

Football Points of Emphasis - 2019

By NFHS on May 16, 2019

football

Proper Procedures for Weather Delays

At some point during the high school football season, many parts of the country have to address weather issues. Some of these, according to NFHS guidelines, dictate a suspension/ delay during a game. Most of the time, the delay is due to lightning and thunder (either lightning seen or thunder heard); and when a suspension or delay occurs, the teams are sent to a safe, sheltered area until the weather situation has ended. NFHS guidelines on handling lightning and thunder delays require use of the 30-minute rule, meaning when the game has been suspended, play cannot resume until at least 30 minutes have elapsed following the last sighting of lightning or the sound of thunder. Once the game is suspended, each further instance of lightning or thunder requires a reset of the clock and the commencement of a new 30-minute interval.

Seldom is there a problem with game officials or site administrators following the basic 30-minute rule when there is lightning or thunder. However, some game officials and administrators are not abiding by the mandatory halftime intermission and warm-up rule when there is a lightning delay near the end of the first half. If there is such a delay late in the second period, once the second period is completed, NFHS playing rules require a halftime intermission of at least 10 minutes followed by the required 3-minute warm-up period before the third period may begin. Coaches or game officials cannot shorten the halftime intermission or the warm-up period. However, both coaches could agree to shorten (end) the second period during the delay, and then the third period could start after the delay as soon as the mandatory warm-up period is completed.

It is important for game officials, coaches and administrators to be aware of the halftime intermission and warm-up rules on nights when the weather could present delays and to administer those NFHS football rules correctly.

Free-Blocking Zone and Legal Blocking

The free-blocking zone is a rectangular area established when the ball is snapped. It extends 4 yards laterally on either side of the ball, and 3 yards behind each line of scrimmage. Blocking below the waist and blocking in the back may be permitted in the free-blocking zone provided that certain conditions are met.

Offensive and defensive linemen may block each other below the waist in the free-blocking zone provided that all players involved in the blocking are on their line of scrimmage and in the free-blocking zone at the snap, and the ball is in the zone. Each team's line of scrimmage is a vertical plane through the point of the

ball closest to that team's goal line.

Offensive linemen may block defensive players in the back in the free-blocking zone as long as the blocker is on his line of scrimmage and in the free-blocking zone at the snap, the opponent is in the free-blocking zone at the snap, and the contact is in the zone.

To determine whether blocking below the waist and blocking in the back are legal, game officials must first determine whether players are in the free-blocking zone at the snap. Since offensive linemen are in the zone if any part of their body is in the zone at the snap, game officials must check the spacing between offensive linemen. As long as the line is using "normal" splits and the formation is "balanced" (i.e., the distance between the outside foot of each lineman and the inside foot of the adjacent linemen is no greater than 2 feet and an equal number of linemen are on each side of the snapper), all players, including the tight end, are deemed to be in the zone at the snap. If the splits are wider than 2 feet, the tight end is considered out of the zone and therefore cannot legally block below the waist or in the back.

Once game officials determine which players are in the zone at the snap, the next determination is whether a block below the waist or a block in the back occurs in the free-blocking zone. Because the free-blocking zone disintegrates once the ball leaves the zone, it may be difficult to determine whether the ball is in the zone at the time the block occurs when the offense is using a "shotgun" formation (a formation where there is no direct hand-to-hand snap and the player who receives the snap is more than 3 yards behind his line of scrimmage), due to the very short time interval between the snap and the ball leaving the zone.

In addition to observing blocking by offensive linemen, game officials must also be alert to defenders "cutting" running backs and wide receivers who are not on their line of scrimmage or in the free-blocking zone at the snap. Restrictions on blocking below the waist apply equally to offensive and defensive players. Finally, offensive players in the backfield can never legally block below the waist or in the back.