

Muff, Touch or Bat?

If it looks like a muff, it can't be anything but a muff, right? Well, not necessarily.

A muff is the touching of a loose ball by a player in an unsuccessful attempt to secure possession (Rule 2-27). In order to muff the ball it must be touched. Touching differs from a muff in that touching may be unintentional and may result from being touched by the ball (Rule 2-44). Batting — the intentional striking or slapping of the ball with the hand or arm — is another type of touching (Rule 2-2).

Three different definitions, yet an act by a player may meet more than one of those criteria.

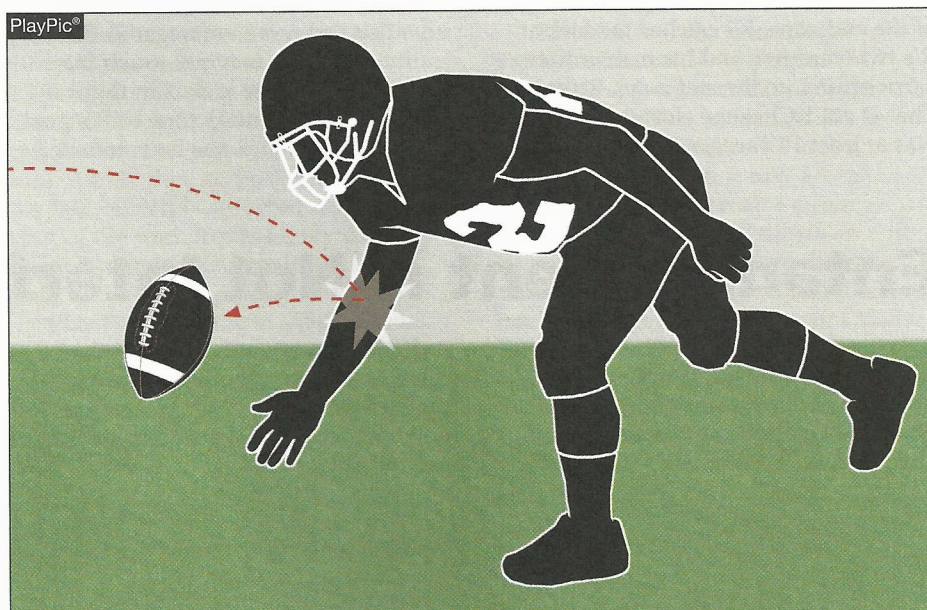
For instance, a player in the PlayPic may be batting, muffing or touching the ball. If he/she is an R player, the ball is loose as the result of a kick and he/she intentionally made contact with the ball, he/she has touched and muffed the ball. If he/she struck the ball, he/she muffed, touched and batted the ball.

Why is that important? Game officials need to know which of those acts has occurred so they can rule on

subsequent action. If the ball is muffed, it may or may not become dead upon recovery, same as if it is touched. If the ball is batted, it may be a foul, depending on where the bat occurs, the direction the ball is batted, the type of

loose ball involved and which team did the batting.

Knowing whether the ball has been muffed, touched or batted is a must, as is knowing how those acts differ and how they are defined. □



Kick-Catching Interference Explained

An R player who is trying to catch a free or scrimmage kick and so located that he/she could have caught the ball must be given an unimpeded opportunity to catch the kick. The kick receiver must be inbounds in the field of play between the goal lines and beyond the neutral zone (for scrimmage kicks).

If the kicking team does not comply with those rules, the foul is called kick-catching interference (KCI). The offended team has a choice of an awarded fair catch after enforcement of a 15-yard penalty from the spot of the foul, a 15-yard penalty enforced from the previous spot and a replay of the down.

KCI is purely a judgment call.

Play 1: K1 bumps R2 before R2 catches a punt at R's 20-yard line. R2 (a) is knocked to the ground, or (b) returns the kick to midfield. **Ruling:** It is KCI in both cases. In (a), the penalty is enforced from the spot of the foul. It is R's ball,

first and 10 at R's 35-yard line. In (b), R will decline the penalty and take the results of the play. That yields first and 10 at the 50-yard line.

Play 2: R1 runs up several yards to catch a punt. he/she has to go around K2, who is in R1's path to the ball. R1 muffs the kick and K2 recovers. **Ruling:** K2 did not give R1 an unimpeded opportunity to catch the ball. The spot of the foul is where R1 had to go around K2. Note that is a foul whether there is contact or not.

In general, restrictions against the kicking team apply whether or not a fair catch signal is given.

Kicking team restrictions end when the kick touches the ground or any receiving team player (6-5-6 Exception).

