

RULE 2

Definitions

SECTION 1. Approved Rulings and Official's Signals

- ARTICLE 1. a. An Approved Ruling (A.R.) is an official decision on a given statement of facts. It serves to illustrate the spirit and application of the rules.
- b. An official's signal [S] refers to the Official Football Signals 1 through 47.

SECTION 2. The Ball: Live, Dead, Loose, Ready For Play

Live Ball

ARTICLE 1. A live ball is a ball in play. A pass, kick or fumble that has not yet touched the ground is a live ball in flight.

Dead Ball

ARTICLE 2. A dead ball is a ball not in play.

Loose Ball

- ARTICLE 3. a. A loose ball is a live ball not in player possession during:
1. A running play.
 2. A scrimmage or free kick before possession is gained or regained or the ball is dead by rule.
 3. The interval after a legal forward pass is touched and before it becomes complete, incomplete or intercepted. This interval is during a forward pass play, and any player eligible to touch the ball may bat it in any direction.
- b. All players are eligible to touch, catch or recover a fumble (**Exceptions:** Rules 7-2-2-a Exception 2 and 8-3-2-d-5) or a backward pass.
- c. Eligibility to touch a kick is governed by kick rules (Rule 6).
- d. Eligibility to touch a forward pass is governed by pass rules (Rule 7).

When Ball is Ready for Play

- ARTICLE 4. A dead ball is ready for play when:
- a. With the 40-second play clock running, an official places the ball at a hash mark or between the inbounds marks and is in position to officiate.
 - b. With the play clock set at 25 seconds, or at 40 seconds after an injury to or loss of helmet by a defensive team player, the referee sounds their whistle and either signals to start the game clock [S2] or signals that the ball is ready for play [S1]. (**A.R. 4-1-4:I and II**)

SECTION 3. Blocking

Blocking

- ARTICLE 1. a. Blocking is obstructing an opponent by intentionally contacting the opponent with any part of the blocker's body.
- b. Pushing is blocking an opponent with open hands.
- c. Continuous contact is a block where contact with an opponent is maintained for more than one second.

Below Waist

- ARTICLE 2. a. A block below the waist is a block in which the force of the initial contact is below the waist of an opponent who has one or both feet on the ground. When in question, the contact is below the waist (Rule 9-1-6).
- b. A blocker who makes contact above the waist and then slides below the waist has not blocked below the waist. If the blocker first contacts the opposing player's hands at the waist or above, it is a legal "above the waist" block (Rule 9-1-6).

Chop Block

ARTICLE 3. A chop block is a high-low or low-high combination block by any two players against an opponent (not the ball carrier) anywhere on the field, with or without a delay between blocks; the "low" component is at the opponent's thigh or below. **(A.R. 9-1-10:I-IV)** It is not a foul if the blockers' opponent initiates the contact. **(A.R. 9-1-10:V)**

Block in the Back

- ARTICLE 4. a. A block in the back is contact against an opponent occurring when the force of the initial contact is from behind and above the waist. When in question, the contact is at or below the waist (see Clipping, Rule 2-5) (Rule 9-3-5). **(A.R. 9-3-3:I,V-VII,IX) (A.R. 10-2-2:XII,XVII)**
- b. The position of the blocker's head or feet does not necessarily indicate the point of initial contact.

Frame of the body

ARTICLE 5. The frame of a player's body is at the shoulders or below other than the back (Rule 9-3-3-a-1-b Exception).

Free-blocking zone

- ARTICLE 6. a. The free-blocking zone is a rectangle centred on the snapper and extending five yards laterally and three yards longitudinally in each direction. (See Appendix D.)
- b. The free-blocking zone disintegrates when the ball leaves the zone.

Blind-side block

ARTICLE 7. A blind-side block is an open field block against an opponent that is initiated from outside the opponent's field of vision, or otherwise in such a manner that the opponent cannot reasonably defend themselves against the block.

SECTION 4. Catch, Recovery, Possession

Possession

ARTICLE 1. Possession refers to custody of (a) a live ball as described later in this article or (b) a dead ball to be snapped or free-kicked. It may refer either to player possession or team possession.

a. *Player possession*

The ball is in player possession when a player has the ball firmly in their grasp by holding or controlling it with hand(s) or arm(s) while contacting the ground inbounds.

b. *Team possession*

The ball is in team possession:

1. When one of its players has player possession, including when they are attempting a punt, drop kick or place kick; or
2. While a forward pass thrown by a player of that team is in flight; or

3. During a loose ball if a player of that team last had player possession; or
 4. When the team is next to snap or free kick the ball.
- c. A team is in legal possession if it has team possession when its players are eligible to catch or recover the ball.

Belongs To

ARTICLE 2. "Belongs to", as contrasted with "in possession", denotes custody of a dead ball. Such custody may be temporary, because the ball must next be put in play in accordance with rules governing the existing situation.

Catch, Interception, Recovery

ARTICLE 3. a. To catch a ball means that a player:

1. Secures firm control with the hand(s) or arm(s) of a live ball in flight before the ball touches the ground, and
 2. Touches the ground in bounds with any part of their body, and then
 3. Maintains control of the ball long enough to enable them to perform an act common to the game, i.e., long enough to pitch or hand the ball, advance it, avoid or ward off an opponent, etc., and
 4. Satisfies paragraphs b, c and d below.
- b. If a player goes to the ground in the act of catching a pass (with or without contact by an opponent), they must maintain complete and continuous control of the ball throughout the process of contacting the ground, whether in the field of play or in the end zone. This is also required for a player attempting to make a catch at the sideline and going to the ground out of bounds. If they lose control of the ball which then touches the ground before they regain control, it is not a catch. If they regain control inbounds prior to the ball touching the ground, it is a catch (**A.R. 7-3-6:IX-XV**).
- c. If the player loses control of the ball while simultaneously touching the ground with any part of their body, or if there is doubt that the acts were simultaneous, it is not a catch. If a player has control of the ball, a slight movement of the ball, even if it touches the ground, will not be considered loss of possession; they must lose control of the ball in order for there to be a loss of possession.
- d. If the ball touches the ground after the player secures control and continues to maintain control, and the elements above are satisfied, it is a catch.
- e. An interception is a catch of an opponent's pass or fumble.
- f. A catch by any kneeling or prone inbounds player is a completion or interception (Rule 7-3-6).
- g. A player recovers a ball if they fulfil the criteria in paragraphs a, b, c, and d for catching a ball that is still alive after hitting the ground.
- h. When in question, the catch, recovery or interception is not completed.

