



# **GHSA FLAG FOOTBALL RULES BOOK 2026 EDITION**

## **2026 GHSA Rules Changes**

**Flags. Section 4 Rule 3. NEW:** Flags shall be one solid single color that contrasts any striping on the lower body garment, with no more than one 2 ½" X 2 ½" logo design.

**Protective Head Gear. Rule 1-5-6. NEW:** It is **mandatory** that each player on the field during play wear protective head gear. The device may cover the entire head or be a headband style and have no hard plastic or metal fixtures. **Refer to the GHSA Constitution & By-Laws for required equipment specifications.**

## **2026 GHSA Points of Emphasis**

**Rule 9-3. Personal Fouls:** Illegal screen blocking, blocking downfield and illegal contact will continue to be strictly prohibited on the grounds of player safety and sportsmanship.

**Rule 9-1. Sportsmanship.** Conduct by players, nonplayers, and officials should remain in a sportsmanship manner.

**Section 4-1 Jerseys -** Jerseys shall be long enough so they remain tucked into the pant/shorts during the entire down and shall not cover any part of the flag belt. **NOTE: Failure to comply will result in the player being directed from the field of play.**

## **Rule 1. THE GAME, FIELD, PLAYERS, AND EQUIPMENT**

### **Section 1. General Provisions**

#### **Article 1. Object of the Game.**

It is the object of the game for one team to carry or pass the ball across the opponent's goal line. The game is won by the team that accumulates the most points.

#### **Article 2. The Game.**

The game shall be played between 2 teams of 7 players each. The game may be continued with fewer players as long as the team has a chance to win.

#### **Article 3. Officials.**

Regular season games shall be played under the supervision of 3 officials and 4 will be used for playoffs. The officials shall assume authority for the contest as soon as they arrive. The officials' jurisdiction extends through the Referee's declaration of the end of the game. The referee shall have authority to rule promptly, and in the spirit of good sporting behavior, on any situation not specifically covered in the Rules.

### **Section 2. The Field**

#### **Article 1. Facility**

##### **Limitations and Safety.**

The field shall be 40 yards wide and 80 yards long. In case of facility limitations, the width can be modified to no less than 30 yards wide. The end zone must always be 10 yards deep. No hard and unyielding rigid fixtures shall be located within 5 yards of the sidelines or within 10 yards of the end lines. When fields are in close proximity, there shall be a minimum of 5 yards between "side by side" fields and 10 yards between "end to end" fields.

#### **Article 2. Team Box.**

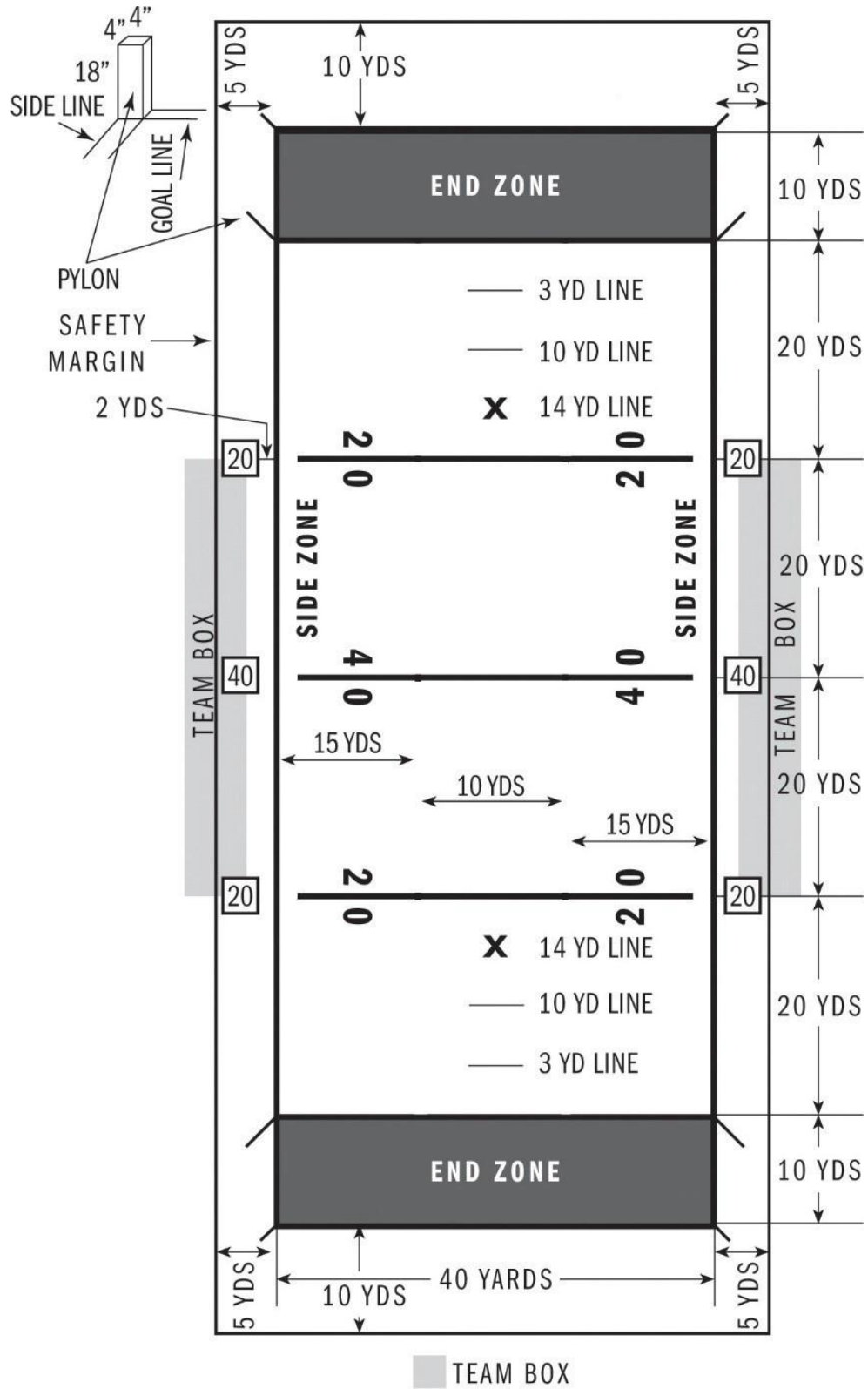
On each side of the field a team box shall be designated for the players and nonplayers. This is located 2 yards off the sideline and between the 20 yard lines. Where possible, teams should be on opposite sidelines.

#### **Article 3. End Zone Pylons.**

Eight soft, flexible pylons shall be placed so that inside corner of the pylon matches the inside corner of the intersections of the sideline with the goal line and end lines.

#### **Article 4. Sideline Zone Line-to-Gain Markers.**

20 yard line and 40 yard line markers, constructed of soft and pliable materials, shall be located 6' (2 feet) beyond the sideline on each side of the field. These markers are used to delineate the zone-to-gain lines.



### **Section 3. Game Equipment Article**

#### **1. The Ball.**

The official ball to be used in the semifinal and championship games is Wilson GST SPEEDSKIN HEIR WOMEN'S OFFICIAL. The Wilson 1784 TDY remains permissible. TDJ may be used for sub- varsity games.

#### **Article 2. Ball Spotters.**

2 soft and pliable ball spotters shall be used to mark the extent of the neutral zone. The host school is responsible providing the ball spotters. It is recommended the ball spotters are different colors. The ball spotters shall always be **2 yards** apart.

#### **Article 3. Down Box.**

A down box shall be used to indicate the number of the down and placed at the zone line-to-gain. It shall be positioned 2 yards out of bounds and operated under the jurisdiction of the Line Judge. During the Try, the down box shall display the point value (1, 2, or 3) declared by the offense and be placed at the goal line. The host school is responsible for providing the down box and down box operator.

### **Section 4. Required Player Equipment.**

#### **Article 1. Jersey.**

Players of opposing teams shall wear contrasting colored jerseys, without pockets, numbered on the front and back of the jersey. Numbers on the front shall be not less than 6" in height and 8" in height on the back of the jersey and shall be in a contrasting color to the torso of the jersey. Players of the same team shall wear the same color or similar jerseys with different numbers. It is recommended the home team wears their dark colored jerseys and the visiting team wears their light colored jersey. Jerseys shall be long enough so they remain tucked into the pant/shorts during the entire down.

#### **Article 2. Pants/Shorts.**

Each player shall wear pants or shorts. They shall be a different color than the flags.

#### **Article 3. Flag Belt.**

Each player shall wear a one-piece quick release belt, without any knots, at the waistline with 3 flags permanently attached, 1 flag on each side and 1 in the center of the back. The flags shall be of a contrasting color to the opponent's flags and contrasting color to the player's lower body garment. **NEW: Flags shall be one single color that contrasts any striping on the lower body garment, with no more that one 2 ½" X 2 ½" logo design.**

#### **Article 4. Shoes.**

Shoes shall be made of canvas, leather, or synthetic material that covers the foot attached to a firm sole of leather, rubber, or composition material that may have cleats or be cleat less. Cleats are limited to studs or projections that do no exceed 1/2" in length.

#### **Article 5. Mouth and Tooth Protector.**

Players must wear a mouthpiece.

### **Section 5. Optional Player Equipment**

#### **Article 1. Gloves.**

Players may wear gloves that must consist of a soft, pliable, and nonabrasive material.

#### **Article 2. Headwear.**

Players may wear a knit or stocking cap. The cap will have no bill.

**Article 3. Play Books.**

Players may carry a play book inside their clothing but cannot wear the play book on their belt or waistline. Players may wear a soft, pliable wrist/forearm band that contains plays.

**Article 4. Sunglasses.**

Players may wear pliable and non-rigid sunglasses.

