



2026 INTERPRETATION MEETING



MEETING AGENDA

Welcome, Introductions and Announcements

2026 Rules Change

2026 Editorial Changes

2026 Rules Reminders

2026 Points of Emphasis

2026 - 2027 Game Officials Manual Update

Closing Comments



2026 Themes

- **EXCELLENCE**

- BE Prepared to do your very best every game
"Strive for Excellence not Perfection"

- **CONSISTENCY**

- Steadfast adherence to the approved officiating mechanics from the first game thru the last game, 1st Quarter thru the 4th Quarter, and from Section 1 thru Section 11

- **HAVE FUN**

- Enjoy the Process of Learning the Rules and Mechanics, Enjoy the On-Field Challenges, Enjoy the Teamwork



PLAY.
PERFORM.
COMPETE.
TOGETHER.

2026 NFHS FOOTBALL RULES POWERPOINT

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dwhitfield@nfhs.org with requests.



NFHS FOOTBALL RULES

Each state high school association adopting these NFHS football rules is the sole and exclusive source of binding rules interpretations for contests involving its member schools. Any person having questions about the interpretation of NFHS football rules should contact the football rules interpreter designated by the respective state high school association.

The NFHS is the sole and exclusive source of model interpretations of NFHS football rules. State rules interpreters may contact the NFHS for model football rules interpretations. No other model football rules interpretations should be considered.

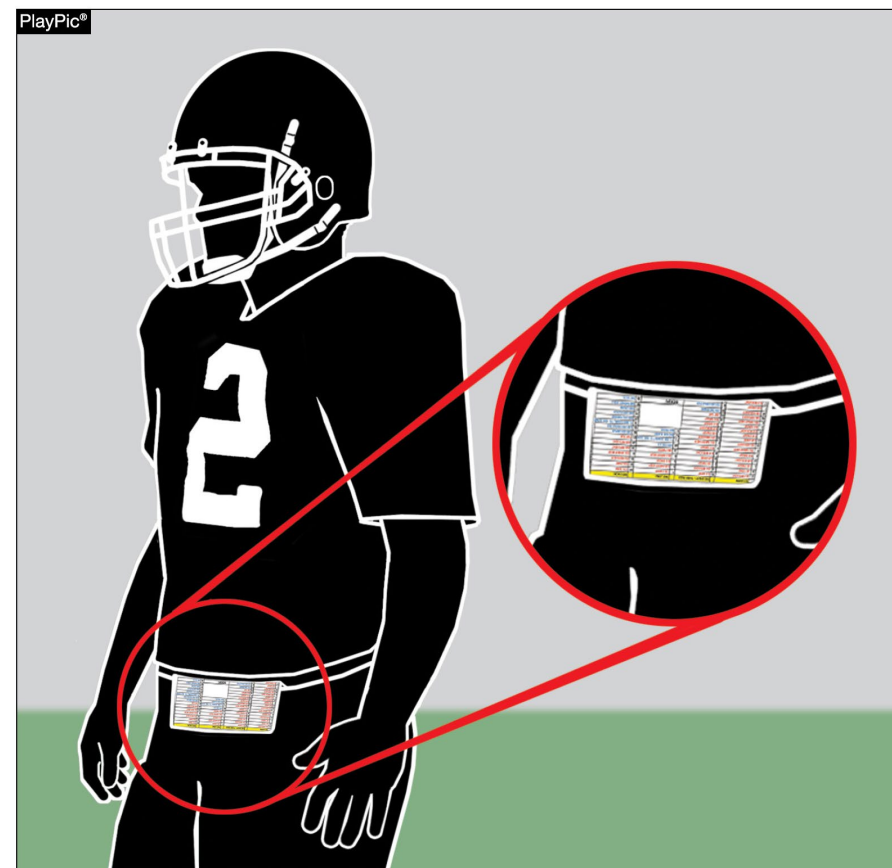


2026 NFHS FOOTBALL RULES CHANGES

PLAY CARDS

RULE 1-5-3c(9)

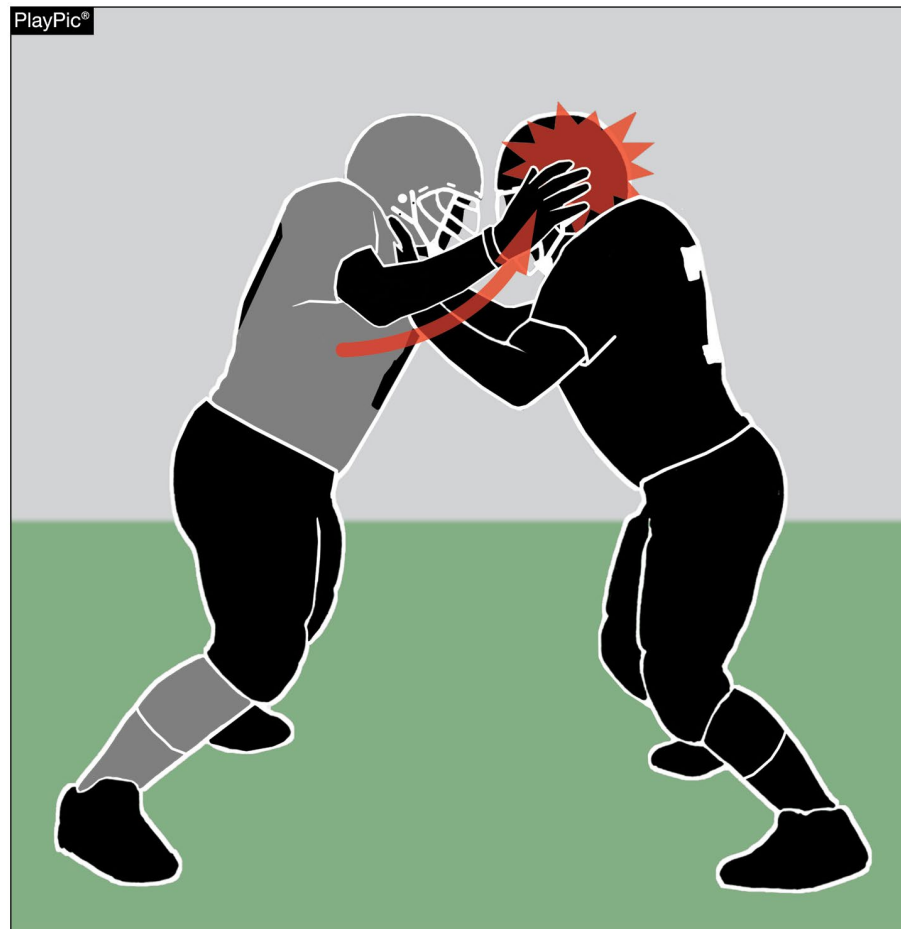
- “Illegal equipment shall always include but is not limited to:
9. Play cards not worn on the wrist, arm or belt.”



LEGAL

HEAD SLAP RULE 9-4-7

- “No player may use the hand(s) to slap the opponent’s head.”



ILLEGAL



2026 NFHS FOOTBALL EQUIPMENT



OAKLEY FOOTBALL VISOR (PRIZM CLEAR)



LEGAL

ILLEGAL

FOOTBALL HELMET COVERS



- **Permissible by 2026 current NFHS Football Rules**



GUARDIAN CAPS



SAFR PRO TECH



Q-COLLAR



- **Permissible by current 2026 NFHS Football Rules**





NEUROGUARD+ MOUTHGUARD



- Permissible by current 2026 NFHS Football Rules





2026 NFHS FOOTBALL EDITORIAL CHANGES





GAME ENDING PROCEDURE

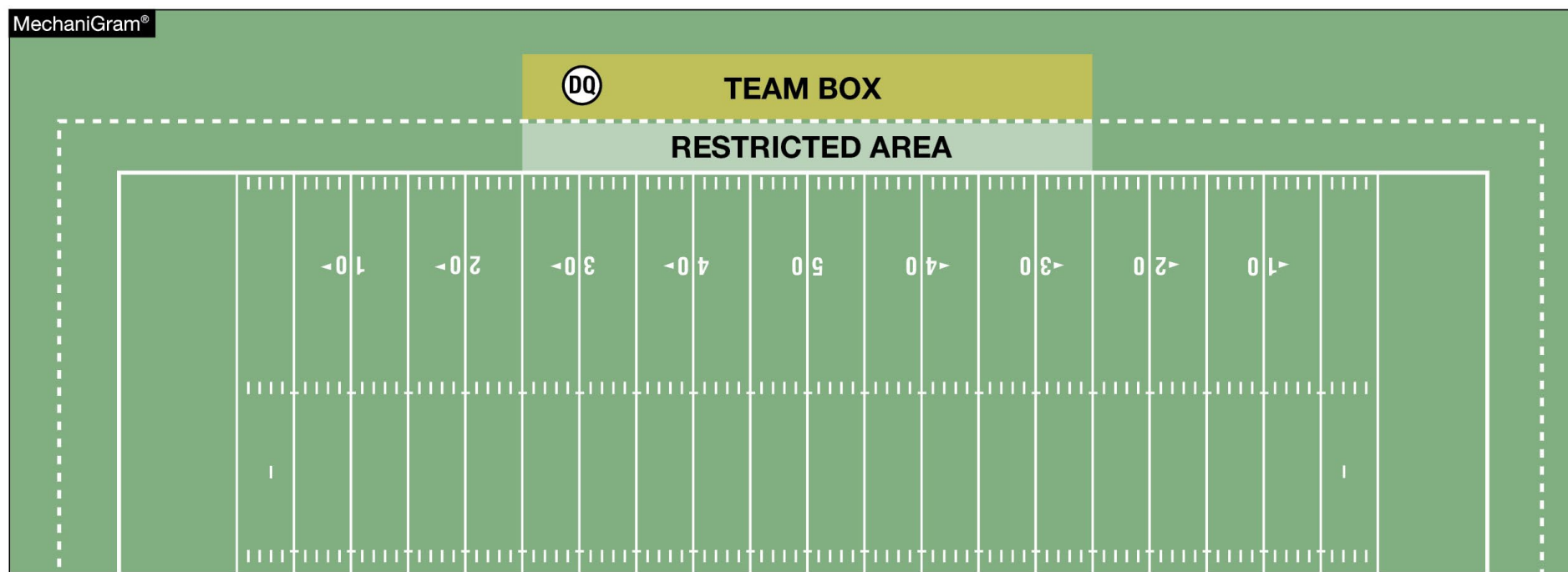
RULE 1-1-8

- The game officials' authority extends through the referee's declaration of the end of the fourth period or overtime. The jurisdiction of the game officials is terminated and the final score has been approved when all game officials leave the visual confines of the playing area. The game officials retain clerical authority over the game through the completion of any reports, including those imposing disqualifications, that are responsive to actions occurring while the game officials had jurisdiction. State Associations may intercede in the event of unusual incidents that occur before, during or after the game official's jurisdiction has ended or in the event that a game is terminated prior to the conclusion of regulation play.

