

RULE 4

Ball in Play, Dead Ball, Out of Bounds

SECTION 1. Ball in Play – Dead Ball

Dead Ball Becomes Alive

ARTICLE 1. After a dead ball is ready for play, it becomes a live ball when it is legally snapped or legally free-kicked. A ball snapped or free-kicked before it is ready for play remains dead. (A.R. 2-16-4:I) (A.R. 4-1-4:I and II) (A.R. 7-1-3:IV) (A.R. 7-1-5:I and II)

Live Ball Becomes Dead

ARTICLE 2. a. A live ball becomes a dead ball as provided in the rules, or when an official sounds their whistle (even though inadvertently), or otherwise signals the ball dead. (A.R. 4-2-1:II) (A.R. 4-2-4:I)

b. If an official sounds their whistle inadvertently or otherwise signals the ball dead during a down (Rules 4-1-3-k, 4-1-3-m and 4-1-3-n) (A.R. 4-1-2:I-VI):

1. When the ball is in player possession, the team in possession may elect to put the ball in play where declared dead or repeat the down.
2. When the ball is loose from a fumble, backward pass or illegal pass, the team in possession may elect to put the ball in play where possession was lost or repeat the down.

Exceptions:

- (1) Rule 12.
 - (2) If the ball goes out of bounds in the immediate continuing action after the inadvertent whistle, then the ball belongs to the fumbling/passing team according to Rule 7-2-4.
 - (3) If there is a clear catch, recovery or interception of a loose ball in the immediate continuing action after the inadvertent whistle, then the ball belongs to the recovering team at the spot of the recovery and any advance is nullified.
3. During a legal forward pass or a free or scrimmage kick, then the ball is returned to the previous spot and the down repeated.

Exceptions:

- (1) Rule 12.
- (2) If, in the immediate continuing action after the inadvertent whistle, a legal forward pass is incomplete (Rule 7-3-7), a free kick goes out of bounds (Rule 6-2) or touches the ground on or behind Team B's goal line (Rule 6-1-7), a scrimmage kick goes out of bounds (Rule 6-3-7 or 6-3-8) or touches the ground on or behind Team B's goal line (Rule 6-3-9), then those rules apply as if the inadvertent whistle had not happened.
- (3) If there is a clear catch, recovery or interception of the pass or kick in the immediate continuing action after the inadvertent whistle, then the ball belongs to the recovering team at the spot of the recovery and any advance is nullified.

(4) If a scrimmage kick crosses the neutral zone and is untouched by Team B beyond the neutral zone, and if [Exceptions 1-3 above](#) do not apply [and the spot where the kick ends \(Rule 2-25-9\) is known](#), the ball is dead and belongs to Team B at the spot where the kick ends. [×] If this spot is beyond the neutral zone, the kick has crossed the neutral zone, and [therefore](#) postscrimmage kick enforcement will apply if the provisions of Rule 10-2-3 hold. On a field goal attempt, a field goal will be scored if the requirements of Rule 8-4-1 are met.

4. After Team B gains possession on the try or during an extra period, then the try is over or the extra-period possession series is ended.
- c. If a foul or violation occurs during any of the above downs, the penalty or violation privilege shall be administered as in any other play situation if not in conflict with other rules. **(A.R. 4-1-2:I and II)**

