

2012 Major Football Rules Differences

Backward Pass

May be thrown by any player at any time for any purpose.	May not be thrown intentionally out of bounds to conserve time.
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Ball

Leather and composition allowed; no panel restrictions.	Must be leather with four panels; marking the ball for special use is prohibited.
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Batting

A grounded loose ball may not be batted in any direction except K can bat a grounded scrimmage kick back towards his own goal line. The penalty is 15 yards.	A grounded loose ball may be batted backward except in the end zone. The penalty is 10 yards.
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Blocking Below the Waist

Not allowed outside the free-blocking zone. Within the zone, linemen of either team may only block opposing linemen.	Offensive linemen at the snap positioned more than seven yards from the middle lineman of the offensive formation, and backs who at the snap are positioned outside the modified tackle box or in motion at the snap and outside the tackle box at any time after the ready, are prohibited from blocking below the waist toward the non-adjacent sideline. Additional restrictions apply.
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Blocking Out of Bounds

No restrictions.	It is illegal for any player to initiate a block against an opponent who is out of bounds. A 15-yard penalty with an automatic first down.
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Catch, Interception/Recovery

No force outs.	Force out only if carried out.
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Chop Block

Any high-low or low-high block at knees or below of opponent in contact with teammate of the blocker.	A high-low or low-high combination block by any two players against an opponent (not the runner) anywhere on the field, with or without a delay between contacts; the "low" component is at the opponent's thigh or below.
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Clipping/Blocking in Back

<p>Not allowed outside the free-blocking zone.</p> <p>Within the zone, offensive linemen may clip only opposing linemen who were in the zone at the snap and may block in the back opponents who were in the zone at the snap.</p>	<p>Blocks from behind at the knee or below are illegal anywhere except against the runner. Blocks from behind above the knee are legal within the blocking zone.</p>
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Clock

<p>The game clock starts on the snap when the ball becomes dead out of bounds.</p> <p>The game clock starts on the snap after a legal kick only when a new series is awarded.</p> <p>The game clock always starts on the snap after a delay penalty is accepted.</p> <p>The play clock is always 25 seconds.</p>	<p>The game clock starts on the snap only during the last two minutes of each half when the ball becomes dead out of bounds except for forward fumble.</p> <p>The game clock starts on the snap after a legal kick.</p> <p>The game clock starts on the snap after a delay penalty, regardless of whether it is accepted or declined, if committed by a team in scrimmage-kick formation.</p> <p>The play clock can be 25 or 40 seconds.</p>
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Coaching Box

<p>Three coaches in a restricted 2-yard belt between team box and sideline only while the ball is dead.</p>	<p>Separate 2-yard belts for officials and coaches.</p>
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Defensive Formation on Place Kicks

<p>No restrictions.</p>	<p>It is illegal for 3 defensive players to line up shoulder-to-shoulder and move forward on place kicks with primary contact against a single team K player; 5-yard penalty, previous spot.</p>
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Defensive Pass Interference

<p>If there is contact while pass is in flight, it is not a foul if contact is away from direction of the pass. Faceguarding is interference.</p> <p>Penalty is 15 yards under all-but-one principle.</p> <p>Interference applies if an eligible receiver voluntarily goes OOB and returns in bounds (illegal participation).</p> <p>Interference restrictions apply if a forward pass is touched behind the line by A, and goes beyond line.</p>	<p>Pass must be catchable.</p> <p>Physical contact required for interference.</p> <p>Spot foul if less than 15 yards. Special enforcement inside 17 yard line. No PI if scrimmage kick is simulated.</p> <p>Interference does not apply against an eligible receiver who goes OOB & returns in bounds (possible illegal touching).</p> <p>Interference restrictions do not apply if a forward pass is touched behind the line by A, and goes beyond line.</p>
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Eligible Receiver Contacted

No automatic first down.	Automatic first down if legal pass crosses line and foul occurs beyond neutral zone.
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Extending the Period