Play 3: K1's punt beyond the neutral zone hits (a) the ground, or (b) R2's shoulder. The ball bounces high into the air. R3 gives a fair catch signal. K3

slightly bumps R2 before R2 completes the catch. **Ruling:** KCI restrictions end when the ball touches the ground or another R player. There is no foul for KCI. However, there can be a foul if the contact is a personal foul.

A kicking team player can catch, touch, muff or legally bat a kick in flight past the neutral zone if no R player is in position to catch the kick (6-5-6). If any free kick or scrimmage kick beyond the neutral zone is caught or recovered by team K, the ball is dead at the spot of recovery (6-2-3, 6-6-5).

Play 4: A punt is partially blocked behind the line and then travels beyond the neutral zone. R1 is in position to make the catch, but the ball bounces off K2's helmet before hitting the ground. K2 is a yard away from R1. **Ruling:** That is KCI on K2 as well as first touching. K may not be first to touch a scrimmage

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kick in flight if a R player is in position to catch the kick.

Play 5: A punt is headed for the end zone. R1 gives a fair catch signal at R's 12-yard line. he/she moves up, trying to convince the kicking team the ball will come down near him. K2 is not fooled and tries to keep the ball out of the end zone. K2 catches the kick at R's two-yard line and his momentum carries him into the end zone. **Ruling:** That is not KCI as the closest R player was at least 10 yards away when K2

caught the kick. The ball is dead where K2 possessed it. It is R's ball, first and 10 at its own two-yard line.

Play 6: A short free kick is in flight. R players retreat to block for a return. With no R player in position to make a catch, K1 catches the kick 12 yards past team K's free-kick line and advances for a touchdown. **Ruling:** The ball is dead where K1 possessed it and the advance and score are negated. K1 is guilty of KCI. K may not touch the ball while any free kick is in flight in or beyond the neutral zone to R's goal line unless the kick has been touched

by an R player.

If interference with a potential kick receiver is the result of a player being blocked into the kick receiver by an opponent, there is no foul.

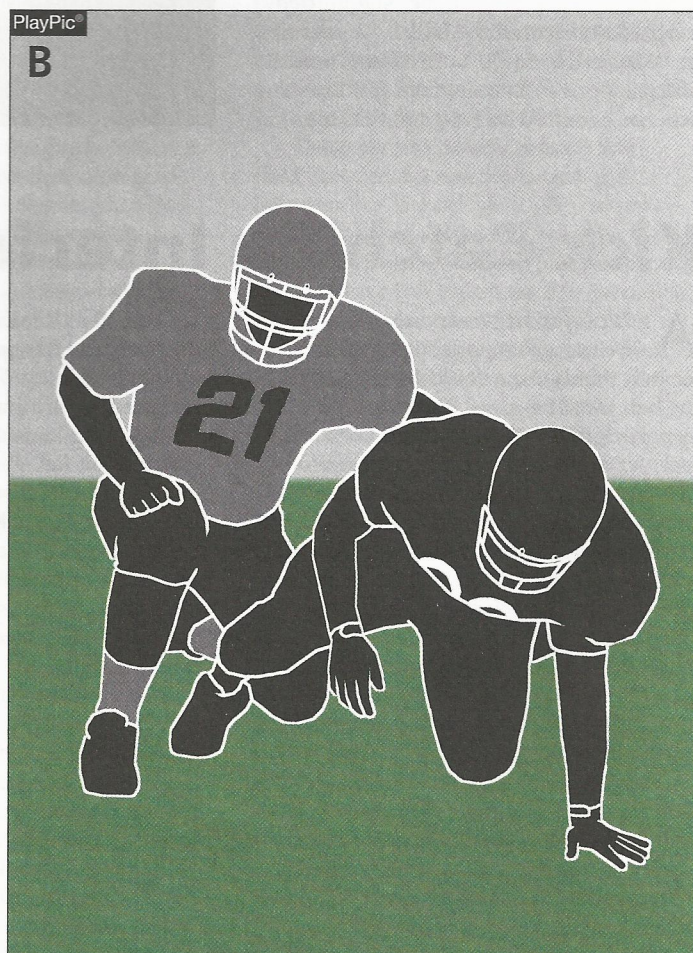
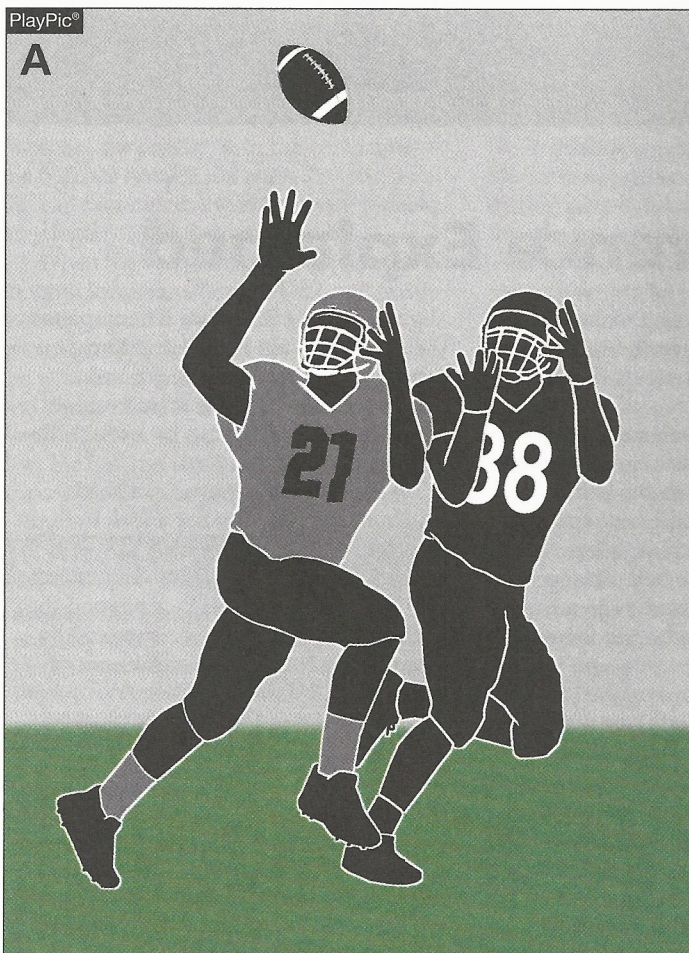
Play 7: R1 is in position to catch a punt. K2 runs downfield to a point about a foot in front of R1 as the ball descends. R1 catches the punt with or without having to adjust his position due to K2's location. K2 immediately tackles R1. **Ruling:** If the covering official believes R1 had an unobstructed chance to catch the ball, there is no foul. □

