

# RULE 6. Kicks

## SECTION 1. Free Kicks

### Restraining Lines

ARTICLE 1. For any free kick formation, the kicking team's restraining line shall be the yard line through the most forward point from which the ball shall be kicked, and the receiving team's restraining line shall be the yard line 10 yards beyond that point. Unless relocated by a penalty, the kicking team's restraining line on a kickoff shall be its 35-yard line, and for a free kick after a safety, its 20-yard line.

### Free Kick Formation

ARTICLE 2. A ball from a free kick formation must be kicked legally and from some point on Team A's restraining line and on or between the inbounds lines. After the ball is ready for play and for any reason it falls from the tee, Team A shall not kick the ball and the official shall sound his whistle immediately. When the ball is kicked (A.R. 6-1-2-I-IV):

- a. Each Team A player, except the holder and kicker of a place kick, must be behind the ball (A.R. 6-1-2-V and VI) [S19].
- b. All players of each team must be inbounds [S18 or S19].
- c. At least four Team A players must be on each side of the kicker [S19].
- d. After a safety, when a punt or drop kick is used, the ball may be kicked from behind the kicking team's restraining line. If a yardage penalty for a live-ball foul is enforced from the previous spot, administration is from the 20-yard line, unless the kicking team's restraining line has been relocated by a previous penalty [S19].

**PENALTY -Live-ball foul. Five yards from the previous spot, five yards from the spot where the dead ball belongs to Team B after Team B's run, or the spot where the ball is placed after a touchback [S19].**

- e. All Team B players must be behind their restraining line [S18].
- f. All players of Team A must have been between the nine-yard marks after the ready-for-play signal [S19].
- g. A Team A player who goes out of bounds during a free kick down may not return inbounds during the down (*Exception:* This does not apply to a Team A player who is blocked out of bounds and attempts to return inbounds immediately) [S19].
- h. No Team A player may block an opponent until Team A is eligible to touch a free-kicked ball [S19].

**PENALTY -Live-ball foul. Five yards from the previous spot [S18 or S19].**

### Free Kick Recovery

ARTICLE 3. A Team A player may touch a free-kicked ball:

- a. After it touches a Team B player (*Exception:* Rule 6-1-4).
- b. After it breaks the plane of and remains beyond Team B's restraining line (*Exception:* Rule 6-4-1) (A.R. 2-11-2-I).
- c. After it touches any player, the ground, an official or anything beyond Team B's restraining line.
- d. Thereafter, all players of Team A become eligible to touch, recover or catch the kick. Illegal touching of a free kick is a violation that, when the ball becomes dead, gives the receiving team the privilege of taking the ball at the spot of the violation. However, if there are offsetting fouls or if a penalty incurred by either team before the ball becomes dead is enforced, this privilege is canceled (A.R. 6-1-3-I).

### Forced Touching Disregarded

ARTICLE 4.

- a. A player blocked by an opponent into a free kick is not, while inbounds, deemed to have touched the kick.
- b. An inbounds player touched by a ball batted by an opponent is not deemed to have touched the ball.

### **Free Kick at Rest**

ARTICLE 5. If a free kick comes to rest inbounds and no player attempts to secure it, the ball becomes dead and belongs to the receiving team at the dead-ball spot.

### **Free Kick Caught or Recovered**

ARTICLE 6.

- a. If a free kick is caught or recovered by a player of the receiving team, the ball continues in play (*Exceptions:* Rules 4-1-3-g, 6-1-7, and 6-5-1 and 2). If caught or recovered by a player of the kicking team, the ball becomes dead (A.R. 4-1-3-II and A.R. 6-1-6-I).
- b. When opposing players, each eligible to touch the ball, simultaneously recover a rolling kick or catch a free kick, the simultaneous possession makes the ball dead. A kick declared dead in joint possession is awarded to the receiving team.

### **Touching Ground On or Behind Goal Line**

ARTICLE 7. The ball becomes dead and belongs to the team defending its goal line when a free kick is untouched by Team B before touching the ground on or behind Team B's goal line.

## **SECTION 2. Free Kick Out of Bounds**

### **Kicking Team**

ARTICLE 1. A free kick out of bounds between the goal lines untouched by an inbounds player of Team B is a foul (A.R. 6-2-1-I-IV).

**PENALTY -Live-ball foul. Five yards from the previous spot or the receiving team may put the ball in play 30 yards beyond Team A's restraining line at the inbounds spot [S19].**

### **Receiving Team**

ARTICLE 2. When a free kick goes out of bounds between the goal lines, the ball belongs to the receiving team at the inbounds spot. When a free kick goes out of bounds behind the goal line, the ball belongs to the team defending that goal line (A.R. 6-2-2-I-IV).