Period extension criteria apply during the last timed down. Period is not extended if the penalty is a safety.	Period extension criteria apply only during a down in which time expires.
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Face Mask Fouls

Grasping face mask without pulling, turning or twisting is a foul with a 5-yard penalty.	Grasping face mask without pulling, turning or twisting is not foul.
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Fair Catch Option

Free kick or snap.	Snap only.
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False Start

If the entire team does not become set before the snap it is an illegal shift.	A false start is called.
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Field Goal From Outside the 20

Unsuccessful kick results in touchback if ball crosses goal line.	Ball returned to previous spot if untouched by B beyond the neutral zone.
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Fighting

Disqualified from the game.	Disqualified. First half fight - for game. Second-half fight - for second half and first half of next game. Second fight --players/substitutes/coaches for season.
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Forward Pass - Definition

Initial direction must be forward.	Point of first touching must be forward.
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Forward Pass - Spike to Conserve Time

Only immediately from hand to hand snap.	Hand to hand snap not required.
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Free-Kick Line

K's 40-yard line.	K's 35-yard line.
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Free-Kick Line Infractions

Encroachment – dead-ball foul.	Offside – live-ball foul. Penalty option to enforce from end of the run when kicking team is offside.
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Free-Kick Out-of-bounds

Place ball 25 yards from previous spot or 5-yard penalty and re-kick.	Place ball 30 yards from previous spot, 5-yard penalty and re-kick, or a five-yard penalty from where the ball belongs to R.
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Free-Kick Positions

All K players except kicker/holder must be behind line.	Same plus a minimum of four players must be on each side of kicker. After the ball has been made ready for play all players on the kicking team except the kicker must be no more than five yards behind their restraining line.
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Free-Blocking Zone

The zone is 3 yards on each side of the ball and 4 yards wide on each side of the line. Only players who are on the line and in the zone may block below the waist. Only offensive players who are on the line and in the zone may block in the back or clip. The zone exists only while ball is in the zone.	Only offensive players on the line of scrimmage within a rectangular area centered on the middle lineman and extending 5 yards laterally in each direction and 3 yards on both sides of the neutral zone may legally clip above the knee in the zone. A player on the line within the zone may not leave the zone and return to clip. Blocking in the back legal under the same conditions. The zone exists until the ball is in player possession outside the zone or is muffed or fumbled outside the zone.
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Fumble – Out of Bounds – Fourth Down

Spotted where it becomes dead. Clock starts on snap. No fourth down fumble rule.	Forward fumbles are returned to spot of fumble – clock starts on ready. Fourth down fumble rule.
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Game Length

12-minute quarters.	15-minute quarters.
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Goalpost Uprights

23 feet 4 inches apart.	18 feet 6 inches apart.
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Helmet comes off during Play

If a player's helmet comes off while the ball is live and is not directly attributable to a foul by an opponent, the player must be replaced for at least one down, unless the halftime or an overtime intermission occurs.	Same, except no exceptions for sitting out a play. The player whose helmet comes off must not continue to participate beyond the immediate action in which he is engaged. Prolonged participation is a personal foul. The penalty is 15 yards plus an automatic first down for fouls by Team B. Additionally, such a player by definition is a player obviously out of the play and cannot be contacted. Players cannot remove helmet unless in team box except for time-outs, etc.
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Horse Collar Tackle

All players are prohibited from grabbing the inside back collar of the shoulder pads or jersey, or the inside collar of the side of the shoulder pads or jersey of a runner, and subsequently pulling the opponent down. There is no requirement for the tackle to be immediate nor are there exceptions for the tackle box or a quarterback in the pocket.	All players are prohibited from grabbing the inside back collar of the shoulder pads or jersey, or the inside collar of the side of the shoulder pads or jersey, and immediately pulling the runner down. This does not apply to a runner who is inside the tackle box or to a quarterback who is in the pocket.
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Inbounds Lines