**Article 5. Face Shield.**

Players may wear a face shield molded to the face with no protrusions to protect against a facial injury.

**Article 6. Protective Head Gear** – It is recommended that each player on the field during play wear a protective head gear. The device may cover the entire head or be a halo style and have no hard plastic or metal fixtures.

**Article 7. Electronic Communication Devices** – Teams are allowed to use a singular one-way non-oral communication device.

**Section 6. Illegal Player Equipment.**

A player wearing illegal equipment shall not be permitted to play. Types of equipment or substances that shall always be declared illegal include the following:

- A. Headwear containing any hard, unyielding, stiff material including billed hats, or items containing exposed knots. EXCEPTION: Face shield.
- B. Jewelry
- C. Shoes with ceramic, screw in, detachable cleats, or any projecting metal. EXCEPTION: Screw-in cleats are allowed if the screw is part of the cleat.
- D. Shirts or jerseys that do not remain tucked in. Any hood on a coat, sweatshirt, or shirt that does not remain tucked in. Tear-away jerseys or jerseys that have been altered in any manner that produces a knot.
- E. Pants or shorts with any belt(s), belt loop(s), pocket(s), or exposed drawstring(s).
- F. Leg or knee braces made of hard, unyielding material, unless covered on both sides and all edges overlapped.
- G. Any slippery or sticky foreign substance on any equipment or exposed part of the body.
- H. Equipment that includes computers and any electronic or mechanical devices for communication.
- I. Exposed metal on clothes or person.
- J. Towels attached at the player's waist.
- K. Flags that can be detached from the flag belt.
- L. Hand warmers worn around waist.

Penalty: Unsportsmanlike Conduct, Illegal Player Equipment, 10 yards

**RULE 2. DEFINITIONS OF PLAYING TERMS.**

**Section 1. Ball Status; Dead, Live, and Loose**

**Article 1. Dead Ball.**

A dead ball is a ball not in play. The ball is dead during the interval between downs.

**Article 2. Live Ball.**

A live ball is a ball in play. A ball becomes live when the ball is legally snapped and a down is in progress.

### **Article 3. Loose Ball.**

A loose ball is a pass, fumble, or a kick. A loose ball that has not yet touched the ground is in flight. A grounded loose ball is one that has touched the ground. Any loose ball continues to be a loose ball until a player secures possession of it or until it becomes dead by Rule, whichever comes first.

### **Article 4. When the Ball Is Ready for Play.**

A dead ball is ready for play when the Referee sounds the whistle and signals ready for play (S1).

## **Section 2. Batting**

Batting is intentionally slapping, striking, or redirecting the ball with the hand or arm.

## **Section 3. Catch, Interception, Simultaneous Catch, and Touching Article**

### **1. Catch.**

A catch is the act of establishing player possession of a live ball that is in flight by first contacting the ground inbounds while maintaining possession of the ball.

- If 1 foot first lands inbounds and the receiver has possession and control of the ball, it is a catch or interception even though a subsequent step or fall takes the receiver out of bounds.
- It is not a catch or interception if a player's initial contact with the ground causes a loss of player possession and either the ball contacts the ground or the player is out of bounds prior to regaining player possession. NOTE: If in doubt, it is a catch.

### **Article 2. Interception.**

An interception is the catch of an opponent's ungrounded fumble or pass.

### **Article 3. Recovery.**

A recovery is gaining possession of a live ball after it strikes the ground.

### **Article 4. Simultaneous Catch or Recovery.**

A simultaneous catch or recovery is a catch or recovery in which there is joint possession of a live ball by opposing players who are inbounds.

### **Article 5. Touching.**

Catching is always preceded by touching the ball; thus, if touching causes the ball to become dead, securing possession of the ball has no significance. Touching refers to any contact with the ball.

## **Section 4. Down and Between Downs**

A down is a unit of the game and starts, after the ball is ready for play, with a legal snap and ends when the ball next becomes dead. Between downs is the interval during which the ball is dead.

## **Section 5. Encroachment**

Encroachment is a term to indicate a player is illegally in the neutral zone. An entering substitute is not considered to be a player for encroachment restrictions until they are on their side of the neutral zone.

## **Section 6. Fighting**

Fighting is any attempt by a player or nonplayer to strike or engage an opponent in a combative manner unrelated to football. Such acts include, but are not limited to, attempts to strike an opponent(s) with the arm(s), hand(s), leg(s), or foot (feet), whether or not there is contact.

## **Section 7. Foul and Flagrant Foul Article**

### **1. Foul.**

A foul is a rule infraction for which a penalty is prescribed. NOTE: If in doubt, it is not a foul.

### **Article 2. Flagrant Foul.**

A flagrant foul is so severe or extreme that it places an opponent in danger of serious injury and/or involves violations that are extremely or persistently vulgar or abusive conduct.

## **Section 8. Fumble**

A fumble is a loss of player possession other than by snapping, handing, passing, or punting the ball.

## **Section 9. Goal Line**

Each goal line is a vertical plane separating the end zone from the field of play. The plane of the goal line extends beyond the sideline.

## **Section 10. Handing the Ball**

Handing the ball is transferring player possession from 1 teammate to another without throwing or punting it.

## **Section 11. Huddle**

A huddle is 2 or more offensive players grouped together after the ball is ready for play and before assuming scrimmage formation prior to the snap.

## **Section 12. Hurdling**

Hurdling is an attempt by a player to jump (hurdle) with 1 or both feet or knees over an opponent who is contacting the ground with no part of their body except 1 or both feet.

## **Section 13. Kicks**

### **Article 1. Kicker.**

The kicker is any player who legally punts. The kicker is a runner until they actually punt the ball.

### **Article 2. Legal and Illegal Kicks.**

A legal kick is a punt by a player of the team in possession when such a kick is permitted by Rule. Any punt continues to be a punt until it is caught by a player or becomes dead. Kicking the ball in any other manner is illegal.

### **Article 3. Punt.**

A punt is made by K under restrictions that prohibit either team from advancing beyond their scrimmage lines until the ball is punted. A player becomes a kicker when their knee, lower leg, or foot makes contact with the ball before it strikes the ground.

## **Section 14. Loss of a Down**

Loss of a down means loss of the right to repeat the down.

## **Section 15. Muff**

A muff is an unsuccessful attempt to catch a ball, with the ball being touched in the attempt.

## **Section 16. Neutral Zone**

The neutral zone is from the forward point of the football **2 yards** to B's scrimmage line and extended to each sideline. It is established when the ball is marked ready for play.

## **Section 17. Passes Article**

### **1. Passer.**

The passer is the player who has thrown a legal forward pass. They remain the passer while the ball is in flight or until they move to participate in the play.

### **Article 2. Passing.**

Passing the ball is throwing it. In a pass, the ball travels in flight. A pass continues to be a pass until caught, intercepted, or the ball becomes dead. The initial direction determines whether a pass is forward or backward.

### **Article 3. Forward Pass and Backward Pass.**

A forward pass is a pass thrown with its initial direction toward the opponent's end line. A backward pass is a pass thrown with its initial direction parallel with or toward the passer's end line. A backward pass or fumble that hits the ground is ruled dead at that spot.

## **Section 18. Penalty**

A penalty is a result imposed by Rule against a team or team member that has committed a foul.

## **Section 19. Possession**

A ball in player possession is a live ball held or controlled by a player after it has been handed or snapped to them, or after they caught or recovered it. A ball in team possession is a live ball that is in player possession or one that is loose following loss of such player possession. A live ball is always in the possession of a team. A change of possession occurs when the opponent gains player possession during the down.

## **Section 20. Removing the Flag Belt**

### **Article 1. Flag Belt Removal.**

When the flag belt is clearly taken from the runner in possession of the ball, the ball is declared dead and the down shall end. If a flag belt inadvertently falls to the ground, a 1 hand tag between the shoulders and knees constitutes capture. A player may leave their feet to remove the flag belt.

### **Article 2. Contact.**

In an attempt to remove the flag belt from a runner, an opponent may contact the body, but not the face, neck, or any part of the head of the runner, with their hands. An opponent may not hold, push, or knock the runner down in an attempt to remove the flag belt.

## **Section 21. Screen Blocking**

Screen blocking is legally obstructing an opponent without using any part of the body to initiate contact.

## **Section 22. Scrimmage Line**

The scrimmage line for A is the yard line and its vertical plane that passes through the forward point of the ball. The scrimmage line for B is the yard line and its vertical plane that passes **2 yards** from the point of the ball nearest its own goal line. B's scrimmage line may extend into their end zone. **Section 23. Shift**

A shift is the action of 1 or more offensive players who, after a huddle or after taking set positions, move to a new set position before the ensuing snap.

## Section 24. Spots

### Article 1. Basic Spot.

The basic spot is a point of reference for penalty enforcement. See 10-2.

### Article 2. Enforcement Spot.

The enforcement spot is the point from which a penalty is enforced.

### Article 3. Dead Ball Spot.

The dead ball spot is the spot under the foremost point of the ball when it becomes dead by rule. EXCEPTIONS: See 7-6-4B, 7-6-5B, and 8-8-1A EXCEPTION.

### Article 4. Inbounds Spot.

The inbounds spot is the intersection of the hash marks and the yard line through the forward point of the ball when the ball becomes dead in a side zone; or through the forward point of the ball on the sideline between the goal lines when a loose ball goes out of bounds; or through the spot under the forward point of the ball in the possession of a runner when they cross the plane of the sideline and goes out of bounds.

### Article 5. Out-of-Bounds Spot.

The out-of-bounds spot is where the ball becomes dead because of going out of bounds.

### Article 6. Post Scrimmage Kick Spot.

The post scrimmage kick spot is the spot where the kick ends. R retains the ball after penalty enforcement from the post scrimmage kick spot when a post scrimmage kick foul occurs. Fouls by R behind the post scrimmage kick spot are spot fouls.