DISQUALIFIED PLAYER

RULE 2-32-6

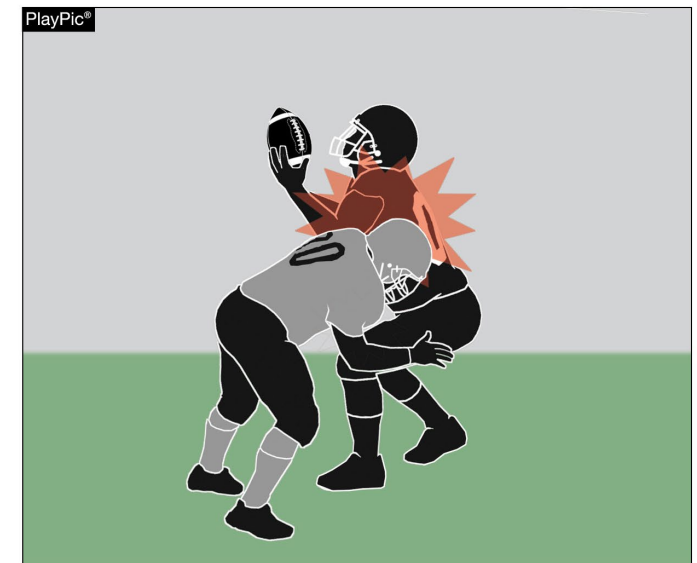
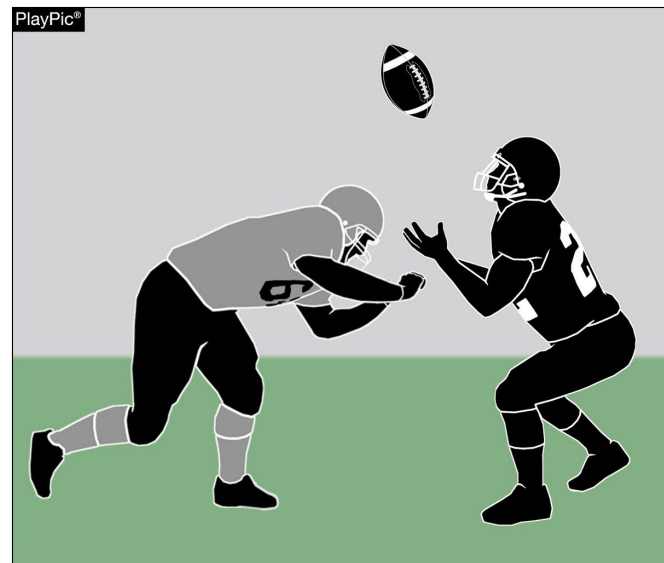
- A disqualified player is a player barred from further participation in a game. A disqualified player can be permitted to remain in the team box area.



ILLEGAL PERSONAL CONTACT/DEFENSELESS PLAYER RULE 9-4-3p



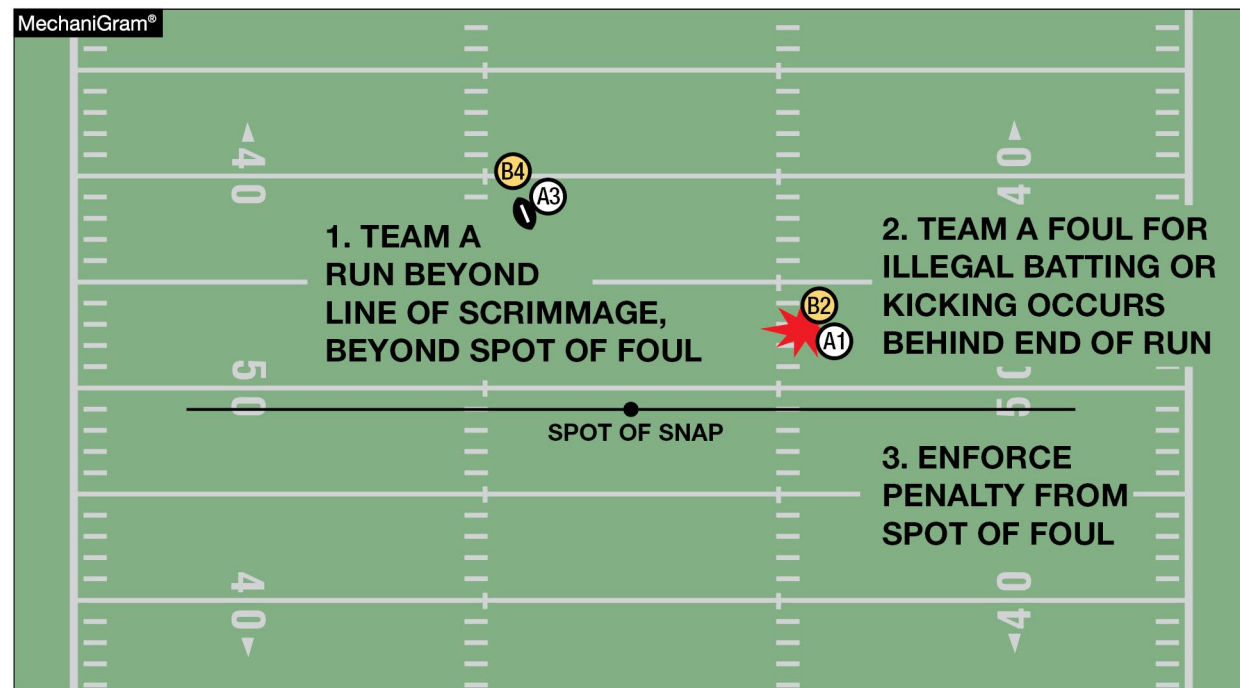
- No player or nonplayer shall:
 - p. Initiate forceful contact against a defenseless receiver as in 2-32-16b, 2-32-16c and 2-32-16e that is not:
 1. Incidental contact as a result of making a play on the ball;
 2. Initiated with open hands; or
 3. An attempt to tackle by wrapping arm(s) around the receiver.



BASIC SPOT

RULE 10-4-4a

- The basic spot is the spot of the foul for:
 - a. Illegal batting or illegal kicking by A that occurs behind the basic spot.



NEW DELAY OF GAME SIGNAL



PREVIOUS
DELAY OF GAME SIGNAL



NEW
DELAY OF GAME SIGNAL

2026 NFHS FOOTBALL EDITORIAL CHANGES



1-3-5b	Changed “Head Linesman” to “Head Line Judge.”
1-5-3a(2)	Deleted the reference to “opponent.”
2-15-1	Further clarified to make definition more consistent with forward fumble rule that was approved in 2025.
3-5-7g	Replaced “heat and humidity” with “circumstances and conditions” better covers a variety of situations that may create a health risk to players.
4-1-3	Deleted “if elected” from the rule as it was not needed.
5-3-1	Added “ball being” before ready-for-play for clarification.
5-3-2	Changed “Head Linesman” to “Head Line Judge.”
8-2-2, 8-2-3, 8-2-4, 8-2-5	Changed “subsequent kickoff” to “succeeding spot” for clarification.

2026 NFHS FOOTBALL EDITORIAL CHANGES



9-8 PENALTY	Added ‘basic spot’ to the PENALTY section to give better clarity that unsportsmanlike and nonplayer unsportsmanlike fouls are enforced from the basic spot.
10-4-2	Revised the rules references in the rule.
10-4-2b	Deleted “behind the line of scrimmage” from the rule to eliminate redundancy.
10-5-3	Deleted “and enforcement is from behind its goal line” to eliminate conflicts with recent rules changes to Rule 10-4.
FOOTBALL FUNDAMENTAL – Penalty Measurement (4)	Removed all of the rules references and relaced with “otherwise specified by rule.”
RESOLVING TIED GAMES – (3-1)	Changed “Head Linesman” to “Head Line Judge.
6-Player Rules Differences – Rule 7	Further clarified when a passer becomes eligible if the pass was touched by B.

