

# RULE 7

## Snapping and Passing the Ball

### SECTION 1. The Scrimmage

#### Starting with a Snap

ARTICLE 1. a. The ball shall be put in play by a legal snap unless the rules provide for a legal free kick. (A.R. 4-1-4:I and II)

**PENALTY – Dead-ball foul. Five yards from the succeeding spot [S7 and S19].**

b. The ball may not be snapped in a side zone (Rule 2-31-6). If the starting point for any scrimmage down is in a side zone, the ball shall be transferred to the hash mark.

#### Shift and False Start

ARTICLE 2. a. *Shift*. After a huddle (Rule 2-14) or shift (Rule 2-22-1) and before the snap, all Team A players must come to an absolute stop and remain stationary in their positions for at least one full second before the ball is snapped, without movement of the feet, body, head or arms. (A.R. 7-1-2:I)

b. *False Start*. Each of the following is a false start by Team A if it occurs prior to the snap after the ball is ready for play and all players are in scrimmage formation:

1. Any movement by one or more players that simulates the start of a play.
2. The snapper moving to another position.
3. A restricted lineman (Rule 2-27-4) moving his hand(s) or making any quick movement. [**Exception:** It is not a false start if a Team A lineman immediately reacts when threatened by a Team B player in the neutral zone (Rule 7-1-5-a-2) (A.R. 7-1-3:V)].
4. An offensive player making any quick, jerky movement before the snap, including but not limited to:
  - (a) A lineman moving his foot, shoulder, arm, body or head in a quick, jerky motion in any direction.
  - (b) The snapper shifting or moving the ball, moving his thumb or fingers, flexing his elbows, jerking his head, or dipping his shoulders or buttocks.
  - (c) The quarterback making any quick, jerky movement that simulates the beginning of a play.
  - (d) A back simulating receiving the ball by making any quick, jerky movement that simulates the beginning of a play.
5. The offensive team never coming to a one-second stop prior to the snap after the ball is ready for play (A.R. 7-1-2:IV).

• **Approved Ruling 7-1-2**

- I. After a huddle or shift, all Team A players come to a stop and remain stationary for one second. Then, before the snap, two or more simultaneously change their positions. **RULING:** All 11 Team A players must again stop for one second before the snap, otherwise it is a live-ball foul at the snap for an illegal shift. Penalty — Five yards from previous spot (Rule 2-22-1). [Cited by 2-22-1-a, 7-1-2-a]
- II. Ten Team A players shift while A1 remains stationary. A1 then starts moving backward before one second elapses and the ball is snapped. **RULING:** If A1, who moved, did not halt with the other Team A players for one second before the snap, it is a dead-ball

foul at the snap for a false start. Penalty — Five yards from the succeeding spot [Cited by 2-22-1-a]

- III. After the Team A players have stopped for one second, end A88 runs wide and stops, and before one second elapses, back A36 starts moving backward. **RULING:** Legal. But if back A36 starts before end A88 stops, the simultaneous movement of two players constitutes a shift and all Team A players must be stationary for one second before the snap (Rule 2-22-1). [Cited by 2-22-1-a]
- IV. Team A is in a no-huddle offense and is moving to the line when the ball is made ready for play. Although some players settle into their positions and stop, at least one player never stops and is still moving when the ball is snapped. **RULING:** Dead-ball foul — false start, since Team A never satisfied the one-second rule before the snap. Officials should shut the play down and penalise Team A five yards. [Cited by 2-22-1-a, 7-1-2-b-5]

### Offensive Team Requirements — Prior to the Snap

ARTICLE 3. Each of the following (a-d) is a dead-ball foul. Officials should blow the whistle and not allow the play to continue. After the ball is ready for play and before it is snapped:

- a. *Snapper*. The snapper (Rule 2-27-8):
  1. May not move to a different position nor have any part of his body beyond the neutral zone.
  2. May not lift the ball, move it beyond the neutral zone or simulate the start of a play.
  3. May take his hand(s) off the ball, but only if this does not simulate the start of a play.
- b. *Nine-Yard Marks*.
  1. Each Team A substitute must have been between the nine-yard marks. Team A players who participated in the previous down must have been between the nine-yard marks after the previous down and before the next snap (**A.R. 3-3-4:I**).
  2. All Team A players must have been between the nine-yard marks after a charged team timeout, an injury timeout, a media timeout or the end of a period.
- c. *Encroachment*. Once the snapper is established, no other Team A player may be in or beyond the neutral zone [**Exceptions:** (1) Substitutes and departing players; and (2) offensive players in a scrimmage kick formation who break the neutral zone with their hand(s) to point at opponents].
- d. *False Start*. No Team A player may commit a false start (Rule 7-1-2-b) or contact an opponent (**A.R. 7-1-3:III**).

**PENALTY – [a-d] Dead-ball foul: Five yards from the succeeding spot. [S7 and S19 or S20].**

- **Approved Ruling 7-1-3**
  - I. A21 is legally on the end of the line of scrimmage next to A88, who is in the stance of a restricted lineman. Team A stops for one second while A21 and A88 are in the above positions, and then A21 moves to a legal backfield position and stops. Then A88 shifts to a wider position on the line. **RULING:** Legal if both A21 and A88 are stationary at the snap (Rules 2-22-1 and 7-1-4). [Cited by 2-22-1-a, 7-1-4-c]
  - II. A21 is legally on the end of the line of scrimmage next to A88, who is in the stance of a restricted lineman. Team A has stopped for one second when A21 leaves the line of scrimmage and goes in motion into the backfield. A88 shifts to a wider position on the line. **RULING:** A88 may break his three-point stance since he is now on the end of the line of scrimmage, but Team A must stop again for one second before the snap to make the play legal (Rule 7-1-4). [Cited by 2-22-1-a, 7-1-4-c]
  - III. B71 crosses the neutral zone into the Team A backfield and does not threaten any Team A player. A23, legally in the backfield, intentionally reaches to contact B71. **RULING:** Team A foul, false start. Penalty — Five yards from the succeeding spot. [Cited by 7-1-3-d, 7-1-4-c]