Approved Ruling 2-4-3

- I. B1 attempts to catch a punt (no fair catch signal) that crosses the neutral zone, strikes their shoulder (a muff) and bounces into the air. The ball does not touch the ground. Airborne A1 receives the ball in flight and first returns to the ground out of bounds. **RULING:** Team B's ball at the spot where the ball crossed the sideline. First and 10.
- II. On third down, B1 blocks a Team A scrimmage kick that goes into the air and does not cross the neutral zone. The ball does not touch the ground. A1 jumps and grasps the ball in flight and first returns to the ground out of bounds. **RULING:** Team B's ball at the spot where the ball crossed the sideline. First and 10 (Rule 6-3-7).

- III. Airborne A3 receives a pass at Team A's 40-yard line. While still airborne, they are contacted by B1 and come to the ground out of bounds with the ball at Team A's 37-yard line. **RULING:** Incomplete pass (Rule 7-3-7-a). [Cited by 7-3-6, 7-3-7-a]
- IV. Receiver A88 is near the sideline, stretching to catch a legal forward pass. As A88 is going to the ground in the act of catching the pass, (a) A88 gains firm control of the ball with the toes down in bounds and falls out of bounds, maintaining firm control; (b) A88 gains firm control of the ball with toes down in bounds, bobbles the ball while airborne, regains firm control before landing out of bounds and maintains firm control when landing; (c) A88 gains firm control of the ball with toes down in bounds, falls out of bounds and loses firm control of the ball when contacting the ground. **RULING:** (a) Catch by A88. (b) Incomplete pass. (c) Incomplete pass.
- V. On second down, A1 fumbles the ball, which strikes the ground and bounces high in the air. B2 receives the ball while off the ground and returns to the ground out of bounds (a) in advance of the spot of the fumble or (b) behind the spot of the fumble. **RULING:** (a) Team A's ball at the spot of the fumble. (b) Team A's ball at the spot where the ball crossed the sideline (Rules 4-2-4-d and 7-2-4).

Simultaneous Catch or Recovery

ARTICLE 4. A simultaneous catch or recovery is a catch or recovery in which there is joint possession of a live ball by opposing players inbounds. (**A.R. 7-3-6:I-II**)

SECTION 5. Clipping

- ARTICLE 1. a. Clipping is a block against an opponent in which the force of the initial contact is from behind and at or below the waist (Rule 9-1-5).
- b. The position of the blocker's head or feet does not necessarily indicate the point of initial contact.

SECTION 6. Deliberate Dead-Ball Advance

Deliberately advancing a dead ball is an attempt by a player to advance the ball after any part of their body, other than a hand or foot, has touched the ground or after the ball has been declared dead by rule (**Exception:** Rule 4-1-3-b Exception).

SECTION 7. Down, Between Downs and Loss of Down

Down

ARTICLE 1. A down is a unit of the game that starts after the ball is ready for play with a legal snap (scrimmage down) or legal free kick (free kick down) and ends when the ball becomes dead [**Exception:** The try is a scrimmage down that begins when the referee declares the ball ready for play (Rule 8-3-2-b)].

Between Downs

ARTICLE 2. Between downs is the interval during which the ball is dead.

Loss of down

ARTICLE 3. "Loss of down" is an abbreviation meaning "loss of the right to repeat a down".

SECTION 8. Fair Catch

Fair Catch

- ARTICLE 1. a. A fair catch of a scrimmage kick is a catch beyond the neutral zone by a Team B player who has made a valid signal during a scrimmage kick that is untouched beyond the neutral zone.
- b. A fair catch of a free kick is a catch by a Team B player who has made a valid signal during an untouched free kick.
- c. A valid or invalid fair catch signal deprives the receiving team of the opportunity to advance the ball. The ball is declared dead at the spot of the catch or recovery. If the catch or recovery precedes the signal, the ball is dead when the signal is first given.
- d. If the receiver shades their eyes from the sun without waving their hand(s), the ball is live and may be advanced.

Valid Signal

ARTICLE 2. A valid signal is a signal given by a player of Team B who has obviously signalled their intention by extending one hand only clearly above their head and waving that hand from side to side of their body more than once.

Invalid Signal

ARTICLE 3. An invalid signal is any waving signal by a player of Team B:

- a. That does not meet the requirements of Rule 2-8-2 (above); or
- b. That is given after a scrimmage kick is caught beyond the neutral zone, strikes the ground or touches another player beyond the neutral zone (**A.R. 6-5-3:III-V**); or
- c. That is given after a free kick is caught, strikes the ground or touches another player (**Exception:** Rule 6-4-1-f).

Approved Ruling 2-8-3

- I. During Team A's punt from the A-20, receiver B44 points at the grounded punt at midfield. As B44 points at the ball, (a) they keep their hands below their shoulders with no waving motion; (b) they keep their hands below their shoulders and have a waving motion; (c) they have their hands just above the shoulders with no waving motion. **RULING:** Rule 2-8-3 states that any waving motion that does not meet the criteria for a valid signal is an invalid signal. Additionally, by interpretation the receiver is allowed to point at a kick as long as their hands remain below the shoulder and there is no waving motion. Both (b) and (c) would be an Invalid Fair Catch Signal. In (a), this would not be considered a signal at all, and Team B would retain the right to recover the ball and advance.

