

Rule Zero

(Of course, there is no real Rule Zero. I made it up!)

FORGET WHAT YOU HEARD ON TELEVISION

Late Flag

There is no such stinking thing as a late flag. This nonsense is simply the favorite figment of the television announcer's imagination. You may search the rulebook from cover to cover with a magnifying glass. Nowhere will you find anything requiring the official to throw his flag before he is sure of what he is doing. Any combination of three circumstances can make a flag come slowly:

1) **The official is using due deliberation.**

Nobody pays the official any more money to get in a god-awful hurry. Nobody rates him higher to get ahead of himself. He does not earn his stripes for speed. Nothing is more odious than the major league umpire who makes a precipitate decision and then obstinately sticks with it. A good football official, by contrast, will think before he throws.

2) **The official is figuring it out.**

So many football calls depend upon what happens in several places in a certain order, that an official sometimes has to sort out events before he can throw the flag.

3) **The official is busy.**

Just because the official saw a foul does not mean that his duties have ended. He must continue to officiate until the end of the play, and frequently beyond. When he is done with that job, if he thinks it advisable, he may then throw the flag. Yellow laundry may be the least of his duties at any given moment.

Late Whistle

There is no such stinking thing as a late whistle. This nonsense is the second favorite figment of the television announcer's fertile imagination. You may search the rulebook from cover to cover with a magnifying glass. Nowhere will you find anything requiring the official to toot his whistle before he is sure of what he is doing.

Before the official blows his whistle, he must make absolutely sure

1. That he sees the ball.
2. That the ball is dead.

Unless and until both conditions are met, he must hold his breath. Even if he is dead morally certain that the ball carrier has the ball underneath him on the ground, unless he actually sees the pigskin, he had better not blow it. In a well-run game, there may be five or six plays on which nobody blew their whistle at all. Nothing is more disgusting to the proper football official than a play where he tooted too soon.

That ain't a rule here.

There is no "halo" for the guy catching the kick. There is no "in the grasp" for the quarterback. There is no "defender can jump across if he gets back before the snap". There is no running a kick out of the end zone in high school football. There are no lots of things. Just because you saw it on TV does not mean it applies here. The NFL rulebook is 500 pages long. The high school rulebook is 63 pages long. Do the math.

FORGET WHAT THE COACH TOLD YOU

Play Until You Hear the Whistle

Unless there is an awful mistake, the whistle does not kill the play.

- When the runner goes down, the play is done.
- When the ball goes out-of-bounds, the play is done.
- When the pass is incomplete, the play is done.

When the play is done, the player must stop blocking, quit tackling, and not pile on.

That is his responsibility. Not a thing in any of this has the least bit to do with hearing a whistle.

Put your face Between His Numbers

Some coaches teach players to tackle by driving their face or head into the ball carrier's chest and wrapping the arms. This is face tackling or illegal helmet contact, 15 yards. And it is even more dangerous to the tackler than it is to the runner. Think of the strain it puts on his neck. If you don't believe this, ask Adam Taliaferro.

Ask the Official

Every receiver appears to have had drilled into him that he should ask the linesman or line judge whether he is properly lined up. The receiver therefore breaks the huddle, comes to the line, and asks, "Am I alright?" Think about it a moment: Does the linesman know the play? No. How, then, can he advise you whether you are "alright"? He has no inkling whether you are supposed to be on the line or in the backfield.

Worse yet is the receiver who comes out and holds a hand or a finger up to the linesman in an enquiring manner. What the heck does that mean?

Do not ask the official. Know where you are supposed to line up and then line up there. Look at the ball. At most, ask the official what you need to know. "Am I on the line?" "Am I in the backfield?" *If he has time* he will answer. If he does not, reflect: He is not your coach. It is your responsibility to line up where you are supposed to be. It is not his responsibility to line you up there.

FORGET WHAT THE CROWD HOLLERS

You had to see that!

No, the official did not have to see that.

In fact, if he was doing his job, I guarantee there are a lot of things he did not see.

Take the referee, for instance. When the referee is properly focused on his sphere of responsibility, he is watching the quarterback and action in the backfield. At the end of the play, a lot of the time, he will not have the vaguest idea where the ball wound up nor how it got there. That is not his job. Likewise, the linesman will not know if the right guard was held. The umpire will not know if the deep safety committed pass interference. And so on it goes.

Everyone does his job. If, while doing his job, an official sees something, rest assured he will take care of it.

That's a clip!

This ignorant iteration is frequently followed by "You had to see that"!

In the first place, there are many circumstances when a clip is legal.

We may all wish it were otherwise, but that's the way it is.

Secondly, in order to call a "clip", the official must know: Did the defender spin so that what began as a legal block would up striking his back instead? This means that the official must not only have seen what the hollering fan so clearly discerned, but he must also have had leisure to observe what came before. There is the rub.

That's a hold!

This ignorant iteration is frequently followed by "You had to see that"!

Ever since God first began installing opposable thumbs on football players, there have been holds on every play.

The open-hand blocking rule guarantees it. Rest assured, if the official sees a bear hug, and it affects the play, he will call it. If he sees a shirt-stretcher, and it affects the play, he will call it. But 95% of all holds are simply not visible. And a good many others don't matter.

That's a facemask!

This ignorant iteration is frequently followed by "You had to see that"!

It is perfectly legal to tackle by grasping the helmet. It is not legal to tackle by grasping a helmet opening (this includes ear holes, behind the nape, etc., by the way). It is also perfectly legal to lay a hand upon a facemask. It is not legal to grasp it. Can you see whether the tackler's fingers grasped or not from your position in the stands or on the sidelines better than the official on the spot ten feet away? If so, come on out, Hawkeye, and we will gladly give you a striped shirt.

Otherwise, you should know that everything from the shoulders up is not a facemask.

FORGET THE NFL

The Deion Factor

This is not the NFL. You do not get to cuss, prance, taunt, mug to the cameras, or generally make a jackass of yourself. This is a school activity. Comportment is a must. You have been warned.

FORGET THAT BAD MATH

There is a formula that computes visual acuity. It states that a clear view of any **Foul** is equal to the product of the **D**istance from the fan to the play, times his **R**ooting interest in a particular team raised to the power of his utter **I**gnorance of football rules.

This ingenious formula is expressed thus: $F = (D \times R)^I$

This Formula explains why the runner's excited father at the farthest end of the top bleachers on the far side of the field could so clearly perceive that the defender maliciously grasped his son's face mask when making the tackle, while the trained official a mere three feet away saw nothing.

Note how the fact that the son was facing away from Dad at the time does not factor into the formula.

Do not rely upon this formula. It is bad math. Rely on this: The guy in the striped shirt three feet away had a much better view than you did. He is trained. He is impartial. He is doing a better job than you could. Do not make his call.

Rule One

What You Need to Play the Game

I clearly remember the very first annual rules test I took. It included a trick true-false question (many of the questions tend to be trick rather than substantive): "The bottom of the crossbar is ten feet from the ground". The answer, of course, is false, because the top of the crossbar is ten feet above the ground. So what? Who is measuring? What's more, when was the grass last watered and mowed, how much has frost swelled it or drought shrunk it, etc.

A lot of these basic game equipment rules are just like that one. I have yet to see an umpire bring a pressure gauge to a game, for instance, to check the air in the balls. I have, however, officiated on a field where there were six yards between the fifty and the forty-five, and yet we went ahead and played.

The game goes on. Some of these following rules are important. Many are mostly important to the manufacturers of equipment. And others are mostly ignored.

1:1 The Basics

Object

The object of the game is to tote the ball across the opponent's goal line. You score by touchdown, field goal, or safety. Most points wins.

Play

You have two teams, an oblong ball with air in it, and a field 300' by 160'. One team has the ball. A down is the span of time while the ball is in play. During the down, the team that has the ball tries to advance it by toting, passing, or kicking it. They have 4 chances to move the ball forward ten yards. Those four chances are a series. If they move it ten yards, they get a new series.

Teams

Each team starts the game with 11 players. The team can substitute for players. If they run out of subs, they can play with fewer than 11. But, on offense, they will still need at least seven men on the line of scrimmage.

Officials

Officials run the game. The number of them may vary. Most times there are five on the field and one on the clock. Sometimes there are five on the field and the clock is kept on the field by one of them. In sub-varsity games, there can be 3, or 4, or even 5 officials.

Replay

No replay.

Authority

The officials have authority for the game from half an hour before the game until after it is over. The referee has the authority to rule on anything not covered by the rules, as well as by the rules. His ruling is final. Period.

Protests

You cannot protest the rules. That's that.

1:2 The Field

Measurements

The field is rectangular, 160' by 300'. It should be crowned about 20", so that it slopes a quarter inch per foot from the center of the field to the sides, but this is only a recommendation, to help it drain off.

Markings

Yard line markers have to be soft and have to be five (5) yards (that's 15 feet, folks) off the sidelines. This may be the most often ignored common-sense rule of all. 99.99% of the time, when we go to a field, the athletic department has placed these yard markers right on the sideline stripe, and we have to move them back ourselves. Consider: If a player comes barreling out-of-bounds and steps on one of these things, he will do the splits as it slides across the turf, and may easily pull a groin.

Any lines or markings on it should be non-caustic, like paint or gypsum. That means no lime. There should be lines across the field each five yards. Yard lines should end 4 inches from the sideline. That means they do not come clear over and touch the sideline. That's so you can still eyeball whether someone steps out even where the yard-line meets. This gap is almost never seen, because athletic departments like to carry the line all the way to the side.

Lines should be four inches broad. Endlines and sidelines may be broader.

Edges

The inside edge of the outlines of the field are the lines which count.

The lines themselves are out of bounds or in the end zone.

So all measurements when laying down the lines should be taken from the inside edges of the lines.

Pylons

At each corner of each end zone is placed a soft orange or yellow pylon 4 x 4 x 18 inches.

These pylons are out of bounds, by the way.

Goal Posts

The goal is a vertical plane.

It stretches from the top of the crossbar, between the uprights, up as far as anyone can kick.

The crossbar should be 10 feet above the ground and 23 feet 4 inches long.

The uprights are 23 feet 4 inches apart and no more than 4 inches wide, and at least ten feet long.

The goal posts must be padded. This is one equipment rule that must be strictly enforced.

The game will not be played until pads are installed. Pads have to be at least six feet high.

Crossbars and uprights cannot be decorated.

Red, yellow, or orange wind streamers 4"x42" can be attached at the tops.

1:3 The Gear

The Ball

There are many detailed rules governing the size, weight, texture, color, construction, etc. of the ball.

All these rules are only of concern to the people who actually make the balls.

All a school or coach needs to worry about is:

1. The ball must have an NFHS label marked on it.
2. The ball needs 13 pounds of air pressure in it.

Each team provides at least one legal game ball to the referee at the beginning of the game, for his approval.

After that, a team may use any of these approved balls. So if a team wants to use the other team's ball, they may. A team may change which ball to use at the beginning of a series or for a kickoff. But the rest of the series, the same ball gets used. The series starts when the ball is whistled ready for play. So if you want to use a certain ball, you need to bring it in before the umpire spots the ball and the referee toots his whistle and signals the first down ready for play.

If the field is sloppy, and the ball is wet, the referee may call for a new ball between plays, at his discretion.

Tees

Kicking tees have to be pliable and cannot hold the ball more than two inches above the ground.

Chains

At each first down, a new line to gain is measured. The common measuring device is two poles joined at their bases by a ten-yard length of light chain. The ten yards is measured between the inside edges of the rods. A third rod with changeable numbers on top shows the down.

Clock

Officials operate the scoreboard clocks in the stands or press box, so the scoreboard clocks show the official time. However, time may be kept on the field.

1:4 The Players

Captains

Each team must designate one player as the captain on the field. Only he may talk to the officials. If there is a penalty, and the captain is given several choices, the first choice he makes is final.

Note that nothing in the rules states that these decisions must be made by the coach. On the contrary, the alternatives are given to the captain and his choice is operative.

Numbering

Players must be numbered between 1 and 99.
Backs and ends should be numbered between 1 and 49.
Offensive linemen should be numbered between 50 and 79.

1:5 The Player's Equipment

Required

Each and every player on each and every play must have:

1. A NOCSAE approved helmet with a visible warning label.
2. A NOCSAE approved facemask.
3. Hip pads.
4. Tailbone protector.
5. A clearly numbered jersey long enough to reach the pants and tucked in if longer.
6. Knee pads.
7. Pants that cover the knees and pads.
8. Shoes that meeting numerous specific requirements as to cleats, etc.
9. Shoulder pads, which must be covered by the shirt.
10. Thigh guards with foam covering any hard surface.
11. A full mouthpiece, which must be in the mouth, and which cannot have the ends cut off.

Requirements for all these items are extensive and detailed. For instance, numbers on jerseys have to be Arabic, 8" to 10" high, with 1 1/2" broad strokes, contrasting colors, borders only a quarter inch wide, etc. etc. Even flags sewn on jerseys cannot be over a certain size. Basically, you can count on it that most any kind of a way you can think of to get fancy and outsmart the uniform requirements has been thought of and prohibited.

Do not tie knots in the sleeves of your jerseys.

That means don't tape them, tie them, nor tie a knot and tuck it in to hide it.

Other than shoulder pads (which must be under the jersey) and helmets, most every other hard surface must have stiff foam covering it.