### Article 7. Previous Spot.

The previous spot is where the ball was last snapped.

### Article 8. Spot of a Foul.

The spot of a foul is where the foul occurs. If a foul occurs out of bounds, the spot of the foul is at the intersection of the nearer hash mark and the yard line extended on which the foul occurs.

### Article 9. Spot Where a Run Ends.

The spot where a run ends is:

- where the ball becomes dead if the runner does not lose possession or if the runner's fumble/backward pass from beyond the scrimmage line touches the ground or goes out of bounds behind the spot of the fumble/backward pass;
- where the player loses possession if their run is followed by their fumble/backward pass that touches the ground or goes out of bounds beyond the spot of the fumble/backward pass, their illegal forward pass, or their fumble/backward pass beyond the scrimmage line is intercepted; or - the spot of the catch or recovery when the momentum rule is in effect.

### Article 10. Succeeding Spot.

The succeeding spot is where the ball would next be snapped if a foul had not occurred. When a foul occurs during a down in which a touchdown is scored, as in 10-3-10, the succeeding spot may, at the option of the offended team, be the succeeding spot after the Try.

## **Section 25. Tagging**

Tagging is placing 1 hand anywhere between the shoulders and knees, including the hand and arm, of an opponent with the ball. The tagger may leave their feet to make the tag. Pushing, striking, slapping, and holding are not permitted. If the player trips the runner in their attempt to make a diving tag, it is a foul. **Section 26. Player and Team Designations Article 1. A and B.**

A is the team that snaps the ball. The opponent of A is B. A player of A is A-1 and teammates are A-2 and A-3. Other abbreviations are B-1 for a player of B, K-1 for a player of the kickers, and R-1 for a receiver.

### **Article 2. Disqualified Player.**

A disqualified player is one who becomes ineligible and is removed from further participation in the game.

### **Article 3. Offensive and Defensive Team.**

The offensive team is the team in possession or the team to which the ball belongs. The defensive team is the opposing team.

### **Article 4. Player and Nonplayer.**

A player is any one of the participants in the game. A nonplayer is a coach, trainer, other attendant, a substitute, or a replaced player who does not participate by touching the ball, hindering an opponent, or influencing the play.

### **Article 5. Runner.**

The runner is the player in possession of a live ball or simulating possession of a live ball. Once a player catches or intercepts a pass, they become a runner.

### **Article 6. Snapper.**

The snapper is the player who snaps the ball.

### **Article 7. Substitute.**

A substitute is a team member who may replace a player.

## **RULE 3. PERIODS, TIME FACTORS, AND SUBSTITUTIONS**

### **Section 1. Start of Each Half**

#### **Article 1. Coin Toss.**

3 minutes before the start of the game the Referee shall instruct the visiting captain to give a "heads" or "tails" choice before the coin toss. The Referee will then toss the coin in the presence of the opposing captains. All officials shall be present for the coin toss.

The captain winning the toss shall have the 1st choice of options for the 1st half or shall defer (S10) their option to the 2nd half. The options for each half shall be as follows:

- To choose whether their team will start on offense or defense.
- To choose the goal their team will defend.
- The captain who did not win the 1st choice of options for a half shall exercise the remaining option.

#### **Article 2. Start 1st and 2nd Halves.**

Unless moved by penalty or field dimensions have been shortened, the ball shall be snapped on the 14 yard line to start the 1st and 2nd halves.

### **Article 3. Start of 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Periods.**

Between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> and between the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> periods, the teams shall not change goals. Team possession, number of the next down, and the zone line-to-gain remain unchanged as well.

## **Section 2. Game Time Article**

### **1. Playing Time and Intermissions.**

The length of the game shall be 40-minutes, divided into 4 periods of 10 minutes each, with a 5-minute halftime interval. When overtime is required, there will be a 3-minute intermission.

### **Article 2. Interrupted and Shortened Games.**

Prior to the beginning of the game, or during the halftime intermission, the playing time may be shortened by mutual agreement of both teams.

In the event of inclement weather, GHSA policy should followed.

### **Article 3. Extension of Periods.**

A period shall be extended by an untimed down (S1) if 1 of the following occurred during a down in which time expires:

- A. There was a foul by either team and the penalty is accepted, except for: (1) unsportsmanlike or nonplayer fouls, (2) fouls that specify loss of down, (3) fouls on a scoring play that are enforced following the Try, or (4) fouls for which enforcement by rule result in a safety. NOTE: For loss of down fouls, any score by the team that fouls is cancelled.
- B. There was a double foul.
- C. There was an inadvertent whistle.
- If a touchdown was scored, the Try is attempted unless the touchdown is scored during the last down of the 4<sup>th</sup> period and the point(s) would not affect the outcome of the game or playoff qualifying. NOTE: The Try shall always be attempted as part of the same half as the touchdown it follows.
- If (A), (B), or (C) occurs during the untimed down (S1), the procedure is repeated. NOTE: The period shall not be extended further when the defense fouls during a successful Try and the offended team accepts the results of the play with enforcement of the penalty from the succeeding spot.

### **Article 4. Game Timer.**

It is recommended that playing time be kept on a displayed visually on the scoreboard or other apparatus. The game clock may also be kept on stopwatch operated by the Back Judge.

### **Article 5. First 18 Minutes of Each Half.**

The clock shall start on the snap. It will run continuously for the first 18 minutes of each half unless it is stopped for one of the following reasons:

- Team time-out - clock restarts on the snap. NOTE: If a team time-out is called prior to a Try, the Try down shall be untimed, and the clock shall restart on the snap of the play that follows the Try.
- Official's time-out - clock restarts on the ready for play.
- End of the 1st or 3rd period - clock restarts on the snap.

### **Article 6. 2 Minute Warning.**

Approximately 2 minutes before the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> period, the Referee shall stop the clock and inform both captains of the playing time remaining in that period. The clock starts on the snap. The Back Judge will announce to the captains the remaining time and status of the clock after every play during the final 2 minutes of each half.

## **Article 7. Last 2 Minute.**

During the final 2 minutes of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> period, the clock will stop for one of the following reasons:

- Incomplete legal or incomplete illegal forward pass - clock restarts on the snap.
- Out of bounds - clock restarts on the snap.
- Safety - clock restarts on the snap.
- Team time-out - clock restarts on the snap.
- First down - clock restart is dependent on the previous play.
- Touchdown - clock restarts on the snap (after the Try).
- Penalty and administration - clock restart is dependent on the previous play (EXCEPTION: Delay of game foul is accepted - clock restarts on the snap).
- Official's time-out - clock restarts at their discretion.
- Touchback - clock restarts on the snap.
- A is awarded a new series - clock restart is dependent on the previous play.
- B is awarded a new series - clock restarts on the snap.
- Either team is awarded a new series following a legal punt - clock restarts on the snap.
- Team attempting to conserve time illegally (includes intentional grounding and a backward pass thrown intentionally out of bounds) - clock restarts on the ready.
- Team attempting to consume time illegally - clock restarts on the snap.
- Inadvertent whistle - clock restarts on the ready.

## **Article 8. Correct Timing Errors.**

The Referee shall have authority to correct obvious timing errors if discovery is prior to the 2nd live ball following the error unless the period has officially ended.

## **Article 9. Ending a Period.**

End the period will occur following a short delay to ensure

- no foul has occurred,
- no obvious timing error has occurred,
- no request for a coach-Referee conference has occurred, or - no other irregularity has occurred.

The Referee shall hold the ball in 1 hand overhead (S14) to indicate the period has officially ended.

## **Section 3. Overtime Article**

### **1. Coin Toss.**

A coin will be tossed by the Referee to determine the options as in the start of the game. The visiting captain shall call the toss. There will be only 1 coin flip during the overtime. If additional overtime periods are played, captains will alternate choices. The winner of the toss shall be given options of offense, defense, or direction. The loser of the toss shall make a choice from the remaining options. Each overtime period is played toward the same goal line by each team.

### **Article 2. Tie Breaker.**

Unless moved by penalty, each team shall start 1st and goal from B's (see 2-26-1) 10 yard line. The object will be to score a touchdown. An overtime period consists of a possession by each team consisting of a series of 4 downs (unless a new series is awarded by rule). If the score is still tied after 1 period, play will proceed to a 2nd period with 1<sup>st</sup> and goal from B's 5 yard line. If the 1st team awarded the ball scores, the opponent shall still have a

chance to win the game. A Try shall be attempted and scored as indicated in Rule 8. If the score is still tied after a 2<sup>nd</sup> period, each team shall have one play from their try line of their choice. This process will continue until a winner is decided. In any overtime period, when B secures possession, the ball is dead and the series is over. Each team is entitled to only 1 time-out during the entire overtime.

### **Article 3. Fouls and Penalties.**

Fouls and penalties are administered similar to the regular game. A shall be awarded a new series of 4 downs when an automatic 1st down foul is accepted. Dead ball fouls following a touchdown are penalized on the Try. Dead ball fouls following a successful Try will be penalized from the succeeding spot, B's 10 yard line, if accepted.

NOTE: The goal line shall always be zone line-to-gain in overtime, regardless of the number of overtimes played.

### **Section 4. Time-Outs Article 1. How Charged.**

The Referee shall declare a time-out when they suspend play for any reason. Each time-out shall be charged either to the Referee or 1 of the teams.

#### **Article 2. Official's Time-Out.**

The Referee shall declare an official's time-out when an excess time-out is allowed for an injured player. The Referee may declare an official's time-out for any contingency not covered elsewhere by the Rules. If a time-out is for repair or replacement of player equipment that becomes illegal through play and is considered dangerous to other players, the Referee shall charge himself/herself.

