

3. RULES APPLICATION

3.1 – Introduction

In order to ensure that all crews consistently interpret rules the same way, the following fouls shall be called only as stipulated.

Note:

1. The intention is for these interpretations to apply in full adult games.
2. A stricter interpretation of the rules is appropriate in games involving junior/youth players and/or where the players are all obviously inexperienced.
3. A stricter interpretation of the rules is appropriate in games in which general (i.e. not just one or two players) player conduct or attitude threatens to escalate the number or type of fouls committed. This may include clamping down on "minor" fouls where frustration may lead to "major" fouls.
4. A less strict interpretation of the rules is appropriate in blowout games when one team has a large lead and is obviously dominant. However, this should not extend to ignoring safety-related or conspicuous fouls.
5. Fouls in the open field are conspicuous enough to need calling whether or not they affect the play.
 - (a) It is likely that officials will lose credibility if they do not call these.
 - (b) Our philosophy has moved from "did it affect the play?" to "was it conspicuous?". This reflects the fact that more and more people watch games on video and therefore see things differently from if they are in the stands or on the side of the field.
 - (c) A less conspicuous foul still merits consideration of whether or not it affected the play. Major fouls (those that carry a 15-yard penalty or similar) should always be called.
6. If a flag is thrown for a foul where these principles indicate that it should not have been, the penalty should still be enforced. Never wave a flag off, once thrown, if it signifies a foul by rule.
7. Also bear in mind section 5.2 on common sense officiating.
8. Where a rule is not mentioned in this chapter, it should be applied in a manner consistent with the following principles:
 - (a) fouls affecting player safety should always be called
 - (b) fouls that are conspicuous should be called
 - (c) fouls that give a team or a player a clear advantage should be called
 - (d) fouls that are minor/technical and probably unrealised by the players should result in a "talk to" for a first offence

3.2 – Definitions

1. **Point of attack** is defined as follows:
 - (a) on a running play, it is the area in advance of the ball carrier – if he changes direction the point of attack changes;
 - (b) on a forward pass play, it is anywhere in the vicinity of the passer or any player attempting to reach the passer, **or in the vicinity of any eligible receiver running a pass route;**[◇]
 - (c) on a scrimmage kick play, it is anywhere in the vicinity of the kicker or returner or any player attempting to reach the kicker or returner, or block the kick.
2. **Conspicuous:** An action is "conspicuous" if it would be visibly apparent to a spectator who knew the rules or to an official observing the game live or watching it on video. Generally, anything that takes place in the open field, or by a player standing alone, is

conspicuous; anything that takes place in close line play or in a pile-up is not conspicuous. Examples of conspicuous fouls that **should be called, even though they^λ** might otherwise be disregarded as "not serious", include:

- (a) **takedown holding** (especially in the tackle box);
- (b) **blocks in the back** in the open field;
- (c) **illegal substitution** when a player leaves the field other than across his own side-line;
- (d) **illegal substitution** when a team has 12 or more players in the huddle for more than 3 seconds (but don't nit pick the 3 second limit);
- (e) **intentional illegal touching** of a forward pass;
- (f) **false start** by a back, tight end or wide receiver;
- (g) **offside** by Team B at their restraining line on a short free kick;
- (h) **free kick out of bounds**.

3.3 – Contact fouls

1. Offensive holding:

- (a) Only call it when *all* of the following conditions are met:
 - (i) the foul is **visibly apparent**, i.e. if it wouldn't show up on video, don't call it;
 - (ii) the foul **affects the play or is conspicuous**, i.e. if it is away from the point of attack and isn't conspicuous, don't call it;
 - (iii) the action is **demonstrably restrictive**, i.e. if the player is not *illegally* slowed down or forced to take a longer route to his target, don't call it;
 - (iv) the foul **disadvantages the opponent**, i.e. if it actually moves the player the way he wants to go, don't call it.
- (b) Actions that constitute offensive holding include:
 - (i) **Grab and restrict** – grabbing the opponent's body or uniform in a manner that restricts his ability to go in the direction he wishes to go in.
 - (ii) **Hook and restrict** – hooking a hand or arm around the opponent's body (beyond the frame of the body presented to the blocker) in a manner that restricts his ability to go in the direction he wishes to go.
 - (iii) **Takedown** – taking an opponent to the ground (by grabbing or hooking) when he doesn't want to go to the ground. Note that blocking the opponent to the ground by use of the hands or arms within the frame of the opponent's body (or in the back in the free-blocking zone) is not illegal.
- (c) A player is **restricted** if:
 - (i) He is unable to turn or change direction due to continued, restrictive contact.
 - (ii) His upper body is turned by the blocker having his arms around him.
 - (iii) He is unable to gain separation or to disengage from the opponent by turning, twisting, stopping, etc.
 - (iv) His balance is changed or his natural foot movement is taken away.
- (d) Don't call holding if *any* of the following conditions are met, unless the foul is really conspicuous:
 - (i) the player held makes the tackle (behind the neutral zone or where there is no neutral zone);
 - (ii) the player knocks down or intercepts a pass;
 - (iii) the player recovers a fumble;
 - (iv) at the point of attack on a run, the opponents are squared up, moving with each other and none of the restrictions above are noted;
 - (v) it happens at the same time as a tackle elsewhere on the field;
 - (vi) it is behind the neutral zone and a forward pass has already been thrown, or is in the process of being thrown;

