

# BATting, KICKING PENALTIES REDUCED

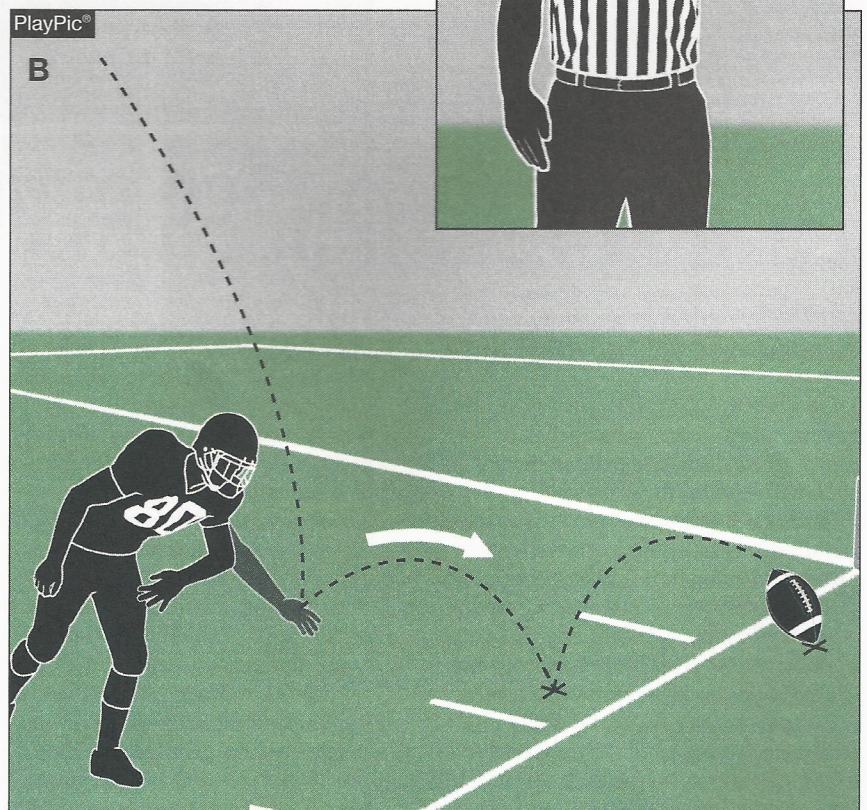
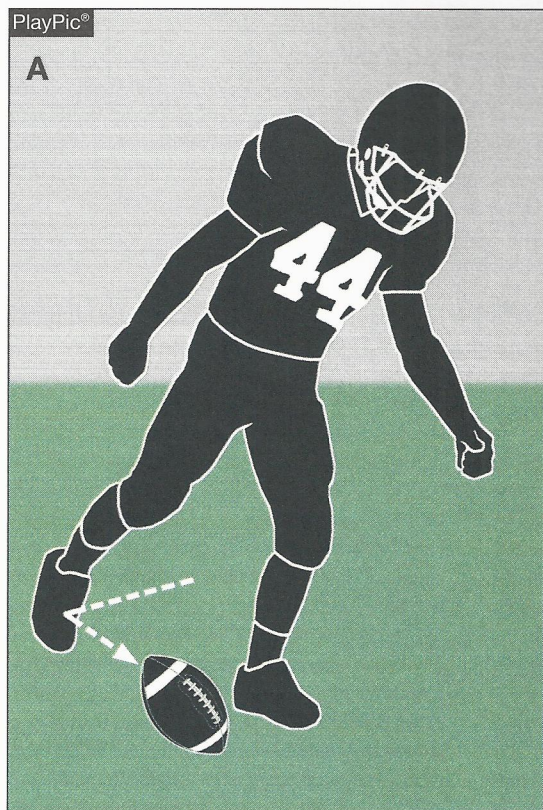
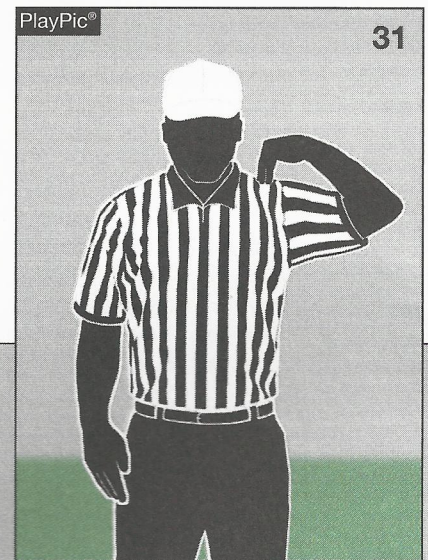
The penalties for illegal batting and kicking have been reduced from 15 to 10 yards. The NFHS Football Rules Committee believes those fouls are not as severe as illegal personal contact fouls and should not carry as steep a penalty. The coverage is found in Rule 6-2-1 PENALTY and Rule 9-7 PENALTY.

