

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. [S7 and S19: ISP]

b. No player shall put the ball in play before it is ready for play (Rule 4-1-4). [S7 and S19: IPR] (**A.R. 4-1-4:I and II**)

PENALTY – [a-b] Dead-ball foul. Five yards from the succeeding spot [S7 and S19: ISP/IPR].

c. 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 nearest 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 without movement of the feet, body, head or arms for at least one full second before the ball is snapped. (**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 their hand(s) or making any quick movement.

Exceptions:

- (a) 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**)
- (b) It is not a false start if the snapper takes their hand(s) off the ball, provided this does not simulate the start of a play (Rule 7-1-3-a-3).
4. An offensive player making any quick, jerky movement before the snap, including but not limited to:
 - (a) A lineman moving their foot, shoulder, arm, body or head in a quick, jerky motion in any direction.
 - (b) The snapper shifting or moving the ball, moving their thumb or fingers, flexing their elbows, jerking their head, or dipping their 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**) This is an illegal shift that converts to a false start.

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 — Illegal shift that converts to a false start. 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]
- V. Team A has 3rd and 3 at the B-40. QB A12 is in shotgun formation, (a) makes a fake clap standing in position; (b) makes a fake clap while chucking their shoulders and hands forward in an exaggerated motion simulating the start of the play. **RULING:** Rule 7-1-2-b-4-c states that it is a false start if the quarterback makes any quick, jerky movement that simulates the start of the play. In (a) no foul; (b) false start on A12.

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 their 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 their 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: FST/ENC].

Approved Ruling 7-1-3

- I. A21 is legally on the end of the line of scrimmage next to A88, who is in a three-point stance. 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 their three-point stance since they are 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]
- IV. Snapper A1 lifts or moves the ball forward before moving it backward to start 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-a, 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. Violation of each of the following (a-c) is a live-ball foul; 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). (**A.R. 7-1-4:VIII**)
 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 they may not be moving toward their opponent's goal line.
2. The player who goes in motion may not start from the line of scrimmage unless they first become 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., they may not start their 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-II)

PENALTY – [a-c] Live-ball foul: Five yards from the previous spot [S19 or S20: ILF/ILM/ISH]. 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 if the kick crosses the neutral zone, five yards from the spot where the subsequent dead ball belongs to Team B.

Approved Ruling 7-1-4

- I. A30, lined up legally as a back, starts in motion legally. They then turn so that they still are legally in motion but are facing their line of scrimmage using a "side-step" motion. At the snap, A30 is bent slightly forward at the waist and is either continuing their "side-step" motion or is "marking time" in place. **RULING:** Legal.
- II. A30, lined up legally as a back, starts in motion legally. They then turn so that they still are legally in motion but are facing their 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 their "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). [Cited by 1-1-1-b-2]
- 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 moves to a backfield position and the flanker on the opposite side of the line moves to an end position on the line. **RULING:** Illegal formation. Since A33 is now an end, they are thus in an illegal position at the snap (live-ball foul). Penalty — five yards from the previous spot. [Cited by 1-1-1-b-2]
- 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 may not legally be on the end of the line at the snap. Penalty — five yards from the previous spot. [Cited by 1-1-1-b-2]
- VII. At the B-45, Team A is in a formation in which the snapper A88 is on the right end of the line. The linemen on their left are numbered 56, 63, 72, 22, 79, and 25. There are four players

in the backfield. A44 is ten yards directly behind the snapper, and the other backs are to their left a few yards behind the line of scrimmage. No player is in position to hold for a place kick. After the snap, A44 completes a pass to snapper A88 for a touchdown. This happens on (a) first or second down; (b) third or fourth down. **RULING:** Because there are only four offensive linemen numbered in the 50-79 range, the legality of the play depends on whether Team A is in a scrimmage kick formation. One of the requirements for such a formation is that "it is obvious that a kick will be attempted." (a) Illegal formation: on first or second down, a team is very unlikely to punt, so it is not obvious that a kick will be attempted. (b) Legal play: touchdown. On third or fourth down a team may be likely to kick. (Rule 2-16-10)

- VIII. Team A lines up with A11 ten yards directly behind the snapper. The other three backs are split wide, all outside the tackle box. Only four Team A linemen have uniform numbers between 50 and 79. A11 receives the backward pass from the snapper with Team A in this formation. **RULING:** Live-ball foul. Illegal formation, not enough players numbered 50-79 on the line of scrimmage. Team A is not in a scrimmage kick formation, because in this alignment it is not obvious that a kick will be attempted. (Rule 2-16-10) [Cited by 7-1-4-a-2]
- IX. Team A lines up with six players on the line of scrimmage, five of whom are numbered in the range 50-79. A seventh player, A88, is in the normal location of an end, but they are positioned so that their feet and shoulders are clearly at a 45-degree angle with the line of scrimmage. The other four players are clearly in the backfield. The ball is snapped with Team A in this alignment. **RULING:** Live-ball foul, illegal formation. Every Team A player must be either a lineman or a back; A88 is neither.
- X. A30, lined up legally as a back, starts in motion toward their opponent's goal line. One yard behind the line of scrimmage, they turn so that they are still in motion but facing the sideline and moving parallel to the line of scrimmage. At the snap, A30 is in motion one yard behind the line of scrimmage. **RULING:** Legal play.