#### **Article 3. Charged Time-Outs.**

Each team is entitled to 3 charged time-outs per **half**. Successive charged time-outs may be granted to each team during a dead ball period. If the ball is dead and a team has not exhausted its charged time-outs, the Referee shall allow a time-out and charge that team or complete a coach-Referee conference.

#### **Article 4. Length of Time-Outs.**

A charged time-out requested by any player or head coach that is legally granted shall be 1 minute and can be shortened if both teams are ready. Other time-outs may be longer only if the Referee deems it necessary.

#### **Article 5. Coach-Referee Conference.**

When a team requests a charged time-out for a misapplication or misinterpretation of a Rule, the Referee and 1 other official will confer with the captain or head coach. The request must be made prior to the time the ball becomes live following the play to be reviewed unless the period has officially ended in which case no change to a ruling shall be allowed. If the Referee changes their ruling, it is an official's time-out. If the ruling is not changed, it is a charged time-out. If the requesting team has used its available time-outs and no change to a ruling is made, a delay of game penalty will be assessed.

#### **Article 6. Notification.**

The Referee shall notify both teams 5 seconds before a charged time-out expires. When 3 time-outs have been charged to a team in a **half**, the Referee shall notify both head coaches. NOTE: The Referee will communicate the number of team time-outs remaining for each team to the A and B captains and all officials after each charged time-out is taken.

## **Article 7. Authorized Conferences.**

There are 2 types of authorized conferences permitted during charged time-outs:

- Players and nonplayers may meet directly in front of the team box within 5 yards of the sideline; or
- One coach or player-coach may enter their team's huddle between the middle of the field to confer with no more than 7 players.

## **Article 8. Injured Player.**

An injured or apparently injured player who is discovered by an official while the ball is dead and the clock is stopped shall be replaced for at least 1 down unless the halftime or overtime intermission occurs. A player who is bleeding, has an open wound, or has any amount of blood on their uniform shall be considered an injured player.

## **Article 9. Concussion.**

Any player who exhibits signs, symptoms, or behaviors consistent with a concussion (such as loss of consciousness, headache, dizziness, confusion, or balance problems) shall be immediately removed from the game and shall not return to play until cleared by an appropriate health care professional.

### **Section 5. Delay of Game**

The ball must be put in play promptly and legally. Any action or inaction by either team that tends to prevent this is delay of game. This includes any of the following:

- Failure to snap within 25 seconds after the ball is declared ready for play.
- Putting the ball in play before it is declared ready for play.
- Deliberately advancing the ball after it is declared dead.
- Coach-Referee Conference after all permissible charged time-outs for the coach's team have been used, and during which the Referee is requested to reconsider the application of a Rule and no change results.

Penalty: Dead Ball Foul, Delay of Game, 5 yards from the succeeding spot (S7 and S21).

### **Section 6. Illegally Conserving or Consuming Time**

When a team attempts to conserve or consume time illegally, the Referee shall order the clock started or stopped. If the kicking team delays kicking the ball, as described in 6-1-4, the Referee may also reset the clock to the time of the previous snap and start the clock on the snap. When a penalty is accepted with less than 2 minutes remaining in either half, the offended team will have the option to start the game clock on the snap.

Penalty: Illegally Consuming Time, 5 yards from the previous spot (S19). NOTE: If in doubt, apply a penalty for Illegally Consuming Time.

### **Section 7. Substitutions Article**

#### **1. Eligible Substitutions.**

Between downs any number of eligible substitutes may replace players provided the substitution is completed by having the replaced players off the field before the ball is snapped. An incoming substitute must enter the field directly from their team area. A replaced player must leave the field immediately at the sideline nearest their team area prior to the ball being snapped. An entering substitute shall be on their team's side of the neutral zone when the ball is snapped. Penalty: Illegal Substitution, 5 yards (S22). If it is a dead ball or nonplayer foul, 5 yards from the succeeding spot (S7 and S22).

#### **Article 2. Legal Substitutions.**

During the same dead ball interval, no substitute shall become a player and then withdraw, and no player shall withdraw and then re-enter as a substitute unless a penalty is accepted, a dead ball foul occurs, there is a charged time-out, or a period ends. Penalty: Illegal Substitution, Dead Ball Foul, 5 yards from the succeeding spot (S7 and S22).

## **RULE 4. BALL IN PLAY, DEAD BALL, AND OUT OF BOUNDS**

### **Section 1. Ball in Play: Dead Ball Article**

#### **1. Dead Ball Becomes Live.**

A dead ball, after having been declared ready for play, becomes a live ball when it is snapped legally.

#### **Article 2. Ball Declared Dead.**

A live ball becomes dead and an official shall sound their whistle or declare it dead when one of the following occurs:

- A. The ball goes out of bounds.
- B. Any part of the runner other than a hand(s) or foot (feet) touches the ground.
- C. A touchdown, touchback, safety, or successful Try is made.
- D. The ball strikes the ground following 1st touching by K.
- E. K catches a punt that is beyond the neutral zone or when an untouched punt comes to rest on the ground and no player attempts to secure it.
- F. A forward pass strikes the ground or is caught simultaneously by opposing players.
- G. A backward pass or fumble by a player strikes the ground or is caught simultaneously by opposing players. A snapped ball that hits the ground before or after getting to the intended receiver is dead at the spot where it hits the ground. NOTE: If in doubt, a snap close to the ground remains live.
- H. A forward pass is legally completed, or a loose ball is caught by a player on, above, or behind the opponent's goal line.
- I. A runner has a flag belt removed legally by an opponent. A flag belt is removed when the clip is detached from the belt, the belt is torn into more than 1 piece, or the flag is torn off the belt (flag only). NOTE: If in doubt, the flag belt has been pulled.
- J. A runner is legally tagged (flag only).
- K. A runner is legally tagged with 1 hand between the shoulders and knees, including the hand and arm (touch only).
- L. A passer is deflagged/tagged prior to releasing the ball. NOTE: If in doubt, the ball is released.
- M. A muff of a punt strikes the ground.
- N. K's punt breaks the plane of R's goal line.
- O. B secures possession during a Try or overtime.
- P. A prosthetic device becomes dislodged from a player who is in possession of the ball.
- Q. An official sounds their whistle inadvertently during a down or during a down in which the penalty for a foul is declined and the status of the ball is as follows:
  - The ball is in player possession. The team in possession may elect to put the ball in play where declared dead or replay the down.
  - The ball is loose from a fumble, backward pass, illegal kick, or illegal forward pass. The team in possession may elect to put the ball in play where possession was lost or replay the down.
  - The ball is in flight during a legal forward pass or a punt. The ball is returned to the previous spot and the down replayed.

- If a foul occurs during any of the above downs, an accepted penalty shall be administered as in any other play situation. When the foul is accepted, disregard the inadvertent whistle. NOTE: There is no time added to the game clock during a down with an inadvertent whistle.

## **Section 2. Succeeding Spot Article**

### **1. Placement of Dead Ball.**

The ball will always be spotted in the middle (laterally) of the field. GHSA will not use hash marks.

## **Section 3. Out of Bounds**

### **Article 1. Player Out of Bounds.**

A player or other person is out of bounds when any part of the person is touching anything, other than another player or official, that is on or outside the sideline or end line.

### **Article 2. Player in Possession Out of Bounds.**

A ball in player possession is out of bounds when the runner or the ball touches anything, other than another player or official, that is on or outside the sideline or end line.

### **Article 3. Loose Ball Out of Bounds.**

A loose ball is out of bounds when it touches anything, including a player or official, that is out of bounds.

## **RULE 5. SERIES OF DOWNS, NUMBER OF DOWNS, AND TEAM POSSESSION AFTER PENALTY**

### **Section 1. A Series: How Started, How Broken, How Renewed Article 1. A Down Is a Unit.**

A down is a unit of the game that starts with a legal snap and ends when the ball next becomes dead. Between downs is any period when the ball is dead.

### **Article 2. Series of Downs.**

A team shall have 4 consecutive downs to advance to the next zone. Any down may be repeated or lost if provided by the Rules.

### **Article 3. Zone Line-to-Gain.**

The zone line-to-gain in any series shall be the zone in advance of the ball, unless distance has been lost due to penalty or failure to gain. In such case, the original zone in advance of the ball at the beginning of the series of downs is the zone line-to-gain. The forward point of the ball, when declared dead between the goal lines, shall be the determining factor.

### **Article 4. Awarding a New Series.**

A new series of downs shall be awarded when a team moves the ball into the next zone on a play free from penalty; or a penalty against the opponents moves the ball into the next zone; or an accepted penalty against the opponents involves an automatic 1st down; or after enforcement of a penalty against A, the ball is in advance of the zone line-to-gain; or either team has obtained legal possession of the ball as a result of a penalty, punt, touchback, pass interception, or failure to gain the zone in advance of the ball.

NOTE: If in doubt, the out-of-bounds punt is "short" of the zone line-to-gain.

### **Article 5. Incorrect Down.**

Until a new series is awarded, the Referee shall have authority to correct an error in the number of downs.

## **Section 2. Down and Possession After a Penalty**

### **Article 1. Penalty Resulting in a 1st Down.**

After a penalty that leaves the ball in the possession of a team beyond its zone line-to-gain, or when a penalty stipulates a 1st down, the down and distance established by that penalty shall be 1st down with next zone line-to-gain.

### **Article 2. Foul Before Change of Team Possession.**

Following a distance penalty between the goal lines that occurs during a down and before any change of team possession during that down, the ball belongs to A. The down shall be repeated unless the penalty also involves loss of a down, or leaves the ball on or beyond the zone line-to-gain. If the penalty involves loss of a down, the down shall count as 1 of the 4 in that series.

### **Article 3. Foul After Change of Team Possession.**

Following a distance penalty for a foul committed after team possession has changed during that down, the ball belongs to the team in possession when the foul occurred. The down and distance established by that penalty shall be 1st down with zone line-to-gain.