- II. Free Kick @ A-35. The kickoff is high and deep, and deep receiver B21 gives the "T signal" as the kick is in flight. B21 catches the kick right at the goal line and returns the kick back to the B-35. **RULING:** Team B will have 1/10 @ B-35. The "T signal", if executed properly, is not considered a valid or invalid fair catch signal. It is important that the signal is executed properly and has no waving motion, and the hands are extended straight out and remain at or below shoulder level. The "T signal" does not cause the ball to become dead and does not deprive the receiving team the opportunity to advance the ball.

SECTION 9. Forward, Beyond and Forward Progress

Forward, Beyond

ARTICLE 1. Forward, beyond or in advance of, as related to either team, denotes direction toward the opponent's end line. Converse terms are backward or behind.

Forward Progress

ARTICLE 2. Forward progress is a term indicating the end of advancement by the ball carrier or airborne pass receiver of either team and applies to the position of the ball when it becomes dead by rule (Rules 4-1-3-a, 4-1-3-b, 4-1-3-p and 4-1-3-r; Rules 4-2-1 and 4-2-4; and Rule 5-1-3-a Exceptions) (A.R. 5-1-3:I-VI) (A.R. 8-2-1:I-IX) (*Exception:* Rule 8-5-1-a (A.R. 8-5-1:I)).

SECTION 10. Foul and Violation

Foul

ARTICLE 1. A foul is a rule infraction for which a penalty is prescribed.

Personal Foul

ARTICLE 2. A personal foul is a foul involving illegal physical contact that endangers the safety of another player.

Flagrant Personal Foul

ARTICLE 3. A flagrant personal foul is illegal physical contact so extreme or deliberate that it places an opponent in danger of catastrophic injury.

Approved Ruling 2-10-3

- I. What is a "catastrophic" injury? **RULING:** The National Center for Catastrophic Sport Injury Research in the USA defines a catastrophic injury as: "fatalities, injuries that result in permanent functional disability, and serious injuries that result in temporary functional disability with full recovery. Examples include spinal cord injuries, brain bleeds, skull fractures, heat stroke, sudden cardiac arrest, internal organ injuries, exertional sickling [exercise collapse associated with sickle cell disease], rhabdomyolysis [rapid dissolution of damaged or injured skeletal muscle], and commotio cordis [ventricular fibrillation precipitated by blunt trauma to the heart]." Note that the flagrant personal foul does not have to *cause* such an injury - it is sufficient for the foul to place the recipient in *danger* of such an injury.

Violation

ARTICLE 4. A violation is a rule infraction for which no penalty is prescribed. Since it is not a foul, it does not offset a foul.

SECTION 11. Fumble, Muff; Batting and Touching the Ball; Blocking a Kick

Fumble

ARTICLE 1. To fumble the ball is to lose player possession by any act other than passing, kicking or successful handing. (A.R. 2-19-2:I) (A.R. 4-1-3:I) The status of the ball is a fumble.

Muff

ARTICLE 2. To muff the ball is to touch the ball in an unsuccessful attempt to catch or recover it. Muffing the ball does not change its status.

Batting

ARTICLE 3. Batting the ball is intentionally striking it or intentionally changing its direction with the head, hand(s) or arm(s). When in question, the ball is accidentally touched rather than batted. Batting the ball does not change its status.

Touching

- ARTICLE 4. a. Touching a ball not in player possession denotes any contact with the ball. It may be intentional or unintentional, and it always precedes possession and control.
- b. Intentional touching is deliberate or intended touching.
- c. Forced touching results when a player's contact with the ball is due to (i) an opponent blocking that player into it, or (ii) the ball being batted or illegally kicked into that player by an opponent. If the touching is forced, by rule the player in question has not touched the ball (Rules 6-1-4 and 6-3-4).
- d. When in question, a ball has not been touched on a kick or forward pass.

Approved Ruling 2-11-4

- l. A punt is rolling along the ground near players A44 and B27 who are engaged. (a) The ball bounces against B27's leg and is then recovered by A55 at the B-35. (b) A44 blocks B27 into the ball which is then recovered by A55 at the B-35. **RULING:** (a) Team A's ball, first and 10 at the B-35. The ball rolled into B27's leg but A44's contact did not cause them to touch the ball. Not forced touching. (b) Forced touching because the block by A44 caused B27 to touch the ball. Illegal touching by A55. Team B's ball at that point. [Cited by 6-1-4-a, 6-3-4-a]

Blocking a Scrimmage Kick

ARTICLE 5. Blocking a scrimmage kick is touching the kicked ball by an opponent of the kicking team in an attempt to prevent the ball from crossing the neutral zone (Rule 6-3-1-b).

SECTION 12. Lines

Sidelines

ARTICLE 1. A sideline runs from end line to end line on each side of the field and separates the field of play from the area that is out of bounds. The entire sideline is out of bounds.

Goal Lines and Pylons

ARTICLE 2. The goal line at each end of the field of play runs between the sidelines and is part of the vertical plane that separates the end zone from the field of play. The two goal lines are 100 yards apart (except when the field is shortened according to Rule 1-2-1-a-2). The plane of the goal line extends between and includes the pylons, which are out of bounds. The entire goal line is in the end zone. A team's goal line is that which it is defending.

Approved Ruling 2-12-2

- l. Team A's untouched scrimmage kick strikes the ground in the field of play and breaks the plane of Team B's goal line. While the ball is in the air over the end zone, A81, who is either on the one-yard line or in the end zone, bats the ball into the field of play. **RULING:** Violation for illegal touching (Rule 6-3-11). Team B may accept the result of the play or next snap the ball at its 20-yard line (Exception: Rule 8-4-2-b). [Cited by 6-3-11, 6-3-2-a]

End Lines

ARTICLE 3. An end line runs between the sidelines normally 10 (but can be 7-13) yards behind each goal line and separates the end zone from the area that is out of bounds. The entire end line is out of bounds.

Boundary Lines

ARTICLE 4. The boundary lines are the sidelines and the end lines. The area enclosed by the boundary lines is "in bounds", and the area surrounding and including the boundary lines is "out of bounds".