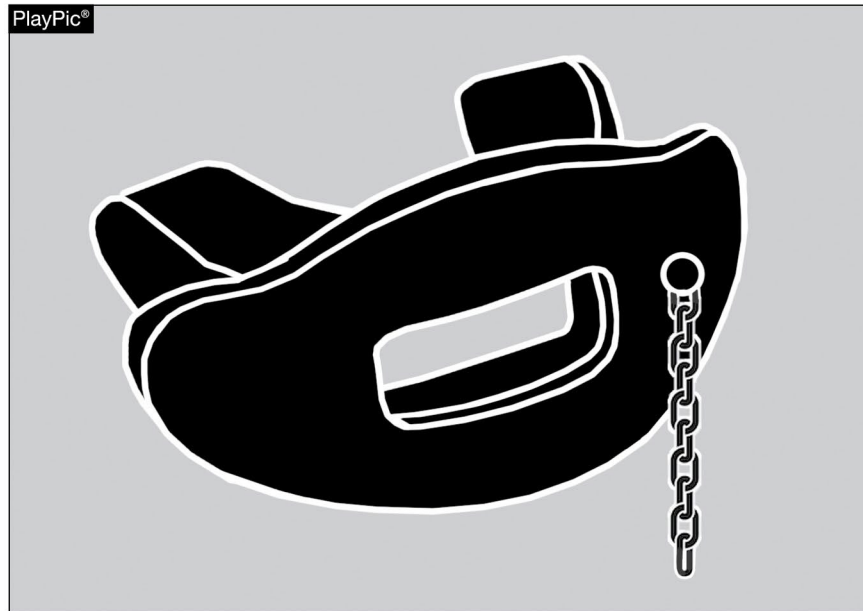


2026 NFHS FOOTBALL RULES REMINDERS

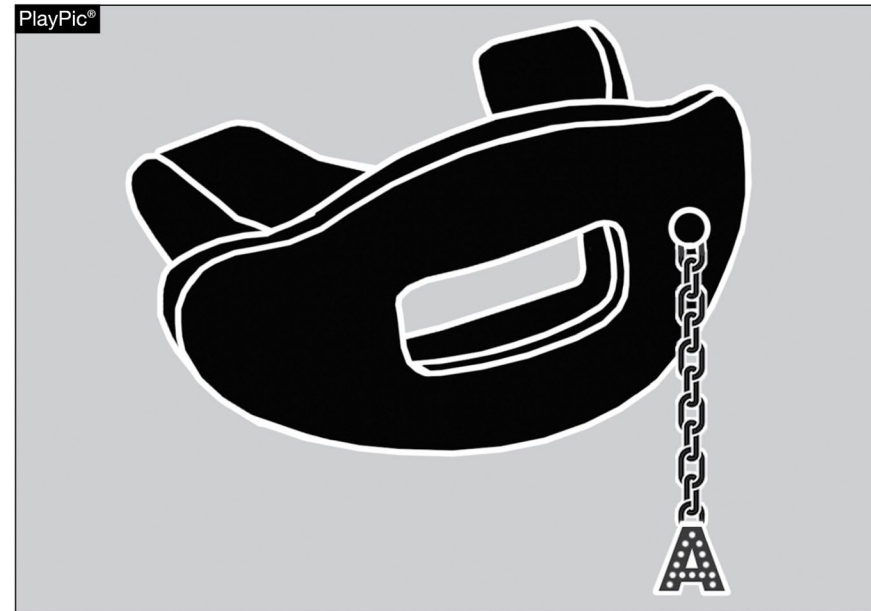


TOOTH & MOUTH PROTECTOR

RULE 1-5-1d(5)a – 4



ILLEGAL

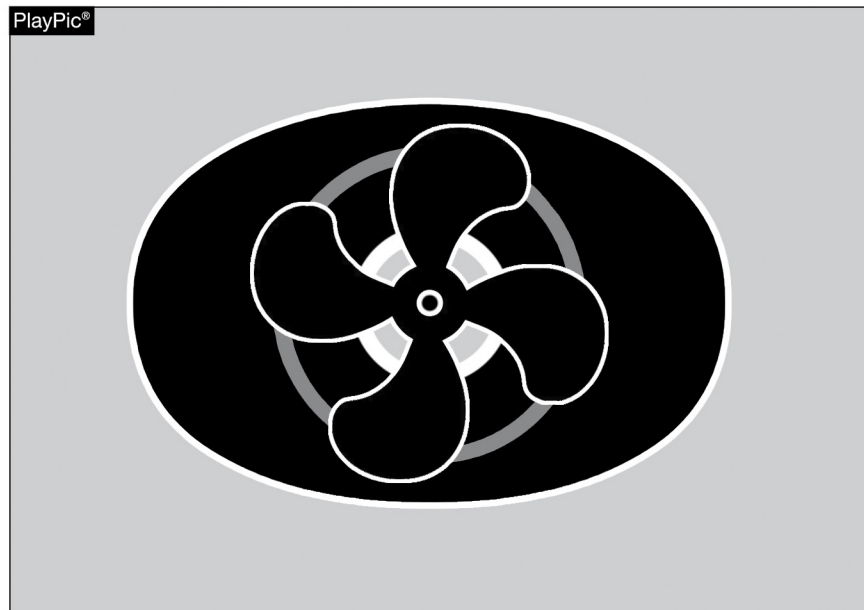


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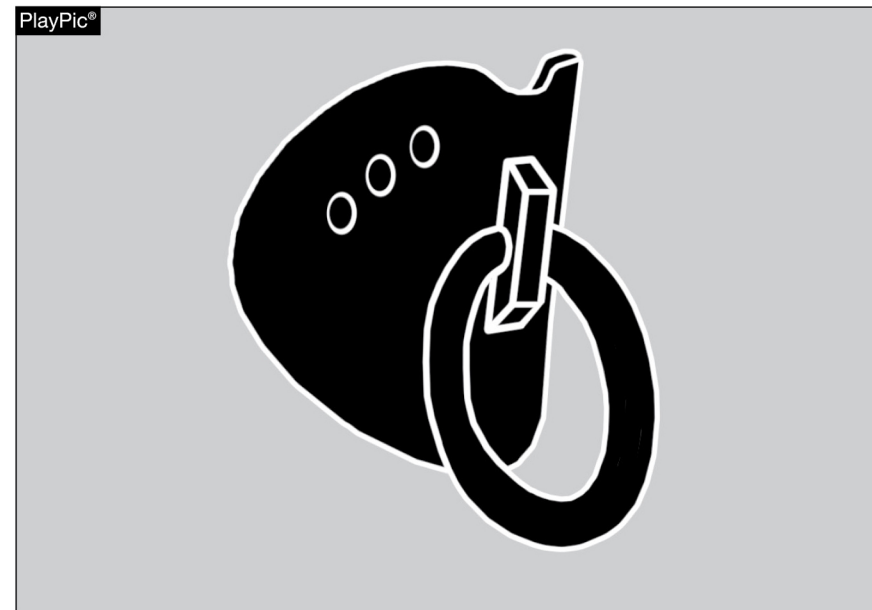
Effective 2026: Tooth and mouth protectors may not include any attachment(s) that do not serve a purpose and function in protecting the teeth or mouth.

TOOTH & MOUTH PROTECTOR

RULE 1-5-1d(5)a – 5



ILLEGAL

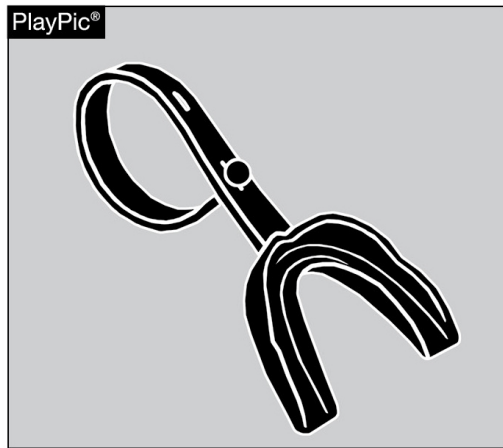


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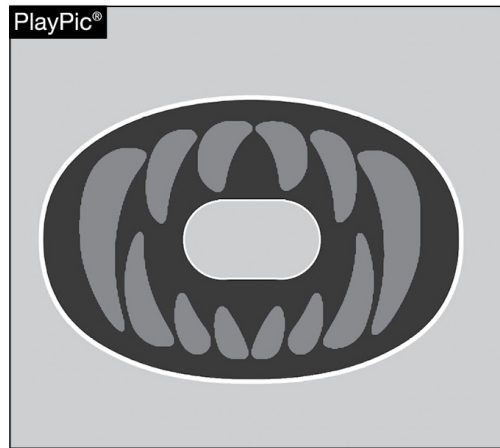
Effective 2026: Tooth and mouth protectors may not include anything on them that is a health or risk issue and can pose a danger to themselves or other players.

TOOTH & MOUTH PROTECTOR

RULES 1-5-1d(5)a – 4, 5



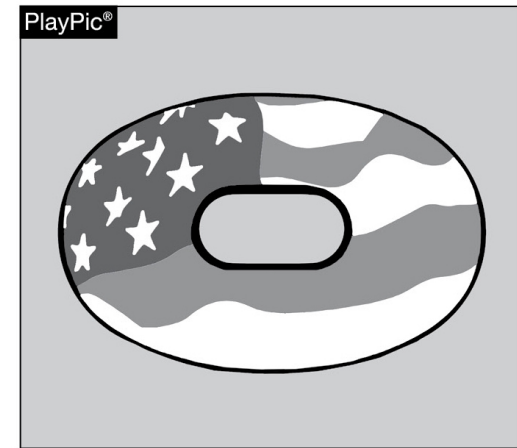
LEGAL



LEGAL



LEGAL



LEGAL

These tooth and mouth protectors neither include any attachment(s) that does not serve a purpose and function in protecting the teeth or mouth, nor anything that is a health or risk issue posing a danger and are not impacted by this rule change.

ARM SLEEVES

RULES 1-5-2d, 1-5-3c(6)



Effective 2027: Arm sleeves, whether attached to a shirt or unattached, manufactured to enhance contact with the football or opponent must meet the SFIA Specification at the time of manufacture.

ARM SLEEVES

RULES 1-5-2d, 1-5-3c(6)



Effective 2027: Arm sleeves must have a permanent, exact replica of the SFIA arm sleeve seal (meets SFIA Specification), that must be visible and appear legibly on the exterior of the arm sleeve.

ELECTRONIC SIGNS

RULE 1-5-3c(2)

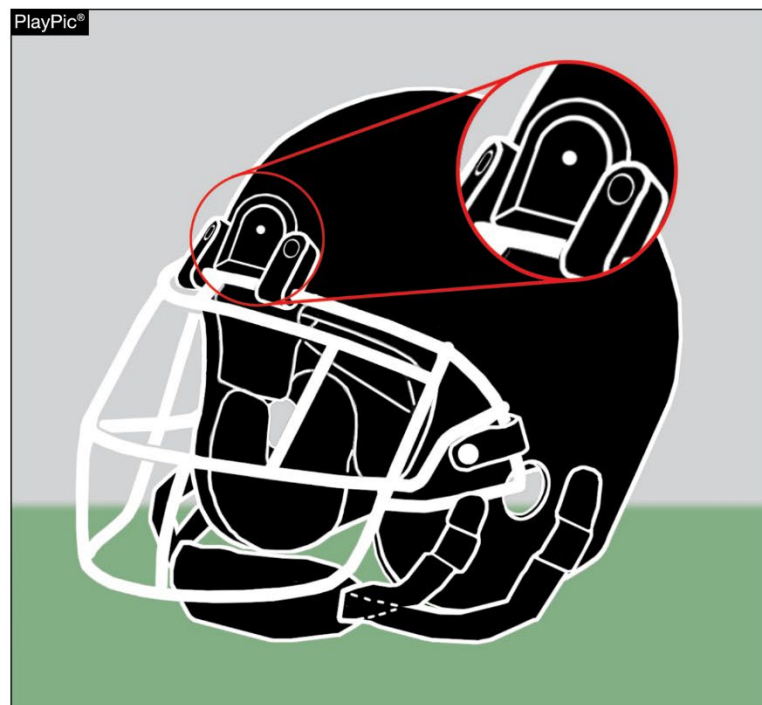


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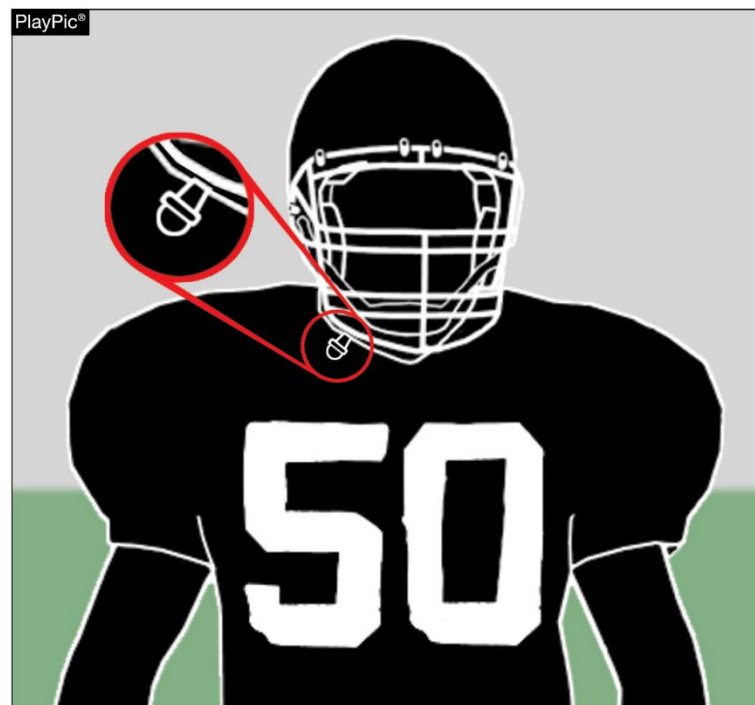
Fixed electronic signs (non-audio) with play signals are allowed to communicate from the sideline.

ILLEGAL EQUIPMENT

RULE 1-5-3c(3) (NEW)



