

Football Game Officials Manual Points of Emphasis - 2018-2019

By NFHS on May 16, 2019

[football](#)

Equipment Issues to be Addressed

It is critical for all game officials to continue to strengthen their efforts to address all issues that deal with the current equipment requirements. Game officials must focus on these three areas of concern: (1) required equipment not worn properly (pants that do not cover the knees), (2) required and/or legal equipment missing or not being used correctly (no knee pads, thigh guards or hip pads), and (3) wearing illegal equipment (a hard cast not properly covered).

One adjustment made to Rule 1-5-4 requires that the head coach will verify to the referee and another game official prior to the game that "his players have been issued all of the required equipment and they will not use illegal equipment."

Crew members are encouraged to become very observant throughout their pre-game responsibilities and to be prepared to immediately address any equipment issues with the player and a coach. Appropriate communication with the player in the presence of the coach allows for correction to be made prior to the beginning of the contest and avoids problems during the game.

Once the game has started, a major rule change (NFHS Football Rule 3-5-10e) for 2018 calls for an official's time-out to be declared for the removal from the game for at least one down of any player who is wearing required/legal equipment improperly or not at all or is wearing illegal equipment. It is certainly appropriate to allow the correction of the equipment problem quickly and avoid removing the player if the correction/repair is clearly possible in a timely manner (a tooth and mouth protector is hanging from the face mask or a back pad attached to the shoulder pads is not covered by the jersey). Multiple requests are NOT recommended/encouraged to address an equipment problem that continues to be an issue. NFHS Football Rule 3-5-10e is likely to get results as this concern is addressed.

Rule 9-9 (Failure to Properly Wear Required Equipment) has been deleted from the 2018 NFHS Football Rules Book. Rule 3-6-2 no longer calls for a delay-of-game foul for failure to properly wear required/legal equipment. An important change to Rule 9-8-1h calls for an unsportsmanlike foul charged to the head coach if, and only if, a player(s) is wearing illegal equipment.

Game officials are very strongly urged to immediately address this current problem with equipment issues early and often as the 2018 season begins. There is appropriate rule support now for dealing with these problems, and this problem cannot be ignored. It will not go away if game officials fail to take appropriate action.

Consistent Pace of Play Throughout the Game

The time difference in marking the ball ready-for-play from referee to referee has incorrectly varied and often very significantly. The time period between downs is supposed to be dictated by the offensive team and not the game officials. The rules afford teams the option of running their offense as fast or as slow as they choose. In many situations, teams are waiting for game officials to declare the ball ready-for-play and could have already resumed, or attempted to resume play. Once the ball is retrieved and placed on the ground for play, all game officials should be in position and ready to officiate without worry of an illegal snap. While regularity and consistency is the responsibility of every game official on the field, the referee likely has the most effect on this procedure. Situations occur such as the referee being overly patient for a quarterback receiving the play call from the coach at the sideline or other crew members unevenly hurrying to retrieve the ball as time declines near the end of a half. Such practices, as inadvertent as they may be, project an inappropriate attitude of bias towards one team or the other and additionally subtract from the fairness of the game.

The 2018-2019 NFHS Football Game Officials Manual is clear on the appropriate procedures in the Basic Philosophy Principles section entitled "Marking the Ball Ready for Play." After the ball is spotted, three to five seconds should be the maximum time to signal the ready-for-play, and game officials are required to "hustle to their proper positions" so that the "same tempo can be maintained throughout the game." Teams want and deserve consistency in this regard.

Timing Rules and Procedures

While the rules allow for some flexibility in length of periods and halftime intermissions, there are set limitations. Risk minimization continues to be an emphasis in football and certain rules are in place to protect warm-up and rest periods, and these rules must be followed without exception.

Length of Periods can be shortened:

1. Shorten any period or periods in any emergency by agreement of opposing coaches and the referee. By mutual agreement of the opposing coaches and the referee, any remaining period may be shortened at any time or the game terminated. (3-1-3)
2. By agreement of the opposing coaches and the referee, the halftime intermission may be reduced to a minimum of 10 minutes (not including the mandatory warm-up period). (TABLE 3-1)
3. When weather conditions are construed to be hazardous to life or limb of the participants, the crew of game officials is authorized to delay or suspend the game. (3-1-5)

When dealing with lightning or thunder disturbances during a game, please refer to the "NFHS Guidelines

on Handling Practices and Contests During Lightning or Thunder Disturbances" in Appendix E of the NFHS Football Rules Book. If a lightning or thunder disturbance occurs near halftime intermission, this delay cannot be treated as halftime intermission. After a weather delay, by rule the second period must be completed and halftime intermission shall be declared. (3-1-3) Halftime intermission may be reduced to a minimum of 10 minutes by agreement of the opposing coaches and the referee. (3-1-3, TABLE 3-1) Rest periods are important for the well-being of the players and should be followed as prescribed.