

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 30-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. The referee will declare the ball ready for play when the umpire hands the ball to the kicker. 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)** [S18].
- b. All Team A players must be inbounds [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 teams restraining line has been relocated by a previous penalty [S18 or appropriate signal].
- e. All players of Team A must have been between the nine-yard marks after the ready for play signal [S19].
- f. 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].
- g. 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, or five yards from the spot where the subsequent dead ball belongs to Team B, or from the spot where the ball is placed after a touchback [S18] (A.R. 6-1-2:VII).

- h. All Team B players must be inbounds [S19].
- i. All Team B players must be behind their restraining line [S18].

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

- **Approved Ruling 6-1-2**

- I. The ball is kicked while teed illegally, punted on a kickoff or kicked from a spot between the inbounds line and the nearer sideline. **RULING:** Illegal kick. Dead-ball foul. Penalty — Five yards from the succeeding spot (2-15-1-a). [Cited by 2-15-1-a, 6-1-2]
- II. Kicker A11 places the ball on the tee in the centre of the field for a free kick with four teammates to the left side of the ball and six teammates to the right side of the ball. The ball blows off the tee, and A55 — who was lined up to the left of the ball — holds the ball on the tee for right-footed kicker A11. No other Team A players move. When the ball is kicked by A11, A55 is to the kicker's right. **RULING:** Foul by Team A for illegal formation at the kick. Penalty — Five yards from the previous spot or five yards from the spot where the subsequent dead ball belongs to Team B. [Cited by 6-1-2]
- III. Free-kicker A11 places the ball on the tee just inside the inbounds line on his right. All of his teammates line up to his left. At the ready for play, four Team A players who were on A11's left run to their right when he kicks the ball. **RULING:** Legal formation. [Cited by 6-1-2]
- IV. A11 places the ball on the tee for a free kick on the 30-yard line in the centre of the field. A12 lines up near the ball. After the ready for play, A11 starts forward as if to kick the ball, and A12 suddenly crosses in front of him and kicks the ball. When the ball is kicked, A11 is directly behind the ball with three teammates on one side of the ball. A12 plants his nonkicking foot on the same side of the ball as his three teammates. **RULING:** Foul by Team A for illegal formation. Penalty — five yards previous spot and rekick if Team B chooses; or five yards from the spot where the subsequent dead ball belongs to Team B. [Cited by 6-1-2]
- V. Team A is offside during its free kick and B27 recovers the kick with his knee touching the ground. **RULING:** Foul by Team A for offside. The ball is dead at the spot of the recovery. Penalty — Team B may choose five yards from the previous spot and another free kick, or five yards from the dead-ball spot with a first and 10. B27's recovery started a running play that ended immediately. This scenario also would have been valid if B27 had completed a fair catch. [Cited by 10-2-2-e, 6-1-2-a]
- VI. Team A is offside during its free kick and B37 fumbles while returning the kick. The ball is recovered by B45, who has a knee touching the ground. **RULING:** Foul by Team A for offside. The ball is dead at the spot of the recovery. Penalty — Team B may choose five yards from the previous spot and another free kick, or five yards from the spot of B45's recovery with a first and 10. [Cited by 10-2-2-e, 6-1-2-a]
- VII. Team A is offside on its free kick and B17 catches the ball at the 15-yard line. B17 returns the ball to the 45-yard line where he fumbles and A67 recovers at the 47-yard line. A67 then runs to the 35-yard line where he fumbles, with B20 recovering at the 33-yard line where he is downed. **RULING:** Team B's options are first and 10 at the 33-yard line, or Team A kicking again after a five-yard penalty from the previous spot. B20's recovery started a run, after a change of team possession, that is not covered by rule. [Cited by 6-1-2 Penalty]

Free Kick Recovery

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

- a. After it touches a Team B player (**Exception:** 6-1-4).
- b. After it breaks the plane of and remains beyond Team B's restraining line. (**Exception:** Rule 6-1-4) (**A.R. 2-11-2:I**).
- c. After it touches any player, the ground, an official or anything beyond Team B's restraining line.

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 a penalty incurred by either team before the ball becomes

dead is enforced, this privilege is cancelled. **(A.R. 6-1-3:I)**

- **Approved Ruling 6-1-3**

- I. A player of Team A illegally touches a free kick; then he or a teammate illegally recovers the kick. **RULING:** Unless cancelled by an accepted penalty, Team B may elect to take the ball at any spot of illegal touching by Team A. [Cited by 6-1-3-c]

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, 6-5-1 and 6-5-2). If caught or recovered by a player of the kicking team, the ball becomes dead. **(A.R. 4-1-3:II) (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.