Restraining Lines

ARTICLE 5. A restraining line is part of a vertical plane that limits a team's alignment for free kicks. The plane extends beyond the sidelines. **(A.R. 2-12-5:I)**

Approved Ruling 2-12-5

- I. A free kick breaks the plane of Team B's restraining line. While the ball is in the air, A1, who is behind Team B's restraining line, touches the ball. **RULING:** Legal touching (Rule 6-1-3-a-2). [Cited by 2-12-5, 6-1-3-a-2]

Yard Lines

ARTICLE 6. A yard line is any line in the field of play parallel to the end lines. A team's own yard lines, marked or unmarked, are numbered consecutively from its own goal line to the midfield line.

Hash Marks

ARTICLE 7. The two hash marks are 60 feet from the sidelines. Hash marks and short yard-line extensions should measure 24 inches in length.

Nine-Yard Marks

ARTICLE 8. Nine-yard marks 12 inches in length, every 10 yards, shall be located nine yards from the sidelines. They are not required if the field is numbered according to Rule 1-2-1-j.

SECTION 13. Handing the Ball

- ARTICLE 1. a. Handing the ball is transferring player possession from one teammate to another without throwing, fumbling or kicking it.
- b. Except when permitted by rule, handing the ball forward to a teammate is illegal.
- c. Loss of player possession by unsuccessful execution of attempted handing is a fumble by the last player in possession (**Exception:** The snap (Rule 2-23-1-c)).
- d. A backward handoff occurs when the ball carrier releases the ball before it is beyond the yard line where the ball carrier is positioned.

SECTION 14. Huddle

A huddle is two or more players grouped together after the ball is ready for play and before a snap or a free kick.

SECTION 15. Hurdling

- ARTICLE 1. a. Hurdling is an attempt by a player to jump with one or both feet or knees foremost over an opponent while that opponent is still on their feet (Rule 9-1-13).
- b. "On their feet" means that no part of the opponent's body other than one or both feet is in contact with the ground.

SECTION 16. Kicks; Kicking the Ball

Kicking the Ball; Legal and Illegal Kicks

- ARTICLE 1. a. Kicking the ball is intentionally striking the ball with the knee, lower leg or foot.
- b. A legal kick is a punt, drop kick or place kick made according to the rules by a player of Team A before a change of team possession. Kicking the ball in any other manner is illegal. **(A.R. 6-1-2:I)**

- c. Any free kick or scrimmage kick continues to be a kick until it is caught or recovered by a player or becomes dead.
- d. When in question, a ball is accidentally touched rather than kicked.

Punt

ARTICLE 2. A punt is a kick by a player who drops the ball and kicks it before it touches the ground.

Drop Kick

ARTICLE 3. A drop kick is a kick by a player who drops the ball and kicks it as it touches the ground.

Place Kick

- ARTICLE 4. a. A field goal place kick is a kick by a player of the team in possession while the ball is controlled on the ground by a teammate (Rule 2-16-9).
- b. A tee is a device that elevates the ball for kicking purposes. It may not elevate the ball's lowest point more than one inch above the ground (**A.R. 2-16-4:I**). If utilised, a tee must be in contact with the ball for the kick to be legal.
 - c. A free kick place kick is a kick by a player of the team in possession while the ball is positioned on a tee or the ground. It may be controlled by a teammate. The ball may be positioned on the ground and contacting the tee.
 - d. No device or material may be used to mark the spot of a scrimmage place kick or to elevate the ball. This is a live-ball foul at the snap (Rule 6-3-10-d).

Approved Ruling 2-16-4

- I. On a free kick to start a game, the kicker uses the toe of a teammate for a tee or builds a tee with a mound of dirt or sod. **RULING:** Illegal kick. Dead-ball foul. Penalty — Five yards from the succeeding spot. [Cited by 2-16-4-b, 4-1-1]

Free Kick

- ARTICLE 5. a. A free kick is a kick by a player of the team in possession made under restrictions specified in Rules 4-1-4, 6-1-1 and 6-1-2.
- b. A free kick after a safety may be a punt, drop kick or place kick.

Kickoff

ARTICLE 6. A kickoff is a free kick that starts each half and follows each try or successful field goal attempt (**Exception:** In extra periods). It must be a place kick or a drop kick.

Approved Ruling 2-16-6

- I. After a touchdown and successful 2-point try, Team A trails 24-22 with 0:55 left in the 4th quarter. Team A intends to try an onside free kick from the A-35. Kicker A90 holds the ball as if they will attempt a drop kick. A90 then tosses the ball up in the air and the ball bounces just behind Team A's restraining line and then A90 kicks the ball after it bounces several feet into the air. **RULING:** Illegal Kick. Dead-ball foul. Penalty - Five yards from the succeeding spot. This kick does not meet the requirements of a drop kick as required in Rule 2-16-3. For a legal drop kick the kicker must drop the ball and kick it as it touches the ground. Since Rule 2-16-6 only allows a place kick or a drop kick for a kickoff, this kick is not a legal kick. The penalty enforcement follows the current Approved Ruling 6-1-2:I.

Scrimmage Kick

ARTICLE 7. a. A scrimmage kick is a punt, drop kick or field goal place kick. It is a legal kick if it is made by Team A in or behind the neutral zone during a scrimmage down before team possession changes.

- b. A scrimmage kick has crossed the neutral zone when it touches the ground, a player, an official or anything beyond the neutral zone (**Exception:** Rule 6-3-1-b). (**A.R. 6-3-1:I-IV**)
- c. A scrimmage kick made when a ball carrier's entire body and the ball is or has been beyond the neutral zone is an illegal kick and a live-ball foul that causes the ball to become dead (Rule 6-3-10-c).

Return Kick

ARTICLE 8. A return kick is a kick by a player of the team in possession after change of team possession during a down. It is an illegal kick and a live-ball foul that causes the ball to become dead (Rule 6-3-10-b).

Field Goal Attempt

ARTICLE 9. A field goal attempt is a scrimmage kick. It may be a place kick or a drop kick.