- (vii) it is part of a double-team block (unless a takedown occurs, or the defender breaks the double team and is pulled back);
 - (viii) it is the result of a defensive rip (i.e. the defensive player raising the offensive player's arm);
 - (ix) the player held makes no effort to get free of the block (i.e. he "gives up").
- (e) Holding an opponent's jersey is *not* the same as holding the opponent. For a jersey pull to be a foul, there must be demonstrable restriction to the player's movement.
- (f) Watching the *disengagement* of opponents is as important as watching their engagement. If a defender slides off a block and is able to proceed normally in the direction he wants to travel (usually towards the ball), then it is unlikely that holding has occurred.
2. **Defensive holding:**
- (a) Downfield on pass plays, everywhere is the point of attack – a foul on an eligible receiver can occur anywhere.
 - (b) Always call fouls that prevent the passer throwing the ball and lead to a sack.
 - (c) *Clotheslining (striking a receiver at the head or neck)*[◇] should be called as a personal foul.
 - (d) Contact that does not demonstrably impede a receiver should be ignored.
 - (e) A grab of the receiver's jersey that restricts the receiver and takes away his feet should be called.
 - (f) Holding should be called against defenders who clearly *illegally* restrict an offensive player from making a lead block for the ball carrier (this includes pulling linemen on trap and sweep plays), but not where the offensive player is too far away from the play to become involved.
 - (g) Defensive holding should *not* be called for contact that occurs after the pass is thrown to the opposite side of the field (unless it is a clear attempt to restrict an offensive player as in (f) above). However, if the foul occurs anywhere while the quarterback still has the ball and is looking to pass, then call it, even though the ball might eventually be thrown elsewhere. This could have had an effect on the play. The timing of the hold is important.
3. **Illegal use of hands:** Call it the same as for offensive holding. However if the initial (brief) contact in a block is on the opponent's helmet or facemask, it must always be called. Remember that continuous contact to the helmet is a personal foul. Make sure you see the initial contact: it is not a foul if a player's hands slide up to a point above the opponent's shoulders.
4. **Blocking below the waist and clipping:**
- (a) When in question, the ball has not left the free-blocking zone (for blocks from the back).
 - (b) For the first three seconds after the snap, when in question, the ball has not left the tackle box (for blocks from the front). Thereafter, *when in question*,[◇] the ball has left the *tackle box*.[◇]
 - (c) *A block towards a player's own end line (Rule 9-1-6-a-3) (also known as a peel-back block)*[◇] is where the direction of the blocker's force is directed south of the east-west line on the field (where due south is directly towards Team A's end line).
 - (d) To call clipping, you need to see *two things*:[◇]
 - (i) the blocker's last stride before the contact (so that you are fairly certain you know which direction he came from), *and*
 - (ii) *you need to have seen* the opponent he hit before the block (so that you know whether *the opponent* turned his back or not).
- You must see the point of initial contact. Remember that contact to the side is legal. See the entire act.

- (e) Remember that it is the direction related to the opponent's area of concentration (not the point of contact) that determines whether a block below the waist is "directed from the front" or not. ®
5. **Illegal block in the back:**
- Before calling this, apply the same conditions as you would apply for holding, but also apply the conditions for calling clipping, particularly the need to see the entire act.
 - If one hand is on the number and the other hand is on the side and the initial force is on the number, it is a block in the back.
 - A block that starts in the side and ends up in the back is not a foul as long as there is continuous contact. §
 - Touching an opponent in the back is not a foul ◊ unless it results in him being knocked down or pushed off balance sufficiently so that he stumbles or missteps *and* misses making a tackle or block. Remember, the foul is for illegal *block* in the back, not an illegal *touch* in the back.
 - Charging into a player's back away from the play may be called as unnecessary roughness. This may be called regardless of the timing of the block relative to the end of the play.
 - Be particularly alert when you see an offensive player chasing a defensive player (and vice versa when the defensive player is not attempting to reach the ball).
6. **Roughing the passer:**
- If the defensive player's initial contact on the passer is at his head, it is always a foul unless the passer ducks into it or the contact is slight. However, it is only targeting if the contact goes well beyond making a legal tackle or attempt to block/deflect the pass. ×
 - Contact at the knee area or below on an offensive player in a passing posture is enforced according to Rule 9-1-9-b. Slight contact should be disregarded.
 - It is a foul if a defender (in front of the passer) takes two steps before contacting the passer after the ball has been thrown/released. A defender behind the passer is given a little more leeway.
 - Defensive players who make a legitimate attempt to avoid or reduce contact are given the benefit of the doubt.
 - When in doubt, it is roughing the passer if the defender's intent is to punish.
7. **Roughing/running into the kicker:**
- Generally, contact with the kicker's kicking leg will be considered as *running* into the kicker, and contact with his plant leg (even if it is off the ground) ◊ will be considered as *roughing* the kicker.
 - Any time the kicker or holder are knocked off their feet it should be called as *roughing*.
 - Where the kicker makes a move before the kick that is not part of the normal kicking motion, then it is no longer obvious that a kick will be made and there will probably be no foul unless the defensive player is out to punish him. Note that "rugby-style" kickers (those who kick on the run) are entitled to as much protection as conventional kickers after they have kicked the ball. But any² contact with a kicker before the kick is simply tackling a ball carrier.
 - Even if the snap is bad, a kick may still be obvious. Provided the kicker or holder gathers the ball and straight away goes into his normal motion, then he is entitled to protection (always assuming the ball is kicked).
8. **Defensive pass interference:**
- Actions that constitute defensive pass interference include:
 - Not playing the ball** – Early contact by a defender (who is not playing the ball) that impedes or restricts the receiver's opportunity to make the catch.

