

Points of emphasis

For 2007, the Rules Committee wishes coaches, players and officials to take particular note of the following points.

Game management

The Rules Committee remains concerned that while the quantity of American football being played in Britain is on the increase, the quality of it in terms of facilities for games is often not. The Committee is particularly concerned that an increasing number of teams:

- do not have balls, ball boys, chains and chain crew available at the appointed time prior to kickoff (Rules 1-3-2-e and 13-3-1)
- provide the equipment and personnel listed above, but that they are of questionable quality;
- provide the personnel but change them during the game;
- do not mark all the field and team area markings required by rule (Rules 1-2-1, 1-2-3-a and 1-2-4-a), or the lines are faint or crooked.

We have taken two steps to address the situation:

1. BAFRA officials will be conducting a game management audit, similar in aim to the field audit conducted in 2006-2007, to identify both the problem teams and those taking the most effective action.
2. We have formalised in the rules the provision for leagues to take action against teams for game management breaches — such action is termed “sanctions” (Rule 13-6).

We appreciate that some teams find it difficult to recruit gameday personnel, and sometimes have to balance the desire for a prestigious venue with lack of total control over field markings. However, any team can take steps to improve its facilities and performance, and we encourage them to do so.

We are also concerned that some teams wish to run the chains on the side of the field opposite to that specified by rule (Rule 1-2-7). This is not such a trivial change as some people may think. It is very disruptive to the positioning mechanics of the game officials, much of whose positioning is dictated by the position of the chains and the expectation that this will be on the opposite side of the field to that designated as the press box for penalty signalling and other purposes. Unless the total playing enclosure does not permit, the chains **MUST** be run on the side of the field opposite the designated press box.

Celebrations

Rule 9-2-1 sets out an explicit list of acts that players and other persons subject to the rules may not do. While many of these prohibitions are responses by NCAA to specific acts carried out by collegiate players, they are generally indicative of conduct that is not of the highest standard.

There is nothing in the rules to stop players holding spontaneous celebrations of touchdowns. What the rules are intended to stop are players who disrespect opponents, fans or the officials by their acts, or whose actions are clearly premeditated and excessive.

Football is a team sport, and players will want to celebrate with their colleagues and acknowledge the support of their fans. This can be done in exciting ways — it just can't be done in any of the ways prohibited by rule.

When the clock starts

There are two changes to timing rules this year:

- Rule 3-2-5 now states that the clock will start on a kick off when the ball is kicked. Previously, it started when the ball was legally touched in the field of play. This means that typically a few extra seconds will run off the clock each time a team kicks off.
- Rule 3-2-5-e now states that after a change of possession, the clock will start on the ready for play. Previously, it started on when the ball was snapped. This means that up to 25 seconds may run off the game clock each time there is a change of possession.

The impact of the latter rule change will depend very much on three factors:

1. how quickly the new offense substitute their players on to the field
2. how soon the Referee declares the ball ready for play
3. how quickly the new offense snap the ball after the ready for play

Clearly, when the team in the lead gets the ball with 25 seconds or less left in the game, there is now no need for them to snap the ball. This removes the need to have what would normally be a “take-a-knee” play. Otherwise, late in the game, when the team with the ball is in the lead, they are likely to want the play clock to run down most of the 25 seconds before snapping the ball. Conversely, teams behind in the score will want to conserve time by rushing to the line of scrimmage and snapping the ball as soon as possible. At the beginning and in the middle of the game, it will be a team’s choice as to whether they want to be quick or slow to snap the ball. Coaches need to be aware of these issues and prepare their players accordingly.

It is important to be fair to both teams that Referees declare the ball ready for play consistently. This is an issue that BAFRA will address with its members at its pre-season meeting.

The BAFA Rules Committee discussed the impact that these rules changes would make on the total number of plays in a game. After extensive discussion, it was agreed that the changes were unlikely to lead to a significant reduction, provided that the rules were applied sensibly and consistently.

In the USA, an undesirable consequence of the rules changes was that a small number of coaches tried to take advantage of them unfairly by instructing their teams to deliberately commit fouls (e.g. by kicking the ball out of bounds on a kick off). Such conduct is unethical and indefensible (see the Football Code on the next page), and if repeated in Britain would likely result in the Referee taking appropriate action during the game (Rule 9-2-3, e.g. by imposing a yardage penalty, and/or restoring the lost time on the clock for a first offence; and by forfeiting the game if the conduct is repeated after a warning), and in disciplinary action against the head coach subsequently.