



2026 NFHS FOOTBALL RULES CHANGES



NFHS FOOTBALL RULES



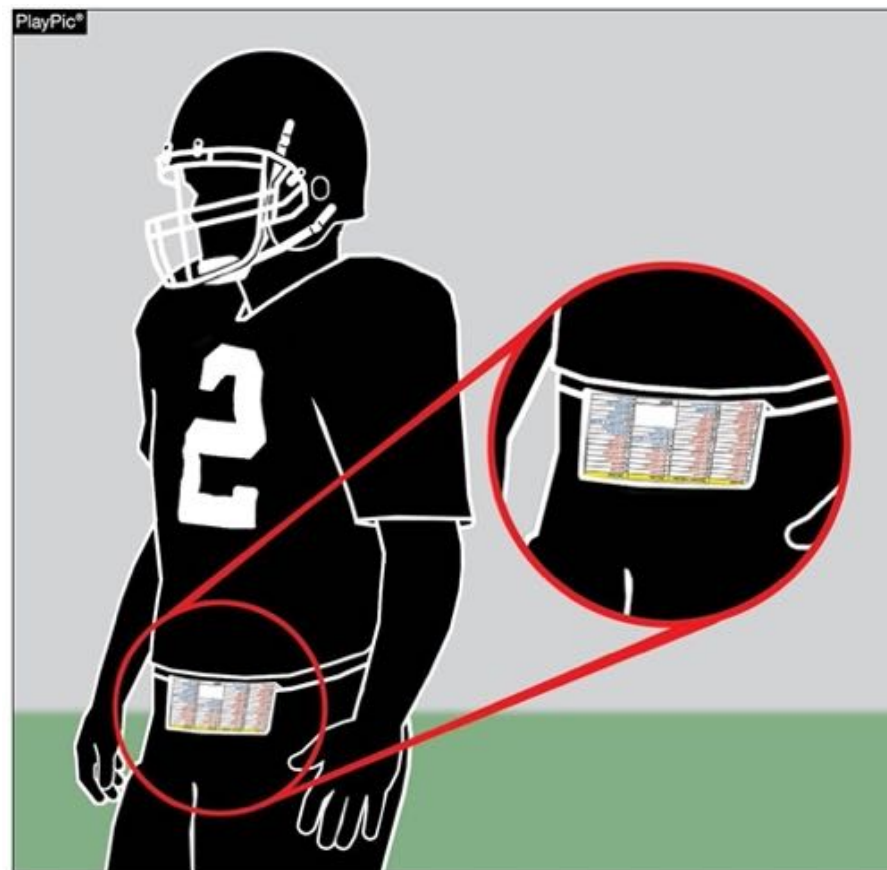
Each state high school association adopting these NFHS football rules is the sole and exclusive source of binding rules interpretations for contests involving its member schools. Any person having questions about the interpretation of NFHS football rules should contact the football rules interpreter designated by the respective state high school association.

The NFHS is the sole and exclusive source of model interpretations of NFHS football rules. State rules interpreters may contact the NFHS for model football rules interpretations. No other model football rules interpretations should be considered.

PLAY CARDS

RULE 1-5-3c(9)

- “Illegal equipment shall always include but is not limited to:
9. Play cards not worn on the wrist, arm or belt.”



LEGAL

HEAD SLAP

RULE 9-4-7

- “No player may use the hand(s) to slap the opponent’s head.”



ILLEGAL



PLAY.
PERFORM.
COMPETE.
TOGETHER.



2026 NFHS FOOTBALL EDITORIAL CHANGES



GAME ENDING PROCEDURE

RULE 1-1-8



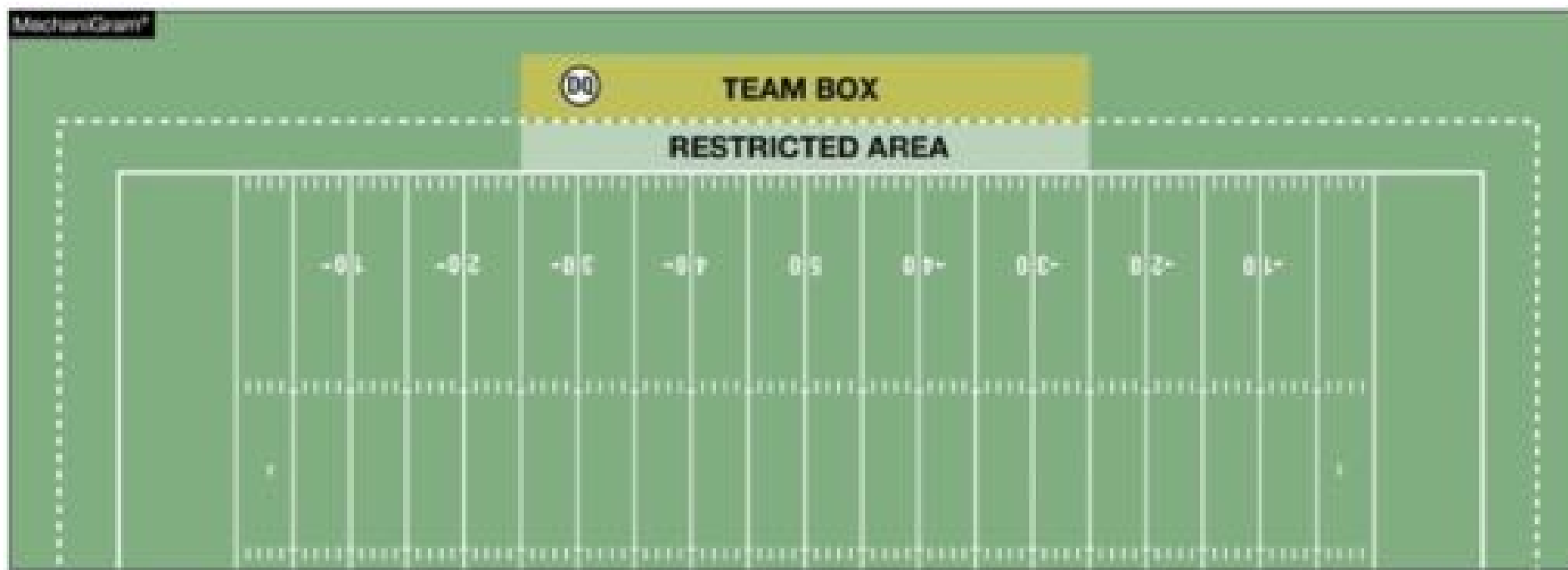
- The game officials' authority extends through the referee's declaration of the end of the fourth period or overtime. The jurisdiction of the game officials is terminated and the final score has been approved when all game officials leave the visual confines of the playing area. The game officials retain clerical authority over the game through the completion of any reports, including those imposing disqualifications, that are responsive to actions occurring while the game officials had jurisdiction. State Associations may intercede in the event of unusual incidents that occur before, during or after the game official's jurisdiction has ended or in the event that a game is terminated prior to the conclusion of regulation play.