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 them. (**A.R. 7-1-5:I-II**)
 2. No player may enter the neutral zone threatening an offensive lineman and causing them to react immediately, or commit any other dead-ball offside foul (Rules 2-18-2 and 7-1-2-b-3 Exceptions). (**A.R. 7-1-3:V**) (**A.R. 7-1-5:III**)
 3. No player may cross the neutral zone and without making contact continue their charge toward any back.

PENALTY – [1-3] Dead ball foul, offside. Five yards from the succeeding spot [S18: DOF].

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 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.

PENALTY – [4-5] Dead ball foul, delay of game. Five yards from the succeeding spot [S21: DOD].

- 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: DOF].

Approved Ruling 7-1-5

- I. Snapper A1 lifts the ball before passing it backward, 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 their 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 they are 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 and the player handing the ball forward has not had their entire body beyond the neutral zone while in possession of the ball.
- b. A Team A back behind their scrimmage line may hand the ball forward to a teammate who is on their scrimmage line at the snap, provided that teammate leaves their line position by a movement of both feet that faces them toward their own end line and is at least two yards behind their scrimmage line when they receive 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: IFH].

Approved Ruling 7-1-6

- I. Eligible receiver A83 is on the end of their 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: IPR].

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: IBP].

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: IPR].

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) (A.R. 8-7-2:I)

Approved Ruling 7-2-4

- I. B20 intercepts a legal forward pass (a) in their end zone, (b) on their three-yard line, and their momentum carries them into their end zone, or (c) in the field of play and retreats into their 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]
- II. On second down, A1 fumbles the ball, which strikes the ground and bounces high in the air. B2 receives the ball while off the ground and returns to the ground out of bounds (a) in advance of the spot of the fumble or (b) behind the spot of the fumble. **RULING:** (a) Team A's ball at the spot of the fumble. (b) Team A's ball at the spot where the ball crossed the sideline (Rules 4-2-4-d and 7-2-4). ×

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:

- a. If in advance of the spot of the pass/fumble, the ball belongs to the passing/fumbling team at the spot of the pass/fumble.
- b. If behind the spot of the pass/fumble, the ball belongs to the passing/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 the ball is released.
- 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 been 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) [S35 and S9: IFP].

- f. The forward 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 forward 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 forward 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: It is not a foul if the forward passer is or has been outside the tackle box and throws the ball so that it crosses or lands beyond the neutral zone or neutral zone extended (Rule 2-19-3) or would have crossed the neutral zone if not touched by Team B. (A.R. 7-3-2:VIII-X) This applies only to the player who controls the snap or the resulting backward pass and does not relinquish possession to another player before throwing the forward pass.]

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

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, they throw a forward pass that is incomplete where there is no eligible Team A player. **RULING:** Illegal forward pass, intentional grounding. 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]
- 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 for intentional grounding; not a valid attempt to conserve time. Penalty — Loss of down at the spot of the foul. 10-second runoff option for Team B (Rule 3-4-4). Clock starts on the ready-for-play signal (Rules 3-3-2-e-14 and 3-4-3) if the 10-second runoff is accepted. [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 for intentional grounding; 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 they throw 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 five at the A-40. QB A12 drops back in the pocket to pass. Under a heavy rush they throw 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. They muff 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]
- XI. Second and 10 at the A-40. In a shotgun formation A11 takes the backward pass from the snapper and hands the ball off to back A44. A44 takes a few steps toward the line of scrimmage and then throws a backward pass to A11, who is still inside the tackle box. Avoiding tacklers, A11 scrambles outside the tackle box, and unable to find an open receiver, at the A-35 they throw the ball toward an area where there are no eligible receivers, and it lands out of bounds beyond the neutral zone. **RULING:** Illegal forward pass. Loss of down at the A-35; third and 15. A11 loses the right to throw the ball away legally because they relinquishes possession before passing it.
- XII. Third and 10 at the A-30. Quarterback A11 drops back to pass. About to be tackled at the A-20, they throw the ball forward to an area where there are no eligible receivers. Tackle A77 catches the pass at the A-28 and is tackled at the A-32. **RULING:** Illegal forward pass; loss of down at the spot of the pass. Fourth and 20 at the A-20. This is "intentional grounding" since A11 throws the ball into an area where there are no eligible Team A receivers. Note that this is not illegal touching by A77, because the rule for illegal touching applies only to a legal forward pass. (Rule 7-3-11)
- XIII. Quarterback A11 drops back to pass and scrambles outside the tackle box. They fumble the ball, which bounces back up into their hands. They then pass the ball forward, and it lands beyond the neutral zone in an open area where there is no eligible receiver with an

opportunity to make a catch. **RULING:** Legal play, since A11 did not relinquish possession to another player.

