

2010 Rule Change: Wedge Formation on Free Kicks

Rule 6-1-9 (FR-88)

Illegal Wedge Formation

ARTICLE 9.

- a. A wedge is defined as two or more players aligned shoulder to shoulder within two yards of each other.
- b. Free-kick down only: After the ball has been kicked, it is illegal for three or more members of the receiving team intentionally to form a wedge for the purpose of blocking for the ball carrier. This is a live-ball foul, whether or not there is contact between opponents.
- c. Formation of the wedge is not illegal when the kick is from an obvious onside kick formation.

PENALTY—Noncontact foul treated as occurring during the kick. 15 yards, spot of the foul; or 15 yards, spot where the subsequent dead ball belongs to Team B if this is behind the spot of the foul. If the subsequent dead ball belongs to Team A: 15 yards, previous spot with the down repeated. [S27]

EXAMPLE 1. Team A kicks off at its 30-yard line. While the ball is in the air, receiving team players B45, B32 and B84 retreat to the B-22 and align shoulder-to-shoulder so that there is no more than two yards between adjacent players. Receiver B21 catches the ball at the B-10 and is tackled at the 50-yard line.

RULING: Foul for formation of an illegal wedge. The 15-yard penalty is enforced half the distance to the goal from the B-22. The receiving team has the ball, first and 10 at its 11-yard line.

EXAMPLE 2. Team A kicks off at its 30-yard line. While the ball is in the air, receiving team players B45, B32 and B84 retreat to the B-22 and align shoulder-to-shoulder so that there is no more than two yards between adjacent players. Receiver B21 catches the ball at the B-10 with one knee on the ground.

RULING: The ball is dead where B21 caught it while grounded at the B-10. The 15-yard penalty is enforced from that spot, half the distance to the goal. The receiving team has the ball, first and 10 at its five-yard line.

EXAMPLE 3. Team A kicks off at its 30-yard line. While the ball is in the air, receiving team players B45, B32 and B84 retreat to the B-22 and align shoulder-to-shoulder so that there is no more than two yards between adjacent players. In an attempt to break up the wedge, A44 blocks below the waist against B45. Receiver B21 catches the ball at the B-10 and runs for an apparent touchdown.

RULING: Foul by Team A for blocking below the waist during a kick down. Foul by Team B for forming an illegal wedge. The fouls offset, and Team A re-kicks from its 30-yard line.

EXAMPLE 4. Team A kicks off at its 30-yard line. While the ball is in the air, receiving team players B45 and B84 retreat to the B-22 and align shoulder-to-shoulder so that there is no more than two yards between them. Receiver B21 catches the kick at the B-10 and is tackled at the A-45.

RULING: No foul. A two-man wedge is not illegal. Team B's ball, first and 10 at Team A's 45-yard line.

EXAMPLE 5. Team A kicks off at its 30-yard line. Receiver B17 catches the ball at the B-20 and begins his return. After the catch receiving team players B45, B32 and B84 gather at the B-33 in front of the ball carrier and align shoulder-to-shoulder so that there is no more than two yards between adjacent players. B17 is tackled at the 50-yard line.

RULING: : Foul for formation of an illegal wedge. The three-man wedge formation is illegal even if formed after the kick has been caught. The 15-yard penalty is enforced at the spot of the foul. Team B's ball, first and 10 at its 18-yard line.