DISQUALIFIED PLAYER

RULE 2-32-6



- A disqualified player is a player barred from further participation in a game. A disqualified player can be permitted to remain in the team box area.



ILLEGAL PERSONAL CONTACT/ DEFENSELESS PLAYER RULE

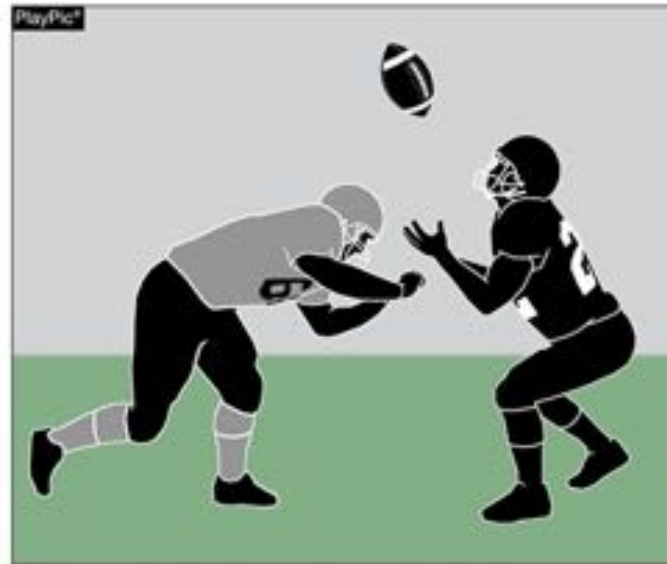


9-4-3p

- No player or nonplayer shall:

p. Initiate forceful contact against a defenseless receiver as in 2-32-16b, 2-32-16c and 2-32-16e that is not:

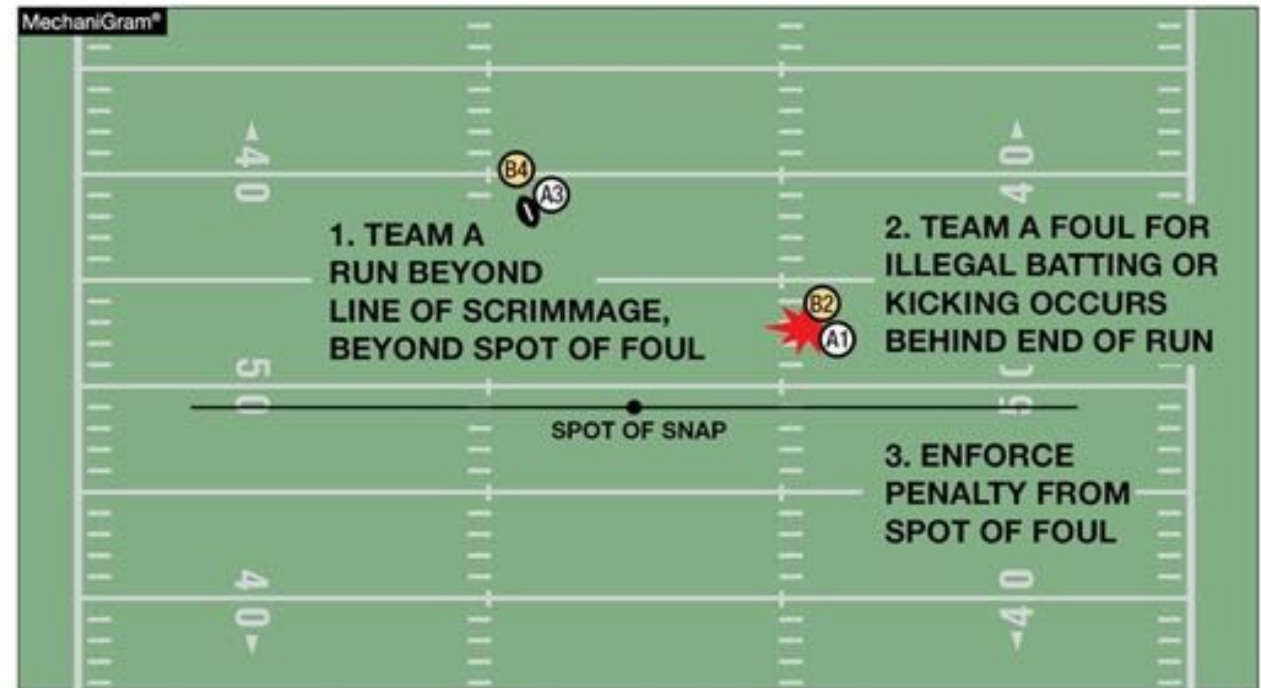
1. Incidental contact as a result of making a play on the ball;
2. Initiated with open hands; or
3. An attempt to tackle by wrapping arm(s) around the receiver.



BASIC SPOT

RULE 10-4-4a

- The basic spot is the spot of the foul for:
 - a. Illegal batting or illegal kicking by A that occurs behind the basic spot.



NEW DELAY OF GAME SIGNAL



PREVIOUS
DELAY OF GAME SIGNAL



NEW
DELAY OF GAME SIGNAL

2026 NFHS FOOTBALL EDITORIAL CHANGES



1-3-5b	Changed “Head Linesman” to “Head Line Judge.
1-5-3a(2)	Deleted the reference to “opponent.”
2-15-1	Further clarified to make definition more consistent with forward fumble rule that was approved in 2025.
3-5-7g	Replaced “heat and humidity” with “circumstances and conditions” better covers a variety of situations that may create a health risk to players.
4-1-3	Deleted “if elected” from the rule as it was not needed.
5-3-1	Added “ball being” before ready-for-play for clarification.
5-3-2	Changed “Head Linesman” to “Head Line Judge.
8-2-2, 8-2-3, 8-2-4, 8-2-5	Changed “subsequent kickoff” to “succeeding spot” for clarification.

2026 NFHS FOOTBALL EDITORIAL CHANGES



9-8 PENALTY	Added ‘basic spot’ to the PENALTY section to give better clarity that unsportsmanlike and nonplayer unsportsmanlike fouls are enforced from the basic spot.
10-4-2	Revised the rules references in the rule.
10-4-2b	Deleted “behind the line of scrimmage” from the rule to eliminate redundancy.
10-5-3	Deleted “and enforcement is from behind its goal line” to eliminate conflicts with recent rules changes to Rule 10-4.
FOOTBALL FUNDAMENTAL – Penalty Measurement (4)	Removed all of the rules references and relaced with “otherwise specified by rule.”
RESOLVING TIED GAMES – (3-1)	Changed “Head Linesman” to “Head Line Judge.
6-Player Rules Differences – Rule 7	Further clarified when a passer becomes eligible if the pass was touched by B.



