



COLLEGE FOOTBALL OFFICIATING, LLC

BLOCKING BELOW THE WAIST: 2013 RULE AND APPLICATIONS

Over the past few years the rules for blocking below the waist have changed several times. The rules committee has attempted to find the right balance of keeping this block in the game when possible while also protecting the safety of the student-athletes. This year the committee made some significant simplifications compared with previous years.

Here is the rule in its entirety.

Blocking Below the Waist (9-1-6)

a. Team A prior to a change of team possession:

Consider a low-blocking zone seven yards on each side of the ball extending five yards beyond the neutral zone and back to Team A's end line (Rule 2-3-7 and Appendix D).

1. The following Team A players may legally block below the waist inside this zone until the ball has left the zone: (a) players on the line of scrimmage completely within this zone and (b) stationary backs who are at least partially inside the tackle box and at least partially inside the frame of the body of the second lineman from the snapper.

2. Players not covered in paragraph 1 (above) while the ball is still in the zone, and all players after the ball has left the zone, are allowed to block below the waist only if the force of the initial contact is from the front, but they may not block below the waist if the force of the initial contact is from the side or back. "From the front" is understood to mean within the clock-face region between "10 o'clock and 2 o'clock" forward of the player being blocked.

3. Once the ball has left the zone a player may not block below the waist toward his own end line.

b. Team B prior to a change of team possession

1. Other than in paragraphs 2 and 3 below, Team B players may block below the waist only within the area defined by lines parallel to the goal line five yards beyond and behind the neutral zone extended to the sidelines. Blocking below the waist by players of Team B outside this area is illegal except against the ball carrier.

2. Team B players may not block below the waist against an opponent who is in position to receive a backward pass.

3. Team B players may not block below the waist against an eligible Team A pass receiver beyond the neutral zone unless attempting to get to the ball or ball carrier. This prohibition ends when a legal forward pass is no longer possible by rule.

c. Kicks

During a down in which there is a free kick or a scrimmage kick, blocking below the waist by any player is illegal except against the ball carrier.

d. After change of team possession

After any change of team possession, blocking below the waist by any player is illegal except against the ball carrier.



It is worthwhile to notice a few simplifications from last year:

- No reference to the “adjacent sideline.”
- No reference to “north-south” blocks.
- Blocks by Team A toward its end line have the same status whether beyond or behind the neutral zone.
- Once the ball leaves the low-blocking zone, all Team A players are under the same rules.

This last point is noteworthy because it means that officials will not have to “map” a player back to his position at the snap once the ball leaves the low-blocking zone; whether a block is a foul then depends on the block itself, not on which Team A player blocks or where he was at the snap.

Also notice some things that are the same as last year:

- Rules for blocking below the waist by Team B.
- No blocking below the waist during kick plays and after any change of team possession.
- Team A players who are restricted regarding low blocks.

One new feature is the notion of the “front” of a player being blocked. It is the clock-face region between “10 o’clock and 2 o’clock” forward of him. Note that this region is not fixed on the field, but it moves with the player. The philosophy in making a block legal when it comes at him in this region is that he is much more likely to see and therefore anticipate the block. This is never going to be perfect, of course, as the rules must be written and interpreted to apply to very dynamic circumstances. But the principle behind the rule is to increase the odds that a player will see a block coming.

Play Situations

1. Back A22 is directly behind the snapper when the ball is snapped. While the ball is still inside the low-blocking zone, he blocks below the waist against linebacker B55, the

block being at B55's side (i.e., at "3 o'clock). The block is made inside the low-blocking zone behind the neutral zone. At the snap, A22 is (a) stationary; (b) in motion. **RULING:** (a) Legal block. (b) Illegal block. Since A22 is in motion at the snap, his block must be "10 o'clock to 2 o'clock" to be legal. 15 yards, previous spot. (9-1-6-a-1b and a-2)

2. The offensive linemen are split wide so that the tackle (second lineman) is outside the tackle box. Back A22 is completely inside the frame of the tackle but is completely outside the tackle box. A22 blocks below the waist against an opponent inside the low-blocking zone before the ball leaves this zone. **RULING:** A22 is restricted because he is not at least partially inside the tackle box. To be legal, A22's block must be from the front—i.e., in the 10 o'clock-to-2 o'clock region. A block outside this region off to either side is a foul. (9-1-6-a-1b)

3. The offensive linemen are in a very tight formation so that the tackle (second lineman) is well inside the tackle box. Back A22 is completely outside the frame of the tackle but is completely inside the tackle box. A22 blocks below the waist against an opponent inside the low-blocking zone before the ball leaves this zone. **RULING:** A22 is restricted because he is not at least partially inside the second lineman. To be legal, A22's block must be from the front—i.e., in the 10 o'clock-to-2 o'clock region. A block outside this region off to either side is a foul. (9-1-6-a-1b)

4. Back A22 is aligned far to the right of the formation. He starts in motion back to his left and then stops. At the snap he is stationary behind the snapper. **RULING:** A22 satisfies the condition of being stationary inside the tackle box and inside the frame of the tackle at the snap, so he may block below the waist at the side or front inside the low-blocking zone before the ball leaves the zone. (9-1-6-a-1b)

5. End A88 is positioned on the right of the formation 10 yards from the ball. As the play develops he blocks below the waist against an opponent directly at the front. His block is directed downfield and toward the sideline to his left. **RULING:** Legal block. As long as the block is not toward his own end line, A88 may legally block below the waist at the opponent's front. (9-1-6-a-2)