- **Approved Ruling 6-1-6**

- I. A player of Team A recovers a rolling free kick beyond Team B's restraining line and makes a backward pass that goes out of bounds. **RULING:** The ball is dead and belongs to Team A where recovered (4-1-3-e). [Cited by 6-1-6-a]

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 five yards from the spot where the subsequent dead ball belongs to Team B; or the receiving team may put the ball in play 35 yards beyond Team A's restraining line at the inbounds spot [S19].

- **Approved Ruling 6-2-1**

- I. A kickoff from Team A's 30-yard line goes out of bounds untouched by Team B, and no other foul (or violation) occurs. **RULING:** Team B may accept a five-yard penalty from the previous spot with Team A kicking from the 25-yard line, or Team B may put the ball in play at Team B's 35-yard line at the inbounds spot or at the inbounds spot where the

ball went out of bounds. Team B may put the ball in play following a penalty at the dead ball spot. [Cited by 6-2-1]

- II. A kickoff from Team A's 30-yard line goes out of bounds untouched by Team B, and Team A has illegally touched the kick. **RULING:** Team B has three options: It may snap at the spot of violation, accept a five-yard penalty from the previous spot with Team A kicking from the 25-yard line, or put the ball in play at the inbounds spot five yards from where the ball went out of bounds (**A.R. 7-1-3-b Penalty**). [Cited by 6-2-1]
- III. A kickoff goes out of bounds after it has been touched by Team B, and no fouls occur. **RULING:** Team B snaps at inbounds spot. [Cited by 6-2-1]
- IV. Team A is offside or commits a substitution infraction, and the kickoff from the 30-yard line goes out of bounds after it has been touched by Team B. **RULING:** For either the offside foul or the substitution foul, Team B may elect to have the kick repeated at Team A's 25-yard line, or snap the ball at the inbounds spot five yards from where the ball went out of bounds (**A.R. 7-1-3-b Penalty**). [Cited by 6-2-1]
- V. Team A's untouched free kick goes out of bounds at the Team B 34-yard line. **RULING:** Team B may choose to have the ball free kicked after a five-yard penalty from the previous spot, or put the ball in play at the Team B 39-yard line.

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**)

• Approved Ruling 6-2-2

- I. A free kick from Team A's 30-yard line, untouched by Team B, goes out of bounds between the goal lines, and Team A was offside. **RULING:** Team B has these options: It may accept a five-yard penalty at the previous spot with Team A re-kicking from the 25-yard line; snap the ball at its 35-yard line at the inbounds spot; or snap the ball at the inbounds spot five yards from where the ball went out of bounds (**A.R. 7-1-3-b Penalty**). [Cited by 6-2-2]
- II. A free kick from Team A's 30-yard line, untouched by Team B, goes out of bounds between the goal lines, and Team A fouled after the ball went out of bounds. **RULING:** Team B has the choice of Team A kicking again after a five-yard and 12½-yard penalty, or putting the ball in play at the 50-yard line at the inbounds spot or 20 yards beyond the inbounds spot where the ball went out of bounds. [Cited by 6-2-2]
- III. A free kick in flight strikes a Team B player who is in his end zone and the ball then goes out of bounds at the three-yard line. **RULING:** Team B's ball, first and 10, on the three-yard line at the inbounds spot. [Cited by 6-2-2]
- IV. Airborne B17 has leaped from inbounds and is the first player to touch Team A's free kick when he receives the ball. He subsequently lands out of bounds with the ball in his possession. **RULING:** Foul, free kick out of bounds. Team B has these options: it may accept a five-yard penalty at the previous spot with Team A re-kicking; snap the ball at its 35-yard line at the inbounds spot (assuming the free kick was from the 30-yard line); or snap the ball at the inbounds spot five yards from where the ball crossed the sideline. [Cited by 6-2-2]
- V. Team A is in free kick formation behind its 30-yard line. As A3 kicks the ball from the 30-yard line, A26 is airborne at the Team A 32-yard line. **RULING:** Team A is offside. Five-yard penalty previous spot or five yards from the spot where the subsequent dead ball belongs to Team B (Rules 2-11-2 and 6-1-2-a).

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).