- (ii) **Playing through an opponent** – Playing through the receiver (i.e. contacting him in the back or on the side of him furthest from the ball), even if attempting to play the ball.
 - (iii) **Grabbing an arm** – Grabbing the receiver's arm in a manner that restricts his opportunity to catch a pass.
 - (iv) **Arm bar** – Extending an arm across the receiver's body to impede his ability to catch a pass, whether or not the defender is playing the ball.
 - (v) **Cut off** – Cutting off or riding a receiver out of the path to the ball by making contact with him without playing the ball (i.e. before the defender looks for the ball).
 - (vi) **Hook and turn** – Hooking a receiver around the waist that causes his body to turn prior to (or even slightly after) the ball arriving (even if the defender is trying to get to the ball).
- (b) Actions that do *not* constitute defensive pass interference include:
- (i) Incidental contact by a defender's hands, arms or body in the act of moving to the ball that does not materially affect the route of the receiver. If in doubt as to whether the route was materially affected, there is no interference.
 - (ii) Inadvertent tangling of feet when both (or neither) players are playing the ball.
 - (iii) Contact occurs during a pass that is clearly uncatchable by the involved players.
 - (iv) Laying a hand on the receiver that does not turn or impede him until after the ball has arrived.
 - (v) Contact on a "hail mary" pass unless it is clear and conspicuous pass interference.
- (c) Further notes:
- (i) A stationary player (in position to catch the ball) who is displaced from his position has been fouled.
 - (ii) It is never pass interference if the defensive player touches the ball before contacting the opponent.
 - (iii) Interference must be conspicuous to be called.
 - (iv) Remember that the defense has as much right to the ball as the offense.
 - (v) It is crucial to identify which players are playing the ball and which are not.
 - (vi) Normally, an offensive receiver will try to catch the ball with two hands. **Often, a defender will try to bat/deflect the ball with only one hand.** § If the defender goes up with only one hand, know what the other one is doing.
 - (vii) When judging whether a pass is catchable, imagine how far the receiver could have run, and how high or wide he could have jumped, if he had not been impeded.
 - (viii) There is no foul when contact is simultaneous with the ball being touched ("bang-bang"). When in doubt, contact is simultaneous with the ball being touched.
9. **Offensive pass interference:**
- (a) Actions that constitute offensive pass interference include:
- (i) **Pushing off** – Initiating contact with a defender by shoving or pushing off, thus creating a separation in an attempt to catch a pass.
 - (ii) **Driving through** – Driving through a defender who has established a position on the field.
 - (iii) **Blocking** – Before the pass is thrown, blocking that occurs anywhere down field. After the pass is thrown, blocking that occurs down field within approximately 20 yards (more if the pass is delayed) of where the pass is thrown to.
 - (iv) **Pick** – Picking off (initiating contact with)° a defender who is attempting to cover a receiver. It is not a foul if the contact occurred at the same time as the pass was touched.

- (b) Actions that do *not* constitute offensive pass interference include:
- (i) Incidental contact by a receiver's hands, arms or body in the act of moving to the ball that does not materially affect the route of the defender. If in doubt as to whether the route was materially affected, there is no interference.
 - (ii) Inadvertent tangling of feet when both (or neither) players are playing the ball.
 - (iii) Contact occurring during a pass that is clearly uncatchable by the involved players.
 - (iv) Blocking downfield when a screen pass (a short pass to a receiver who has blockers in front of them)[◇] prevents a defensive player from catching the ball.
 - (v) Blocking downfield when the pass is legally grounded out of bounds or near the sideline.
 - (vi) Contact on a pick play when the defensive player is already blocking the offensive player.
 - (vii) Contact on a "hail mary" pass unless it is clear and conspicuous pass interference.[◇]
- (c) Further notes:
- (i) Non-flagrant contact well away from the play should not be called.
 - (ii) Blocking down field can be called even if the passer is legally grounding the ball.
 - (iii) Do not call offensive pass interference if either foot of the Team A ineligible player is within one yard of the neutral zone.
 - (iv) If in doubt as to which player initiated a block, the initiator will be the one who is upright or leaning forward and the player blocked will be knocked back.

10. **Late hit:**

- (a) Be more likely to call it the later the hit or the more severe the contact. Slight contact immediately after the ball is dead should not be called.
- (b) Any deliberate push against a ball carrier out of bounds is a foul.
- (c) Use of the helmet is a foul even if only slightly late.
- (d) When a ball carrier is near the sideline, contact that occurs before the ball carrier has a foot down out of bounds is a legal hit.
- (e) When a ball carrier is out of bounds but continues running down the sideline in bounds, any subsequent hit is legal provided he has not eased up and the whistle has not blown.

11. **Facemask:**

- (a) Incidental grasping in a pile of players should not be called unless there is twisting that makes it a 15-yard penalty.
- (b) Remember that a facemask foul involves *grasping* the helmet or facemask, not simply *touching* it.

12. **Unnecessary roughness:**

- (a) An act that occurs well away from the play may be classed as a personal foul even though the act itself is legal. In other words, it is the location of the players with respect to the play that causes the foul, not the legality of the contact.
- (b) Be certain that the act wasn't justified by the play situation (e.g. an interception or fumble return or a broken play). If a player is in position to influence the play or moving towards it, he is a fair target: if he is standing still, he is not.
- (c) It is not a foul if two players are each blocking each other – only contact against a player off his guard needs to be penalised.
- (d) For unnecessary hits away from the ball near the end of a play, make them dead-ball fouls rather than live-ball ones.
- (e) When a player is hit after giving himself up, a foul is warranted.
- (f) Fouls on the ball carrier after a touchdown that are obviously late must be called.

13. Roughing the snapper:

- (a) This foul can only occur when it is reasonably obvious that a scrimmage kick will be made. In other words, only on field goal and PAT attempts, or when a team lines up in a punting formation on 4th down.
- (b) Don't be picky about the one second interval. If the snapper is upright before the one second has elapsed then permit contact, but if he takes longer to recover then allow him more protection.
- (c) Don't call a foul if a defensive player contacts the snapper after being blocked by an adjacent offensive lineman.
- (d) Disqualify any player who attempts to punish by contact to the snapper's helmet or spears using the defender's own helmet.

14. Defenseless players/targeting:

- (a) The definition of a defenseless player is per the rules (Rule 2-27-14). If in doubt, a player is defenseless.
- (b) Targeting (or another personal foul) on a pass play is enforced according to Rules 7-3-12 and 10-2-2-e.

15. Horse collar tackle:

- (a) The two requirements for this to be called are that (i) the defender grabs the collar or name plate area; and (ii) the ball carrier is pulled towards the ground.
- (b) As with other safety related fouls, if in doubt as to whether it is a foul or not, call it.
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- (c) However, just grabbing another part of the jersey and pulling a ball carrier[×] down is not a foul.

16. Chop block:

- (a) It is not a foul if either the high or low player involved simply brushes past or makes only slight contact with the opponent. There must be force enough in each block to change the velocity of the relevant part of the opponent's body.
- (b) By rule it is not a foul if the defensive player initiates the contact.

