



Football Game Management Resource

A field-ready reference for pre-game duties, adversity management, and rules mechanics — built for Michigan high school football officiating crews.

Michigan High School Athletic Association

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SECTION 01**Pre-Game Duties – Deep Wing Officials (FJ & SJ)**

Duties begin 60 minutes before kickoff. At least two officials should be assigned – the combination varies from crew to crew; prefer first shift.

Primary Purpose – Warm-Up Supervision

- Conference procedures govern designated warm-up areas and the “no-fly zone.”
- This is the first official job of the day – be visible, alert, and proactive.
- Keep people and balls away from opponents. Coaches will often time snap-to-kick with a stopwatch; players may “socialize” after the game.
- Address coaches' questions – usually from special teams coaches. Be careful with your answers.

Contest & Field Readiness

Handle all of the following before game time, as soon as possible and before the whole team arrives:

- Confirm the field phone connection to timers in the press box.
- Check the location of game and play clocks – are there visual issues from different positions on the field?
- Run a couple of clock cycles with the clock operator while you're on the field.
- Identify ball persons – who they are, how many, and which teams they represent. Handle instructions at this time if possible.
- Check pylons – number, type, and placement.
- Check yard-line markers, especially their distance from the sideline at the goal line.
- Check kicking nets, benches, and other equipment for proper distance from the sideline.
- Confirm space available for the chain crew and sideline personnel.
- Check the chains, down marker, and auxiliary marker. Identify who is handling the penalty report and help with foul numbers.
- Address any player equipment or uniform issues.

Public relations

Game management, doctors, trainers, and other on-site personnel.

Personal Game Preparation

Visualize game situations, mental-image the contest, and make notes.

Category	What to check
Kicking Game	Weather – wind direction/strength, and whether sun will require shading for players and officials (review mechanics with kick returners and special teams coaches; confirm with head coaches if possible). Also note whether punters are right- or left-footed – it makes a difference.
Passing Game	Will weather affect the passing game? Watch receiver and DB drills for technique if possible. Note pass patterns, formations, and defensive coverages for both teams.
Physical Prep	Warm up from your field position – light running, backpedaling, stretching. Take some snaps from position for both teams if possible.

Leaving the Field

- Remain on the field until relieved by crew mates or until a team leaves the field.
- Share any pertinent information with crew mates before leaving warm-up.
- If in doubt, remain out there.
- Leave the field with a crew mate or the whole crew – never alone.

SECTION 02

Managing In-Game Adversity

Even with a trained and qualified crew, sound mental and physical preparation, and strong crew communication — every official eventually gets a “turn in the barrel.”

“We all get our turn in the barrel.”

What's the Right Response?

When the inevitable happens, the goal isn't to avoid mistakes entirely — it's to have a process for handling them well. That means:

- Accepting that the crew will mess up from time to time.
- Not letting another official or the crew “sink or swim” alone.
- Not hoping somebody else gets involved instead of you.
- Not ignoring it and hoping no one notices.

Modern technology — replay, video boards, broadcast angles — has created a fundamental expectation at every level of football: get it right.

We can't anticipate every situation, but we can have a process to deal with it. Crew members providing input and asking questions on the field must be valued and reinforced — that culture is what makes “getting it right” possible.

Roles & Responsibilities

Role	Focus
Official(s) directly involved in the play	Under stress: remain calm and slow their world down.
Adjacent officials to the play	Bring a different perspective — not under the spotlight, and able to apply football IQ to what they saw.
Remaining members of the crew	Hold the “big picture” perspective for the whole game.

The Stressed Official's Role — Don't “Check Out”

- Swallow your pride.
- Keep your focus.
- Take a deep breath and relax — accept help when it's offered.
- Don't overstate or understate the situation.
- Listen, “replay” the situation in your mind, and contribute.

When Adjacent Officials Need to Get Involved

- There's an obvious problem — an incapacitated or out-of-position official.
- An egregious mistake has occurred.
- The situation is game-determining or game-changing.
- There's a fight or spectators on the field.
- Sometimes an official is simply looking for an out — read the moment.

When crew is in distress, anything and everything is appreciated. Ask what they saw (proximity vs. angle matters), look for players' body language, pull other adjacent officials in for feedback and reinforcement, and ask a lot of questions to determine the real level of concern — don't underestimate it.