### **Article 4. Penalty Declined.**

If a penalty is declined, the number of the next down shall be whatever it would have been if that foul had not occurred.

### **Article 5. Rule Decisions Final.**

A Rules decision may not be changed after the ball is next legally snapped.

## **RULE 6. KICKING THE BALL**

### **Section 1. Punt**

#### **Article 1. Legal Punt.**

A legal punt is a kick made in accordance with the Rules. Quick punts are illegal. Penalty: Illegal Kick, Quick Punt, 10 yards (S31).

#### **Article 2. Punt.**

Prior to marking the ball ready for play on 4th down, the Referee must ask the A captain if they want to punt. The Referee must announce this decision to all A and B players and all officials (S43). The A captain may declare a punt on any down. After such announcement, the ball must be punted. EXCEPTION: If (a) an A or B time-out is called, (b) the period ends, (c) a foul occurs, or (d) an inadvertent whistle is blown anytime prior to or during this down after the A captain's decision that results in the kicking team having the right to repeat the down again, the Referee must ask the A captain whether or not they want to punt and communicate this decision to the B captain (S43).

#### **Article 3. Crossing the Scrimmage Line.**

Neither K nor R may enter the neutral zone until the ball is punted. Penalty: Illegal Procedure, 5 yards (S19). NOTE: Rules 7-1, 7-2, and 7-3 apply prior to and during the snap only.

#### **Article 4. Punting the Ball.**

After receiving the snap, the kicker must punt the ball immediately in a continuous motion. Penalty: Illegal Procedure, 5 yards (S19). NOTE: See 3-6.

### **Article 5. After Being Punted.**

Once the ball is punted, any R player may block the kick. If the blocked punt hits the ground, it is dead at that spot. If the punt is blocked by any R player behind K's scrimmage line and then caught by any K player behind K's scrimmage line K may run and/or throw a pass. R may advance the punt anywhere in the field of play. A K player cannot punt the ball to herself or any other K player. K may punt the ball only once per down. Penalty: Illegal Kicking, 10 yards (S31).

### **Article 6. Punt Crosses K's Scrimmage Line.**

When a punt that has crossed K's scrimmage line, touches a player from either team and then hits the ground, the ball is dead and belongs to R. If it hits an R player and then is caught in the air, it can be advanced by R. If the ball hits an R player beyond R's scrimmage line and is then caught by K beyond R's scrimmage line, the ball is dead, belongs to K, and a new series begins for K.

### **Article 7. 1st Touching.**

If any K player touches a punt after it crosses K's scrimmage line and before it is touched there by any R player, it is referred to as "1st touching" (S16). R may take the ball at that spot or may choose to have the ball put in play as determined by the action that follows 1st touching. The right of R to take the ball at the spot of 1st touching by K is cancelled if R touches the punt and thereafter during the down commits a foul or if the penalty is accepted for any foul committed during the down.

### **Article 8. Punt Out of Bounds Between the Goal Lines or at Rest.**

If a punt goes out of bounds between the goal lines or comes to rest inbounds untouched and no player attempts to secure it, the ball becomes dead and belongs to the receiving team at that spot.

### **Article 9. Punt Behind the Goal Line.**

When a punt breaks the plane of R's goal line, it is a touchback unless R chooses a spot of 1st touching by K.

## **Section 2. Kick Catching Interference**

While any punt is in flight beyond K's scrimmage line, K shall not touch the ball or R, nor obstruct R's path to the ball, unless the punt has been touched by R. K may catch, touch, muff, or bat a punt in flight beyond K's scrimmage line if no R player is in position to catch the ball. Penalty: Kick Catching Interference, 10 yards (S33). **Section 3.**

### **Signals**

Players shall ignore any signals given by K or R. The ball remains live.

## **RULE 7. SNAPPING, HANDING, AND PASSING THE BALL**

### **Section 1. The Scrimmage**

#### **Article 1. The Start.**

All plays must be started by a legal snap next to the offensive ball spotter. The ball may be moved with approval by the Referee due to poor field conditions.

#### **Article 2. Ball Responsibility.**

A players are responsible for retrieving the ball after a down. The snapper will bring the ball from the huddle to the A scrimmage line. A small towel may be placed under the ball, regardless of weather or field conditions.

#### **Article 3. Stances.**

Players may use a 2, 3, or 4 point stance.

## **Section 2. Prior to the Snap Article**

### **1. Encroachment.**

Following the ready for play signal and until the snap, no B player may encroach or touch the ball, nor may any player contact opponents or interfere with them in any other way. This includes standing in the neutral zone to give defensive signals or shifting through the zone. After the snapper has placed their hand(s) on the ball, it is encroachment for any player to break the scrimmage line plane, except for the snapper's right to be over the ball. Penalty: Dead Ball Foul, Encroachment, 5 yards from the succeeding spot (S7 and S18). During the interval between downs when 2 or more encroachment fouls are committed by B, the penalty will be 10 yards for the subsequent encroachment fouls.

### **Article 2. False Start.**

No A player shall make a false start. A false start includes simulating a charge or start of a play. An infraction of this Rule may be penalized whether or not the ball is snapped and the penalty for any resultant encroachment shall be cancelled. Penalty: Dead Ball Foul, False Start, 5 yards from the succeeding spot (S7 and S19).

### **Article 3. Snap.**

The snapper, after assuming position for the snap at A's scrimmage line and adjusting the ball, may neither move nor change the position of the ball in a manner simulating the beginning of a play until it is snapped. An infraction of this provision may be penalized, whether or not the ball is snapped, and the penalty for any resultant encroachment foul by an opponent shall be cancelled. When over the ball, the snapper shall have their feet behind their scrimmage line. The snapper shall pass the ball back from its position on the ground/towel/ ball spotter with a quick and continuous motion of the hand(s). The ball shall leave the hand(s) in this motion. There is no Rule restriction regarding placement of the long axis of the ball at right angles to A's scrimmage line. NOTE: The snapper may have one or both knees on the ground during the snap. Penalty: Dead Ball Foul, Illegal Snap, 5 yards from the succeeding spot (S7 and S19).

## **Section 3. Position and Action During the Snap**

### **Article 1. Legal Position.**

Anytime on or after the ball is marked ready for play, each A player must momentarily be at least 5 yards inbounds before the snap. NOTE: If a B player covers an A player positioned within 5 yards of the sideline, it is not a foul. Penalty: Illegal Formation, 5 yards (S19).

### **Article 2. Minimum Line Players.**

The snapper is the only A player required to be on their scrimmage line at the snap.

### **Article 3. Motion.**

Only 1 A player may be in motion, but not in motion toward the opponent's goal line at the snap. Other A players must be stationary in their positions without movement of their feet, body, head, or arms. Penalty: Illegal Motion, 5 yards (S20).

### **Article 4. Direct Snap.**

The player who receives the snap must be at least 2 yards behind A's scrimmage line. The distance is determined by the point at which the ball is first touched following the snap. The snapper may not snap the ball to himself. Penalty: Illegal Formation, 5 yards (S19). NOTE: If in doubt, the A player 1st touched the snap 2 yards behind A's scrimmage line.

## **Article 5. Shift.**

In a snap preceded by a huddle or shift, all A players must come to a complete stop and remain stationary in legal position without movement of feet, body, head, or arms for at least 1 full second before the snap. Penalty: Illegal Shift, 5 yards (S20).

## **Section 4. Handing the Ball**

Any player may hand the ball forward or backward at any time.

## **Section 5. Backward Pass and Fumble**

### **Article 1. When Legal.**

A runner may pass the ball backward or lose player possession by a fumble anytime except if intentionally thrown out of bounds to conserve time. Penalty: Illegal Pass, 5 yards from the spot of the pass or fumble and loss of down (S35 and S9). The Referee will start the clock on the ready for play. NOTE: If in doubt, the pass is backward. See 9-5.

### **Article 2. Caught or intercepted.**

A backward pass or fumble in flight may be caught or intercepted by any other player inbounds and advanced. A player may not throw an untouched backward pass to himself. Penalty: Illegal Pass, 5 yards from the spot of the pass and loss of down if by A before possession changes during a scrimmage down (S35 and S9).

### **Article 3. Simultaneous Catch by Opposing Players.**

If a backward pass or fumble in flight is caught simultaneously by members of opposing teams inbounds, the ball becomes dead at the spot of the catch and belongs to the offensive team.

### **Article 4. Out of Bounds.**

A backward pass or fumble that goes out of bounds is dead. If the backward pass/fumble goes out of bounds between the goal lines, the ball belongs to the offensive team:

- at the out-of-bounds spot if it is behind the spot of the pass or fumble, or
- at the spot of the pass or fumble if it goes out of bounds beyond the spot of the pass or fumble.
- If out of bounds behind a goal line, it is a touchback or safety.

A forward fumble that goes out of bounds or is ruled out of bounds between the goal lines, the ball shall be returned to the spot of the fumble.

### **Article 5. Ball Dead When It Hits the Ground.**

A backward pass or fumble that touches the ground is dead.

**Forward Fumble Out of Bounds. Rule 7-5-4.** When a forward fumble goes out of bounds or is ruled out of bounds between the goal lines, the ball shall be returned to the spot of the fumble.

## **Section 6. Legal and Illegal Forward Pass**

### **Article 1. Legal Forward Pass.**

All players are eligible to touch or catch a pass. During a scrimmage down and before team possession has changed, a forward pass may be thrown provided the passer's feet are on or behind the plane of A's scrimmage line when the ball leaves the passer's hand. Only 1 forward pass can be thrown per down. NOTE: If in doubt, the passer is behind the A scrimmage line.