Scrimmage Kick Formation

- ARTICLE 10. a. A scrimmage kick formation is a formation with no player in position to receive a hand-to-hand snap from between the snapper's legs, and with either (1) at least one player seven or more yards behind the neutral zone; or (2) a potential holder and potential kicker five or more yards behind the neutral zone in position for a place kick. For either (1) or (2) to qualify as a scrimmage kick formation, it must be obvious that a kick will be attempted (**A.R. 7-1-4:VIII**) (**A.R. 9-1-14:I-III**).
- b. If Team A is in a scrimmage kick formation at the snap, any action by Team A during the down is deemed to be from a scrimmage kick formation.

Approved Ruling 2-16-10

- I. At the snap Team A has four linemen numbered between 50-79 and three linemen numbered outside this range. A potential kicker is six yards deep but there is no potential holder.
RULING: Illegal formation. Team A is not in a scrimmage kick formation and does not have the required number of linemen with proper jersey numbers.

SECTION 17. The Neutral Zone

- ARTICLE 1. a. The neutral zone is the space between the two scrimmage lines extended to the sidelines (Rule 2-21-2). Its width is equal to the length of the ball.
- b. The neutral zone is established when the ball is ready for play and is resting on the ground with its long axis at right angles to the scrimmage line and parallel to the sidelines.
 - c. The neutral zone exists until there is a change of team possession, until a scrimmage kick crosses the neutral zone, or until the ball is declared dead.

SECTION 18. Encroachment and Offside

Encroachment

ARTICLE 1. After the ball is ready for play, encroachment occurs when an offensive player is in or beyond the neutral zone after the snapper touches or simulates (hand(s) at or below their knees) touching the ball before the snap. (**Exception:** When the ball is put in play, the snapper is not encroaching when they are in the neutral zone.)

Offside on a scrimmage play

ARTICLE 2. After the ball is ready for play, offside occurs (Rule 7-1-5) when a defensive player:

- a. Is in or beyond the neutral zone when the ball is legally snapped; or
- b. Contacts an opponent beyond the neutral zone before the ball is snapped; or
- c. Contacts the ball before it is snapped; or
- d. Threatens an offensive lineman, causing an immediate reaction, before the ball is snapped (Rule 7-1-2-b-3-Exception, (**A.R. 7-1-3:V Note**)); or
- e. Crosses the neutral zone and charges toward a Team A back (**A.R. 7-1-5:III**).

Offside on a free kick play

ARTICLE 3. Offside occurs (Rule 6-1-2) when:

- a. A defensive player is not behind their restraining line when the ball is legally free-kicked.
- b. One or more players of the kicking team are not behind their restraining line when the ball is legally free-kicked (**Exception:** The kicker and holder are not offside when they are beyond their restraining line.)

SECTION 19. Passes

Passing

ARTICLE 1. Passing the ball is throwing it. A pass continues to be a pass until it is caught or intercepted by a player or the ball becomes dead.

Forward and Backward Pass

- ARTICLE 2. a. A pass is forward if the ball first strikes the ground, a player, an official or anything else beyond the spot where the ball is released. All other passes are backward passes. When in question, a pass thrown in or behind the neutral zone is a forward rather than a backward pass.
- b. When a Team A player is holding the ball to pass it forward toward the neutral zone, any intentional forward movement of their hand with the ball firmly in their control starts the forward pass unless the player clearly starts to bring the ball back with firm control to their body. If a Team B player contacts the forward passer or ball after forward movement begins and the ball leaves the forward passer's hand, a forward pass is ruled regardless of where the ball strikes the ground or a player. (**A.R. 2-19-2:I**)
 - c. When in question, the ball is passed forward and not fumbled during an attempted forward pass.
 - d. A snap becomes a backward pass when the snapper releases the ball, other than via a hand-to-hand exchange (**A.R. 2-23-1:I**).

Approved Ruling 2-19-2

- I. A1 intends to throw a forward pass, but B1 bats the ball from their hand before A1's hand starts forward. **RULING:** Fumble (Rule 2-11-1). [Cited by 2-11-1, 2-19-2-b]

Crosses Neutral Zone

- ARTICLE 3. a. A legal forward pass has crossed the neutral zone when it first strikes the ground, a player, an official or anything beyond the neutral zone inbounds. It has not crossed the neutral zone when it first strikes the ground, a player, an official or anything in or behind the neutral zone inbounds.
- b. A player has crossed the neutral zone if their entire body has been beyond the neutral zone.
 - c. A legal forward pass is beyond or behind the neutral zone where it crosses the sideline.

Approved Ruling 2-19-3

- I. QB A12 throws a legal forward pass, and receiver A88 first touches the pass when the ball is 1½ yards beyond the neutral zone. The receiver's back foot is not beyond the neutral zone.

RULING: The legal forward pass has crossed the neutral zone. Rule 2-19-3-a states that a pass has crossed the neutral zone when it strikes anything beyond the neutral zone. By Rule 2-19-3-b, A88 as a player is not beyond the neutral zone. Nevertheless, by Rule 2-19-3-a the pass has crossed the neutral zone since it was beyond the neutral zone when A88 touched it. The guiding principle on a pass crossing the neutral zone is the location of the ball when it is first touched.

Catchable Forward Pass

ARTICLE 4. A catchable forward pass is an untouched legal forward pass beyond the neutral zone to an eligible player who has a reasonable opportunity to catch the ball. When in question, a legal forward pass is catchable.

SECTION 20. Penalty

A penalty is a result imposed by rule against a team that has committed a foul and may include one or more of the following: loss of yardage, loss of down, automatic first down, disqualification or subtraction from the game clock (Rule 10-1-1-b).

SECTION 21. Scrimmage**Scrimmage Down**

ARTICLE 1. A scrimmage down is the action between the two teams during a down that begins with a legal snap.

NOTE: A try down is a scrimmage down that begins when the referee declares the ball ready for play (Rule 8-3-2-b).

Scrimmage Line

ARTICLE 2. The scrimmage line for each team is established when the ball is ready for play. It is the yard line that defines the vertical plane passing through the point of the ball nearest a team's own goal line.