When to Stay Out of It

- If you have nothing to contribute — no clue what happened — stay out.
- When in doubt, get in there.
- Even when not directly involved, you can still help: stay alert, listen, watch body language, sneak a peek at the video board, keep players away from the conference, and manage the sidelines by keeping coaches off the field.

Resolving the Situation

- Everyone gets involved initially — sort out all possible issues.
- Give the Referee all information and possible scenarios.
- Get it right.
- Don't leave the Referee too soon.

Decision announced by the Referee: With a mic, state “The ruling on the field is ...” with the appropriate signal(s), and keep the announcement as concise as possible. Without a mic, give the appropriate signal and, depending on the situation, go to each bench to provide a concise explanation.

No one welcomes adversity.

But how well it's handled separates crews. Managing it and getting it right makes the game — and our work — more credible.

SECTION 03

Pass Interference

Defensive Pass Interference (DPI)

Actions that constitute DPI include but are not limited to:

- Early contact by a defender who is not playing the ball — provided the other requirements for DPI are met, regardless of how close the pass is to the receiver.
- Playing through the back of a receiver in an attempt to make a play on the ball.
- Grabbing and/or restricting a receiver's arm(s) in a manner that inhibits the opportunity to catch a pass.
- Extending an arm across the body (arm bar) of a receiver, restricting the ability to catch a pass — regardless of whether the defender is playing the ball.
- Cutting off or riding the receiver out of the path to the ball by making contact without playing the ball.
- Hooking and turning a receiver while attempting to get to the ball, causing the receiver's body to rotate prior to the ball's arrival.
- Tangling of feet (or tripping) from behind when a player has no chance of reaching or playing the ball.

Not Defensive Pass Interference

- Incidental contact by hands, arm, or body when both players are competing for the ball, or neither is looking for the ball. If there's any question, the ruling is no interference.
- Inadvertent tangled feet when both players are playing the ball, or neither is.
- Contact that would normally be PI, but the pass is clearly uncatchable (NCAA only).
- Laying a hand on a receiver that does not restrict them, in an attempt to play the ball.
- On a “Hail Mary” pass, contact must be clear and obvious to rule pass interference.

Offensive Pass Interference (OPI)

Actions that constitute OPI include but are not limited to:

- Initiating contact with a defender by shoving or pushing off, creating separation in an attempt to catch a pass.
- Driving through a defender who has established a position on the field.
- If the pass hasn't been thrown and a block occurs downfield, OPI applies if the pass subsequently crosses the line of scrimmage (exception: block on the left, pass thrown quickly to the right).

- If the pass has been thrown and a block occurs in the overlapping third of the field where the ball is thrown, call OPI.
- OPI for downfield blocking can be called even if the passer is legally grounding the ball (NCAA only).
- A catchable pass is required for OPI to apply on a thrown ball.
- Both feet of the offensive player must be beyond one yard past the line of scrimmage for OPI, if all other criteria are met.
- Tangling of feet (or tripping) from behind, when a player has no chance to reach or play the ball, is OPI.

Not Offensive Pass Interference

- Incidental contact when both players are competing for the ball, or neither is looking for it.
- Inadvertent tangled feet when both, or neither, player is playing the ball.
- Contact that would normally be PI, but the ball is clearly uncatchable.
- On a screen pass, the ball is overthrown behind the LOS but lands within 1 yard beyond it, with linemen blocking downfield.
- On a look-in pass where contact is shoulder to shoulder.
- On a pick play, it is not OPI if the defender is blocking the offensive player when the pick occurs.