- IV. Snapper A1 lifts or moves the ball forward before backward motion of the snap. B2 bats the ball, causing it to roll loose with B3 recovering. **RULING:** Team A foul, illegal snap, ball remains dead. Penalty — five yards from succeeding spot (Rule 4-1-1). [Cited by 4-1-1]
- V. A66, a restricted lineman between the snapper and the player on the end of the line, or A72, a restricted player on the end of the line of scrimmage:
1. Lifts a hand or hands from the ground immediately when threatened by B1, who is in the neutral zone. **RULING:** Blow the whistle immediately. Team B dead-ball foul, offside. Penalty — Five yards from the succeeding spot.
  2. Lifts a hand or hands from the ground upon initial charge by B1, who (a) does not enter the neutral zone or (b) enters the neutral zone but does not threaten the position of A66 or A72. **RULING:** In both (a) and (b), blow the whistle immediately. Team A dead-ball foul, false start. Penalty — Five yards from the succeeding spot. [Cited by 2-18-2-d, 7-1-2-b-3, 7-1-5-a-2]
- NOTE: Before the snap, a team B player who enters the neutral zone may threaten a maximum of three Team A linemen. If the Team B player enters the neutral zone directly toward a Team A lineman, then that Team A player and the two adjacent linemen are considered to be threatened. If the Team B player enters the neutral zone directly toward a gap between two Team A linemen, then only those two Team A players are considered to be threatened.*
- VI. A80 on the end of the line, a non-restricted interior lineman or a back, misses the snap count and makes a casual movement that is not abrupt, quick or jerky and does not simulate the start of a play. **RULING:** No foul by Team A.

### Offensive Team Requirements — At the Snap

ARTICLE 4. Each of the following (a-c) is a live-ball foul and the play is allowed to continue.

- a. *Formation.* At the snap, Team A must be in a formation that meets these requirements:
1. All players must be inbounds
  2. All players must be either linemen or backs (Rule 2-27-4).
  3. At least five linemen must wear jerseys numbered 50 through 79 (**Exception:** When the snap is from a scrimmage kick formation, paragraph 5 below.)
  4. No more than four players may be backs.
  5. In a scrimmage kick formation at the snap (Rule 2-16-10) Team A may have fewer than five linemen numbered 50-79, subject to the following conditions:
    - (a) Any and all linemen not numbered 50-79 who are ineligible receiver(s) by position become exceptions to the numbering rule when the snapper is established.
    - (b) Any and all such numbering-exception players must be on the line and may not be on the end of the line. Otherwise, Team A commits a foul for an illegal formation.
    - (c) Any and all such players are exceptions to the numbering rule throughout the down and remain ineligible receivers unless they become eligible under Rule 7-3-5 (forward pass touched by an official or a Team B player).  
The conditions in 5(a)-5(c) are no longer in effect if prior to the snap a period ends or there is a timeout charged to the referee or one of the teams.
- b. *Man in motion.*
1. One back may be in motion, but he may not be moving toward his opponents' goal line.
  2. The player who goes in motion may not start from the line of scrimmage unless he first becomes a back and comes to a complete stop.
  3. A player in motion at the snap must have satisfied the one-second rule — i.e. he may not start his motion before any shift has ended (Rule 2-22-1-c).

c. *Illegal shift*. At the snap, Team A may not execute an illegal shift (Rule 7-1-2-a).

(A.R. 7-1-3:I-III)

**PENALTY – [a-c] Live-ball foul: Five yards from the previous spot [S19 or S20]. For live-ball fouls occurring when or after the snap starts during scrimmage kick plays other than field goal plays: Five yards from the previous spot or five yards from the spot where the subsequent dead ball belongs to Team B [S18, S19 or S20].**

• **Approved Ruling 7-1-4**

- I. A30, lined up legally as a back, starts in motion legally. He then turns so that he still is legally in motion but is facing his line of scrimmage using a "side-step" motion. At the snap, A30 is bent slightly forward at the waist and is either continuing his "side-step" motion or is "marking time" in place. **RULING:** Legal.
- II. A30, lined up legally as a back, starts in motion legally. He then turns so that he still is legally in motion but is facing his line of scrimmage using a "side-step" motion. At the snap, A30, still behind the neutral zone, is moving slightly forward from the waist up or his "side-step" motion has veered slightly toward the line of scrimmage. **RULING:** Live-ball foul at the snap for illegal motion. Penalty — Five yards from the previous spot.
- III. Team A's formation at the snap includes only 10 players: five players on the line of scrimmage numbered 50-79, one player on the line wearing number 82, and four players in the backfield. **RULING:** The formation is legal because Team A has no more than four players in the backfield and the required number of players (five) on the line wearing 50-79.
- IV. Team A, with fourth and eight, sends two substitutes numbered 21 and 33 into the game as exceptions to the mandatory numbering, and they are positioned legally on their line of scrimmage between the end players on the line of scrimmage. After the ball is snapped, a Team A player, 15 yards deep in a scrimmage kick formation, throws a legal forward pass to an eligible receiver for a 10-yard gain. **RULING:** Legal play (Note: The same play from a field goal formation is legal).
- V. A33, an exception to the mandatory numbering rule, assumes a position on the line of scrimmage next to end A88. Before the snap, A88 shifts to a backfield position with the flanker on the opposite side of the line shifting to an end position on the line. **RULING:** Illegal formation. Since A33 is now an end, he is in an illegal position at the snap (live-ball foul). Penalty — five yards from the previous spot.
- VI. A33, an exception to the mandatory numbering rule, assumes a position on the line of scrimmage to the left of snapper A85, who is on the end of the line. All other Team A players on the line are to A33's left. After a one-second stop, all players on the line except A85 legally shift to the other side of the ball, with A33 now positioned as an end. **RULING:** If the ball is snapped with A33 in this position, it is a foul for an illegal formation. A33 must be between the end players at the snap. Penalty — five yards from the previous spot.

## Defensive Team Requirements

ARTICLE 5. The defensive team requirements are as follows:

- a. Each of the following (1-5) is a dead-ball foul. Officials should blow the whistle and not allow the play to continue. After the ball is ready for play and before the ball is snapped:
  1. No player may touch the ball except when moved illegally as in Rule 7-1-3-a-1, nor may any player contact an opponent or in any other way interfere with him. (A.R. 7-1-5:I-II)
  2. No player may enter the neutral zone causing an offensive lineman to react immediately or commit any other dead-ball offside foul (Rules 2-18-2 and 7-1-2-b-3 Exception) (A.R. 7-1-3:V) (A.R. 7-1-5:III)
  3. No player shall use words or signals that disconcert opponents when they are preparing to put the ball in play. No player may call defensive signals that simulate the sound or cadence of (or otherwise interfere with) offensive starting signals.