Entanglement is Not Interference

Entanglement occurs when a receiver accidentally trips a defender (or vice versa) during a pass play. The key word in that sentence, of course, is "accidentally." In PlayPic

A, both players are running in the same direction and are attempting to play the ball. After their feet become entangled, both players go to the ground (PlayPic B).

Doubtless coaches, fans and players will scream for a flag. But ignore the hoots and howls; entanglement should not be called pass interference. □



Double, Multiple Fouls Prove Challenging

If, during the same play, one team fouls more than once or there are fouls by both teams, various penalty enforcement scenarios can happen.

When the same team commits more than one live-ball foul during a down, the term is multiple fouls. In order for multiple foul provisions to apply, neither of the fouls can be a nonplayer foul or unsportsmanlike foul. If more than one live-ball foul by the same team is reported to the referee, only one penalty can be enforced.

Play 1: On third down, A is flagged for an illegal formation. During the play, which results in an incomplete pass, A1 holds B2. **Ruling:** B can decline both penalties to advance the down to fourth or accept either penalty.

Play 2: During a play, A is flagged for an illegal shift and A1 is flagged for tripping. B1 intercepts a pass while grounded. **Ruling:** Multiple fouls on A. Game officials should assume B will decline both penalties to keep the ball. It is OK for the referee to give signals for both fouls, followed by the penalty declined signal, then signal B's first down.

Play 3: On first down, A1 clips B2. After a pass falls incomplete, A3 is flagged for a late hit. **Ruling:** Live-ball and dead-ball fouls cannot be paired to create a multiple foul. B may accept the penalties for both fouls.

What happens when both teams commit an infraction while the ball is live? That is called double fouls. If live-ball fouls are committed by both teams, the penalties cancel and the down is repeated. That does not apply when one of the fouls is a nonplayer or unsportsmanlike foul.

Play 4: A is flagged for illegal motion. B1 grabs and twists A2's facemask while making a tackle. **Ruling:** Each team has committed a live-ball foul; thus the fouls offset. The down is repeated.

Play 5: During live-ball action, A is flagged for two fouls and B commits one. **Ruling:** No matter how many live-ball fouls occur during the down, as long as both teams foul, it is a double foul situation. The fouls offset.

Clean hands. The clean hands rule comes into play when each team fouls during a down in which there is a change of possession and the last

team in possession did not foul before it gained possession. The penalties do not automatically cancel and the final team in possession of the ball is given two choices.