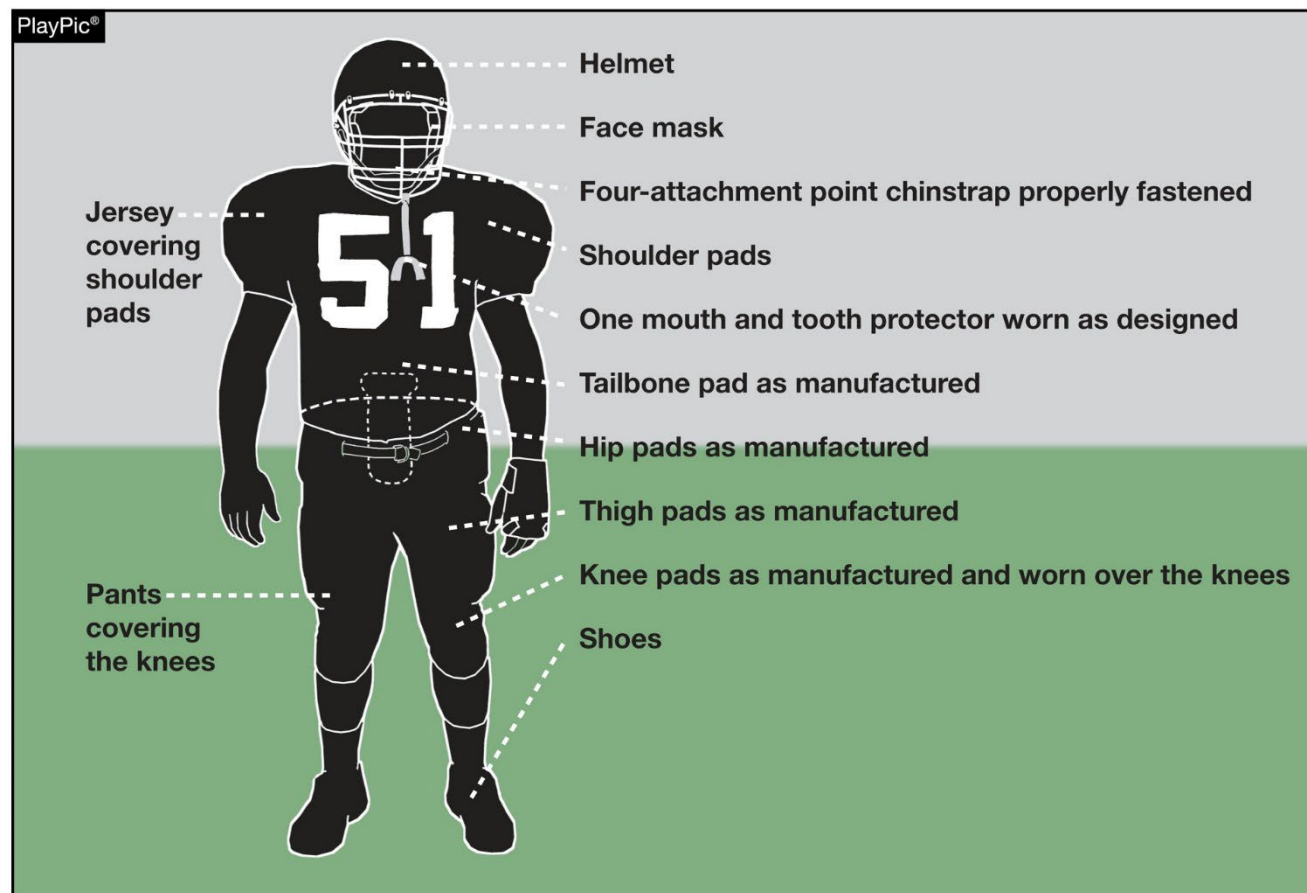
ILLEGAL



ILLEGAL

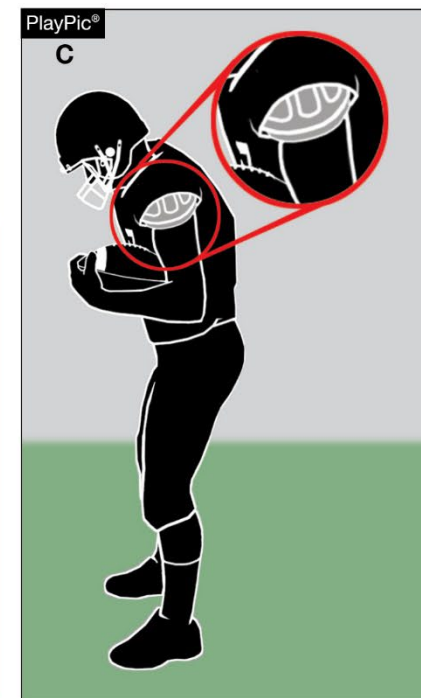
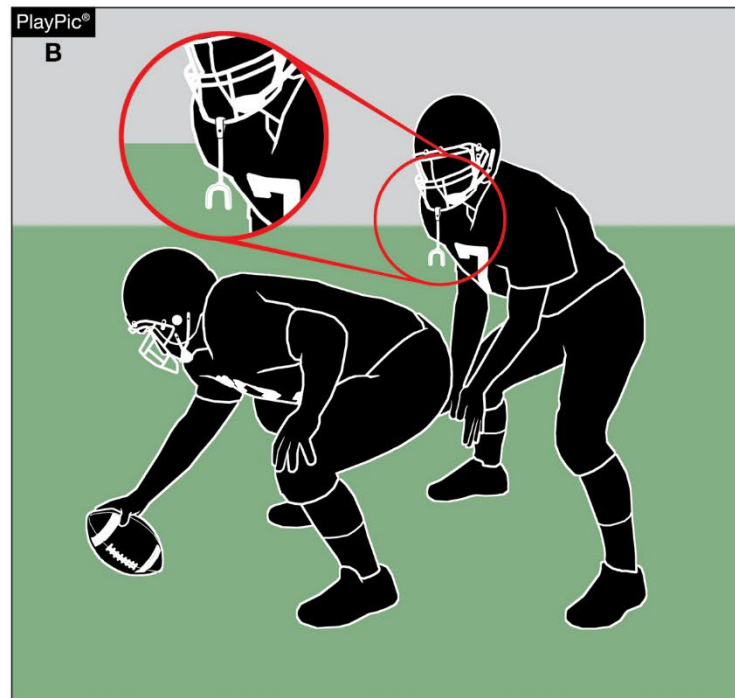
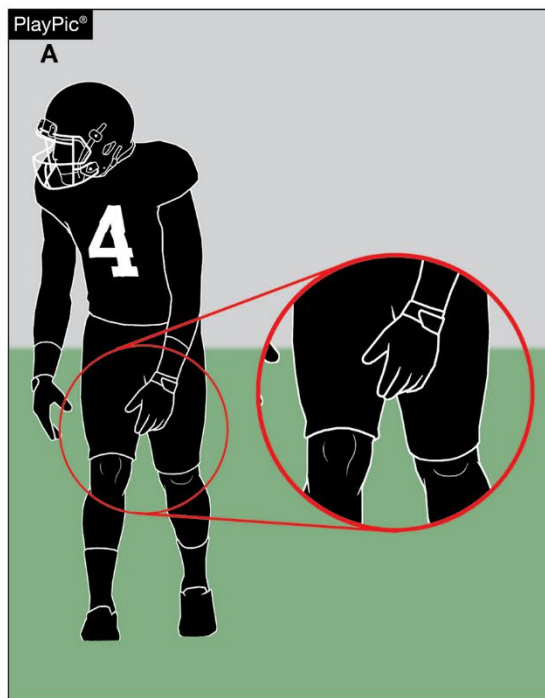
Any video (camera) device or audio (microphone) worn by a player during the game is illegal.

ILLEGAL AND IMPROPERLY WORN PLAYER EQUIPMENT



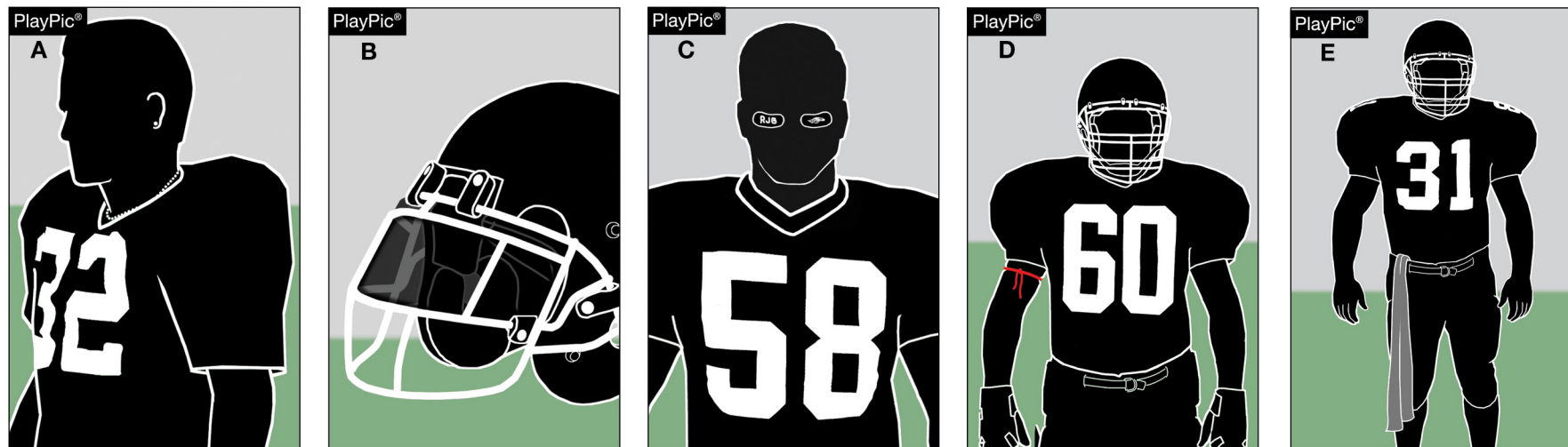
To support the safety of all participants, players must wear equipment and uniforms that are properly fitted and worn as intended by the manufacturer. Before starting each game, the head coach must verify that all players are properly and legally equipped. Allowing players to use illegal equipment or to wear required equipment improperly could subject the coach to a penalty.

ILLEGAL AND IMPROPERLY WORN PLAYER EQUIPMENT



Improperly worn equipment pertains to all equipment that is otherwise legal but not worn as intended. Examples include pants not covering the knees, tooth and mouth protectors not being worn as play starts and shoulder pads not properly covered by the jersey.

ILLEGAL AND IMPROPERLY WORN PLAYER EQUIPMENT

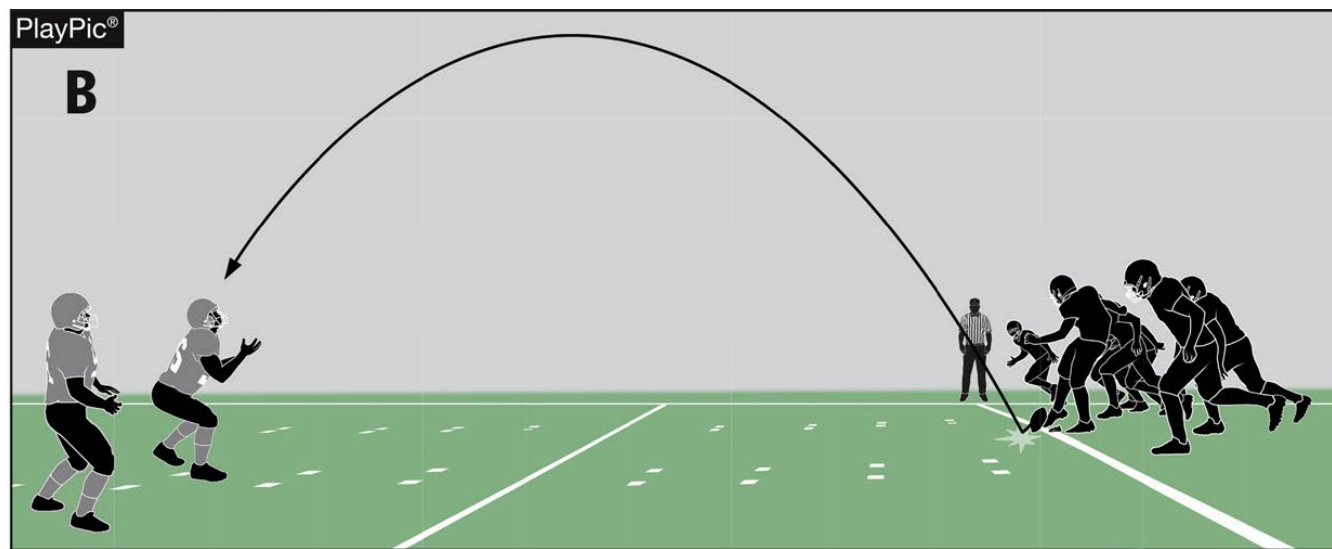
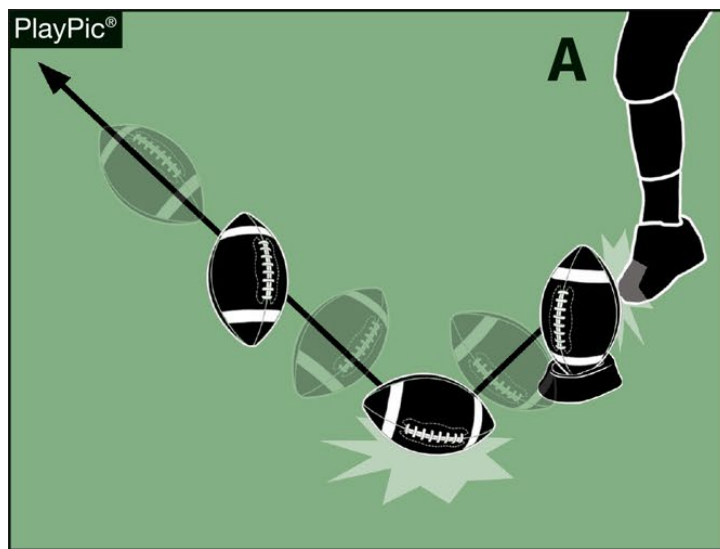


Illegal (prohibited) equipment includes jewelry (A), tinted visors (B), non-compliant eye shade (C), bands worn around the upper arm, neck or legs (D), and uniform adornments like towels that do not conform to rules (E).

POP-UP KICK

RULES 2-24-10; 6-1-11; 6-1 PENALTY

- A pop-up kick is a free kick in which the kicker drives the ball immediately to the ground, the ball strikes the ground once and goes into the air in the manner of a ball kicked directly off the tee. Such kicks are penalized as a dead-ball foul.