Pass Interference – Key Notes

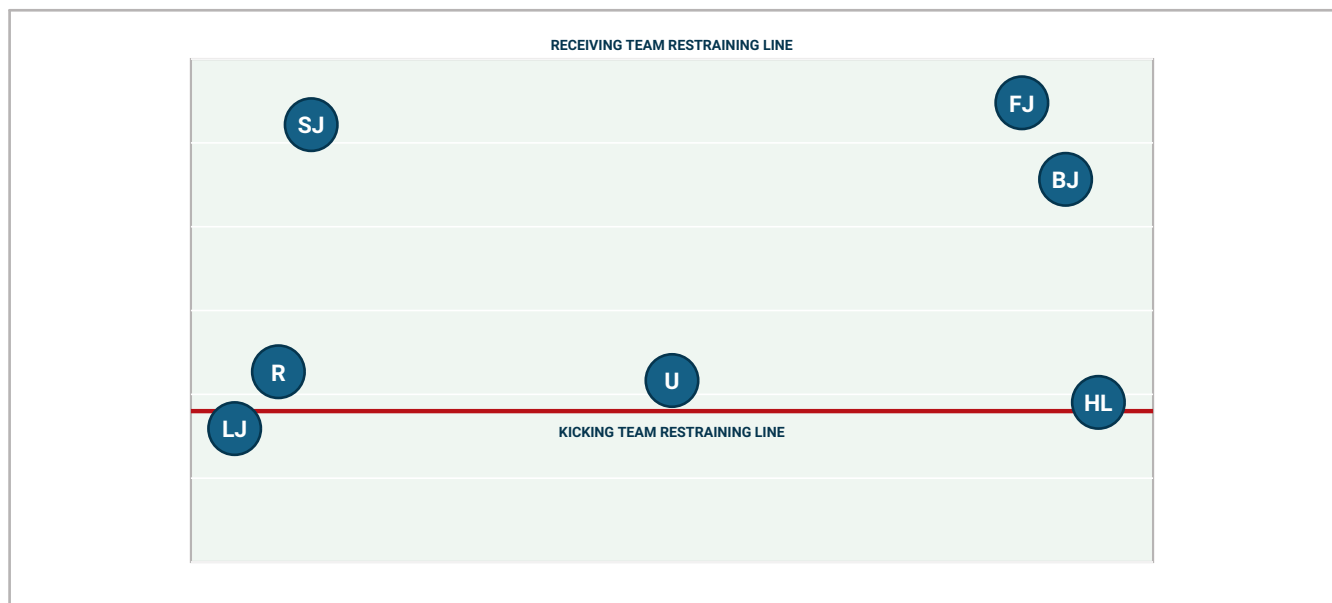
- Both players have a right to the ball – there must be an “obvious intent to impede” to rule pass interference.
- If there's any question whether contact is incidental, the ruling should be no interference.
- Defensive players have as much right to the path of the ball as eligible offensive players.
- Pass interference for both teams ends the moment the pass is touched.
- There is no pass interference at or behind the line of scrimmage, or if the pass does not cross the neutral zone – though defensive actions like tackling a receiver can still draw a penalty for defensive holding.

SECTION 04

The Kicking Game – Formations & Coverage

Free Kicks

Simplified coverage formation showing on-field position responsibilities relative to each team's restraining line.



Free-kick formation – official positions are illustrative; follow your crew's mechanics manual for exact spacing.

