



2026 NCAA FOOTBALL RULES BOOK LANGUAGE

Targeting – Rule 9-1-3 & 9-1-4 Penalty

PENALTY—[ARTICLE 3 and ARTICLE 4]—15 yards. For dead-ball fouls, 15 yards from the succeeding spot. Automatic first down for fouls by Team B if not in conflict with other rules. As an experimental rule for 2026, for a player's first targeting foul in a season, disqualification for the remainder of the game with no carryover disqualification (See Rule 2-27-12). If a player receives a second Targeting foul within the same season, disqualification for the remainder of the game and the first half of the team's next scheduled game within that season including post-season games. If a player receives a third or subsequent Targeting foul within the same season, disqualification for the remainder of the game and that player will receive an automatic one-game suspension in their team's next scheduled game of that season including post-season games. There is no targeting carryover disqualification to the following season.

The disqualification must be reviewed by Instant Replay (Rule 12-3-5). [S38, S24 and S47]

When the Instant Replay Official overturns the disqualification:

If the targeting foul is not in conjunction with another personal foul by the same player, the 15-yard penalty for targeting is not enforced. If the player commits another personal foul in conjunction with the targeting foul, the 15-yard penalty for that personal foul is enforced according to rule. (A. R. 9-1-4-VII-VIII)

For games in which Instant Replay is used:

If a player receives a second and/or subsequent upheld targeting foul within the same season, the conference has the option to consult the national coordinator of football officials who would then facilitate a video review. Based on the review, if and only if the national coordinator concludes that it is clearly obvious the player should not have been disqualified on the first, second or any subsequent targeting foul, the carryover suspension will be vacated. If the national coordinator supports the disqualification, the suspension for the next game will remain.

For games in which Instant Replay is not used:

If a player is disqualified in the first half, at the option of the conference or by pre-game mutual agreement of the teams in inter-conference games, during the intermission between halves the Referee will be provided a video of the play in question for their review in the officials' private secure location. The Referee will review the video to determine whether the disqualification is overturned. The decision of the Referee is final. (A. R. 9-1- 4-IX)

Note: The video source and the location of the review will be determined prior to the game through mutual agreement of the teams and the Referee.

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Numbering Exceptions - Scrimmage Kick Formation Rules 2-16-10 & 7-1-4-a

Scrimmage Kick Formation – Rule 2-16-10

ARTICLE 10.

- a. A scrimmage kick formation is a formation with no player other than the potential kicker (or holder) aligned within the frame of the body of the snapper and no player aligned in the clear path from the snapper to the potential kicker (or holder), and with either (1) at least one potential kicker 10 or more yards behind the neutral zone; or (2) a potential holder and potential kicker seven or more yards behind the neutral zone in position for a place kick.
- b. To qualify as a scrimmage kick formation, Team A must either (1) have at least five linemen wearing jerseys numbered 50 through 79; or (2) meet the numbering exception requirements under Rule 7-1-4-a-5.
- c. To qualify as a scrimmage kick formation, it must be obvious that a kick will be attempted. (A.R.9-1-14-I-III)
- d. If Team A is in a scrimmage kick formation at the snap, any action by Team A during the down is deemed to be from a scrimmage kick formation.

Offensive Team Requirements—At the Snap – Rule 7-1-4-a

ARTICLE 4. Violation of each of the following (a-c) is a live-ball foul; the play is allowed to continue.

a. *Formation.* At the snap Team A must be in a formation that meets these requirements:

1. All players must be inbounds.
2. All players must be either linemen or backs (Rule 2-27-4, A.R.7-1-4- VIII).
3. At least five linemen must wear jerseys numbered 50 through 79 (*Exception: When the snap is from a scrimmage kick formation, paragraph 5 below.*)
4. No more than four players may be backs.
5. If lined up in scrimmage kick formation (Rule 2-16-10), Team A may have fewer than five linemen numbered 50 through 79, subject to the following conditions:
 - (a) Team A must have the snapper and two linemen on each side of the snapper, who are lined up in (or touching) the tackle box (2x2 formation) and these five linemen become exceptions to the numbering rule.
 - (b) These linemen are ineligible receivers by position and become exceptions to the numbering rule when they line up following the snapper taking his position.(A.R.9-1-14-I-III)
 - (c) Once a player is established as a numbering exception, they may not shift or move to another position.
 - (d) Any and all such numbering-exception players must be clearly on the line of scrimmage, and all backs must be clearly in the backfield. Otherwise, Team A commits a foul for illegal formation.