2026 NFHS FOOTBALL POINTS OF EMPHASIS





2026 NFHS FOOTBALL POINTS OF EMPHASIS

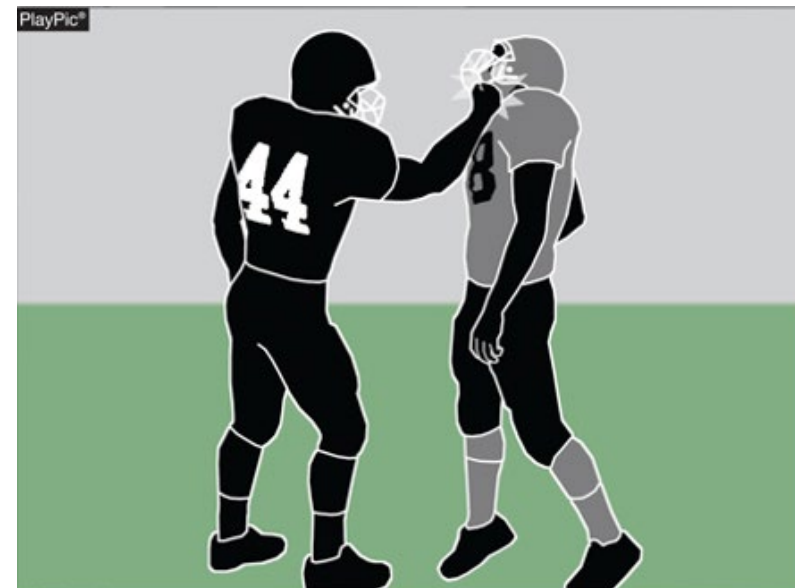


- 1. Flagrant and Unsportsmanlike Fouls**
- 2. Helping the Runner**
- 3. Sideline Management and Control**
- 4. Identification of the NFHS Authenticating Mark on Game Balls**

FLAGRANT AND UNSPORTSMANLIKE FOULS



- In high school football, flagrant fouls and unsportsmanlike fouls are serious rule violations that threaten player safety and the integrity of the game.
- Game officials must consistently penalize both flagrant and unsportsmanlike fouls to maintain control of the game.



FLAGRANT AND UNSPORTSMANLIKE FOULS



- Flagrant fouls are the most severe type of personal foul in high school football.
- A foul so severe or extreme that it places an opponent in danger of serious injury, and/or involves violations that are extremely or persistently vulgar or abusive conduct.
- These actions involve intentional, reckless or excessively violent behavior that shows a clear disregard for the safety of others. Examples include fighting, maliciously targeting the head or neck area, striking an opponent, or delivering a violent illegal blindside block or late hit.
- Disqualification if any foul is judged by the game official to be flagrant.

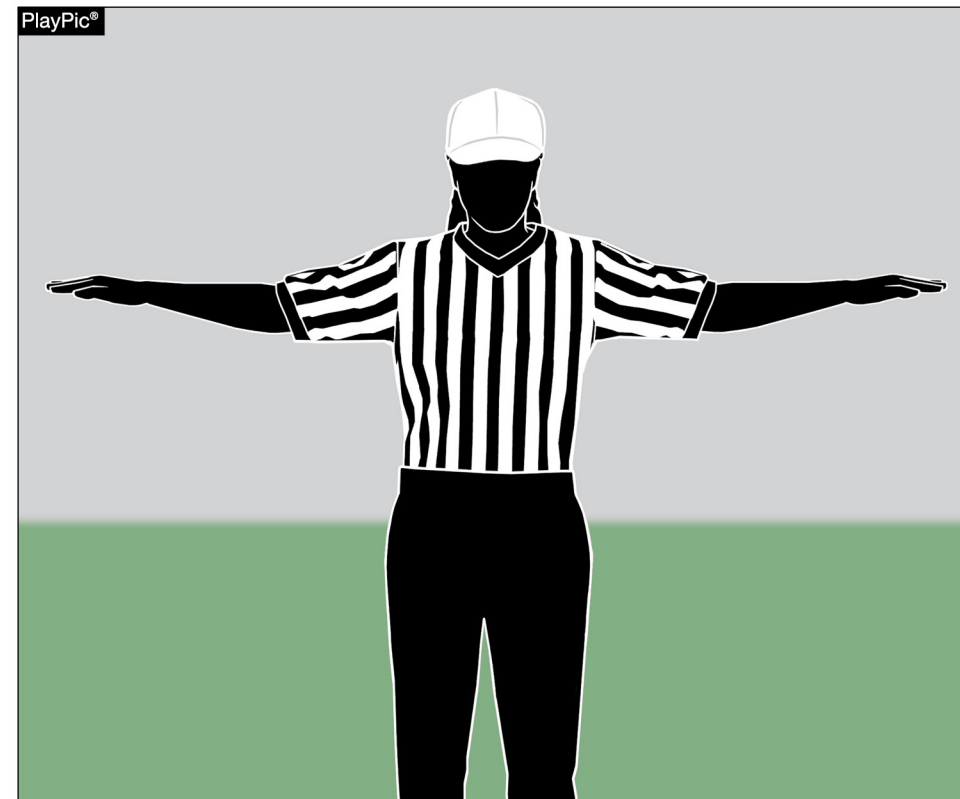


PERSONAL FOUL

FLAGRANT AND UNSPORTSMANLIKE FOULS



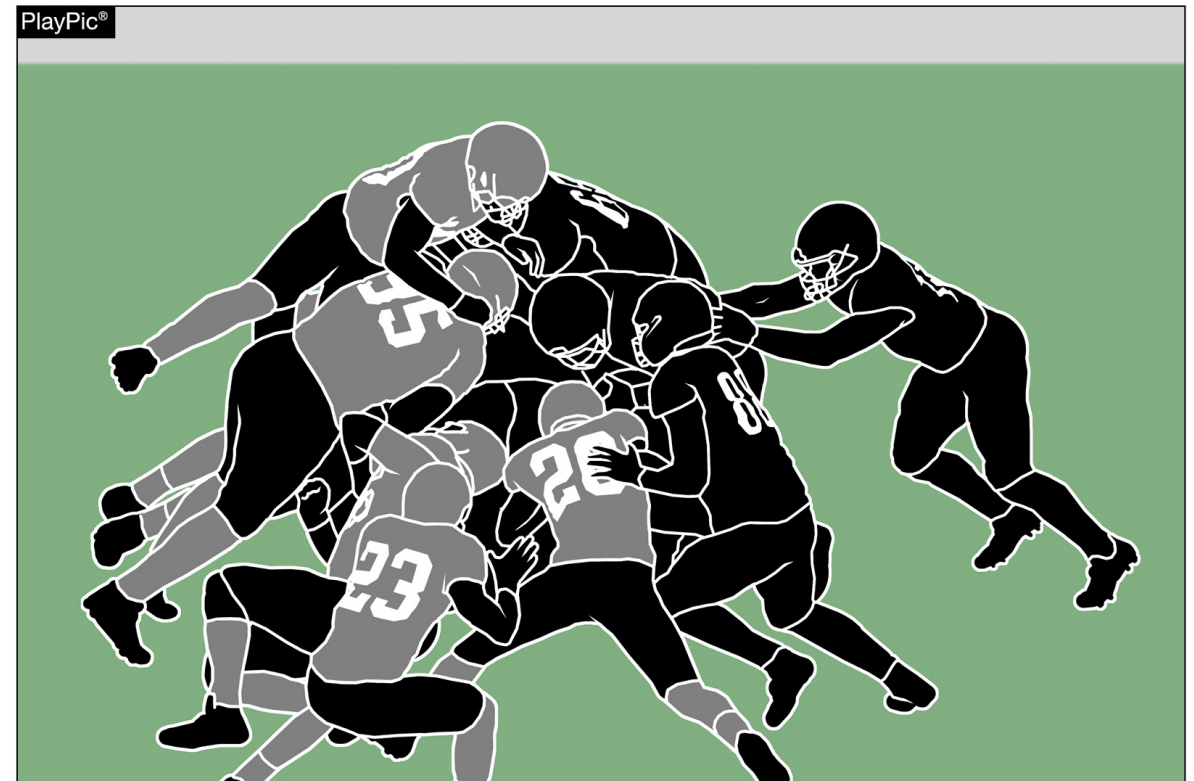
- Unsportsmanlike fouls are non-contact fouls that violate standards of fair play, respect and sportsmanship.
- Common examples include taunting, threatening gestures or posturing, racist comments, trash talking, excessive or choreographed celebrations, aggressively spiking, spinning or throwing the ball high into the air, using profanity, spitting, arguing with game officials, or throwing equipment.



UNSPORTSMANLIKE CONDUCT
NONCONTACT FOUL

HELPING THE RUNNER

- Illegally helping the runner to assist forward progress presents a risk of injury to the runner and others. The additional momentum to a particular offensive player, as opposed to the pile, swings the competitive balance toward the offense in a manner not intended by the rules.





HELPING THE RUNNER

- Although direct contact with the runner is illegal under NFHS rules, these types of plays are becoming more common in the high school game. As guardians of the game, it is imperative that all stakeholders work together to remove “illegally helping the runner” from our high school game.



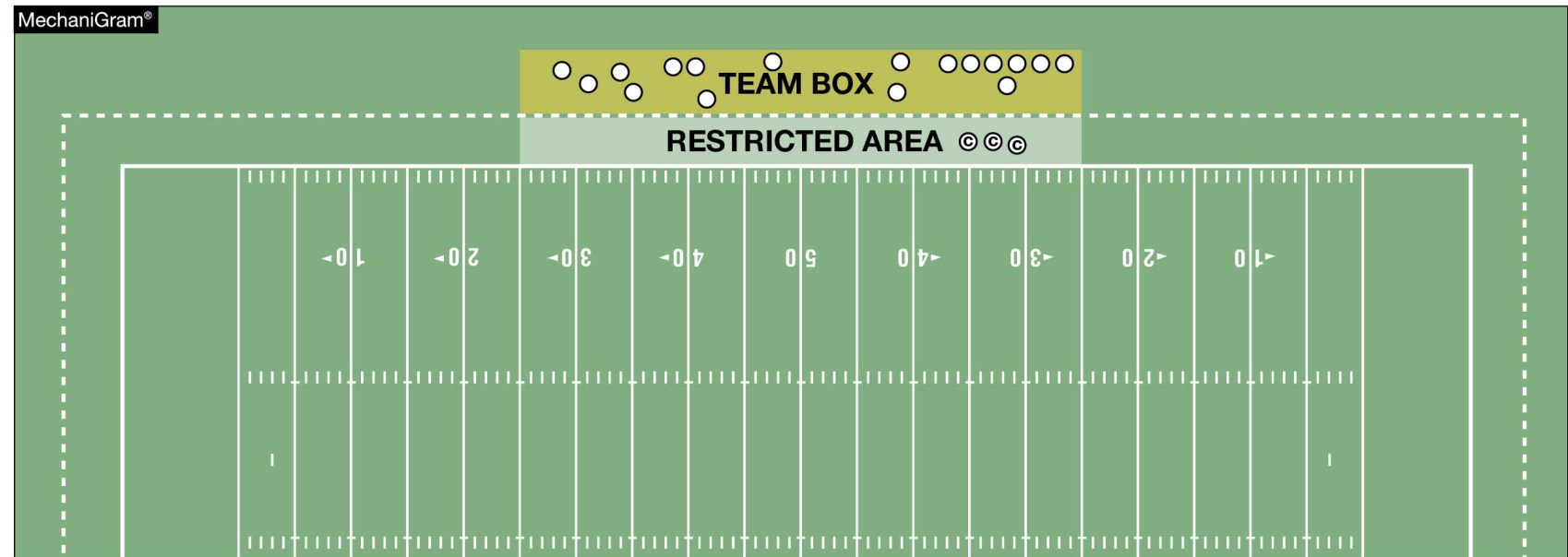
HELPING THE RUNNER

- Although a foul can occur on any play, game officials should especially be alert for this type of action on short-yardage plays near the goal line and line to gain. Remember, pushing the pile is legal; direct contact while pushing, pulling, lifting of the runner to assist forward progress is not.