Optional Equipment

Gloves must have an NF/NCAA label

Bandages, tape wraps, etc., covering a cast or splint should be checked by the umpire before the game to ensure they are sufficiently padded.

If a player carries a towel, it must be an unmarked white towel (4 by 18) or (12 by 36).

Prohibited Equipment

- Helmets, jerseys, gloves, etc., cannot be the same color as the ball or as the penalty flags.
- Sleeves cannot have crosswise stripes below the elbows.
- Once upon a time, some smart aleck must have sewn stripes across his sleeve to rake other players with.
- No electronic communication devices are allowed. Radios, pagers, etc. are all forbidden.
- Uncovered hard stuff is forbidden. So any braces or splints, etc., must be covered with foam.
- Knee braces, even under the pants, must be padded.
- No metal sticking out.
- No uncovered rib pads or back protectors are allowed.
- No jerseys or arm pads or etc. that are made to stick to the ball are allowed.
- No slippery stuff.
- No sticky stuff.
- No tear-away jerseys.
- Again, **do not tie knots in your jerseys.**
- That means don't tape them, tie them, nor tie a knot and tuck it in to hide it.
- No slogans or adornments.
- No jewelry. Period. Don't argue, because we did not make this up. None.
- Tinted eye shields. Eye shields must be clear.
- If a player gets hurt, attendants must be able to clearly see his eyes. That's it.

Responsibility

Before the game starts, the referee asks the coach whether all players are legally equipped. If he says they are, then any lapse is the coach's responsibility. If something breaks or comes loose, the officials can give a 25 second time-out for quick repair. This time out is not charged to either team. If 25 seconds won't do it, the player must leave the field.

The umpire decides all equipment questions.

We would much rather spot an inadvertent equipment lapse, such as a dangling mouthpiece, before the play gets off. Then, you may hear us cautioning a player to put his mouthpiece in, or stopping the clock to allow a fallen ear pad to be replaced in a helmet.

If we can't do that, and the ball is about to be snapped, it is far preferable to stop the play from going off and throw a flag before the snap. PENALTY: 5 yards.

But, if we fail to spot the foul in time, and the play goes off, then we spot the player during the play with his mouthpiece out: PENALTY: 15 yards.

1:6 The Coaches' Equipment

Electronics

A coach may use a headset. A player may not. An audio tape player is permitted. Otherwise, no electronic communication stuff of any type or description is allowed. PENALTY: 15 yards.

1:7 State Exceptions

Special rules which states may adopt

State athletic associations may adopt any of 14 special rules to suit their circumstances:

1. How many officials to use
2. Smaller balls for under ninth grade
3. Specific balls for playoffs
4. Additional markers to supplement chains
5. Commemorative patches for uniforms
6. Artificial limbs
7. Drums to signal deaf players
8. Hearing aids
9. What to do in case of a tie
10. A running clock when the score gets lop-sided
11. What to do if a game is interrupted by weather
12. 10 minute periods for 9th grade and under
13. When to toss the coin
14. Smaller fields for nine or eight or six man teams

Rule Two

What Football Terms Mean

What chaos would reign on a ship without port and starboard, for instance? Someone would holler: "There's a reef on the right!" and anyone facing aft would look over the Port side and ask "Where?" while everyone facing forward would look over the starboard side and ask "Where?" while everyone facing port would crap in their pants while everyone facing starboard would say "So what?"

This is the same reason why we have these special football terms. Get to know them. The football term "clipping" has no more to do with your hedges than the shipboard term "port" has to do with wine. If you don't know the special meaning of either one, you are going to be confused.

Football officials of many years experience always begin their studies with this rule two, the definitions.

Definitions

Back Judge

The back judge stands deep in the defensive backfield.

The back judge counts the defense, keeps the play clock, watches receivers and defenders on pass plays, and generally provides deep coverage.

A back judge wears out his cleats running and running, and running some more.

He fetches the ball and he chases receivers up and down the field.

Batting

When you smack the ball around, that's called "batting" the ball.

It's only batting if the official judges that you did it on purpose. If, say, a pass bounces off your arm when you aren't looking, that's not batting.

Block Below the Waist

A block below the waist is when the first place the blocker touches his opponent is below his waist.

Not that if the opponent instinctively sticks out a hand to ward off the blocker, then the first place the blocker touches him may well be that hand and not below the waist.

If the opponent jumps in the air right before he is blocked, then the block below the waist is legal.

If the opponent is a defensive lineman and the snap has not left the expanded neutral zone, then a block below the waist is legal.

Blocking

Blocking is getting in an opponent's way and includes touching him.

Blocking rules are extremely complex. What is legal depends upon who did it, where they did it, when they did it and who they did it to as much as how they did it. Many illegal blocks are not called simply because in the pressure of business the official may only have observed, say, five out of the six conditions necessary to call the foul.

A blocker may either use the backs of his forearms or his palms in front of him.

Butt Blocking

A butt block is when you block using your helmet or facemask.

Butt blocking is doubtless even more dangerous to the blocker than to the opponent. Players who watch their NFL heroes regularly dive into other players like guided missiles must suppress their desire to copy them.

Broken necks are no fun.

Coaches used to recommend that a player plant his facemask between an opponent's numbers when blocking or tackling. They should no longer do so.

Catch

A catch happens when a player gets possession of a live ball.

Note that the ball has to be a live ball.

After he gets the ball, the player either has to land inbounds, or else, if he was up in the air and he got knocked out-of-bounds by an opponent before he could come down, then the officials has to judge that he *would* have landed inbounds, if he hadn't been knocked out-of-bounds.

Chop Block

When one player stands an opponent up with a block, and another player comes in at his knee, that is a chop block.

Chop blocking is very dangerous to the knees, and a quick way to end a player's career. Never hit someone low when your teammate has him in a block.

Clipping

Clipping is hitting a player in the back or on the back of his legs when that player is not the runner and isn't even pretending to be a runner.

If a player turns around so that a block that would have got him on the side or front instead gets him in the back, or if the player was able to see the block coming, then that is not a clip. In fact, there are lots of ways a guy can get hit in the back and it isn't a clip.

The rulebook specifically states that if there is any doubt at all, or if the official did not see the entire play, then it is not called.

Dead Ball

A ball is called "dead" between plays.

The ball becomes dead at the end of a down and remains dead until it is snapped or free kicked.

Down

A down is one play.

A down starts when the ball gets snapped or free kicked and goes on until it is dead.

Encroachment

Encroachment is when a player gets in the neutral zone before the ball is snapped.

If this foul were called strictly every time, the average game would end somewhere around dawn of the next day.

End Zone

An end zone is the field area from the goal line to the end of the field.

Fair Catch

If a kicker waves one arm side to side over his head, the kickers have to lay off him.

A fair catch only works on a kickoff or punt beyond the neutral zone.

Once he gives a fair catch signal, the receiver can't block and can't run with the ball.

An invalid fair catch signal is if the ball has already been touched or has touched the ground or if he doesn't wave one hand way over his head.

An illegal fair catch signal is after the ball has been caught or recovered.

Field of Play

The field of play is the area from goal line to goal line and from sideline to sideline.

First Touching

On a kickoff, if any kicker touches the ball before it goes ten yards and before any receiver touches it, then that is first touching.

On a punt, if a kicker touches a ball on the receiver's side of the ball before any receiver touches it, that is first touching.

Force

Force is what takes a ball into the end zone. It could be a carry, kick, fumble, snap, bat or pass. If a pass or kick or fumble is still in the air, then a muff or bat doesn't give it a new force.

We use force to decide how the ball got in the end zone, so that we will know what to do with the ball when it gets there.

Interlocked Blocking

If you grab or lock onto your teammate and block together, that is interlocked blocking.

Several rule prohibitions, such as this one and assisting the runner, seem to stem from the old days when players would lock all together into a flying wedge. Players got severely trampled under flying wedges; so all these interlocking techniques are illegal now.

Line Judge

The line judge stands near the sidelines on the side opposite the chains and down marker.

The line judge watches forward progress, short pass receivers, substitutions, sideline control, formations, play on the ends of the lines, and many other things. They move downfield with the play.

The line judge is almost always on the side of the home team. Home team coaches like to holler at line judges because they are handy to holler at. These *wingmen* must know how to put up with it.

Linesman

The linesman stands near the sidelines where the chains and down marker are.

The linesman watches forward progress, short pass receivers, substitutions, sideline control, formations, play on the ends of the lines, and many other things. They move downfield with the play.

The linesman is almost always on the side of the visiting team. Visiting coaches like to holler at linesmen because they are handy to holler at. These *wingmen* must know how to put up with it.

Live Ball

During a play, the ball is called a "live ball".

The ball becomes live when it is snapped or free kicked, and it stays live until the down ends.

Loose Ball

A live ball is called a "loose ball" when nobody has it.

A pass or a fumble or a kick, are all examples of a loose ball.

Loss of a Down

When a team loses a down as a result of a penalty that means that they don't get to play it over again.

Offensive pass interference is an example of a penalty that results in loss of a down.

Referee

The referee is the man in charge. The referee can be identified by his white hat.

The referee stands behind the offense.

He is responsible for the safety of the quarterback and for observing action in the backfield.

If there is a foul, he gives the options to the captains and administers the penalty.

Side Zone

The side zone is the field area between the sidelines and the hash marks.

Simultaneous Catch

A simultaneous catch happens when two opposing players get possession of a live ball.

Note that the ball has to be a live ball.

When two players get the ball at the same time, the ball is dead immediately, and the offense gets the ball.

Time Out Conferences

Three times per half, a team can stop the clock so that the coach can come out to talk to the players.

The coach can either hold this conference on the field, in which case only one coach can come out, or, he can hold it in front of the team box at the sidelines, in which case all the coaches can be there on the side.

Only a player or the head coach is allowed to call time-out.

Only eleven players can be in the conference. If a team wants to substitute during the time out, the subs have to get in and out, and not dawdle to hear the conference.

Umpire

The umpire stands just behind the linebackers.

The umpire spots the ball and guards it. He watches for holds and illegal blocks, for short passes over the middle, and many other things. He is the man who controls behavior by both teams, especially when unpling at the end of a play. His job is so complex that it is humanly impossible to observe each and every illegal block or hold which occurs.

The umpire need not be fast, but he had better have a quick first step. When you see some barrel chested old duffer get tumbled head over heels in a scrum, that's the umpire.

Penalty Versus Foul

A foul is a prohibited act. A penalty is the punishment for a foul.

A foul is the cause. A penalty is the effect.

The official throws the flag when he sees a foul.

The referee administers the penalty and the umpire marches it off.

Frequently, we all use the term "*penalty*" to refer to the whole bundle of wax, including foul, flag, penalty, and administration.

This is technically incorrect. The technicalities gain some importance when we are trying to explain the rules.

Rule Three

How the Clock Works

In football, a team has three opponents: The score, the other team, and the clock.

3:1 How Long is a Period

High School Periods

The Varsity high school football game is 48 minutes of playing time, divided into four, twelve-minute quarters. Junior Varsity and Youth league games are progressively shorter as the ages of the players are less. Why this should be so is a mystery to me.

Ten-year-old boys can run, bike, or play at top speed undaunted from dusk to dawn.

Certainly, when we were boys, we played unsupervised every play both ways for hours on end.

Yet, nowadays, a youth league with 30 team members, each of whom is eager to get in for a play or two, may be limited to an eight-minute-a-quarter game.

The "mercy" Rule

Football is a kinetic game. When two players collide, the one with greater impetus transfers his energy to the one with less, in proportion to the difference. That's why injuries occur so frequently to players who have given up. Once a team ceases to hustle and strive, they are about to get waffled.

That's why some states have adopted the "mercy" or "slaughter" rule.

The rule says that if one team gains a thirty five point lead over the other in the second half, then the clock runs continuously, to get the game over with as quickly as possible.

The only thing that stops the clock is a charged time out, injury time out, or the end of a quarter.

Even at the end of a quarter, the clock starts after a minute.

You may see an official signal time out while the mercy rule is in effect, as when a runner goes out of bounds.

This is only a habit and years of training that makes him signal.

The clock should not stop even when he signals it to.

If the lead is reduced below 35 points, the normal clock resumes.

Overtime

If a game ends in a tie, it may be extended into overtime until the tie is resolved.

The exact overtime procedures will vary widely, according to state, conference, etc.

Because overtime procedures vary widely and may not always apply, they will not be discussed here.

Emergencies

In an emergency, the periods or even the game may be shortened. The referee and the two coaches simply agree on it. For example, if two teams met late in the day on a field where the lights were out, the two coaches and referee might decide to shorten the periods in order to finish before dark.

Weather

When weather becomes dangerous, the officials will delay the game.

A frequent example of this would be thunderstorms with lightning.

Interrupted Games

Games that have been suspended for a valid reason will be continued from the point where they left off.

So if a game is suspended because of lightning at 3:02 of the second quarter on Saturday, and the sides decide to finish it next Tuesday, then on Tuesday the clock starts at 3:02 of the second.

Between Quarters

The interval between quarters is limited by rule to one minute.

So, theoretically, teams are required to swap ends of the field and be ready to go in one skinny minute.

This rule is almost never adhered to by either team, and it is not uncommon for both sides to fritter away three or four times the stated interval before they are ready.

Oddly, neither side is ever called for this plain infraction of the rules.

Between Halves

The length of half time varies widely according to conference and circumstances.

