGE. The crew must remain impartial and may not communicate down and distance information to members of the coaching staff or team.

4. While serving on the line-to-gain crew, the crew should refrain from using items that would distract them from their responsibility (i.e. using electronic devices).

GAME PROCEDURES

1. On the HEAD LINESMAN’S signal, the crew shall move as quickly as possible to the next position.

2. When a runner or pass receiver is going out of bounds in the immediate vicinity, the involved crew member is to quickly and carefully drop the marker and move away from the sideline, keeping his/her eye on the spot of the marker. The crew members away from the play should hold their positions if possible.

3. The HEAD LINESMAN will set the spot of all first downs by going to the sidelines and marking, while facing the field, the exact spot where the rear stake will be set. The front crew member will then be sure the chain is fully extended before setting his/her stake.

4. The DOWN-MARKER INDICATOR OPERATOR, on every new series of downs, will set the down-marker indicator at the spot marked by the HEAD LINESMAN. When the line-to-gain equipment is moved, the rear rod is to be set behind the down-marker indicator and then the clip shall be placed at the back edge of the 5-yard line nearest the rear rod. The down-marker indicator must be held at all times in an upright position with the down correctly shown.

5. The DOWN-MARKER INDICATOR OPERATOR is to show the number of the down just completed and shall not indicate the new down until so notified by the HEAD LINESMAN. On instruction from the HEAD LINESMAN, the DOWN-MARKER INDICATOR OPERATOR will move the down-marker indicator to a new position with the marker indicator placed at the forward point of the ball and change the marker indicator to the correct down.

6. On all measurements for first down when the chain is moved onto the field, the DOWN-MARKER INDICATOR OPERATOR is to place his/her marker indicator at the spot of the front rod until a new series of downs is declared or the chain is returned to its previous position.

7. The chain is not extended if it is a first-and-goal situation. The HEAD LINESMAN should provide the DOWN-MARKER INDICATOR OPERATOR a bean bag in this situation to mark location of the box in case it is moved during the down.

8. The DOWN-MARKER INDICATOR OPERATOR should place the marker indicator on the line of scrimmage on all try situations. This will aid players and officials in determining the line of scrimmage on all plays toward the sideline. The chain will not be placed on a try.

9. If the sidelines become crowded and the crew does not have room to efficiently discharge its duties, the crew is to notify the HEAD LINESMAN immediately so that a time-out may be called and sidelines cleared before the game will be allowed to proceed.

10. If the game is delayed for any reason, the crew will stay with the game officials.

11. The official line-to-gain and down-marker indicators shall be operated approximately 2 yards outside the sideline opposite the press box, except in stadiums where the total playing enclosure does not permit. Unofficial auxiliary line-to-gain and down-marker indicators may be used on the sideline opposite the official line-to-gain and down-marker indicators, and shall be operated approximately 2 yards outside the sideline, except in stadiums where the total playing enclosure does not permit. All indicators shall be operated as far off the sideline (up to 2 yards) as facilities permit and as directed by the HEAD LINESMAN and LINE JUDGE.

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