

No Passing Fancy



It's no secret that the ball is in the air more often than in the good old days of "three yards and a cloud of dust." A seemingly routine pass play can have a lot of elements. This one is no exception.

1. In NFHS mechanics, the referee should start on the passing-arm-side of the quarterback.

2. Did the defender's rush take him past the blocker, or did his momentum in that direction get a boost via a block in the back? Remember that both codes have exceptions for offensive linemen that allow blocking in the back under specific circumstances.

3. The defender appears to be fighting through the block. If so, that might inspire the blocker to grab a handful of jersey. Additionally, the initial block is above the waist, but the blocker may try to cut off the opponent's advance by continuing the block below the waist. That may or may not be legal, depending on the circumstances and rules code.

4. This defender is unblocked at the moment. He may make a late charge at the passer. Be alert for contact on the passer after the ball has been passed. It is suggested that the referee give a verbal notification such as, "It's gone!" or "Ball's away!" as a preventive officiating measure.



Hat's Off to Helmet Rules

To lose one's head is a familiar idiom. It may happen to a coach or player if something on a football field goes awry. But no one wants it to happen literally. That's why the NFHS Football Rules Book addresses situations in which a player's helmet comes completely off his head.

Rule 3-5-10d indicates that a player whose helmet comes completely off during subsequent dead-ball action related to the down is treated the same as one whose helmet comes off during the down.

According to Rule 9-4-3l, initiating contact with an opponent whose helmet has come completely off is a personal foul. In a companion addition, Rule 9-6-4g states that a player who continues to participate beyond the immediate action in which the player is engaged after their helmet has come completely off shall be penalized for illegal participation.

Any situation in which a player whose helmet comes completely off during the down without being attributable to a foul will result in a game official's timeout and handled the same as an injured or bleeding player. The player must sit out one down unless the halftime or an overtime intermission occurs. Players who leave the game under those circumstances may not "buy their way back" into the game with a charged team time-out.

If, however, a foul directly leads to the helmet coming off, the fouled player may remain in the game.

Note that if the player whose helmet comes completely off is in possession

of the ball, the ball becomes dead immediately per Rule 4-2-2k. But if it is another player, the ball remains live.

Play 1: As seen in PlayPic A, runner A1 is contacted so that his helmet comes completely off. **Ruling:** Because A1 is the runner, the ball is dead immediately. A1 must leave the game for one down (PlayPic B).

Play 2: As seen in PlayPic C, A1's helmet comes off due to a facemask foul by a B player. **Ruling:** Because A1 is the runner, the ball is dead immediately. A1 may remain in the game (PlayPic D).

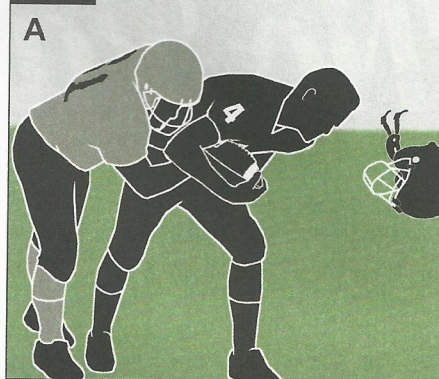
Play 3: During a down, B1's helmet comes off (a) due to a foul by A1, or (b) without a foul. B1 either immediately picks up the helmet, puts it on and continues to chase the runner, or continues to chase the runner while not wearing a helmet. **Ruling:** In (a), the foul by A1 that caused B1 to lose the helmet, and B1's continued participation in the play, result in a double foul. The penalties cancel. Because B1 lost the helmet as the result of a foul, B1 may remain in the game. In (b), B1 is guilty of illegal participation. When the down ends, B1 must leave the game for the next down.

Play 4: During a down, B1's helmet comes off due to a foul by A1. B1 freezes. A2 then initiates contact against B1. **Ruling:** The foul by A1 that caused B1 to lose the helmet and A2's contact against a helmetless opponent constitute a multiple foul against team A. Team B will have the choice of penalties. Because B1 lost the helmet as the result of a foul, B1 need not leave the game for the next down.