Approved Ruling 4-1-2

- I. Team A punts on fourth and 15 at the A-30. B44 is in position to receive the kick. In attempting to catch the ball, B44 muffs it at the B-35. The back judge blows their whistle when it appears that B44 is catching the ball, but it rolls along the ground after B44 muffs it. A88 chases the ball, and in the immediate continuing football action they recover it while grounded at the B-30. B22 is flagged for holding during the kick. **RULING:** Inadvertent whistle. Rule 4-1-2-b-3 Exception 3 applies. Team A declines the penalty and will have the ball at the B-30, first and 10. [Cited by 4-1-2-b, 4-1-2-c]
- II. Team A punts on fourth and 15 at the A-30. B44 is in position to receive the kick. In attempting to catch the ball, B44 muffs it at the B-35. The back judge blows their whistle when it appears that B44 is catching the ball, but it rolls along the ground after B44 muffs it. The ball disappears into a pile of players. B22 is flagged for holding during the kick. **RULING:** Inadvertent whistle. Since there is no clear recovery of the kick, the ball is returned to the previous spot and the 10-yard holding penalty is enforced. Team A retains possession and will have fourth and 5 at the A-40. [Cited by 4-1-2-b, 4-1-2-c]
- III. First and 10 at the B-45. Ball carrier A22 is tackled and is going to the ground, when they fumble. An official sounds their whistle inadvertently. Players on both teams go after the ball, and (a) B66 clearly recovers it while grounded. (b) it is not clear who recovers it. **RULING:** Inadvertent whistle. Rule 4-1-2-b-2 Exception 3 applies. (a) If it is determined that A22 lost control of the ball before they were down, then the ball belongs to Team B at the spot of the recovery by B66. (b) In the event that it cannot be determined which team recovers the ball, Team A retains possession at the dead-ball spot or may elect to repeat the down. [Cited by 4-1-2-b]
- IV. Team A punts on fourth and 15 at the A-30. B44 is in position to receive the kick. In attempting to catch the ball, B44 muffs it at the B-35. The back judge blows their whistle when it appears that B44 is catching the ball, but it rolls along the ground after B44 muffs it. A88 chases the ball, and in the immediate continuing football action they recover it while grounded at the B-30. **RULING:** Inadvertent whistle. Rule 4-1-2-b-3 Exception 3 applies. Team A will have the ball at the B-30, first and 10. [Cited by 4-1-2-b]
- V. Team A punts on fourth and 15 at the A-30. B44 is in position to receive the kick. In attempting to catch the ball, B44 muffs it at the B-35. The back judge blows their whistle when it appears that B44 is catching the ball, but it rolls along the ground after B44 muffs it. The ball disappears into a pile of players. **RULING:** Inadvertent whistle. Since there is no clear recovery of the kick, the ruling of the dead ball stands. Repeat the down at the previous spot. [Cited by 4-1-2-b]
- VI. What is meant by "otherwise signals the ball dead" in Rule 4-1-2-b? **RULING:** It means an official giving one of the following signals: stop the clock (S3); touchdown/field goal (S5); safety (S6); dead ball (S7); incomplete pass (S10). Such a signal interrupted before the official's arms are held or moved in the correct position is not regarded as a signal. [Any verbal statement \(e.g. saying "the ball is dead" or similar\) is also not regarded as a signal unless preceded by a whistle.](#) [Cited by 4-1-2-b]

Ball Declared Dead

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

- a. When it goes out of bounds other than a kick that scores a field goal after touching only the uprights or crossbar; when a ball carrier is out of bounds; or when a ball carrier is so held that their forward progress is stopped. When in question, the ball is dead. (A.R. 4-2-1:II) (A.R. 4-1-3:IX-XI)
- b. When any part of the ball carrier's body, except their hand or foot, touches the ground or when the ball carrier is tackled or otherwise falls and loses possession of the ball as they contact the ground with any part of their body, except their hand or foot. (*Exception:* The ball remains alive when an offensive player has simulated a kick or at the snap is in position to kick the ball held for a place kick by a teammate. The ball may be kicked, passed or advanced by rule.) (A.R. 4-1-3:I-II)
- c. When a touchdown, touchback, safety, field goal, or successful try occurs; or when a free kick or a scrimmage kick that is untouched by Team B beyond the neutral zone touches the ground in Team B's end zone (Rules 6-1-7-a and 6-3-9). (A.R. 6-3-9:I)
- d. When, during a try, a dead-ball rule applies (Rule 8-3-2-d-5).
- e. When a player of the kicking team catches or recovers any free kick or a scrimmage kick that has crossed the neutral zone.
- f. When a free kick, scrimmage kick or any other loose ball comes to rest and no player attempts to secure it.
- g. When a scrimmage kick or a free kick is caught or recovered by any Team B player after a valid or invalid fair catch signal by a Team B player; or when an invalid fair catch signal is made after a catch or recovery by Team B (Rules 2-8-1, 2-8-2 and 2-8-3).
- h. When there is a return kick or a scrimmage kick is made beyond the neutral zone.
- i. When a forward pass is ruled incomplete.
- j. When, before a change of team possession on fourth down or a try, a Team A fumble is caught or recovered by a Team A player other than the fumbler (Rules 7-2-2-a, 7-2-2-b and 8-3-2-d-5).
- k. When a live ball not in player possession touches anything inbounds other than a player, a player's equipment, an official, an official's equipment or the ground (inadvertent whistle provisions apply).
- l. When there is a simultaneous catch or recovery of a live ball.
- m. When the ball becomes illegal while in play (inadvertent whistle provisions apply).
- n. When a live ball comes into possession of an official (inadvertent whistle provisions apply).
- o. When a ball carrier simulates placing their knee on the ground.
- p. When an airborne pass receiver from either team is held so that they are prevented from immediately returning to the ground. (A.R. 7-3-6:III)
- q. When a ball carrier's helmet comes completely off.
- r. When a ball carrier obviously begins, simulates or fakes a feet-first slide. (A.R. 4-1-3:III-IV)
- s. When all players in the vicinity of the ball stop playing and/or believe it to be dead.