**PLAY 1:** It is fourth and 10 for A from its own 15-yard line. A1 fakes a kick and runs beyond the neutral zone and kicks the ball at the 20. The kicked ball: (a) is caught by A2 at A's 30 and he is downed there; or (b) goes out of bounds at midfield; or (c) comes to rest on A's 45 and no player of either team will touch it, so the covering official sounds his whistle. **RULING:** The kick is illegal and the resulting loose ball is treated as a fumble. The normal kicking rules and restrictions are not in effect during an illegal kick. In (a), (b) and (c), if the penalty for

the illegal kick is declined, it will be A's ball first and 10 from the yard line where the ball became dead. If the distance penalty is accepted, B may elect enforcement from the end of the run which is the spot of the illegal kick or may elect enforcement from the succeeding spot [2-24-9, 2-33, 4-2-2e(2), 6-2-1, 10-4-2 EXCEPTION].

**PLAY 2:** A is in punt formation and the ball is snapped to A1, who turns his back to the line of scrimmage and throws a backward pass into the air. A2 comes forward and bats the ball 20 yards downfield where: (a) A3 recovers it 5 yards beyond the line to gain; or (b) it is caught by A4 who advances for an additional 5 yards; or (c) it goes out of bounds in advance of the line to gain; or (d) B1 intercepts and returns it for an apparent touchdown. **RULING:** In (a), (b), (c) and (d), the batting by A2 is illegal. In (a), (b) and (c), it will be B's advantage

to accept the distance penalty which will be administered from the spot of the foul because the batting occurred during the loose-ball play and behind the basic spot. In (d), because the foul was during a loose-ball play, before a change of possession, B may keep the touchdown by declining the penalty for A's foul. Otherwise, the penalty will be enforced from the spot of the foul and A will retain possession of the ball if B accepts the penalty. □



The penalty for illegally kicking a loose ball (PlayPic A) or illegally batting a loose ball forward (PlayPic B) is now 10 yards. The penalty signal is seen in the inset.

# YOU'LL GET A KICK OUT OF THIS ONE

Unlike a scrimmage play, a kick play will involve most of the players and they will be spread over a wide area of the field. Add some rule variations, and you quickly understand how kick plays got their reputation as often being tricky.

Consider the one depicted in the MechaniGram.

On fourth down, K1 attempts a field goal from Team R's 10-yard line. The kick is partially blocked behind the neutral zone by R2. The ball bounces toward the open sideline (the one abandoned by the wing official who is behind the goalposts) where R3, in attempting to pick up the ball which has not come to rest near Team R's 5-yard line, muffs it across the goal line. The ball then skips out of bounds after hitting the ground in the end zone.

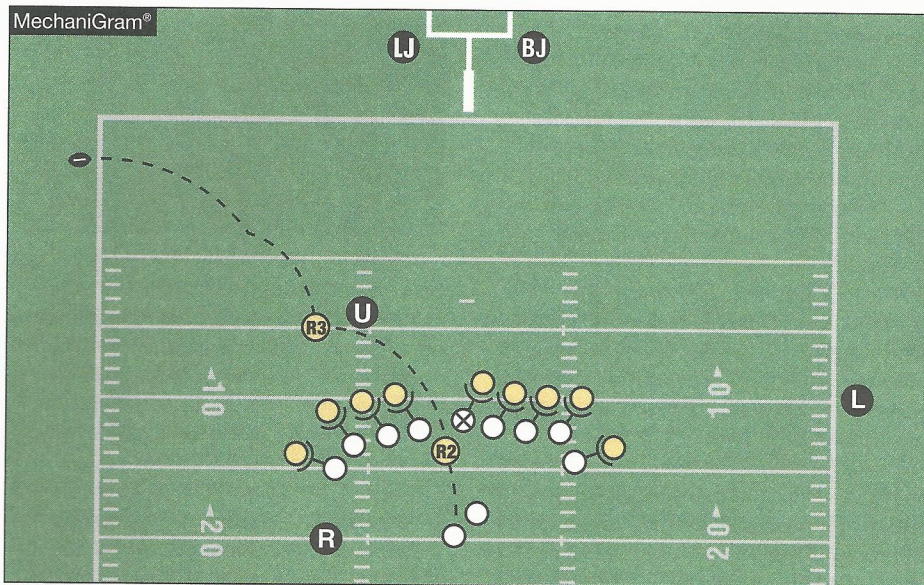
Who is most likely to see Team R touch the kick? The line judge may be able to sprint to that spot, but likely could not arrive in a timely fashion. The most likely observer is the umpire.

What would have been the result of the play if a member of the kicking team had downed the ball in the end zone? The player would be in possession of a dead ball, thus a touchback. It would be Team R's ball on its 20-yard line.

What would have been the result of the play if Team K downed the ball on Team R's 1-yard line before it crossed the goal line (after Team R had touched it)? It would be Team K's ball, first and goal. R3's muff gives Team K the chance for a new series.

The head linesman must observe the snap and action of linemen from both teams and move in rapidly toward players after the kick. In the case of the tipped ball described, the head linesman might help on penetration of the goal line plane by moving to the goal line.

The umpire should slightly favor the line judge's side of the field, four to seven yards beyond the line of scrimmage. The umpire must watch for contact on the snapper; tripping and/or holding; and the pull and shoot (defenders pulling Team K to one side, allowing teammates through a gap). The umpire could also help rule on action to the open side of the field in the event of a broken play. □



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# FOOTBALL INJURY SURVEILLANCE STUDY

After over 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 14<sup>th</sup> year of sports exposure and injury data.