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 their scrimmage line and who is wearing a number other than 50 through 79.
 2. Each back wearing a number other than 50 through 79.
- d. An eligible player loses their eligibility when they go out of bounds. (Rule 7-3-4) **(A.R. 7-3-9:III)**

Eligibility Lost by Going Out of Bounds

ARTICLE 4. No eligible offensive receiver who goes out of bounds and returns in bounds during a down shall touch a legal forward pass while 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 originally eligible offensive player who immediately returns inbounds after going out of bounds due to contact by an opponent **(A.R. 7-3-4:III)**]. If they touch the pass before returning in bounds, it is an incomplete pass (Rule 7-3-7) and not a foul for illegal touching.

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

Approved Ruling 7-3-4

- I. Eligible A88 voluntarily goes out of bounds, returns inbounds, 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. They return to the field of play inbounds 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. [Automatic first down](#). [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 them, they accidentally step on the sideline, leap, muff the pass into the air while airborne, return to the ground inbounds, grab the ball and land on their knees inbounds with the ball firmly in their possession. **RULING:** Incomplete pass. A44 first touched the ball while airborne and thus out of bounds since they had not established in bounds. (Rule 2-27-15) [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 inbounds airborne player receives a legal forward pass. While still in the air, they are tackled by an opponent and obviously held for a moment before being carried in any direction. They then land 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 them 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 their 30-yard line. While still in the air, they are tackled by B40 and driven forward to team A's 34-yard line, where they are 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 their 30-yard line. While still in the air, they are 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-2, 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 they receive A16's legal forward pass. They land in Team B's end zone with the ball in their grasp. **RULING:** Incomplete pass. A86 did not establish in bounds before touching the pass, and hence they were still out of bounds. (Rule 2-27-15) [Cited by 7-3-6]
- VII. B33 leaps from in bounds and is airborne as they receive Team A's legal forward pass. They complete the interception by landing (a) in the field of play or (b) in Team B's end zone, and are then tackled. **RULING:** B33 is a ball carrier until they lose 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 and in bounds, eligible receiver A89 touches a forward pass when they propel 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 their left foot as they fall 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 their left foot as they fall to the ground inbounds. Immediately upon A85 hitting the ground, the ball comes loose but never touches the ground before they regain 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 their left foot inbounds as they fall 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 their own as they are 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 their own in the process of making a catch must maintain control of the ball when they hit the ground.
- XIII. Receiver A85 is airborne and in bounds in the end zone and grasps a forward pass, but while airborne they are 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 they receive a legal forward pass. They grasp the ball firmly in their hands, and as they are returning toward the ground, the nose of the football touches the ground before any part of their body. A80 retains their firm control of the ball and it does not move during this action. A80's knees then touch the ground and they maintain control of the ball. **RULING:** Completed pass.
- XV. Eligible A80 is airborne near the sideline when they receive a legal forward pass. As they come to the ground facing the field of play, their toe (a) clearly drags the ground inbounds before they fall out of bounds; (b) touch the ground inbounds and then their heel comes down on the sideline in a continuous motion. They maintain 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 they have 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 (Rule 4-2-3) or if it touches the ground when not firmly controlled by a player. It also is incomplete when a player leaves their feet and receives the pass but first lands on or outside a boundary line, unless their progress has been stopped in the field of play or end zone (Rule 4-1-3-p). (**A.R. 2-4-3:III**) (**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 Team B 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 (a) while they are contacting a boundary line; (b) while airborne after having leaped from out of bounds. **RULING:** (a) and (b). The ball is out of bounds, the pass is incomplete, and the down counts. The player loses their eligibility when they go out of bounds (Rules 2-27-15, 4-2-3-a and 7-3-3). [Cited by 7-3-7-a]
- II. Fourth and nine on Team A's six-yard line. A1 intentionally grounds a forward pass in their 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 their 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 is contact by a Team A player beyond the neutral zone that interferes with a Team B player during a legal forward pass play in which the forward pass crosses the neutral zone. 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 maintains the contact for no more than three yards beyond the neutral zone. (**A.R. 7-3-10:II**)
 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: OPI].