4. Player(s) aligned in a stationary position within one yard of the line of scrimmage may not make quick, abrupt or exaggerated actions that are not part of normal defensive player movement. **(A.R. 7-1-5:IV)**
5. No player may cross the neutral zone and without making contact continue his charge toward any back.

**PENALTY – [1-5] Dead ball foul. Five yards from the succeeding spot [S18 or S21].**

b. When the snap starts:

1. No player may be in or beyond the neutral zone at the snap.
2. All players must be inbounds.

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

• **Approved Ruling 7-1-5**

- I. Snapper A1 lifts the ball before backward passing it, B2 bats the ball away and B3 recovers the ball. **RULING:** Team A dead-ball foul, illegal snap. The ball remains dead because it was not put in play by a legal snap. Penalty — Five yards from the succeeding spot. Team A retains possession. [Cited by 2-23-1-b, 2-23-1-f, 4-1-1, 7-1-5-a-1]
- II. Snapper A1 legally begins the snap, but B2 bats the ball before A1 completes the snap, and B3 recovers the ball. **RULING:** Team B foul and the ball remains dead. Penalty — Five yards from the succeeding spot. Team B may not touch the ball until it has been snapped. Team A retains possession. [Cited by 2-23-1-b, 2-23-1-f, 4-1-1, 7-1-5-a-1]
- III. Before the snap, a Team B player crosses the neutral zone and, without making contact, continues his charge behind a Team A lineman and directly toward the quarterback or kicker. **RULING:** A Team B player who is on team A's side of the neutral zone and is moving in a direct path toward the quarterback or kicker while he is behind an offensive lineman is considered to be interfering with Team A's formation. Penalty — Team B dead-ball foul, offside. Five yards from the succeeding spot. [Cited by 2-18-2-e, 7-1-5-a-2]
- IV. Linebacker B56 is stationary within one yard beyond the neutral zone. As the offense is calling its snap signals, B56 feints toward the line in an obvious attempt to induce a false start by the offense. **RULING:** Dead-ball foul, delay of game. Five-yard penalty at the succeeding spot. [Cited by 7-1-5-a-4]

### Handing the Ball Forward

ARTICLE 6. No player may hand the ball forward except during a scrimmage down as follows:

- a. A Team A back may hand the ball forward to another back only if both are behind their scrimmage line.
- b. A Team A back behind his scrimmage line may hand the ball forward to a teammate who is on his scrimmage line at the snap, provided that teammate leaves his line position by a movement of both feet that faces him toward his own end line and is at least two yards behind his scrimmage line when he receives the ball. **(A.R. 7-1-6:I)**

**PENALTY – Five yards from the spot of the foul; also loss of a down if by Team A before team possession changes during a scrimmage down [S35 and S9].**

• **Approved Ruling 7-1-6**

- I. Eligible receiver A83 is on the end of his scrimmage line and adjacent to the snapper in an unbalanced "T" formation. Quarterback A10 receives a handed snap and immediately conveys the ball to A83. **RULING:** If the movement of the ball is forward and it left A10's hand before having been touched by A83, it is a legal forward pass. A83 may have turned sufficiently to receive a backward pass or handoff (legal); but if the action immediately followed the snap, it is not likely that a handoff would have had time to comply with the "turn" and "two yards behind the line" requirement. [Cited by 7-1-6-b]

### Planned Loose Ball

ARTICLE 7. A Team A player may not advance a planned loose ball in the vicinity of the snapper.

**PENALTY** – Five yards from the previous spot and loss of down [S19 and S9].

## SECTION 2. Backward Pass and Fumble

### During Live Ball

ARTICLE 1. A ball carrier may hand or pass the ball backward at any time, except to throw the ball intentionally out of bounds to conserve time.

**PENALTY** – Five yards from the spot of the foul; also loss of down if by Team A before team possession changes during a scrimmage down (A.R. 3-4-3:III) [S35 and S9].

### Caught or Recovered

ARTICLE 2. a. When a backward pass or fumble is caught or recovered by any inbounds player, the ball continues in play (A.R. 2-23-1:I.)

#### *Exceptions:*

1. Rule 8-3-2-d-5 (Team A fumble on the try).
  2. On fourth down, before a change of team possession, when a Team A fumble is caught or recovered by a Team A player other than the fumbler, the ball is dead. If the catch or recovery is beyond the spot of the fumble, the ball is returned to the spot of the fumble. If the catch or recovery is behind the spot of the fumble, the ball remains at the spot of the catch or recovery.
- b. When a backward pass or fumble is caught or recovered simultaneously by opposing players, the ball becomes dead and belongs to the team last in possession (*Exception:* Rule 7-2-2-a Exceptions).

### After the Ball is Snapped

ARTICLE 3. No offensive lineman may receive a hand-to-hand snap.

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

### Out of Bounds

ARTICLE 4. a. *Backward Pass*. When a backward pass goes out of bounds between the goal lines, the ball belongs to the passing team at the out-of-bounds spot.

b. *Fumble*. When a fumble goes out of bounds between the goal lines:

1. In advance of the spot of the fumble, the ball belongs to the fumbling team at the spot of the fumble (Rule 3-3-2-e-2).
2. Behind the spot of the fumble, the ball belongs to the fumbling team at the out-of-bounds spot.

c. *Behind or Beyond Goal Line*. When a fumble or backward pass goes out of bounds behind or beyond a goal line, it is a safety or touchback depending on impetus and responsibility (Rules 8-5-1, 8-6-1 and 8-7) (A.R. 7-2-4:I), (A.R. 8-6-1:I) and (A.R. 8-7-2:I).