Play 6: First and 10 from A's 20-yard line. A1 holds at A's 15-yard line before A2 throws a legal forward pass. B3 intercepts the pass at A's 40-yard line and is downed at A's 15-yard line. During B3's advance, B4 clips A5 at A's 35-yard line. **Ruling:** B can decline the penalty for A's holding foul. A may then accept the penalty for B's foul, which is enforced from the spot of the foul. In the highly unlikely event B accepts the penalty for A's foul, the penalties offset.

Play 7: A1 is guilty of a chop block before A2 throws a pass. B3 roughs A2. B4 intercepts the pass and is immediately tackled. **Ruling:** Clean hands does not apply because B fouled before team

possession changed. The penalties cancel and the down is repeated.

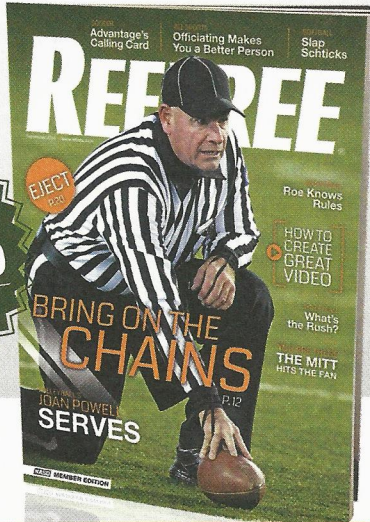
The second exception is when a K foul precedes a R post-scrimmage kick (PSK) foul. R can decline the penalty for K's foul and retain possession of the ball after the PSK penalty is enforced.

Play 8: K is flagged for illegal formation. R1 catches a punt at R's 20-yard line. he/she advances to R's 35-yard line and is tackled. While the kick is in flight, R2 clips K3 at R's 30-yard line. **Ruling:** R may accept the penalty for K's foul, creating offsetting penalties, and the down will be repeated. Or R may keep the ball by declining the penalty for K's foul and having PSK penalty enforcement apply. Thus, the penalty would be enforced half the distance to the goal line from the PSK spot. That would give R the ball, first and 10 at its 10-yard line. □

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Flashback: 2014 NFHS Football Rules Changes

Here is a review of the NFHS football rules changes from 2014 that are still applicable in 2015.

Targeting Defined (Rule 2-20-2)

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 penalty for targeting is 15 yards. The offending player may be disqualified if the foul is judged by the game official to be flagrant.

Defenseless Player Definition (Rule 2-32-16, 9-4-3i(3))

A defenseless player is a player who, because of his physical position and focus of concentration, is especially vulnerable to injury.

Examples of defenseless players include, but are not limited to:

- A quarterback moving down the line of scrimmage who has handed or pitched the ball to a teammate, and then makes no attempt to participate further in the play.
- A kicker who is in the act of kicking the ball, or who has not had a reasonable amount of time to regain his/her balance after the kick.
- A passer who is in the act of throwing the ball, or who has not had a reasonable length of time to participate in the play again after releasing the ball.
- A pass receiver whose concentration is on the ball and the contact by the defender is unrelated to the receiver attempting to catch the ball.
- A pass receiver who has clearly

relaxed when he/she has missed the pass or feels he/she can no longer catch the pass.

- A kick returner attempting to catch a kick.
- A kick receiver who is immediately contacted after touching the ball.
- A player on the ground.
- Any player who has relaxed once the ball has become dead.
- A player who receives a blindside block.
- A ball carrier already in the grasp of an opponent and whose forward progress has been stopped.
- Any player who is obviously out of the play.

Forced Touching Ignored (Rule 8-5-1b)

The accidental touching of a loose ball by a player who was blocked into the ball is ignored and does not constitute a new force. For instance, touching of a scrimmage kick by R caused by K pushing or blocking R into contact with the ball or legally batting or muffing the ball into R is ignored. Also, touching of a free kick by either team is ignored if it is caused by being blocked or pushed into contact with the ball.

Extending a Period (Rules 3-3-3, 3-3-4)

A period shall be extended for an untimed down if, during a down in which time expires, there was an inadvertent whistle; there was a foul by either team and the penalty is accepted (Exception: no extension for unsportsmanlike or nonplayer fouls and

fouls which include loss of down or for which the penalty is a safety); there was a double foul; or a touchdown is scored.

If a touchdown is scored, the period is extended for the try except if the touchdown was scored on the last down of the fourth period and the try would not affect the game's outcome or playoff qualification.

Also, the period is not extended further when the defense fouls during a successful try or field goal and the offended team accepts the results of the play with enforcement of the penalty from the succeeding spot.

The period is not extended if a penalty that has a loss-of-down provision is accepted. Any score by the fouling team is cancelled.

Also, if any of the above occur during the untimed down, the procedure is repeated.