## **SECTION 3. Scrimmage Kicks**

### **Behind the Neutral Zone**

ARTICLE 1.

- a. A scrimmage kick that fails to cross the neutral zone continues in play. All players may catch or recover the ball behind the neutral zone and advance it (A.R. 6-3-1-I-III).
- b. The blocking of a scrimmage kick by an opponent of the kicking team who is no more than three yards beyond the neutral zone is considered to have occurred within or behind that zone (Rule 2-10-5).

### **Beyond the Neutral Zone**

ARTICLE 2.

- a. No inbounds player of the kicking team shall touch a scrimmage kick that has crossed the neutral zone before it touches an opponent. Such illegal touching is a violation that, when the ball becomes dead, gives the receiving team the privilege of taking the ball at the spot of the violation (*Exception:* Rule 6-3-4) (A.R. 2-11-1-I and A.R. 6-3-2-I).
- b. If a penalty incurred by either team before the ball becomes dead is enforced or there are offsetting fouls, the privilege is canceled (*Exceptions:* Rules 6-3-11 and 8-4-2-b) (A.R. 6-3-2-I-VI, A.R. 6-3-11-I and A.R. 10-1-4-VIII).
- c. Illegal touching in Team A's end zone is ignored.

### **All Become Eligible**

ARTICLE 3. When a scrimmage kick that has crossed the neutral zone touches a player of the receiving team who is inbounds, any player may catch or recover the ball (Rule 6-3-1-b) (*Exception:* Rule 6-3-4).

### **Forced Touching Disregarded**

ARTICLE 4.

- a. A player blocked by an opponent into a scrimmage kick that has crossed the neutral zone shall not, while inbounds, be deemed to have touched the kick (A.R. 6-3-4-I, II and IV).

- b. An inbounds player touched by a ball batted by an opponent is not deemed to have touched the ball (A.R. 6-3-4-III).

#### **Catch or Recovery by Receiving Team**

ARTICLE 5. If a scrimmage kick is caught or recovered by a player of the receiving team, the ball continues in play (*Exceptions*: Rules 4-1-3-g, 6-3-9, and 6-5-1 and 2) (A.R. 8-4-2-IX).

#### **Catch or Recovery by Kicking Team**

ARTICLE 6.

- a. If a player of the kicking team catches or recovers a scrimmage kick that has crossed the neutral zone, the ball becomes dead (A.R. 6-3-1-V).
- b. When opposing players, each eligible to touch the ball, simultaneously recover a rolling kick or catch a scrimmage kick, the simultaneous possession makes the ball dead. A kick declared dead in joint possession of opposing players is awarded to the receiving team (Rules 2-2-8 and 4-1-3-1).

#### **Out of Bounds Between Goal Lines or at Rest Inbounds**

ARTICLE 7. If a scrimmage kick goes out of bounds between the goal lines or comes to rest inbounds and no player attempts to secure it, the ball becomes dead and belongs to the receiving team at the dead-ball spot (*Exception*: Rule 8-4-2-b).

#### **Out of Bounds Behind Goal Line**

ARTICLE 8. If a scrimmage kick (other than one that scores a field goal) goes out of bounds behind a goal line, the ball becomes dead and belongs to the team defending that goal line (Rule 8-4-2-b).

#### **Touching Ground On or Behind Goal Line**

ARTICLE 9. The ball becomes dead and belongs to the team defending its goal line when a scrimmage kick that has crossed the neutral zone is subsequently untouched by Team B before touching the ground on or behind Team B's goal line (Rule 8-4-2-b) (A.R. 6-3-9-I-III and A.R. 8-4-2-IV).

#### **Legal and Illegal Kicks**

ARTICLE 10.

- a. A legal scrimmage kick is a punt, drop kick or place kick made according to rule.
- b. A return kick is an illegal kick and a live-ball foul that causes the ball to become dead.

**PENALTY -For a return kick (live-ball foul): Five yards from the spot of the foul [S31].**

- c. A scrimmage kick beyond the neutral zone is a live-ball foul that causes the ball to become dead.

**PENALTY -For an illegal kick beyond the neutral zone (live-ball foul): Five yards from the previous spot and loss of down [S31 and S9].**

- d. Any device or material used to mark the spot of a scrimmage place kick or elevate the ball makes the kick illegal.

**PENALTY -For an illegal kick (live-ball foul): Five yards from the previous spot [S31].**

#### **Loose Behind the Goal Line**

ARTICLE 11. If a Team A player bats a scrimmage kick in Team B's end zone that was untouched by Team B after the kick crossed the neutral zone, it is a violation. Team B may elect a touchback when the ball is declared dead (A.R. 6-3-11-I). VIOLATION—Touchback [S16 and S7] (*Exception*: Rule 8-4-2-b) (A.R. 2-11-1-I).