Divide field in thirds.	60 feet from each sideline.
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Injured Player

Any player who exhibits signs of a concussion must be removed from the game and may not return until cleared by an appropriate health care professional. It is no longer necessary for an unconscious player to have a physician's note to continue to play.	A player sustaining an injury, including showing signs of a concussion, must go to the team area for medical attention and remain out of the game until an appropriate medical professional designated by his institution approves his return.
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Intentional Grounding to Save Yardage

Loss of down and 5-yard penalty from spot of pass (end of run).	Loss of down at the spot of pass, no yardage assessed. Passer may avoid grounding when outside the normal position of the tackle by throwing the ball beyond neutral zone.
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Kick-Catch Interference

Interference occurs if a free kick is touched in-flight by K.	Interference on a free kick in-flight only applies if an R player is positioned to make a catch. The receiving team has the same kick-catch and fair-catch protection whether the ball is kicked directly off the tee or is immediately driven to the ground. Kicking team players cannot enter the area defined by the width of the receiver's shoulders and extending one yard in front of the receiver before he touches the ball.
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Kicker Contacted

A kicker is protected until he has had a reasonable opportunity to regain his balance. No foul if defender is blocked into kicker/holder.	A kicker who runs outside the tackle box is not protected as a kicker. No foul only if defender is illegally blocked into kicker/holder.
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Kicking Tee

<p>Kicking tee allowed for free kicks and placekicks. Tee may be two inches high. Use of illegal tee is an unfair act.</p>	<p>Tee allowed only for free kicks. Tee is limited to one inch high. Use of illegal tee is an illegal kick; a five-yard penalty from the previous spot.</p>
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Kick into Receiver's End Zone

<p>Touchback when non-scoring breaks plane of R's goal line or when scoring attempt is unsuccessful.</p>	<p>Remains alive unless ball first touches the ground in the end zone before it touches a B player.</p>
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Leaping

<p>Defensive players may leap from the ground to block a kick without restriction.</p>	<p>It is a foul if the leaping player lands on any player. Team B players may not attempt to block a punt by jumping over a Team A player behind the neutral zone inside the tackle box.</p>
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Neutral-Zone Infractions

<p>Offensive false start and encroachment – dead-ball foul. Defensive encroachment – dead-ball foul. Defensive lineman quick/abrupt actions– unsportsmanlike conduct.</p>	<p>Offensive false start and encroachment – dead-ball foul. Defensive offside – dead-ball or live-ball foul. Defensive lineman quick/abrupt actions – dead-ball delay foul.</p>
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Nine-Yard Marks

<p>Team A players and substitutes must be between the nine-yard marks after the ready.</p>	<p>Only Team A substitutes must be between the nine-yard marks after the ready. Players who participated in the previous down need only be between the nine-yard marks anytime after the previous down ended and the next snap.</p>
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Numbering Exception

<p>Applies only on fourth down or a try whenever K is in a scrimmage-kick formation. On 1st, 2d or 3d down, only the snapper can have a number outside the 50-79 range.</p>	<p>Applies whenever K is in a scrimmage-kick formation.</p>
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Offensive Formation

<p>Only the snapper may lock legs with the guards. All other linemen must have both feet outside the outside foot of the adjacent player.</p>	<p>Any offensive lineman may lock legs with another lineman.</p>
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Officials Jurisdiction

30 minutes before scheduled kickoff.	60 minutes before scheduled kickoff.
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Overtime

Equal series from 10-yard line (State Assn option).	Equal series from 25-yard line. No kick try after second series.
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Participation

12 or more players on the field at the snap is a 15-yard penalty for illegal participation.	12 or more players on the field at the snap is a 5-yard penalty for illegal substitution.
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Placekick Holder

Must rise to keep ball alive. May rise to catch or recover a snap.	Need not rise to keep ball alive.
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Player Voluntarily Out of Bounds

