40-Second Play Clock Management

Football Officiating — Quick Reference

MHSAA
Officials Department

Basic premise: The play clock will ALWAYS start at :40 when an official signals the conclusion of a play with no administrative stoppage — the offense then has 40 seconds from the end of the previous play to snap the ball. When play is stopped for one of the administrative reasons below, the offense instead has :25 from the moment the umpire spots the ball and the referee starts the ready-for-play.

:40 Signals That Start the Clock

Any of these signals marks the end of a play and starts the play clock at :40:

1. Upward extended arm marking forward progress
2. "Stop the clock" signal
3. "Incomplete pass" signal
4. "Wind the clock" signal — runner remained in-bounds

RESETTING THE PLAY CLOCK

Runs below :25, ball not yet spotted — referee sounds whistle, resets to :25 (one palm pumped upward over the head), and starts the play clock on the whistle/signal.

Started early or malfunctions — referee sounds whistle, resets to :40 (both palms pumped upward over the head), and starts the play clock on the whistle/signal.

:25 Administrative Stoppages

The play clock is set to :25 for each situation below:

Situation	Referee Signal
Administration of a foul & penalty	**Chop or Wind**
At the start of a period	**Chop**
Measurement	**Chop or Wind**
Helmet comes off	**Chop or Wind**
Injury	**Chop or Wind**
Defense (Team B) awarded a 1st down	**Chop**
After any score	**Chop**
Start of Team A's possession in OT	**Chop**
Inadvertent whistle	**Wind**
Timeout by either team	**Chop**
Official timeout	**Chop**
Touchback	**Chop**
Untimed down	**Chop**
Period extension	**Chop**

NOTES

- This change affects only the play clock — never the game clock.
- The back judge still raises an arm with :10 remaining, then visibly counts down the final :05.
- The full crew reacts to ball movement and placement as efficiently and accurately as possible.
- There's no requirement to let the defense "match up." The umpire controls when the ball is ready: on short, quick plays, watch for the defense actively substituting and allow it; on long plays with ample time to substitute, spot the ball as soon as the crew is ready.

Quick Summary of Clock Operation

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A situation-by-situation breakdown of exactly when the play clock and game clock start and stop.

Situation	Play Clock	Game Clock
Kickoff	25-second clock starts on R signal (Chop)	Starts when legally touched
Running play ends in bounds	40-second clock starts at end of play	Continues running
Running play ends out of bounds	40-second clock starts at end of play	Stops at end of play. Starts on snap
Fumble out of bounds	40-second clock starts at end of play	Stops at end of play. Starts on snap
Backward pass out of bounds	40-second clock starts at end of play	Stops at end of play. Starts on snap
Incomplete pass	40-second clock starts at end of play	Stops at end of play. Starts on snap
First down in bounds	40-second clock starts at end of play	Stops at end of play. Starts on R signal (silent wind)
First down out of bounds	40-second clock starts at end of play	Stops at end of play. Starts on snap
Measurement — play ends in bounds	25-second clock starts on R signal (Wind)	Stops at end of play. Starts on R signal (Wind)
Measurement — play ends out of bounds	25-second clock starts on R signal (Chop)	Stops at end of play. Starts on snap
Penalty — dead ball or live ball (foul on Team A)	25-second clock starts on R signal (Chop)	Stops on signal. Retains status prior to foul
Penalty — dead ball or live ball (foul only on Team B)	40-second clock starts on R signal (Chop)	Stops on signal. Retains status prior to foul
Punt play — ends with A or B possession	25-second clock starts on R signal (Chop)	Stops on signal. Starts on snap
Time out — team	25-second clock starts on R signal (Chop)	Stops on signal. Starts on snap
Time out — injury or helmet comes off (Team A player)	25-second clock starts on R signal (Chop)	Stops on signal. Retains status prior to stoppage
Time out — injury or helmet comes off (Team B player)	40-second clock starts on R signal (Chop)	Stops on signal. Retains status prior to stoppage
Score — TD, PAT, FG or safety	25-second clock starts on R signal (Chop)	Stops on signal. Starts according to free kick or OT rules
Start of new period	25-second clock starts on R signal (Chop)	Starts on snap
Inadvertent whistle	25-second clock starts on R signal (Chop)	Starts on R signal (Wind)
Other administrative stoppages	25-second clock starts on R signal (Chop)	Stops on signal. Retains status prior to stoppage or by rule

SIGNAL KEY

R = Referee • **A** = Team A (offense) • **B** = Team B (defense) • **Chop** = chopping arm motion, starts clock immediately • **Wind** = circular motion restarting a stopped game clock without a snap