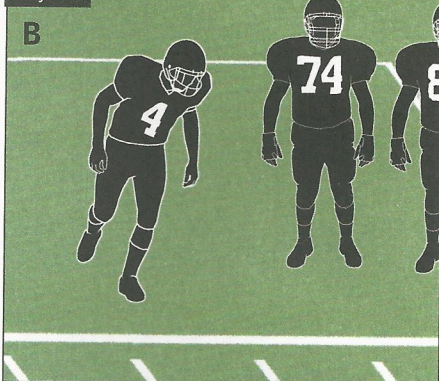
Play 5: During a down, B1's helmet comes off without a foul. B1 freezes. A1 then initiates contact against B1. **Ruling:** A1's contact against a helmetless opponent constitutes a personal foul. Because no foul caused B1 to lose the helmet, B1 must leave the game for the next down.

Play 6: Runner A1 is contacted by team B players so that his forward progress is stopped. When A1 falls onto the ground, his helmet comes completely off. **Ruling:** A1 must leave the game for one down. □

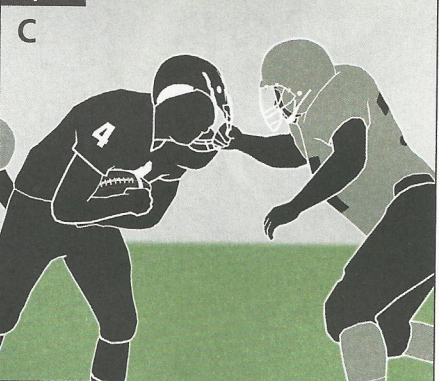
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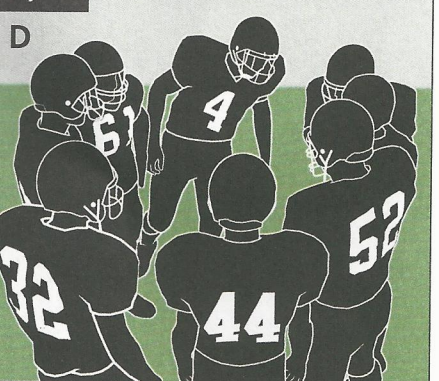
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DID YOU KNOW?

Today, the head coach, the head coach's designee or any player may request a charged team timeout, but that wasn't always the case. Until the rule changed in 1974, an official had to wait for a team captain to ask for a timeout before one could be granted. Equipment rules have also evolved over the years. Shoulder and hip pads became mandatory equipment in 1976. The next year, the rule mandating thigh guards was implemented.

Football Injury Surveillance Study

After a decade of injury surveillance, football continues to have the highest injury rates of all high school sports included in the National High School Sports-Related Injury Surveillance Study (High School RIO).

As high school sports participation continues to increase in the United States, the number of sports injuries will also likely increase unless effective injury prevention programs are implemented. The NFHS Sports Medicine Advisory Committee (SMAC) and the NFHS Sport Rules Committees use information from High School RIO to monitor rates and patterns of sports injuries among high school athletes. High School RIO is currently collecting the 11th year of sports exposure and injury data.

High School RIO data shows that in 2014/15, concussions (25.4% of all injuries) were the most common injury in football followed by ankle strain/sprain (10.1%) and knee strain/sprains (8.2%). Rates of concussion

have increased over the past 10 years. However, the proportion of football players returning to activity the same day or

within a week of sustaining a concussion has decreased dramatically over the past six years. In fact, in 2014/15 less than 0.5% of all concussed football players returned to play the same day.

In 2014/15, High School RIO also began collecting data on whether practice injuries happened during a full contact drill/activity. If the injury occurred during a "Thud" or "Live Action" practice, the injury was categorized as due to full-contact. If it occurred during an "Air", "Bags", or "Control" practice activities, the injury was marked as not due to full-contact. In 2014/15, 40.8% of all football concussions were sustained during practice. Of these concussions that



occurred in practices, 89.6% occurred during a full contact drill/activity. This finding supports the recent NFHS recommendations regarding limiting full contact activities in football practice. Understanding such patterns of injury is one important tool in the efforts to keep football players as safe as possible.