• Approved Ruling 6-3-1

- I. A Team A punt crosses the neutral zone, and the ball is touched (not blocked) by a Team B player and then rebounds behind the zone, where it is recovered by Team A in the field of play. **RULING:** The ball is dead and may not be advanced. First down for Team A. (Rules 6-3-3 and 6-3-6-a). [Cited by 2-15-7, 6-3-1-a]
- II. Team A's untouched kick goes beyond the neutral zone in flight, is blown back by the wind and first touches the ground, a player, an official behind the neutral zone. **RULING:** The kick is not considered to have crossed the neutral zone until it has touched the ground, a player, an official or anything beyond that zone. Any scrimmage kick may be advanced after catch or recovery by Team B, or after catch or recovery by Team A in or behind the neutral zone if the kick had not crossed the neutral zone (Rule 2-15-7). [Cited by 2-15-7, 6-3-1-a]
- III. A1 interferes with B1's opportunity to catch a kick when a scrimmage kick fails to cross the neutral zone. **RULING:** Interference with opportunity to catch a kick does not apply, and all players are eligible to touch, recover and advance the ball. Therefore, any player legally may push an opponent in an actual attempt to get at the ball; but no player may hold an opponent to prevent his reaching the ball, or in an attempt to permit a teammate to reach it (9-1-2-d-3 and 9-3-3-c-3). [Cited by 2-15-7, 6-3-1-a, 6-4-1, 9-1-2-d-3, 9-3-3-c-3]
- IV. Team A's punt from behind its own goal line crosses the neutral zone into the field of play. It then strikes a Team B player and rebounds across Team A's goal line where Team A falls on the ball. **RULING:** Safety (6-3-3, 6-3-6-a and 8-5-1-a). [Cited by 2-15-7, 8-5-1-a]
- V. Team A's punt from behind its own goal line crosses the neutral zone into the field of play. It then strikes a Team B player and rebounds behind Team A's goal line where Team A recovers the ball and advances to the one-yard line. **RULING:** Safety —ball dead where recovered (6-3-3, 6-3-6-a and 8-5-1-a). [Cited by 2-15-7, 6-3-6-a, 8-5-1-a]

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 cancelled (**Exception:** Rule 6-3-11 and Rule 8-4-2-b). **(A.R. 6-3-2:I-IV)** **(A.R. 6-3-11:I)** **(A.R. 10-1-4:VIII)**

c. Illegal touching in Team A's end zone is ignored.

• Approved Ruling 6-3-2

- I. Team A illegally touches its kick; then after Team B has touched it, Team A recovers. **RULING:** Touching by Team A after Team B has touched the kick is legal; and, in order to get the ball, Team B must take it where Team A illegally touched it. Unless illegal

touching is also illegal recovery by the kicking team and no fouls are involved, the receiving team may play the ball with the assurance that it may later elect the ball at any spot of illegal touching (6-3-2). [Cited by 6-3-2-a, 6-3-2-b]

- II. During a scrimmage kick, A1 commits a touching violation, after which B1 recovers, advances and fumbles. A2 recovers the fumble and, during the advance, B2 holds, trips or slugs. **RULING:** Team A may have the ball where left by the penalty for Team B's foul; but declining the penalty permits Team B to have the ball by electing the touching violation (6-3-2). [Cited by 6-3-2-b]
- III. Players of both teams, attempting to recover a blocked kick behind Team A's scrimmage line, force the ball across the neutral zone. **RULING:** After a scrimmage kick has crossed the neutral zone, no Team A player may touch the ball until it has been touched by an opponent (6-3-2). [Cited by 6-3-2-b]
- IV. Team A commits an illegal touching. **RULING:** Not a foul. Team B may choose to put the ball in play at the spot of illegal touching or where the ball is dead, including a touchback. If this was an unsuccessful field goal attempt and Team B did not touch the kick beyond the neutral zone, the options of Rule 8-4-2-b are available to the receiving team (6-3-2). [Cited by 6-3-2-b]
- V. Team A's punt is first touched by A80, then picked up by B40, who runs five yards and fumbles. A20 picks up the fumble and scores. During A20's run, B70 holds. **RULING:** Five- and 10-yard penalties are not administered on the try or the succeeding kickoff. Team B's foul is declined by rule. The ball belongs to Team B at the spot of illegal touching.
- VI. Team A's ball, fourth and 12 at Team A's 20-yard line. During Team A's scrimmage kick, B85 taunts A44. The ball is illegally touched by A20 at the 50-yard line and then recovered by B14, who advances the ball before fumbling at Team A's 25-yard line. A27 recovers the fumble and is downed immediately. **RULING:** Team A accepts the penalty. Team B's ball, first and 10 at Team B's 35-yard line following enforcement of the live-ball foul penalized as a dead-ball foul.