#### • **Approved Ruling 7-2-4**

1. B20 intercepts a legal forward pass (a) in his end zone, (b) on his three-yard line, and his momentum carries him into his end zone, or (c) in the field of play and retreats into his end zone (no momentum). In each instance, B20 fumbles in the end zone and the ball rolls forward and out of bounds on Team B's two-yard line. **RULING:** The ball belongs to Team B at the spot of the fumble (Team B's end zone); (a) touchback, (b) Team B's ball at the three-yard line, and (c) safety (Rules 8-5-1 and 8-6-1). [Cited by 7-2-4-c, 8-5-1-a, 8-6-1-a]

**At Rest**

ARTICLE 5. When a backward pass or fumble comes to rest inbounds and no player attempts to secure it, the ball becomes dead and belongs to the passing or fumbling team at the dead-ball spot.

**SECTION 3. Forward Pass****Legal Forward Pass**

ARTICLE 1. Team A may make one forward pass during each scrimmage down before team possession changes, provided the pass is thrown from a point in or behind the neutral zone.

**Illegal Forward Pass**

ARTICLE 2. A forward pass is illegal if:

- a. It is thrown by a Team A player whose entire body is beyond the neutral zone when he releases the ball.
- b. It is thrown by a Team B player.
- c. It is thrown after team possession has changed during the down.
- d. It is the second forward pass during the same down.
- e. It is thrown from in or behind the neutral zone after a ball carrier's entire body and the ball have gone beyond the neutral zone.

**PENALTY – [a-e] Five yards from the spot of the foul; also loss of down if by Team A before team possession changes during a scrimmage down (A.R. 3-4-3:IV) and (A.R. 7-3-2:II) [S35 and S9].**

- f. The passer, to conserve time, throws the ball directly to the ground (1) after the ball has already touched the ground; or (2) not immediately after controlling the ball.
- g. The passer, to conserve time, throws the ball forward into an area where there is no eligible Team A receiver. (A.R. 7-3-2:II-VII)
- h. The passer, to conserve yardage, throws the ball forward into an area where there is no eligible Team A receiver (A.R. 7-3-2:I)

**[Exception:** If the passer is or has been outside the tackle box, he may throw the ball so that it crosses or lands beyond the neutral zone or neutral zone extended (Rule 2-19-3) (A.R. 7-3-2:VIII-X). This applies only to the player who controls the snap or the resulting backward pass.]

**PENALTY – [f-h] Loss of down at the spot of the foul [S36 and S9]**

- **Approved Ruling 7-3-2**

- I. Quarterback A10, who is not outside the tackle box and is attempting to save yardage, intentionally throws a desperation forward pass that falls incomplete where there is no eligible Team A receiver. **RULING:** Intentional grounding. Penalty — Loss of down at the spot of the foul. The clock starts on the snap (Rule 3-3-2-d-4) unless Rule 3-4-4 applies. [Cited by 7-3-2-h]
- II. Late in either half with more than one minute remaining, A10 is unable to locate an open receiver. To conserve time, he throws a forward pass that is incomplete where there is no eligible Team A player. **RULING:** Illegal forward pass. Penalty — Loss of down at the spot of the foul. The clock will start on the ready-for-play signal (Rule 3-3-2-e-14 and 3-4-3). [Cited by 3-3-2-e-14, 7-3-2-g, 7-3-2 Penalty]
- III. On third down near the end of either half, potential field goal holder A4 muffs the snap and A4 or potential kicker A3 recovers the ball and immediately throws it forward to the ground. **RULING:** Illegal forward pass, not a valid attempt to conserve time. Penalty — Loss of down at the spot of the foul. Clock starts on the ready-for-play signal (Rules 3-3-2-e-14 and 3-4-3) unless Rule 3-4-4 applies. [Cited by 3-3-2-e-14, 7-3-2-g]

- IV. The ball is snapped over the head of quarterback A12, who is in the “shotgun” formation. A12 recovers the ball and immediately throws it forward to the ground. **RULING:** Illegal forward pass, not a valid attempt to conserve time. Penalty — Loss of down at the spot of the foul. Clock starts on the ready-for-play signal (Rules 3-3-2-e-14 and 3-4-3). [Cited by 3-3-2-e-14, 7-3-2-g]
- V. On third down near the end of the half, A1 muffs the snap. A1 or A4 catches the muffed ball and immediately throws it forward into the ground. **RULING:** Legal play. [Cited by 3-3-2-e-14, 7-3-2-g]
- VI. On third down near the end of the half, A1 – positioned seven yards behind the snapper – catches the snap and immediately throws the ball forward to the ground. **RULING:** Legal play. [Cited by 3-3-2-e-14, 7-3-2-g]
- VII. With seconds remaining in a half and the ball ready for play, Team A quickly lines up and the ball is legally snapped to quarterback A12, who throws the ball forward directly to the ground. Team A’s formation was not legal at the snap. When the ball becomes dead, two seconds show on the game clock. **RULING:** Illegal formation. Penalty — Five yards from the previous spot. The clock starts on the snap. [Cited by 3-3-2-e-14, 7-3-2-g]
- VIII. Quarterback A10 sprints toward a sideline and is outside the tackle box when he throws a legal forward pass that is batted down by a defensive lineman and lands behind the neutral zone. **RULING:** Legal play. Without the batting the ball would have landed beyond the neutral zone, so A10 has satisfied the spirit of the rule. [Cited by 7-3-2-h]
- IX. Third and 5 at the A-40. QB A12 drops back in the pocket to pass. Under a heavy rush he throws a backward pass to back A22 who carries the ball outside the tackle box. About to be tackled, A22 at the A-35 throws a forward pass that crosses the neutral zone and lands in an area 20 yards away from the nearest Team A eligible receiver. **RULING:** Foul, intentional grounding. The tackle-box rule exception applies only to the player who controls the snap or the resulting backward pass. Loss of down at the spot of the foul. Fourth and 10 at the A-35. (Rule 7-3-2-h Exception) [Cited by 7-3-2-h]
- X. Quarterback A12 is in a shotgun formation. He muffs the backward pass from the snapper and the ball is picked up by A63 inside the tackle box. Under a heavy rush, A63 gets outside the tackle box and throws the ball incomplete beyond the line of scrimmage. **RULING:** Legal play. A63 controlled the backward pass that resulted from the snap. (Rule 7-3-2-h Exception) [Cited by 7-3-2-h]

### Eligibility to Touch Legal Forward Pass

- ARTICLE 3. a. Eligibility rules apply during a down when a legal forward pass is thrown.
- b. All Team B players are eligible to touch or catch a pass.
  - c. When the ball is snapped, the following Team A players are eligible:
    1. Each lineman who is on the end of his scrimmage line and who is wearing a number other than 50 through 79.
    2. Each back wearing a number other than 50 through 79.

