

# Points of emphasis

For 2009, the Rules Committee wishes coaches, players and officials to take particular note of the following points.

## Marking ball ready for play

NCAA made a rule change in 2008 that introduced a combined 40/25-second play clock, similar to the system used by the NFL. This rule has considerable benefits in maintaining a consistent pace of play and marking the ball ready for play.

Unfortunately for us in Britain, stadium play clocks are extremely rare, and there are practical difficulties in any official operating a 40-second clock on the field.

We have therefore decided to adopt the 40/25-second play clock only in games played in venues where visible play clocks are available. In all other games, we will retain the old 25-second play clock rule, but ask all referees to aid consistency by targeting approximately 12 to 15 seconds from the end of one play to the ball being declared ready for play for the next.

## Sideline control

Leagues and teams are strongly encouraged to develop plans to enforce the rules regarding the team area and coaching box (Rule 1-2-4-a, back of the limit lines between the 25-yard lines), and the space between the limit lines (Rules 1-2-3-a and 1-2-3-b, 12 feet outside the sidelines and the end line) and the sidelines. These plans should focus on keeping these field-level positions clear of persons who have no game responsibilities. Simply put, "No job means no pass to be on the sideline."

Each team is limited to 40 persons in its team area, not including squad members in full uniform, who shall be wearing a "team" credential. (Full uniform is defined as equipped in accord with BAFA rules and ready to play.) These persons should only be those who are directly involved in the game.

A credential shall be a piece of card or plastic, at least as big as a credit card, and worn as a badge or hung from the bearer's neck. The credential must be light blue for coaches, red for medics and yellow for all others.

Persons who are directly involved in the game include, but may not be limited to: coaches, team managers, medical and athletic training staff members, athletics communications staff members, and game operations staff members (e.g., chain crew, ball persons, official media liaisons, technicians responsible for coach-to-press box communications).

Teams are recommended to clearly separate spectator areas from the field. If there is no spectator seating, a rope or similar marker should be used to keep spectators back from the field. Game management should ensure that this is enforced.

These guidelines are intended to reduce the increasing number of disturbing, and potentially dangerous, incidents that occur at field level, between persons who need to be at field level and those who do not. The field level is for those who are performing a service associated with action on the field of play and for administration of the game; it is not for spectators.

Please consider the following points when developing a plan regarding field-level access:

- Violation encourages persons in stadium seats to join spectators in the restricted area;
- Persons on the sidelines are subject to injury at the end of plays when players enter the

restricted area out of control. Conversely, they may be responsible for injury to players and game officials in similar circumstances;

- Spectators on the sideline can verbally or physically abuse players and game officials;
- Spectators at field level are in a prime position to rush onto the field of play following the game;
- Persons with vicious intent may be in sideline groups; and
- The view of spectators in the first few rows of seats who have paid admission to the game might be restricted. In addition, the view from television and team video cameras of plays near the sidelines may be hindered.

It is the responsibility of BAFA leagues and teams to provide an environment both on the field of play and in the areas immediately surrounding it that allows the teams, officials and persons mentioned above to perform without distractions.

### **Protection of defenseless players**

The Rules Committee has introduced a new rule that explicitly prohibits initiating contact with and targeting a defenseless opponent (Rule 9-1-3).

The following are situations in which defenseless players are susceptible to serious injury:

- The quarterback moving down the line of scrimmage who has handed or pitched the ball to a teammate, and then makes no attempt to participate further in the play;
- The kicker who is in the act of kicking the ball, or who has not had a reasonable length of time to regain his balance after the kick;
- The passer who is in the act of throwing the ball, or who has not had a reasonable length of time to participate in the play again after releasing the ball;
- The pass receiver whose concentration is on the ball;
- The pass receiver who has clearly relaxed when the pass is no longer catchable;
- The kick receiver whose attention is on the downward flight of the ball;
- The kick receiver who has just touched the ball;
- The player who has relaxed once the ball has become dead; and
- The player who is obviously out of the play.

These players are protected by rules that have been in place for many years. It is of the utmost importance that participants, coaches and game officials carefully and diligently observe safety rules.

Intentional helmet-to-helmet contact is never legal, nor is any other blow directed toward an opponent's head. Flagrant offenders shall be disqualified.

### **Equipment**

Football participants have access to the finest available equipment in terms of safety and style. Before each contest, head coaches certify that all players:

1. Have been informed what equipment is mandatory by rule and what constitutes illegal equipment.
2. Have been provided the equipment mandated by rule.
3. Have been instructed to wear, and how to wear, mandatory equipment during the game.

4. Have been instructed to notify the coaching staff when equipment becomes illegal through play during the game.

Players have an important responsibility in wearing pads properly and adhering to team dress codes while representing their team. More importantly, they may avoid serious career-ending injury or life-threatening infections by very conscientiously wearing the equipment available for their football participation.

### **Medical considerations with equipment**

In response to a presentation by the National Athletic Trainers Association liaison to the NCAA Football Rules Committee, the committee strongly encourages the enforcement of wearing all pads properly and covering the body parts for which they were designed. Not only does properly worn equipment prevent or reduce the severity of injury from direct trauma, but in some cases, equipment prevents skin wounds from occurring to areas that would otherwise be protected by the uniform. The committee recommends that pads and uniforms are worn properly, paying particular care to wear uniform pants that cover the participant's knees, which can be easily abraded when exposed.

Methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus (MRSA) is becoming more prevalent. MRSA is a significant concern because this infection is resistant to commonly used antibiotics. MRSA infections can result in lost playing time and in some cases, players have been hospitalized in order to control the infection. Unfortunately, MRSA infections have also caused the deaths of several football players in the past couple of years.

The usual mode of transmission of MRSA is through body-to-body contact from an infected wound. If abrasions do occur on the knees or any other body part, that open wound then is more susceptible to MRSA transmission and infection. MRSA can also be transmitted from an object (e.g., towel) that has come in contact with the infected area to another person sharing that same object. MRSA bacterium is not transmitted through the air, nor is it found on mud or grass. MRSA cannot live on artificial turf.

The committee recommends the following precautions to reduce the incidence of MRSA infections:

- Participants should wear all required padding and uniform as found in Rule 1-4-4.
- Keep hands clean by washing thoroughly with soap and water, or by using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer routinely.
- Immediate showering after all physical activity.
- Avoid whirlpools or common tubs when a player has an open wound.
- Properly wash athletics gear and towels after each use.
- Refer all active skin lesions and lesions that do not respond to initial care to the athletic trainer for proper first aid and observation for infection.
- Cover all skin lesions appropriately before participation.
- Participants should be discouraged from sharing towels, and any participant who has MRSA or is recovering from MRSA should have his own colour-coded towel to prevent the spread of infection.

### **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 they are too young to do the job properly;
- 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 three steps to address the situation:

- 1 BAFRA officials will continue to do game management and/or field audits 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).
- 3 We have changed Rule 13-3-1-c to make it mandatory that officials’ assistants under the age of 14 are not used, and that those under 18 must be supervised by a responsible member of game management.

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.