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**)

• Approved Ruling 6-3-4

- I. Team A's scrimmage kick is "at rest" on the Team B two-yard line. Receiver B4 is blocked by A7 and forced to touch the ball. **RULING:** Touching by Team B is disregarded since B4 is deemed not to have touched the kick. A new impetus is not possible without contact of the ball by a player (8-7-1). [Cited by 6-3-4-a, 8-7-1, 8-7-2-b-2-Exception]
- II. Team A kicks from its own 30-yard line. The untouched kick has come to rest on Team B's three-yard line when A3 blocks B1 into the ball that is forced through the end zone by Team B's contact with the ball. **RULING:** Touchback. Since Team A blocked Team B into the ball, Team B is not deemed to have touched the ball. Impetus cannot be charged to Team B (8-7-1). [Cited by 6-3-4-a, 8-7-2-b-2-Exception]
- III. Team A's long field goal attempt is first touched when A1 legally bats the rolling ball into nearby B1. **RULING:** Team B is not deemed to have touched the ball (8-4-2-b). [Cited by 6-3-4-b, 8-4-2-b, 8-7-2-b-2-Exception]

- IV. Team A's untouched scrimmage kick is at rest on the Team B three-yard line when B22 blocks A80 into the ball, forcing it into the end zone where it touches the ground.

RULING: Touchback —Ignore touching by A80. Neither team has touched the kicked ball (8-6-1-b). [Cited by 6-3-4-a, 8-6-1-b, 8-7-2-a, 8-7-2-b-2-Exception]

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 (*Exception:* Rules 4-1-3-g, 6-3-9, 6-5-1 and 6-5-2).

(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 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, this 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) (A.R. 8-4-2:IV)

• Approved Ruling 6-3-9

- I. A Team A player illegally touches a punt and the ball then rolls into Team B's end zone, where Team B recovers and advances the ball into the field of play. **RULING:** The ball is dead when it strikes the ground in the end zone. Team B may choose a touchback or take the ball at the spot of Team A's illegal touching (4-1-3-c). [Cited by 4-1-3-c, 6-3-9]
- II. Team A's scrimmage kick goes into Team B end zone and the ball is untouched by Team B beyond the neutral zone. Team B commits a personal foul after the ball touches the ground in the end zone. **RULING:** Team B's ball, first and 10 on the 10-yard line (*Exception:* Rule 8-4-2-b). [Cited by 6-3-9]
- III. Team A's scrimmage kick goes into Team B's end zone and the ball is untouched by Team B beyond the neutral zone, and Team A commits a personal foul after the ball touches the ground in the end zone. **RULING:** Team B's ball, first and 10 on the 35-yard line. If the snap was outside the 20-yard line on an unsuccessful field goal attempt, the penalty is at the previous spot. [Cited by 6-3-9]
- IV. A Team B player touches a scrimmage kick in flight in Team B's end zone and downs the ball in the end zone. **RULING:** Touchback (8-6-1-a). [Cited by 8-6-1-a]

- V. A Team B player touches a scrimmage kick in flight in Team B's end zone and catches or recovers the ball and runs to Team A's end zone. **RULING:** Team B touchdown (6-3-5).
- VI. A Team B player touches a scrimmage kick in flight in Team B's end zone and Team A downs the ball in the end zone. **RULING:** Team A touchdown (6-3-3 and 8-2-1-e).
[Cited by 8-2-1-e]

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 made beyond the neutral zone is an illegal kick and 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)

- **Approved Ruling 6-3-11**

- I. Team A kicks from the 50-yard line. During the kick, B1 clips at Team B's 25-yard line. The untouched kick is batted backward out of bounds from the end zone by Team A and goes out of bounds on the two-yard line. **RULING:** Team B's ball. First and 10 on the 10-yard line. [Cited by 6-3-11, 6-3-2-b, 9-4-1-c]

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 or five yards from the spot where the subsequent dead ball belongs to Team B. [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 X**)

- a. This protection terminates when the kick touches the ground or is muffed 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 penalise from the succeeding spot. Flagrant offenders shall be disqualified [S47].