### Eligibility Lost by Going Out of Bounds

ARTICLE 4. No eligible offensive receiver who goes out of bounds during a down shall touch a legal forward pass in the field of play or end zones or while airborne until it has been touched by an opponent or official (**A.R. 7-3-4:I-II and IV**).

**[Exception:** This does not apply to an eligible offensive player who attempts to return inbounds immediately after going out of bounds due to contact by an opponent (**A.R. 7-3-4:III**)].

**PENALTY – Loss of down at the previous spot [S16 and S9].**

- **Approved Ruling 7-3-4**
  - i. Eligible A88 voluntarily goes out of bounds, returns, and is the first player to touch the legal forward pass. This touching by A88 occurs in Team B’s end zone. **RULING:** Illegal touching. Penalty — Loss of down at the previous spot. [Cited by 7-3-4]



- II. Eligible A88 voluntarily goes out of bounds during a down in which a legal forward pass is thrown. He returns to the field of play but does not touch the ball and is held by an opponent before the ball is touched by any player. **RULING:** Not pass interference – A88 is not eligible to catch a legal forward pass. Penalty — 10 yards from the previous spot. [Cited by 7-3-4]
- III. Wide receiver A88 is blocked out of bounds by B1 and then runs 20 yards before returning to the field of play. A88 catches a legal pass in Team B's end zone. **RULING:** Foul for illegal touching due to A88's failure to return inbounds immediately. Penalty — Loss of down at the previous spot. [Cited by 7-3-4]
- IV. Eligible receiver A44 is running a pass pattern near the sideline. As a legal forward pass comes toward him, he accidentally steps on the sideline, leaps, muffs the pass into the air, returns to the ground inbounds, grabs the ball and lands on his knees inbounds with the ball firmly in his possession. **RULING:** Illegal touching. Penalty — loss of down at the previous spot. A44 lost his eligibility by stepping out of bounds and did not regain his eligibility before touching the ball the second time. [Cited by 7-3-4]

### Eligibility Gained or Regained

ARTICLE 5. When a Team B player or an official touches a legal forward pass, all players become eligible (**A.R. 7-3-5:I**).

- **Approved Ruling 7-3-5**
  - I. Team B touches the legal forward pass near a sideline while originally eligible A1 is out of bounds. A1 comes inbounds and touches the pass. **RULING:** Legal play. Touching by Team B made all players eligible during the remainder of the down. [Cited by 7-3-5]

### Complete Pass

ARTICLE 6. Any forward pass is complete when caught by a player of the passing team who is inbounds, and the ball continues in play unless completed in the opponent's end zone or the pass has been caught simultaneously by opposing players. If a forward pass is caught simultaneously by opposing players inbounds, the ball becomes dead and belongs to the passing team (Rules 2-4-3 and 2-4-4) (**A.R. 2-4-3:III**) (**A.R. 7-3-6:I-VIII**).

- **Approved Ruling 7-3-6**
  - I. Two opposing players receive a legal forward pass while both are off the ground, and both players return to the ground inbounds at the same time. **RULING:** Simultaneous catch; the ball is awarded to the passing team (Rule 2-4-4). [Cited by 2-4-4, 7-3-6]
  - II. Two opposing players receive a ball while both are off the ground, and one player returns to the ground inbounds before the other. **RULING:** No simultaneous catch. The legal forward pass is completed or intercepted by the player who first returned to the ground (Rule 2-4-4). [Cited by 2-4-4, 7-3-6]
  - III. An airborne player receives a legal forward pass. While still in the air, he is tackled by an opponent and obviously held for a moment before being carried in any direction. He then lands inbounds or out of bounds with the ball. **RULING:** Completed pass. The ball is dead at the yard line where the receiver/interceptor was held in a manner that prevented him from immediately returning to the ground (Rule 4-1-3-p). [Cited by 4-1-3-p, 7-3-6]
  - IV. Airborne A80 receives a legal forward pass at his 30-yard line. While still in the air, he is tackled by B40 and driven forward to team A's 34-yard line, where he is downed. **RULING:** Team A's ball at its 34-yard line (Rule 5-1-3-a). [Cited by 7-3-6]
  - V. Airborne A80 receives a legal forward pass at his 30-yard line. While still in the air, he is tackled by B40 and driven backward to team A's 26-yard line, where the ball becomes dead. **RULING:** Team A's ball at the 30-yard line (Rule 5-1-3-a Exception). [Cited by 5-1-3-a, 7-3-6]
  - VI. A86 is legally blocked out of bounds by B18 at Team B's two-yard line. A86, while attempting an immediate return to the field of play, leaps from out of bounds and is airborne as he receives A16's legal forward pass. He lands in Team B's end zone completing the catch. **RULING:** Touchdown (Rules 4-1-3-c, 4-2-3-a, 7-3-4 Exception and 8-2-1-b). [Cited by 7-3-6]