#### **Out-of-Bounds Player**

ARTICLE 12. No Team A player who goes out of bounds during a scrimmage kick down may return inbounds during the down (*Exception*: This does not apply to a Team A player who is blocked out of bounds and attempts to return inbounds immediately).

**PENALTY -Live-ball foul. Five yards from the previous spot [S19].**

## SECTION 4. Opportunity to Catch a Kick

### Interference With Opportunity

ARTICLE 1. A player of the receiving team within the boundary lines attempting to catch a kick, and so located that he could have caught a free kick or a scrimmage kick that is beyond the neutral zone, must be given an unimpeded opportunity to catch the kick (A.R. 6-3-1-III, A.R. 6-4-1-V and A.R. 6-4-1-X).

- a. This protection terminates when the kick touches the ground or is touched by any player of Team B beyond the neutral zone (Rule 6-5-1-a) (A.R. 6-4-1-IV).
- b. If interference with a potential receiver is the result of a player being blocked by an opponent, it is not a foul.
- c. It is an interference foul if the kicking team contacts the potential receiver before, or simultaneous to, his first touching the ball (A.R. 6-4-1-II, III, VII and IX). When in question, it is an interference foul.

**PENALTY -For foul between the goal lines: Receiving team's ball, first down, 15 yards beyond the spot of the foul for an interference foul [S33]. For foul behind the goal line: Award a touchback and penalize from the succeeding spot. Flagrant offenders shall be disqualified [S47].**

## SECTION 5. Fair Catch

### Dead Where Caught

ARTICLE 1.

- a. When a Team B player makes a fair catch, the ball becomes dead where caught and belongs to Team B at that spot (**Exception:** When a valid fair catch signal is made, the unimpeded opportunity to catch a free or scrimmage kick is extended to a player who muffs the kick and still has an opportunity to complete the catch. This protection terminates when the kick touches the ground. If the player subsequently catches the kick, the ball is placed where it was first touched) (A.R. 6-5-1-I-IV).
- b. Rules pertaining to a fair catch apply only when a scrimmage kick crosses the neutral zone or during free kicks.
- c. The purpose of the fair catch provision is to protect the receiver who, by his fair catch signal, agrees he or a teammate will not advance after the catch (A.R. 6-5-5-III).
- d. The ball shall be put in play by a snap by the receiving team at the spot of the catch if the ball is caught (**Exceptions:** Rules 6-5-1-a Exception, 7-1-2 and 8-6-1-b).

### No Advance

ARTICLE 2. No Team B player shall carry a caught or recovered ball more than two steps in any direction after a valid or invalid fair catch signal by any Team B player (A.R. 6-5-2-I-IV and A.R. 10-1-5-II).

**PENALTY -Dead-ball foul. Five yards from the succeeding spot [S7 and S21].**

### Invalid Signals

ARTICLE 3.

- a. During a down in which a kick is made, no player of Team B shall make any invalid fair catch signal during a free kick or beyond the neutral zone during a scrimmage kick. Any signal is invalid after a scrimmage kick is caught beyond the neutral zone, strikes the ground or touches another player beyond the neutral zone. A signal is invalid after a free kick is caught, strikes the ground or touches another player (A.R. 6-5-3-IV-VI).
- b. A catch after an invalid signal is not a fair catch, and the ball is dead where caught. If the signal follows a catch, the ball is dead when the signal is first given (A.R. 6-5-1-II).
- c. Invalid signals beyond the neutral zone apply only to Team B (A.R. 6-5-3-II).
- d. An invalid signal beyond the neutral zone is possible only when the ball has crossed the neutral zone (Rule 2-15-7) (A.R. 6-5-3-I).

### Illegal Block or Contact

ARTICLE 4. A player of Team B who has made a valid or invalid signal for a fair catch and does not touch the ball shall not block or foul an opponent during that down (A.R. 6-5-4-I and II).

**PENALTY -Free kick: Receiving team's ball 15 yards from the spot of the foul (Rule 10-2-2-e) [S40]. Scrimmage kick: 15-yard penalty, postscrimmage kick enforcement or basic spot enforcement (Rule 10-2-2-e) [S40].**

**No Tackling**

ARTICLE 5. No player of the kicking team shall tackle or block an opponent who has completed a fair catch. Only the player making a fair catch signal has this protection (A.R. 6-5-5-I and III).

**PENALTY -Dead-ball foul. Receiving team's ball 15 yards from the succeeding spot [S7 and S38].**