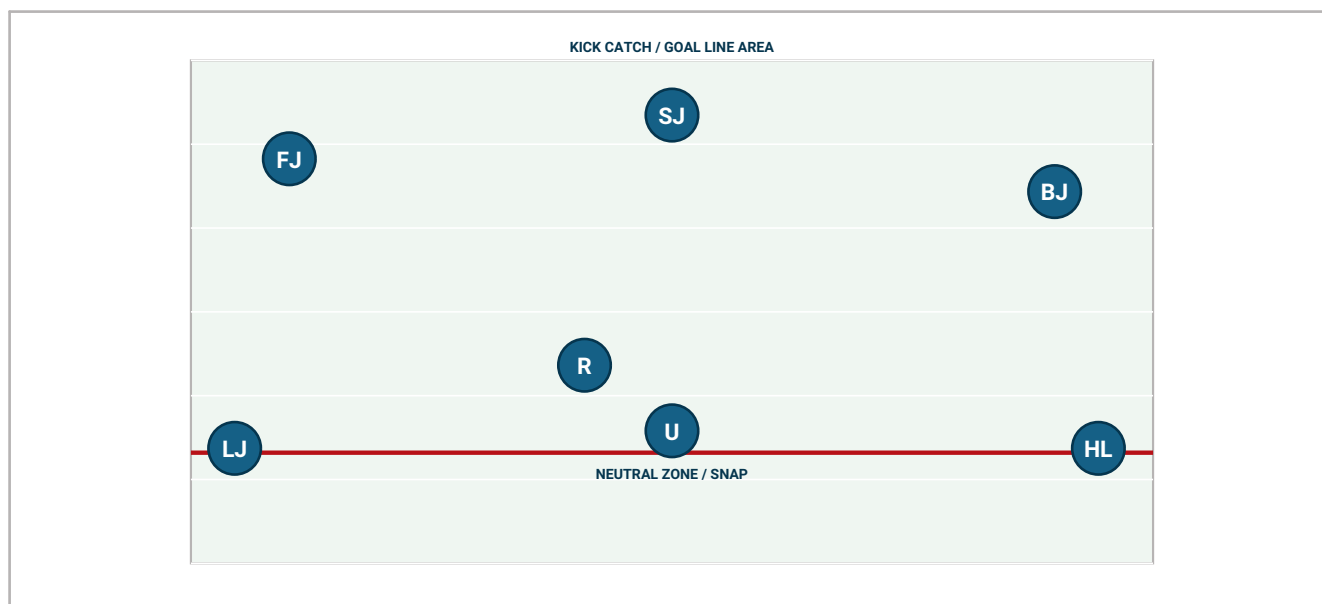
Free-Kick Checkpoints

1. Encroachment by Team A or Team B	11. Simultaneous recovery
2. Line-up restrictions by Team A	12. Kick at rest
3. Team A inside the 9-yard marks	13. Illegal touch by Team A
4. Ball legally kicked by Team A	14. Forced touching & batting situations
5. Must have 4 Team A players on each side of the ball	15. Kick out of bounds — touched vs. untouched by Team B
6. Both teams must be inbounds	16. Team B opportunity to catch
7. Team A may not voluntarily go OB and return	17. Team B fair catch
8. Blocking restrictions — all above the waist	18. Team B signals — does not touch — blocks
9. Team A eligible to touch: kicker 5 yds, touched player, or the ground	19. Wedge blocking; touchback
10. Clock status: A — touch/catch/recovery; B — legal touch/catch/recovery	20. Momentum

Short free kicks follow the same numbered checkpoints with a compressed field position.

Scrimmage Kicks

Simplified punt-coverage formation showing the kicking-team line, punter, and deep officiating positions.



Scrimmage-kick coverage — official positions are illustrative; follow your crew's mechanics manual for exact spacing.

Scrimmage-Kick Checkpoints

1. 4th down fumbles	14. Interference with the opportunity
2. Snap: backward pass	15. Simulated kick
3. Kick out of bounds	16. Expanded neutral zone
4. Forced touching	17. Momentum situations
5. Unsuccessful FG	18. Fair catch
6. Eligible/ineligible	19. Signal-no-touch block
7. Receivers	20. Illegal blocks
8. Ineligibles downfield	21. Blocks in back
9. Illegal touching by A	22. Post scrim kick fouls
10. A out of bounds	23. Fouls against snapper
11. Goal line kick	24. Running into/roughing
12. Illegal batting	25. Leaping
13. Kick beyond the line	

Kick-Catch Interference & Illegal Touching

The following recreates the classic teaching diagram for kick-catch interference and illegal touching, using R1/R2 (receiving team) and K1 (kicking team) as reference players.

EXAMPLE 1		EXAMPLE 2	
Example 1: R1 blocks K1 into ...		Ruling	
... R2 (legally or illegally)		No contact interference foul on K1.	
... the ball, in the air or on the ground		K1 is deemed not to have touched the ball.	
... R2, and the ball touched R2 or R1		Live ball – K can recover but not advance.	
Example 2: K1 blocks R1 into ...		Ruling	
... R2 (legally or illegally)		No foul.	
... the ball, in the air or on the ground		R1 is deemed not to have touched the ball.	
... R2, and the ball touches R2		Live ball.	
... R2, and the ball touches K1		Illegal touching.	

SECTION 05

Holding – Tight End / Wide Receiver

Offensive Holding (9-3-4)

What's Legal	What's Not Legal
Hands in advance of elbows	Hands/arms to the face or a head slap
Hands inside the frame of the opponent's body	Hooking, grasping, pulling, or encircling to impede or obstruct
Hands at or below the shoulders	
Hands apart and not locked	
Hands open, palms facing opponent, or closed/cupped with palms inward	

Classification of Holds

Type	Description
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Bear Hug	Arms surround the opponent.
Wrap / Grab and Turn	Hands are outside the shoulders and the opponent is actually turned.
Shoulder Dip	Hands inside on the chest or outside on the shoulder, with a noticeable shoulder dip.
Jersey Stretch	Hands inside the opponent's chest; at disengagement there's a noticeable jersey stretch.
Pullover	Appears the offensive player is run over by the defender, but the offensive player actually grabbed the jersey and pulled the defender down.
Leg Grab	Done when the offensive player is on the ground.