3.4 – Non-contact fouls**1. Delay of game:**

- (a) If Team A is still in the huddle, or moving into formation, with 10 seconds to go, warn them verbally that there are 10 seconds remaining. Always throw the flag when the count reaches zero, unless the snap is very imminent (i.e. the quarterback is calling out "huts"), in which case he can have an extra second.
- (b) After a score, it is a delay of game if either team is not on the field (or on the field but still in the huddle) within one minute regardless of whether the ready for play has been given or not. For a first offence warn the Head Coach of the team rather than throw a flag.
- (c) If no players from Team B are ready to play when Team A is set to snap the ball following a timeout, penalise Team B for delay of game. Do *not* give Team A a free play. The officials on the sideline are responsible for ensuring that the captain or coach of the team knows that the timeout is about to end.
- (d) If Team A makes last second substitutions (rushing to the line of scrimmage while in the process of substituting), Team B must be given an opportunity to "match-up". If the play clock expires prior to the snap, the officials must determine whether Team B was given ample opportunity to react to the "rushed" substitution. If Team B reacted promptly but the play clock expired, Team A will be assessed a delay of game foul. If Team B delayed in their substitution then Team B will be assessed a delay of game foul.
- (e) If Team A snaps the ball in a situation where they have been asked not to (e.g. while Team B are being allowed to make matching substitutions), for a first offence

shut down the play and issue a warning. Penalise for Delay of Game on the second or subsequent instance. †

2. **Players not within the nine-yard marks:** On a scrimmage play don't call this unless no Team B player lines up opposite the offending player. On a free kick, if Team A's formation is unusual or confusing, the Team A restraining line officials should ensure that all Team A players are or have been within the nine-yard marks before signalling to the Referee that they are ready.
3. **False start:** Movement by an offensive player is not a false start unless either (i) he moves one or both feet; (ii) it is sudden; or (iii) it causes a defensive player to move in reaction. If a running back misses the snap count, makes a sudden movement and then stops abruptly, it is a false start. (If he was genuinely going into motion, he wouldn't stop.) If in doubt as to whether movement was prior to the snap or not, it was *not*. Don't be picky on this.
4. **Offside:**
 - (a) When a defensive player, before the snap, moves and an offensive player subsequently moves, a conference between the Umpire and the wing officials is mandatory. This is to determine if the defensive player was in the neutral zone and if the offensive player was threatened. When in question, the offensive player *is* threatened. If the Team A player who first moves is not threatened, it is a false start.
 - (b) When a defensive player, before the snap, crosses the neutral zone and charges towards a Team A back, it is a dead-ball offside foul. The time to call this as a foul is when the defender passes the hip of the nearest Team A lineman.
 - (c) Don't rule a defensive player offside if he is stationary and only intruding on the neutral zone by a trivial amount.
 - (d) Don't be picky about offside, particularly on fields that are not marked perfectly.
 - (e) Don't call offside if the defensive player is moving forward at the snap but is not actually in the neutral zone.
5. **Disconcerting signals:** Rule 7-1-5-a-5 prohibits defensive players from using words or signals that may interfere with offensive starting signals. This includes claps or any other noise that mimics offensive signals.
6. **Illegal motion:**
 - (a) A player is in illegal motion only if his forward movement is conspicuous.
 - (b) A motion man angling forward while in motion at the snap has committed a live-ball foul.
7. **Ineligible receiver downfield:**
 - (a) Call it only if it is conspicuous.
 - (b) An ineligible receiver must be clearly more than 3 yards down field at the time the pass is thrown — don't be picky if the player is just at 3 yards. ◊ Be cautious that^λ if a player is seen 5 yards downfield and moving downfield as the ball passes him, he was probably not more than 3 yards downfield when the ball was thrown.
 - (c) If a lineman blocks downfield, call it as ineligible downfield unless he goes far enough to block a linebacker or defensive back in pass coverage in which case call it as offensive pass interference.
 - (d) Only regard a wide receiver as covering a tight end on the line of scrimmage if there is no stagger between their alignments. If in doubt, the tight end is *not* covered up.
 - (e) Don't call it if the offense are legally throwing the ball beyond the neutral zone to save a loss of yardage.
 - (f) Don't call it if a screen pass is overthrown and lands beyond the neutral zone, unless the presence of the ineligible receiver prevents a defensive player from catching the ball. §

8. **Kick-catch interference:**

- (a) Anything that impedes the receiver from the opportunity to catch the ball should be called a foul. This includes:
 - (i) contact with the receiver (however incidental);
 - (ii) running menacingly close to the receiver;
 - (iii) standing too close to the receiver;
 - (iv) yelling while close to the receiver;
 - (v) waving arms in front of the receiver;
 - (vi) being positioned in front of the receiver in such a way that the receiver is forced to step around the opponent or change path in an effort to catch the ball.
- (b) It is not a foul where:
 - (i) a Team A player runs past the receiver without touching him or making him change course;
 - (ii) the receiver "gives up" his attempt to catch the kick too easily;
 - (iii) the receiver catches the ball and there was no contact and the extent of any non-contact interference is slight or in doubt: don't award cheap 15-yard penalties.
- (c) A player who viciously contacts a potential kick receiver has committed a flagrant personal foul and should be disqualified. Give only the personal foul signal (not the signal for kick-catch interference) in this case.
- (d) A player who is in the process of catching a kick must be given an unimpeded opportunity to complete the catch before being contacted. This protection terminates if the player muffs the ball, unless he has given a valid fair catch signal and still has an opportunity to complete the catch (Rule 6-5-1-b).²

9. **Intentional grounding:**

- (a) Don't call it if the passer was contacted *after* he has started the act of throwing the ball, or if the ball is touched. Under these circumstances, you must assume the passer intended to throw the ball to a receiver.
- (b) Do call it if the passer was contacted *before* he has started his throwing motion. He is not allowed to throw the ball away to avoid a sack. In some circumstances it may be appropriate to rule the ball dead (rather than penalise for intentional grounding) because he was held and his forward progress stopped.
- (c) Do not call intentional grounding if the passer throws the ball away (except straight down) when not under defensive pressure. He is entitled to waste a down if he is in no danger of being sacked. The clock is not a factor.
- (d) There is no need to call it if the pass is intercepted *and* this would be the only foul called.
- (e) Getting the ball to within one yard of the neutral zone is to be regarded as close enough. Don't be technical on this.
- (f) If a pass is touched by an ineligible receiver, it will normally just be a foul for illegal touching. However, if the passer does this in an obviously deliberate manner to avoid a loss of yardage, then a foul for intentional grounding is justified. By rule, you cannot have illegal touching on an illegal pass.