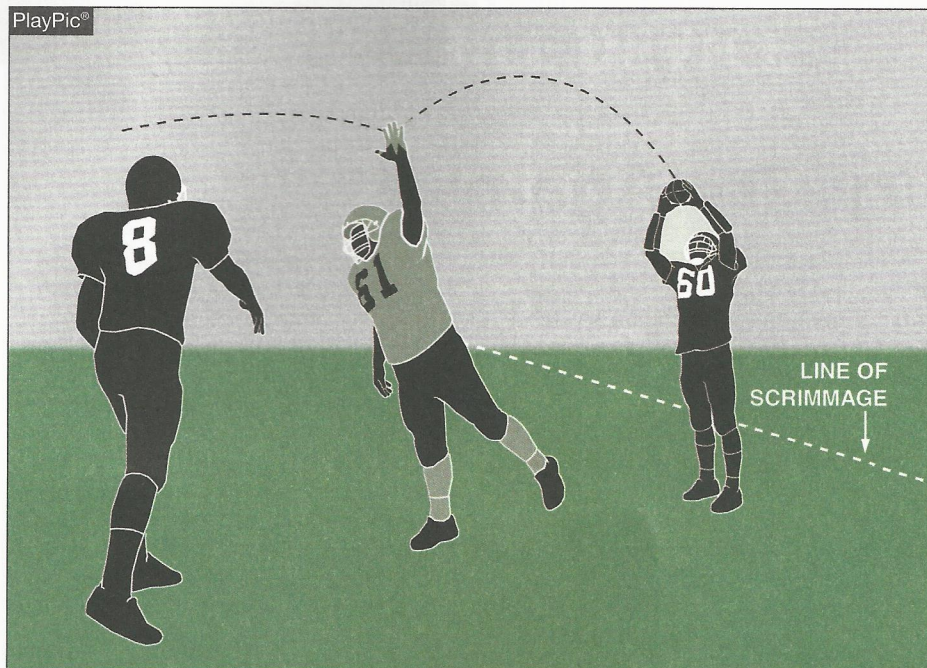
If you are interested in more information on the High School RIO Study or a certified athletic trainer is interested in becoming a reporter for football, please visit <http://www.ucdenver.edu/academics/colleges/PublicHealth/research/ResearchProjects/piper/projects/RIO/Pages/Study-Reports.aspx> for summary reports. □

All Bets Are Off When Team B Touches the Legal Forward Pass

The rules give Team A more restrictions than Team B when it comes to passing plays. Offensive linemen are restricted in how far downfield they may venture. Pass interference restrictions apply and ineligible receivers are prohibited from being the first to touch the forward pass.

But those rules go by the boards when Team B is first to touch the pass. As seen in the PlayPic, a Team B player deflects a legal forward pass. That means previously ineligible number 50 may catch the tipped ball.

Additionally, pass interference restrictions for both teams end because of the touching and previously ineligible Team A players may legally be more than two yards beyond the expanded neutral zone. □