(e) Any and all such players are exceptions to the numbering rule throughout the down and remain ineligible receivers unless they become eligible under Rule 7-3-5 (forward pass touched by an official or a Team B player).

The conditions in 5(a)–5(e) are no longer in effect if prior to the snap a period ends or there is a timeout charged to the referee or one of the teams.

Offensive Pass Interference – Rule 7-3-8-b Penalty

b. Offensive pass interference is contact by a Team A player beyond the neutral zone that interferes with a Team B player during a legal forward pass play in which the forward pass crosses the neutral zone. It is the responsibility of the offensive player to avoid the opponents. It is not offensive pass interference (A.R.7-3-8-IV, V, X, XV and XVI):

1. When, after the snap, a Team A ineligible player immediately charges and contacts an opponent at a point not more than one yard beyond the neutral zone and maintains the contact for no more than three yards beyond the neutral zone.(A.R.7-3-10-II)
2. When two or more eligible players are making a simultaneous and bona fide attempt to reach, catch or bat the pass. Eligible players of either team have equal rights to the ball (A.R.7-3-8-IX).
3. When the pass is in flight and two or more eligible players are in the area where they might receive or intercept the pass and an offensive player in that area impedes an opponent, and the pass is not catchable.

PENALTY—10 yards from the previous spot [S33].

Play Clock Following a Replay Review after the Two-Minute Timeout – Rule 3-2-4-c-12

c. *25-Second Clock.* If the officials signal the game clock to be stopped for any of the following reasons, the referee shall signal (one open palm in an over-the-head pumping motion) that the clock should be set at 25 seconds:

12. Instant replay review.(*Exception: After the Two-Minute Timeout in the 2nd or 4th quarters, when the Replay Official stops the game for review, the play clock will be frozen at that point and if the ruling is upheld, it will be restarted following the review when the ball is made ready for play by the Referee's signal.If the play clock displays less than 10 seconds when it is frozen, it will be reset to 10 seconds and started when the ball is made ready for play by the Referee's signal.*)

Modernize Unsportsmanlike Conduct – Rule 9-2-1-a

Unsportsmanlike Acts

ARTICLE 1. There shall be no unsportsmanlike conduct on the part of players, substitutes, coaches, authorized attendants or any other persons subject to the rules, before the game, during the game or

between periods. Infractions for these acts by players are administered as either live-ball or dead-ball fouls depending on when they occur. (A.R. 9-2-1-I-X)

a. Unsportsmanlike Conduct includes:

1. Actions that interfere with orderly game administration.

2. Taunting actions that are directed at an opponent.

3. Abusive, threatening, obscene, or celebratory actions that are demeaning to the game or an opponent.

4. In addition to the above list (1-3), actions that qualify as automatic unsportsmanlike conduct fouls are:

(a) Any form of gun violence including brandishing a weapon.

(b) A slashing of the throat or a nose wipe signal.

(c) A player removing their helmet after the ball is dead (with exceptions for timeouts and equipment adjustments).

(d) Dead-ball contact fouls such as pushing, shoving, striking, etc. that occur clearly after the ball is dead and that are not part of the game action.

(e) After the ball is dead, using forcible contact to push or pull an opponent off the pile.

PENALTY—Unsportsmanlike conduct. Live-ball fouls by players: 15 yards [S27]. Live-ball fouls by non-players and all dead-ball fouls: 15 yards from succeeding spot [S7 and S27]. Automatic first down for live-ball and dead-ball fouls by Team B if not in conflict with other rules. Flagrant offenders, if players or substitutes, shall be ejected [S47].

For Team A fouls during free or scrimmage kick plays: Enforcement may be at the previous spot as the basic spot or, if the scrimmage kick crosses the neutral zone, the spot where the subsequent dead ball belongs to Team B (field-goal plays exempted) (Rules 6-1-8 and 6-3-13).

For Team B unsportsmanlike conduct fouls during a legal forward pass play (Rules 7-3-12 and 10-2-2-e): Enforcement is at the end of the last run when it ends beyond the neutral zone and there is no change of team possession during the down. If the pass is incomplete or intercepted, or if there is a change of team possession during the down, the penalty is enforced at the previous spot.