2026 NFHS FOOTBALL RULES REMINDERS



TOOTH & MOUTH PROTECTOR

RULE 1-5-1d(5)a – 4



ILLEGAL



ILLEGAL

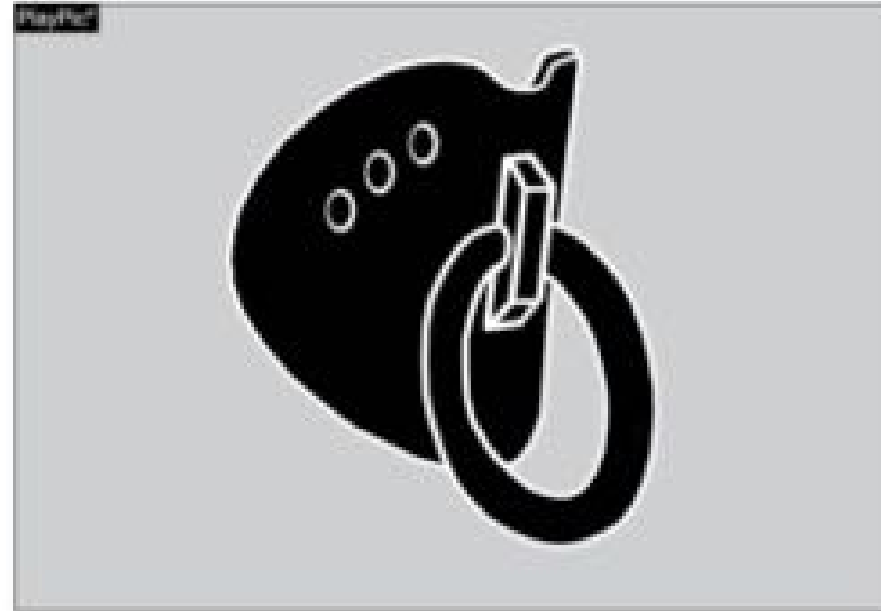
Effective 2026: Tooth and mouth protectors may not include any attachment(s) that do not serve a purpose and function in protecting the teeth or mouth.

TOOTH & MOUTH PROTECTOR

RULE 1-5-1d(5)a – 5



ILLEGAL



ILLEGAL

Effective 2026: Tooth and mouth protectors may not include anything on them that is a health or risk issue and can pose a danger to themselves or other players.

TOOTH & MOUTH PROTECTOR

RULES 1-5-1d(5)a – 4, 5



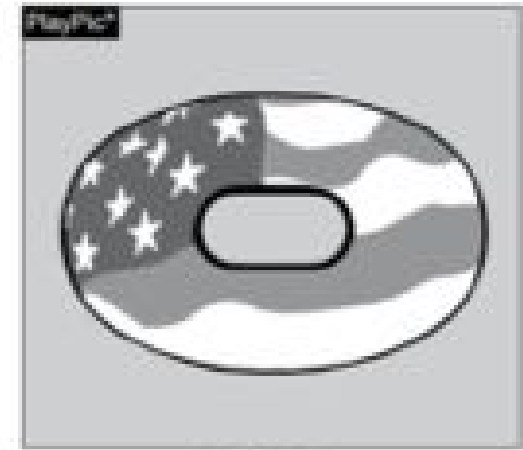
LEGAL



LEGAL



LEGAL



LEGAL

These tooth and mouth protectors neither include any attachment(s) that does not serve a purpose and function in protecting the teeth or mouth, nor anything that is a health or risk issue posing a danger and are not impacted by this rule change.



ARM SLEEVES

RULES 1-5-2d, 1-5-3c(6)



Effective 2027: Arm sleeves, whether attached to a shirt or unattached, manufactured to enhance contact with the football or opponent must meet the SFIA Specification at the time of manufacture.



ARM SLEEVES

RULES 1-5-2d, 1-5-3c(6)



Effective 2027: Arm sleeves must have a permanent, exact replica of the SFIA arm sleeve seal (meets SFIA Specification), that must be visible and appear legibly on the exterior of the arm sleeve.

ELECTRONIC SIGNS

RULE 1-5-3c(2)

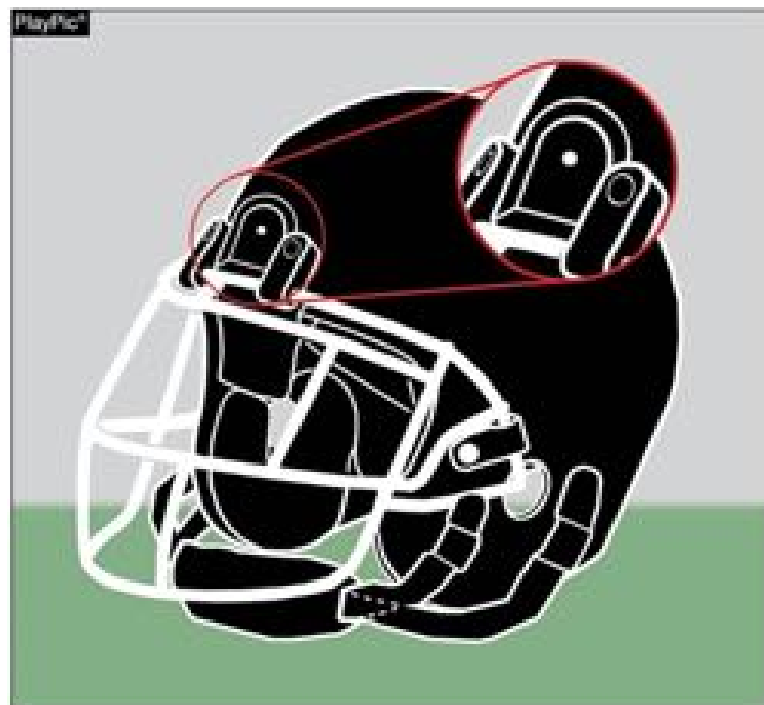


LEGAL

Fixed electronic signs (non-audio) with play signals are allowed to communicate from the sideline.

ILLEGAL EQUIPMENT

RULE 1-5-3c(3) (NEW)