- VII. B33 leaps from out of bounds and is airborne as he receives Team A's legal forward pass. He completes the interception by landing (a) in the field of play or (b) in Team B's end zone, and is then tackled. **RULING:** B33 is a ball carrier until he loses player possession or the ball becomes dead by rule. (a) First and 10 for Team B. (b) Touchback. (Rules 4-1-3-c, 4-2-3-a, 5-1-1-e and 7-3-4). [Cited by 7-3-6]
- VIII. While airborne, eligible receiver A89 touches a forward pass when he propels it toward (a) eligible receiver A80, who catches the pass; or (b) B27, who intercepts the pass. **RULING:** Legal play, and the ball remains live in both (a) and (b). A89 has batted a forward pass (Rules 2-4-3, 2-11-3 and 9-4-1-a). [Cited by 7-3-6]
- IX. Airborne receiver A85 grasps a forward pass and in the process of going to the ground, first contacts the ground with his left foot as he falls to the ground inbounds. Immediately upon A85 hitting the ground, the ball comes loose and touches the ground. **RULING:** Incomplete pass. An airborne receiver must maintain control of the ball while going to the ground in the process of completing a catch.
- X. Airborne receiver A85 grasps a forward pass and in the process of going to the ground, first contacts the ground with his left foot as he falls to the ground inbounds. Immediately upon A85 hitting the ground, the ball comes loose but never touches the ground before he regains control. **RULING:** Catch. If the receiver is inbounds and is going to the ground and loses control, as long as the player remains inbounds and the ball never touches the ground, it is a completed pass.
- XI. Airborne receiver A85 grasps a forward pass and in the process of going to the ground, first contacts the ground with his left foot inbounds as he falls to the ground out of bounds. Immediately upon A85 hitting the ground out of bounds, the ball comes loose. **RULING:** Incomplete pass regardless of whether or not the ball hits the ground because the receiver is out of bounds.
- XII. Receiver A85 stretches out at the Team B two-yard line and grasps a forward pass and is going to the ground on his own as he is attempting to complete the catch. As A85 falls to the ground in the end zone, the ball immediately comes loose and falls to the ground. **RULING:** Incomplete pass. Any receiver going to the ground on his own in the process of making a catch must maintain control of the ball when he hits the ground.
- XIII. Receiver A85 is airborne in the end zone and grasps a forward pass but while airborne he is hit by a defender, which causes A85 to fall to the ground. Immediately upon A85 hitting the ground, the ball comes loose and strikes the ground. **RULING:** Incomplete pass. An airborne receiver contacted before completing all the requirements of a catch must still maintain control of the ball after hitting the ground.
- XIV. Eligible A80 is airborne when he receives a legal forward pass. He grasps the ball firmly in his hands, and as he is returning toward the ground, the nose of the football touches the ground before any part of his body. A80 retains his firm control of the ball and it does not move during this action. A80's knees then touch the ground and he maintains control of the ball. **RULING:** Completed pass.
- XV. Eligible A80 is airborne near the sideline when he receives a legal forward pass. As he comes to the ground facing the field of play, his toe (a) clearly drags the ground inbounds before he falls out of bounds; (b) touches the ground inbounds and then his heel comes down on the sideline in a continuous motion. He maintains firm control of the ball in both cases. **RULING:** (a) Complete pass. (b) Incomplete pass. The continuous toe-heel touching is part of a single process and by interpretation he has landed out of bounds, thus not executing a catch.

### Incomplete Pass

- ARTICLE 7. a. Any forward pass is incomplete if the ball is out of bounds by rule or if it touches the ground when not firmly controlled by a player. It also is incomplete when a player leaves his feet and receives the pass but first lands on or outside a boundary line, unless his progress has been stopped in the field of play or end zone (Rule 4-1-3-p) (**A.R. 2-4-3:III**) and (**A.R. 7-3-7:I**).
- b. When a legal forward pass is incomplete, the ball belongs to the passing team at the previous spot.

- c. When an illegal forward pass is incomplete, the ball belongs to the passing team at the spot of the pass (**Exception:** If the offended team declines the penalty for an illegal pass thrown from the end zone, the ball shall next be put in play at the previous spot.) (**A.R. 7-3-7:II-III**)
- **Approved Ruling 7-3-7**
    - I. A player touches a legal forward pass while he is contacting a boundary line. **RULING:** The ball is out of bounds, the pass is incomplete, and the down counts. Eligibility of the touching player does not affect this ruling (Rule 4-2-3-a). [Cited by 7-3-7-a]
    - II. Fourth and nine on Team A's six-yard line. A1 intentionally grounds a forward pass in his end zone to save loss of yardage. **RULING:** Team B may accept the penalty for a safety. If they decline the penalty, it is Team B's ball, first and goal on the six-yard line. [Cited by 7-3-7-c]
    - III. Third and nine on Team A's six-yard line. A1 throws a second forward pass from his end zone. B2 intercepts and is downed on Team A's 20-yard line. **RULING:** Team B may accept the penalty which results in a safety or take the result of the play, retaining the ball for a first down on Team A's 20-yard line. [Cited by 7-3-7-c]

### Illegal Contact and Pass Interference

- ARTICLE 8. a. During a down in which a legal forward pass crosses the neutral zone, illegal contact by Team A and Team B players is prohibited from the time the ball is snapped until it is touched by any player or an official. (**A.R. 7-3-8:II**)
- b. Offensive pass interference by a Team A player beyond the neutral zone during a legal forward pass play in which a forward pass crosses the neutral zone is contact that interferes with a Team B eligible player. It is the responsibility of the offensive player to avoid the opponents. It is not offensive pass interference (**A.R. 7-3-8:IV, V, X, XV and XVI**):
1. When, after the snap, a Team A ineligible player immediately charges and contacts an opponent at a point not more than one yard beyond the neutral zone and does not continue the contact more than three yards beyond the neutral zone.
  2. When two or more eligible players are making a simultaneous and bona fide attempt to reach, catch or bat the pass. Eligible players of either team have equal rights to the ball. (**A.R. 7-3-8:IX**)
  3. When the pass is in flight and two or more eligible players are in the area where they might receive or intercept the pass and an offensive player in that area impedes an opponent, and the pass is not catchable.

#### **PENALTY – 15 yards from the previous spot [S33].**

- c. Defensive pass interference is contact beyond the neutral zone by a Team B player whose intent to impede an eligible opponent is obvious and it could prevent the opponent the opportunity of receiving a catchable forward pass. When in question, a legal forward pass is catchable. Defensive pass interference occurs only after a legal forward pass is thrown. (**A.R. 7-3-8:VII, VIII, XI and XII**): It is not defensive pass interference (**A.R. 7-3-8:III**):
1. When, after the snap, opposing players immediately charge and establish contact with opponents at a point that is within one yard beyond the neutral zone.
  2. When two or more eligible players are making a simultaneous and bona fide attempt to reach, catch or bat the pass. Eligible players of either team have equal rights to the ball (**A.R. 7-3-8:IX**).
  3. When a Team B player legally contacts an opponent before the pass is thrown (**A.R. 7-3-8:III and X**).

4. When a Team A potential kicker, from scrimmage kick formation, simulates a scrimmage kick by throwing the ball high and deep, and contact by a Team B player occurs.