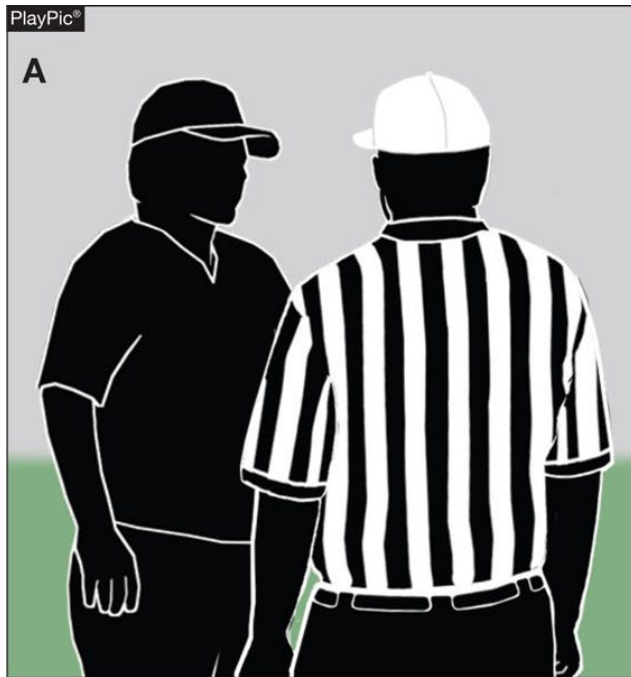
SIDELINE MANAGEMENT AND CONTROL



- Sideline management has become a recurring “point of emphasis” because it improves game safety. To minimize the risk of all involved, non-players must remain in their team box and out of any restricted areas, especially while the ball is live. The coaches’ area is a minimum of a 2-yard belt between the front of the team box and the sideline and becomes the restricted area when the ball is live. A maximum of three coaches – and only coaches – may be in this area when the ball is dead between plays.



SIDELINE MANAGEMENT AND CONTROL



- Game officials are instructed to strictly enforce NFHS Football Rules when coaches or team personnel enter the field of play to dispute rulings or address game officials outside the coaching area.

SIDELINE MANAGEMENT AND CONTROL



- Sideline management and control promotes good sportsmanship and professionalism across all levels of play and also prevents unnecessary delays and confrontations that can impact game flow and fairness.



IDENTIFICATION OF NFHS AUTHENTICATING MARK ON GAME BALLS

- The NFHS Authenticating Mark ensures easy identification of inflated and non-inflated balls used in interscholastic competition for which the NFHS writes playing rules. All such balls are required to display the NFHS Authenticating Mark.





Football

NFHS Authenticating Mark on Game Balls



Old Size



Current Size





2026 AND 2027 NFHS FOOTBALL GAME OFFICIALS MANUAL



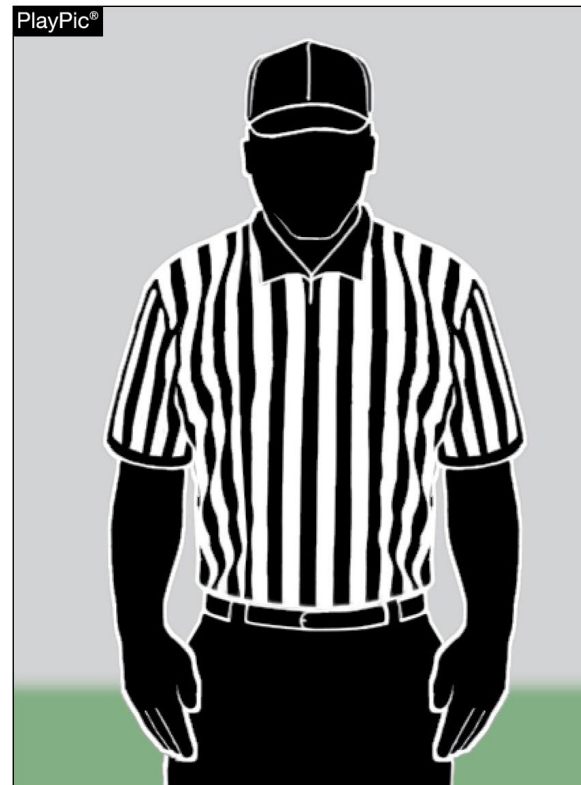
2026 AND 2027 NFHS FOOTBALL GAME OFFICIALS MANUAL POINTS OF EMPHASIS

- 1. Penalty Communication**
- 2. Forward Progress**
- 3. Free-Kick Coverage**
- 4. Scoring kick Positioning**

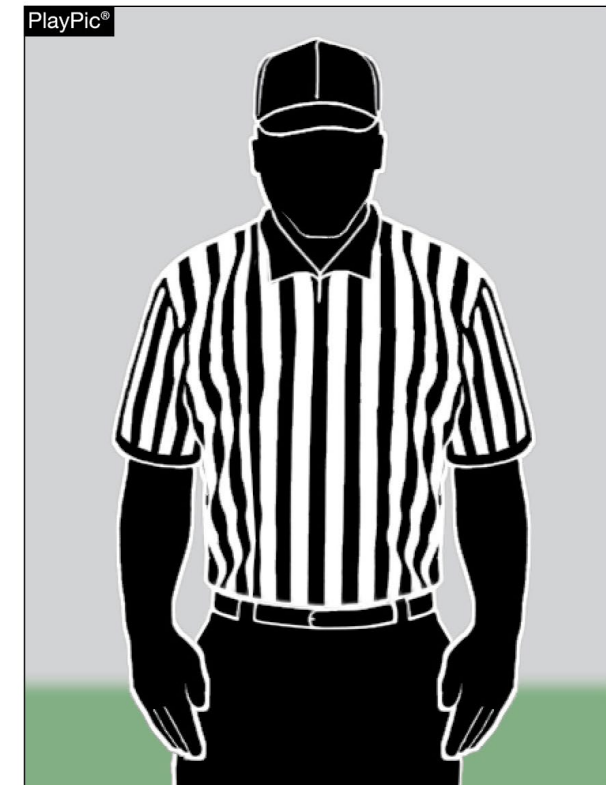


NEW POSITION NAME

- The *Head Linesman* position is now referred to as *Head Line Judge*.



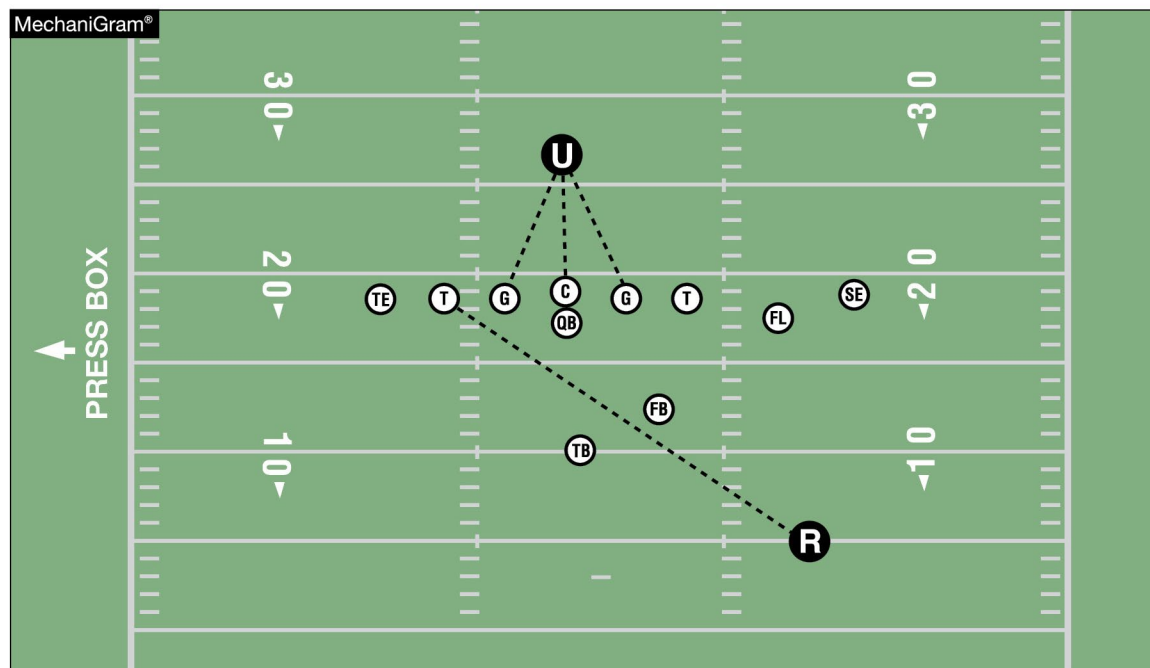
PREVIOUS
HEAD LINESMAN



NEW
HEAD LINE JUDGE



REFEREE & UMPIRE KEYS

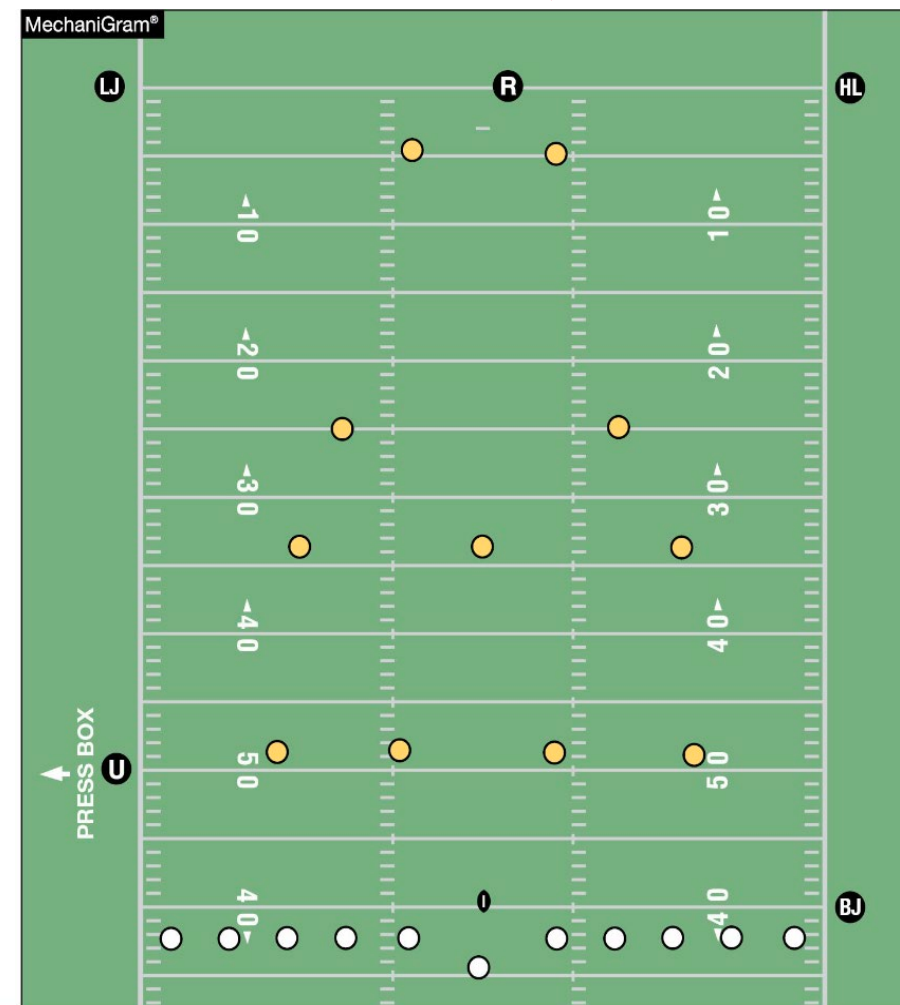


In all but the rarest cases, the Referee will key on the opposite side tackle. In all cases the Umpire will key on the center and both guards.