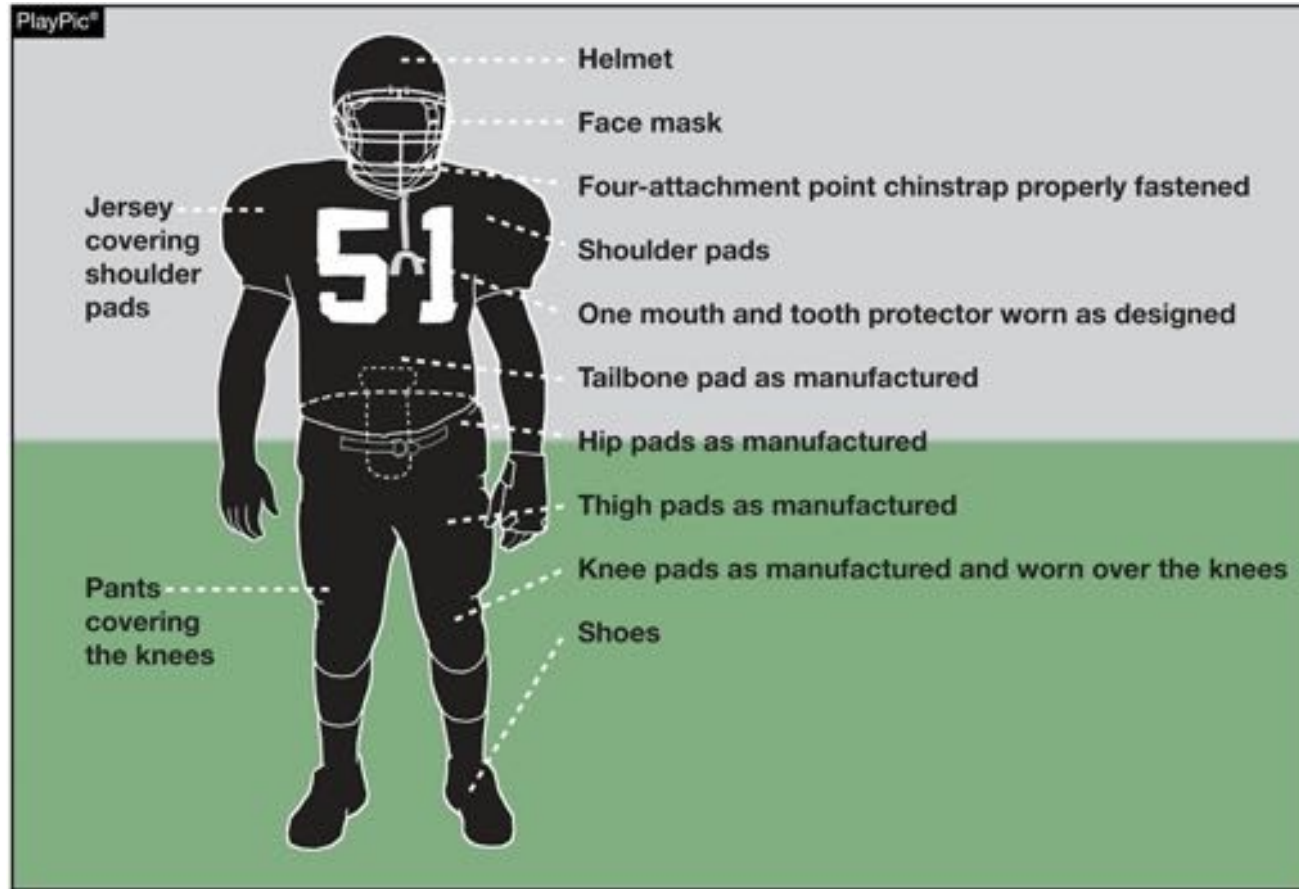
ILLEGAL



ILLEGAL

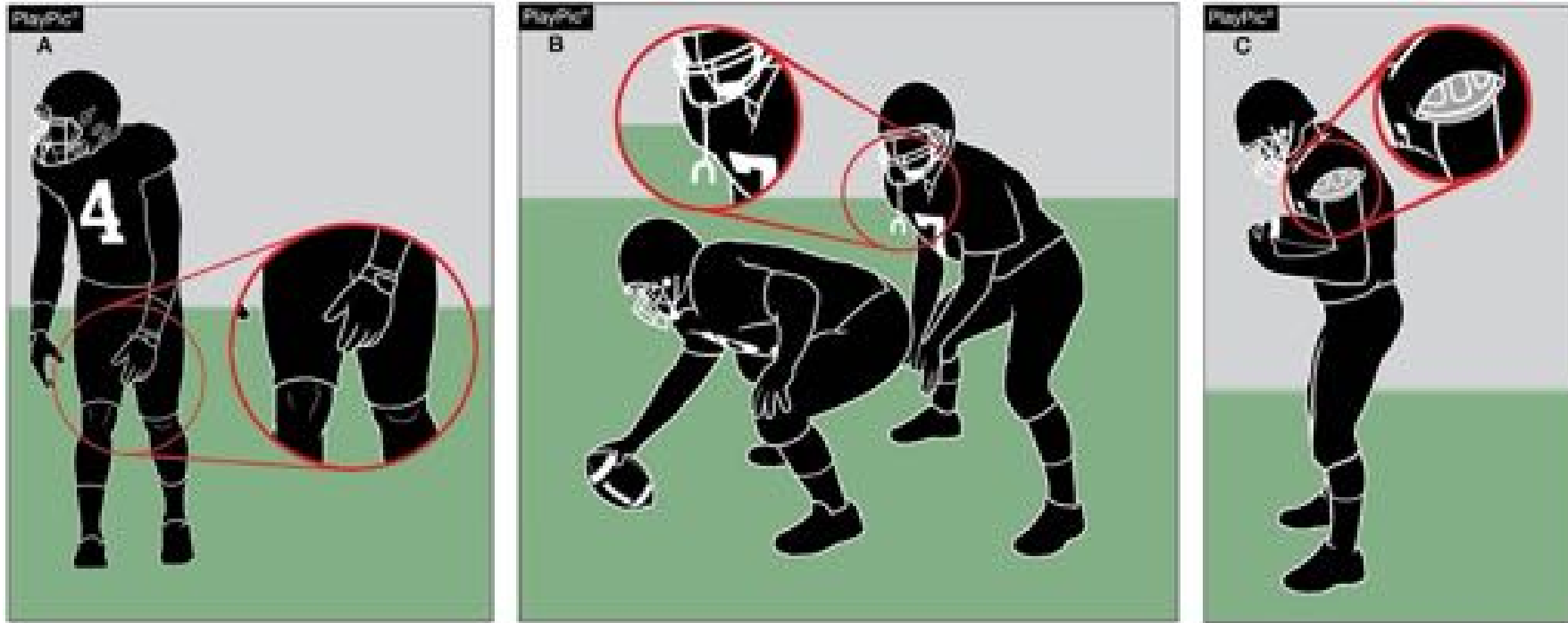
Any video (camera) device or audio (microphone) worn by a player during the game is illegal.