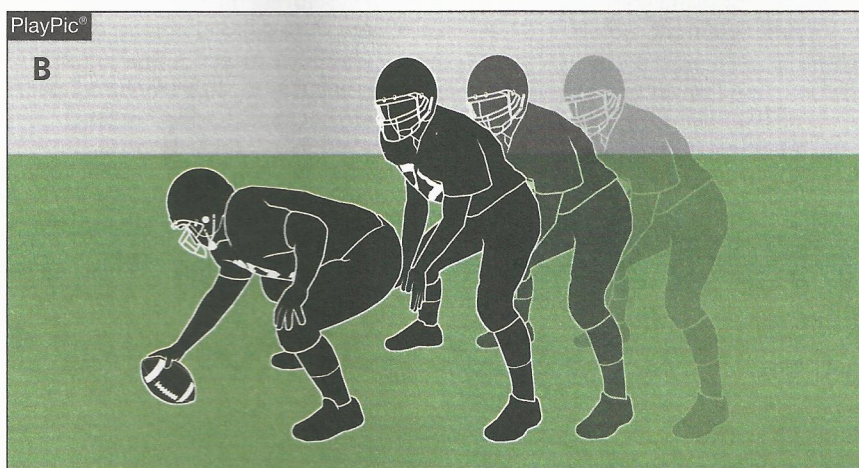
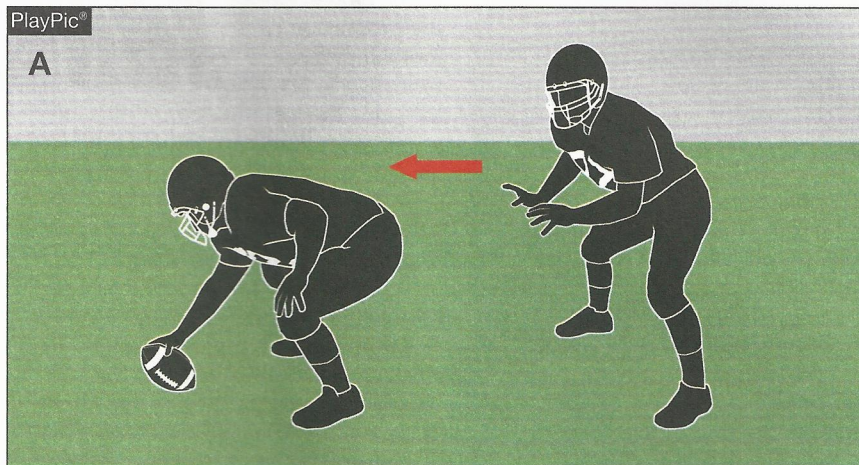
Beware of 'Rolling Starts' by the Quarterback

In short-yardage situations — particularly near Team B's goal line — it is not unusual for Team A to snap the ball on the first sound or even a silent count in order to catch the defense by surprise.

In the latter instance, the quarterback will walk up behind the center while the snapper has his hand or hands on the ball and the offensive linemen are getting set (PlayPic A). Either on the first sound or upon feeling the quarterback's hands on his rump (PlayPic B), the center snaps the ball.

All of that can be legal, but game officials should be especially alert for illegal acts by Team A in those situations. Remember that all Team A players must be set for one second before the snap. In Team A's haste to snap the ball quickly, it is not unusual for the snap to occur before everyone has had a chance to take that required pause. If the movement simulates action at the snap, it's a dead-ball foul for a false start.

Also be prepared for the quarterback to employ a "rolling start." That occurs when he approaches the snapper but never stops moving forward before taking the snap. That is an illegal shift. □



Try, Try Again

According to the NFHS Football Rules Book, the play that occurs after a touchdown is called a try. In common parlance it is an extra point, conversion or point after touchdown (PAT).

By any name, the bottom line is the team that scored the touchdown may score two points from what would be a touchdown under rules governing play at other times during the game, or one point from what would normally be a field goal.

Unless moved by penalty, the ball is snapped from a spot designated by

A anywhere between the hash marks on B's 3-yard line. The down is neither numbered nor timed.

A live-ball foul that occurs during a try down may or may not result in the down being repeated. If during a successful try, a loss of down foul by A occurs, there is no score and no replay. If during an unsuccessful try, a foul by A occurs, the penalty is obviously declined, the results of the play stand and there is no replay.

If B fouls and the penalty is accepted, the down is replayed after enforcement. If a double foul occurs,

the down shall be replayed.

When a try is replayed, the snap may be from any point between the inbounds lines on the yard line through the spot of the ball.

If a touchdown is scored during the last down of the fourth period, the try shall not be attempted unless the point(s) would affect the outcome of the game or playoff qualifying.

The try begins when the ball is ready for play. It ends when B secures possession, the try is successful or the ball becomes dead for any other reason.

SEE "TRY AGAIN" P. 13

► Try Again CONT. FROM P.12

After a successful try, the opponent of the scoring team shall designate which team will kick off. A live-ball foul by one team is not paired with a dead-ball foul to create a double foul.

During a try, only A may score.

Play 1: A has a huge lead and scores another touchdown in the third period. The captain of A informs the referee that his team (a) does not wish to attempt the try; or (b) wishes to kick off. **Ruling:** In (a), there is no choice. A shall attempt a try, or at least snap the ball. Legal request in (b).