### **Article 2. Illegal Forward Pass.**

A forward pass is illegal

- if the passer's foot is beyond the plane of A's scrimmage line when the ball leaves their hand (S35 and S9).
- if thrown after team possession has changed (S35).
- if intentionally thrown to the ground or out of bounds to save loss of yardage or conserve time (S36 and S9).
- if a passer catches their untouched forward pass (S35 and S9). - if there is more than 1 forward pass per down (S35).

Penalty: Illegal Pass, 5 yards from the spot of the pass and a loss of down if by A before possession changes during a scrimmage down (S35 and S9). NOTE: If in doubt, the pass is legal.

### **Article 3. After Illegal Forward Pass.**

When an illegal forward pass touches the ground or goes out of bounds, the ball becomes dead and belongs to the passing team at the spot from where the pass was thrown, unless a new series of downs has been created. In such a case the ball belongs to the passing team if, after enforcement of the penalty, the ball is left in advance of the zone line-to-gain, or belongs to the opponents if the ball, after the penalty, did not make the next zone line-to-gain and the foul occurred during 4th down. If a player catches an illegal forward pass, the ball continues in play until declared dead.

## **Section 7. Completed or Intercepted Passes**

### **Article 1. Pass Caught or Intercepted.**

A forward pass is completed when caught by a member of the passing team inbounds. A forward pass is intercepted when caught by a member of the opposing team inbounds. It is counted as a completion or interception as long as the 1st part of the receiver to make contact with the ground after the catch, usually 1 foot, touches inbounds.

### **Article 2. Simultaneous Catch by Opposing Players.**

If a forward pass is caught simultaneously by members of opposing teams inbounds, the ball becomes dead at the spot of the catch and belongs to the offensive team.

## **Section 8. Incomplete Pass**

When a forward pass touches the ground or anything out of bounds, it becomes dead.

## **Section 9. Forward Pass Interference**

### **Article 1. Interference.**

During a down in which a legal forward pass crosses A's scrimmage line, contact that interferes with an eligible receiver who is beyond A's scrimmage line is pass interference unless it occurs when 2 or more eligible receivers make a simultaneous and bona fide attempt to reach, catch, or bat a pass. It is also pass interference if an eligible receiver is deflagged/tagged prior to touching a forward pass thrown beyond A's scrimmage line.

### **Article 2. Offensive Pass Interference.**

After the ball is snapped and until the pass has been touched by any player there shall be no offensive pass interference beyond A's scrimmage line. Penalty: Offensive Pass Interference, 10 yards from the previous spot (S33).

### **Article 3. Defensive Pass Interference.**

After the pass is thrown and until the pass has been touched by any player there shall be no defensive pass interference beyond A's scrimmage line while the pass is in flight. Penalty: Defensive Pass Interference, 10 yards from the previous spot **and automatic first down** (S33). If the pass interference by either player is intentional or unsportsmanlike, their team shall be penalized an additional 10 yards (S27).

**Article 4. Not Interference.**

Contact by B that is obviously away from the direction of the forward pass is not pass interference but may be a personal foul.

**Article 5. Catchable/Uncatchable.**

Whether a pass is catchable or uncatchable has no bearing on offensive and defensive forward pass interference.

**RULE 8. SCORING PLAYS AND TOUCHBACK**

**Section 1. Communication**

The Referee will communicate the current score to the A and B captains, head coaches, and all officials after each touchdown, Try, and safety. If there is a disagreement regarding the current or final score, the Referee will make the final decision after consulting with the other officials and, if available, the scorekeeper.

**Section 2 Sportsmanship Rule**

**Article 1. At The 2-minute Warning**

If a team is 19 or more points ahead when the Referee announces the 2-minute warning for the 4<sup>th</sup> period, the game shall be over. Prior to implementing the Sportsmanship Rule, the Referee shall apply the Extension of Period Rule (3- 2-1). NOTE: Game clock starts according to Rule 3.

**Article 2. After 2 Minute Warning.**

If a team scores during the last 2 minutes of the 4<sup>th</sup> period and that score creates a point differential of 19 or more points, the game shall end at that point.

**Section 3. Player Responsibility**

The player scoring must raise their arms so the nearest official can deflag the player. It is permissible for a teammate to deflag the player under the supervision of a game official. If the player is not able to be deflagged and the official determines the flag belt has been secured illegally, the score is disallowed, the offending team is penalized, and the player is disqualified. Penalty: Personal Foul, Tampering with the Flag Belt, 10 yards from the previous spot (S38 and S47). If by A, loss of down (S9). If by B, automatic 1st down (S8).

**Section 4. Touchdown Value: 6 Points**

**Article 1. Touchdowns**

All touchdowns are 6 points.

**Article 2. How Scored.**

It is a touchdown when a runner advances from the field of play so that the ball penetrates the vertical plane of the opponent's goal line. It is a touchdown when a loose ball is caught by a player while the ball is on or behind the opponent's goal line.

**Section 5. Try Value: 1, 2, or 3 Points**

**Article 1. Referee's Responsibility and Team's Choice.**

The Referee must speak to the coach or captain, asking them whether the Try shall be from the 3, 10, or 15 yard line. Once the A coach/captain makes the choice, they may change the decision only when an A or B charged time-out is taken. The value of the Try may not be changed if a dead ball foul occurs after the ready for play signal, or if a live ball foul occurs during the Try. Enforcement of yardage penalties does not change the value of the Try. The point(s) shall be awarded if the Try results in what would have been a touchdown.

**Article 2. 1, 2, or 3 Points.**

An opportunity to score 1 point from the 3 yard line, 2 points from the 10 yard line, or 3 points from the 15 yard line by running or passing only shall be granted the team scoring a touchdown. NOTE: If a touchdown is scored on the last timed down of the 4<sup>th</sup> period, the Try is not attempted, unless it will affect the outcome of the game or playoff qualifying.

**Article 3. Try Begins and Ends.**

The Try begins when the ball is marked ready for play. The Try ends when B secures possession, the Try is successful, or the ball becomes dead by Rule. B cannot score during the Try.

**Article 4. Next Play.**

After a Try, the ball shall be snapped by the opponent of the scoring team at their own 14 yard line, unless moved by penalty or to begin overtime.

**Section 7. Force and Responsibility**

**Article 1. Force.**

The force imparted by a player who punts, passes, snaps, or fumbles the ball shall be considered responsible for the ball's progress in any direction even though its course is deflected, or reversed, after striking the ground or after striking a player of either team. However, the initial force is considered expended and a new force is provided if a loose ball is illegally kicked or batted or it is contacted again after coming to rest.

**Article 2. Responsibility.**

The team responsible for a ball being on, above, or behind a goal line is the team whose player

- carries the ball to or across that goal line.
- imparts to the ball an impetus that forces it to or across that goal line.
- incurs a penalty that leaves the ball on or behind the goal line.

**Section 8. Momentum, Safety, and Touchback**

**Article 1. Safety Value: 2 Points.**

It is a safety when one of the following occurs:

- A. A runner carries the ball from the field of play to or across their own goal line, and it becomes dead there in their team's possession. This includes when a player's fumble or backward pass from inside their own end zone lands or goes out of bounds between the goal lines.

EXCEPTION: Momentum Rule: When a defensive player intercepts their opponent's forward pass, fumble, or backward pass, or an R player catches or recovers a punt between their 5 yard line and the goal line and their original momentum carries them into the end zone where the ball is declared dead in their team's possession behind the goal line, the ball belongs to the defensive team at the spot where possession was gained.

- B. A player punts, passes, fumbles, snaps, muffs, or bats a loose ball from the field of play to or across their goal line and the ball subsequently becomes dead there in their team's possession. This includes when the

ball is declared dead on or behind their goal line. However, it does not apply to a legal forward pass that becomes incomplete.

- C. A player on offense commits any foul for which the penalty is accepted, and measurement is from a spot in their end zone; or throws an illegal forward pass from their end zone and the penalty is declined in a situation that leaves them in possession at the spot of the illegal pass and with the ball having been forced into the end zone by the passing team.
- D. After a safety, the ball shall be snapped by the scoring team at their own 14-yard line, unless moved by penalty.

#### **Article 2. Touchback.**

It is a touchback when 1 of the following occurs:

- A. K's punt breaks the plane of R's goal line.
- B. The ball is out of bounds behind a goal line (except from an incomplete forward pass), when the ball becomes dead in the possession of a player on, above, or behind the player's own goal line, or when the ball becomes dead not in possession on, above, or behind the team's own goal line and the attacking team is responsible. NOTES: If in doubt, it is a touchback. If in doubt, the out-of-bounds punt near the goal line is a touchback.

After a touchback, the ball shall be snapped from the nearest 14 yard line, unless moved by penalty.

NOTE: Teams cannot score points by a field goal attempt.

### **RULE 9. CONDUCT OF PLAYERS AND OTHERS**

#### **Section 1. Unsportsmanlike Conduct**

##### **Article 1. Noncontact Acts.**

No player or nonplayer shall commit noncontact acts during a period or intermission. Examples include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Refusal to comply with or abide by the request or decision of an official
- Using words similar to the offensive audibles and quarterback cadence prior to the snap in an attempt to interfere with A's signals or movements
- Intentionally kicking at the ball, other than during a punt
- Leaving the field between downs to gain an advantage unless replaced or with permission of the Referee
- Participate while wearing illegal player equipment
- Being outside the team box, but not on the field, during a live ball. NOTE: During a dead ball, coaches can be a maximum of 2 steps on the field for coaching purposes only.

Penalty: Unsportsmanlike Conduct, 10 yards (S27) (S7 and S27 if dead ball). If flagrant, the offender shall be disqualified (S47).

##### **Article 2. Dead Ball Fouls.**

When the ball becomes dead in the possession of a player, they shall not

- intentionally kick the ball,
- spike the ball into the ground, or throw the ball high into the air.