For example, a school may request a 20-minute halftime for homecoming ceremonies, and that period may easily stretch to half an hour before everybody's business is done.

Conversely, both teams may return from their locker rooms, the field may be cleared, and everyone may be ready to go in 10 minutes.

Officials tend to allow great latitude in these matters, so long as there is good reason.

Warm Up

After halftime is over, both sides are required to warm up on the field for three minutes before resuming play.

This rule, also, is largely observed in the breach.

The problem is this: Both sides are always late lining up, every quarter.

If officials were to call both sides for delay of game, the penalties would only offset.

Meanwhile, stopping to administer offsetting delay penalties would only delay the game even more.

3:2 HOW DOES A PERIOD START

The Coin Toss

Before the game, referee and captains meet at mid-field for a coin flip.

Only four captains from either side may attend.

A captain of the visiting team calls heads or tails.

The Referee flips a coin.

If the coin comes up matching what the captain called, then his team gets the first option.

Otherwise, the home team gets the first option.

Some years back, a notorious event occurred in an NFL game, when referee Phil Luckner misheard the captain's call and botched the toss.

Our association has always avoided such a possibility by having the umpire attend the toss and loudly repeat the captain's call at the flip to make doubly sure of what was called. If the umpire finds the captain's call inaudible or unintelligible, or if what he hears differs from what the referee hears, then the flip is repeated.

Since the Luckner fiasco, some referees have even extended this protocol to have the captain call and the umpire repeat before the coin is even tossed.

The Options

Pay attention, captains: The winner of the coin toss has four options:

1. **Defer** his choice until the second half,
2. **Receive** the kickoff,
3. **Kick** the ball,
4. **Defend** a specific goal.

If a team chooses to defer, they will exercise their option to begin the second half, rather than the first.

If they choose any of the other three, then they have used their option, and when the second half starts, the option will belong to the other team.

Here is where the problem comes in: A coach will tell his captain that their team wants to kick off for the first half and receive for the second half. If he wins the toss, the captain quickly tells the referee he wants to kick. The referee cautions the captain to wait until the four options are offered him, and then explains the options. The captain unthinkingly repeats that he wants to kick. The referee repeats the four options, and asks the captain is he certain this is what he wants. The captain unthinkingly repeats what he thinks he heard from his coach. The referee then warns the captain that his team will inevitably kick off both halves. The captain insists. The referee complies. The team kicks the ball away both halves.

Coaches: This goof recurs, time and again, because captains are taught to obey unthinkingly, rather than to use their heads. If coaches were content to teach captains to be leaders rather than puppets, the captain would stop to consider when the referee gave him a second, third, and even fourth chance to get it right. Perhaps coaches assume that thinking players lose games (I would argue that). Is it better, then, to lose a game once in a long while and develop young men who can think or to win one more game once in a very long while and develop young men who are robots?

Captains: If you want the ball to start the second half, then choose to defer at the coin toss.

That is the only way you can choose to receive to start the second half.

Which Way

If one team chooses to take the ball, then the other team chooses which way to kick to them.

Quarters

At the start of the second and fourth quarters, the teams swap goals.
By rule, they have one minute to do this. In practice, they almost always dawdle.
The problem is this: Both sides are always late lining up, every quarter.
If officials were to call both sides for delay of game, the penalties would only offset.
Meanwhile, stopping to administer offsetting delay penalties would only delay the game even more.

3:3 How Does a Period End

Warning

Around four minutes before the half ends, the referee stops the game and let's the coaches know the time. If there is an official clock on the scoreboard, this warning is omitted.

Play at End of Period

Play continues at the end of a period until the play is completed.
There is even a rule that forbids a horn or buzzer to sound at the end of a period, so that a player is not misled into thinking the play is up.

Untimed Down

At the end of a period, one more down which does not count on the clock will be added to the period if:
If any foul, except unsportsmanlike, took place during the last down of the period, and the penalty is accepted
If both teams fouled during the last down of the period
If an official tooted his whistle before the ball went dead during last play of the period (an "inadvertent whistle")
If a team scores a touchdown on the last down of a period, the try for point will be completed before the teams swap goals
(Though, if it is the fourth period, and the extra point does not affect who wins the game nor playoff standings, the extra point will be omitted).

And if, during that untimed down, the same circumstances recur, then yet another untimed down is added.

Signal

At the end of the period, the Referee first makes sure that all such business is completed, and then he raises the ball overhead to signal the period is over.

Penalties Between Quarters

If someone fouls while the ball is dead and after the period has expired, then that penalty is tacked on to the succeeding spot, which means that it is marched off from where the ball is placed to start the next period.
So let's say that the clock runs out on the second quarter during a long run; the runner goes out-of-bounds; and a player whacks him well out-of-bounds.
His late hit will be marched off before the kickoff for the second half.
His team will either kick from their 25 or receive on their 35.

3:4 What Makes the Clock Start and Stop

Kickoffs Begin Periods

The clock starts on a kickoff the first time a receiver touches the ball.
This is the way it starts to begin each half.
If the ball goes out-of-bounds before any receiver touches it, then the clock will start the first time it is snapped.

Snaps Begin Periods

Unless there was a score on the last play of the first or third quarter, the ball will be snapped to start the second or fourth quarter. The clock starts on this snap.

"Ready" Begins Clock

The clock starts when the referee whistles the ball ready-for-play:

1. If the clock was stopped for an official's time out
2. For an injury time out
3. To administer a penalty
4. To move the chains
5. Because of an inadvertent whistle.

Remember, in all these circumstances, the way the previous down ended must not have also stopped the clock. So if, for instance, a runner makes a first down and then goes out of bounds, the clock is stopped, the chains are moved, but the clock does not start on the ready-for-play.

Snap Starts the Clock

The clock starts when the ball is snapped if the clock stopped:

1. Because the ball went out-of-bounds
2. Because a kick was fair caught
3. Because a kick went out-of-bounds
4. Because the ball went dead behind either goal line
5. Because of an incomplete pass
6. For the end of the first or third quarter
7. For a delay of game penalty
8. For a time out charged to either team.

What Stops the Clock

The clock stops:

1. At the end of a down during which there was a foul
2. When an official stops it (for instance, to repair player equipment)
3. When a period ends
4. When the ball goes out-of-bounds
5. When a forward pass went incomplete
6. When a team scores
7. When there is a touchback
8. When a fair catch is complete
9. When an inadvertent whistle sounds.

Usually, the clock stops when the ball goes out, but not always.

If the runner is stopped, then pushed backwards and out-of-bounds, then the ball is spotted at his forward progress and the clock continues.

The Kickoff

On a kickoff, the clock starts when a receiver first touches the ball.

This means that it does not start of the first player to touch it is on the kicking team.

Errors

The referee can straighten out a clock goof if the goof comes to his attention before the second snap after the goof. So, let's say that the scoreboard clock packed up just before second down began; then at the end of the down, it decided to run again. At this point, the referee can stop play and wind some seconds off to make the clock right.

3:5 How Time-Outs Work

Team Time Outs

Each team starts each half able to call three time outs during that half.

They cannot carry time outs that they do not use in the first half over to the second half, but they can carry time outs they do not use during the second half over to overtime, if the game requires overtime.

Calling a Team Time Out

Only a player or a head coach can request a time out.

Any attempts by anyone else to call time for a time out will be ignored.

He has only to ask any of the officials, either verbally or by making the accepted *time-out* gesture by holding a horizontal palm over a vertical one.

Note: None of this requires screaming, hopping, or any other excited behavior.

A tizzy will not bring a faster time out.

Some seconds will be lost while the official brings his whistle to his lips and waves his arms to stop the clock, and that's just the way it is going to be.

No time out request will be entertained while a penalty is being administered.

Officials have to finish their business first, and then turn to the time out request.

Again, no amount of tizzy will change any of this.

Equipment Time Out

An official may grant a brief time out if a player's equipment needs repair and if the official thinks the repair can be completed within 25 seconds. So, for instance, an official may grant a brief time-out for a player to refasten a helmet ear pad that has come adrift, but may not decide to grant a time out for a player to refasten broken laces on his shoulder pads. It is up to the official's judgment whether to grant this 25-second time out. The player, of course, has the option of either going off for repairs or calling a charged time out.

If the repair requires more than 25 seconds or requires help from the sideline, a time out is required.

Rule Review

A team may call time out to review the application of a rule. The time out is neither for abuse nor for objecting to a call. It is for the narrow purpose of discussing the possible misapplication of a rule. For example, if the referee were to march off 15 yards for an offensive holding penalty, the coach of the offense may want to call time out to point out that offensive holding carries a ten yard penalty. This is an example of reviewing the application of a rule. The coach may not dispute whether or not the hold occurred, nor may he abuse the official who made the call. That is not the application of a rule. The call is the call. The rule is the rule. The referee is not required to listen to a coach complain simply because he has called a time out intending to do so.

If the ruling is changed as a result of the conference, then the time out is not charged to the team.

If it is not changed, then the team uses a time out.

Water breaks

When the weather is hot and humid, officials may call time outs at their discretion for players to get some water.

Time

One time out lasts sixty seconds.

If the team that called the time out is ready to go in less time, the other team has the right to take the full minute.

If both teams are ready to go, the time out may be shortened.

One Time Out After Another

A team may call one time out after another, until they run out.

Out of Time Outs

Once a team is out of time outs, they may still be granted 25-second pauses for brief repairs.

If the repair takes more than 25 seconds, the player has to leave the field for one play.

Also, once a team is out of time outs they can still have as much time as they need for an injury.

Likewise, a team that is out of time outs can still call a time out for rule application review.

Note that if a coach does not win his point as a result of such a conference, he will be hit with delay of game.

Official Time Outs

And official can call a time out for all sorts of things:

1. To measure and see if a team has gained a first down
2. When a first down is gained, to move the chains
3. When the ball passes from one team to the other
4. When the sides are warned that only four minutes remain in a half
5. When it looks like there may be an injury
6. When a player needs to fix his equipment
7. When the ball needs to be dried
8. When it's so hot and humid that they think the lads should take a break and get a drink
9. While taking care of a penalty
10. When anything, like a dog on the field, or a ball that went flat, or a stalker, or you name it, delays getting the ball ready to go.

Conferences

Coaches and players can conference:

1. When they call a time out
2. When the officials call time out for heat
3. Between periods
4. After extra points.

Authorized conferences

There are only two ways that coaches and players can meet.

Either: one coach comes onto the field and meets with the players
or the players come over near the sideline and meet with the coaches.

First down

Usually, it is the line judge, who has the best view of the chains, who stops the clock when the ball goes dead and it appears that the offense has earned a first down.

Injuries

Any official will stop the clock as soon as it **appears** that a player is injured. Note that the player does not have to **be** injured. The appearance is enough. Remember that when the clock is stopped for an injury, then that player has to leave the field for one play. Arguing will not help. So a player who is not injured should get up and look normal, or at least respond when the official asks him if he is all right. Otherwise, if he lies on the field, he will be required to leave the field for a play.

If the player appears unconscious, time will be called and he will have to leave the game and may not return without a doctor's note. Again, he does not have to be unconscious. Coaches, trainers, nor parents have any say in this. We don't take chances with a young man's brain.

If a player has blood on him, no matter whether it is his or another's, time will be called and he will have to leave until he is bandaged and cleaned up.

3:6 What Makes The Ball Ready For Play

How you know

The ball is ready for play when the referee toots his whistle and gives the ready for play signal. He does that when all business is complete and the ball has been set down where the next play will begin.

The Play Clock

From the time the ball is signaled ready-for-play, the offense has 25 seconds to get its next play under way.

3:6 Delay of Game

The Usual Thing

If the offense does not snap the ball within 25 seconds after it has been signaled ready-for-play, that's delay of game.

The back judge usually keeps track of the 25 second clock, so it's his flag which you will see fly.

The Rare Thing

Either team can get hit with delay of game. For instance, if a runner totes the ball around after the run is over and does not return it to the officials to be spotted for the next play, then that can be delay. Or if players refuse to unpile, or if they hold a runner down, or if they delay getting back on their side, or anything else that tends to waste time. These things happen when a team is ahead and they want to run the clock out before their opponent has a chance to catch up.

The Odd Thing

If a team snaps or kicks the ball before it has been signaled ready, ironically, that impatience is flagged as delay.

If a coach calls for a conference to discuss what he considers a misinterpretation of a rule, and he does not win his point, and he has no more time outs, then that will cost him five yards for delay of game.

If a player does not have his equipment all in order when the play is about to go off, then that is delay. This actually happens quite frequently, when a player neglects to clamp his mouthpiece in place. Rather than let the play go off while the player's equipment is not safe; we will try to remind him as he comes from the huddle, and, if that doesn't work, we prevent the play from beginning.

The Bizarre Thing

If a team were to "go on strike", and just refuse to play, the game could be forfeited for delay.

The Ignored Thing

The home team athletic director and his crew are technically responsible to have the field ready and cleared in time to begin each half at the scheduled time. Of course, much of this is plainly out of their hands. Bands, for instance, sometimes seem to think that the event is being held for their performance rather than as an athletic event. Then you have those interminable introductions of graduating seniors and their parents, or of homecoming queen and court and escorts, and blah, blah, blah.

We try to ignore all that. There's not much sense in penalizing a team for stuff they cannot control. If you call it, PENALTY: five yards.