ILLEGAL AND IMPROPERLY WORN PLAYER EQUIPMENT



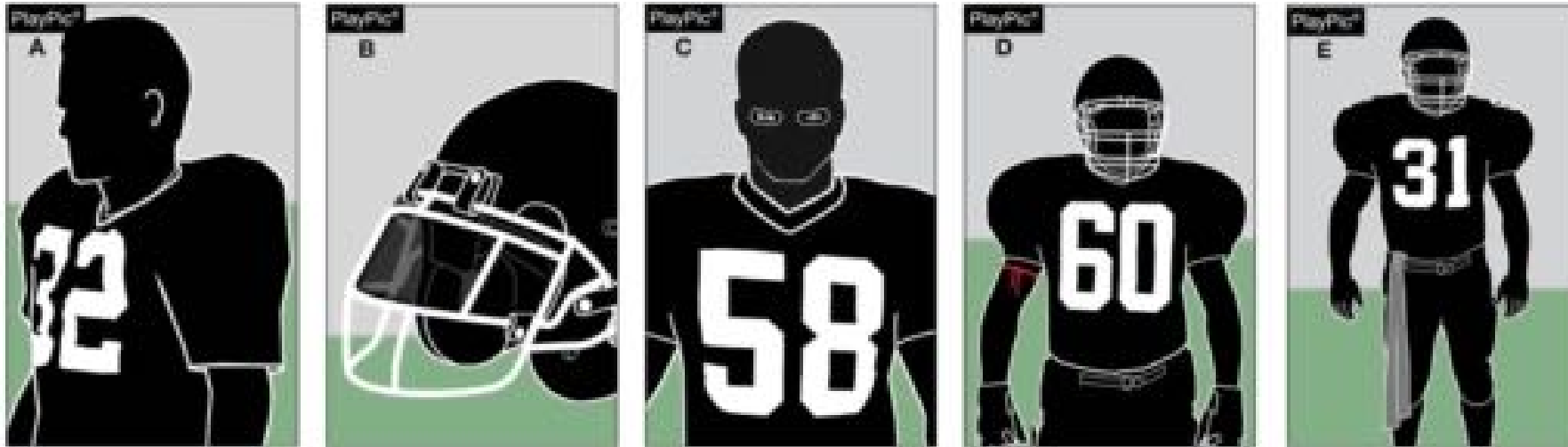
To support the safety of all participants, players must wear equipment and uniforms that are properly fitted and worn as intended by the manufacturer. Before starting each game, the head coach must verify that all players are properly and legally equipped. Allowing players to use illegal equipment or to wear required equipment improperly could subject the coach to a penalty.

ILLEGAL AND IMPROPERLY WORN PLAYER EQUIPMENT



Improperly worn equipment pertains to all equipment that is otherwise legal but not worn as intended. Examples include pants not covering the knees, tooth and mouth protectors not being worn as play starts and shoulder pads not properly covered by the jersey.

ILLEGAL AND IMPROPERLY WORN PLAYER EQUIPMENT

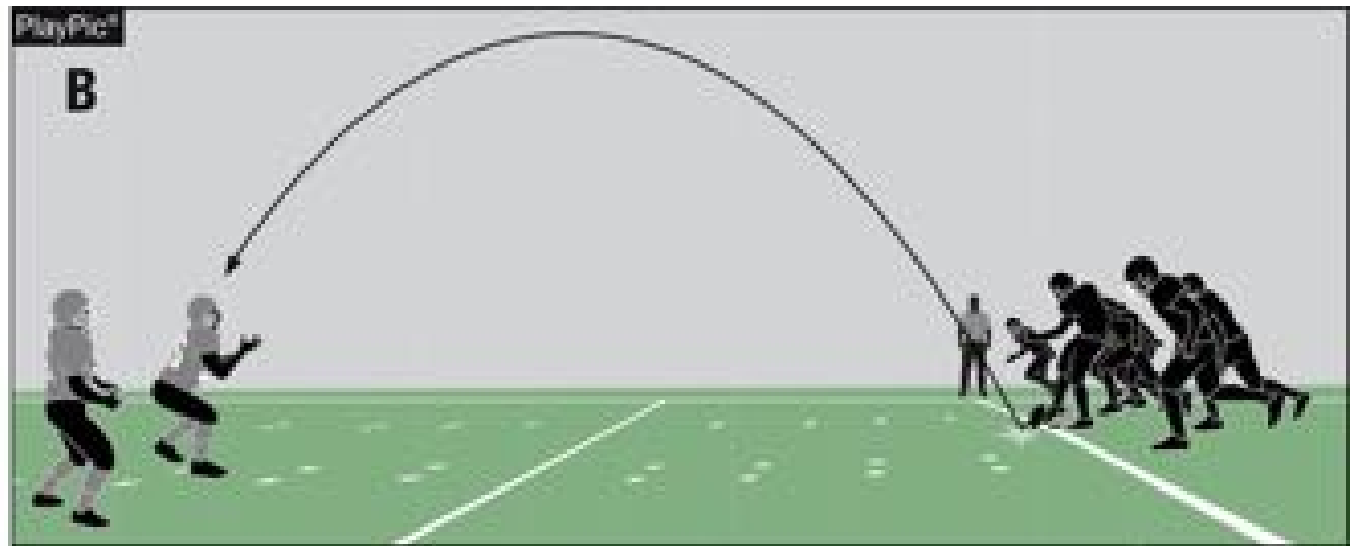
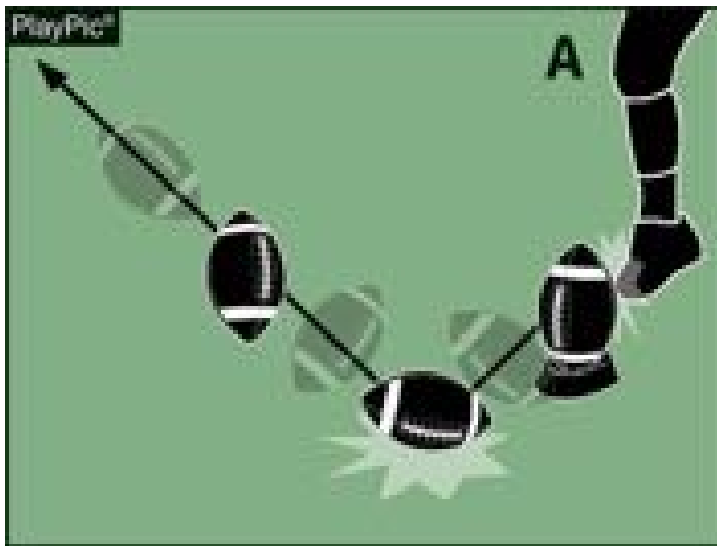


Illegal (prohibited) equipment includes jewelry (A), tinted visors (B), non-compliant eye shade (C), bands worn around the upper arm, neck or legs (D), and uniform adornments like towels that do not conform to rules (E).

POP-UP KICK

RULES 2-24-10; 6-1-11; 6-1 PENALTY

- A pop-up kick is a free kick in which the kicker drives the ball immediately to the ground, the ball strikes the ground once and goes into the air in the manner of a ball kicked directly off the tee. Such kicks are penalized as a dead-ball foul.