SECTION 22. Shift

ARTICLE 1. a. A shift is a simultaneous change of position or stance by two or more offensive players after the ball is ready for play before the snap for a scrimmage down. **(A.R. 7-1-3:I-II) (A.R. 7-1-2:I-IV)**

- b. The shift ends when all players have been motionless for one full second.
- c. The shift continues if one or more players are in motion before the end of the one second interval.

SECTION 23. Snapping the Ball

ARTICLE 1. a. Legally snapping the ball (a snap) is handing or passing it backward from its position on the ground with a quick and continuous motion of the hand or hands, the ball actually leaving the hand or hands in this motion (Rule 4-1-4).

- b. The snap starts when the ball is moved legally and ends when the ball leaves the snapper's hands; the ball then becomes alive (Rule 4-1-1) **(A.R. 2-23-1:I-II) (A.R. 7-1-5:I-II)**.
- c. If, during any backward motion of a legal snap, the ball slips from the snapper's hand, it becomes a backward pass and is in play (Rule 4-1-1).

- d. While resting on the ground and before the snap, the long axis of the ball must be at right angles to the scrimmage line (Rule 7-1-3).
- e. Unless moved in a backward direction, the movement of the ball does not start a legal snap. It is not a legal snap if the ball is first moved forward or lifted.
- f. If the ball is touched by Team B during a legal snap, the ball remains dead and Team B is penalised. If the ball is touched by Team B during an illegal snap, the ball remains dead and Team A is penalised. **(A.R. 7-1-5:I-II)**
- g. The snap need not be between the snapper's legs; but to be legal, it must be a quick and continuous backward motion.
- h. The ball must be snapped on or between the hash marks.

Approved Ruling 2-23-1

- I. Fourth and goal on Team B's five-yard line. A55's legal snap is muffed by A12 and (a) any player of Team A recovers and advances the ball into the end zone, or (b) a player of Team B recovers and advances the ball. **RULING:** The snap is a backward pass and may be advanced by any player. (a) Touchdown. Since this is a backward pass and not a fumble there is no restriction on a Team A player recovering and advancing the ball. (b) Ball continues in play. [Cited by 2-19-2-d, 2-23-1-b, 7-2-2-a, 8-2-1-a]
- II. 3/5 @ B-25. QB A12 is in shotgun formation. Center A57 legally starts the backward motion of the snap with a quick and continuous motion. During this backward motion (a) the ball slips from the snapper's hands and is loose at the B-29 and B54 recovers the ball, or (b) the snapper clutches or pauses before releasing the ball and the ball subsequently slips from the snapper's hands and is loose at the B-29 and B54 recovers the ball. **RULING:** (a) Legal Snap that becomes a backward pass. Team B's ball, 1/10 @ B-29. (b) Team A dead-ball foul, illegal snap. Team A's ball, 3/10 @ B-30. To be a legal snap, the ball must be handed or passed backward from its position on the ground with a quick and continuous motion and the ball leaving the snapper's hands in this motion. If the ball, during the backward motion of a legal snap, slips from the snapper's hand, it becomes a backward pass, and the ball is in play. Any other action or motion by the snapper such as not releasing the ball, pausing, restarting, or breaking the continuous motion of the ball during the snap is considered an illegal snap. [Cited by 2-23-1-b]

SECTION 24. Series and Possession Series

Series

ARTICLE 1. A series comprises up to four consecutive downs that each begins with a snap (Rule 5-1-1).

Possession Series

ARTICLE 2. A possession series is a team's continuous possession of the ball in an extra period (Rule 3-1-3). It may consist of one or more series.

SECTION 25. Spots

Enforcement Spot

ARTICLE 1. An enforcement spot is the point at which the penalty for a foul or the result of a violation is enforced.

Previous Spot

ARTICLE 2. The previous spot is the point at which the ball was last put in play.

Succeeding Spot

ARTICLE 3. The succeeding spot is the point at which the ball is next to be put in play.

Dead-Ball Spot

ARTICLE 4. The dead-ball spot is the point at which the ball became dead.

Spot of the Foul

ARTICLE 5. The spot of the foul is the point at which that foul occurs. If out of bounds between the goal lines, it shall be the intersection of the nearer hash mark and the yard line extended through the spot of the foul. If out of bounds between the goal line and the end line or behind the end line, the foul is in the end zone.

Out-of-Bounds Spot

ARTICLE 6. The out-of-bounds spot is the point at which the ball becomes dead by rule because of going or being declared out of bounds.

Inbounds Spot

ARTICLE 7. The inbounds spot is the intersection of the nearer hash mark line and the yard line passing through either the dead-ball spot or the spot where a penalty leaves the ball in a side zone.

Spot Where Run Ends

ARTICLE 8. The spot where the run ends is the point:

- a. Where the ball is declared dead in player possession.
- b. Where player possession is lost on a fumble.
- c. Where handing of the ball occurs.
- d. Where an illegal forward pass is thrown.
- e. Where a backward pass is thrown.
- f. Where an illegal scrimmage kick is made beyond the line of scrimmage.
- g. Where a return kick occurs.
- h. Where player possession is gained under provisions of the "momentum rule" (Rule 8-5-1-a Exceptions).

Spot Where Kick Ends

ARTICLE 9. A scrimmage kick that crosses the neutral zone ends at the spot where it is caught or recovered or where the ball is declared dead by rule (Rule 2-16-1-c). (**Exception:** If inadvertent whistle provisions apply, the end of a kick is where the ball next touches a player, official, the ground or crosses a boundary line after the whistle has blown.)

Basic Spot

ARTICLE 10. The basic spot is a benchmark for locating the enforcement spot for penalties governed by the Three-and-One Principle (Rule 2-33). Basic spots for the various categories of plays are given in Rule 10-2-2-d.

Postscrimmage Kick Spot

ARTICLE 11. The postscrimmage kick spot serves as the basic spot when postscrimmage kick enforcement applies (Rule 10-2-3).