Game Officials' Authority (Rule 1-1-7)

State associations may opt to have game officials' authority earlier than the prescribed 30 minutes. Teams sometimes take the field for pre-game warmups earlier than 30 minutes prior to the game. The change enables game officials in those states to assume authority during that time. If a fight should break out before the game, the game officials could penalize the offenders.

Status of Ball After Illegal Kick (Rule 2-24-9)

When the ball is loose following an illegal kick, it retains the same status as prior to the illegal kick. □

QUICK TIP

Check the line-to-gain equipment thoroughly before each game. Is the chain free of kinks? Are the ends of the poles covered with the required soft cap? Is there a piece of tape halfway between the markers to aid in determining if a 5-yard penalty will result in a first down? Don't assume the chain is 10 yards long. Start at the goalline and stretch the chain to the 10-yard line, then move to the 5-yard line and stretch it to the 15-yard line. You may find out that either the chain is messed up or the field is improperly marked.

No Extension After Loss of Down Foul

In most cases, when the penalty for a foul that occurs during a down in which time expires is accepted, the period is extended for an untimed down. But there is an exception: a foul for which the penalty includes a loss of down (Rules 3-3-3a, 3-3-4b(3)).

For example: Second and four

from B's 5-yard line. The clock for the first quarter expires during a play on which team A is penalized for an illegal forward pass from B's 12-yard line. The teams will move to the other end of the field and the second quarter will begin with A in possession. It will be third and 16 from B's 17-yard line. □

On Top of What's Going on Up Front

Defensive line strategy can influence the manner in which fouls occur in and around the neutral zone. Knowledge of the techniques employed by defensive linemen can assist the umpire and the referee in detecting fouls. There are generally two ways responsibility can be assigned to defensive linemen: one gap or two gap.

In a one-gap scheme, a player is responsible for only one side of his blocker: one gap between that blocker and the adjacent lineman. The objective is to blow into the backfield through that one opening as often as possible and disrupt the play.

The defense cannot control the line of scrimmage to stifle running plays by using that approach. For a good run defense, the defender must stand in a fixed position and block a route until he/she determines exactly which gap the runner will use. Consequently, the one-gap defense works best against passing plays.

The one-gap defensive rusher has a narrow responsibility and does not present a stationary target to the offense. Defensive players like it because it allows them to get off the ball fast and attack the blocker with little risk of getting pushed down the line.

The quicker the defender, the greater is the potential for the blocker to grab or trip him. Holding is a 10-yard penalty while tripping is 15 yards.

The two-gap assignment is when the defender is assigned responsibility for the openings on either side of the blocker he/she is facing. That scheme is primarily a run defense and requires a defender big and strong enough to plug up either gap.

When the ball is snapped, the defensive lineman will hold his ground and will know immediately if it is



At one time, the swinging gate formation was all the rage. But defenses eventually saw it enough times that the surprise factor wore off and it became less effective.

At the same time, game officials saw all of the different options the formation presented and figured out the best ways of covering those plays.

But since the swinging gate hasn't completely gone away, here are some rules reminders.

1 The snapper is not required to snap the ball between his legs, but other restrictions apply.

- The snap must be one quick and continuous backward motion.
- The snapper may lift the ball for lateral rotation but may not rotate end-for-end, change the location or fail to keep the long axis of the ball at right angles to the line of scrimmage.

2 The snapper will likely turn his head to call signals, observe the other linemen or check the position of the backs. he/she may do that as long as the movement is not abrupt. Some of the acts that qualify

as a false start include:

- Shifting or moving the ball.
- Moving the thumb or fingers.
- Flexing the elbows.
- Jerking the head.
- Dipping the shoulders.
- Dipping the buttocks.

3 Because there is considerable space between the snapper and the rest of the line, the other linemen may not be able to align themselves properly. The line judge and head linesman should be alert to a possible illegal formation. Remember that team A must have seven linemen at the time of the snap. Having less than seven linemen at the snap is a live-ball foul for illegal formation. However, there is no rule preventing team A from more than seven linemen, which might be used if a two-point try is attempted.

4 If team A decides to shift into a more conventional formation, the linemen's movements must not simulate action at the snap. Also, if any lineman between the snapper and the end places a hand(s) on or near the ground, he/she may not lift it until the ball is snapped.

Snap Location After Kick Out of Bounds

When a punt goes out of bounds across a sideline between the goal lines, or when a free kick goes out of bounds between the goal lines (MechaniGram A) and R chooses not to have K rekick, R has no choice of lateral position for the next snap. The

ball will be snapped from the nearest hash mark (MechaniGram B), just as if the ball was carried out of bounds by a runner (4-3-2).

