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NFHS Flag Football Rule Updates & Clarifications 2026

2026-2027 Points of Emphasis

Screen Blocking

Flag Football is a non-contact sport and any intentional contact made by a player, either on offense or defense, is a foul.

Screen blocking is a non-contact, position-based technique. The blocker must establish position prior to the defender's arrival and may not lean into or initiate contact. Advantage is gained through anticipation and proper angles, not physical engagement. Once established, the blocker may only move in the same direction and path of the opponent while maintaining their frame. Any movement that initiates contact or takes away the opponent's ability to avoid the screen results in an illegal screen and may lead to an illegal blocking foul.

Another key emphasis is the use of hands, arms, knees, legs and body control. Blockers should keep their arms at their sides, across their chest or behind their back and may not extend elbows, forearms, shoulders, knees or legs to impede a defender's progress. Even minimal contact initiated by the blocker should be considered illegal, regardless of intent or force. Coaches should stress discipline and balance, as poor body control often leads to leaning or drifting that results in fouls.

Game officials and coaches must also focus on timing and distance. A legal screen requires that the defender be given a reasonable opportunity, generally one (1) to two (2) steps to change direction and avoid the block. Screening from a blindside or stepping into a defender at the last moment removes that opportunity and should be penalized. Game officials should judge whether the blocker was clearly in position before the defender's approach and whether the defender had a viable avoidance path. Finally, there should be consistent emphasis on player safety and responsibility. Once a legal screen is established, defenders are responsible for avoiding contact; however, the burden remains on the blocker to be legal first. Game officials should prioritize safety by penalizing screens that result in contact early in the game to set expectations. Proper enforcement promotes fair competition, reduces collisions, and reinforces the non-contact nature of flag football.

Kicking

Prior to the ball being kicked, the kicking team must be set and stationary. Any movement by the kicking team prior to the kick is a foul for a false start. The return team has no requirement and may shift prior to the kick assuming they do not encroach into the neutral zone.

NEW

Rule 1 – The Game, Field, Players and Equipment

Summary:
Beginning in 2026-27, ASAA has officially approved the use of field size 360' by 160' field size. (NFHS Diagram #3 – Standard 11-man football field)

Rule 3 – Periods, Time Factors and Substitutions

Section 4 Starting and Stopping the Game Clock

Summary:
-The game clock shall start on a legal snap to start a period.
-The game clock shall continue to run for the first 22 minutes of each half.

EXCEPTIONS
Clock will stop, then start on the Ready for Play after….
*An officials time out is called (Ex. Injury time out or to administer a penalty)
*Inadvertent Whistle

Clock will stop, then start on the next legal Snap after….
*A **Team Time Out** is called.
*An officials time out is called for a **Change of Possession**.
*Either team is awarded a new series following a **Legal Kick.**
*A **Score** or **Touchback** occurs. (The Try remains an untimed down)
*The **two minute** warning occurs.

With less than two minutes remaining in either half, the clock will stop, then start on the next legal Snap after….
A **Team Time Out is called.*
An officials time out is called for a **Change of Possession.*
Either team is awarded a new series following a **Legal Kick.*
****Backwards Fumble Out of Bounds***
An incomplete **Legal or **Illegal** forward pass.*
A runner goes **Out of Bounds.*
A **Score or **Touchback** occurs. (The Try remains an untimed down)*
An official's time out is called to **Award A a **New Series** or **Administer** a **Foul** if the action which caused the down to end also caused the game clock to stop. (Ex. Inc pass or runner out of bounds)*

With less than two minutes remaining in either half, the clock will stop, then start on the Ready for Play after….
An official's time out is called to **Award Team A a New Series or **Administer a Foul** if the action which caused the down to end **did not** also cause the game clock to stop. (ex. Running play ends in bounds)*
****Forward Fumble Out of Bounds***

3-4-6
With less than two minutes remaining in either half, when a foul is committed, the offended team will have the option to start the clock on the snap.

Section 5 Charged and Official's Time Outs - Intermissions
ART. 1 . . . Each team is entitled to three charged team time-outs during each half. Unused first half time-outs cannot be used in the second half. Unused second half time-outs cannot be used in overtime.

Summary:
-Changed back to 3 timeouts per half.

Rule 7 – Snapping, Handling and Passing the Ball

Section 4 Fumble and Backwards Pass
ART. 3 . . . If a fumble or backward pass hits the ground, the play is dead.
ART. 5 . . . If a fumble or a backward pass is out of bounds behind a goal line, the ball belongs to the team defending that goal and the result is either a touchback or a safety.
ART. 6 (DELETED)
EXCEPTION
A ball fumbled forwards out of bounds is returned to the spot of the fumble.

Summary:
-Mark the spot where the ball first touches the ground of the backward pass/fumble.
-If the ball first touches the ground beyond the spot of the fumble and the spot at which it first touches the ground is in the opponent's end zone, it is a TOUCHBACK.
-If the ball first touches the ground behind the spot of the fumble and the spot at which it first touches the ground is in the team in possession's end zone, it is a SAFETY.
-If the ball is fumbled forwards out of bounds, mark the spot where the player lost possession. If the game clock is under two minutes, the clock will start on the Ready for Play.
-A ball may be fumbled forward, but in the judgement of the official, if the ball is intentionally fumbled forward to gain yardage or conserve time, it may be considered a forward pass or possible grounding.

Rule 8 – Scoring Plays and Touchbacks

Section 3 Try
ART. 9 . . . After a try, the opponent of the scoring team shall gain possession at their 14-yard line.

EXCEPTION
The scoring team may (if trailing in score) elect to keep possession of the ball. The scoring team would take possession, fourth down, on its own 20-yard line. All rules, including timing for a scrimmage down shall apply.

Section 5 Force, Safety and Touchback
ART. 4 . . . The team whose goal line was involved shall put the ball in play on its 14-yard line after a touchback.
ART. 5 . . . The team whose goal line was involved shall put the ball in play by a scrimmage kick from its own 20-yard line after a safety.

Summary:
-After a Touchback, scrimmage play from the 14-yard line.
-After a Safety, scrimmage kick (snap & punt) from the 20-yard line.
-After a Safety, the neutral zone remains 1 yard wide. (It is not expanded to 10 yards)
-The game clock will start when the ball is snapped.

Rule 9 – Conduct of Players and Others

Section 7 Illegal Kicking and Batting
ART. 4 . . . A ball in player possession shall not be batted, stripped or attempted to be stripped by punching, striking or grabbing the ball by a player of either team.