CREW OF FIVE FREE KICK POSITIONS (PSAL ONLY; NYS NOT USING)



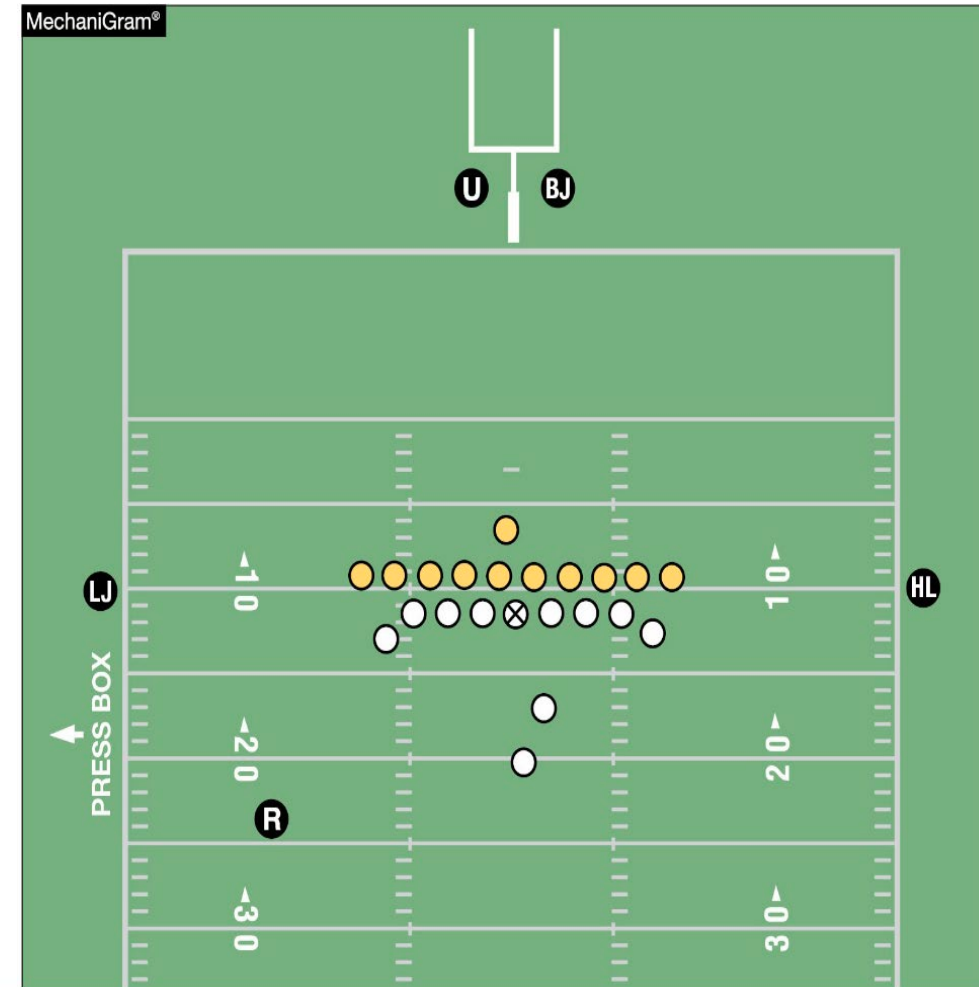
- **REFEREE:** Starting position is on the goal line between the hash marks and in the center of the field.
- **UMPIRE:** Starting position is outside the sideline on the side opposite the chains, on Team R's free-kick line.
- **WING OFFICIALS:** Starting position is on Team R's goal line extended but can be adjusted based on the deepest receiver. If starting position is adjusted, both line of scrimmage officials must be on the same yard line and deeper than the deepest receiver.
- **BACK JUDGE:** Starting position is outside the sideline on the side with the chains, on Team K's free-kick line.



CREW OF FIVE SCORING KICK POSITIONING: (5-yard line and in ONLY)



- REFEREE: Starting position is 2 to 3 yards to rear and 3 to 5 yards to side of potential kicker, facing holder.
- UMPIRE: Starting position is beyond the end line and behind the upright.
- WING OFFICIALS: Starting position is straddling the line of scrimmage.
- BACK JUDGE: Starting position is beyond the end line and behind the upright.





2026-27 NFHS FOOTBALL INFORMATION

2027 NFHS FOOTBALL RULE CHANGE PROPOSAL ONLINE FORM



Due:

November 1, 2026

**Must be submitted to your state
association office for approval.**

- **Suggestions to Rob Argento**

NFHS SUGGESTED GUIDELINES FOR MANAGEMENT OF CONCUSSION IN SPORTS



Page 101 2026 NFHS Football Rules Appendix B

NFHS
PLAY.
PERFORM.
COMPETE.
TOGETHER.

SUGGESTED GUIDELINES FOR MANAGEMENT OF CONCUSSION IN SPORTS

COMMON SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF CONCUSSION INCLUDE:

- Headache or "pressure" in head;
- Neck pain
- Dizziness
- Dazed or stunned or vacant appearance;
- Confusion about assignment or position;
- Forgetfulness;
- Uncertainty of game, score, or opponent;
- Clumsy movements;
- Slow response to questions;
- Mood, behavior or personality changes;
- Can't recall events prior to or after hit or fall;
- Nausea;
- Balance problems or dizziness;
- Double or blurry vision;
- Sensitivity to light or noise;
- Feeling sluggish, hazy, foggy or groggy;
- Concentration or memory problems;
- Emotions of "not feeling right" or "feeling down."

Activate the Emergency Medical System or Call 9-1-1 if, after a blow, or jolt to the head or body, an athlete has one or more of these danger signs:

- One pupil larger than the other;
- Drowsiness or inability to wake up;
- A headache that gets worse and does not go away;
- Slurred speech, weakness, numbness, or decreased coordination;
- Repeated vomiting or nausea;
- Convulsions or seizures (shaking or twitching);
- Unusual behavior, increased confusion, restlessness, or agitation;
- Loss of consciousness (passed out/knocked out). Even a brief loss of consciousness should be taken seriously. Consider activating EMS for prolonged loss of consciousness.

SUGGESTED CONCUSSION MANAGEMENT:

1. No athlete should return-to-sport (RTS) or practice on the same day of a concussion.
2. Any athlete suspected of having a concussion should be evaluated by an appropriate health-care professional as soon as possible.
3. Any athlete with a concussion should be medically cleared by an appropriate health-care professional prior to resuming participation in any practice or competition.
4. After medical clearance, RTS should follow a step-wise protocol with provisions for delayed RTS based upon return of any signs or symptoms at rest, while doing school work or with physical activity.

For further details, please see the "NFHS Suggested Guidelines for Management of Concussion in Sports" at www.nfhs.org.

Revised and Approved October 2023

In the Appendix
in all of the
2026-27 NFHS
Rules Book
Rule 3-5-10b

NFHS GUIDELINES ON HANDLING PRACTICES AND CONTESTS DURING LIGHTNING OR THUNDER DISTURBANCES



Appendix E

2026 NFHS Football Rules

Page 104



GUIDELINES ON HANDLING PRACTICES AND CONTESTS DURING LIGHTNING OR THUNDER DISTURBANCES

It is important that state associations continue to educate their member schools on the importance of having an established Lightning Policy/Plan in place for all outdoor high school sports and activities and for indoor swimming pools and that this Policy/Plan is current, practiced and executed. These guidelines provide a default policy to those responsible or sharing duties for making decisions concerning the suspension and restarting of practices and contests based on the presence of lightning or thunder. The preferred sources from which to request such a policy for your facility would include your state association and the nearest office of the National Weather Service.

PROACTIVE PLANNING

1. Assign a specific staff member to monitor local weather conditions before and during practices and contests. This staff member is charged with suspending outdoor activities and determining when to resume activities. Any individual following these guidelines shall not be challenged.
2. Develop an emergency action plan, including identification of appropriate nearby safer areas and determine the amount of time needed to get everyone to a designated safer area:
 - a. A designated safer place is a substantial building with plumbing and wiring where people live or work, such as a school, gymnasium or library. An alternate safer place from the threat of lightning is a fully enclosed (not convertible or soft top) metal car or school bus.
3. Develop criteria for suspension and resumption of play:
 - a. When thunder is heard or lightning is seen*, the leading edge of the thunderstorm is close enough to strike your location with lightning. Suspend play for at least 30 minutes and vacate the outdoor activity to the previously designated safer location immediately.
 - b. 30-minute rule. Once play has been suspended, wait at least 30 minutes after the last thunder is heard or lightning is witnessed* prior to going outdoors and resuming play.
 - c. Any subsequent thunder or lightning* after the beginning of the 30-minute count will reset the clock and another 30-minute count will begin.
 - d. If available, data from a nationally connected network for lightning detection network should be monitored closely when storms are possible or during lightning delays. Play shall be suspended when lightning is within a 10-mile radius of the event and will not be resumed until at least 30 minutes have passed since the last lightning within the 10-mile radius. However, never depend on the reliability of any detection device if the sky looks threatening, you hear thunder, or see lightning*. Visual and audio indications of a storm should always take precedence over information from a mobile app or lightning-detection device.

* – At night, under certain atmospheric conditions, lightning flashes may be seen from distant storms. In these cases it may be safe to continue an event. If no thunder can be heard and the flashes are low on the horizon, the storm may not pose a threat. Independently verified lightning detection information would help eliminate any uncertainty.

4. Review the lightning safety policy annually with all administrators, coaches and game personnel and train all personnel.

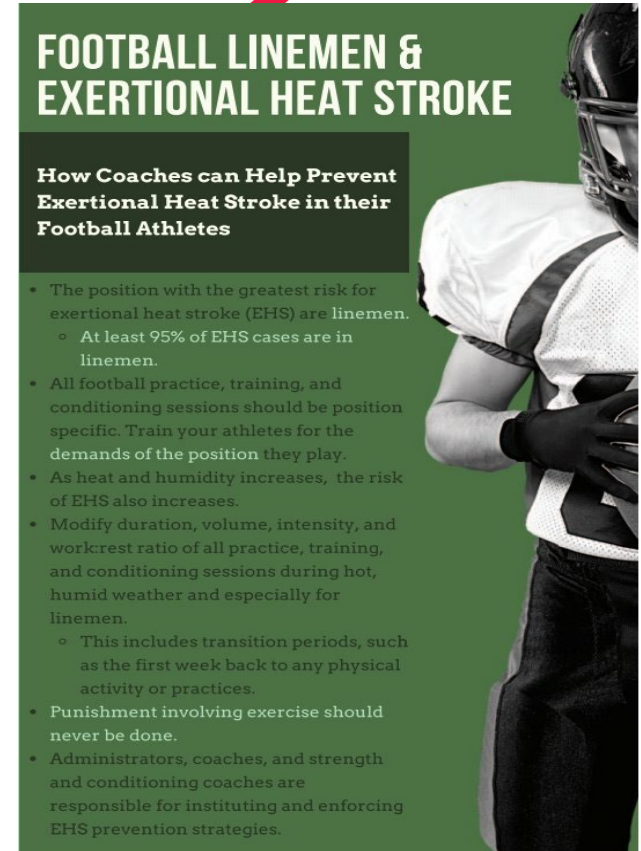
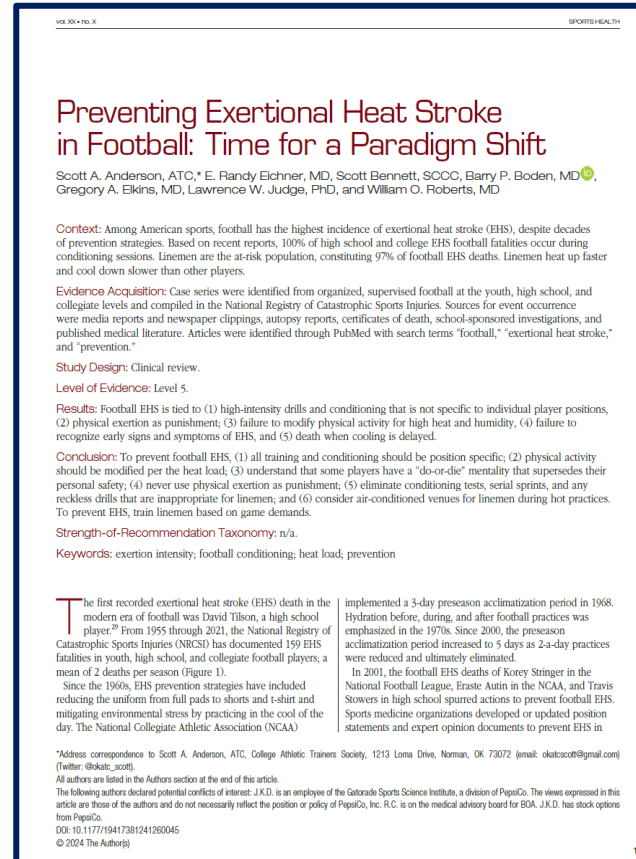
5. Inform student-athletes and their parents of the lightning policy at start of the season.