Penalty: Unsportsmanlike Conduct, 10 yards (S7 and S27), and if flagrant, the offender will be disqualified (S47).

##### **Article 3. Prohibited Acts.**

There shall be no unsportsmanlike conduct by players or nonplayers. Examples include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Attempting to influence a decision by an official
- Disrespectfully addressing an official
- Indicating objections to an official's decision
- Holding an unauthorized conference, or being on the field illegally
- Using profanity or taunting, insulting, or vulgar language or gestures
- Intentionally contacting a game official (DQ)
- Leaving the team box and entering the field during a fight (DQ)

Penalty: Unsportsmanlike Conduct, 10 yards (S27) (S7 and S27 if dead ball), and if flagrant, the offender shall be disqualified (S47).

#### **Article 4. 2nd Unsportsmanlike Foul.**

The 2nd unsportsmanlike foul by the same player or nonplayer results in disqualification.

#### **Section 2. Unfair Acts Article**

##### **1. Refusal to Play or Halving the Distance.**

If a team refuses to play within 2 minutes after being ordered by the Referee, or if a team repeatedly commits fouls that can be penalized only by halving the distance to its goal line, the Referee may enforce any penalty they consider equitable, including the awarding of a score. For refusal to play or for repeated fouls, the Referee shall, after 1 warning, forfeit the game to the opponents.

##### **Article 2. Unfair Acts.**

No player or nonplayer shall use verbiage or commit any act not in accordance with the spirit of fair play for the purposes of confusing the opponent. Penalty: Unfair Act, 10 yards (S38).

#### **Section 3. Personal Fouls Article**

##### **1. Restrictions.**

No player or nonplayer shall commit a personal foul during a period or an intermission. Any other act of unnecessary roughness is a personal foul. Any player or nonplayer commits a personal foul when they take any of the following actions:

- Strips or attempts to strip the ball from a runner by punching, striking, or grabbing the ball (S38). NOTE: Any player who controls a pass with both feet off the ground becomes a runner when the 1st part of the player touches the ground.
- Throws the runner to the ground (S38)
- Hurdles an opponent (S38)
- Contacts an opponent either before or after the ball is declared dead (S38)
- Makes contact of any nature with an opponent that is deemed unnecessary including using fists, locked hands, elbows, or any part of the forearm or hand, except according to the Rules (S38) - Drives or deliberately runs into an opponent (S38)
- Positions herself on the shoulders or body of a teammate or opponent to gain an advantage (S38)
- Tackles the runner by grasping or encircling with the hand(s) or arm(s) and taking the opponent toward the ground as in tackle football (S38 and S47) (DQ)
- Fights an opponent (S38 and S47) (DQ). NOTE: Each player who participates in the fight will be assessed 1 flagrant personal foul for fighting.
- Be in the restricted area (within 2 yards of the sideline) and cause unintentional contact with a game official (nonplayers only).

- Deliberately contacting a game official. (DQ)

Penalty: Personal Foul, 10 yards, and if flagrant, the offender will be disqualified (S47). In (H) and (I), the offender will be disqualified.

### **Article 2. Roughing the Passer.**

Defensive players must make a definite effort to avoid charging into a passer after it is clear the ball has been thrown forward legally. No defensive player shall contact the passer who is standing still or fading back as they are considered out of the play after the pass. Roughing the passer restrictions do not apply if the forward pass is thrown from beyond A's scrimmage line. Penalty: Roughing the Passer, 10 yards, automatic 1st down (S34 and S8).

### **Article 3. Screen Blocking.**

The offensive screen block shall take place without contact. The screen blocker shall have their hands and arms at their side or behind their back when screen blocking. Any use of the hands, arms, elbows, legs, or body to initiate contact during an offensive player's screen block is illegal. A blocker may use their hand or arm to break a fall or to retain their balance. A player must be on their feet before, during, and after screen blocking. Penalty: Personal Foul, Illegal Contact, 10 yards (S38).

### **Article 4. Screen Blocking Fundamentals.**

A player who screens shall not do any of the following:

- Take a position closer than a normal step when behind a stationary opponent.
- Make contact when assuming a position at the side or in front of a stationary opponent.
- Take a position so close to a moving opponent that their opponent cannot avoid contact by stopping or changing direction. The speed of the player to be screened will determine where the screener may take their stationary position. This position will vary and may be 1 to 2 normal steps or strides from the opponent.
- After assuming their legal screening position move to maintain it, unless they move in the same direction and path as their opponent. If the screener violates any of these provisions and contact results, they have committed a personal foul.

Penalty: Personal Foul, Illegal Contact, 10 yards (S38).

### **Article 5. Blocking and Interlocked Interference.**

Teammates of a runner or passer may interfere for them by screen blocking, but shall not use interlocked interference by grasping or encircling one another in any manner. Penalty: Personal Foul, Interlocked Interference, 10 yards (S38).

### **Article 6. Use of Hands or Arms by the Defense.**

Opponents must go around the offensive player's screen block. The arms and hands may not be used as a wedge to displace the opponent. A defender may use their arms or hands to break a fall or retain their balance. Penalty: Personal Foul, Illegal Contact, 10 yards (S38).

## **Section 4. Runner Article**

### **1. Flag Belt Removal.**

- A. Players must have possession of the ball before they can be deflagged legally by an opponent.

- B. When a runner loses their flag belt either accidentally, inadvertently (not removed by grabbing or pulling), or on purpose, play continues. The deflagging reverts to a 1 hand tag of the runner between the shoulders and knees by an opponent.
- C. In circumstances where a flag belt is removed illegally by a player, play should continue with the option of a penalty on the play. Penalty: Personal Foul, Illegal Flag Belt Removal, 10 yards (S38).
- D. An opponent intentionally pulling a flag belt from an offensive player without the ball is illegal. Penalty: Personal Foul, Illegal Flag Belt Removal, 10 yards (S38).
- E. Tampering with the flag belt in any way to gain an advantage, including tying, using foreign materials, or other such acts, is illegal. Penalty: Personal Foul, Tampering with the Flag Belt, 10 yards from the previous spot, and player disqualification (S38 and S47). If by A, loss of down (S9). If by B, automatic 1st down (S8).
- F. A nonplayer deflags or interferes with a runner. Penalty: Personal Foul, Nonplayer Deflagging/Interfering with the Runner, 10 yards (S38). The Referee will award a touchdown (S5) and disqualify (S47) the nonplayer.

### **Article 2. Guarding the Flag Belt.**

A runner shall not flag guard by using their hands, arms, or the ball to cause contact between the runner and an opponent that denies the opponent the opportunity to pull or remove the flag belt. Examples of flag guarding include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Placing or swinging the hand or arm over the flag belt
- Placing the ball in possession over the flag belt
- Lowering the shoulders in such a manner that places the arm over the flag belt Penalty: Flag , 10 yards (S24).

### **Article 3. Stiff Arm.**

The runner shall be prohibited from contacting an opponent with extended hand or arm. This includes the use of a “stiff arm” extended to ward off an opponent attempting to deflag/tag. Penalty: Personal Foul, Illegal Contact, 10 yards (S38).

### **Article 4. Help the Runner.**

The runner shall not grasp a teammate or be grasped, pulled, or pushed by a teammate. Penalty: Help the Runner, 5 yards (S44).

### **Article 5. Obstruct the Runner.**

An opponent shall not hold, grasp, or obstruct the forward progress of a runner when in the act of removing the flag belt or making a legal tag. Penalty: Holding, 10 yards (S42).

### **Article 6. Charge.**

A runner shall not charge into nor contact an opponent in their path nor attempt to run between 2 opponents or between an opponent and a sideline, unless the space is such as to provide a reasonable chance for them to go through without contact. If a runner in their progress has established a straight line path, they may not be crowded out of that path, but if an opponent is able to legally establish a defensive position in that path, the runner must avoid contact by changing direction. Penalty: Personal Foul, Illegal Contact, 10 yards (S38). **Section**

### **5. Batting and Kicking Article 1. Batting a Loose Ball.**

Players shall not bat a loose ball other than a pass or fumble in flight. EXCEPTION 1: A backward pass in flight shall not be batted or thrown forward by the passing team. EXCEPTION 2: K may bat a grounded or an airborne punt beyond K’s scrimmage line toward their own goal line. Penalty: Illegal Batting, 10 yards (S31).

### **Article 2. Batting a Ball in Player Possession.**

A ball in player possession shall not be batted forward by a player of the team in possession. Penalty: Illegal Batting, 10 yards (S31).

### **Article 3. Illegal Kicking.**

No player shall intentionally kick a ball other than a punt. NOTE: An illegal kick shall be treated like a fumble. Penalty: Illegal Kicking, 10 yards (S31).

## **Section 6. Illegal Participation**

The following actions are considered illegal participation:

- To have 8 or more players participating at the snap.
- If an injured player is not replaced for at least 1 down; unless the halftime or overtime intermission occurs.
- To use a player, replaced player, or substitute in a substitution or pretended substitution to deceive opponents at or immediately before the snap. - For a disqualified player to reenter the game.
- For a replaced player or substitute to hinder an opponent, touch the ball, influence the play, or otherwise participate.
- If, prior to a change of possession, an A or K player goes out of bounds and returns inbounds during the down to participate, unless blocked out of bounds by an opponent. If a player is blocked out of bounds by an opponent and returns inbounds during the down, they shall return at the first opportunity. During the down, no player shall intentionally go out of bounds and return to the field, intentionally touch the ball, influence the play, or otherwise participate.

When any player, replaced player, or substitute enters during a down. Penalty: Illegal Participation, 10 yards (S28).

## **RULE 10. ENFORCEMENT OF PENALTIES**

### **Section 1. Procedure After a Foul**

#### **Article 1. Definitions.**

A foul is a rule infraction for which a penalty is prescribed. Types of fouls are listed below:

- Dead Ball: A foul that occurs in the time interval after a down has ended and before the ball is next legally snapped.
- Live Ball: A foul that occurs during a down.
- Simultaneous With the Snap: An act that becomes a foul when the ball is snapped.