• **Approved Ruling 6-4-1**

- I. A Team A player catches a free kick, thus preventing an opponent from making the catch. **RULING:** Illegal interference. Penalty —15 yards from the spot of the foul.
- II. A Team B player, about to catch a scrimmage kick, is tackled before the ball arrives, but catches the kick while he is falling. **RULING:** Illegal interference. Penalty —15 yards from the spot of the foul. Disqualification of the Team A player if the contact is flagrant. If the foul is between the goal lines, enforcement is from the spot of the foul and Team B puts the ball in play by a snap; if behind Team Bs goal line, award a touchback and penalize from the succeeding spot. The ruling would be the same had the kick been muffed or fumbled. The ruling is also the same on an unsuccessful field goal attempt since Team B touched the ball beyond the line of scrimmage. [Cited by 6-4-1-c]
- III. A1 of the kicking team beyond the neutral zone is standing or running between a kick in flight and B1, and (a) A1 is struck by the ball while B1 is in a position to catch the ball; or (b) B1, in attempting to catch the ball, bumps into A1. **RULING:** Illegal interference. Penalty —(a) 15 yards for interference with the opportunity to catch the kick; or (b) 15 yards for interference with the opportunity to catch the kick. [Cited by 6-4-1-c]
- IV. A player of Team B, attempting to catch a kick (no fair catch signal), muffs the ball that is then touched by an opponent who was not interfering with the opportunity of the receiver when he was in position to make the catch. **RULING:** Not interference. Protection against interference with the opportunity to catch a kick ends when any player of Team B muffs the ball [Cited by 6-4-1-a]
- V. A Team A player beyond the neutral zone first touches or catches a scrimmage kick that no receiver could have caught while it was in flight. **RULING:** Illegal touching but not interference. [Cited by 6-4-1]
- VI. On a scrimmage kick beyond the neutral zone, a Team A player stands in or runs through an area close to a Team B player who is in position to catch the ball and is deemed to have impeded the Team B player. **RULING:** Interference with the opportunity to catch a kick. Penalty —15 yards from the spot of the foul, which is where the Team B player was positioned to catch the kick.
- VII. On a free kick, catch interference occurs. The ball subsequently goes out of bounds between the goal lines untouched by Team B. **RULING:** Team B may elect the interference penalty or decline it and consider the kick out of bounds. [Cited by 6-4-1-c]
- VIII. B10 signals for a fair catch, muffs the ball and then catches it. **RULING:** If B10 has an opportunity to catch the kick following the muff, he must be given an unimpeded opportunity to complete the catch. If B10 catches the muffed kick, the ball is dead where first touched by B10.
- IX. Team As ball, fourth and 10 at the 50-yard line. B17 is at Team B’s 20-yard line and in position to catch Team A’s high scrimmage kick. During the downward flight of the ball, A37 contacts B17 viciously and flagrantly before he touches the ball. A37 did not alter his speed or make any attempt to elude B17. **RULING:** Team A personal foul, interference with the opportunity to catch a kick. Penalty —15 yards from the spot of the foul. 37 is disqualified. [Cited by 6-4-1-c]
- X. Team A’s ball, fourth and 10 at the 50-yard line. Team A’s windblown scrimmage kick is on

its downward flight at Team B's 30-yard line. B18, who was at the 20-yard line, must detour around A92 at the 25-yard line to make the catch at the 30-yard line. **RULING:** Team A foul, interference with the opportunity to catch a kick. Penalty —15 yards from the spot of the foul, which is the 25-yard line. [Cited by 6-4-1]

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 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. (**Exception:** Rules 6-5-1-a Exception, 7-1-2 and 8-6-1-b).
- **Approved Ruling 6-5-1**
 - I. After a valid or invalid signal, B1 muffs and B2, who did not signal, catches the kick. **RULING:** The ball is dead when and where caught. [Cited by 6-5-1-a]
 - II. After a valid or invalid signal by both B1 and B2, one muffs the kick and the other catches it. **RULING:** Ball is dead. Team B's ball at the spot of the catch. [Cited by 6-5-1-a, 6-5-3-b]
 - III. B1 has a foot out of bounds when he gives a valid or invalid signal. He then catches the kick inbounds. **RULING:** There is no rule against a receiver going out of bounds during a kick. The signal is valid or invalid; the inbounds catch is legal, and the ball is dead. [Cited by 6-5-1-a]
 - IV. Following his valid fair catch signal, B17 muffs the kick but still has a reasonable opportunity to catch the kick. **RULING:** After a valid fair catch signal, the unimpeded opportunity to complete the catch does not end when the kick is muffed. The player who signaled must be given a reasonable opportunity to catch the ball without being interfered with by members of the kicking team. An intentional muff forward prior to the catch is an illegal bat. [Cited by 6-5-1-a]

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**) (**A.R. 10-1-5:II**)