10. **Illegal substitution:**

- (a) If a replaced player is leaving the field of play or end zone but is still clearly on the field of play at the snap, then it should be called and play shut down.
- (b) A replaced player who re-enters the field after leaving it has fouled. However, a player who leaves the field believing he is being replaced, but is not in fact replaced, should be allowed to re-enter without penalty (provided this is not a deception).[§]
- (c) If substitutes enter the field momentarily before the ball is dead but don't interfere with play, then don't call it.

- (d) If the offense breaks its huddle with more than 11 players on the field, this confuses the opposition and should be penalised. However, there can be a foul only if the ball has been declared ready for play (Rule 2-14-1) **or the 12th man does not leave the huddle immediately.** [◇]
 - (e) If the defense has more than 11 players on the field when the snap is imminent (or has just occurred), they should be penalised.
 - (f) Fouls associated with the substitution process and having more than 11 players on the field will normally be violations of Rule 3-5. However, an intentional attempt to confuse opponents will be penalised for unfair tactics (Rule 9-2-2-b).
11. **Failure to wear mandatory equipment:**
- (a) Regard failure to have a mouthpiece or to secure all points of a chinstrap as seriously as failure to wear a helmet. If you observe a player leaving the huddle without a mouthpiece or chinstraps, remind him to secure his equipment. Players who ignore the reminder must be dealt with by rule (Rule 1-4-8), but give quarterbacks and other players calling signals more time to do so. [×] The same procedure applies to players wearing opaque eye shields.
 - (b) **Do not stop either the game clock or play clock. It is therefore important to try to deal with equipment issues early enough that the team has time to make an appropriate substitution. If Team A cannot substitute a player quickly enough, then it will suffer a Delay of Game penalty. If a restricted lineman needs to be replaced, it will be a False Start when he stands up.** [®]
 - (c) For other non-critical mandatory equipment, instruct the player to remedy the problem the next time he is off the field. If he ignores the instruction, when he returns to the field tell him to go off and fix the problem immediately. If he does so, then fine. If his team replaces him immediately, do not penalise for an illegal substitution. If his team takes a timeout or suffers a delay of game penalty, that is their choice. If he stays and attempts to participate in a play, deal with him by rule (Rule 1-4-8).
12. **Illegal equipment:** Anything that might be a risk to participant safety must be dealt with before the ball is next put in play. Other infringements may be left for the player to rectify next time he leaves the field, but must be rectified before he can be allowed to return.
13. **Illegally kicking the ball:** If a player intentionally contacts the ball with knee, lower leg or foot with the objective of propelling the ball in any direction, he is kicking it. There is no foul if it touches his knee, lower leg or foot as part of an act of obtaining possession of the ball – this is not to be regarded as a kick.
14. **Illegal wedge:** For a wedge to be illegal, it has to form **before the end of the kick** [◇] and continue during the beginning of the return. Once the return gets upfield, players will come together as a consequence of the play – this is *not* considered as an illegal wedge.

3.5 – Unsportsmanlike conduct and fighting

1. **Celebration:**
- (a) Celebration is different from taunting – be more tolerant of it.
 - (b) A "sack dance" over a tackled opponent should always be penalised.
 - (c) Only penalise spiking after a score if it taunts an opponent. It need not be intentional, but does have to be in the direction of an opponent.
 - (d) A celebration should be penalised if it involves:
 - (i) any of the 20+ specific prohibitions in Rule 9-2-1;
 - (ii) the ball (other than spiking it);
 - (iii) player equipment;
 - (iv) field equipment (including a goal);

- (v) any object taken from another person;
 - (vi) any prop;
 - (vii) a player going to the ground in a delayed (not immediately after the score) and unnecessary manner.
- (e) An act that isn't on the above list is probably legal, so be tolerant of it, unless you believe it is abusive, threatening or obscene, provokes ill will, or demeans the game. Don't be a prude (one who is excessively concerned with being or appearing to be proper, modest, or righteous; or a person who is easily shocked or offended by things that do not shock or offend other people).
- (f) If an illegal celebration occurs near the goal line, assume that it occurred *after* the score unless an official was in an excellent position to rule on its exact location.
- (g) "Choreographed" means that one or more players have clearly pre-decided, pre-arranged or rehearsed how they will move (as in a dance).
2. **Dissent:**
- (a) Players play with passion and emotion – coaches share the same traits. At various times, players and coaches can be happy or sad, joyous or disappointed, satisfied or frustrated. These are normal human emotions (officials have them as well), but need self-control.
 - (b) Players and coaches are entitled to be disappointed. It is only when it is excessive or challenges an official's authority that it becomes dissent.
 - (c) Dissent is when players, coaches or other persons subject to the rules:
 - (i) speak in an abusive, aggressive or denigrating manner to an official;
 - (ii) assert as true something that it is contrary to rule or an official's ruling, or assert as false something that is true;
 - (iii) continue to argue a proposition after being informed that it is incorrect, or asked to stop;
 - (iv) make denigrating comments about an official or a decision while speaking to each other;
 - (v) make gestures (with hands or otherwise) that signify frustration or lack of respect at an official;
 - (vi) throw/kick the ball or equipment in disgust;
 - (vii) move aggressively towards an official to argue or complain.
 Dissent differs from a player or coach asking a genuine question.
 - (d) If a player or coach shows the official respect, then the official will show them the same level of respect in return.
 - (e) We distinguish between overt dissent and covert dissent. The former is conspicuous, usually because the speech is loud enough for many people to hear, or the gestures are clear and in the open. Covert dissent is where only the official hears it and can be treated slightly differently.
 - (f) There are six levels of response to dissent:
 - (i) **Ignore it.** If the dissent is minor, and is the first example of its kind from that player or team, then it *can* be ignored. It might be an isolated incident, never to happen again. However, there is always a risk that ignoring dissent will give encouragement to the participants to repeat it. Ignoring it is certainly not the appropriate response to repeated dissent.
 - (ii) **Pretend you didn't hear it.** Ask the player or coach to repeat their comment ("what did you say?"). If it was inappropriate, they will likely not repeat it. If they do, then there is no doubt that you must respond firmly, professionally and rapidly.
 - (iii) **Quiet word.** A quiet word with a player or coach is often more beneficial than an immediate penalty. It shows your commitment to resolving the issue without recourse to a strict application of the rules of the game.