High School RIO™ data shows that in 2017/18, concussions (22.8% of all injuries) were the most common injury in football followed by ankle strains/sprains (12.7%). 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 2017/18 only 1.6% of all concussed football players returned to play the same day they were injured.

Data from High School RIO™ shows a statistically significant decrease in practice related concussion rates in the three-year time period after the NFHS contact practice limitation recommendations were made. Practice related concussion rates in the three-year time period post NFHS recommendation (2015/16-2017/18) was nearly 20% lower compared to rates in the three-year time period

prior to the recommendation (2012/13-2014/15). This finding supports the 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. □

## GAME OFFICIALS' ONFIELD MANNERISMS AFFECT HOW THEY ARE PERCEIVED

One of those cooking competition shows was on TV the other night and the amateur watched nervously as the world-famous chef tasted her creation. The chef was effusive in his praise of the sauce. The vegetables were crisp. The meat had a crusty exterior and a nice pink interior. All in all, a winning effort. Except, the chef sighed, the presentation was horribly lacking. It didn't matter that everything tasted good if it didn't look good.

That's sort of analogous to a football crew. You can get all of your rulings correct. Your rules knowledge can be first rate. But if your mechanics, mannerisms and cohesion aren't on the same level,

you won't pass the eye test.

Some aspects of your performance are so technical that only other game officials or an observer would notice or care. Others are so obvious that even casual observers will raise an eyebrow and wonder what turnip truck dropped you off at the gate.

Check these out and see if they apply to you or your crew.

**Failure to stop the clock.** Often game action obscures the clock operator's vision and a signal is missed, such as a fumble out of bounds on the far side of the field near a goal line. The solution is for game officials to get in the habit of echoing one

another's stop-the-clock signals.

Sometimes rather blatant miscues occur, resulting from either sloppy signaling or outright lapses. Crews often fail to stop the clock for pre-snap violations, on fair catches, after kick returns and even on ordinary first downs.

Line judges and umpires are alerted to look for the lead stake and react accordingly on plays that end near that stake, calling to the linesman that a first down has been achieved. Some game officials, however, are not very conscientious about doing that consistently. As a result, the clock improperly runs while the referee sorts ▶

▶ out the enforcement. Timers who don't see a signal will just let it run. They're only doing what they've been told.

**Measurements.** The wing official on the side of the field opposite the chains is a key cog when the ball becomes dead beyond or close to the line to gain. That game official can see the chains and can alert the referee if the ball is clearly short, is clearly beyond the line to gain or is so close the referee needs to take a look. The linesman should never peek over a shoulder to check the line to gain. Best practice is for the linesman to memorize the line to gain; failing that, observing the line judge will provide the information needed.

The tape on the chain helps determine if Team A will achieve a first down on a five-yard penalty, thus precluding the need for a measurement. For instance, if the down marker is three links behind the tape and Team B is flagged for a five-yard penalty, the linesman can check the tape and tell the referee, "They'll still be short." Conversely, if the down marker is slightly beyond the tape, the linesman can place his hand on his chest, which has come to mean "Five will get you one."

When the referee calls for a measurement, the linesman should have the down marker moved behind the lead stake. That is a reference point in case the line to gain should somehow become lost during the process. The NFHS manual indicates the down should not be changed on the down marker.

A bean bag may be placed at the yard line on the sideline where the line-to-gain indicator is clipped. If Team A is short, that enables the linesman to go directly to the spot with certainty.

As the chains are being brought onto the field, the line judge should use his foot to indicate the intersection of the five yard line where the line-to-gain indicator is clipped and a line through the ball parallel to the sideline. That is the spot where the linesman will place the line-to-gain indicator.

The linesman brings the chain in from the sideline with the crew members. Putting one hand on the links on each side of the line-to-gain indicator improves the linesman's chances of keeping track of the proper link in case the line-to-gain indicator falls off the chain. The line-to-gain indicator must be placed on the back edge of the line for the measurement. A

good double-check is for the linesman to state that the next down will be first if the ball is beyond the stake or the next down of the series if it is short. (Example: "It will either be first or fourth.")

The back judge holds the ball, in a position outside of the forward stake facing the offensive huddle, and does not let go of the ball until the measurement is totally finished. In some areas, it is customary for the line judge to step on the chain to prevent any movement when the umpire pulls the stake. Once the linesman tells the referee the chain is on the proper mark, the umpire takes the forward stake from the crew member, then pulls the stake to ensure the chain is taut. The referee makes the determination.

If the measurement is in a side zone and does not result in a first down, the umpire should keep control of the stake. The referee uses his hands (or thumb and index finger if the ball is inches short of the front stake) to indicate how short the

play ended of a first down.

The referee grasps the chain at the link in front of the ball and rises. Referee, umpire, line judge and linesman walk to the nearest hashmark. The line judge should have another ball ready to be placed. It's OK if it's not the offensive team's game ball. Once the ball is set and the chains removed, the balls are switched so the offense will snap its own ball.

If the measurement occurred on fourth down and Team A is short, the referee signals the change of possession. The referee then sets the ball in the same position as it was when it became dead so its foremost point becomes the rear point when the direction is changed. The new rear stake is then moved to the new foremost point of the ball.

