

2023 NFHS FOOTBALL RULE CHANGES

- 1.) This change deals directly with a towel that any player may choose to wear. The description of a towel that may be worn basically remains the same with these minor changes. If more than one player on a team is wearing a towel, **the color of these towels no longer have to match** as long as they satisfy the other requirements. It is also **now permissible for the towel to have a school logo** that is limited in size to the 2 ¼ inches in any dimension.
- 2.) Definition 2-29-1 now has added language that clarifies that **a player who is out of bounds remains out of bounds until returning to the field with any body part touching in the field of play and no body part still in contact out of bounds**. Therefore, there is nothing that this out of bounds player may do to legally participate such as jump into the air and bat a pass to a teammate while he/she is not touching out of bounds. It is important to note that this added language **does not change rule 9-6-1 or 9-6-2**. Consider these situations and note the result of the play. An eligible team A receiver accidentally steps on or outside of the sideline boundary and catches or bats a forward pass before returning to the field of play. This would simply result in an incomplete forward pass (no foul). If this eligible team A receiver did return to the field of play and participated in any manner, there would be a foul for illegal participation (9-6-1). An exception to this situation would be if there was a change of possession (team B intercepts the forward pass), the team A player may reenter the field of play to pursue the team B runner. Do not forget that 9-6-1 does allow the team A receiver to return immediately to the field of play and legally participate if he was blocked out by an opponent. This change would also impact a team K player in the same way during a legal kick that is in kick status.
- 3.) Additional language has been added to the defenseless player definition (2-32-16) that deals specifically with a pass receiver to aid officials in determining what an opponent can legally do to a pass receiver (offensive or defensive) that would not be deemed excessive or unnecessary and would be considered legal contact. **Incidental contact while making a play on the pass, contact initiated with open hands and/or an attempted tackle with wrapping arm(s) around the receiver is now considered legal in an attempt to avoid a foul**. Be aware that rule 9-4-3-g did not change, but this definition change gives more clarity to what a player can do.
- 4.) The 2022 rule change that allows a passer to legally ground a forward pass does still exist and this new change adds an additional limitation to the 7-5-2-Exception-2. **The only player who may legally ground a forward pass in this manner is the player who received the original snap** and has possessed the ball beyond the lateral boundary of the free-blocking zone and their forward pass reaches the neutral zone in flight.

5.) This change addresses a piece of the pass interference rule (7-5-10) that has appeared in the chart on page 65 of the 2022 NFHS Football rule book. **‘Intentional’ pass interference no longer exists at this time!** It has been completely removed from the chart and from the penalty section associated with 7-5-10. Pass interference by either team certainly does still exist and remains a 15-yard penalty at this time.

6.) Several significant changes in the language associated with penalty enforcement spots will be found in rule 10-4. It will be critically important that each official study this new language very carefully as it appears to be a complete overhaul of where we will enforce penalties, but you will discover that **the only thing that has really changed is the enforcement spot for fouls by team A or by team B that occur in the field of play behind the line of scrimmage prior to any change of possession during the down.** For all of our officials who for years have wanted a holding foul by team A that occurs behind the line of scrimmage to be enforced from the previous spot rather than the spot of the foul, **that will now be the case.** This is just one example of a penalty enforcement that has changed and there are certainly other examples, but it **will not** be accurate to suggest that every team A or team B foul behind the line of scrimmage will be enforced from the previous spot! Another example that involves a team B foul would be a scrambling QB looking to pass and is pulled to the ground by the face mask behind the line of scrimmage. This penalty will also now be enforced from the previous spot. As you can see from these 2 examples, there is clearly an effort to make certain that the balance between the offense and the defense hopefully remains the same. One more example that shows that every foul that occurs behind the line of scrimmage will not be enforced from the previous spot would be the intentional grounding of a forward pass. This enforcement will still be a penalty of 5 yards from the spot of the pass and the down counts. Read section 10-4 very carefully and also expect this change to be explained very carefully at our July meeting with the coaches and our July and August state rules meetings for officials. It is also very important to note that **rule 10-6 has been removed from the book and the all-but-one principle will not exist at this time.** You will discover that the philosophy of the all-but-one still applies in many situations, but that language has been removed.

7.) Please note that the NFHS Press Release listing the 2023 rule changes will include a 7th rule change that applies only to the 6-man football rules which of course is not played in Oklahoma.

Contact David Gore if you need to ask any question about these changes.

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