Revised and Approved October 2024

In Appendix E
in the
2026 NFHS
Football Rules Book
&
NYSPHSAA website

PREVENTING EXERTIONAL HEAT STROKE IN FOOTBALL

- 100% of high school EHS deaths in football occurred during conditioning sessions
- **Linemen** are the at-risk population (97% of football EHS deaths)
- Paradigm Shift:
 - Position specific training
 - Transition period protocols
 - Recognize high risk situations
 - Eliminate punishment drills



**Sports Health,
May-June 2025**

2026 NFHS SMAC TASK FORCE

Preventing Exertional Heat Stroke (EHS) in High School Football Linemen



PREVENTING EXERTIONAL HEAT STROKE (EHS) IN HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL LINEMEN

National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS)
Sports Medicine Advisory Committee (SMAC) Task Force

June 2026

THE PROBLEM:

- Exertional heat stroke (EHS) is the No. 1 cause of preventable death in youth, high school and collegiate football players, with an average of nearly three deaths per season.
- 100% of high school and collegiate EHS football deaths occur during sustained, high-intensity conditioning sessions, usually within the first week of practice, with 97% of those fatalities being linemen.
- Recommended guidelines for EHS (uniform reduction, WetBulb Globe Temperature (WBGT) scales, acclimatization periods, hydration, etc.) - although still important - have been insufficient in preventing fatality, as these do not account for the intensity of exertion nor linemen at risk.
- Linemen's physiological response to exertion and environmental heat differs from other players as they heat up faster and cool down slower, contributing to their increased risk for EHS.

SOLUTIONS:

- Establish a paradigm shift on how to train and condition football linemen.
- Training and conditioning should be position-specific, with a gradual and paced progression in intensity and duration, particularly during the first week of any new conditioning or preseason program.
- Continue to implement well-established guidelines for heat acclimatization, hydration, WBGT scales with appropriate practice modifications to reduce the risk of exertional heat illness.
- Encourage preseason strength and conditioning to enhance player preparedness.
- Linemen are excluded from certain preseason performance testing, such as mile runs, serial sprints, etc., during the first few weeks of practice as several deaths have occurred in this setting. Post-practice sprinting puts linemen at greater risk for exertional heat illness.
- Exertion drills are never used as punishment as this accounts for 37% of football EHS deaths.
- A struggling athlete is immediately withdrawn from training and conditioning for evaluation and treatment.
- Coaches' written plan for training and conditioning workouts include types of drills that match how linemen play the game, with appropriate work/rest ratios, intensity and duration, with focus on skill development.
- Rehearse the EHS Emergency Action Plan (EAP) with rapid cooling protocols.
- EHS is predominantly exertional rather than environmental; therefore, control exercise intensity, particularly in linemen, to prevent EHS.

REFERENCES:

Anderson SA, et al. **Preventing Exertional Heat Stroke in Football: Time for a Paradigm Shift.** *Sports Health.* 2025 May-Jun 14;17(3):484-490. doi: [A 10.1177/19417381241260045](https://doi.org/10.1177/19417381241260045)

NFHS HEAT ACCLIMATIZATION AND HEAT ILLNESS PREVENTION POSITION STATEMENT



Heat Acclimatization and Heat Illness Prevention Position Statement

National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) Sports
Medicine Advisory Committee (SMAC)

Exertional Heatstroke (EHS) is the leading cause of preventable death in high school athletics. Students participating in high-intensity, long-duration or repeated same-day sports practices and training activities during the summer months or other hot-weather days are at greatest risk.

This NFHS Sports Medicine Advisory Committee (SMAC) position statement is the companion piece to the NFHSLearn.com online course “Heat Illness Prevention.” **This position statement provides an outline of “Fundamentals” and should be used as a guiding document by member state associations.** Further and more detailed information can be found within the NFHSLearn.com online course and the resources listed below and the NFHS SMAC “Position Statement and Recommendations for Maintaining Hydration to Optimize Performance and Minimize the Risk for Exertional Heat Illness” (October 2025):

Following the recommended guidelines in this position statement and “Heat Illness Prevention” can reduce the risk and incidence of EHS and the resulting deaths and injuries in high school athletics. The NFHS recognizes that various states and regions of the country have unique climates and variable resources, and that there is no “one-size-fits-all” optimal acclimatization plan. However, the NFHS and the NFHS SMAC strongly encourage member state associations to incorporate all of the “Fundamentals” into any heat acclimatization plan to improve athlete safety. In addition, the online course **“Heat Illness Prevention” should be made available for all coaches.** (<https://nfhslearn.com/courses/heat-illness-prevention-2>)

Heat Acclimatization and Safety Priorities:

Recognize that EHS is the leading preventable cause of death among high school athletes.

Know the importance of a formal pre-season heat acclimatization plan.

Know the importance of having and implementing a specific hydration plan, keeping your athletes wellhydrated, and encouraging and providing ample opportunities for regular fluid replacement.

Know the importance of appropriately modifying activities in relation to the environmental heat stress and contributing individual risk factors (e.g., illness, obesity) to keep your athletes safe and performing well.

Know the importance for all members of the coaching staff to closely monitor all athletes during practice and training in the heat and recognize the signs and symptoms of developing heat illnesses.

Know the importance of and resources for establishing an emergency action plan and promptly implementing it in case of suspected EHS or other medical emergency.

Energy drinks are NOT appropriate hydration fluids. Refer to NFHS SMAC “Position Statement and Recommendations for the Use of Energy Drinks by Young Athletes” (October 2024):

Fundamentals of a Heat Acclimatization Program:

1. Physical exertion and training activities should begin slowly and continue progressively. An athlete cannot be “conditioned” in a period of only two to three weeks.

- Begin with shorter, less intense practices and training activities, with longer recovery intervals between bouts of activity.
- Minimize protective gear (such as helmets and pads) during first several practices and introduce additional uniform and protective gear progressively over successive days.
- Emphasize instruction over conditioning during the first several practices.

Rationale: The majority of heat-related deaths happen during the first few days of practice, usually prompted by doing too much, too soon, and in some cases with too much protective gear on too early in the season (wearing helmet, shoulder pads, pants and other protective gear). Players must be allowed the time to adapt safely to the environment, intensity, duration, and uniform/equipment.

2. Keep each athlete’s individual level of conditioning and medical status in mind and adjust activity accordingly. These factors directly affect exertional heat illness risk.

Rationale: Athletes begin each season’s practices and training activities at varying levels of physical fitness and varying levels of risk for exertional heat illness. For example, there is an increased risk if the athlete is obese, unfit, has been recently ill, has a previous history of exertional heat illness, or has Sickle Cell Trait.

Among American sports, **football has the highest incidence of exertional heat stroke (EHS)** despite decades of prevention strategies. Based on recent reports, 100% of high school and college EHS football fatalities occurred during conditioning sessions. Lineman are at the at-risk population, constituting 97% of football EHS deaths. Lineman heat up faster and cool down slower than other players. Football EHS is tied to:

- High-intensity drills and conditioning that is not specific to individual player positions.
- Physical exertion as punishment.
- Failure to modify physical activity for high heat and humidity.
- Failure to recognize early signs and symptoms of EHS.
- Death when cooling is delayed.

To prevent football EHS, the following recommendations are made:

- All training and conditioning should be position-specific.
- Physical activity should be modified per the heat load.
- Understand that some players have a “do or die” mentality that supersedes their personal safety.
- Never use physical exertion as punishment.
- Eliminate conditioning tests, serial splints, and any reckless drills that are inappropriate for lineman.
- Consider air-conditioned venues for linemen during hot practices.
- To prevent EHS, train lineman based on game demands.

3. Adjust intensity (lower) and rest breaks (increase frequency/duration), and consider reducing uniform and protective equipment, while being sure to monitor all players more closely as conditions are increasingly warm/humid, especially if there is a change in weather from the previous few days.

NFHS HEAT ACCLIMATIZATION AND HEAT ILLNESS PREVENTION POSITION STATEMENT



Rationale: Coaches must be prepared to immediately adjust for changing weather conditions, while recognizing that tolerance to physical activity decreases and exertional heat illness risk increases, as the heat and/or humidity rise. Accordingly, it is imperative to adjust practices and/or competitions to maintain safety and performance. Coaches can monitor the athletes' weights pre and post practice to ensure adequate fluid replacement, and can follow guidelines for hot and humid weather including using Wet Bulb Globe Temperature (WBGT) readings.

4. Athletes must begin practices and training activities adequately hydrated.

Rationale: While proper hydration alone will not necessarily prevent exertional heat illness, it will decrease risk. Athletes can observe the color of their urine, which should be straw yellow or the color of lemonade, when adequately hydrated.

A Urine Color Chart link: <https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/urine-colour-chart>

5. Recognize early signs of distress and developing exertional heat illness, and promptly adjust activity and treat appropriately. First aid should not be delayed!

Rationale: An athlete will often show early signs and/or symptoms of developing exertional heat illness. If these signs and symptoms are promptly recognized and the athlete is appropriately treated, serious injury can be averted and the athlete can often be treated, rested and returned to activity when the signs and symptoms have resolved.

6. Recognize more serious signs of exertional heat illness (clumsiness, stumbling, collapse, obvious behavioral changes and/or other central nervous system problems), immediately stop activity and promptly seek medical attention by activating the Emergency Medical System (or Call 9-1-1). On-site rapid cooling should begin immediately.

Rationale: Immediate medical treatment and prompt rapid cooling can prevent death or minimize further injury in the athlete with EHS. Ideally, tubs, pools, tarps (TACO Method) or tubs of ice water to be used for rapid cooling of athletes and should be available on-site and personnel should be trained and practiced in using these facilities for rapid cooling. **Remember: Cool first, transport later.**

7. An Emergency Action Plan (EAP) with clearly defined written and practiced protocols should be developed and in place ahead of time.

Rationale: An EAP should be in place in case of any emergency, as a prompt and appropriate response in any emergency situation can save a life. The EAP should be designed and practiced, addressing all teams (freshman, junior varsity, and varsity) and all practice and game sites. For heat illness emergencies, emphasis must be placed on **full body cooling prior to transport.**

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October 2025

April 2022

April 2018

April 2015

April 2012

DISCLAIMER – NFHS Position Statements and Guidelines

The NFHS regularly distributes position statements and guidelines to promote public awareness of certain health and safety-related issues. Such information is neither exhaustive nor necessarily applicable to all circumstances or individuals and is no substitute for consultation with appropriate health-care professionals. Statutes, codes or environmental conditions may be relevant. NFHS position statements or guidelines should be considered in conjunction with other pertinent materials when taking action or planning care. The NFHS reserves the right to rescind or modify any such document at any time.



Thank You !

- **EXCELLENCE**

- BE Prepared to do your very best every game
"Strive for Excellence not Perfection"

- **CONSISTENCY**

- Steadfast adherence to the approved officiating mechanics from the first game thru the last game, 1st Quarter thru the 4th Quarter, and from Section 1 thru Section 11

- **HAVE FUN**

- Enjoy the Process of Learning the Rules and Mechanics, Enjoy the On-Field Challenges, Enjoy the Teamwork