- a. When the kick ends in the field of play, other than in the special cases given below, the postscrimmage kick spot is the spot where the kick ends.
- b. When the kick ends in Team B's end zone, the postscrimmage kick spot is Team B's 20-yard line.

Special cases:

1. On an unsuccessful field goal attempt, if the ball is untouched by Team B after crossing the neutral zone and is declared dead beyond the neutral zone, the postscrimmage kick spot is:
 - (a) The previous spot, if the previous spot is on or outside Team B's 20-yard line;
(A.R. 10-2-3:V)
 - (b) Team B's 20-yard line, if the previous spot is between Team B's 20-yard line and its goal line.
2. When Rule 6-3-11 is in effect, the postscrimmage kick spot is Team B's 20-yard line.
3. When Rule 6-5-1-b is in effect, the postscrimmage kick spot is the spot where the receiver first touched the kick.

SECTION 26. Tackling

Tackling is grasping or encircling an opponent with a hand(s) or arm(s).

SECTION 27. Team and Player Designations

Teams A and B

ARTICLE 1. Team A is the team that is designated to put the ball in play, and Team B is the opponent. The teams retain these designations until the ball is next ready for play.

Offensive and Defensive Teams

ARTICLE 2. The offensive team is the team in possession, or the team to which the ball belongs; the defensive team is the opposing team.

Kicker and Holder

- ARTICLE 3. a. The kicker is any player who punts, drop kicks or place kicks according to rule. They remain the kicker until they have had a reasonable time to regain their balance.
- b. A holder is a player who controls the ball on the ground or on a kicking tee. During a scrimmage-kick play, they remain the holder until no player is in position to make the kick or, if the ball is kicked, until the kicker has had a reasonable time to regain their balance.

Lineman and Back

ARTICLE 4. a. *Lineman*.

1. A lineman is any Team A player legally on their scrimmage line (Rule 2-21-2).
 2. A Team A player is legally on the scrimmage line when facing their opponent's goal line with the line of their shoulders approximately parallel thereto and either (a) they are the snapper (Rule 2-27-8) or (b) their head breaks the plane of the line drawn through the waistline of the snapper.
- b. *Interior lineman*. An interior lineman is a lineman who is not on the end of their scrimmage line.
- c. *Restricted lineman*. A restricted lineman is any interior lineman, or any lineman wearing a number 50-79, whose hand(s) are below the knees.
- d. *Back*.
1. A back is any Team A player who is not a lineman and whose head or shoulder does not break the plane of the line drawn through the waistline of the nearest Team A lineman.

2. A back is also the player in position to receive a hand-to-hand snap.
3. A lineman becomes a back before the snap when they move to a position as a back and stop.

Forward passer

ARTICLE 5. The forward passer is the player who throws a forward pass. That player is a forward passer from the time the ball is released until the pass is complete, incomplete or intercepted, or until they move to participate in the play.

Player

- ARTICLE 6. a. A player is any one of the participants in the game who is not a substitute or a replaced player and is subject to the rules when inbounds or out of bounds.
- b. An airborne player is a player not in contact with the ground because they have leapt, jumped, dived, launched, or been contacted by an opponent or teammate, etc. in other than normal running action.
 - c. A departing player is a player leaving the field, having been replaced by a substitute.
 - d. A teammate is a player of the same team.

Runner and Ball Carrier

- ARTICLE 7. a. The runner is a player in possession of a live ball or simulating possession of a live ball.
- b. A ball carrier is a runner in possession of a live ball.

Snapper

ARTICLE 8. The snapper is the player who snaps the ball. That player is established as the snapper when they take a position behind the ball and touch or simulate (hand(s) at or below their knees) touching the ball (Rule 7-1-3).

Substitute

- ARTICLE 9. a. A legal substitute is a replacement for a player or a player vacancy during the interval between downs.
- b. A legal incoming substitute becomes a player when they enter the field of play or end zones and communicate with a teammate or an official, enter the huddle, are positioned in an offensive or defensive formation, or participate in a play (**A.R. 3-5-2:VI**).

Replaced Player

ARTICLE 10. A replaced player is one who participated during the previous down, has been replaced by a substitute and has left the field of play and the end zones.

Player Vacancy

ARTICLE 11. A player vacancy occurs when a team has fewer than 11 players in the game.

Disqualified Player

- ARTICLE 12. a. A disqualified player is one who is declared ineligible for further participation in the game.
- b. A disqualified player or coach must leave the playing enclosure under the escort of team personnel before the next play after their disqualification. They must remain out of view of the field of play under team supervision for the duration of the game.

Squad Member

ARTICLE 13. A squad member is part of a group of potential players, in uniform, organised for participation in the ensuing football game or football plays.

Defenseless player

ARTICLE 14. A defenseless player is one who because of their physical position and focus of concentration is especially vulnerable to injury. When in question, a player is defenseless. Examples of defenseless players include but are not limited to:

- a. A player in the act of or just after throwing a pass. This includes an offensive player in a passing posture with focus downfield.
- b. A receiver attempting to catch a forward pass or in position to receive a backward pass, or one who has completed a catch and has not had time to protect himself or has not clearly become a ball carrier.
- c. A kicker in the act of or just after kicking a ball, or during the kick or the return.
- d. A kick returner attempting to catch or recover a kick, or one who has completed a catch or recovery and has not had time to protect himself or has not clearly become a ball carrier.
- e. A player on the ground.
- f. A player obviously out of the play.
- g. A player who receives a blind-side block.
- h. A ball carrier already in the grasp of an opponent and whose forward progress has been stopped.
- i. A quarterback any time after a change of possession.
- j. A ball carrier who has obviously given themselves up and is sliding feet-first.
- k. A player attempting to catch or recover a fumble.
- l. A long snapper protected by Rule 9-1-14.

Player Out of Bounds and In Bounds

ARTICLE 15. a. *Out of Bounds*

1. A player is out of bounds when any part of their body touches anything other than another player or a game official on or outside a boundary line.
2. An out-of-bounds player who becomes airborne remains out of bounds until they touch the ground in bounds without simultaneously being out of bounds.

b. *In Bounds*

1. An inbounds player is a player who is not out of bounds.
2. An inbounds player who becomes airborne remains in bounds until they are out of bounds.