Play 2: During a try, A1 completes a pass to A2 in the end zone and (a) ineligible A3 was illegally beyond the neutral zone; (b) A4 interfered with B1; or (c) B2 interfered with A2. **Ruling:** In (a), if the 5-yard penalty is accepted, the try will be repeated. In (b), if the 15-yard penalty is accepted, the try

will be repeated. In (c), A undoubtedly will accept the result of the play and enforce the penalty from the succeeding spot.

Play 3: During a successful two-point try (a) B1 roughs the passer; or (b) B2 holds tight end A8. **Ruling:** In both (a) and (b), Team A may accept the score and have the penalty assessed from the succeeding spot.

Play 4: During a successful one-point try, B1 roughs the kicker. **Ruling:** A may keep the point and have the penalty enforced from the succeeding spot, or have the penalty enforced from the previous spot and replay the down.

Play 5: During a successful two-point try, B1 is flagged for pass interference against A1. After the untimed down is over, A1 taunts B1. **Ruling:** Team A may accept the score and have the penalty enforced at the succeeding spot. However, B may

accept the penalty for the dead-ball foul by A, and have 15 yards marked off from the spot where the ball is placed after enforcement of B's penalty. The ball would then be free-kicked from K's 40-yard line.

Play 6: A series of penalties has left A snapping the ball for a try deep in its own territory. A1's backward pass (a) goes through A's end zone and over the end line, or (b) is in A's end zone when B2 recovers the loose ball. **Ruling:** In (a) and (b) the try is unsuccessful and A will kick off to resume play. Under normal circumstances, B would score a safety in (a) and a touchdown in (b). However, only A can score on a try.

Play 7: During a successful two-point try, A1 is flagged for an illegal forward pass. **Ruling:** B will accept the penalty. Because the penalty includes loss of down, the try will not be repeated. □

Forced Touching is No Touching

Rule 8-5-1, regarding who is responsible for forcing a ball across a goal line, has two subsections. The second subsection — Rule 8-5-1b — notes that 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.

Play: It is first down and 10 on A's 12. A fumble by A1 is still rolling slowly on A's 4-yard line. During an attempt to recover the ball, A2 pushes B1 into the ball, causing the ball to roll across the goal line where it is recovered by: (a) A3 who is downed there; or (b) A4 who advances to A's 15-yard line; or (c) B2 who is downed immediately. **Ruling:** Safety in (a). In (b), it is A's ball on the 15-yard line and the next down is second and 7. In (c), it is a touchdown. □

National Federation of State High School Associations



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The Importance of Facilitating NFHS Football Rules

Many often wonder how the rules that govern high school football are developed and why they are written the way they are. The NFHS football playing rules reflect a national perspective based on decisions that best serve the needs of the sport on a national level. Therefore, the purposes of the playing rules are to:

- Minimize risk to participants.
- Preserve the sound traditions of the sport.
- Standardize competition.
- Provide for orderly administration.
- Facilitate the decision-making process of game officials.

- Permit common records.
- Provide for evaluating competition.
- Maintain a balance between offense and defense.

With these goals in mind, the NFHS Football Rules Committee believes the rules and the game facilitate and enrich a well-rounded educational experience that promotes academic achievement, encourages positive school/community relations and develops good citizenship and healthy lifestyles. Furthermore, the committee believes the current code of ethics for both coaches and game officials facilitate these goals as written.

One aspect of coach and official

ethics is to teach and officiate the rules within the intent of NFHS Football Rules Book. THE COACH shall master the contest rules and shall teach them to their team members. THE COACH shall not seek an advantage by circumvention of the spirit or letter of the rules. THE OFFICIAL shall master the rules of the game, and also the officiating mechanics necessary to enforce the rules, and shall exercise that responsibility in an impartial, firm and controlled manner.

