

RULE 4

Ball in Play, Dead Ball, Out of Bounds

SECTION 1. Ball in Play – Dead Ball

Dead Ball Becomes Alive

ARTICLE 1. After a dead ball is ready for play, it becomes a live ball when it is legally snapped or legally free-kicked. A ball snapped or free-kicked before it is ready for play remains dead (A.R. 2-15-4:I) (A.R. 3-2-6:I) (A.R. 4-1-4:I and II) (A.R. 7-1-3:VI) (A.R. 7-1-5:I and II).

Live Ball Becomes Dead

- ARTICLE 2. a. A live ball becomes a dead ball as provided in the rules or when an official sounds his whistle (even though inadvertently), or otherwise signals the ball dead (A.R. 4-2-1:II) (A.R. 4-2-4:I).
- b. If an official sounds his whistle inadvertently or otherwise signals the ball dead during a down (Rules 4-1-3-k and 4-1-3-m):
1. When the ball is in player possession, then the team in possession may elect to put the ball in play where declared dead or replay the down.
 2. When the ball is loose from a fumble, backward pass or illegal pass, then the team in possession may elect to put the ball in play where possession was lost or replay the down.
 3. During a legal forward pass or a free or scrimmage kick, then the ball is returned to the previous spot and the down replayed.
 4. After Team B gains possession on the try or during an extra period, then the try is over or the extra period series is ended.
- c. If a foul occurs during any of the above downs, the penalty shall be administered as in any other play situation if not in conflict with other rules. (A.R. 4-1-2:I and II)
- **Approved Ruling 4-1-2**
 - I. Fourth and 16 at the 50-yard line, Team A kicks. B1 clips on Team B's 40-yard line, and B2 muffs the kick on the 25-yard line. While the ball is loose, an inadvertent whistle is sounded. **RULING:** If Team A accepts the penalty, penalise Team B from the 50-yard line. Team A's ball, first and 10 on the 35-yard line. If Team A declines the penalty, replay the down. [Cited by 4-1-2-c]
 - II. Fourth and 16 at the 50-yard line. At the snap, B1 is offside. Team A advances the ball to the 30-yard line and fumbles. During the loose ball, an inadvertent whistle is sounded. **RULING:** Team A may refuse the penalty and put the ball in play on the 30-yard line, first and 10. [Cited by 4-1-2-c]

Ball Declared Dead

ARTICLE 3. A live ball becomes dead and an official shall sound his whistle or declare it dead:

- a. When it goes out of bounds other than a kick that scores a field goal after touching the uprights or crossbar, when a ball carrier is out of bounds, or when a ball carrier is so held

- that his forward progress is stopped. When in question, the ball is dead. **(A.R. 4-2-1:II)**
- b. When any part of the ball carrier's body, except his hand or foot, touches the ground or when the ball carrier is tackled or otherwise falls and loses possession of the ball as he contacts the ground with any part of his body, except his hand or foot. **(Exception:** The ball remains alive when an offensive player has simulated a kick or is in position to kick the ball held for a place kick by a teammate. The ball may be kicked, passed or advanced by rule.) **(A.R. 4-1-3:I)**
 - c. When a touchdown, touchback, safety, field goal, or successful try occurs; when Team A completes an illegal forward pass in Team B's end zone; when Team A completes a forward pass to an ineligible player in Team B's end zone; or when an unsuccessful field goal attempt that has crossed the neutral zone and is then untouched by Team B, lands in Team B's end zone or out of bounds. **(A.R. 6-3-9:I)**
 - d. When, during a try, a dead-ball rule applies. (Rule 8-3-2-d-5).
 - e. When a player of the kicking team catches or recovers any free kick or a scrimmage kick that has crossed the neutral zone. **(A.R. 4-1-3:II)**
 - f. When a free kick, scrimmage kick or any other loose ball comes to rest and no player attempts to secure it.
 - g. When a free kick or scrimmage kick (beyond the neutral zone) is caught or recovered by any player after a valid or invalid fair catch signal; or when an invalid fair catch signal is made after a catch or recovery by Team B (Rules 2-7-1, 2-7-2 and 2-7-3).
 - h. When a return kick or scrimmage kick beyond the neutral zone is made.
 - i. When a forward pass strikes the ground.
 - j. When, on fourth down before a change of team possession, a Team A fumble is caught or recovered by a Team A player other than the fumbler (Rules 7-2-2-a and 7-2-2-b).
 - k. When a live ball not in player possession touches anything inbounds other than a player, a player's equipment, an official, an official's equipment or the ground (inadvertent whistle provisions apply).
 - l. When a simultaneous catch or recovery of a live ball occurs.
 - m. When the ball becomes illegal while in play (inadvertent whistle provisions apply).
 - n. When the live ball is in possession of an official.
 - o. When a ball carrier simulates placing his knee on the ground.
 - p. When an airborne pass receiver from either team is so held and subsequently carried that he is prevented from immediately returning to the ground. **(A.R. 7-3-6:IV)**
 - q. When a ball carrier's helmet comes completely off. The ball belongs to the ball carrier's team at that spot.
- **Approved Ruling 4-1-3**
 - I. While A1 is holding the ball for a place kick, Team B plays the ball by (a) recovering a loose ball, (b) snatching it from A1 or (c) batting it from his hands. **RULING:** (a) The ball remains alive. (b) The ball remains alive. (c) Fumble, the batting by Team B is legal. [Cited by 2-10-1, 4-1-3-b]
 - II. A player, ineligible to touch a kick, catches or recovers it. **RULING:** The ball is dead, no exception for illegal possession. [Cited by 4-1-3-e, 6-1-6-a]