3:7 How To Substitute Players

Basic Substitutions

A team may substitute as many players as they want. These substitute players can only enter the field between downs. As soon as a player is replaced, he must leave the field right away. If a player is replaced, he has to leave across his team's sideline. If a substitute cannot complete the substitution, he has to leave the same way. Once they get off, they have to go straight to the team box.

Substitution Fouls

A sub has to come in from his sideline and go off via his sideline. It sometimes happens that a replaced player in a hurry to leave the field takes the short route, out through his end zone. That's illegal substitution.

It sometimes happens that a sub comes into the huddle and the player he replaces stays in the huddle too. Now you have twelve in the huddle, and that is illegal substitution.

Teams who try to fool the other team by bringing on twelve or more and sending the excess off only when taking their positions will get flagged.

The same player cannot go off and come back on nor come on and go back off unless:

1. There is a time out called by either team
2. A penalty is marched off
3. There is a dead ball penalty
4. The period comes to an end

If either a sub who couldn't get 'in' in time or a player who was replaced by a sub is on the field when the ball is snapped, then that is illegal substitution.

In practice, we try to use some discretion on this. If a player is honestly sprinting toward the sideline, especially if he can get behind the sideline official, we let it go.

If a sub comes in at the last second, he must be on his own side of the ball when it is snapped.

If a replaced player does not leave the field, and the team plays with twelve, which will be illegal participation. This should never happen. Illegal substitution is five yards. Illegal participation is fifteen. Therefore, we try to call the substitution foul before the snap, to avoid the costlier penalty after. The official's function, you see, is not to hurt a team for making a mistake, but only to prevent the team gaining an unfair advantage.

Another thing: At some point after the ball is ready-for-play and before they snap the ball, the offense has to get all its men within fifteen yards of the ball.

PENALTY: five yards.

Rule Four

What Is the Status of the Ball

A football is the only ball that is not round. A lot of funny things happen because of this curious fact.

4:1 What Makes The Ball Live

Kickoffs

At the beginning of each half and after either a field goal or an extra point attempt, one team kicks off to the other. This kickoff puts the ball in play, but it does not start the clock. The clock does not start until a receiver has touched the ball. Nevertheless, the ball goes live when it is kicked.

This kickoff is also called a "*free kick*", because the kicker gets to kick free of any interference, since nobody is allowed to rush him when he kicks. The ball is placed on a tee or held on the ground and kicked from there.

After a safety has been scored, the team that was scored on free kicks the ball to the team which scored. But this free kick can be either a kickoff from a tee or else a punt. Either way, there is no rush.

Now, here's a real odd one: After a fair catch, a team can choose to free kick the ball. So, if receivers fair-caught a ball on the opponent's forty, with just a couple of seconds left, behind by two, and they had a strong kicker, they may choose to free-kick a field goal. Since there is no rush, the kicker can just tee it up and whack away.

Snap

Other than free kicks, the ball becomes live when it is snapped. That's how the ball is put in play for most downs.

Where

The ball must be put in play between the hash marks. After an incomplete pass, the umpire will try to spot the ball about the same distance from each sideline as where it was before the pass. Sometimes, though, officials will move a ball sideways to get out of a mud hole.

False Starts, etc.

Sometimes, the ball appears to be snapped, but it never did go live. Maybe there was an illegal snap or a false start or a dead ball foul that prevented the ball from truly being put into play. In these cases, you see the officials tooting their whistles and killing the clock right at the snap.

4:2 What Makes The Ball Dead

End of a Run

A running play ends and the ball goes dead:

1. When the runner goes out of bounds.
2. When the runner's forward progress is stopped
3. When a runner puts anything other than a hand or a foot on the ground

Now, if a player is still moving forward rolling over a pile of tacklers but never himself touches the ground, then the play has not ended. But if a runner has not touched the ground, but is held on top of the pile, then his run has ended.

Here is an exception to note: If a place kick holder has his knee on the ground, that doesn't make the ball dead. In fact, if he has to come up from the ground to take a high snap, and then brings the ball back down and puts his knee on the ground, the ball is still not dead. Even if the holder comes back up from his kneeling position and runs the ball or passes the ball, it is still not dead. So the holder is the one guy who can have his knee down.

Ball Out-Of-Bounds

When a live ball goes out of bounds, it becomes dead. But there is no plane of the sideline like there is a plane of the goal line. So if a player holds the ball out over the sideline, that doesn't make it dead. It has to touch something that is out-of-bounds. For example, the pylon is out-of-bounds. If the ball touches that, it is out. But if a player who is inbounds sticks the ball through the goal line plane out-of-bounds, that is a touchdown.

Usually, the clock stops when the ball goes out, but not always. If the runner is stopped, then pushed backwards and out-of-bounds, then the ball is spotted at his forward progress and the clock continues.

Incomplete Pass

When a forward pass goes incomplete, the ball is dead and the clock stops.

It is incomplete as soon as it hits the ground before anyone catches it.

A backward pass stays live. A backward pass can bounce all over the place, but it is still live and anybody could jump on it.

Simultaneous Catch

If a defender and a receiver both come down holding the ball at the same time, the clock stops, the ball is dead, and it belongs to the offense right there.

Touchback

In high school football, you do not run the kick out of the end zone. If a kick is not a field goal, or if it is a field goal attempt but it has bounced on the ground, well, the instant it breaks the goal line plane, it is dead and the clock stops. Then it comes back out for a touchback. A field goal attempt can touch a receiver in the end zone and stay live, or it can hit the crossbar or posts and stay live. But if it touches anything out-of-bounds, like a pylon, or if it touches one of the kicking team, it is dead. So if a kicker reaches up and knocks a short field goal through the uprights, it fails; but if the ball bounces off a defender's head and caroms through, it is good.

Loose Ball

If opponents grab any loose ball, such as a kick or fumble, simultaneously, it becomes dead.

If that loose ball comes to rest and nobody is trying to get it, it goes dead.

If that loose ball touches anything except a player, official, the ground, or equipment such as chains, it goes dead. So if a dog runs out on the field and bites a fumble, he has killed the ball.

Kickoffs

If someone from the kicking team is the first one to get hold of a kickoff, and nobody else from the receiving team has touched it, and it's on the receiver's side of the field, it's dead. Note the three requirements here. If it doesn't meet all three, it's still live. So if a kick goes across to the receiver's side and a receiver catches it and then a receiver fumbles it and a kicker grabs the fumble in mid air, then the ball is still live, and he can run with it. But if the same kick goes across and the receiver just lets it bounce and the kickers grab it, it is dead there, and they can't run with it.

Fair Catch

If anybody on the receiving team, not just the actual receiver, gives a fair catch signal, even an invalid one, then the ball is dead as soon as it's caught.

Scores

When someone scores, the ball becomes dead.

Tries

When an extra point kick is obviously bad, the ball goes dead.

During an extra point try, when the defense gets hold of the ball, it is dead.

Whistle

When an official commits the cardinal sin of tooting his whistle while the ball is live, that whistle makes the ball become dead.

Runner's Helmet

When the runner loses his helmet, the ball goes dead and the officials will sound their whistles right away to kill the play so that the runner doesn't get clobbered on his bare bean.

4:3 How Out-of-Bounds Works

Spots

Let's say a fumble bounces out-of-bounds:

1. The farthest forward point of the ball where it went through the sideline is the out-of-bounds spot.
2. The spot at the hash marks directly inbounds from the out-of-bounds spot is the inbounds spot. That's where the ball will be placed.

Of course, if it is an incomplete pass that bounced out, then it is placed back at the previous spot, and not at the inbounds spot.

Safety

If the out-of-bounds spot is behind the offense's goal line, then a safety is scored.

Now, the pylon is out-of-bounds behind the goal line.

So if a fumble bounced back and touched the pylon, it would be a safety.

Touchback

On the other hand, the pylon in the defense's end zone is out-of-bounds behind their goal line.

So if a fumble bounced forward and hit that pylon, it would be a touchback.

Running Out-Of-Bounds

When a runner carries the ball out-of-bounds, the out-of-bounds spot is the front end of the ball at the time he went out. The ball could be in either hand, stretched out-of-bounds, or stretched forward. That's not the issue. The issue is how far has the ball gone at the instant his foot hits the stripe. Or, if he's leaping out, how far forward was it at the time he broke the sideline plane while airborne.

Take, for example, a runner going for the near corner of the end zone. If he stretches the ball out-of-bounds and past the goal line while his foot is inbounds on the ground, then that's a touchdown, because the ball went dead past the goal line. But if he dives and stretches the ball out-of-bounds past the goal line, and his feet are in the air, then the ball is spotted where it was when he dove out. He does not score.

Dead Ball Spot

When a ball goes dead inbounds, the next play starts from the spot where it went dead, called the dead ball spot.

On the other hand, if that dead ball spot is between the hash mark and the sideline, it gets moved sideways to the hash. Again, that's the inbounds spot.

Incomplete

An incomplete forward pass, of course, goes back to the previous spot.

Moving the Ball From Side to Side

A team can choose to have the ball moved sideways if:

1. They are going to try for an extra point
2. They are going to kick off
3. There was a safety
4. They fair caught the ball
5. There was a touchback
6. Starting any series of downs during overtime.

Just remember: They have to ask for the ball to be moved before it is whistled ready for play.

And, if they choose to move the ball sideways, but then the down is played over because of a penalty, or if there is a dead ball foul, then they can have it moved sideways again. So, let's say a team catches a fair catch on the right side, and, since there are just a few seconds left, they want to try a long field goal immediately. So they ask for the ball to be placed in the center, because the kicker thinks he has a better chance from there. But, alas, their center jumps, and they get marched back five yards. The kicker can't make it from here. The quarterback comes in, looking to throw a long bomb. He may prefer the ball on the right side. He can have it moved.

Rule Five

How Downs Work

Football is a game of domination.

The team that can earn one new series after another controls the ball, controls the clock, controls the game.

5:1 A Series

A Series

A series is four downs. A down is a play. So a series is four plays. A team can lose a down as result of a penalty. They can repeat a down as result of a penalty.

If the offense can take the ball past the first down mark, they'll get a new series.

First Downs

A team can get a whole new series of downs if they can get the ball past the first down marker.

1. After any one of the first three downs, you take into account everything that happened during the down, including the play, any penalties, etc., and you also take into account any dead ball penalty. If the result of all this is a first down, then the team gets a first down.
2. But after the fourth down, you only take into account what happened during the down. Dead ball penalties are ignored, for the purpose of measuring the first down. Unsportsmanlike penalties are also ignored.

So if a team gained six yards on first down, and the opponent was flagged for unsportsmanlike because he started cussing, the penalty would mean a first down for the offense. But if the same thing happened on fourth down, and the offense hadn't got the ball past the first down marker, then the ball would change hands before marching off the unsportsmanlike.

The defense actually has several more ways to get a new series than the offense does:

1. The offense gets a new series if they get the ball past the first down mark.
2. The defense gets a new series if they can get the ball during the down.
3. The defense gets a new series if they can hold the offense behind the first down mark for a whole series.
4. The defense gets a new series if the offense punts to them and they catch the kick or the kick goes out of bounds or rolls dead.

But if a penalty by either side occurred before the ball went from offense to defense, and that penalty is accepted, the defense may not get a series.

So, many times, the defense may have to decline a penalty in order to get the ball.

First Down After Punt

- The team that winds up with the ball gets a new series if the offense punts, the defense touches the ball, and then the offense jumps on it.
- The defense gets a new series if the offense punts the ball, and it goes a couple of yards past the line, and then the offense is the first one to touch it. Here, they get the ball where it was first touched.
- Say that the punt is botched. If the offense jump on their own punt behind the scrimmage line and the receivers never touched the thing on the other side of the line, then the offense gets the ball, and the down counts.

When one team first gets the ball from the other team, they will begin a new series.

5:2 After A Penalty

Penalty Declined

If the penalty for a foul is declined, then down, distance, and possession are all the same as if the penalty had never happened. This is why, if it's fourth down, and the defense holds the offense, while the offense fouls, the defense will generally decline the penalty, so that they can get the ball the same way they would have if no foul had occurred.

Double Foul

If both teams fouled during the down, so that the fouls cancel each other out, then everything goes back to the same down and spot as before.

Penalty Accepted

If the penalty for a foul is accepted, then the distance is marched off, and the same team that had the ball before has it now, and it is the same down as before. This is why, if it's fourth down, if the offense would have made a first down during the play, but the offense fouled, then the defense will want to take the penalty, so that it remains fourth down.

Of course, some penalties include loss of down. In those cases, the penalty is marched off, and then it is the next down. So if the offense were to commit pass interference during the second down, the penalty would be marched off, and then it would be third down, because that penalty includes loss of down. If they committed a foul that came with a loss of down penalty on fourth down, and, after the thing was marched off, they did not make a first down, then they would lose the ball.

Loss of Down Negated

If a penalty includes a loss of down, but the offense gets a new first down after the yardage is marched off, then the loss of down is meaningless. Likewise, if the defense gets the ball during a down in which the offense committed a foul which comes with a loss of down penalty, then the loss of down means nothing because the other guys get the ball.

Double Foul

If both teams foul during a down, then the ball goes back where it was before the down, to the same team that had it before the down, and the same down gets played over again.

Foul Before the Snap

If there is a foul before the down begins, then the down remains the same. But if the yards are marched off against the defense, and the ball is spotted forward of the line to gain, then the offense gets a new first down.