6. Quarterback A12 takes the snap, leaves the low-blocking zone and scrambles back and forth across the field looking for a receiver. At the snap, back A33 is (a) stationary directly behind the left guard; (b) 12 yards to the left of the snapper. A33 moves downfield and then returns toward the neutral zone. He blocks B2 below the waist clearly from the side, the block being directed toward a sideline. **RULING:** (a) and (b) Illegal block below the waist since it is not at the front and the ball had left the zone. Once the ball leaves the low-blocking zone all Team A players are under the "10 o'clock to 2 o'clock" rule. 15-yard penalty. (9-1-6-a-2)

7. On a run-pass option play, wide receiver A2 at the snap is positioned 12 yards to the right of the snapper. He moves downfield and then returns toward the neutral

zone. The ball has left the low-blocking zone. Eight yards beyond the neutral zone A2 blocks B2 below the waist directly at B2's front and slightly toward Team A's end line. **RULING:** Illegal block below the waist. Even though A2 blocks below the waist directly at the front, the block is toward his own end line. Once the ball has left the low-blocking zone, no Team A player may block below the waist toward his own end line. 15-yard penalty. (9-1-6-a-3)

8. Back A31, a flanker positioned to the left side of a formation, runs a deep reverse to the right side after receiving the ball from a teammate. End A82 is positioned 10 yards from the snapper on the right side of the formation. As A31 turns the corner A82 blocks B62 toward the left sideline. The block by A82 is below the waist and generally at the front but outside the 10 o'clock-to-2 o'clock range. The block occurs behind or one yard beyond the neutral zone. **RULING:** Illegal block below the waist because it is too much to the opponent's side. 15-yard penalty. Enforce at the previous spot if the foul occurs behind the neutral zone. (9-1-6-a-2)

9. Defensive end B88 blocks below the waist against tackle A75 one yard beyond the line of scrimmage. The block is at the opponent's side. **RULING:** Legal block because it takes place within the 10-yard belt. Had this block taken place more than five yards from the line of scrimmage in either direction it would be a foul. (9-1-6-b-1)

10. Third and seven at the A-30. The ball is at the left hash mark. Back A22 is split completely outside the frame of the tackle on the left side, and B40 moves out to cover him. The handoff goes to back A44 who sweeps around the right end. As the play develops B40 follows the play and A22 chases him. At the A-40 beyond the right hash mark A22 overtakes B40 and blocks him below the waist clearly and directly at the front. The direction of this block is downfield and slightly toward the right sideline. A44 is tackled at the B-45. **RULING:** Legal play. The block made directly in front of the opponent is legal no matter which sideline it is toward, since it is not toward Team A's end line. (9-1-6-a-2)

11. A12 drops straight back to pass. Back A22 is stationary at the snap behind the right guard, and he drops back into pass-protection position. Defensive end B88 slips past A22 and pursues A12 who continues to retreat straight back. A22 chases B88 and while still inside the low-blocking zone blocks him below the waist at the front and toward Team A's end line. **RULING:** Legal block. Because the ball has not left the low-blocking zone A22 may block below the waist toward his end line. The block legally may be at the front or the side within the low-blocking zone. (9-1-6-a-1b and a-3)

12. Defensive back B33 intercepts a pass at the B-40 and is tackled at the A-35. During the return (a) B88 blocks an opponent below the waist at the A-45; (b) A44 blocks an opponent below the waist at the A-45. **RULING:** Both (a) and (b): Foul for blocking below the waist after a change of possession, which is not allowed for either

team. Each is a foul whether the block is at the front or the side. (a) 15-yard penalty at the spot of the foul. Team B's ball, first and 10 at the B-40. (b) 15-yard penalty at the A-35. Team B's ball, first and 10 at the A-20. (9-1-6-d and 10-2-c and d)

13. Quarterback A12 takes the snap, leaves the low-blocking zone and scrambles back inside the low-blocking zone as he looks for an open receiver. At the time he releases the pass he is directly behind the location of the snap. Without leaving the low-blocking zone guard A66 blocks below the waist toward his own goal line. The block by A66 takes place (a) before A12 leaves the low-blocking zone; (b) just as A12 releases the pass; (c) at a moment early in the play when it is not clear whether A12 has left the low-blocking zone. **RULING:** (a) Legal block. The block may be at the front or the side since A66 was inside the low-blocking zone at the snap and is inside the zone when he blocks before the ball leaves the zone. (b) Illegal block. Even though A12 is inside the low-blocking zone when A66 blocks, A66's block toward his end line is illegal since the ball had earlier been outside the zone. (c) Legal block. By interpretation, if there is a question as to whether the ball had left the low-blocking zone, it is deemed not to have left. (9-1-6-a-1 and a-3)

14. End A88 is lined up 10 yards from the snapper to the right side of the formation. Quarterback A12 takes the snap, leaves the low-blocking zone and scrambles back inside the low-blocking zone as he looks for an open receiver. At the time he releases the pass he is directly behind the location of the snap. A88 blocks below the waist toward his own goal line. The block by A88 takes place (a) before A12 leaves the low-blocking zone; (b) just as A12 releases the pass. **RULING:** (a) Legal block if it is at the front. Since A88 was aligned outside the low-blocking zone he may not block low at the side. His block at the front toward his own goal line is legal because the ball has not yet left the zone. (b) Illegal block. Even though the ball carrier is inside the low-blocking zone when A88 blocks, A88's block toward his end line is illegal since the ball had earlier been outside the zone. (9-1-6-a-1 and a-3)

15. Back A44 is lined up as a flanker to the right of the formation. At the snap he drops back a few steps and is in position to receive a backward pass from the quarterback. Before the ball is thrown cornerback B27 crosses into the backfield and blocks A44 below the waist three yards behind the neutral zone. **RULING:** Illegal block below the waist. Although B27's block was within five yards of the neutral zone, he may not block below the waist against a player in position to receive a backward pass. (9-1-6-b-2)

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