

NATIONAL FEDERATION OF STATE  
HIGH SCHOOL ASSOCIATIONS



**NEWS RELEASE**

**Additional Timing Changes on Play Clock Approved  
in High School Football Rules**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Contact: Bob Colgate

INDIANAPOLIS, IN (February 6, 2020) — In an effort to eliminate a potential timing advantage gained by the defensive team in high school football, the play clock will be set to 40 seconds – effective with the 2020 season – when an official’s time-out is taken for an injury to a defensive player or a defensive player has an equipment issue.

This change was one of six rules revisions recommended by the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) Football Rules Committee at its January 12-14 meeting in Indianapolis. All recommended changes were subsequently approved by the NFHS Board of Directors.

Last year, in an effort to establish a more consistent time period between downs, the play clock was expanded from 25 seconds to 40 seconds in many cases, although the play clock remained at 25 seconds in most cases following an official’s time-out. However, this coming season, the play clock will be set at 40 seconds following an injury to a defensive player or a when a defensive player has an equipment issue.

“The rules committee was provided situations in which the defensive team was gaining a timing advantage late in games with a defensive injury or an equipment issue with the defense,” said Todd Tharp, assistant director of the Iowa High School Athletic Association and

chair of the NFHS Football Rules Committee. “Under the current rule, if a play ended with less than 40 seconds left in the game and a defensive player was injured which resulted in an official’s time-out, the play clock would reset to 25 seconds and another play would need to be run. With the new rule change, another play would not need to be run.”

In the same rule dealing with the play clock (Rule 3-6-1), the committee approved one additional situation when 25 seconds will be on the play clock. Beginning next season, 25 seconds will be on the play clock and start on the ready-for-play signal when a new series is awarded following a legal free kick or scrimmage kick.

Two changes to Rule 7 – Snapping, Handling and Passing the Ball – were approved by the committee. The exception in Rule 7-5-2 regarding an illegal forward pass being a foul was expanded. Previously, it was legal to conserve time only by intentionally throwing the ball forward to the ground immediately after receiving a direct hand-to-hand snap. The committee expanded the exception to permit a player positioned directly behind the center (shotgun formation) to intentionally ground the ball.

In Rule 7-1, a new Article 9 states that no defensive player shall use disconcerting acts or words prior to the snap in an attempt to interfere with an offensive player’s signals or movements.

Bob Colgate, NFHS director of sports and sports medicine and staff liaison to the NFHS Football Rules Committee, said this language was moved from Rule 9-5-1d and has been reclassified from a 15-yard unsportsmanlike foul to a 5-yard foul.

In addition, several rules will be affected by the committee’s ruling that the head coach, prior to the game, should notify the referee as to the team’s designated representative (coach or player) who will make decisions regarding penalty acceptance or declination. Several locations in the rules book required the team captains to make these decisions, so the new language throughout the book will provide teams more options.

The final change approved by the committee is an addition to the Note in Table 3-1 related to clock times. The new Note 2 will read as follows:

“If the game is interrupted due to weather during the last three minutes of the second period, and the delay is at least 30 minutes, the opposing coaches can mutually agree to

shorten halftime intermission, provided there is at least a one-minute intermission (not including the three-minute warm-up period).”

“I am totally impressed with the thoughtfulness and discussion that went into the rules-making process this year by the Football Rules Committee,” Tharp said. “Two of the proposals dealt with the new play clock rule that went into effect last year, while another rule change now allows the passer who is in the shotgun position to intentionally throw the ball to the ground.

“Additionally, the penalty on the defensive team for any player using disconcerting acts has been reduced from 15 yards to 5 yards. Coaches and officials shared concerns that this was too harsh a penalty for this act, comparing this act to a 5-yard encroachment penalty on the defense.”

A complete listing of the football rules changes will be available on the NFHS website at [www.nfhs.org](http://www.nfhs.org). Click on “Activities & Sports” at the top of the home page and select “Football.”

According to the 2018-19 NFHS High School Athletics Participation Survey, 11-player football is the most popular high school sport for boys with 1,006,013 participants in 14,247 schools nationwide. In addition, there were 31,221 boys who participated in 6-, 8- and 9-player football, along with 2,604 girls in all four versions of the game for a grand total of 1,039,828.

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#### **About the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS)**

The NFHS, based in Indianapolis, Indiana, is the national leadership organization for high school sports and performing arts activities. Since 1920, the NFHS has led the development of education-based interscholastic sports and performing arts activities that help students succeed in their lives. The NFHS sets direction for the future by building awareness and support, improving the participation experience, establishing consistent standards and rules for competition, and helping those who oversee high school sports and activities. The NFHS writes playing rules for 17 sports for boys and girls at the high school level. Through its 50 member state associations and the District of Columbia, the NFHS reaches more than 19,500 high schools and 12 million participants in high school activity programs, including almost eight million in high school sports. As the recognized national authority on interscholastic activity programs, the NFHS conducts national meetings; sanctions interstate events; offers online publications and services for high school coaches and officials; sponsors professional organizations for high school coaches, officials, speech and debate coaches, and music adjudicators; serves as the national source for interscholastic coach training; and serves as a national information resource of interscholastic athletics and activities. For more information, visit the NFHS website at [www.nfhs.org](http://www.nfhs.org).



## 2020 NFHS FOOTBALL RULES CHANGES

### **Defining Team Designated Representative for Penalty Decisions [1-4-1, 1-4-4 (NEW), 2-32-5, 3-5-2, 10-1-1, 10-1-2, 10-2-4]**

Prior to the game, the head coach will notify the referee of the designated representative (coach or player) who will make decisions regarding penalty acceptance or declination.

### **Halftime Intermission Option Following Weather Delay [Table 3-1 NOTES 2 (NEW)]**

The halftime intermission may be shortened by mutual agreement of opposing coaches if a weather delay occurs during the last three minutes of the second period.

### **40-Second Play Clock Clarification [3-6-1a(1)e EXCEPTIONS 2 and 3 (NEW)]**

To eliminate a potential timing advantage gained by the defensive team, the rules committee approved the play clock being set to 40 seconds when an officials' time-out is taken for an injury to a defensive player or a defensive player has an equipment issue.

### **25-Second Play Clock Clarification [3-6-1a(1)f (NEW)]**

Following a legal kick when either team is awarded a new series, the play clock will be set to 25 seconds.

### **Disconcerting Act Penalty Reclassified [7-1-9 (NEW), 7-1-9 PENALTY (NEW), 9-5-1d]**

Disconcerting acts or words by the defense has been reclassified from a 15-yard unsportsmanlike foul to a 5-yard foul.

### **Spiking the Ball to Conserve Time (7-5-2 EXCEPTION)**

The exception to allow a player to conserve time by intentionally throwing the ball forward to the ground immediately after receiving the snap, has been expanded to include any player positioned directly behind the center. This exception now includes snaps that are not hand-to-hand.

## 2020 EDITORIAL CHANGES

TABLE 1-3-1, 2-41-9, 3-4-8, 7-2-5a, b and c (NEW), 7-5-12, 8-2-4, 10-4-2 EXCEPTION, 10-5-1j, PENALTY SUMMARY, NFHS OFFICIAL FOOTBALL SIGNALS, APPENDIX, INDEX

## 2020 POINTS OF EMPHASIS

1. Sportsmanship
2. Intentional Grounding
3. Ineligible Downfield and Line of Scrimmage Formation

***\*\*As of February 7, 2020***