If the measurement results in the award of a new series for Team A, the referee signals the first down. The linesman need not hold the chain as the crew returns to the sideline, but must go

▶ SEE "MANNERISMS" P. 12

National Federation of State High School Associations



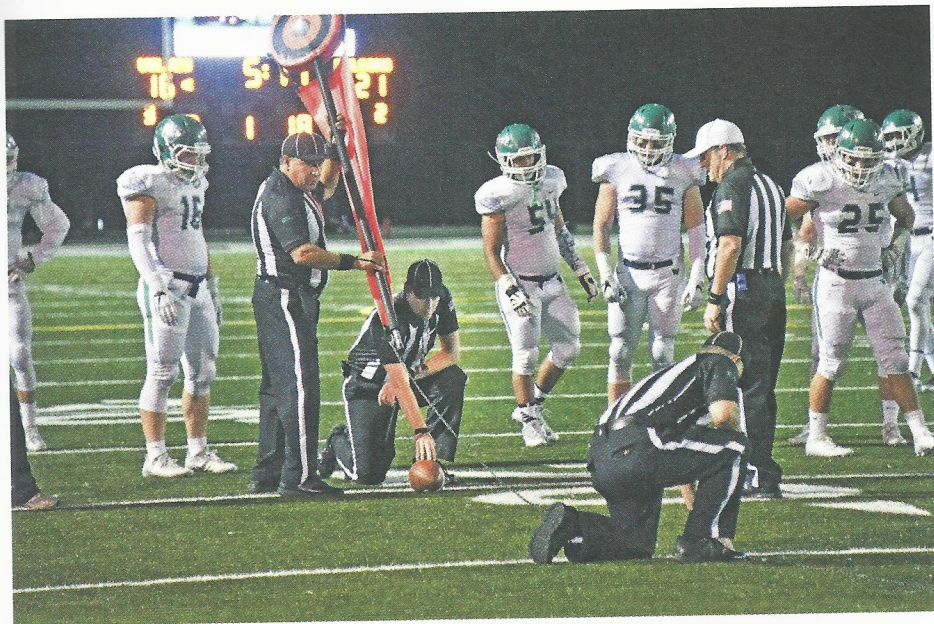
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Washington state game officials see if a first down has been achieved: (from left) Terry Granillo, North Bend; Aaron Wells, Seattle; Kevin Corbett, Bothell; and Michael Livingston, Seattle. Although artificial turf fields have reduced the number of measurements needed, knowing how to conduct one is necessary.

## ▶ MANNERISMS CONT. FROM P.11

all the way to the sideline and indicate to the crew where the new series will begin.

Regardless of the result of the measurement, the referee must wait for the linesman's signal that the crew is back in position before giving the ready signal.

**Quit officiating.** Some game officials quit officiating once they've tossed a flag. It happens often when game officials hurl a flag and then simply stop in their tracks, eyes transfixed on the spot. Referees periodically toss a flag for holding in the backfield or running into a kicker and then remain over their flags, oblivious to subsequent player contact nearby or action downfield.

Sliding the flag out of a pocket, particularly if it has to be dug out for more than a second, and shoveling it underhanded invariably results in crowd displeasure, because spectators don't see the flag come out to designate the foul. Flags should be propelled overhanded, like pegging a dart at a dartboard, but of course not aimed at the players themselves.

**Marking progress.** A crew, even though it may consist of five individuals who have never worked together before, can look sharp and coordinated if two things are done. First, the forward progress spot must be obtained quickly

and without confusion between the two wing officials.

If the far wing is blocked out from the forward progress spot, the near wing can mark it until the near wing is ready to take it. That procedure should be discussed in the pregame conference in conjunction with the umpire, who must know from which game official to take the spot. If necessary, the wings can communicate verbally.

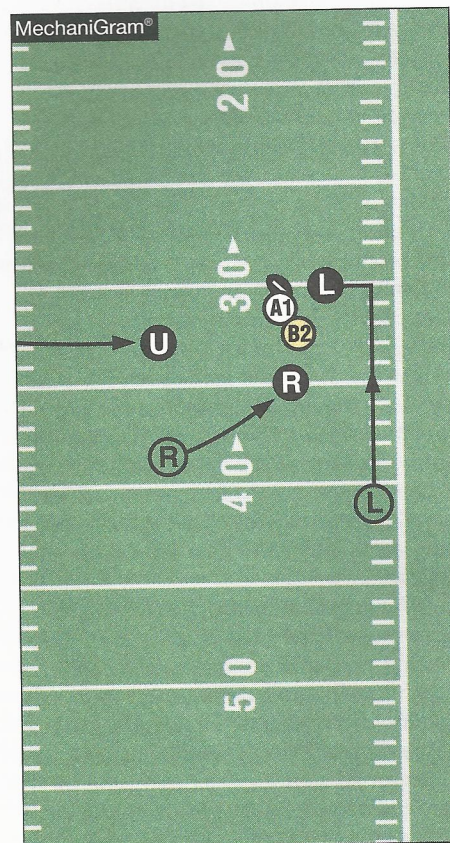
In moving to mark forward progress, the wings should treat forward progress as a line. The umpire will determine the exact spot once shown the appropriate yard line. The wings should be in an "L" as seen in the MechaniGram at right. From their live-ball position on or near the sideline, the wing should move in straight to the forward progress line and then move in toward the ball, if necessary, to complete the "L." That movement not only appears crisper than angling in, it also enhances dead-ball officiating by leaving the wing with a wider view.

