

NATIONAL FEDERATION OF STATE
HIGH SCHOOL ASSOCIATIONS



NEWS RELEASE

New Blocking, Kicking Rules Address Risk Minimization in High School Football

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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INDIANAPOLIS, IN (February 22, 2017) — New rules on blindside blocking are the most recent steps taken by the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) Football Rules Committee in minimizing the risks associated with the sport.

The establishment of a new definition of a blindside block in Rule 2-3-10 and the addition of Rule 9-4-3n prohibiting a blindside block were two of 11 rules changes recommended by the NFHS Football Rules Committee at its January 20-22 meeting in Indianapolis. All rules changes were subsequently approved by the NFHS Board of Directors.

“The NFHS Football Rules Committee’s actions this year once again addressed risk minimization, officiating, competitive balance and game administration,” said Bob Colgate, director of sports and sports medicine at the NFHS and staff liaison for football.

The definition of a blindside block established by the committee is “a block against an opponent other than the runner, who does not see the blocker approaching,” and now results in a 15-yard penalty.

The committee stated that the blindside block “involves contact by a blocker against an opponent who, because of physical positioning and focus of concentration, is vulnerable to injury.

Unless initiated with open hands, it is a foul for excessive and unnecessary contact when the block is forceful and outside of the free-blocking zone.”

“As has been the case for many years, the NFHS Football Rules Committee continued to place their main emphasis on risk minimization,” said Todd Tharp, chair of the NFHS Football Rules Committee and assistant director of the Iowa High School Athletic Association. “With this new definition of a blindside block and the penalty to be assessed, the committee stresses the importance of proper coaching techniques under the rules and accurate enforcement by the game officials.”

Another significant risk-minimization change was elimination of a pop-up kick in new Rule 6-1-11. A new definition of a pop-up kick in Rule 2-24-10 is defined as “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.”

The committee implemented this change in an effort to reduce risk of injury due to the increased use of the pop-up kick on onside kickoffs. Such kicks will be penalized as a dead-ball free-kick infraction, as noted with new Rule 6-1-11 PENALTY.

The NFHS Football Rules Committee also expanded Rule 2-32-16 regarding a defenseless player by adding specific examples of a defenseless player. Those examples include, but are not limited to:

- a) A player in the act of or just after throwing a pass;
- b) A receiver attempting to catch a pass who has not had time to clearly become a runner;
- c) The intended receiver of a pass in the action during and immediately following an interception or potential interception;
- d) A runner already in the grasp of a tackler and whose forward progress has been stopped;
- e) A kickoff or punt returner attempting to catch or recover a kick, or one who has completed a catch or recovery and has not had time to protect himself or has not clearly become a ball carrier;
- f) A player on the ground including a ball carrier who has obviously given himself up and is sliding feet-first;
- g) A player obviously out of the play or not in the immediate vicinity of the runner; and
- h) A player who received a blindside block with forceful contact not initiated with open hands.

“A great deal of time was spent by the committee creating specific criteria to define exactly what a defenseless player is,” Tharp said. “Coaches can use these examples to focus on the proper mechanics of blocking and tackling, and game officials now are able to use this expanded definition to focus on continued risk minimization of the players.”

Changes to Rule 7-1-6 expand on the situations required for encroachment to occur after the ready-for-play and after the snapper has placed his hand(s) on the ball. The rule previously stated that encroachment occurred if “any other player breaks the plane of the neutral zone.” In addition, now defensive players are restricted from contacting the ball prior to the end of the snap or making contact with the snapper’s hand(s) or arm(s) until the snapper has released the ball.

The remaining changes approved by the NFHS Football Rules Committee touched on a new ball specification (1-3-1h), uniforms [(1-5-1b(3))], game officials (1-5-4), post-scrimmage kick fouls (2-16-2h), penalty time clock management (3-4-7), prosthetic limbs (4-2-2l) and forward-pass interference (7-5-10), in which the previous foul for non-contact face guarding was eliminated as forward-pass interference.

Regarding the uniform change in Rule 1-5-1b(3), effective with the 2021 season, “the jerseys of the home team shall be a dark color that clearly contrasts to white.”

“The committee revised the rule to provide schools and manufacturers more clarification regarding the game’s current trend of utilizing lighter gray shades,” Colgate said. “The requirement for teams to wear contrasting colors to white is not a new rule, and it is the committee’s expectation that this new clarification will allow changes to be made during normal replacement cycles.”

A complete listing of all rules changes will be available soon on the NFHS website at www.nfhs.org. Click on “Activities & Sports” at the top of the home page, and select “Football.”

According to the 2015-16 NFHS High School Athletics Participation Survey, football is the most popular sport for boys at the high school level with 1,083,308 participants in 11-player football. Another combined 28,943 boys participated in 6-, 8- and 9-player football. In addition, 2,140 girls participated in one of the four football offerings during the 2015 season.

This press release was written by Cody Porter, graphic arts/communications assistant in the NFHS Publications/Communications Department.

About the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS)

The NFHS, based in Indianapolis, Indiana, is the national leadership organization for high school sports and performing arts activities. Since 1920, the NFHS has led the development of education-based interscholastic sports and performing arts activities that help students succeed in their lives. The NFHS sets direction for the future by building awareness and support, improving the participation experience, establishing consistent standards and rules for competition, and helping those who oversee high school sports and activities. The NFHS writes playing rules for 17 sports for boys and girls at the high school level. Through its 50 member state associations and the District of Columbia, the NFHS reaches more than 19,000 high schools and 11 million participants in high school activity programs, including more than 7.8 million in high school sports. As the recognized national authority on interscholastic activity programs, the NFHS conducts national meetings; sanctions interstate events; offers online publications and services for high school coaches and officials; sponsors professional organizations for high school coaches, officials, speech and debate coaches, and music adjudicators; serves as the national source for interscholastic coach training; and serves as a national information resource of interscholastic athletics and activities. For more information, visit the NFHS website at www.nfhs.org.

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