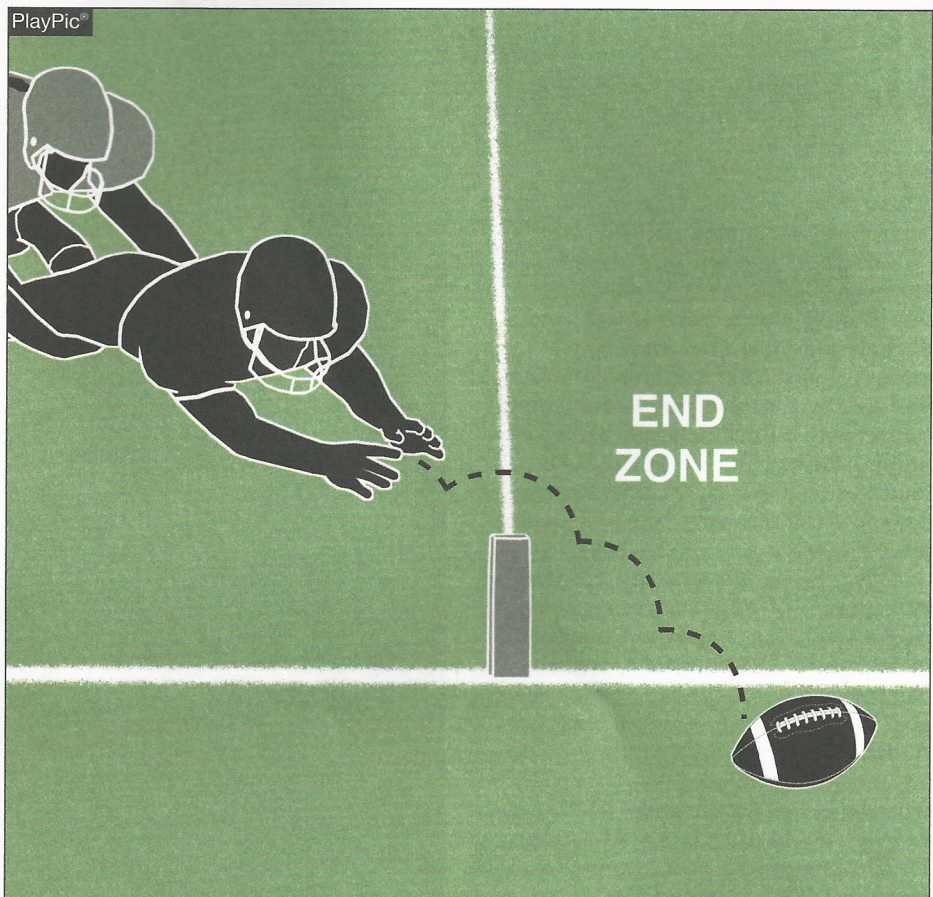
Coaching and officiating the rules are extremely important to maintain the integrity of the game, and to minimize risk to the athletes participating in the game. □

Touchback or Safety? It Depends

When a loose ball goes out of bounds in the end zone, the first questions an official must answer are, "How did the ball get there?" and "Who put it there?" If the answer to the first question is "fumble," you have two possibilities. The result of the play will either be a touchback or a safety.

If the runner in the PlayPic fumbles into the opponent's end zone, his team provided the force. The result is a touchback and the opponent will next snap from its own 20-yard line. If the runner fumbles the ball and it goes out of bounds in his own end zone, it's a safety.

Whenever a ball is loose near a goal line, be especially alert for bats and muffs. A bat in that situation may or may not be a foul, depending on location of the ball and the direction in which the ball is batted. Muffs are common because players are in a hurry to secure possession of an oddly shaped ball that is bouncing every which way. After a fumble, kick or backward pass has been grounded, a new force may result from a bat, an illegal kick or a muff. The muffing or batting of a pass, kick or fumble in flight is not considered a new force. □



Start the Play Legally? That's a Snap!

The word "center" is a layman's term for the player who snaps the ball. But the proper football term is "snapper." In the context of players, you will not find the word "center" in the NFHS Football Rules Book. Similarly, the ball is "snapped," not "hiked." In the past some referred to the ball being "centered," but that is no longer common parlance.

A snap is one of two ways in which the ball is put into play (a free kick is the other). From a scrimmage formation, no down starts until there is a legal snap.

Several fouls can prevent the snap. False start, encroachment and an illegal snap are among the most common. Those are dead-ball fouls and may occur after the ready-for-play signal and before a legal snap. The referee, umpire and wing officials are most likely to call those fouls.