Ball Ready for Play

ARTICLE 4. No player shall put the ball in play before it is ready for play. (**A.R. 4-1-4:I and II**)

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

- **Approved Ruling 4-1-4**

- I. Snapper A1 snaps the ball before the ball is made ready for play. A2 muffs the snap and B1 recovers the ball. **RULING:** Dead ball foul. Team A snap infraction. Penalty – Five-yards from the succeeding spot, Team A's ball. The ball does not become alive, and all action should be stopped immediately by the game officials. [Cited by 2-2-4-b, 4-1-1, 4-1-4, 7-1-1, 7-1-3-a-5]
- II. Kicker A1 kicks off before the referee has declared the ball ready for play. **RULING:** Dead ball foul. Penalty – Five yards from the succeeding spot. The ball does not become alive, and all action should be stopped immediately by the game officials. [Cited by 2-2-4-b, 4-1-1, 4-1-4, 7-1-1]

Play-Clock Count

ARTICLE 5. The ball shall be put in play within 40 or 25 seconds after it is made ready for play (Rule 3-2-4), unless, during that interval, play is suspended. If play is suspended, the play-clock count will start again.

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

SECTION 2. Out of Bounds

Player Out of Bounds

ARTICLE 1. a. A player or an airborne player is out of bounds when any part of his person touches anything, other than another player or game official, on or outside a boundary line. (**A.R. 4-2-1:I and II**)

b. A player or an airborne player who touches a pylon is out of bounds.

- **Approved Ruling 4-2-1**

- I. A inbounds runner bumps into or is touched by a player or game official on the sideline. **RULING:** The runner is not out of bounds. [Cited by 4-2-1-a]
- II. Runner A1 is running inbounds near the sideline when he is contacted by a substitute of Team B, who is on the sideline. **RULING:** Rule 4-2-1 states a player is out of bounds when any part of his person touches anything other than a player or an official. Penalty – 15 yards from the basic spot or other illegal interference penalties (9-1-5-a and 9-2-3). [Cited by 4-1-2-a, 4-1-3-a, 4-2-1-a, 9-2-3-c]

Held Ball Out of Bounds

ARTICLE 2. A ball in player possession is out of bounds when either the ball or any part of the runner touches the ground or anything else that is on or outside a boundary line except another player or game official.

Ball Out of Bounds

ARTICLE 3. a. A ball not in player possession, other than a kick that scores a field goal, is out of bounds when it touches the ground, a player, a game official or anything else that is on or outside a boundary line.

- b. A ball that touches a pylon is out of bounds behind the goal line.
- c. If a live ball not in player possession crosses a boundary line and then is declared out of bounds, it is out of bounds at the crossing point.

Out of Bounds at Forward Point

ARTICLE 4. a. If a live ball is declared out of bounds and the ball does not cross a boundary line, it is out of bounds at the ball's most forward point when it was declared dead. **(A.R. 4-2-4:I)** (*Exception:* Rule 8-5-1-a, **(A.R. 8-5-1:I)**).

- b. A touchdown may be scored if the ball is inbounds and has broken the plane of the goal line before or simultaneous to the runner going out of bounds.
 - c. A receiver who is in the opponent's end zone and contacting the ground is credited with a completion if he reaches over the sideline or end line and catches a legal pass.
 - d. The most forward point of the ball when declared out of bounds between the end lines is the point of forward progress. **(A.R. 8-2-1:II)** **(A.R. 8-5-1:X)**
 - e. When a runner dives or jumps toward the sideline and is airborne as he crosses the sideline, forward progress is determined by the position of the ball as it crosses the sideline. **(A.R. 8-2-1:III and IV)**
- **Approved Ruling 4-2-4**
 - i. A player with one foot out of bounds behind a goal line touches a loose ball in the field of play. **RULING:** Ball is out of bounds and dead at its most forward point in the field of play. If this loose ball was an untouched free kick, it is a free kick out of bounds and a foul. Penalty – Five yards from the previous spot or Team B's ball 30 yards beyond Team A's free kick line. [Cited by 4-1-2-a, 4-2-4-a]