**PENALTY – Team A’s ball at the spot of the foul, first down, if the foul occurs fewer than 15 yards beyond the previous spot. If the foul occurs 15 or more yards beyond the previous spot, Team A’s ball, first down, 15 yards from the previous spot [S33].**

**When the ball is snapped on or inside the Team B 17-yard line and outside the Team B two-yard line and the spot of the foul is on or inside the two-yard line, the penalty from the previous spot shall place the ball at the two-yard line, first down (A.R. 7-3-8:XIV).**

**No penalty enforced from outside the two-yard line may place the ball inside the two-yard line (Exception: On the try when the snap is at the three-yard line, Rule 10-2-5-b).**

**If the previous spot was on or inside the two-yard line, first down halfway between the previous spot and the goal line (Rule 10-2-6 Exception).**

• **Approved Ruling 7-3-8**

- I. A Team B player, defending against a legal forward pass beyond the neutral zone, has his back to the ball and is waving his arms in the face of an eligible player of Team A, who, in his attempt to catch the pass, bumps into the Team B player. **RULING:** Pass interference by the Team B player, first down. He was not making a bona fide attempt to catch or bat the pass.
- II. Wide receiver A80, 15 yards beyond the neutral zone, turns his back toward the neutral zone. The passer throws the ball high over A80’s hands, which are extended above his head. The ball is overthrown and beyond the receiver (uncatchable pass) when B2 pulls A80 down by the facemask. **RULING:** Personal foul (Rule 9-1-12-a), not pass interference. Penalty — 15 yards from the previous spot. First and 10 for Team A. Flagrant offenders shall be disqualified. [Cited by 7-3-8-a]
- III. A83, a wide receiver 10 yards from the nearest interior lineman, slants toward the middle of the field. Before the ball is thrown, B1, a back, legally blocks him and knocks him down. **RULING:** Legal unless the block was below the waist (Rule 9-1-6). [Cited by 7-3-8-c-3, 7-3-8-c]
- IV. At the snap, A88 is on the line of scrimmage 10 yards from the tackle position and A44 is in the backfield, four yards to his inside. Just before the Team A passer releases the ball, A88 contacts B1 five yards beyond the neutral zone. The pass is thrown to A44, who has moved in front and to the outside of the spot where A88 had contacted B1. **RULING:** Team A foul, offensive pass interference. Penalty — 15 yards from previous spot. [Cited by 7-3-8-b]
- V. Before the ball is thrown, wide receiver A88 moves four yards downfield directly toward and in front of the defender, B1. At this spot, B1 pushes A88, who then uses his hands to contact B1. **RULING:** Team A foul, offensive pass interference, if the legal forward pass is beyond the neutral zone. Penalty — 15 yards from previous spot. [Cited by 7-3-8-b]
- VI. Before the ball is thrown, wide receiver A88 slants to the inside where linebacker B1 attempts to block him. A88 uses his hands to shove B1 away. **RULING:** Team A foul, offensive pass interference if the legal forward pass crosses the neutral zone. If B1’s initial contact was below the waist and beyond the neutral zone, Team B also has fouled and the live-ball fouls offset.
- VII. A88, a spread receiver, runs a 10-yard route and cuts 90 degrees to the sideline. After the ball is thrown, B2 contacts A88 with a tackle, block, grasp or push before A88 touches the ball, a catchable forward pass. **RULING:** Team B foul, defensive pass interference. Penalty — Spot foul and first down. [Cited by 7-3-8-c]
- VIII. A80, a tight end, runs 10 yards into the secondary and cuts toward the goal posts. B1 is one step behind and to the outside when he recovers. After the legal forward pass has been thrown, B1 contacts A80 with a tackle, block, grasp or push as the ball goes over

A80's outstretched hands. **RULING:** Team B foul for defensive pass interference.

Penalty — Spot foul and a first down if infraction occurs less than 15 yards from previous spot; 15-yard penalty from the previous spot and a first down if the foul is more than 15 yards beyond the neutral zone. [Cited by 7-3-8-c]

- IX. A88 and B2 are running closely together before or after the ball has been thrown. Either A88 or B2, or both, falls when their feet become entangled. Neither player was tripped intentionally. **RULING:** No foul. [Cited by 7-3-8-b-2, 7-3-8-c-2]
- X. Before the pass is thrown, wide receiver A88 and defender B1 are running shoulder to shoulder and side by side 15 yards beyond the neutral zone. A88 is nearest to the sideline, and B1 is nearest to the hash mark. A88 breaks to the inside. B1 does not move, and A88 collides with him. **RULING:** No foul because the ball has not been thrown. [Cited by 7-3-8-b, 7-3-8-c-3]
- XI. Wide receiver A88 and defender B1 are running shoulder to shoulder and side by side 15 yards beyond the neutral zone. A88 is nearest to the sideline, and B1 is nearest to the hash mark. A legal forward pass is thrown toward the goal post. While the ball is in the air, A88 breaks to the inside toward the catchable forward pass. B1 does not move and makes no attempt to go for the pass, and A88 collides with him. **RULING:** Team B foul, defensive pass interference. Penalty — 15 yards from previous spot and first down. [Cited by 7-3-8-c]
- XII. A44, a slot back, runs a pattern 25 yards downfield toward the goal line pylon. B1, a safety, is positioned between A44 and the pylon when the ball is thrown. B1 obviously reduces his speed and collides with A44 before the catchable ball touches the ground. **RULING:** Team B foul, defensive pass interference. Penalty — 15 yards from the previous spot and first down. [Cited by 7-3-8-c]
- XIII. A80, a tight end, moves across the formation on a pass pattern at a depth of 25 yards where he contacts B1, a safety, before or after the ball has been thrown. A88, a wide receiver, positioned on the opposite side from the tight end at the snap, crosses behind the contact of A80 and B1 and catches the legal forward pass. **RULING:** Team A foul, offensive pass interference. Penalty — 15 yards from previous spot.
- XIV. Fourth and goal for Team A on Team B's five-yard line. Team A's legal forward pass is incomplete, but Team B interfered on its one-yard line or in its end zone. **RULING:** First and goal for Team A on Team B's two-yard line. [Cited by 7-3-8 Penalty]
- XV. A80 and B60 are attempting to catch a forward pass thrown toward A80's position, which is beyond the neutral zone. The pass is high and ruled uncatchable. As the ball passes overhead, A80 pushes B60 in the chest. **RULING:** Not offensive pass interference. [Cited by 7-3-8-b]
- XVI. On a legal forward pass beyond the neutral zone, A80 and B60 are attempting to catch the pass thrown to A80's position. A14, who is not attempting to catch the pass, blocks B65 downfield, either before the pass is thrown or while the uncatchable pass is in flight. **RULING:** Team A foul, offensive pass interference. Penalty — 15 yards from the previous spot. [Cited by 7-3-8-b]

### Contact Interference

ARTICLE 9. a. Either Team A or Team B legally may interfere with opponents behind the neutral zone.

b. Players of either team legally may interfere beyond the neutral zone after the pass has been touched (**A.R. 7-3-9:I**).

c. Defensive players legally may contact opponents who have crossed the neutral zone if the opponents are not in a position to receive a catchable forward pass.