Foul on a Free Kick

It doesn't matter whether a foul happened before a free kick or during a free kick, as long as it's before the receivers get the ball. Either way, the next down is a free kick down. So if a kicker goes offside before the kickoff, the next play is a kickoff. Or if a receiver holds before his team catches the kickoff, the next play is a kickoff.

The exception to this would be if the free kick came after a fair catch. Say that a team fair-caught a kickoff, and decided to try a long field goal, with no rush, from the spot of the fair catch. But during that kick, a team member jumped offside. Well, now the ball is marched five yards back, and the kicker may not be able to reach from here. Well, the team can exercise their fair catch options all over again. Now, if they prefer to run a scrimmage play, they may.

How a Penalty Ends a Series

- A series of downs can be ended by a penalty. Here's how:
- If the penalty awards a first down, the series ends, and a new one begins. Roughing the kicker is an example.
- If the distance marched off for a penalty leaves the offense with the ball beyond the line to gain, then the series ends, and a new one begins. So if the runner goes forty yards, and then he is called for yanking the facemask of a defender, then even after the penalty, he is apt to have a first down.
- On the other hand, what if, on fourth down, the offense did not get the first down, but during the down they fouled? Then the defense could decline the penalty, the series would end, and a new series for the defense would begin; only now they would have the ball.
- If declining a penalty leaves the defenders with the ball, then the series ends and a new one begins with the defense now the offense. An example here would be if the defense grabbed a fumble after the offense held. The defense could just decline the penalty and keep the ball, with a new series for them.
- If the ball goes to the other team and then there is a penalty, then there will be a new series. So if the defense grabbed a fumble before the offense yanked a mask, then the defense would keep the ball, with a new series for them, after the penalty was marched off.
- And if a penalty on fourth is accepted which includes a loss of down, and the whole business leaves the offense behind their line to gain, then the series comes to an end and a new series starts for the other team.

All this stuff above explains why football officials are frequently in conference.

You have to be sure about what came first before you can determine what comes next.

New Series

When one series ends, then another one usually begins. That means a first down and ten yards to gain. Here are the exceptions:

- If the down that ended the series was a field goal
- If the down that ended the series was an extra point try
- If the down that ended the series was a free kick after a safety or a fair catch.

5:3 How To Get A First Down

Line to Gain

For each new series, a line to gain is established. It will be ten yards from the front end of the ball. The line to gain stays put until a new series is awarded.

For any fouls that happen before the ball is whistled ready for play, the penalties are marched off before the line to gain is measured. This includes dead ball fouls, unsportsmanlike, everything. So you can no longer have a first and fifteen or twenty to begin a series. Here is an example: A team makes a first down. The ball is spotted. The chains are moved. But before the referee can signal the ready for play, an offensive lineman shoves an opponent. The penalty will be marched off, the chains will be reset, and it will be first and ten from the new spot.

But what if the ball is signaled ready for play, and then the offensive lineman jumps offside? Then the yards will be marched off, the chains will not be moved, and it will be first and fifteen. So the series starts when the ball is marked ready for play.

Measurements

The referee can ask the linesman to bring the chains out on the field for a measurement. If any part of the ball is beyond the inside edge of the front chain pole, it is a first down.

The team captain can ask the referee for a measurement. But if the referee thinks it is obvious, he can decline to measure. No amount of shouting and capering by the coach counts for anything. If he wants a measurement, he has to get his captain to ask, just like a timeout. But, unlike a timeout, the referee does not have to grant a measurement. One last time: captain asks; referee decides.

Front End of the Ball

To start each series, the near pole of the first down chains is set at the front end of the ball. That means that, when the ball goes over to the other team, the back end of the ball now becomes the front end.

Goal Line

If the ball becomes dead with any teeny bit of it touching the goal line, it is in the end zone.

Rule Six

The Kicking Game

Here's the part that puts the "foot" in "Football".

It also put the "special" into "special teams", because the kicking game produces more bizarre and hard to officiate plays than any other aspect of the game.

6:1 Free Kicks

Free Kick

A kickoff is a free kick. You can also choose a free kick after a fair catch.

"Free kick" means that the kicker gets to haul back and boot the thing without worrying about defenders rushing at him. The play doesn't start until he boots it. This is unlike a scrimmage kick, where the ball is snapped before it is kicked, as in a punt or most field goals. There, the kicker is not free of rushers.

After a safety, the kickers may choose to punt. Otherwise, they have to place kick.

Yard Line

A free kick is taken:

- From the kickers 40, to begin a half
- From the kickers 40, after a score
- From the kickers 20, after a safety
- From the yard line of a fair catch, after a fair catch

This is known as the "free kick line".

If the kickers choose to punt after a safety, of course the ball is not placed right on the free kick line.

But it must be punted no more than a step away from that line.

The receivers have to stay at least ten yards away on their side of the free kick line.

Position

The kickers may take their free kick anywhere between the inbounds lines (also know as "hash marks").

It's their choice, but, once they choose, they cannot change their minds.

If there is some good reason, such as a puddle or a mud slick, then the referee can move the ball away from that mess to give the kicker a fair chance of kicking without falling on his butt.

If he moves the ball forward or backward to escape the mess, then the receivers' line moves as well.

Offsides

Once the ball is whistled ready for play, no player on either team may cross their free kick line.

The exception to this is the kicker and the guy who holds the ball (if he does not use a tee).

They can, naturally, have a foot over the line, since they probably have to, in order to do their jobs.

Receiver Gets the Kick

What happens if a member of the receiving team gets hold of a kick? Any receiver may catch a kick. If the kick hits the ground, any receiver can recover it. He can even recover it inside the kickers' end zone. If any receiver has the ball, he may run with it. But if any receiver has given either a fair catch signal, even an invalid one, then the ball becomes dead as soon as any receiver gets possession.

Kicker Gets the Kick

What happens if a member of the kicking team gets hold of a kick? The ball is dead. As far as who gets the ball, that depends on what happened where. And here, once again, you need to know your definitions.

- If it is kick-catching interference, then the receivers can choose an awarded fair catch.
- If it is first touching, then the receivers may choose to take the ball there.
- Otherwise, the kickers get the ball.

On a free kick, a kicker can go get the ball if it goes ten yards and touches the ground.

The same is true if a receiver touches it first.

If a kicker gets blocked into the ball, then the fact he touched it is ignored.

If a kick just lies there and no one jumps on it, then it goes dead and the receivers get it there.

First Touching

When you have a free kick, the kickers place the ball on their free kick line, and the receivers have a free kick line ten yards away. In between the kickers' line and the receivers' line is like a big overgrown neutral zone. If one of the kickers is the first player to touch a kick in this area, before it goes over the receivers' free kick line, then that is called "first touching".

Note that if the ball goes across, but then it blows back, and then it is touched, that isn't first touching.

First touching means that the receivers can take the ball right there where it was touched, if they want. Otherwise, they can go ahead and take the result of the play.

The kicker doesn't have to touch the ball on purpose, but if the kicker touched the ball because he was blocked into it, then his first touching doesn't count.

If the kickers first touch the ball in this area, but then the receivers touch the ball after that, and then the receivers commit a foul, then they don't get to take the ball at that first touching spot. Likewise, if the kickers commit a foul, and then that foul is accepted by the receivers, then they don't get that first touching spot.

Kicking Over

The kickers will have to kick over again if:

1. There is a foul that requires the down to be played over.
2. Both sides foul.
3. A ref toots his whistle before the ball is dead.

Kick Out-Of-Bounds

When a free kick goes out-of-bounds, and the receivers never touched it, the receivers actually have three choices:

1. They can make the kickers kick again from five yards farther back.
2. They can take the ball 25 yards from where it was kicked.
3. They can take the ball where it went out-of-bounds.

6:2 SCRIMMAGE KICKS

Examples

Scrimmage kicks are plays where the ball is snapped and then kicked.

A punt, or a place kick such as a field goal or extra point, or even a drop kick, is a scrimmage kick.

Where and When

You can only kick from behind the neutral zone.

You can only kick before a change of possession. So you can't, intercept and then kick on the same play.

Receivers Catching

Any receiver can catch or grab a scrimmage kick and run with it, except:

- If it's an extra point, the ball is dead as soon as he gets it.
- If another member of his team gave a fair catch signal, good or bad, the ball is dead as soon as he gets it.
- If the ball goes out-of-bounds, of course, it's dead.

Kickers Catch and Run

Any one of the kickers can get hold of a scrimmage kick and run with it, so long as it is still behind the line.

But if it's on an extra point try, the ball is dead as soon as he gets it.

Kickers Catch Downfield

Any one of the kickers can get hold of a scrimmage kick downfield, as long as any one of the receivers touched it downfield first. This makes the ball dead.

Now, the kickers can't just block a receiver into the ball so that he touches it, for the kickers to then jump on it. If the kickers block a receiver into the ball, his touching doesn't count.

If there isn't any receiver where he can catch the ball, then a kicker can catch it downfield, or even bat it back. That wouldn't be kick-catching interference because there was no receiver there to interfere with.

First Touching

When a kicker is the first one to touch a scrimmage kick downfield, then that is called "first touching", and the spot where he touched it is called the "spot of first touching." He doesn't have to touch it on purpose, but if he was blocked into the ball, then that doesn't count.

First touching means that the receivers can take the ball right there where it was touched, if they want. Otherwise, they can go ahead and take the result of the play.

If the kickers first touch the ball, but then the receivers touch the ball after that, and then the receivers commit a foul, then they don't get to take the ball at that first touching spot. Likewise, if the kickers commit a foul, and then that foul is accepted by the receivers, then they don't get that first touching spot.

Tipping the Kick

If players from either side touch the kick while it is flying through the air and they are in the offensive backfield or even in the expanded neutral zone, then that touch doesn't count. So if it bounces off a blocker's helmet or tips a rusher's hand or such, then this is not the same as first touching.

You will have to see the definition of expanded neutral zone to figure out where all this could happen. But beware that the expanded neutral zone cannot extend into the end zone. So, for instance, if a team tries to kick a field goal from the one, and it bounces off the helmet of a blocker in the end zone, then you do not ignore that touch. That touch makes the field goal fail.

Out-Of-Bounds

If any scrimmage kick goes out-of-bounds, the receivers get the ball at the yard line where it went out. Except, of course, if there was first touching, then the receivers could choose to take it there.

6:3 TOUCHBACKS

What Is a Touchback

If any kick goes into the end zone, it is a touchback.

You cannot run the ball out from the end zone in high school football.

Of course, if the kick was a field goal attempt or an extra point try, then it's not a touchback. But if a field goal attempt bounces on the ground, and then goes into the end zone, that's a touchback. Or if a field goal attempt does not score, then that's a touchback.

If a field goal attempt touches a kicker in the end zone, then it's a touchback.

So it can't bounce off a kicking team member in the end zone and pop through the goal posts for a score.

When everyone just lets a kick lie there in the kickers' end zone, until it goes dead, or if it went out of bounds there, then it could be either a touchback or a safety. Here's how that could happen: Say that a team punted real short from their one, it bounced, and then the receivers muffed the ball, and it bounced back the other way, into the kicker's end zone and out of bounds. That would be a touchback, and the kickers would get it. That's true whether they muffed it or whether they batted it. But the ball has to have hit the ground. Or, what if the runner fumbled the ball on the one, and it bounced through the end zone and out the back. That's a touchback, and the defense gets the ball. Even if the defense jumps on the fumble in their end zone, that's a touchback. For all this stuff, you have to decide who forced the ball into the zone.

Complicated game, eh?

6:4 TABLE

A Reference

Here's a little table summarizing all sorts of things that can happen on a kick:

If it's a punt or a field goal attempt:

1. If the receivers get the ball downfield, they can run
2. If the kickers get the ball downfield, they cannot run.
3. If either team gets the ball on the offensive side of the line, they can run
4. If neither team gets the ball, the receivers get it
5. If members of both teams get the ball at the same time, the receivers get it.

If it's a kickoff, or a free kick after a fair catch:

1. A kickoff cannot score a field goal.
2. A kick after a fair catch can score a field goal.
3. The kickers can't run with their kick.
4. If neither team gets the ball, the receivers get it.
5. If members of both teams get the ball at the same time, the receivers get it.

If any kick goes dead in the receivers' end zone. Unless it scores a field goal, it's a touchback.

If the kick becomes dead in the kickers' end zone:

If the force came from the kickers:

1. If nobody gets the ball, it's a safety.
2. If a kicker gets the ball, it's a safety.
3. If a receiver gets the ball, it's a touchdown.

If the force came from the receivers"

1. If a receiver gets the ball, it's a touchdown.
2. If nobody gets the ball, it's a touchback.
3. If a kicker gets the ball, it's a touchback.

6:5 FAIR CATCHES

Who and How

Any receiver can call for a fair catch as long as the ball is still in the air. To signal the right way, he just waves one hand high overhead. He doesn't have to be in position to catch the ball. Once he signals fair catch, the ball will be dead wherever any of his teammates catches it. But only the guy who signaled is going to be given protection. So if number 2 signals fair catch, but then number 3 catches, number 3 might get waffled.

Once he signals fair catch, a receiver can't block anyone.

PENALTY: 15 yards.

Even an invalid fair catch signal has the same effect as a valid one.

So if number 2 waves one hand at shoulder height, and then number 3 catches the ball, it is dead right there.

