

2009 Football Rule Changes

Horse-collar Tackle To Be Penalized in High School Football

INDIANAPOLIS, IN (February 13, 2009) - The horse-collar tackle has been added to the list of illegal personal contact fouls in high school football.

This addition to Rule 9-4-3 was one of 10 rules changes approved by the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) Football Rules Committee at its January 24-25 meeting in Indianapolis. The rules changes were subsequently approved by the NFHS Board of Directors.

Effective with the 2009 season, it will be illegal to grab the inside back or side collar of the runner's shoulder pads or jersey and subsequently pull the runner to the ground. The penalty will be 15 yards from the succeeding spot.

Julian Tackett, assistant commissioner of the Kentucky High School Athletic Association and chair of the NFHS Football Rules Committee, said the committee felt the need to continue to address risk minimization issues for the runner.

"Risk minimization continues to be one of the most important fundamentals to the rules-writing process of the NFHS," Tackett said. "Though this play does not happen often, we must ensure that our coaches and officials understand the importance of penalizing this act."

Another risk-minimization change in Rule 9-4-3 will make it illegal to grasp an opponent's chin strap, in addition to the opponent's face mask or edge of a helmet opening.

The committee made a significant change in Rule 9-8-3 in an effort to reduce the risk of injury along the sidelines. A maximum of three coaches may be in the restricted area to communicate with players during dead-ball situations. Before the ball becomes live, however, the coaches must retreat into the team box.

Bob Colgate, NFHS assistant director and liaison to the Football Rules Committee, said this rule change results in a 2-yard belt that is clear of team personnel and helps eliminate sideline congestion while helping to minimize the risk for participating players, coaches and officials during live-ball situations.

"There no longer will be an allowance for three coaches to remain in an area adjacent to the sideline when the ball is live," Colgate said. "The results of a three-year experiment were favorable, which led to the committee's support for this rule change in 2009."

A change in Rule 9-8-1g clarifies that the mandatory three-minute warm-up period begins immediately following the conclusion of the halftime intermission. An unsportsmanlike conduct penalty will be assessed to the head coach if the team is not back on the field prior to the start of the warm-up period.

Changes in Rules 7-2-5 and 2-14-2 clarify the numbering-exception rule from when it was originally approved in 1982.

"The definition of a scrimmage-kick formation was clarified to differentiate formations that have been used traditionally for attempting a field goal or kick try from those used for a punt," Colgate said. "In addition, the circumstances under which the numbering exception can be utilized have been changed to clarify what can be done on first, second, third and fourth downs."

Two changes were made in Rule 1 - The Game, Field, Players and Equipment. The committee clarified Rule 1-3-1c regarding the stripes on the football. The change states that the stripes located on the football must be adjacent to and perpendicular to the seam upon which the laces are stitched. In Rule 1-2-3b, a note was added stating that all required field markings must be clearly visible. Further, when other markings such as logos are placed on the field, the required markings shall remain visible.

Other changes approved by the Football Rules Committee:

- Rule 3-3-4b5 - If a penalty resulting in a safety occurs on the last timed down of a period, the period is not extended. The teams will change goals to start the next period.
- Rules 8-2-2, 8-2-3, 8-2-4 (new), 10-5-1f - Three rules were revised and a new article was created regarding penalty enforcement for dead-ball, non-player or unsportsmanlike fouls that occur during or after a touchdown-scoring play. The revisions now allow the offended team, in most situations, the option of enforcing the penalty on the subsequent kickoff. Fouls committed after the initial ready-for-play signal following the touchdown are not affected by this change.
- Rule 9-7-2 Exception: A foul will now occur for illegal batting by the kicking team if it bats a scrimmage kick that has not yet been grounded unless it is batted by the kicking team toward its own goal line.

"Though many of the changes in the rules were subtle clarifications, each of this year's changes ensures that the sound traditions of the game are protected and that student-athlete safety remains our top priority," Tackett said.

In addition, the committee identified six points of emphasis for the 2009 season: Illegal Personal Contact, Blocking and Illegal Blocks, Helmet and Face Mask, Uniforms, Sportsmanship and NFHS Guidelines on Handling Contests During Lightning Disturbances.

In terms of the number of participants, football is the most popular high school sport for boys. According to the 2007-08 NFHS High School Athletics Participation Survey, 1,108,286 boys played 11-player football with another 27,075 involved in six-, eight- and nine-player football. In addition, 1,225 girls played high school football in 2007-08.