**Cleaning up after the play.** Instead of going past the sidelines to cover players who end up in the bench area, some game officials reach for a ball from ball assistants and ignore the players. Few back judges get to the sidelines on scrimmage downs to assist in clean-up on plays that carry out of bounds. Some

referees decline to enter a side zone on scrimmage plays — not following runners on sweeps — and therefore miss vital follow-up coverage and do not help in ball relays. Here is how some of those errant habits result in problems.

A back judge can only get to a sweep out of bounds if the runner advances seven or more yards before being driven out. In any event, a top-notch back judge will move into a side zone whenever a play carries that way, ready to check all blocking ahead of the runner, and ready also to help with ball relaying if the play should end inbounds.

Say the runner goes outside on a sweep on the line judge's side, is barreled into by a couple of defenders and driven back a number of yards before being dumped on his back. The line judge will have to give ground so as not to get entangled with the players and won't get an accurate progress spot. That's an opportunity for the crew to use crossfield spotting. The line judge can look across the field to see that the linesman is mirroring his spot. Then the line judge can still practice dead-ball officiating while moving toward and finally marking a spot that both can agree upon. □



# EDITORIAL CHANGE CLARIFIES R'S PENALTY OPTIONS ON KICK PLAYS

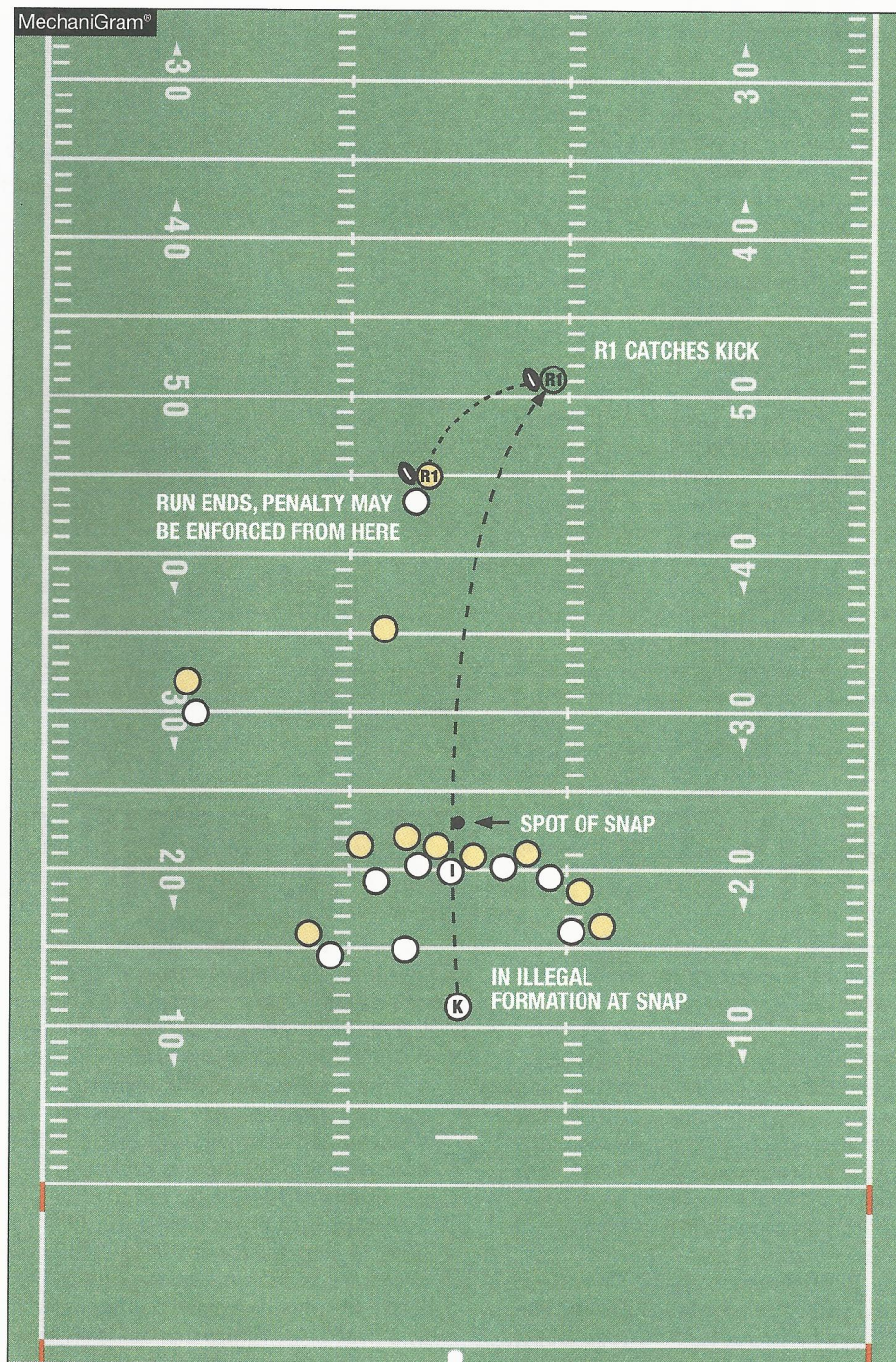
Language in Rules 5-2-2, 5-2-4, 10-4-2c EXCEPTION and 10-5-1j underwent minor modification to clarify Team R's options when Team K commits a foul other than kick-catching interference.