Keys to Officiating Holding – MIBT

- Point of Attack – see the whole play.
- Advantage/Disadvantage – make sure something happens. If a player attempts to hold but the opponent runs right through them, it's likely not a foul.
- Engagement/Disengagement – the blocker must release when the defender breaks the frame of the blocker, overpowers the blocker, or changes direction for pursuit.

SECTION 06

Touching, Illegal Touching & Forced Touching

Applies to both free kicks and scrimmage kicks.

Rule Basics (2-10-4)

Touching a ball not in player possession denotes any contact with the ball (exceptions: 6-1-4-a & b, 6-3-4-a & b). It may be intentional or unintentional, and always precedes possession and control. Intentional touching is deliberate or intended touching. When in question, the ball hasn't been touched on a kick or forward pass.

Team A May Legally Touch a Free Kick

- After it touches a Team B player (exception: forced touching – a Team A player who voluntarily goes out of bounds during a free-kick down may not touch a free kick even after it touches a Team B player).
- After it breaks the plane of, and remains beyond, Team B's restraining line – but Team A may not interfere with Team B's opportunity to catch the kick, including kicks driven immediately into the ground.
- After the kick touches any player, the ground, or an official beyond Team B's restraining line.
- An inbounds player touched by a ball batted by an opponent is not deemed to have touched the ball.
- An inbounds player blocked by an opponent into a free kick is not deemed to have touched the ball.

Scrimmage Kicks

- No inbounds Team A player shall touch a scrimmage kick that crossed the neutral zone before it touches an opponent.
- An inbounds player blocked by an opponent into a scrimmage kick that has crossed the neutral zone is not deemed to have touched the kick.
- An inbounds player touched by a ball batted by an opponent is not deemed to have touched the ball.
- If a Team A player bats a scrimmage kick in Team B's end zone, and it was untouched beyond the neutral zone after crossing it, that's a violation.
- No originally ineligible player, while inbounds, shall intentionally touch a legal forward pass until it has touched an opponent.
- No eligible offensive player who voluntarily goes out of bounds during a down shall touch a legal forward pass – in the field of play, in the end zones, or while airborne – until it's been touched by an opponent or an official.

Approved Rulings (AR 6-3-4)

Situation	Ruling
A kicks from its own 30. The untouched kick comes to rest at B3 when A blocks B into the ball, forcing it through the end zone by B's contact.	Touchback. Since A blocked B into the ball, B isn't deemed to have touched it; impetus is not charged to B (Rule 8-7-1).
A's long field-goal attempt is first touched when A1 legally bats the rolling ball into nearby B1.	Team B is not deemed to have touched the ball (Rule 8-4-2-b).
A's untouched scrimmage kick is at rest on B3 when B blocks A into the ball, forcing it into the end zone where it touches the ground.	Touchback — ignore the touching by A. Neither team has touched the kicked ball (Rule 8-6-1-b).

Additional Considerations

- Supervisor's philosophy.
- Assistance from other officials.

SECTION 07

Airborne Ball Carrier & the Goal-Line Plane

For years, a distinction was made between a ball carrier who goes airborne voluntarily — e.g., diving for the pylon — and one who is in the air because of contact by an opponent.

Effective 2011: there is no distinction.

Both are simply "airborne players."

The Updated Goal-Line Plane

For a ball carrier to score a touchdown, the ball in their possession must break the plane of the goal line. The current interpretation:

The goal-line plane runs between the pylons and includes the entire pylon. This plane does not extend beyond the pylons except in two specific cases: when a ball carrier touches the pylon, and when a ball carrier touches the ground in the end zone.

Rule 2-12-2 (definition of goal line) and Rule 8-2-1-a (how a touchdown is scored).

Previously, the plane was extended only if a ball carrier went airborne due to contact — not if they dove on their own. Now it doesn't matter how the player got into the air. What matters is whether they touch either the pylon or the ground in the end zone. If they do neither, the plane is not extended — no matter how they got airborne.

Play Situations

Play 1. A22 dives for the goal line at the B-1. The ball in his possession (a) touches the pylon; (b) goes over the top of the pylon; (c) crosses the goal line inside the pylon. A22 then first contacts the ground out of bounds three yards beyond the goal line.