After a Fair Catch

Once a fair catch is made, the receivers can take the ball anywhere between the hash marks on the yard line where it was caught. If there is a dead ball foul or a down replayed, the same team gets to choose again. So they might take the ball on the right side, then the defense encroaches so that they move it up five yards, and now they might prefer to have the ball in the center.

Opportunity to Catch

Kickers have to give receivers a chance to get at and catch the kick, whether or not there was a fair catch signal.

PENALTY: 5 yards.

So the opportunity to catch the ball has nothing to do with the fair catch signal. You can't slam into the guy who is trying to catch the kick, regardless whether he signaled or not. The fair catch signal only means that, after the catch, the kickers can't whack the guy. On the other hand, if no receivers are in a position where they can catch the kick, then the kickers can catch it. This is true regardless whether anyone signaled for a fair catch.

Penalties

No receivers are allowed to give an invalid fair catch signal.
Likewise, a runner is not allowed to give a fair catch signal.

PENALTY: 5 yards.

Rule Seven

The Snap, the Pass, and the Handoff

Football is a game of conspiracy. Many a player, coach, and assistant has stayed up nights plotting ways to deceive the opponent so that they will not know who is to be snapped, passed, or handed the ball, nor where.

7:1 THINGS THAT HAPPEN RIGHT BEFORE THE SNAP

Snapper (a.k.a. Center) Offside

The center, or whoever snaps the ball, is allowed to be offside, to a certain extent. After all, he has to encroach in order to snap the ball. So he can have his head over the ball and his hand on the ball. But his feet have to be behind the ball and nothing other than his hand can be past the ball.

Lifting the Ball

The snapper (a.k.a. Center) can rotate the ball, but he cannot spin it, move it, nor advance it. By rotating it, that means that he can turn the laces around the way he likes them. And he can lift the ball slightly to do this. By not spinning it, that means he cannot turn the ball end for end. In fact, the ball has to remain pointed at either goal; it can't even be turned sideways. By moving it, that means he cannot go sideways with it. By advancing it, that means he cannot pick it up and stretch it forward. A surprising number of centers habitually advance the ball slightly.

Ready to Snap

Once the ball has been signaled ready for play, and the snapper has put his hands on the ball, several restrictions apply to him:

1. He can't take both hands off the ball before he snaps
2. He can't jerk around in some way that looks like a snap
3. He can't snap immediately; he has to pause first
4. Once he has adjusted the ball once, he can't move it again until the snap

Illegal Snap

A snap infraction means the ball stays dead.

Encroachment - Ball Ready

Once the ball is ready for play, nobody can touch it other than the center.

Nobody can touch an opponent, either.

Frequently, you will see a defender standing in the neutral zone calling defensive signals to his teammates.

This is also illegal.

Encroachment - Center Ready

Once the center is down ready to snap, anyone who breaks the plane of the neutral zone is offside.

Breaking the plane means your hands or your head as well as your feet. Nothing can hang over.

In high school ball, this includes the defenders. You can't go across the line and then jump back before the snap.

This is not the NFL. The ball stays dead and it is an infraction as soon as you go across.

The most common encroachment is when an offensive lineman comes up to the line, lines his feet up with the line, and then, as soon as he puts his hand down, he is hanging way over the line. Linemen should allow themselves some room behind the line so that when they go down they are not hanging over.

Now, listen, we try to solve a lot of these inadvertent stationary offside by counseling the coaches and players. We tend to throw the flag for these little things only when counseling doesn't work and we feel we need to get their attention. As long as nobody is gaining a clear advantage and the thing is inadvertent, we are not going to penalize the team for this.

And any amount of hollering by spectators, etc., is not apt to change the way we do this.

If you were in our cleats, you would try to use some common sense judgment too.

False Start

Once the ball is set ready for play, the offense cannot look as though the play has started when it has not. That's a false start. Examples are:

1. A sudden shift or a fake charge that looks like a play
2. Anything the offense does which is intended to make the defense jump offside. Yes, that would include the quarterback bobbing his head or jerking his hands.
3. Any inside down lineman lifting a hand or making a sudden movement. An end can get up and shift, slowly, smoothly, and deliberately. But an inside lineman, once he has put his hand down, cannot. He cannot jerk even if he keeps his hand down. Even if he put his hand down close to the ground, but doesn't touch it, he is still down.

False Start and Encroachment

If there is a false start and that makes a defender encroach, then the encroachment gets ignored, and only the false start gets penalized.

PENALTY: 5 yards.

7:2 HOW PLAYERS LINE UP

The Huddle

Here is an odd rule: At some time after the ball is signaled ready for play, each of the offensive players must get within 15 yards of the ball before it is snapped. This means that, no, you cannot leave one lone receiver way over there on the far sidelines out of the huddle. Nor can you bring a substitute receiver onto the field at the last minute way over by the sidelines. The defense should get a chance to take an inventory of who is in this play and cover them accordingly.

Locking Legs

The guards on either side of the center may lock their legs with his. So they can, say, put their knees behind his knees. But nobody else anywhere on the line can do this. All the other linemen have to keep their feet outside the next guy's feet.

Up or Down Position

The offensive players can stand, crouch, or kneel before the snap. It doesn't matter.

Backs

Only one offensive back can be forward of the nearest lineman's waist. He is the guy in position to take the snap, usually the quarterback. "In position" means his hands have to be ready to take the ball between the center's legs. This doesn't mean he has to actually take the snap. It can be snapped past him to someone else.

Everyone else has to be behind the waist of the nearest lineman. There is a lot of misunderstanding about this. Many receivers seem to think that as long as they are off the line they are in the backfield. This is not true. A player can be neither on the line nor in the backfield. To be on the line, he has to be forward of the snapper's waist. To be in the backfield, he has to be behind the nearest waist. Let's say that a tight end is down, with his head just forward of the snapper's waist, and a wide out is standing just even with his waist. In this case, he could be a yard and a half off the line, not on the line, yet not in the backfield, either. The tight end is not eligible. This type of thing happens all game long.

The solution to this is not, as coaches always tell players, to "ask the official if you are okay." The official does not know the play. He does not know where you are supposed to be lined up. So he does not know whether you are "okay" or not. Furthermore, he is not your coach. The solution is to line up properly.

7:2 THE SNAP

Legal Snap

Every down has to start with a legal snap.

If the snap is illegal, the ball remains dead because the down never started.

A snap has to immediately leave the snapper's hands, and then touch a back or the ground, before any offensive lineman can touch it. So a center can lay the ball on the ground and a guard can come by, pick it up, and run with it. (But see the last item in this section.) But a center cannot just lift the ball, have quarterback touch it, and then run with it himself. He would have to hand the ball to the quarterback, and then run behind the quarterback to take a legal handoff.

7:2 HOW PLAYERS ARE NUMBERED

Jersey Numbers

- Seven or more offensive players have to be on the line at the snap.
- Five of them have to have numbers between 50 and 79 on their jerseys. They won't be eligible to catch a pass.
- Defenders can be any number anywhere on their side of the ball.
- Two teammates with the same number cannot play during the same down.
- The exception to the numbering rule comes on a kick. Then, any number jersey can get on the line. But they won't be eligible for a pass for this down.
-

7:2 WHAT HAPPENS AT THE SNAP

A Full Stop

After they come out of their huddle, all eleven offensive players have to come to a complete motionless stop for one second before the snap.

After a shift, all eleven offensive players again have to come to a full motionless stop for a second.

Motionless means no motion. Hands, head, feet, body; everything has to hold still with no fidgeting. Hot receivers frequently break this rule. They will rock in their stance. This is not only illegal, but it tips off the defense as to who the intended receiver. Hold still.

Man in Motion

Only one offensive player can be in motion at the snap. If two are in motion, they had better both get still along with everyone else, and then one can go in motion again.

A player in motion cannot be going toward the line of scrimmage at the snap.

If the player in motion started from the line, he has to be at least five yards back at the snap. That's fifteen feet, ends; so if you have an end around play called, you had better plan to hand it off way in the backfield. Now, of course, if the end shifts into the backfield, and everyone gets still for a second, then he is a back, and now he can go in motion and take the handoff less than five yards back.

Trick Snap

If you plan to lay the ball on the ground for a lineman to pick up and run with it, then you have to tell the referee what you are about to do right before that trick play.

7:3 HANDOFFS

Legal Handoffs

Any player can hand the ball off at any time.

Handoffs must always hand the ball backwards, except when these two conditions are met:

1. The ball has not changed possession in this down
2. Both the player handing the ball and the player being handed the ball are in the backfield.

If both these conditions are met, then:

1. If the ball is handed to a lineman, he has to first come back a yard off the line, then he has to face his goal line, feet and all.
2. Or, the ball can either be handed to a back, or else to a lineman who was on the end of the line. But that end cannot have been the snapper, nor can he have been the man next to the snapper.

After a change of possession, nobody can hand the ball forward.

7:4 FUMBLES

Who Can Fumble

Anyone who has the ball during a down can make a backward pass or fumble the ball.

Backward Pass Versus Fumble

In many ways, a backward pass and a fumble are the same thing.
The ball stays live and anyone can grab it and run.

Fumble Out-of-Bounds

If a fumble or backward pass goes out-of-bounds between the goal lines, the ball becomes dead and it belongs to the team which fumbled or passed it, unless it was a fourth down and they didn't make the first.

Likewise, if the ball becomes dead and nobody pounces on it, or if both teams pounce on it and possess it simultaneously, then it goes to the team that fumbled it.

Fumble Out of the End Zone

If a fumble or backward pass goes out-of-bounds behind the goal line, the ball goes to the team that fumbled it.
The result is as follows:

- If the offense fumbles the ball out of bounds in their own end zone, then it's a safety.
- If the defense gets the ball in their end zone, but then fumbles out-of-bounds before they get out of their end zone, then it's a touchback.

7:5 FORWARD PASSES

Legal Pass

A legal pass must be thrown:

- During a scrimmage down
- Before change of possession
- With both feet of the passer in or behind the neutral zone.

Note that the rule does not say anything about where the ball is when it is released.
Just the passer's feet have to be in or behind the neutral zone.
Note that he can be in the neutral zone.

More than one forward pass cannot be thrown during a single down any more. This rule was changed in 2005.

Intentional Grounding

It is illegal to throw a pass into an area that is not occupied by an eligible receiver.

Note that the rule does not mention who was *supposed* to have been there. There is no requirement for the referee to have ESP to know what play was called and who didn't run to the right place. It simply says don't throw it where the receiver isn't.

Also note that the rule doesn't say the receiver has to be in a position to catch the ball, or that he has to try to catch the ball. If a back goes downfield, and the quarterback bonks him on the back of the head with the ball, then he is an eligible receiver in the area and there is no intentional grounding.

On the other hand, any ball intentionally thrown to kill the clock or to save yardage is intentional grounding. So if the back goes downfield to block, and the quarterback needs to bail out of a heavy rush so he bonks him on the back of the head with it, then that could be construed as intentional grounding.

There is one way that intentional grounding is legal:

If the quarterback takes the snap and spikes the ball immediately, that is legal.

Illegal Passes

It is also illegal to throw a pass:

1. After change of possession
2. Once you are past the neutral zone.

Enforcement

The penalty for an illegal pass is marched off from the spot where it was thrown. If the defense declines the penalty, they can choose to have the down counted from the spot of the pass or else from the end of the play. So let's say it's third and fifteen at the Mustang 40. The Mustang quarterback runs to the 45 and then throws a pass, which is intercepted by the Wildcats at their 30, where the Wildcat is immediately tackled. The wildcats can now choose to take the penalty, which would march the Mustangs back five yards from their 45, where the pass was thrown, and lose them a down, so that it would be fourth and fifteen at their 40. Or they can turn the penalty down and have fourth and ten at the 45. Or they can turn it down and take the ball.

Complete Pass

Whether it is legal or not, a pass is complete and the man who catches it can run with it. And that is true whether a defender or a receiver caught the ball.

Simultaneous Catch

If both offense and defense come down with the ball at the same time, the ball is dead and belongs to the offense.

- If an eligible receiver catches the ball, it remains live, and the offense has it.
- If an ineligible offensive man catches the ball, it remains live, and the offense has it.
- If any defender catches the ball, it remains live, and the defense has it.
- If both offense and defense catch the ball at the same time, it is dead, and the offense has it.

Incomplete Pass

If the pass touches the ground before it is caught, it is incomplete. Here is how we call it: If any official, anywhere on the field, sees the ball touch the ground, then it is incomplete. So two men standing three feet from the diving receiver may both think it was complete, because their view may have been partially obstructed, but another official twenty yards off may have seen it bounce, and he comes running in and waves it off. Don't get upset; that is the way we do it, because it makes sense.

If the pass goes out-of-bounds, it is incomplete. It goes out-of-bounds when it touches anything out-of-bounds. So a pass that touches the pylon, for instance, is out, dead, and incomplete, regardless who catches it.

If a player from either side catches the ball in the air and comes down so that the first thing he touches is out-of-bounds, then it is incomplete. So if a player leaps up and catches the ball, and on the way down contacts the pylon, then, even if he gets both feet inside, it is incomplete. Now, if he contacts a player who is out-of-bounds or an official who is out-of-bounds, then he can still alight inbounds. They don't count. Likewise, if he is up in the air and would have come down inbounds, but a defender pushes him out, then he is in.

- A pass that hits the ground is incomplete.
- A pass that touches anything out of bounds is incomplete.
- A pass caught in the air by a player who comes down out of bounds is incomplete.