The editorial change makes it clear that the basic spot may, at the option of the offended team, be the succeeding spot for fouls by K during a free or scrimmage kick down (other than kick catch interference) prior to the end of the kick when K will not be next to put the ball in play. The receiving team has all of the previous options as well as accepting the distance penalty at the end of the down.

**PLAY 1:** K's free kick from its 40-yard line goes out of bounds untouched at R's 20-yard line. **RULING:** R may accept a five-yard penalty from the previous spot and have K rekick; put the ball in play at the inbounds spot 25 yards beyond the previous spot; decline the penalty and put the ball in play at the inbounds spot; or accept a five-yard penalty enforced from the dead-ball spot. That would put the ball at team R's 25-yard line.

**PLAY 2:** As seen in the MechaniGram, it's fourth and 10 from K's 23-yard line. At the snap, K is flagged for an illegal formation. K1's punt is caught by R2 at the 50-yard line and returned to K's 45-yard line. **RULING:** Team R may have the five-yard penalty enforced from the previous spot, or have the penalty enforced from the succeeding spot (K's 45-yard line).

**PLAY 3:** Fourth and 10 from K's five-yard line. At the snap, K is flagged for illegal motion. K1's punt is blocked and the ball (a) rolls out of the back of K's end zone, or (b) is recovered by R2, who advances across K's goal line. **RULING:** In (a), if team R wants the two points for a safety it must decline the penalty. The penalty cannot be enforced on the succeeding kickoff because K will be next to put the ball in play. R could have the penalty enforced from the previous spot. In (b), team R scores a touchdown. The penalty will be enforced on the try. □



Team R may choose penalty enforcement from the succeeding spot for a foul other than kick-catching interference that occurs from the start of a kick down until the kick ends.

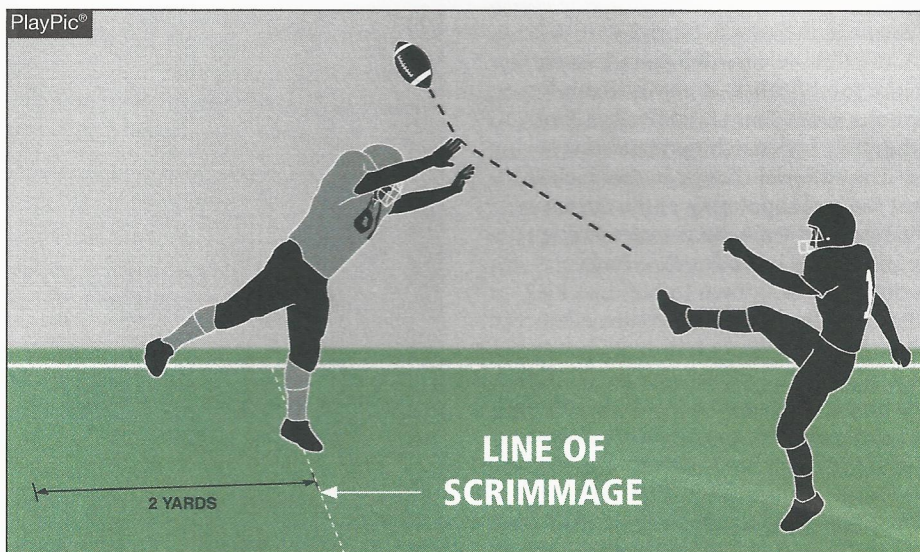
# WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THE NEUTRAL ZONE EXPANDS ON A KICK PLAY?

The neutral zone is the space between the two scrimmage lines during a scrimmage down. It is established when the ball is ready for play. The neutral zone may be expanded following the snap up to a maximum of 2 yards behind the defensive line of scrimmage, in the field of play, during any scrimmage down.

For scrimmage kick plays, the neutral zone may be expanded following the snap to a maximum of two yards beyond the defensive line of scrimmage in the field of play.

As seen in the PlayPic, touching of a low scrimmage kick by any player is ignored if the touching is in or behind the expanded neutral zone. Because R's touching was in the expanded neutral zone, R is not considered to have touched the kick.

Low scrimmage kicks may touch or be touched by players of K or R, and such touching is ignored if the kick has not been beyond the expanded neutral



zone. The zone disintegrates immediately when the kick has crossed the expanded zone or when the trajectory is such that it cannot be touched until it comes down. Once the zone disintegrates, touching of

the kick by K in flight beyond the neutral zone is kick-catching interference if an R player is in position to catch the ball. If touched by R beyond the neutral zone, it establishes a new series. □

## PLAYERS AS GAME OFFICIALS' PARTNERS

Trying to manage a football game would be nearly impossible without effective communication. Although managing players is primarily the responsibility of the coaching staff, game officials can facilitate the conduct of the game if specific game officials manage certain players. To do that, game officials must talk to and with players frequently. There are a few special relationships and here are the most notable ones.

**Referee-quarterback.** The referee's first priority is the quarterback. The referee helps protect the quarterback not only by holding late-hitting defenders accountable, but also by deterring unnecessary contact through

his presence and the use of his voice.