If the kick results in a touchback, R does have the option to choose to snap from anywhere between the hashes. \square

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a run or a pass. If his blocker holds his ground or steps back, it is a pass play. If the blocker charges forward it is a run. If the defender commits to the wrong gap, he/she has taken himself out of the play, and it is highly unlikely a foul will be committed against him. It won't take much of a block to keep him out of the play.

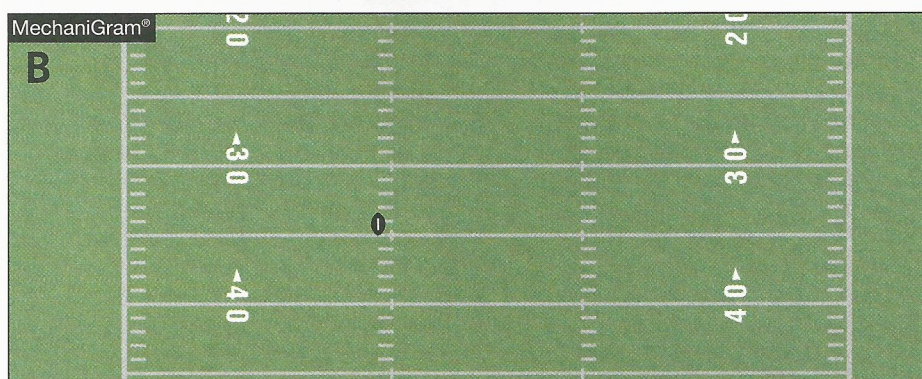
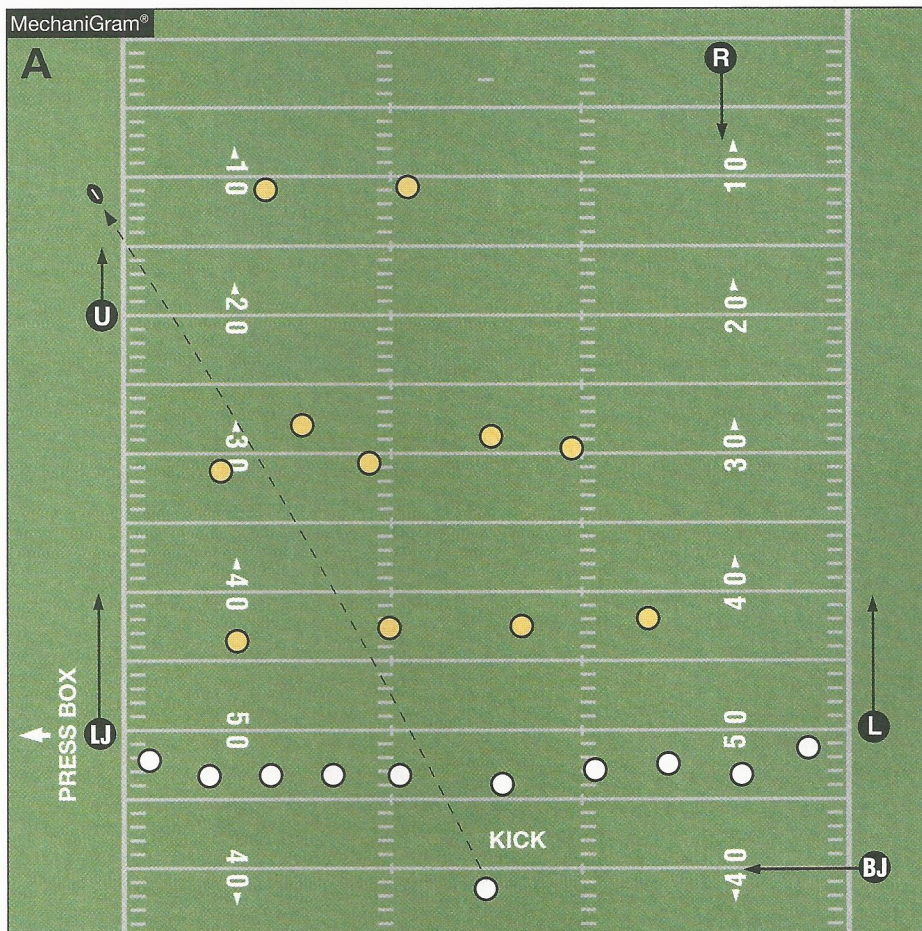
However, if the defensive player is in the intended path of the runner, the offense must move the defender out of the way. To do so legally, blockers cannot grab and physically control him. That is a prime opportunity for a foul. Also, if the defender has a clear shot at the ball carrier, an opponent must get between those two players and either push the defender beyond the path of the play, or impede his effort to get to the ball. The latter is an opportunity for the blocker to grab from behind in an effort to restrain.