Down Counts

Whether or not a pass is complete or not, the down counts.

Eligible Receivers

All defenders may legally catch the pass. Only certain offensive players may legally catch the pass.

- They have to be on the ends of the line or else in the backfield.
- They have to be numbered 1-49 or 80-99.
- The maximum number of eligible receivers is six.
 - Once a player is eligible at the snap, he will be eligible until the end of the down.
 - Once a defender touches the ball, everyone is eligible.
 - So if a defender leaps up and bats the pass, then an offensive lineman can catch it.

Rule Eight

How to Score

In football, you have an offense and a defense. The offense strives to score while the defense strives to stop them. And yet, the most important points are frequently scored by the defense. And a third of the points are scored by neither offense nor defense.

8:1 Points

How to Score

A touchdown scores six points. To score a touchdown, a team has to take any part of the ball into the opponent's end zone.

A field goal scores three points. To score a field goal, a team has to kick the ball above the crossbar and between the uprights of the goal posts in the back of opponent's end zone.

A safety scores two points. To score a safety, a team has to tackle an opponent in his own end zone. The best part of a safety is that the team scored on then has to kick the ball to the scoring team from their own 20.

An "extra point" can score either one or two.

- If the scoring team kicks the ball through the uprights, it's one point.
- If the scoring team carries or passes the ball into the end zone, they score two points.
- If the defending team scores a safety on a try, then it's one point. That's one you will never see. Figure: Either the one-point kick would have to be blocked and the ball would have to bounce clear back through the opposite end zone, or else the quarterback would have to get chased back, back, back, back ninety seven and a half yards plus, and then tackled in his own end zone.

Now, here's a curious way to score:

- If a game is forfeited to a team that is behind or tied, then the final score is one to nothing, their favor.
- But if the team is ahead, then the score stands.
-

8:2 TOUCHDOWNS

The Goal Line

Imagine an invisible vertical barrier rising all along the near edge of the goal line stripe, and note this: This barrier also stretches out past the sidelines. This invisible barrier is as thin as the skin of a soap bubble, and it breaks just as easily. All you have to do is just touch this barrier with the ball and POP! You have a TD.

A Running TD

If a player runs the ball through the goal line, that's a touchdown. Now, remember how the goal line stretches out past the sideline. So if a runner has his feet inside the field and reaches the ball through the goal line outside the sideline, it is a TD.

A Passing TD

If a player catches the ball in the end zone, he is obviously past the goal line, so he scores a TD.

A Loose Ball TD

If a player recovers a loose ball in his opponent's end zone, that is a TD. An example would be if a runner fumbled in his end zone and a defender jumped on it.

A TD you will never see

Can you imagine if the offense dropped a pitch-out, and then nobody jumped on it? Or what if they fumbled back there, and everyone just let the ball bounce around until it just died there? After it lies there awhile, the officials would give up and toot the whistle. It would then be a touchdown for the team whose end zone this wasn't.

8:3 EXTRA POINTS

Try

After scoring a touchdown, a team gets to try for an extra point or two from the 3-yard line. This play is technically called a "try", though most everyone refers to it as an "extra point". During this play, the clock remains stopped. During this one untimed down, the offense can either kick the ball through the uprights for one point, or else carry it into the end zone for two points. If they fail, or if the defense gets the ball, then the ball is immediately dead. So the defense cannot run with the ball on an extra point try.

If the offense commits a foul that entails a loss of down penalty, then the extra point is over. They don't get to try again.

If the defense commits a foul during an extra point kick which scores one point, then the offense can either take the penalty and try again, or decline the penalty and take the score.

If the defense commits a foul during a successful two-point try, then the penalty is automatically declined, and the two points scores.

If the offense commits a foul during a successful try, then the defense can take the penalty, march them back, and make them try again.

If the offense commits a foul during an unsuccessful extra point try, then the penalty is declined and the try fails.

If the defense fouls on an unsuccessful extra point try, then the offense gets to march off the penalty and try again.

If both teams commit a foul, then the extra point try is replayed.

Any time an extra point try is replayed, the offense can take the ball anywhere between the hash marks.

After an extra point try, believe it or not, the team that was scored on has the right to choose who will kick off the ball. So after the other team scored on them, they could kick the ball off to them again.

8:4 Field Goals

Field Goal

If a team kicks the ball between the uprights and above the crossbar of the opponent's goal posts, they score a field goal. They may use a place kick or a drop kick, though you never see the drop kick any more.

Kickoff After Field Goal

The opponent of the team which kicked the field goal actually has a choice of which team shall kick off after the field goal. Of course, they always want the ball.

Foul During Field Goal

If the field goal scores and there was a foul by the defense on the play, the kicking team can give up the score and take the penalty, or they can take the score and decline the penalty.

8:5 Force

What Put the Ball in the End Zone

Say the ball goes in the end zone. It could be a touchback, touchdown, or safety. It all depends on how it got there. So then you ask: What put the ball in the end zone? Force put it there. A player applies force to the ball when he carries, passes, hikes, fumbles or kicks the ball. Who put the ball in the end zone? The last player to apply a force to it.

Note that muffing is not included in that list. Neither is batting. If a kickoff, for instance, were muffed by a receiver on the three, then bounced into the end zone, where one of the kickers jumped on it, the force which put it there is still the kick. So that is a touchback. Now, what if that same kick was fumbled into the end zone? Well, fumbling is in the list, so that is a touchdown. The thing to remember is that if a player muffs or bats a ball in flight, such as a pass or a kick, but even including a fumble, then that does not apply a new force.

But wait: Muffing or batting can apply a new force. See the section on *Touchback*, below.

8:5 SAFETY

The Dreadful Safety

No play has so decisive an effect on a game as a safety. One minute, a team is on offense; the next instant, they are scored on; and to top it all off, they have to kick the ball from their own twenty, guaranteeing that the other team will get the ball in excellent field position and in a mood to make the most of it.

Ball Carried into End Zone

If a player carries the ball into his own end zone and it becomes dead there, then the opponents score a safety. How does it become dead there? There are three ways a safety can happen:

1. He could be tackled.
2. He could run out-of-bounds.
3. He could fumble the ball out-of-bounds.

Exception

If a defender intercepts a pass or catches a kick, and he is inside his own five, and his momentum carries him into the end zone, where the ball goes dead, then his team keeps the ball and it is spotted where he caught it. Note the four elements of this:

1. He intercepts or catches
2. He is inside the five
3. His momentum carries him in
4. The ball goes dead there

Ball Forced into End Zone

If the offense forces the ball into their own end zone and it goes dead there, then the opponents score a safety. An example would be where the quarterback throws a backward pass that goes through the back's hands into the end zone and out of bounds. Of course, if it were a forward pass, then it's just incomplete, and no safety.

Foul in the End Zone

If the offense commits a spot foul in the end zone, guess what? Safety!

For example, if a back held a rushing defender in the end zone, well, a hold is penalized from the spot of the foul, the spot is already inside the end zone, so there you are.

8:5 TOUCHBACK

Touchback on a Kick

High school football differs from the NFL here. You cannot run a kick out of the end zone.

If a kickoff goes in the end zone, the ball is dead, and it's a touchback.

This is true of a punt, a kickoff, and even of an unsuccessful field goal.

Touchback on a Bat

A batted ball can be a touchback. Here's how: If the offense kicked the ball, then their kick touched the ground, then the defense batted or muffed the kick, which forced it into the kicker's end zone, where the kicker grabbed the ball, then it's a touchback. Note that for the muff or bat to apply a new force, the ball has to have touched the ground. Compare the discussion of "*Force*", above.

Is this complicated enough for you yet?

Touchback on an Interception

If the defense were to intercept in their own end zone, and the ball went dead there, it would be a touchback, and they would get the ball on the 20.

Rule Nine

How Players Must Behave

Football is a game on the verge of a melee. It is a game of controlled violence.

Now, it is not difficult to administer violence; nor is it difficult to administer control; what is difficult is to administer controlled violence. It is like trying to douse an electrical fire with gasoline. This is why so much emphasis is placed on player conduct in the football rules. The question is always: How far can you go?

9:1 HELPING THE RUNNER

History

In the early days of football, offensive players frequently locked together into a flying wedge, like the phalanx of the ancient Greeks, then trampled forward as a single united mass. Meanwhile, the defense attempted to bust this wedge apart, hurtling against it, attacking its legs, or leaping on top. Once the wedge broke apart, offensive players would continue to either shove or pull the runner forward, while the defense continued to pile on. Sometimes, the offense even handed the ball back to a smaller guy, and then tossed this runner over the pile.

Problem was, players got trampled to death underfoot.

So many collegians died that, at one point, Teddy Roosevelt contemplated banning the sport.

So to save lives and the game, two drastic changes were made. First, forward passes were introduced. The intent was to open up formations. Everyone wouldn't pack the middle if one lone receiver downfield might scoot for a score. So the offense would open their formation to get receivers out, and the defense would open up to cover them. Secondly, new rules were enacted to prohibit all those tactics that make a flying wedge lock together. So assisting the runner and interlocked blocking were prohibited. You can't throw, tow, or push the runner. You can't grasp a teammate. You can do none of those things.

Helping the Runner

A player on offense may not shove the runner forward, nor pull him, nor even lift him up.

PENALTY: five yards.

9:2 ILLEGAL USE OF HANDS

Runner Excepted

Illegal use of hands does not apply to the runner. The runner may stiff-arm a tackler, for instance, whereas if his blocker were to attempt that, he would surely get flagged. Likewise, the tackler may not lead with his head when tackling, but the runner may. So the same behavior that characterizes a punishing runner would get anyone else flagged for ten or fifteen yards.

Offense

Any blocking technique that is not expressly permitted by the rules is apt to be illegal use of hands.

To see what is permitted, you should look at Rule Two, which defines everything including blocking.

Interlocked Blocking

A blocker is not allowed to link up with a teammate in such a way that they are blocking together. So he cannot grasp his teammate, nor can he hook, encircle, or in any other way lock up with his teammate. Curiously, this could even be by planting his foot inside his teammate's foot to lock their knees together. So the blocker could be called for illegal use of hands (interlocked blocking) when he wasn't using his hands at all. But we never see this.

When I was young, we played a game called Red Rider, where we stood in two teams, holding hands, and challenged someone from the opposition to try to break through our barrier. This would not be allowed in football. It is interlocked blocking.

To find out why this restriction is in the rules, read "*History*" in section 9:1 "*Helping the Runner*" above.

Catching a Tow

Likewise, the runner may not grab his teammate in order to get towed along through the pile. Again, read "*History*" in section 9:1 "*Helping the Runner*" above to find out why.

Defense

Any defensive technique that is not expressly permitted by rules is apt to be illegal use of hands. Again, to see what is permitted, you should look at Rule Two, which defines everything including blocking. Rule Two is always the most important rule to know.

The Whip

A defender cannot grab his teammate and yank him forward through the line. Again, read "*History*" in section 9:1 "*Helping the Runner*" above, to find out why.

When I was a lad, we used to play a game called "crack the whip", in which we joined hands and ran in circles to give the guy on the end of the line a critical momentum which would crack the whip and fling him off the line. This would be illegal in football.

Tackling Non-Runners

The defender cannot tackle someone who is not running the ball. Of course, common sense tempers this rule to also include someone who is pretending to run the ball.

Bumping Receivers

The defense cannot bump an eligible receiver unless he is still apt to be a blocker. PENALTY: 10 yards.

9:2 HOLDING

What is a Hold

A blocker cannot hold a defender with his hands, with his arms, even with his legs. Even if he does not grasp the defender, he cannot even wrap or hook around him in any way.

Why Holding Occurs

Ever since the open handed blocking technique was legalized, years ago, not a single football play has transpired without a hold. It's just human nature. If your job is to restrain someone slippery, active and athletic, and you have your open hands right on him, what else exactly are your hands going to do?

Probably 90% of these holds we officials could never see if we wanted to. They happen momentarily in a narrow space between two men who are themselves amidst a churning throng. Players, this is why, if you come to us and complain that you are being held, we will usually agree with you, yes, you probably are being held. But we can't call it unless we see it.

Nine out of the last ten percent of holds we will not call. They happen away from the point of attack and have no affect on the game. Or they consist of a hand hooked in an armpit. No big deal.

That leaves just a rare play now and then where a guy either bear hugs the opponent or stretches his shirt out a foot or two. These holds we call. PENALTY: 10 yards.

9:3 ILLEGAL BLOCKS

The Free-Blocking Zone

If you were to draw an imaginary rectangle eight yards wide and six yards deep with the ball in the center, that would enclose the free blocking zone. Another way to describe it is that it stretches three yards back from the line of scrimmage into both backfields and four yards from the ball out toward the sidelines either way.

The thing about it is that normal blocking rules are suspended inside this imaginary rectangle. Clipping and even blocking below the waist are inexplicably legal within this zone. This only applies for certain players, under certain circumstances, and the rules make this rectangle disappear as soon as the ball leaves it.

For a full understanding the zone, you would be well advised to read about it in Rule Two, definitions, before continuing with this section that discusses illegal blocks.

Kick Catching Interference

Neither side can block a guy who is trying to catch a kick.

Pass Interference

Neither side can block a guy who is trying to catch a pass.

Personal Foul

Neither side can throw a block when that block is a personal foul.

Below the Waist

Neither side can block below the waist.