2026 NFHS FOOTBALL POINTS OF EMPHASIS



2026 NFHS FOOTBALL POINTS OF EMPHASIS

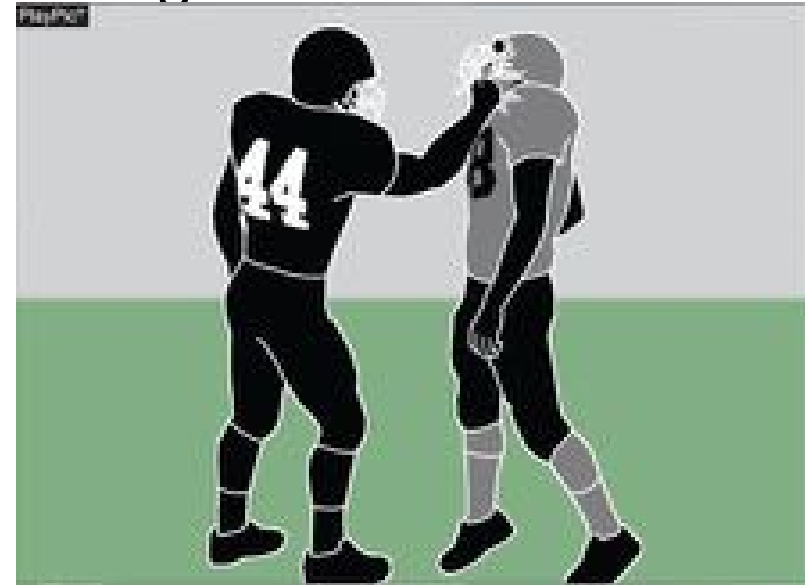


- 1. Flagrant and Unsportsmanlike Fouls**
- 2. Helping the Runner**
- 3. Sideline Management and Control**
- 4. Identification of the NFHS Authenticating Mark on Game Balls**

FLAGRANT AND UNSPORTSMANLIKE FOULS



- In high school football, flagrant fouls and unsportsmanlike fouls are serious rule violations that threaten player safety and the integrity of the game.
- Game officials must consistently penalize both flagrant and unsportsmanlike fouls to maintain control of the game.



FLAGRANT AND UNSPORTSMANLIKE FOULS



- Flagrant fouls are the most severe type of personal foul in high school football.
- A foul so severe or extreme that it places an opponent in danger of serious injury, and/or involves violations that are extremely or persistently vulgar or abusive conduct.
- These actions involve intentional, reckless or excessively violent behavior that shows a clear disregard for the safety of others. Examples include fighting, maliciously targeting the head or neck area, striking an opponent, or delivering a violent illegal blindside block or late hit.
- Disqualification if any foul is judged by the game official to be flagrant.

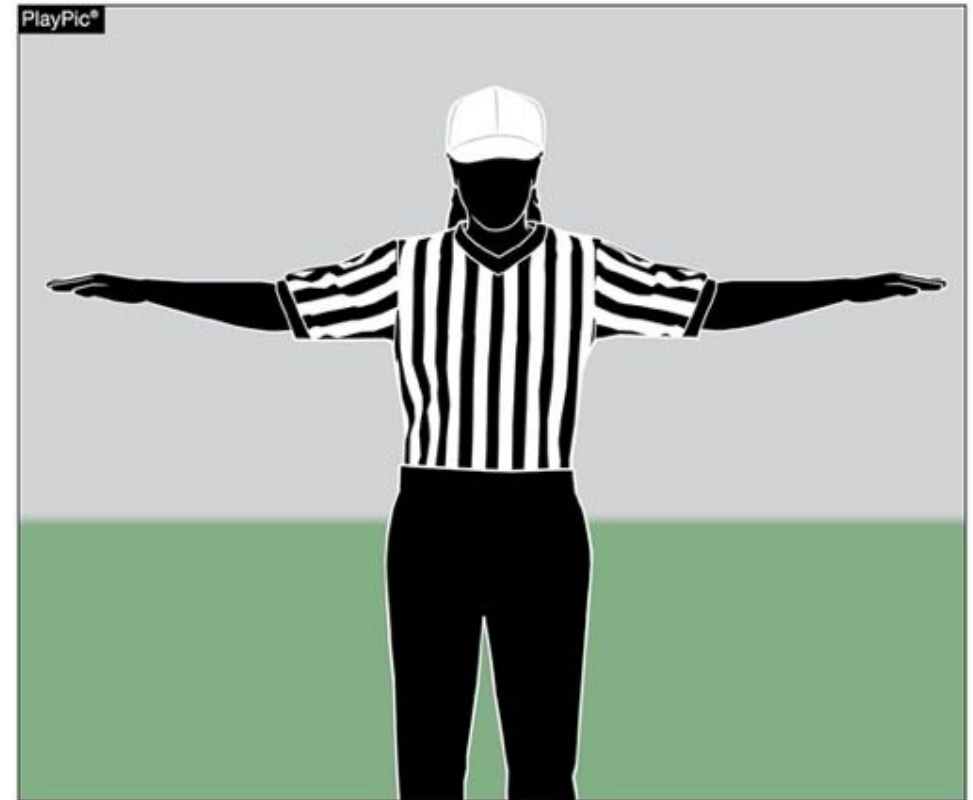


PERSONAL FOUL

FLAGRANT AND UNSPORTSMANLIKE FOULS



- Unsportsmanlike fouls are non-contact fouls that violate standards of fair play, respect and sportsmanship.
- Common examples include taunting, threatening gestures or posturing, racist comments, trash talking, excessive or choreographed celebrations, aggressively spiking, spinning or throwing the ball high into the air, using profanity, spitting, arguing with game officials, or throwing equipment.



UNSPORTSMANLIKE CONDUCT
NONCONTACT FOUL

HELPING THE RUNNER

- Illegally helping the runner to assist forward progress presents a risk of injury to the runner and others. The additional momentum to a particular offensive player, as opposed to the pile, swings the competitive balance toward the offense in a manner not intended by the rules.





HELPING THE RUNNER

- Although direct contact with the runner is illegal under NFHS rules, these types of plays are becoming more common in the high school game. As guardians of the game, it is imperative that all stakeholders work together to remove “illegally helping the runner” from our high school game.



HELPING THE RUNNER

- Although a foul can occur on any play, game officials should especially be alert for this type of action on short-yardage plays near the goal line and line to gain. Remember, pushing the pile is legal; direct contact while pushing, pulling, lifting of the runner to assist forward progress is not.

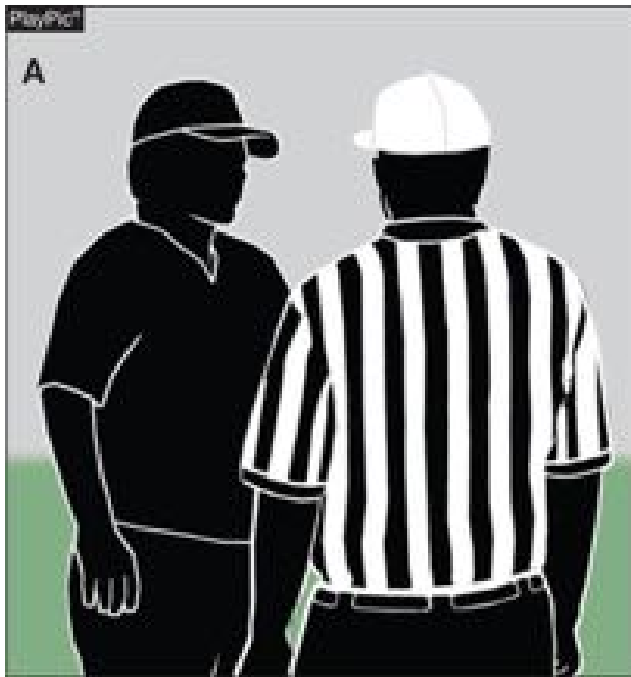
SIDELINE MANAGEMENT AND CONTROL



- Sideline management has become a recurring “point of emphasis” because it improves game safety. To minimize the risk of all involved, non-players must remain in their team box and out of any restricted areas, especially while the ball is live. The coaches’ area is a minimum of a 2-yard belt between the front of the team box and the sideline, and becomes the restricted area when the ball is live. A maximum of three coaches – and only coaches – may be in this area when the ball is dead between plays.