Coach

ARTICLE 16. a. A coach is a person subject to the rules who, while in the team area, coaching box, press box (or another authorised place within the playing enclosure), observes the game and/or gives instructions to players and substitutes.

- b. A player/coach is regarded as being a coach when in the team area or coaching box and as a player or substitute otherwise.
- c. Each team shall designate a coach as its head coach, and identify them on the roster form and to the referee. A head coach disqualified from the game may designate a new head coach (Rule 9-2-6-d).

SECTION 28. Tripping

Tripping is intentionally using the lower leg or foot to obstruct an opponent below the knees (Rule 9-1-2-c).

SECTION 29. Timing Devices

Game Clock

ARTICLE 1. The game clock is any device under the direction of the appropriate official used to time the duration of the game.

Play Clock

ARTICLE 2. a. Each stadium should have a visual play clock at each end of the playing enclosure. The play clock (if provided) must be capable of counting down from both 40 seconds and 25 seconds. It should automatically default to 40 seconds and start immediately upon being reset by the play-clock operator. [The play clock operator will consistently start the 40-second play clock within one second of any official signalling that the ball is dead after a play.](#)

b. Otherwise, the play clock is any device under the direction of the appropriate official used to time the 40/25 seconds between the end of the previous play or the ready for play signal and the ball being put in play.

SECTION 30. Play Classification

Forward Pass Play

ARTICLE 1. A legal forward pass play is the interval between the snap and when a legal forward pass is complete, incomplete or intercepted.

Free Kick Play

ARTICLE 2. A free kick play is the action during the interval from the time the ball is legally kicked until it comes into player possession or is declared dead by rule.

Scrimmage Kick Play

ARTICLE 3. A scrimmage kick play is the action during the interval between the snap and when a scrimmage kick comes into player possession or the ball is declared dead by rule.

Running Play and Run

ARTICLE 4. a. A running play is any live-ball action other than that during a free kick play, a scrimmage kick play, or a legal forward pass play.

b. A run is that segment of a running play during which a ball carrier has possession.

c. If a ball carrier loses possession by a fumble, backward pass, or illegal forward pass, the spot where the run ends (Rule 2-25-8) is the yard line where the ball carrier loses possession. The running play includes the run and the loose-ball action before a player gains or regains possession or the ball is declared dead. **(A.R. 2-30-4:I and II)**

d. A new running play begins when a player gains or regains possession.

Approved Ruling 2-30-4

l. A21 catches a forward pass with their knees on the ground. The forward passer is roughed during the pass. **RULING:** A21's catch started a running play, which ended immediately. Penalise 15 yards from the end of the run, first down for Team A. [Cited by 2-30-4-c]

- II. Third and 10. A21 catches a forward pass and fumbles when tackled after gaining nine yards. The fumble is recovered by grounded A24 five yards in advance of the fumble. During the pass, the forward passer is roughed. **RULING:** Penalise 15 yards from the spot of recovery by A24 (end of last run), first down for Team A. [Cited by 2-30-4-c]

Result of the Play

ARTICLE 5. The result of the play is the game situation when the ball becomes dead and before the enforcement of penalties for any fouls or violations occurring during the play.

SECTION 31. Field Areas

The Field

ARTICLE 1. The field is the area within the limit lines and includes the limit lines and team areas and the space above it (**Exception:** Enclosures over the field).

Field of Play

ARTICLE 2. The field of play is the area enclosed by the sidelines and the goal lines.

End Zones

ARTICLE 3. a. The end zone at each end of the field is the rectangle defined by the goal line, sidelines and end line.

b. The goal line and goal line pylons are in the end zone.

c. A team's end zone is the one it is defending. (**A.R. 8-5-1:VII**) (**A.R. 8-6-1:I**)

Playing Surface

ARTICLE 4. The playing surface is the material or substance within the field of play, including the end zones.

Playing Enclosure

ARTICLE 5. The playing enclosure is that area bounded by the stadium, dome, stands, fences or other structures (**Exception:** Scoreboards are not considered within the playing enclosure). Where there is no stadium, dome or stands, the playing enclosure is any area within sight and/or sound of the field (Rules 9-2-6-b and 9-2-7).

Side Zone

ARTICLE 6. The side zone is the area between the hash marks and the near sideline.

SECTION 32. Fighting

ARTICLE 1. Fighting is any attempt by a player, coach or squad member in uniform to strike an opponent in a combative manner unrelated to football. Such acts include, but are not limited to:

- a. An attempt to strike an opponent with the head, arm(s), hand(s), leg(s) or foot (feet), whether or not there is contact.
- b. An unsportsmanlike act toward an opponent that causes any opponent to retaliate by fighting (Rules 9-2-1 and 9-5-1).

SECTION 33. Three-and-One Principle

The Three-and-One Principle of penalty enforcement applies when the penalty statement for a foul does not specify the enforcement spot. Application of this principle is described in Rule 10-2-2-c.

SECTION 34. Tackle Box

- ARTICLE 1. a. The tackle box is the rectangular area enclosed by the neutral zone, the two lines parallel to the sidelines five yards from the snapper and Team A's end line. (See Appendix D.)
- b. The tackle box disintegrates when the ball leaves it.

SECTION 35. Targeting

ARTICLE 1. "Targeting" means that a player takes aim at an opponent for purposes of attacking with forcible contact that goes beyond making a legal tackle or a legal block or playing the ball. Some indicators of targeting include but are not limited to:

- a. Launch — a player leaving their feet to attack an opponent by an upward and forward thrust of the body to make forcible contact in the head or neck area.
- b. A crouch followed by an upward and forward thrust to attack with forcible contact at the head or neck area, even though one or both feet are still on the ground.
- c. Leading with helmet, shoulder, forearm, fist, hand or elbow to attack with forcible contact at the head or neck area.
- d. Lowering the head before attacking by initiating forcible contact with the crown of the helmet.