1. Those infractions that occur during a down in which a forward pass crosses the neutral zone are pass interference infractions only if the receiver had the opportunity to receive a catchable forward pass.
2. Those infractions that occur during a down in which a forward pass does not cross the neutral zone are Rule 9-3-4 infractions and the penalty is enforced from the previous spot.

- d. Pass interference rules apply only during a down in which a legal forward pass crosses the neutral zone (Rules 2-19-3 and 7-3-8-a and c)
  - e. Contact by Team B with an eligible receiver involving a personal foul that interferes with the reception of a catchable pass may be ruled either as pass interference or as a personal foul with the 15-yard penalty enforced from the previous spot. Rule 7-3-8 is specific about contact during a pass. However if the interference involves an act that ordinarily would result in disqualification, the fouling player must leave the game.
  - f. Physical contact is required to establish interference.
  - g. Each player has territorial rights, and incidental contact is ruled under “attempt to reach ... the pass” in Rule 7-3-8. If opponents who are beyond the line collide while moving toward the pass, a foul by one or both players is indicated only if intent to impede the opponent is obvious. It is pass interference only if a catchable forward pass is involved.
  - h. Pass interference rules do not apply after the pass has been touched anywhere inbounds by an inbounds player or has touched an official. If an opponent is fouled, the penalty is for the foul and not pass interference. **(A.R. 7-3-9:I)**
  - i. After the pass has been touched, any player may execute a legal block during the remaining flight of the pass.
  - j. Tackling or grasping a receiver or any other intentional contact before he touches the pass is evidence that the tackler is disregarding the ball and is therefore illegal.
  - k. Tackling or running into a receiver when a forward pass obviously is underthrown or overthrown is disregarding the ball and is illegal. This is not pass interference but a violation of Rule 9-1-12-a, which carries a penalty of 15 yards from the previous spot plus a first down. Flagrant offenders shall be disqualified.
- **Approved Ruling 7-3-9**
    - I. A legal forward pass beyond the neutral zone is tipped or muffed by an eligible receiver of either team or glances off an official. Then, while the pass is still in flight, either Team A or Team B holds or otherwise fouls an eligible opponent who is beyond the neutral zone. **RULING:** Interference rules do not apply after the pass has been touched. Penalise as a foul during a loose ball. Penalty — 10 or 15 yards from the previous spot (Rule 9-3-6). [Cited by 7-3-9-b, 7-3-9-h, 9-3-4-e, 9-3-6]
    - II. On a legal forward pass behind the neutral zone, eligible A1 “has position” on B1 and is about to touch the pass when B1 pushes A1 and the pass is incomplete. **RULING:** Legal. Interference rules do not apply behind the neutral zone (Rules 7-3-9-d, 9-1-5 Exception 4 and 9-3-3-c Exception 5).

### Ineligible Receiver Downfield

ARTICLE 10. No originally ineligible receiver shall be or have been more than three yards beyond the neutral zone until a legal forward pass that crosses the neutral zone has been thrown. **(A.R. 7-3-10:I and II)**

**PENALTY – Five yards from the previous spot [S37].**

- **Approved Ruling 7-3-10**
  - I. Ineligible lineman A70 runs more than three yards beyond the neutral zone and does not make contact with an opponent. He circles toward the flank and returns across the neutral zone before A10 throws a legal forward pass that crosses the neutral zone. **RULING:** Ineligible downfield. Penalty — Five yards from the previous spot. [Cited by 7-3-10]
  - II. Ineligible lineman A70 makes contact with an opponent within one yard of the neutral zone. A70 drives B4 more than three yards beyond the neutral zone and then circles back across the neutral zone before A1 throws a legal forward pass that crosses the neutral zone. **RULING:** Team A foul, ineligible downfield or offensive pass interference. Penalty — Five yards from previous spot or 15 yards from previous spot (Rule 7-3-8-b). [Cited by 7-3-10]

## Illegal Touching

ARTICLE 11. No originally ineligible player while inbounds shall intentionally touch a legal forward pass until it has touched an opponent or an official (**A.R. 5-2-3:I**) and (**A.R. 7-3-11:I-II**).

**PENALTY – Five yards from the previous spot [S16].**

- **Approved Ruling 7-3-11**

- I. Late in the half, quarterback A10, who has not been outside the tackle box, throws a desperation pass to intentionally save yardage that falls incomplete after ineligible A58 touches the ball in an attempt to catch it. **RULING:** Foul for intentional grounding. No foul for illegal touching since the pass is illegal. Penalty — Loss of down at the spot of the pass. The clock starts on the snap (Rules 3-3-2-d-4 and 7-3-2-h). If time expires in the quarter the quarter is not extended. [Cited by 7-3-11]
- II. Team A snaps on its 10-yard line. A10 retreats and then passes forward to ineligible A70 who, while in his end zone, (a) touches the ball as he attempts to catch the pass, and the pass is incomplete; (b) catches the pass and is downed in the end zone; or (c) catches the pass and is downed after having advanced to his three-yard line. **RULING:** (a) Team B may accept the penalty to get the five yards or decline the penalty so the down will count. (b) The ball is dead in the end zone with impetus by Team A, and Team B may accept the safety or the penalty at the previous spot. (c) The down counts if the penalty is declined and the dead-ball spot is more advantageous to Team B than the penalty. [NOTE: (a), (b) and (c) could be intentional grounding depending on the location of an eligible Team A player or the location of A10 when the ball is thrown] (Rule 10-1-1-b). If intentional grounding is warranted, there is no illegal touching. [Cited by 7-3-11]