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

- **Approved Ruling 6-5-2**
 - I. A Team B player who has made a fair catch is tackled after he has carried the ball more than two steps. **RULING:** Foul by the catcher. Penalty —Five yards from the succeeding spot. [Cited by 6-5-2]
 - II. B1 signals before a muff by B2 and then B1 catches or recovers the kick and advances. **RULING:** Advancing after the fair catch does not cancel the dead ball that is established when the ball is caught or recovered. Two steps are permitted to enable B1 to come to a stop or to regain balance. A third or subsequent step inbounds is

subject to penalty from where the ball is caught or recovered. If B1 is tackled, the tackle is disregarded unless deemed unnecessarily rough or is so late that the tackler should know that there was no intention to advance. If the kick is caught or recovered by Team B in the end zone, it is a touchback. If B1 is tackled before completion of a third step, only the tackler has fouled. [Cited by 6-5-2]

- III. B1, who signaled for a fair catch, is on the run and off balance when he catches the ball, and his third step ends on or outside a boundary line. **RULING:** No advantage is gained by carrying a dead ball out of bounds. Therefore, the third step is disregarded and the ball is put in play at the succeeding spot, the spot of the catch. [Cited by 6-5-2]
- IV. Team A punts. B1, after signalling for a fair catch on his 20-yard line, deliberately lets the ball strike the ground where B2 recovers the bouncing ball and advances to Team B's 35-yard line. **RULING:** The ball is dead at the spot of recovery. Advance is illegal. Penalty —Five yards the succeeding spot, the spot of recovery Team B's ball, first and 10 (5-2-7). [Cited by 6-5-2]

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).

• Approved Ruling 6-5-3

- I. A1 or B1 signals for a fair catch beyond the neutral zone during a kick that does not cross the neutral zone. **RULING:** Not an invalid signal, and the ball remains alive (2-7-1-a).
- II. A1 signals for a fair catch beyond the neutral zone during a kick that crosses the neutral zone. **RULING:** Not an invalid signal (2-7-3). [Cited by 6-5-3-c]
- III. On a free kick, B17 makes an invalid signal for a fair catch near the sideline, muffs, and the kick goes out of bounds. **RULING:** Team B's ball, first and 10 at the inbounds spot.
- IV. A scrimmage kick strikes the ground beyond the neutral zone and bounces high into the air and B1 signals for a fair catch. **RULING:** Invalid signal. The ball is dead when recovered. [Cited by 6-5-3-a]
- V. B1 catches a scrimmage kick beyond the neutral zone and then signals for a fair catch. **RULING:** Invalid signal. The ball is dead where the signal first was given. [Cited by 6-5-3-a]
- VI. Team A's scrimmage kick is rolling beyond the neutral zone when B17 alerts his teammates to stay away from the ball by a "get away" signal at his waist or below. **RULING:** This is not an invalid signal and Team B may recover and advance until the ball is dead by rule. [Cited by 6-5-3-a]

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].

• **Approved Ruling 6-5-4**

- I. B1 signals and does not touch a punt, but while the untouched ball is loose in the field of play, he blocks an opponent (a) more than three yards beyond the neutral zone or (b) in the receiver’s end zone. **RULING:** (a) If the ball crosses the neutral zone and Team B has possession when the down ends, Team B is penalised 15 yards from the postscrimmage kick enforcement spot. (b) Safety. The ruling is the same on an unsuccessful field goal attempt. [Cited by 6-5-4]
- II. B1 signals at the 50-yard line and does not touch a punt. While the ball is rolling on the ground at Team B’s 45-yard line, B1 illegally uses his hands in an attempt to get to the ball and the ball is declared dead in Team B’s possession. **RULING:** Penalty —15 yards from the postscrimmage kick enforcement spot. Team B retains the ball (10-2-2-e-3). [Cited by 6-5-4]

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].

• **Approved Ruling 6-5-5**

- I. B1 and B2 each signal. B1 muffs and B2 is about to catch the kick when he is tackled by A1. **RULING:** Not interference, but holding. Penalty —10 yards from the previous spot. [Cited by 6-5-5]
- II. A Team B player who has made a fair catch signal is tackled before he has carried the ball more than two steps. **RULING:** Foul by the tackler. Penalty —15 yards from the succeeding spot.
- III. The fair catch signal is by a teammate of B1, who catches the ball. **RULING:** The ball is dead when and where caught. B1 is not entitled to catch protection but is entitled to the same protection he has after any other dead ball (6-5-1-c). [Cited by 6-5-1-c, 6-5-5]