Player of A and K is guilty of illegal participation if they return to field.	Foul for K, but A player may return unless first to touch forward pass.
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Scrimmage-Kick Formation

Deep player must be 10 yards back. Also for FG attempt, the holder may be 7 yards back with a kicker in position.	Deep player must be 7 yards back and obvious a kick will be attempted.
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Sideline Interference

First – warning Second -foul for sideline interference (5-yard penalty). Third and subsequent - foul for unsportsmanlike conduct (15-yard penalty) Contact foul is a 15-yard penalty for all occurrences.	First two - fouls for delay of game (5-yard penalty). Third and subsequent - foul for sideline interference (15-yard penalty)
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Shift

Movement of one or more players.	Movement of two or more players.
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Substitution

Replaced player must depart within 3 seconds of arrival of substitute. Breaking the huddle with 12 or more players is not a foul unless it violates the above.	Replaced player must depart immediately (3 seconds), but A cannot break huddle with 12 players. While in the process of substitution, Team A is prohibited from rushing quickly to the line of scrimmage and snapping.
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Timeout

Coach may go to huddle.	Coach may not enter field.
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Touchback

Ball is next snapped at 20 yard line.	Same except 25 yard line if during a free kick.
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Try for Point

Ball dead when kick fails or when B secures possession. B cannot score. Ball remains alive on fumble if Team A recovers. Not attempted following touchdown on last timed down if game decided and playoff qualification is not a factor.	The ball remains live as on any field goal attempt. B may score two points. Prior to change of possession, the try ends if A1 fumbles and a teammate recovers. Not attempted following touchdown on last timed down if game decided.
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Video Review

Not allowed.	Allowed – special review procedures (instant replay). Also, conferences are to review games for flagrant fouls.
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Wedge Formation

It is legal to block from a wedge formation during any down.	It is illegal for three or more members of the receiving team to intentionally form a wedge for the purpose of blocking for the ball carrier after the ball has been kicked, except when the kick is from an obvious onside kick formation.
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Uniforms/Equipment

Gloves/Hand Pads

Any color except ball colored. In 2013, test specifications currently in effect for gloves will apply to hand pads and there will be a NOCSAE standard.	No restriction on the color of gloves. The specifications in effect for gloves apply to hand pads.
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Helmets

Similar team color not required. No rule on taking it off.	Team color and design must be same. Facemasks same color.
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Illegal/Mandatory Equipment

15-yard penalty charged to coach.	Charged timeout until exhausted, then five-yard penalty.
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Jersey

All must be long enough to reach the top of the pants, and shall be tucked in if longer. Jersey color violations are reported to state association. Visiting team must wear jerseys of contrasting color.	Full length and tucked in. Jersey color violations are a foul at the start of each half; 15-yard penalty. Visiting team must wear white jerseys unless prior agreement
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Pants

Extra outside pad may be worn.	External pad not allowed. All players must have same color/design.
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Shoes

Required.	Not required. Disqualified if cleats are longer than ½ inch.
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Socks

Not required.	All players must have same color and design.
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Towels

One (4"x12" min/18"x36" max) plain white towel per player. Must be moisture absorbing and cannot be sticky.	Any player may have a towel that is solid white with no words, symbols, letters or numbers, and must be no larger than 4"x12".
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PENALTY ENFORCEMENT

NFHS:

The all-but-one principle applies. All fouls are penalized from the basic spot, except a foul by the offense behind the spot. Loose-ball plays include the snap, kicks, legal passes or fumbles in or behind the neutral zone and includes the run(s) which precede such legal or illegal kick, legal forward pass, backward pass or fumble. The basic spot for loose-ball plays is the previous spot. The basic spot for running plays is the end of the run.

Only roughing the passer, snapper, or kicker /holder plus defensive pass interference include an automatic first down.