A snapper is the player who lines up over the ball and places a hand or hands on the ball. The snapper is exempt from encroachment; his hands and upper body can be in the neutral zone before the snap.

The snap must occur on or between the hash marks. If a previous play ends in a side zone or out-of-bounds, the ball is placed at the nearest hash mark for the next snap. When snapped, the ball must be parallel to the sideline.

After a safety or touchback and before the ready-for-play signal, a team may select the ball's lateral position between the hash marks. That privilege also applies before a try down, kickoff or the start of an overtime series, or after a fair catch or awarded fair catch.

The snapper cannot make any movement that simulates the start of a play. That includes any jerky body gestures or abruptly moving the ball. He may lift the ball in order to rotate it laterally, but not rotate it end for end.

Some umpires ask both snappers before the game, "How do you like your laces?" That allows the umpire to position the ball on the ground to the snapper's specifications and avoids pre-snap adjustments. Other umpires simply spot the ball and have the snapper adjust it to his liking.

Once the snapper touches the ball, the snapper may remove one but not both hands from the ball.

The snap begins when the snapper

legally moves the ball. The snap must be a quick, fluid and continuous backward motion. The ball must touch a back or the ground before it touches an A lineman. The snap ends when the ball touches the ground or any player.

The penalty for an illegal snap (dead-ball foul) is five yards from the succeeding spot.

Play 1: After putting both hands on the ball, the snapper (a) tilts the ball to a 90-degree angle, (b) lifts the ball before backward movement, (c) rotates the ball laterally, or (d) removes both hands.

Ruling: Legal in (a) and (c). Illegal snap

in (b) and (d).

Play 2: Before a punt, the snapper moves the ball forward before starting the backward motion. R1 bats the ball while still in the snapper's hands. The loose ball is recovered by R2. **Ruling:** Illegal snap. The ball never became live, thus R2's recovery is nullified.

On a wet field, the umpire should be proactive to keep balls dry. That might entail frequently bringing in a new dry ball to avoid game delay. The key is game officials and ball persons having dry towels.

SEE "START LEGALLY" P. 16

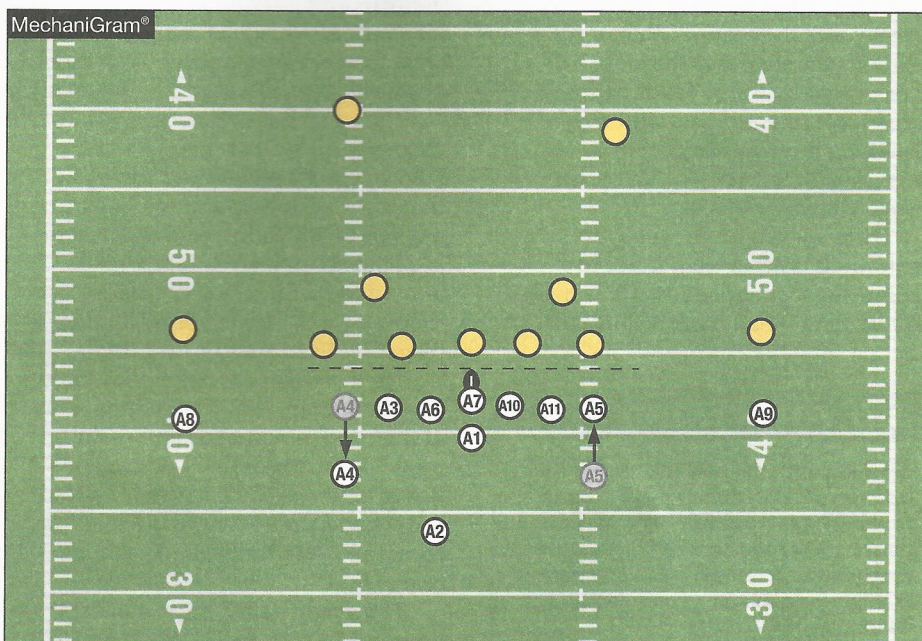
Shifty Business

Legend has it that the shift was invented by legendary coach Knute Rockne, who came up with the idea after watching the choreographed movements of a chorus line.

A shift is the action of one or more offensive players who, after a huddle or after taking set positions, move to a new set position before the ensuing snap.