- (iv) **Public rebuke.** Sometimes, the player or coach needs to be spoken to loudly enough that his teammates are aware. This may be necessary in order to solicit their help in controlling his emotions.
- (v) **Penalty.** If dissent is conspicuous to spectators,^λ then it needs to be penalised as unsportsmanlike conduct. Conspicuous dissent includes^λ all actions that involve audible abusive language, thrown equipment, or running towards an official. Verbal dissent also certainly needs to be penalised if it is said a third time (or more).[◇]
- (vi) **Disqualification.** If a player or coach is penalised for dissent twice, then he will be disqualified under Rule 9-2-1. In extreme cases, an act of dissent may be so flagrant as to require immediate disqualification.

There is no need to go through these levels in order. A serious (and conspicuous) act of dissent may require immediate penalty, and possibly even disqualification.

- (g) The following acts by a participant should *always* result in a foul being called:
 - (i) making an aggressive gesture towards an official;
 - (ii) speaking in an abusive, aggressive or denigrating manner to an official that can be heard clearly by spectators;
 - (iii) making "demonstrative disagreement", such as raising hands in incredulity;
 - (iv) smacking themselves to demonstrate how they were fouled;
 - (v) running directly at an official to complain about a call;
 - (vi) making excessive enquiries about a call, even in a civilised tone (as in 3.5.2.f.v above).
 - (h) Failing to deal with dissent is letting your colleagues and the sport down. Not only does dissent undermine officials, it can also severely disrupt the atmosphere and flow of a game.
 - (i) If you hear dissent directed at another official, *you* deal with it. An important part of officiating teamwork is to back up your colleagues in this way.
 - (j) Engage with the captain(s) and coach(es) to make clear it is their responsibility to control their players, to prevent dissent or to stamp it out at first sign. Doing this shows that the official is attempting to work *with* the teams rather than penalise.
 - (k) Where appropriate, advise coaches and players to ask genuine questions rather than make assertions about what is true or false.
 - (l) If left unchecked, dissent is like a disease that will grow and undermine your authority.
3. **Unsportsmanlike acts requiring disqualification:** The following acts of unsportsmanlike conduct normally require disqualification:
- (a) spitting at an opponent or official;
 - (b) any abusive language that involves derogatory reference to an opponent or official's ethnic origin, colour, race, nationality (except in the context of international competition), religion/belief, sex/gender identity, age, class or social background, political belief, sexual orientation, disability or any other speech intended to demean or brutalize.[§]
4. **Multiple fouls:**
- (a) Do not penalise a player or team twice for the same unsportsmanlike[◇] act.
 - (b) However, where there are multiple, distinct acts by the same player or by different players, it is appropriate to penalise them separately. Two unsportsmanlike acts by the same player will result in him disqualifying himself.
 - (c) Examples of separate acts include:
 - (i) a prohibited celebration followed by dissent at an official's call;
 - (ii) taunting an opponent followed by bowing to spectators;
 - (iii) shoving after the ball is dead followed by removing a helmet;

- (iv) a prohibited celebration followed by one or more substitutes entering the field to join the celebration.
- (d) Examples of acts that normally would NOT be regarded as separate include:
 - (i) more than one player participating in a delayed, excessive, prolonged or choreographed celebration;
 - (ii) a player taunting more than one opponent;
 - (iii) a player bowing in more than one direction.
- 5. **Other points regarding unsportsmanlike conduct:**
 - (a) **Live or dead:** If in doubt whether an unsportsmanlike conduct foul occurred while the ball was live or dead, it was dead.
 - (b) **Who to penalise:** Do not penalise the conduct of anyone other than a player or coach. If someone else is giving you a problem, ask the team or game management to deal with it.
 - (c) **Simulating being roughed:** Normally a kicker who simulates being roughed should be ignored. A penalty should only be administered if necessary to exert proper game control.
 - (d) **Removing helmets on the field:** Players who unthinkingly remove their helmets on the field of play should not be penalised unless they are (i) directing anger or criticism at an opponent or an official; or (ii) celebrating. Remind them to keep their helmets on. A player removing their helmet in the vicinity of the sideline just prior to entering the team area should be ignored.
- 6. **Sideline interference:**
 - (a) While the ball is dead:
 - (i) Provided participants in the team area respond reasonably promptly to requests to get back from the sideline, there is no need to warn or penalise them, no matter how many times it happens.
 - (ii) Give a sideline interference foul (Rule 9-2-5) only if a Head Coach repeatedly (i.e. more than once) ignores requests (made[^] while the ball is dead) to keep his team back from the sideline **while the ball is alive or in continuing action after it is dead.** [◇]
 - (b) While the ball is in play:
 - (i) Coaches, substitutes and other non-players *on* the field should always be flagged for sideline interference (Rule 9-2-5). An exception is not to be too bothered if the ball is near Team B's goal line and the personnel are still near their team area.
 - (ii) If they are *between* the sideline and the coaching box line, use your discretion and issue a verbal warning if they did not actually cause any problem.
 - (iii) Any contact between an official and a team member on the field or between the sideline and the coaching box line should be called as a team unsportsmanlike act (Rule 9-2-5-b) (with normally a 15-yard penalty from the succeeding spot) even for a first offence. This also applies if there is no physical contact but the official is forced to change direction either to avoid contact or to maintain their view of what they are observing.
- 7. **Fighting:**
 - (a) If action is deemed to be "fighting" then the player must be disqualified. It is *not* fighting if players are merely pushing each other (i.e. no deliberate punches, kicks or blows are struck or aimed). If in doubt, it is *not* fighting. Don't use the term "punch" to describe roughness to a player or coach unless it is associated with a disqualification.
 - (b) During a fight, try to distinguish between those players (on the field at the start of the fight), substitutes and coaches who actively participate in a fight and those who are trying only to separate the combatants. The latter should not be disqualified.

