

Points of emphasis

For 2010-11, the Rules Committee wishes coaches, players and officials to take particular note of the following points.

Sideline control

Competitions and teams should 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.

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. Simply put, no job means no sideline pass.

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 (Rules 1-1-6 and 1-2-4-b): 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.

Protection of defenseless players

In 2009, the Rules Committee introduced a separate rule prohibiting 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.

Safety and medical considerations

In consultation with the National Athletic Trainers Association (NATA), the NCAA Football Rules Committee strongly encourages coaches and officials to be diligent in ensuring that players wear mandatory equipment. It is especially important that equipment and pads cover body parts for which they were designed. Particular attention is drawn to wearing uniform pants that cover the knees, which are easily abraded when exposed.

Football players are especially susceptible to methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus (MRSA), which is resistant to commonly used antibiotics. MRSA not only results in lost playing time and in some cases, it has caused the deaths of several football players in recent years.

MRSA is typically transmitted through body-to-body contact from an infected wound or via an object (e.g. towel) that has come in contact with the infected area. It is not transmitted through the air, is not found on mud or grass, and cannot live on artificial turf.

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

- Proper wearing of all required padding and uniform equipment.
- 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 having an open wound.
- Proper washing of athletics gear and towels after each use.
- Referring all active skin lesions to the athletic trainer.
- Covering all skin lesions appropriately before participation.

Other key areas cited by the NATA:

CONCUSSIONS. Coaches and medical personnel should exercise prudence in making return-to-play decisions when a participant suffers a concussion.

HYDRATION. Coaches and medical personnel should encourage hydration without restriction to participants during all physical activity.

The BAFA Rules Committee concurs with the above.

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 competitions 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.