In addition to gap responsibility, there are several other factors which increase the likelihood of a foul. Size is one such factor. When the defensive player overmatches the offensive player, the blocker may resort to illegal techniques. Undersized players may have a tendency to hang on.

Cutback runners or runners who simply decide to go through a hole different than the one that was called, present a challenge to their blockers. In most cases, the defender sees the change of direction before the offensive lineman figures it out. That sometimes gives birth to the wrap-around block where the lineman puts his hands and arms outside the frame of the opponent. The umpire, who is initially focused on the original point of attack, must judge the play based on the severity of the restriction and its impact on the play.

Another area where defensive action precipitates holding is a stunting defense. At the prep level, the focus tends to be on whom to block versus where to block. When the defender stunts, his original blocker usually still pursues resulting in a reach out and grab.

Game officials who are cognizant of what the players are trying to do, will be better prepared to observe the fouls that may occur. \square



The Restricted Area

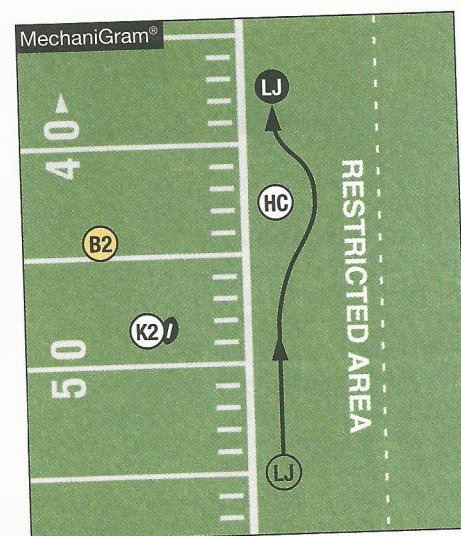
The coaches' area measures at least two yards wide between the front of the team box and the sideline. It becomes a restricted area when the ball is live. Rules regarding the restricted area must be observed.

In the MechaniGram, the coach is in the restricted area while the ball is live and the game official has to go around the coach to avoid a collision. When the ball is dead, a warning will be given on the first offense. There is a five-yard penalty (sideline interference) on the second offense and a 15-yard penalty (unsportsmanlike conduct) on each

subsequent offense. All are penalized as dead-ball fouls from the succeeding spot. If the offender cannot be identified, the foul is charged to the team's head coach (9-8-3 Pen., 9.8.3A).

Since the head coach is responsible for his team box, the fouls count toward the coach's disqualification.

If there is contact between a game official and a coach, it is considered illegal personal contact and the penalty is 15 yards from the succeeding spot for all occurrences. A second foul results in the disqualification of the head coach regardless of who is contacted (9-4-8). □



Five Referees? Believe It!

Most would say that in a crew of five, there is only one referee, but if a referee is a game official in charge of something specific, we can say there are actually five referees.

The referee of the defense. That would be the back judge. he/she is responsible for counting the defense and verifying the count with the other game official(s) who are counting the defense.

The back judge is also the chief dead-ball official for the defense and must strive to keep all 22 players in view when the play ends. That won't be possible on every play because the back judge will need to get to the sideline when players go out of bounds, but on most plays he/she should gently accordon in toward the players and not retreat until opponents have separated. Getting within earshot of opponents can provide useful information on the tone of the game and doing so acts as a deterrent to extracurricular activity.

A critical role for the back judge that is sometimes overlooked is that of a coordinator for fouls called downfield. That especially applies to pass plays. Depending upon the position of the receiver, the covering defender and their location on the field, the play may only be viewed from limited angles. An example is an arm bar that is visible only from the sideline and not from the middle of the field. When a play occurs in an overlapping coverage area and

there is only one flag, the back judge must convene a quick discussion to piece together the puzzle. When there are two (or more) flags, it must be ascertained that the flags were for the same offense. Such a discussion also makes sense on possible catches near a sideline where one game official has the best view of possession and another on whether or not the receiver was inbounds when the catch was completed.

The referee of first downs. The line judge is in the best position to quickly determine if the play has resulted in a first down for team A. Years ago, the preferred mechanic was for the referee to run up to the line after every play and make that determination. When you think about it, that is an inefficient (and probably wasted) movement, but it took changes to the substitution rules for the mechanics gurus to recognize the referee can be better utilized by keeping all offensive players in his view after the play ends. Replaced players must leave "immediately," which means within three seconds of the substitute's arrival. If the referee is not monitoring the huddle, he/she won't know if that rule is violated. The referee should always know how many players are in team A's huddle.