Approved Ruling 4-1-3

- l. While A1 is holding the ball for a place kick, Team B plays the ball by (a) recovering a loose ball, (b) snatching it from A1 or (c) batting it from their hands. **RULING:** (a), (b) and (c) The ball remains alive. In (c), the batting by Team B is legal and results in a fumble. [Cited by 2-11-1, 4-1-3-b]

- II. Team A is in formation to attempt a field goal. At the snap A22 is in position to execute a right-footed place kick and A33 is in position as the holder. The snap goes to A33 who has a knee on the ground. Just after the snap A22 breaks to their left and toward the neutral zone, and A33, while still on their knee, flips a forward pass to A22 who carries the ball beyond the line to gain before they are tackled. **RULING:** Legal play, because at the snap A22 was in position to attempt a place kick. First and 10 for Team A. [Cited by 4-1-3-b]
- III. Third and 10 at the A-35. Quarterback A11 sweeps to their right and goes into a feet-first slide to give themselves up. When they start their slide, the forward-most point of the ball is at the A-44, and when they come to a stop the forward-most point of the ball is at the A-46. **RULING:** Fourth and one at the A-44. The ball is dead at its forward-most point when they start their slide. [Cited by 4-1-3-r]
- IV. 3/10 @ B-40. QB A12 takes the snap and rolls out to the right. Finding no receiver open, A12 turns up field and runs. After making the line to gain, A12 breaks stride as if they are going to slide feet first at the B-27, stays upright and runs for a touchdown. **RULING:** The live ball becomes dead at the point where A12 simulates or fakes as if they will begin a feet-first slide. An official shall sound their whistle and declare the ball dead. Team A will have 1/10 @ B-27. A fake slide is not reviewable under Rule 12-2-2. [Cited by 4-1-3-r]
- V. B23 catches a kick but does not advance. No Team A player attempts to tackle B23. (i) B23 places the ball on the ground and walks away from it, (ii) tosses the ball to an official, or (iii) pauses for a few seconds then advances the ball. **RULING:** The ball is dead when it is clear B23 is not going to advance it or it is clear Team A believe them to have given up (Rule 4-1-3-s). In (iii), a foul for delay of game might be warranted (Rule 3-4-2-b-1).
- VI. Team A punts the ball downfield and no Team B player attempts to catch or recover it. A40 touches the ball and stops it rolling but does not secure possession of it. A40 walks away from the ball and no Team B player moves to recover the ball. **RULING:** The ball is dead when it is clear that players in the vicinity of the ball show no interest in recovering it (Rule 4-1-3-f).
- VII. Team A punts the ball downfield and no Team B player attempts to catch or recover it. A40 touches the ball and stops it rolling but does not secure possession of it. A40 walks away from the ball and no nearby Team B player moves to recover the ball. After 2 seconds, B33 shouts "it's still live" and starts running towards the ball, picks it up and advances with it. **RULING:** The ball is dead when it is clear that players in the vicinity of the ball show no interest in recovering it. B33's action occurred after the ball became dead (Rule 4-1-3-f).
- VIII. 4th and 10 on Team B's 15-yard line. Team A attempts a field goal but the kick is partially blocked. The ball rolls to a stop at Team B's 2-yard line where B15 picks it up but does not advance. A24 stops next to B15 but does not tackle them. After a pause, B15 hands the ball to A24 who advances into the end zone. **RULING:** The ball is dead when it is clear that B15 is not going to advance the ball. Handing the ball to an opponent shows that B15 believes the ball to be dead. Not tackling an opponent shows that A24 believes the ball to be dead. Team B's ball 1st and 10 at their 2-yard line (Rules 4-1-3-s and 5-1-1-e-1).
- IX. 4th and 10 on Team B's 40-yard line. Team A's punt is blocked and does not cross the neutral zone. A84 recovers the ball behind the neutral zone at Team A's 45-yard line, but does not advance. Team B players start leaving the field. **RULING:** The ball is dead when it is clear that A84 is not going to advance it. Team B's ball 1st and 10 at Team A's 45-yard line (Rules 4-1-3-s and 5-1-1-c). [Cited by 4-1-3-a]
- X. A2's place kick is driven low and strikes the crossbar. The ball bounces off the crossbar directly onto the helmet of B80 who is standing in the end zone. The ball ricochets off B80's helmet over the crossbar and between the posts. **RULING:** No score. The ball is dead when it hits the crossbar. By interpretation, if it continues on through the uprights after striking the crossbar, it is good, but the attempt in this play is no good because it touches something else before going through the goal. [Cited by 4-1-3-a]
- XI. A2's place kick is driven low and strikes the crossbar. The ball bounces off the crossbar, bounces directly up before hitting the crossbar again and then going through the uprights. **RULING:** Field goal. As long as the ball does not touch anything other than the uprights or crossbar before going through, the score is good. [Cited by 4-1-3-a]