- (c) Only disqualify a player if you are certain of his number. If two opposing players are fighting with each other, don't disqualify one unless you know the identity of the other.
 - (d) Unnecessary roughness when Team B has no chance to win and Team A has clearly indicated its intention to "take a knee" should normally result in disqualification of the player committing the foul.
 - (e) If in doubt as to whether a player has intentionally elbowed an opponent, look at the player's hand. It is a natural reaction to make a fist before striking with the elbow. An open hand probably indicates unintentional contact.
8. **Retaliation:**
- (a) For the purposes of this section, we define retaliation as when a player commits an aggressive act in direct response to an aggressive act by an opponent on himself or a teammate. Retaliation may be by physical contact or by unsportsmanlike word or deed. Retaliation normally occurs within a few seconds of the original act, but could in theory be delayed.
 - (b) Normally, we want to impose the most severe punishment on the participant who started the incident (the "instigator"). The "punishment" in this context, may be a warning (for a minor infringement), a penalty (for a significant infringement) or disqualification (for a serious infringement).
 - (c) If the retaliation is of less seriousness than the original act, the retaliator should normally receive a lesser punishment than the instigator. For example, if A31 commits an unnecessary roughness foul on B45, and B45 retaliates by (a) pushing A31 away; or (b) swearing at A31, then in both cases we would likely not penalise B45, but simply warn him. This would also apply if A31 spat on B45 (a mandatory disqualification according to 3.5.3) and B45 retaliated by pushing A31. A31 would be disqualified, but B45 may only be penalised or warned.
 - (d) However, if the retaliation prolongs or escalates the incident by being as (or more) severe than the original act, then normally the retaliator should receive the same or a higher punishment than the instigator. For example, if B45 responds by (a) committing an equally unnecessary act of roughness on A31; or (b) starting a fight with A31, then both would be severely penalised. In the case of a fight, Rules 2-32-1 and 9-5-1 together mandate disqualification of both players.
 - (e) In any case where retaliation is delayed (to the next play or later) and deliberate, disqualification of the retaliator alone is normally required. This includes cases where the retaliator is a teammate of the player who was the victim of the original attack.
9. Apply a zero tolerance policy to acts of unsportsmanlike conduct and fighting in junior/youth football.

3.6 – Fouls that always involve advantage

The following fouls always involve advantage, even if it doesn't appear so, and shall be called:

1. **Illegal formation:**

- (a) It is always a foul when Team A has five (or more) players in the backfield at the snap. Team A gains a blocking advantage by being further away from the defense.
- (b) It is still a foul for five players in the backfield even if Team A has only 10 (or fewer) players on the field at the snap.
- (c) Only call the foul if the fifth player is conspicuously off the line (e.g. his head is clearly behind the rear end of the snapper) or has ignored repeated warnings (i.e. at least 2 warnings).[×]
- (d) Give more leeway to wide receivers and slot backs in determining whether they are on or off the line of scrimmage than you do to interior linemen or tight ends. Be particularly generous on fields that are not well marked out.

- (e) On a trick or unusual play, formations should have the highest degree of scrutiny and should be penalised unless they are completely legal.
2. **Offensive pass interference:** Blocking downfield by the offense (against a player in pass coverage) on a forward pass play before the ball is thrown is always offensive pass interference. The defense (particularly the safeties) may see a block and read the play as a run, so drawing coverage away from the destination of the subsequent pass. (See paragraph 3.3.9 for how to call offensive pass interference while the ball is in flight.)
 3. **Handing the ball forward illegally:** Handing the ball forward (except where allowed by rule) is always a foul. A team can gain significant yardage (as well as the benefits of deception) from this illegal play.
 4. **Offside on free kick:**
 - (a) Officiate the Team A restraining line as a plane.
 - (b) On an onside or other short kickoff (deliberate or unintentional), any player (other than the kicker or holder) breaking the plane before the ball is kicked is offside.
 - (c) On a deep kickoff, do not be too technical.
 - (d) Only call a foul if a kicking team player (other than the kicker) obviously takes a run up of more than 5 yards on a free kick. Players who simply adjust their position or stance should not be penalised for being temporarily more than 5 yards behind. The aim of the rule is to reduce a player's momentum at kickoff.
 5. **Team A player out of bounds:**
 - (a) Whenever any Team A player returns inbounds after voluntarily going out of bounds during a kick play, or an eligible receiver touches the ball illegally after voluntarily going out of bounds during a pass play, it is always a foul. A Team A player leaving the field of play gains an advantage by avoiding being blocked. Remember that a player is out of bounds even if only one foot touches the sideline or end line – this must be called.
 - (b) Any contact by a Team B player that causes a Team A player to go out of bounds should be regarded as the cause of it, **provided the Team A player attempts to come back in bounds immediately.** [◇]
 6. **Kick-catch interference:** It is always a foul when contact, however slight, is made with a player in position (or moving to position) to catch a kick in flight. His balance will have been disturbed, so hindering his ability to catch the ball cleanly. (See also paragraph 3.4.8.)