SIDELINE MANAGEMENT AND CONTROL



- Game officials are instructed to strictly enforce NFHS Football Rules when coaches or team personnel enter the field of play to dispute rulings or address game officials outside the coaching area.

SIDELINE MANAGEMENT AND CONTROL



- Sideline management and control promotes good sportsmanship and professionalism across all levels of play, and also prevents unnecessary delays and confrontations that can impact game flow and fairness.

IDENTIFICATION OF NFHS AUTHENTICATING MARK ON GAME BALLS

- The NFHS Authenticating Mark ensures easy identification of inflated and non-inflated balls used in interscholastic competition for which the NFHS writes playing rules. All such balls are required to display the NFHS Authenticating Mark.



NFHS Authenticating Mark Update



Old Logos

Current Logo



Specifications

- Do not use the NFHS Authenticating Mark without prior written approval from the NFHS
- This mark is for use of licensees only.

Minimum size

- **Inflatable Balls** - 2 ½" in length (Basketball, Football, Soccer, Volleyball, and Water Polo)
- **Non-Inflatable Balls** - 1 ¼" in length (Baseball, Field Hockey, Ice Hockey Puck, Lacrosse, and Softball)
- On a ball or puck, the NFHS mark may be smaller than manufacturer's logo, but should be placed in proximity to the manufacturer's name for easy identification. Allow enough space around the mark so it can be easily recognized as distinct and separate.
- Reproduce the mark only from the vector artwork provided on Direct Licensing Hub. Do not copy, scan art electronically or use as a template to redraw the symbol.

Note: If sizing or specifications do not work well in your particular design situation, contact K12 Licensing.

Football



Old Size



Current Size





2026 AND 2027 NFHS FOOTBALL GAME OFFICIALS MANUAL





2026 AND 2027 NFHS FOOTBALL GAME OFFICIALS MANUAL POINTS OF EMPHASIS

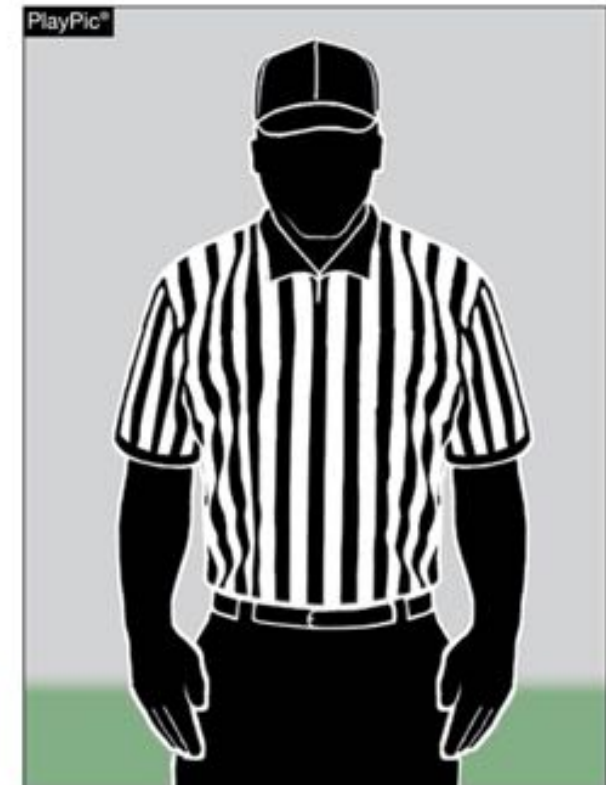
- 1. Penalty Communication**
- 2. Forward Progress**
- 3. Free-Kick Coverage**

NEW POSITION NAME

- The *Head Linesman* position is now referred to as *Head Line Judge*.