For roughing the passer, the dead-ball spot is the spot from which to enforce the 15-yard penalty. If there is a change of team possession or the run ends behind the previous spot, the penalty is enforced from the previous spot.

The following fouls have special enforcement provisions and options for the offended team: free kick out-of-bounds; kick-catching interference); unfair acts; roughing the passer; and fouls on scoring plays.

When unsportsmanlike or dead-ball personal fouls by both teams are reported to the referee, they are enforced in the order of their occurrence. If the order cannot be determined, the fouls cancel.

Live-ball fouls on touchdown or successful field goal plays may be enforced on the try or succeeding kickoff provided they occur after any change of possession. Live-ball fouls enforced as dead-ball fouls and dead-ball fouls must be enforced on the try.

NCAA:

The all-but-one principle applies during running plays beyond the line or when there is no scrimmage line. The basic spot for fouls during a pass play (other than defensive pass interference less than 15 yards beyond neutral zone) is the previous spot. **EXCEPTION:** Holding, personal fouls, illegal facemask fouls and illegal use of hands behind the neutral zone are always enforced from the previous spot. Other specific penalty spots exist for

kicking fouls. All personal fouls include an automatic first down. Numerous fouls carry a specific enforcement spot. Carry-over penalties only for personal fouls on a scoring play and personal fouls against snapper, holder, kicker and passer on a successful try.

For roughing the passer, the end of the last run is the spot from which to enforce the 15-yard penalty. If there is a change of team possession during the down or the run ends behind the previous spot, the penalty is enforced from the previous spot.

On both free and scrimmage kicks, excepting field goal plays, fouls by the kicking team may be enforced from where the play ends if B is in possession at the end of the play.

When unsportsmanlike or dead-ball personal fouls by both teams are reported to the referee and before any of the penalties have been completed, the fouls cancel. Unsportsmanlike conduct is penalized as a live-ball foul if it occurs by a player while the ball is live. If a player commits an unsportsmanlike act before a touchdown is scored, the score is nullified and the offending team is penalized from the spot of the foul. The penalties for unsportsmanlike acts committed by coaches or other bench personnel are administered as dead-ball fouls regardless of the status of the ball when the foul occurs. Penalties for unsportsmanlike fouls by team B include an automatic first down. Penalties for dead-ball fouls (for example, unsportsmanlike behavior after the player crosses the goal line) are assessed on the ensuing kickoff or the try.

Live-ball personal fouls on touchdown plays may be enforced on the try or succeeding kickoff as well as live-ball fouls enforced as dead-ball fouls and dead-ball fouls. All fouls on a successful field goal are enforced by rule from the previous spot or are declined.

A 10-second rundown of the game clock is part of the penalty option for fouls that stop the clock with less than one minute in either half. The runoff does not apply if the game clock is not running when the foul occurs. The fouls included are:

- Any foul that prevents the snap (e.g., false start, encroachment, defensive offside by contact in the neutral zone, etc.).
- Intentional grounding to stop the clock.
- An illegal forward pass thrown from beyond the neutral zone.
- A backward pass thrown out of bounds to stop the clock.
- Any other foul committed with the intent of stopping the clock (referee's discretion).

The offended team may accept the yardage penalty and decline the runoff. If the yardage penalty is declined, the runoff is declined by rule. Following enforcement of the penalty and runoff (if any) the game clock starts on the referee's signal. However, if the fouling team has a charged team timeout remaining it may avoid the runoff by using a timeout. In that case the game clock starts on the snap following the timeout which either team may use to confer.

These NFHS/NCAA Football Rules Differences are presented in summary form and should only to be used as a guide; not all nuances are described. This information is in no way meant to replace the NFHS Rules Book. 2012 changes are shaded. These differences have been generously compiled and provided by George Demetriou, Rules Interpreter for Colorado. The NFHS is not responsible for content accuracy or the maintenance of this information. You may contact the author at george.demetriou.cos@gmail.com.