#### **Article 2. Coach's/Captain's Choice.**

When a foul occurs during a live ball, the Referee shall, at the end of the down, notify both coaches/captains. They shall inform the coach/captain of the offended team regarding the rights of penalty acceptance or declination and shall indicate to them the number of the ensuing down, distance to be gained, and status of the ball for each available choice. The distance penalty for any foul may be declined. If the penalty is declined or if there is a double foul, there is no loss of distance. The coach's/captain's choice of options may not be revoked.

Decisions involving penalties shall be made before any charged time-out is granted.

#### **Article 3. Dead Ball Foul.**

When a foul occurs during a dead ball either between downs or before a snap, the officials shall not permit the ball to become live. The penalty for any foul between downs, any nonplayer foul, or any unsportsmanlike foul, is enforced from the succeeding spot (EXCEPTION: 10-3-10 and 10-3-11). If a dead ball foul occurs after time expires for any period, the penalty shall be measured from the succeeding spot. The succeeding spot is where the ball would next be snapped if a foul had not occurred.

#### **Article 4. Live Ball/Dead Ball Foul.**

When a live ball foul by 1 team is followed by a dead ball foul by the opponent, the penalties are administered separately and in the order of occurrence. When the same team commits a live ball foul followed by 1 or more dead ball fouls, all fouls may be penalized.

#### **Article 5. Establishing the Zone Line-to-Gain.**

On a live ball foul, mark off the penalty yardage first then establish the zone line-to-gain.

Penalties for fouls with succeeding spot enforcement that occur prior to the ready for play signal shall be administered before setting the zone line-to-gain down box for a new series.

Penalties for fouls with succeeding spot enforcement that occur after the ready for play signal shall be administered after setting the zone line-to-gain down box for a new series. NOTE: During overtime, the zone line-to-gain is always the goal line.

### **Section 2. Types of Play and Basic Enforcement Spots Article**

#### **1. Live Ball Fouls.**

Any live ball foul is penalized according to the All-But-One Enforcement Principle (10-2-2), except as follows:

- A foul that occurs simultaneously with the snap is penalized from the previous spot.
- A nonplayer foul, unsportsmanlike foul, or dead ball foul is penalized from the succeeding spot.
- A foul by K during a punting down (other than Kick Catching Interference or Illegally Consuming Time) may be penalized from the succeeding spot, at R's option, when K will not be next to put the ball in play.

#### **Article 2. Basic Spot**

All fouls behind the neutral zone by Team A, will be enforced from the previous spot. The basic spot for Team B fouls during a running play is the previous spot when the run ends behind the neutral zone and the succeeding spot when the runs beyond the neutral zone.

#### **Article 3. 2 Types of Plays.**

Whenever the ball is live, 1 of 2 types of plays is in progress, either a loose ball play or a running play. The type of play has no significance unless a foul occurs. If a foul does occur, the officials must know whether it was during a loose ball play or during a running play. This determines the basic spot of enforcement.

#### **Article 4. Loose Ball Play.**

A loose ball play is action during 1 of the following:

- A punt, other than post scrimmage kick fouls
- A legal forward pass
- A backward pass (including the snap), illegal kick, or fumble made by A from on or behind their scrimmage line and prior to a change of team possession
- The run or runs which precedes such legal pass, punt, or fumble
- If a foul occurs during a loose ball play, the basic enforcement spot is the previous spot (2-24-7).

EXCEPTION 1: The penalty for roughing the passer on a completed forward pass will be enforced from the dead ball spot when the run ends beyond A's scrimmage line and no change of possession has occurred.

EXCEPTION 2: A post scrimmage kick (PSK) foul is an R foul that occurs on R's side of the neutral zone prior to the end of the kick during a punt that ends beyond the neutral zone and K does not have possession of the ball when the kick ends. The PSK spot is the spot where the kick ends. R retains the ball after penalty enforcement from the

PSK spot when a PSK foul occurs. R fouls behind the PSK spot are spot fouls. The spot where the kick ends is R's 14 if the kick ends in R's end zone.

EXCEPTION 3: Kick catching interference, 10 yards from the spot of the foul and a 1st down, or 10 yards from the previous spot and replay the down.

### **Article 5. Running Play.**

A running play is any action that is not a loose ball play. There are 2 types of running plays:

Behind the line, it includes a run that is not followed by a loose ball behind the line or, a run that is followed by an illegal pass from behind the line. Beyond the line, it includes any run. If a foul occurs during a running play, the basic enforcement spot is the spot where the run ends (2-25-9)

### **Section 3. Special Enforcements Article 1. Automatic 1st Down Fouls.**

Fouls by B that give A an automatic 1st down (S8) are Roughing the Passer, Tampering with the Flag Belt and defensive pass interference.

### **Article 2. Dead Ball Fouls.**

Penalties for dead ball fouls are enforced separately and in the order of occurrence. Dead ball fouls are not coupled with live ball fouls or other dead ball fouls to create double or multiple fouls. Where there are 10 yard dead ball fouls (or live ball fouls treated as dead ball fouls) committed by each team prior to penalty administration, each 10 yard foul will cancel a 10 yard foul on the other team. Any remaining 10 yard fouls will be enforced. Any 5 yard dead ball fouls will be enforced separately and in order of occurrence and would never cancel with a 10 yard foul.

### **Article 3. Double Foul.**

It is a double foul if both teams commit fouls (other than unsportsmanlike or nonplayer) during the same down in which

- there is no change of team possession,
- there is a change of team possession and the team in possession at the end of the down fouls prior to the final change of possession, or
- there is a change of team possession and the team in final possession accepts the penalty for its opponent's foul.

In all of the above, the penalties cancel and the down is replayed.

EXCEPTION 1: If each team fouls during a down in which there is a change of team possession, the team last gaining possession may retain the ball, provided its foul is not prior to the final change of team possession and it declined the penalty for its opponents foul(s) (other than unsportsmanlike or nonplayer). This exception is commonly referred to as the principle of "clean hands." NOTE: This Rule does not apply to double fouls during a Try or overtime period. EXCEPTION 2: PSK foul. R must decline the K fouls (other than unsportsmanlike or nonplayer).

### **Article 4. Goal Line.**

For a defensive team foul, if the enforcement spot, which is now the basic spot, is on or behind the offended team's goal line, any measurement is from the succeeding spot or goal line.

### **Article 5. Half the Distance.**

A measurement cannot take the ball more than half the distance from the enforcement spot to the offending team's goal line. If the penalty is greater than this, the ball is placed halfway between the enforcement spot and the goal line.

**Article 6. Last Play of 2<sup>ND</sup> Half or Overtime.**

Succeeding spot fouls that occur: (a) during the last play of the game or (b) during the last play of an overtime period; or (c) dead ball fouls that occur after the last play of a game or overtime period can be carried over to overtime, unless a touchdown is scored on that play, in which case the penalty can only be enforced on the Try.

**Article 7. Loss of Down Fouls.**

Loss of down (S9) fouls by A: Illegal Backward Pass, Illegal Forward Pass, and Tampering with the Flag Belt.

**Article 8. Multiple Foul.**

When 2 or more live ball fouls (other than unsportsmanlike or nonplayer) are committed during the same down by the same team, only 1 penalty may be chosen by the offended team.

**Article 9. Safety.**

If the offensive team throws an illegal forward pass from its end zone or commits any other foul for which the penalty is accepted and measurement is from on or behind its goal line, which is now the basic spot, it is a safety.

**Article 10. Touchdown.**

If there is a foul by the scoring team (other than unsportsmanlike or nonplayer) during a down that results in a touchdown, the acceptance of the penalty nullifies the score.

If an opponent of the scoring team commits a foul (other than unsportsmanlike or nonplayer) during a down in which a touchdown is scored, and there was not a change of team possession during the down, A may accept the results of the play and then choose to have the foul enforced either on the Try or after the Try, at the succeeding spot.

If an opponent of the scoring team commits a foul (other than unsportsmanlike or nonplayer) during a down in which a touchdown is scored and there was a change of team possession during the down, and such foul occurs after the change of team possession, the scoring team may accept the results of the play and then choose to have the foul enforced either on the Try or after the Try, at the succeeding spot.

If either team commits an unsportsmanlike or nonplayer foul during the down in which a touchdown is scored, the opponent may accept the results of the play and then choose to have the foul enforced either on the Try or after the Try, at the succeeding spot.

**Article 11. Try.**

If either team commits a dead ball foul following a touchdown and prior to the initial ready for play on a Try, the offended team has the option of enforcing the penalty on the Try or after the Try, at the succeeding spot.

If there is a foul by A (other than unsportsmanlike or nonplayer) during a down that results in a successful Try, acceptance of the penalty nullifies the score. If the foul carries a loss of down, the Try is not replayed.

If there is a foul by B during a successful Try, the penalty may be enforced at the succeeding spot.

If a double foul occurs, the down is replayed.

**Article 12. Fouls by K During Punts.**

Fouls by K During Punts. When K fouls during a punt (other than Kick Catching Interference or Illegally Consuming Time), R may have the penalty enforced at either the previous spot or the succeeding spot, provided K will not be next to put the ball in play.



GHSA SPORT COORDINATOR: Ernie Yarbrough – Email: [ery@ghsa.net](mailto:ery@ghsa.net)

GHSA RULES INTERPRETER: David Reynolds – Email: [dh.reynolds@hotmail.com](mailto:dh.reynolds@hotmail.com)

GHSA OFFICIALS TRAINING COORDINATOR: James Arnold – Email: [footballtraining@comcast.net](mailto:footballtraining@comcast.net)