The movement of one or more offensive players to new set positions

is a shift. This formation is legal A3 is now on the end of the line; if he is also wearing an eligible receiver's number, he is an eligible receiver. A9 is also on the end of the line and is eligible if he is wearing an eligible receiver's number. Following a shift, all 11 players must simultaneously meet the one-second motionless requirement prior to the snap. Note that A5, who is no longer on the end of the line, is ineligible by position even if he's wearing an eligible receiver's number. □



► Start Legally CONT. FROM P.15

When in a scrimmage formation, the snapper's number does not have to be 50-79 as long as there are five players numbered 50-79 on the line.

When in a scrimmage-kick formation, the snapper can have any number. Players with numbering exceptions do not have to report to a game official prior to a kick play. The player in the game using that exception is an ineligible receiver because of his position. The umpire can note numbering exceptions on one side of the line and the referee the other. Then if players end up downfield, the game officials will know which one(s) are not eligible to touch a forward pass.

It's rare but not unheard of to see the snapper on the end of the line. That might happen during what is called a "swinging gate" formation. Be prepared for K to shift to a typical scrimmage-kick formation.

When K is in scrimmage-kick formation, the snapper has certain protection. With his head down, he is especially vulnerable during the snap. The snapper cannot be contacted by a defensive player until the snapper has a reasonable chance to regain his balance and can protect himself, or until he blocks or moves to participate in the play.

The penalty for roughing the snapper is 15 yards from the previous spot and an automatic first down.

Play 3: K is in scrimmage-kick formation. After the snap, R1 charges directly into the snapper. Punter K2 (a) muffs the snap and the loose ball is recovered by R3, or (b) throws an incomplete forward pass. **Ruling:** Roughing the snapper in both cases. Even though no kick was made, the snapper is still protected.

There are no specific snapper protections when a team is not in a scrimmage-kick formation. He is treated no differently than other A lineman. □

DID YOU KNOW?

Crawling with the ball was once a foul. Defined as "an attempt by the runner to advance the ball after any part of his person, other than a hand or foot, has touched the ground," crawling resulted in a five-yard penalty. The rule was deleted in 1981.



A loose ball is one situation in which a game official may be tempted to put air in the whistle. Greg Olmstead, Sammamish, Wash., rules the runner was down before the ball came loose.

Inadvertent Whistle Options Explained

There's nothing like an inadvertent whistle to mess up an otherwise well-officiated game.

How to deal with inadvertent whistles is covered in Rule 4-2-3.

A down shall be replayed if during a down, or during a down in which the penalty for a foul is declined, an inadvertent whistle is sounded while a legal forward pass or snap is in flight, or during a legal kick.

The team last in possession may choose to either put the ball in play where possession was lost or replay the down if, during a down or during a down in which the penalty for a foul is declined, an inadvertent whistle is sounded while the ball is loose following a backward pass, fumble, illegal forward pass or illegal kick.

The team in possession may choose to either accept the results of the play at the dead-ball spot or replay the down if, during a down or during a down in which the penalty for a foul is declined, an inadvertent whistle is sounded while the ball is in player possession.

The penalty shall be administered as determined by the basic spot, and takes

precedence over inadvertent whistle administration if, during a down a live-ball foul occurs prior to the inadvertent whistle and the penalty is accepted.

Here are some examples:

Play 1: A1 rolls out and is two yards behind the neutral zone when he throws a backward pass to A2. While the backward pass is still in flight, a game official sounds his whistle.

Ruling: A will likely choose to replay the down.

Play 2: While a legal forward pass is in flight: (a) B1 interferes with eligible A1 and then there is an inadvertent whistle; or (b) a whistle is inadvertently sounded after which B2 contacts A2 while the ball is still in flight. **Ruling:** In (a), if the captain accepts the penalty for a foul which occurred prior to the inadvertent whistle, the penalty takes precedence. It will be a new series for A, 15 yards in advance of the previous spot. In (b), the contact by B2 occurred during a dead-ball period and unless it is a personal foul, will be ignored. Because the whistle was inadvertently sounded while a legal forward pass was in flight, the down shall be replayed. □