Shouting phrases such as "The ball's gone!" after the pass is thrown tells rushing defensive players not to contact the quarterback and reinforces the notion they are being watched by a game official. After the ball is released, the referee must stay with the quarterback until there is no longer a possibility of him being roughed.

**Umpire-snapper.** The lower the level of play, the more dialogue is necessary. A snap before the ball is ready for play can make a game ugly in a heartbeat. While that act is clearly a foul, it can easily be prevented. The penalty is five yards for delay of game.

Long snappers inevitably prefer

the laces in a different position than the regular snapper so his fingers can grip the laces. Some long snappers like to move the ball forward to gain momentum before passing it backward and the umpire should address that as necessary.

As the referee is with the quarterback, the umpire is the protector of the snapper and when the offense is in a scrimmage kick formation, the umpire should remind the defense not to hit the snapper. In that formation, no defensive player may charge directly into the snapper until the snapper is able to protect himself, blocks or otherwise moves to participate in the play. "Protect ▶

▶ himself” means the snapper has time to look up and regain his balance. If contacted directly while his head is still down and before the snapper has been given a chance to look up, the contact is likely to be a foul. If the contact is slight and indirect, it is unlikely to be a foul.

Roughing the snapper results in a 15-yard penalty with an automatic first down.

#### **Back judge-kicker (kickoffs).**

The dialogue between those two is essential, especially because most of it should take place before the game begins. The back judge should know how many players are in the formation, and if there are less than 11, should ask the kicker to count teammates. The back judge should also advise the kicker if any player is in a position that would result in a foul when the ready is blown.

The back judge can help prevent a premature kick (one before the ready is sounded) by communicating to the kicker how it will be made clear to him that it is OK to kick the ball. In many stadiums, the crowd may preclude hearing the referee’s ready whistle. Some back judges prefer to point at the kicker when the ready is blown.

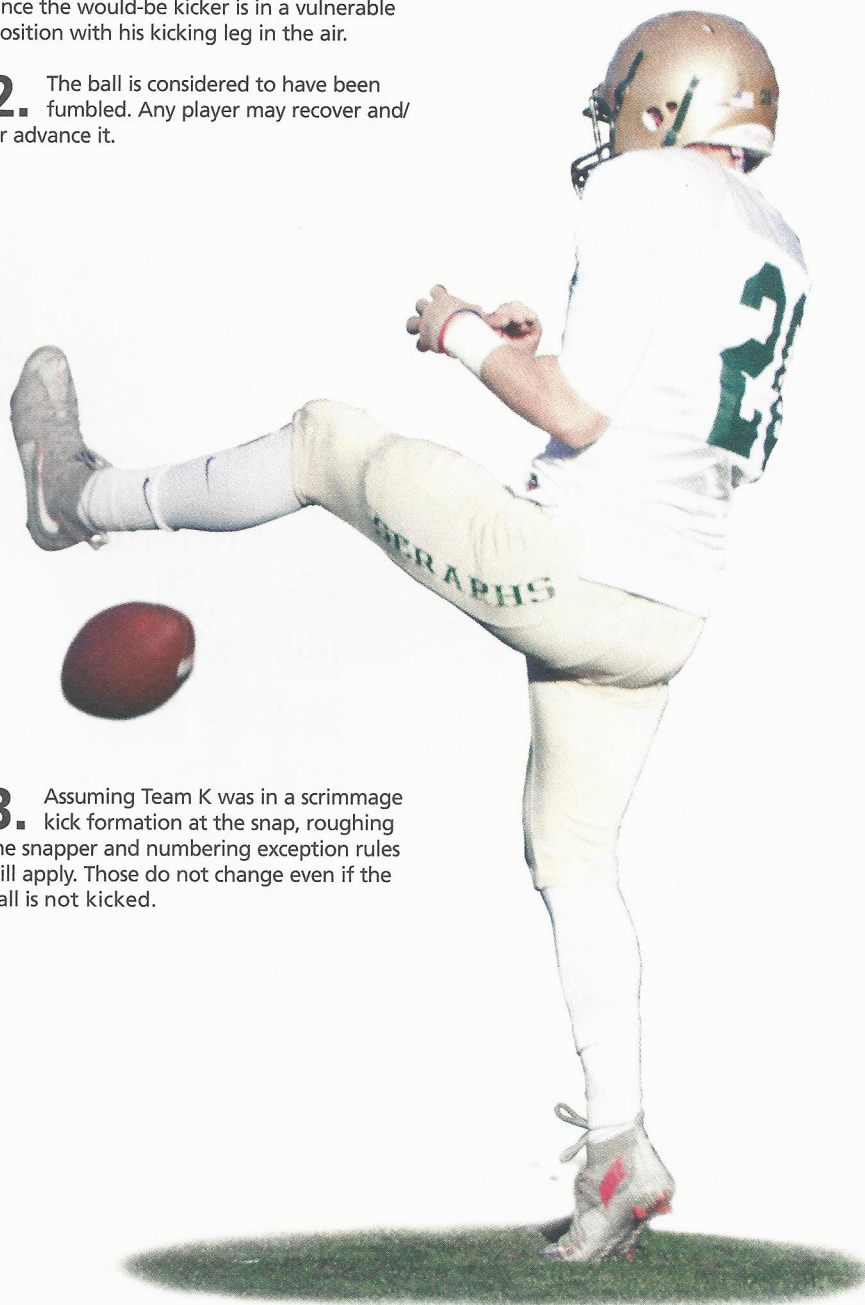
**Back judge-punt returner.** On the first punt for each team, the back judge should remind the receiver how to signal properly. A valid fair catch signal is the extending and lateral waving of one arm, clearly above the head, by any member of the receiving team. NFHS specifies at full arms’ length. Examples of invalid signals include a limp wave, partially extending and waving one hand in front of the face or chest and fully extending and laterally waving both hands above the head. When a receiver shades his eyes during a kick, it must be done with a bent arm and without waving so it cannot be interpreted as an invalid signal.