- 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 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**) (**A.R. 7-3-9: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 there is contact by a Team B player that otherwise would be pass interference during a down in which a Team A potential kicker, from scrimmage kick formation, simulates a scrimmage kick by throwing the ball high and deep.

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: DPI].

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 on or inside 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. B33, defending against a legal forward pass beyond the neutral zone, has their back to the ball and is waving their arms in the face of eligible A88, but does not make contact. **RULING:** No foul. There is no foul for defensive pass interference if there is no contact. [Cited by 7-3-9-f]

- II. Wide receiver A80, 15 yards beyond the neutral zone, turns their back toward the neutral zone. The forward passer throws the ball high over A80's hands, which are extended above their 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 them and knocks them 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 end of the line of scrimmage 10 yards from the tackle position and A44 is in the backfield, four yards to their inside. Just before the Team A forward 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 their 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 them. A88 uses their 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 they recover. 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 fall 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 them. **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 them. **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 their 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 they contact 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]

Pass Interference: Summary

- 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, b 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 is disqualified from the game.
- f. Physical contact is required to establish interference. **(A.R. 7-3-8:I)**
- 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 occurs 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 the receiver 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 9-3-4). [Cited by 7-3-9-b, 7-3-9-h]
- 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 9-3-5 Exception 5).
- III. Running a pattern near the sideline, end A88 touches the sideline just before a defender jumps into them and bats the ball to the ground. **RULING:** Not defensive pass interference. A88 became ineligible when they stepped out of bounds. (Rule 7-3-3) [Cited by 7-3-3-d, 7-3-8-c]

Ineligible Receiver Downfield

ARTICLE 10. No originally ineligible receiver shall be or have been more than three yards beyond the neutral zone until a forward passer throws a legal forward pass that crosses the neutral zone. A player is in violation of this rule if any part of their body is beyond the three-yard limit (*Exception:* If the passer is legally throwing the ball away and the ball lands near or beyond the sideline.) (A.R. 7-3-10:I and III).

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

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. They circle 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, offensive pass interference. Penalty — 15 yards from the previous spot (Rule 7-3-8-b). [Cited by 7-3-8-b-1]
- III. First and 10 at the A-37. Ineligible lineman A70 avoids defensive linemen after the snap and starts downfield. When the passer releases the ball, the top of A70’s helmet is penetrating the plane of the A-40. The pass crosses the neutral zone and falls incomplete at the A-39. **RULING:** Foul, ineligible receiver downfield. Some part of A70’s body was more than three yards beyond the neutral zone when the pass was released. [Cited by 7-3-10]

Illegal Touching

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

PENALTY – Five yards from the previous spot, loss of down [S16 and S9: ITP].

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). Rule 3-4-4 applies if

less than one minute remains on the game clock. 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 their end zone, (a) touches the ball as they attempt 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 their three-yard line. **RULING:** (a) Team B may accept the five-yard penalty [from the previous spot that includes loss of down](#), 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 [with loss of down](#). (c) [Five-yard penalty from the previous spot and loss of down](#). The down counts if the penalty is declined; the dead-ball spot might be deemed 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]

Team B personal foul and unsportsmanlike conduct during legal forward pass play

ARTICLE 12. Penalties for personal fouls [and unsportsmanlike conduct](#) by Team B during a completed legal forward pass play are enforced at the end of the last run when it ends beyond the neutral zone. If the pass is incomplete or intercepted, or if there is a change of team possession during the down, the penalty is enforced at the previous spot. (Rule 9-1 Penalty) **(A.R. 7-3-12:I) (A.R. 9-1-2:III)**

Approved Ruling 7-3-12

- I. A11 throws a forward pass intended for A88. During the play defensive end B88 is flagged for a head-slap to tackle A79. The pass to A88 is (a) complete for a 10-yard gain to the A-30 where A88 is tackled; (b) incomplete or intercepted. **RULING:** (a) The penalty is enforced at the end of the of run, which is the A-30; first and 10 for Team A at the A-45. (b) The penalty is enforced at the previous spot, first and 10 for Team A at the A-35. (Rule 9-1 Penalty) [Cited by 10-2-2-e, 7-3-12]
- II. A11 throws a forward pass intended for A88. During the pass, defensive end B88 is flagged for unsportsmanlike conduct. The pass to A88 is (a) complete for a 10-yard gain to the A-30 where A88 is tackled. (b) incomplete or intercepted. **RULING:** (a) The penalty is enforced at the end of the run, which is the A-30; first and 10 for Team A at the A-45. (b) The penalty is enforced at the previous spot, first and 10 for Team A at the A-35. (Rule 9-2-1 Penalty)