- There are exceptions in the free blocking zone.
- The runner may be blocked below the waist.
- Someone pretending to be a runner may be blocked below the waist.

Block after Fair Catch Signal

After he gives a fair catch signal, a receiver may not block.

Kickers and Holders

A kickers or a kick holder may not be blocked until he has gone 5 yards or the kick has touched the ground or the kick has touched another player.

Clipping

No clipping, except:

- In the free blocking zone under certain circumstances
- To ward off a blocker
- To get at a runner
- To get at a loose ball
- To tackle a runner
- To tackle someone pretending to be a runner.

Chop Blocking

Neither side can chop block. There are no free-blocking zone exceptions to this.

Tripping

You can only trip the runner.

PENALTY: fifteen yards.

9:8 UNSPORTSMANLIKE BY COACHES

Who it Covers

Coaches, substitutes, trainers, or anyone else from the water girl on up, are all prohibited from unsportsmanlike conduct, from before the game begins until after it ends.

What It Is

Unsportsmanlike conduct is not limited.

It can be any of the following, or anything else that the officials deem to be unsportsmanlike:

- Profanity
- Insults
- Vulgar language
- Vulgar gestures
- **Attempting to influence an official's decision**
- Disrespect to an official
- Even **objecting to an official's decision**
- Illegal communication equipment
- Unauthorized conferences
- A team not ready to start either half
- Failure to wear required equipment
- Going on the field, other than as a substitute
- Smoking or chewing tobacco
- Wandering beyond the team box
- Leaving the team box during a fight

Note the two examples printed in bold above.

By that strict definition, how many coaches routinely commit unsportsmanlike conduct every game repeatedly?

PENALTY: 15 yards.

Attendants

Three attendants, such as water girls, or the like, may come out on the field during a charged time out, or during the one minute before the kickoff following an extra point or field goal or safety, or when the officials call a time out because of heat. But none of these attendants can be coaches. Coaches cannot grab a rack of water bottles as an excuse to insinuate themselves into a huddle.

If there is an injury, anyone the referee thinks is necessary can come on the field to take care of the injured player.

Otherwise, no one who is not a player or a substitute can come on the field.

PENALTY: 5 yards, 15 if repeated.

Team Box

The team box is a marked area two yards outside the sidelines between the 25-yard lines.

During the entire contest, all the team members who are not actually playing or going in as substitutes are required to stay in that box. Only three (3) coaches are allowed between the box and sidelines.

This rule is largely infringed, often treated with contempt, and little understood by teams, who excitedly crowd up to the sidelines to see a play, and who have sixteen coaches between the box and sidelines. Listen up: This is an important safety rule. If a sweep comes to your side and players are crowded up to the stripe, then many are apt to find diving players going full tilt at their knees. Linesmen, chain crew, coaches, and all need to make sure there is room behind them so that they can leap out of the way.

Injured teammates on crutches, etc., should never, under any circumstances, get close to the sidelines. This is common sense.

PENALTY: 1st offense: warning.

2nd offense: 5 yards

3rd offense: 15 yards thereafter: 15 yards and ejection.

9:9 STUFF THAT'S JUST NOT FAIR

Unwritten Rules

The rulebook is too long and complex as it is. But it still cannot imagine every last possibility. Unfair stuff can happen that is not in the rules. If so, the referee can take care of it by marching off what yardage he thinks is right or even by handing a team some points. This principle prevents some wise guy from getting overly imaginative and thinking he can get away with it.

Hindering

Even if it's not written in the rules, even if it's not a player, and even if it's someone who is normally not subject to the rules, nobody gets to hinder the play with impunity. So, for example, if a spectator in the stands throws snowballs at the runner, the referee can march off yards or even put points on the board to remedy the situation.

Repeated Fouls

What if a team decides they are going to take it out on the other side? They commit foul after foul. They figure that the worst thing that can happen is they keep losing half the distance to the goal, right? Wrong. The referee can just call the game off right then and there and hand the victory to the other guys. That's the penalty for repeatedly committing fouls that halve the distance.

Travesty

No team is going to be allowed to do anything that makes a travesty of the game. What this act may be is entirely up to the opinion of the referee.

So if you think you can all pull your pants down and moon the opponent, for instance, just because it is not written in the rules, forget it.

Rule Ten

How Fouls Are Enforced

There is a very good reason why the referee is generally a white haired old feller who has been through the wars. He is put in place, not because he is a dodderer who cannot run, but because he has seen it all. His decisions are complicated by important considerations of who had the ball, what the ball was doing, where the ball started, where the ball wound up, which thing happened first, and innumerable other legalistic goodies, in addition to the mere matter of what actually is the penalty. Only when all these complexities are resolved is he ready to administer the penalty.

When you see the officials in conference, they are surely discussing all these complexities in order to sort it out right.

Do not get impatient. This conference is not a bad thing. It is a most excellent thing. This conference is exactly why officiating in football is superior to that of every other sport.

10:1 WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THERE IS A FOUL

Live Ball

When the flag flies for something that happened during a down, that is a live ball foul. A penalty for a live ball foul does not kill the down. Instead, enforcement waits until the play is over. The referee kills the clock, lets the captains know what their choices are, signals the foul, marks off the penalty, and starts up the game again.

Dead Ball

When a flag flies for something that happened between downs, that's a dead ball foul. For a dead ball foul, the clock stops right away and the snap is prevented. The captains are consulted, the foul is signaled, and the penalty is marched off before the game gets back on track.

Live and Then Dead

When there is a live ball foul followed by a dead ball foul, for instance, when a face mask on the tackle provokes the runner to jump up off the ground and punch the tackler, then the live ball penalty is taken care of first, and the dead ball penalty is take care of afterwards.

Multiple Dead Ball

When there are several dead ball penalties they are all administered.

Who Decides

In theory, the decision of which penalty option to accept belongs to the captain of the team. In practice, however, all the brainwork has been successively sucked off the field and put in coaches' hands. For years, now, we have not seen a team on which, for instance, the quarterback calls the plays. This used to be customary when the quarterback was taught to be a leader. Now, even he is a mere follower. So it is also with decisions affecting penalties; the captain, if consulted, will always look to the coach on the sideline for an answer what to do, rather than accept the responsibility himself. This despite the fact that the options are still explained to the captains and not to the coaches. So the captain will have full knowledge of the options even if the coach has none.

In modern football, the players are mute automatons while the coach fiddles at the controls. The young players are not taught by this to use their heads; they are taught not to use them. Ironic, isn't it ironic that in such a popular school activity a young person is systematically taught not to think. It's a shame. Any coach sincerely interested in educating his players to be responsible adults capable of leadership, judgment, and decision ought to rethink this.

Time Out After Penalty

If one team or another wants to call a time out at this point, the time out has to wait for the penalty to get sorted out first, before it can be granted. So just hold on. The referee will get to it as soon as he is done.

Half the Distance

A yardage penalty cannot move the ball more than halfway from the spot where the penalty is going to get marched off from toward the goal line.

This goes for both offense and defense. So in this case, the ball is placed halfway to the goal.

Loss of Down

If the foul is for an illegal forward pass, offensive pass interference, or illegal touching, the down on which the foul occurred does not get replayed.

Thus, we say that part of the penalty is loss of down.

Note that these are all fouls by the offense.

Automatic First Down

If the foul for either roughing the kicker, roughing the passer, roughing the snapper, or defensive pass interference, then the offense gets a first down, regardless where the ball winds up after the yardage is marched off.

Thus we say that part of the penalty is automatic first down.

Note that these are all fouls by the defense.

10:2 WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THERE IS MORE THAN ONE FOUL

Double Fouls

If both teams get flagged on the same play, then this is called a double foul.

The penalties offset and the down is played over.

One of three conditions also has to be met:

1. The same team had the ball throughout the down. For instance, the offense held and the defense grabbed a facemask, but the ball never changed hands.
2. The ball changed hands, but both fouls happened beforehand. For instance, the offense held, the defense grabbed a facemask, and then the runner fumbled, recovered by the defense.
3. The ball changed hands, but the team that winds up with it decides to take the penalty rather than the ball. This never happens, because anyone would rather have the ball than the penalty.

Decline and Keep the Ball

Say that the offense held, the runner fumbled, the defense grabbed it up, and then the defense held.

They can keep the ball if they decline the penalty against the offense. The penalty against them will be marched off.

Multiple Fouls

When one team gets flagged for two or more fouls during the same down, then that is called a multiple foul.

They can only get penalized for one of these fouls. So you generally march off the worst one and ignore the others.

Dead Ball

If the flag flies for something that happened between downs, that is a dead ball foul.

Dead ball fouls do not cancel each other off like double fouls do.

They are marched off one after another, in the order in which they happened, first one direction and then the other direction.

Likewise, several dead ball fouls by the same team do not get combined into a multiple foul, so you don't march off one and ignore the others. They are marched off one after another, in the order in which they happened, in the same direction.

A dead ball foul does not get combined with a live ball foul, either. So the live ball foul would be marched off first, and then the dead ball foul would get marched off. Or if there are two dead ball fouls, the live one gets marched off and then the dead ones get marched off in order.

So the dead ball fouls always stands on its own.

10:3 HOW DIFFERENT TYPES OF PLAY AFFECT ENFORCEMENT

Loose Ball Play

The ball is loose when nobody has it in their hands.

One team or the other still possesses it.

No single player has it. Examples are:

- A kick
- A pass
- A backward pass by the offense on their side of the ball
- A snap
- A fumble by the offense on their side of the ball

Anything that happens during the run before that pass, fumble, kick, etc., along with the loose ball stuff, is called a loose ball play.

Running Play

Everything else is a running play.

End of the Run

A run ends where:

- The ball goes dead while the runner has it
- The runner loses the ball
- The spot of a catch, when momentum carries the player, who caught the ball, into his own end zone.
-

10:4 WHERE THE BALL GETS SPOTTED

The Basic Spot

Think about where the ball becomes dead at the end of the play.

If the runner goes out-of-bounds, for example, it's where the ball went out with him.

If he went down, it's where the ball was when he went down. This place is ordinarily the basic spot.

Succeeding Spot

Where will the ball be for the next down? That's the succeeding spot.

This is usually the same as that spot at the end of the play.

Previous Spot

Where was the ball before the last down? That's the previous spot.

A Foul During a Down

When there is a foul during a down, then the penalty will be marched off from a spot which will be determined by what happened during the down. That will be the basic spot.

A Foul at the Snap

If that foul happened at the same moment the snap happened, then the penalty is marched off from the previous spot. An example is illegal procedure.

A Foul During a Loose Ball

The penalty gets marched off from the previous spot if the foul happened while the ball was loose. That will be the basic spot.

A Foul During a Run

The basic spot is the end of the run if the foul happened during a run.

Unsportsmanlike

The penalty for unsportsmanlike gets marched off from the succeeding spot. That's the basic spot.

Dead Ball Foul

If a foul is committed while the ball is dead, then the penalty is naturally marched off from the succeeding spot.

Non-Player Foul

If a coach or a sub on the sideline commits a foul, then that penalty is marched off from the succeeding spot.

Foul During Touchback

If the play ended in a touchback, then that penalty is marched off from the succeeding spot.

10:5 EXCEPTIONAL ENFORCEMENT CIRCUMSTANCES

Foul on an Extra Point

If the defense fouls during a good extra point kick, the offense can choose to take the point and have the penalty tacked onto the kickoff, or else to take the penalty now and try again. This would come into play if the offense preferred to go for two, now that they had a shorter distance to go.

Defensive Foul During Safety

If the defense fouls during a play that results in a safety, then the penalty gets marched off from the goal line. So if the blitzing linebacker sacks the quarterback in the end zone by grabbing his facemask, then the ball will be spotted on the fifteen.

Score Despite Foul

If the offense scores during an extra point try, but the defense fouls, then the penalty is automatically declined, and the score counts.

No Score on Foul

On the other hand, if the offense were to foul during a scoring play of any sort, when the defense accepts the penalty, the score does not count.

Offensive Fouls in the End Zone

If the offense commits a foul in their own end zone, and it is the kind of foul which gets marched off from where it happens, then the defense scores a safety. So if the Mustangs' fullback held a defender on the one-foot line, it would be half the distance, and the ball would wind up six inches from the goal. But if he held on the minus one foot line, then it's two points for the defense, and the Mustangs have to kick the ball away from their own twenty.

Roughing the Passer

The penalty for roughing the passer is marched off from where the ball wound up at the end of the play.

Ejections

An ejected player has to leave the game.
The ejected player will also be ineligible for the next game.

10:6 THE "ALL BUT ONE" PRINCIPLE

The Idea

The basic idea is that a team should not gain an advantage from an illegal act. That seems fair enough. And that principle explains the last sentence in the whole rulebook. This last sentence is what is called the "All But One" principle.

The Basic Spot

Think about where the ball becomes dead at the end of the play. If the runner goes out of bounds, for example, it's where the ball went out with him. If he went down, it's where the ball was when he went down. This place is called the basic spot.

The Principle

The all-but-one principle says that a foul that happens during a play gets marched off from the basic spot unless it was a foul by the offense behind this basic spot. That makes sense. The play ends where it ends, and then you march off the penalty; but if the offense got that far by illegal play, then you go back to the foul and start marking from there.

An Example

What if the fullback held a defensive end, and that is why the halfback was able to run for forty yards. To be fair, you have to bring that ball back and march off the foul from where the man was held in the backfield, so that the offense can't benefit from the foul.