Ball Ready for Play

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

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

Approved Ruling 4-1-4

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

Play-Clock Count

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

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

SECTION 2. Out of Bounds

Player Out of Bounds

ARTICLE 1. a. A player is out of bounds when any part of their person touches anything, other than another player or game official, on or outside a boundary line (Rule 2-27-15). (A.R. 4-2-1:I and II)

- b. An out-of-bounds player who becomes airborne remains out of bounds until they touch the ground in bounds without simultaneously being out of bounds.
- c. A player who touches a pylon is out of bounds.

Approved Ruling 4-2-1

- I. An inbounds ball carrier bumps into or is touched by a player or game official on the sideline. **RULING:** The ball carrier is not out of bounds. [Cited by 4-2-1-a]
- II. Ball carrier A1 is running inbounds near the sideline when they are contacted by a squad member of Team B, who is on the sideline. **RULING:** Rule 4-2-1 states a player is out of bounds when any part of their person touches anything other than a player or an official. Penalty — 15 yards or other unfair-action game administration-interference penalties (Rules 9-2-3 and 9-2-5). [Cited by 4-1-2-a, 4-1-3-a, 4-2-1-a, 9-2-3-c]
- III. Team A executes an onside kick at the A-35. A33 is running near the sideline and steps out of bounds at the A-45. At the A-47 they leap and bats the ball forward, and it rolls out of bounds at the A-49. **RULING:** Foul against Team A for free kick out of bounds at the A-47. Airborne A33 is out of bounds when they touch the ball because they have not established themselves in bounds after going out of bounds. Not a foul for batting the ball forward because the ball is dead as soon as A33 touches it (Rule 4-2-3-a). [Cited by 6-2-1]

Held Ball Out of Bounds

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

Loose Ball Out of Bounds

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

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

Approved Ruling 4-2-3

- l. A88 is airborne and secures firm control of A12's forward pass. A88's right foot lands inbounds and they maintain firm control of the ball as they contact the ground. B28, who is standing out of bounds, has their hand touching the ball while A88 is airborne and in firm control of the ball. **RULING:** Completed forward pass.

Out of Bounds at Forward Point

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

- b. A touchdown is scored if the ball is inbounds and has broken the plane of the goal line (Rule 2-12-2) before or simultaneous with the ball carrier going out of bounds.
- c. A receiver who is in the opponent's end zone and contacting the ground is credited with a completion if they reach over the sideline or end line and catch a legal pass.
- d. The most forward point of the ball when declared out of bounds between the goal lines is the point of forward progress. (**A.R. 8-2-1:I**) (**A.R. 8-5-1:VII**) (*Exception:* When a ball carrier is airborne as they cross the sideline (including a striding runner) forward progress is determined by the position of the ball as it crosses the sideline. (**A.R. 8-2-1:II-III and V-IX**))

Approved Ruling 4-2-4

- l. A player with one foot out of bounds behind a goal line touches a loose ball in the field of play. **RULING:** Ball is out of bounds and dead at its most forward point in the field of play. If this loose ball was an untouched free kick, it is a free kick out of bounds and a foul. Penalty — Five yards from the previous spot or Team B's ball 30 yards beyond Team A's free kick line. [Cited by 4-1-2-a, 4-2-4-a]