Ruling: Touchdown in all three. The ball has broken the plane of the goal line in all three scenarios — the pylon is in the end zone out of bounds, and the plane includes it.

Play 2. A22 heads for the right pylon. At the B-2 he dives or is blocked into the air. The ball in his right hand crosses the sideline at the B-1, passing outside the pylon, and then A22 (a) touches the pylon with foot or hand; (b) first touches the ground out of bounds three yards beyond the goal line.

Ruling: (a) Touchdown — the plane is extended since A22 touched the pylon. (b) Not a touchdown — the plane is not extended because A22 touched neither the pylon nor the ground in the end zone; ruled out of bounds at the B-1.

Play 3. A22 heads for the right pylon; the ball in his right hand crosses the extension of the goal line outside the pylon, and then A22 steps (a) on the goal line; (b) on the sideline inches short of the goal line.

Ruling: (a) Touchdown — the plane is extended because A22 touched the ground in the end zone. (b) Not a touchdown — ruled out of bounds at the crossing point.

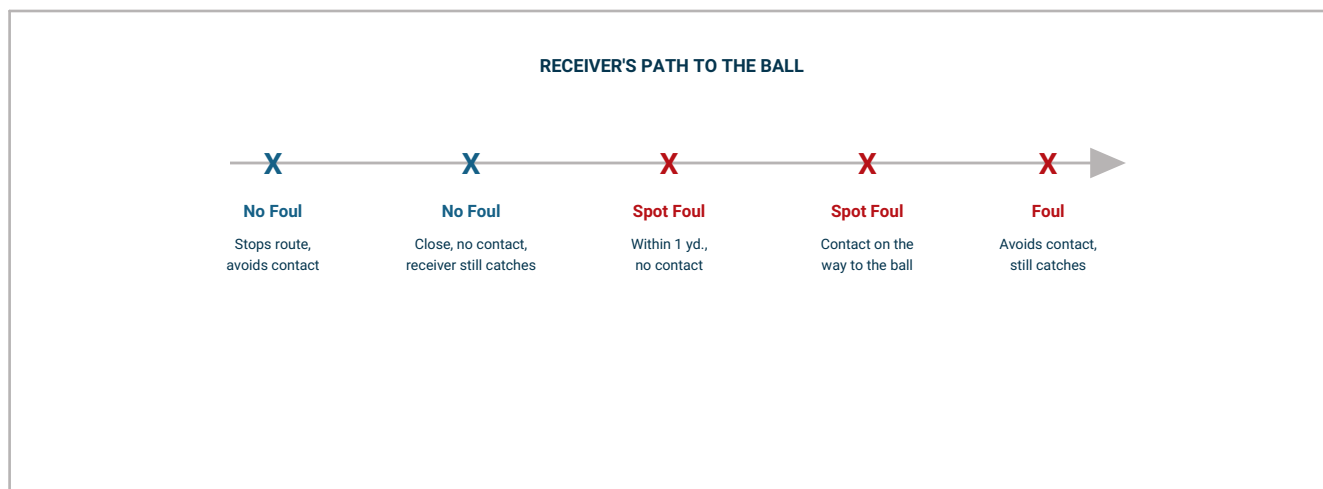
Play 4. A22 heads for the right pylon. His foot hits the pylon just before the ball crosses (a) the pylon or (b) the extension of the goal line just outside the pylon.

Ruling: No touchdown in either case. Because the pylon is out of bounds, the ball is dead when A22's foot hits it — dead before it crosses the goal line in both cases.

SECTION 08

Interference with the Opportunity to Catch

Recognizing a spot foul along the receiver's path to the ball comes down to proximity, contact, and whether the receiver is still able to make a play on the ball.



Interference with the opportunity to catch — spot-foul recognition along the receiver's route.

Situation	Ruling
Receiver avoids contact and continues to catch the ball.	Foul.
Receiver has a direct path; a defender is very close without contact along the route, but the receiver still makes the catch.	No foul.
Receiver contacts a defender on the way to the ball.	Spot foul.
Receiver stops their route and avoids contact, but does not continue — gives up.	No foul.
Receiver is in position to make the catch; a defender is within 1 yard (as defined by shoulders) without contact.	Spot foul.