

2017 Football Rule Changes

This document is being prepared earlier in the calendar year in an effort to share the significant rule changes for 2017 that coaches will need to share with their players during their spring football activities. We have not received the actual 2017 Federation rule book yet to see the exact wording of the changes, but we are confident that we have the necessary information to share with you at this time. There are 11 changes for 2017 although some of them do not directly impact the playing of the game. We are sharing all of the changes here with the most critical ones listed first.

* New definition of a 'blindside block' - a block outside of the free-blocking zone against an opponent other than the runner who is not able to see the block coming.

Crack back and peel back shoulder blocks and shoulder blocks during kick plays are particularly dangerous because the blocker is often running at full speed while his opponent may be in the process of turning to pursue the runner. In 2017, it will be a personal foul (15 yard penalty) to initiate a blindside block UNLESS the block is initiated with open hands with the palms pointed toward the opponent and the contact is made with the open hands.

* A 'pop-up' kick in which the kicker immediately drives the ball directly into the ground once causing the ball to bounce high into the air, is now an illegal kick. This relatively new kick is being used in onside kick situations and becomes a significant safety issue for the receiving player whose total focus is on catching the ball. The free kick (kickoff) will be blown dead immediately if the pop-up kick is executed.

* On forward pass plays, 'face guarding' by the defensive player which does not involve physical contact against the opponent is no longer a foul for defensive pass interference.

* Once the snapper has placed his hand(s) on the ball and the ball has been made 'ready-for-play', it will be a foul for encroachment if a defensive player makes contact with the football prior to the end of a legal snap OR if a defensive player makes contact with the hand(s) or arm(s) of the snapper prior to the end of a legal snap. The defensive player must avoid any contact with the ball or with the snapper until the snapper has released the ball during a legal snap.

*** We now use the term 'defenseless player' when dealing with player safety issues. The 2017 rule book has added a list of specific examples of a defenseless player. Examples include but are not limited to the following: a player in the act of or just throwing a pass; a receiver attempting to catch a pass who has not had time to clearly become a runner; the intended receiver of a pass in the action during and immediately following an interception or potential interception; a runner already in the grasp of a tackler and whose forward progress has been stopped; a kickoff or punt returner attempting to catch or recover a kick, or one who has completed the catch or recovery and has not had time to protect himself or has not clearly become a ball carrier; a player on the ground including a ball carrier who has obviously given himself up and is sliding feet first; a player obviously out of the play or not in the immediate vicinity of the runner; a player who receives a "blindside" block with forcible contact that is not initiated with open hands.**

*** When a penalty is accepted with less than 2 minutes remaining in either half, the offended team will have the option to have the game clock started on the next snap rather than on the 'ready-for-play'.**

*** The ball becomes dead immediately and the down is ended when a prosthetic limb comes completely off a player who is in possession of the ball.**

*** The wording of a post scrimmage kick foul situation was changed to address a small conflict in the current post scrimmage foul rule as it applies to penalty enforcement.**

*** There shall not be any advertising on the surface of a football with these obvious exceptions: brand name or logo of the ball; school logo, name or mascot; conference name or logo; state association name or logo; NFHS name or logo.**

*** The purchase of any future home team jerseys MUST include a clearly distinctive dark color that contrasts with the white visitor jersey color.**

*** The referee and any other official may now meet with the coach prior to the game to verify that all players are legally equipped. It does not have to be the umpire.**