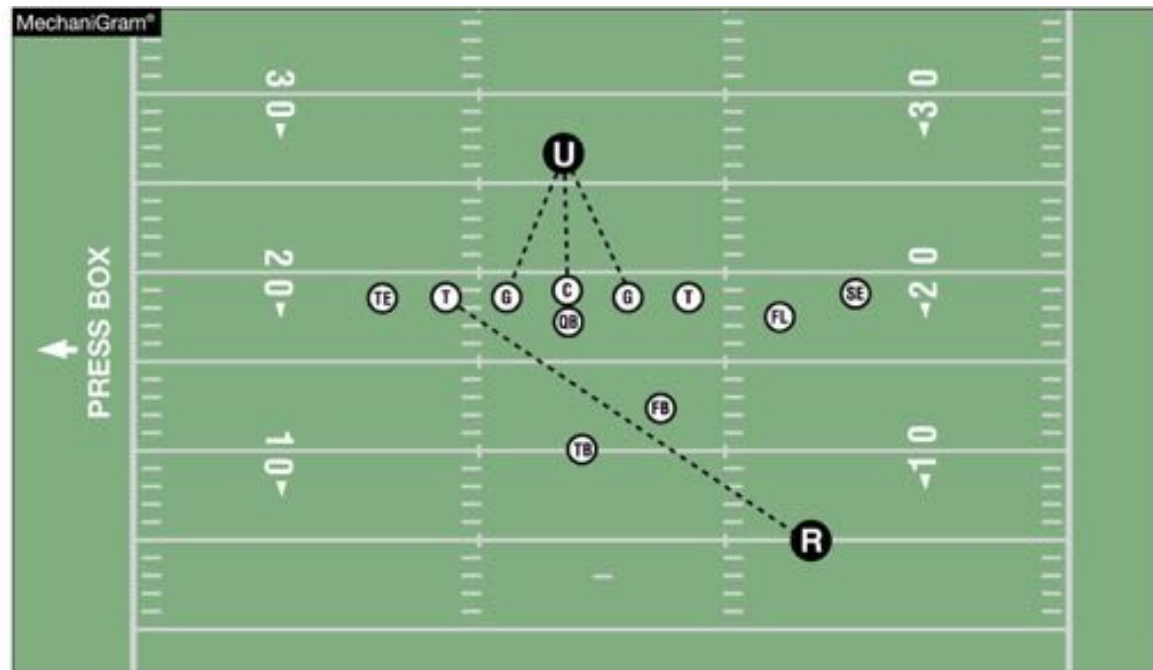


PREVIOUS
HEAD LINESMAN



NEW
HEAD LINE JUDGE

REFEREE & UMPIRE KEYS

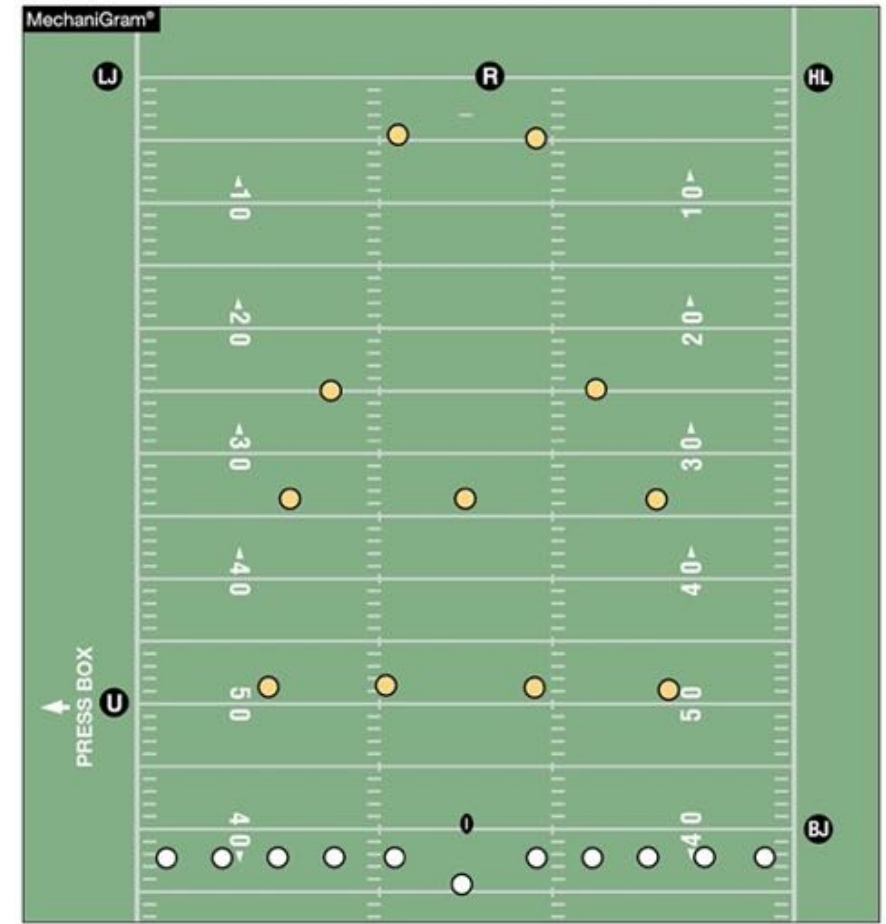


In all but the rarest cases, the Referee will key on the opposite side tackle. In all cases the Umpire will key on the center and both guards.



CREW OF FIVE FREE KICK POSITIONS

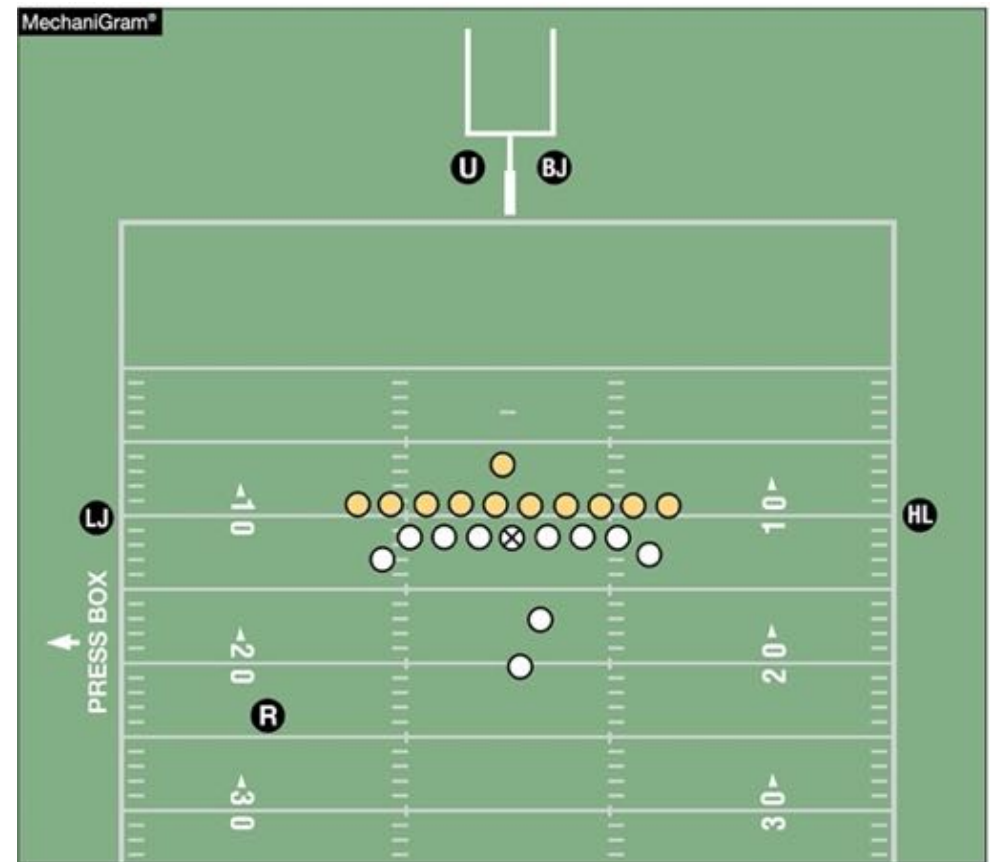
- **REFEREE:** Starting position is on the goal line between the hash marks and in the center of the field.
- **UMPIRE:** Starting position is outside the sideline on the side opposite the chains, on Team R's free-kick line.
- **WING OFFICIALS:** Starting position is on Team R's goal line extended but can be adjusted based on the deepest receiver. If starting position is adjusted, both line of scrimmage officials must be on the same yard line and deeper than the deepest receiver.
- **BACK JUDGE:** Starting position is outside the sideline on the side with the chains, on Team K's free-kick line.



CREW OF FIVE SCORING KICK POSITIONS



- **REFEREE:** Starting position is 2 to 3 yards to rear and 3 to 5 yards to side of potential kicker, facing holder.
- **UMPIRE:** Starting position is beyond the end line and behind the upright.
- **WING OFFICIALS:** Starting position is straddling the line of scrimmage.
- **BACK JUDGE:** Starting position is beyond the end line and behind the upright.
- **NOTE:** *On a field-goal attempt by free kick (in accordance with Rules 6-1-1a and 8-4-1a), the chains are set to establish the 10-yard neutral zone. Referee is behind the upright. Umpire is behind the upright and rules on the crossbar. Both game officials determine whether kick is successful. All other game officials' mechanics are the same as for a kickoff.*





Thank You

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