When the play ends near the line to gain, the line judge must signal to the referee. If the ball is clearly short of the line to gain, he/she will signal the number of the next down. If it is a first

down, he/she will so signal that to the referee (a finger on the chest pointing downfield is the preferred signal). If it's too close to call, he/she will wave to the referee to come forward. In the latter two cases, he/she must first stop the clock.

The referee of the line-to-gain equipment. The line-to-gain equipment can be tended by three to seven persons; four people is typical for a prep game. It is truly a "crew within a crew" and the head linesman is the referee of that group. It is important for the head linesman to have a thorough pregame meeting with the line-to-gain crew. The proper and efficient function of the line-to-gain equipment is often taken for granted and that can make a premature movement of the line-to-gain equipment to be a devastating error.

At the prep level, the line-to-gain equipment crew is sometimes recruited just before the game begins and the members are not always willing volunteers. The head linesman must recognize the strengths and weaknesses of the crew he/she is handed and ensure they don't negatively impact the game.

The referee of the ball. A hub is the effective center of an activity, and in a football game that distinction falls on the umpire. There is no escaping that, like it or not; the umpire is in the middle of virtually every play. That physical presence aids his stature as the hub

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of the crew, but is not the entire story. The umpire is the key to the proper functioning of the crew.

By promptly retrieving and spotting the ball, the umpire allows his crewmates to have more time to perform their post-play and pre-snap duties. Hopefully the days of the "bucket brigade," where three game officials relay the ball to an immobile umpire, are long gone.

The referee of the referees. That leaves the game official who actually has the title of referee. he/she is responsible for the overall functioning of the crew and ensures everyone is working as a team. However, there are a few things for which he/she is not the sole referee.

One is managing the clock, which is a crew responsibility. Every game official has a role in ensuring the clock functions correctly. After a change of possession, all game officials should either signal for the clock to stop or check to see that it has stopped. Continuing to wave the arms after the clock is stopped detracts from dead-ball officiating and brings game awareness into question. At least one supervisor refers to it as the "mindless flapping of arms in the breeze."



As the head linesman on her crew, Christina Lockamy, Fayetteville, N.C., is in charge of the line-to-gain equipment crew. A good working relationship between the personnel working the line-to-gain equipment and the game officials makes for a smooth game.

Perhaps one of the biggest mistakes made by game officials is the belief that the referee is totally responsible for penalty enforcement. Although the referee makes the announcement and is thus the most visible game official, every crew

member has a role in properly enforcing a penalty. The process begins with a short and succinct explanation of the foul that was flagged. If that information is not conveyed correctly, the referee cannot possibly get his part right. □

Tricks That Click: Be Ready For Gadget Plays

By design, trick plays are an effort to deceive opponents and gain an advantage. Some trick plays are legal but others should draw a penalty flag.

Trick plays usually but not always happen at the end of a game when a miracle is needed to win or tie the contest. But game officials should be alert, as they can happen during the normal course of the game.

The NFHS Football Rules Committee has attempted to keep up with creative coaches and adopt a rule change to address a specific act.

During the pregame meeting, the referee should ask the head coaches. "Do you have any unusual plays or formations?" If a coach describes a play you know is illegal, tell him so. If he/she still elects to run that illicit play and complains when flag flies, remind him you warned him before the game.

Some head coaches will ask if a play

is legal. If told no, they will usually delete it from their game plan. Also expect that a legal trick play stated to you will never be run. What may catch you off guard is a trick play that was not described in the pregame meeting.

Never tell the opposing head coach a team may run a special play. But share what a head coach tells you with your crewmates. That is so they won't be caught off guard should such a play transpire during competition.

Here is a review of just a few of the more common gadget plays.

- **Using simulated replacements or substitutes to deceive the other team.** No tactic associated with the substitution process to confuse an opponent is allowed. Examples are a player coming onto the field just before the snap or free kick and a player who acts like a replaced player but who does not leave the field and is involved in the next

play. That play is commonly called a "hideout" play.

- **"Fumblerooski."** That is the common name for a planned loose ball play. An example is the quarterback taking the snap and placing the ball on the ground behind the snapper. The quarterback then acts like he/she has the ball, while a lineman picks up the ball and runs in the opposite direction. That trick play is illegal and results in a five-yard penalty.

- **Deception.** The most common example is the "wrong ball" play. A team A back walks toward the sideline while shouting that the wrong game ball is being used. When the ball is snapped, that player runs up field and catches a pass. Or the ball is snapped to a different back, who runs through the relaxed defense.

Such unfair acts result in a 15-yard penalty for unsportsmanlike conduct. □