3.7 – Catches and fumbles

1. If the ball moves from the control of one player to another (whether teammate or opponent) during the act of gaining possession, the ball belongs to the player in final control (provided he had control inbounds). This is not a simultaneous possession. If the last player in control did not have control inbounds, or any player was out of bounds at the same time as he touched the ball, the ball is loose out of bounds. If in doubt as to whether a player had control inbounds, he did not.
2. If the receiver gets his toe inbounds but his heel comes down a fraction later out of bounds (or vice versa) then the pass is incomplete. If the whole foot touches the ground, it all has to be inbounds for the catch to be completed. This principle does not extend to the foot and leg/knee, nor to the hand and arm/elbow – these are regarded as separate parts of the body and only the first contact with the ground is relevant.
3. It is not a fumble if the ball is stripped after the ball carrier has been **driven** [◇] back. The ball is dead once the ball carrier is so held that his forward progress is stopped.
4. A player has the ball long enough to become a ball carrier when, after his foot is on the ground, he **does** [§] one of the following (sometimes known as "acts common to the game") (Rule 2-4-3):
 - (a) avoiding or warding off impending contact by an opponent

- (b) tucking the ball away
 - (c) [advancing the ball \(or retreating with it\)](#)[◇]
 - (d) taking additional steps while upright (i.e. not while falling to the ground)
 - (e) passing the ball or handing it off
5. Do not try to be too technical on ruling a catch. We do not want officials who try to have "the greatest eyes in the history of the game" and rule too many times the receiver has completed the process of the catch and fumbled the ball when it should be an incomplete pass. The most important principle is "when in doubt, incomplete".
 6. [We use exactly the same approach, whether the catch is in the end zone or in the field of play.](#)[§]
 7. [In ruling whether a Team A player has passed or fumbled the ball, bear in mind the following:](#)[§]
 - (a) Any action by the player's hand moving forward and the ball coming out should be ruled a forward pass.
 - (b) If the player is able to see the defender approaching, he is likely to be able to move his hand or arm forward before he is contacted. When he does not see the hit coming, the chances are greater that a fumble occurred.
 - (c) After the player was hit, if the ball lands behind him it is more likely that a fumble occurred.

3.8 – Other rules applications

1. **Fair catch signals:**
 - (a) Don't be picky about fair catch signals. Any waving signal or raising a single arm above the head is sufficient to indicate that a fair catch has been called for.
 - (b) Players obviously shading their eyes from the sun have *not* signalled for a fair catch.
 - (c) Any "get away" signal before or after the ball touches the ground is an invalid signal.
 - (d) [A receiver who points at the ball and keeps his hands below his shoulders with no waving motion has made no signal and can advance the ball. A receiver who keeps his hands below his shoulders and has a waving motion, or one who has his hands just above the shoulders with no waving motion, has made an invalid signal.](#)[‡]
2. **Onside kick on poor field markings:** If in doubt on a poorly marked field, the chain can be used following a free kick to measure whether a spot of first touching is illegal or not.
3. **Change of possession close to goal line:** If an interception, kick catch or recovery is made inside the one-yard line [and immediately carried into the end zone,](#)[◇] try to make the play a touchback rather than a momentum exception. Where Team A illegally touches a kick near the goal line, try to rule the touching as being in the end zone, particularly if they carry the ball into the end zone.
4. **Ball coming out of end zone:** If there is a change of possession in the end zone (or the momentum exception rule applies), when in doubt during the return the ball has NOT left the end zone.
5. **Time on field goals:** On normal field goals, no more than 5 seconds should be run off the clock.
6. **Coach requesting a timeout:** Officials should not be distracted from their game duties by the possibility that a Head Coach may request a timeout.^λ
 - (a) When a snap or free kick is imminent (i.e. when Team A is in its formation), wing officials must not turn their eyes away from the field of play. In these circumstances, the Head Coach may need to attract the attention of one of the officials in the middle of the field (Referee, Umpire, Back Judge), or even the wing official on

the opposite sideline, who is facing him. A "T" hand signal (like signal S4) *and* verbalising the word "timeout" are both necessary under these circumstances.

- (b) When the ball is dead and there is no threat of action on the field, a verbal request to the nearest official will be sufficient.
 - (c) Under no circumstances shall an official stop the clock unless he is certain that the request comes from the *Head Coach*. If the official is unsure whose voice requested the timeout, and is unable to turn round to find out, no timeout will be granted.
7. **Coaches on the field during timeout:** During a charged timeout, coaches who come on to the field less than 9 yards from the sideline and do not go beyond the 25-yard lines are not normally to be regarded as a problem unless their behaviour draws attention to themselves.
8. **Trick plays:** Be very strict in penalising trick plays that constitute unfair tactics. Such plays include (but are not limited to):
- (a) trick plays depending on the ball being concealed or substituted (Rule 9-2-2-a);
 - (b) trick plays associated with simulated substitutions (Rule 9-2-2-b);
 - (c) trick plays involving players' equipment (Rule 9-2-2-c);
 - (d) trick plays with actions or verbiage designed to confuse the defense into believing the snap is not imminent (Rule 9-2-2-d) – this includes pretending to have a problem with the play that has been called, an equipment problem with a shoe, the ball, etc. and feigning an injury (Rule 9-2-2-e); it also includes assuming the role or functions of an official.

A good rule of thumb to follow is that if an unusual act appears to be unfair, it is probably contrary to the rules.

9. **Take a knee plays:** When Team A inform the officials that they intend to "take a knee" (sometimes known as the "victory formation"):
- (a) Ensure that Team B is informed.
 - (b) Remind Team A that Team B will still be able to stop the clock if they have timeouts remaining.
 - (c) Remind Team A that they will be penalised (UFT) if they subsequently run a "normal" play after having declared their intention to "take a knee".
 - (d) Remind Team B of Team A's declared intention on each subsequent play, unless Team A informs you that they will run a normal play, in which case inform Team B of that.
 - (e) Warn Team B not to "punish" opponents or otherwise attempt to interfere with the process (other than in a legitimate attempt to gain possession of a loose ball).
 - (f) Penalise players from either team who try to take advantage of the situation to either gain yards (Team A) or punish an opponent (Team B normally).
 - (g) If the score is close, then Team B has a legitimate right to attempt to gain possession. However, if the margin in the score is wider than could reasonably be overcome in the time available, Team B should not instigate any forcible contact.