Game Stop – Additional Coach Replay Challenge – Rule 12-5-1-b

b. The head coach of either team may request that the game be stopped and a play be reviewed by challenging the on-field ruling.

1. A head coach initiates this challenge by taking a team timeout before the ball is next legally put in play (*Exception*: Rule 12-3-6-e) and informing the referee that they are challenging the ruling of the previous play. The head coach has two replay challenges per game. If a coach wins either of their first two challenges, they are awarded a third challenge.

2. After a review has been completed, if the on-field ruling is overturned, that team's timeout will not be charged.

3. After a review has been completed, and the on-field ruling is not overturned, the charged team timeout counts as one of the three permitted that team for that half or the one permitted in that extra period.

4. A head coach may not challenge a ruling in which the game was stopped and a decision has already been made by the replay official. However, a head coach may challenge an aspect of the same play if that component of the play was not considered by the replay official as part of the initial review.
5. If a head coach requests a team timeout to challenge an on-field ruling and the play being challenged is not reviewable, the timeout shall count as one of the three permitted team timeouts during that half of the game or the one permitted in that extra period.
6. A head coach may not challenge an on-field ruling if the team timeouts are not available or have been exhausted for that half or in that extra period.

Fair Catch Kick - Rules 6-5-1-e, 2-16-11, 2-8-1-d, 3-3-2-f, 3-2-3-a-4 & 3-2-4-c-15

Fair Catch – Rule 6-5-1-e

e. The ball shall be put in play by a snap by the receiving team at the spot of the catch if the ball is caught (**Exceptions:** Rules 6-5-1-a, 6-5-1-b, 7-1-3 and 8-6-1-b). Optionally, the receiving team may elect to put the ball in play with a fair catch kick if they notify the Referee before the ball is ready for play (see Rule 2-16-11).

Fair Catch Kick – Rule 2-16-11

Fair Catch Kick

ARTICLE 11.

- a. To trigger the option for a Fair Catch Kick, a fair catch must be completed of an opponent's scrimmage kick or free kick.
- b. Following the fair catch (or awarded fair catch), optionally the ball may be put in play by a Fair Catch Kick by the receiving team at the spot of the catch or the succeeding spot after penalties.
 1. This selection for a fair catch kick must come from the head coach before the dead ball is ready for play and the decision is irrevocable. Following the ready for play, there is no option to select a Fair Catch Kick.
- c. If the catch is in a side zone, the ball is transferred into the nearest hash mark. There is no option for Team A to otherwise relocate the ball.
- d. The play clock is set to 25 seconds, and the game clock starts when the ball is legally kicked.
- e. If the fair catch occurs as time expires in a half, the team is allowed to make the Fair Catch Kick as an untimed down.
- f. The Fair Catch Kick line for the kicking team is the most forward point of the ball at the spot of the fair catch (or awarded fair catch), or the succeeding spot after penalties.
- g. The Fair Catch Kick line for the receiving team is the yard line 10 yards in advance of the kicking team's Fair Catch Kick line.
- h. The formation requirements for a fair catch kick will follow Free Kick rules (Rule 6-1-2-a, b and c).
- i. The kick must be a field goal place kick with a holder (no tee) or a drop kick, and if the kick passes over the crossbar and through the uprights, a field goal is scored and 3 points are awarded to the kicking team.

j. If the Fair Catch Kick is unsuccessful, all rules pertaining to scrimmage kicks (Rule 6-3) and the Next Play provisions of an unsuccessful field goal apply (Rule 8-4-2-b).

Awarded Fair Catch – Rule 2-8-1-d

d. An awarded fair catch occurs when the offended team chooses to take the ball after enforcement of kick-catching interference to a receiving team player that has given a valid signal for a fair catch.

Starting and Stopping the Clock – Rule 3-3-2-f

f. Fair Catch Kick. When the receiving team elects to put the ball in play with a fair catch kick, the game clock starts when the ball is legally kicked.

Extension of Periods – Rule 3-2-3-a-4

f. Fair Catch Kick. When the receiving team elects to put the ball in play with a fair catch kick, the game clock starts when the ball is legally kicked.

25-Second Clock – Rule 3-2-4-c-15

c. *25-Second Clock*. If the officials signal the game clock to be stopped for any of the following reasons, the referee shall signal (one open palm in an over-the-head pumping motion) that the clock should be set at 25 seconds:

15. To attempt a fair catch kick.

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