**Wing officials.** Game officials on the sideline don’t have a relationship with a specific player, but communicating properly with the widest player in the formation to indicate that player is on or off the line is essential. A game official should never tell a player to move. That will likely get the game official blamed for causing a foul. □

# SWING AND A MISS

The title is stolen from the bat-and-ball sports, of course. But the kicker’s leg swing failing to produce a punt brings the following rules to the fore:

1. There cannot be roughing or running into the kicker because there was no kick, thus no kicker. Personal fouls or targeting fouls are still possible, especially since the would-be kicker is in a vulnerable position with his kicking leg in the air.
2. The ball is considered to have been fumbled. Any player may recover and/or advance it.



3. Assuming Team K was in a scrimmage kick formation at the snap, roughing the snapper and numbering exception rules still apply. Those do not change even if the ball is not kicked.



# INJURY RISK FOCUS OF HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL



By Karissa Niehoff, NFHS Executive Director, and David Jackson, NFHS President

**F**ootball. Mention of the word elicits various responses. To

many people, it is the most popular high school sport and has been the focus of Friday nights in the fall throughout their lives. To some individuals, it occupies every Sunday, Monday night and Thursday night in the fall as they follow their favorite professional teams. And to others, it is a sport with concerns about risk of injury.

Despite a drop of 20,565 participants in 11-player football from 2016 to 2017, there are more than one million (1,039,079) boys and girls playing high school football. Although some of the decrease may be the result of concern regarding concussions, there are other factors as well. In some cases, a decline in enrollment has caused schools to discontinue 11-player football and start 8- or 9-player football, and in other cases, students may be electing to compete in other sports.

If attendance at some recent state football championships is any indication, interest in watching high school football and supporting the local team remains strong. In Texas, 48,421 fans attended the Class 6A-Division II final at AT&T Stadium in Arlington, and more than 228,000 attended the 12 Texas University Interscholastic League state title games, an average of 19,000 a game. And in Alabama, the seven "Super 7" state championships games totaled 51,651 – up 30 percent from last year. In Ohio, the seven state championship games totaled 52,390 – an average of 7,480 – and in 2017 in Kentucky, an all-

time record of 52,796 fans attended the six state title games in Lexington.

As has always been the case, weather and location of the schools involved in the games affects attendance; however, these were good reports during a time when the future of the sport is being questioned by some.

In the end, whether it is a parent of a youth or high school football player, leaders of the sport at all levels, insurance companies or the participants themselves, the question

**WHILE FOOTBALL IS A CONTACT SPORT AND INJURIES DO OCCUR, RULES ARE IN PLACE TO LOWER THE RISK OF CONCUSSION, AND THE ABILITY TO DETECT AND MANAGE CONCUSSIONS HAS NEVER BEEN HIGHER.**

is the same: What is the risk associated with playing the sport? And with regard to the answer to that question at the high school level of football, we would say that the focus on risk minimization is strong across the country.

The NFHS has been writing and publishing its own rules in football since 1932, and the organization has had an unwavering focus on limiting the inherent risk of injury. However, by the late 1960s and early 1970s, the number of deaths in high school

football had accelerated, with a high of 35 in 1970. In 1975, spearing was outlawed and several other equipment and safety-related changes were put in place and the number of fatalities dropped significantly.

In 2016 and 2017, there were only two direct deaths each year compared to an average of 20 annually in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Moreover, as opposed to 50 years ago, today playing rules are in place at the high school level to manage a student who exhibits signs and symptoms of a concussion. Thanks to these guidelines and state laws in place, the incidence of high school players incurring a repeat concussion has been greatly reduced. In addition, practice restrictions and contact limits have been adopted by all member state associations.

The NFHS and its 51-member associations have never been more committed to the health and safety of the almost eight million participants in high school sports. Early last year, the NFHS provided more than 400 AEDs to schools and state associations through a grant from the NFHS Foundation. This past January, more than 600 additional units were shipped to schools and states. The goal is to have one AED in every high school in the United States, and we will not stop short of that goal. The free "Concussion in Sports" online education course through the NFHS Learning Center ([www.NFHSLearn.com](http://www.NFHSLearn.com)) was updated last year and has been taken by an amazing four million people since 2010.

While football is a contact sport and injuries do occur, rules are in place to lower the risk of concussion, and the ability to detect and manage concussions has never been higher. Football continues to bring communities together on Friday nights in the fall across this country, and we expect those lights to burn bright for years and years to come. □