

Understanding the All but One Principle

Introduction

The play is over and there is a yellow penalty marker down on the field. It is now the entire crew's duty to verify that the referee explains the choices and results of those choices to the offended captain. This article seeks to clarify the "all-but-one" enforcement principle used by officiating crews in high school football games (governed by the NFHS) so that everyone involved can be assured that the officials enforce the penalty correctly..

This article assumes that only a single foul was flagged, the foul itself does not have a special enforcement, and the foul occurred while a down was in progress (i.e. the ball was live). Fortunately, penalty enforcement is pretty easy if you understand how to determine the location of two spots on the field during a play with a foul.

The Two Spots Used in Determining Penalty Enforcement

The Spot of the Foul

The first spot used to determine how to enforce any penalty is *the spot of the foul*. The spot of the foul is always where a foul occurred and is marked with a yellow penalty flag. There should never be any question where a foul occurred because it is marked.

The Basic Spot

The second spot, *the basic spot*, is slightly more complicated because this is determined by the action that occurred during the down. It will **typically** be **one** of three spots on the playing field. It can be 1) the previous spot, 2) the end of a run, or 3) where a scrimmage kick (punt or field goal) is possessed or becomes dead by rule (e.g. kick goes out-of-bounds). What happened and when it happened determines the basic spot for every play.

The Basic Spot - Explained

Foul simultaneous with the snap

If a foul occurs simultaneously with the snap, that is as a result of the ball being made live through a snap, the basic spot is always the previous spot. Some of the common fouls that fit this description are illegal shift, illegal motion, and illegal formation.

Foul during a loose ball play

If a foul occurs during a loose-ball play, the basic spot is always the previous spot. Understanding how a loose-ball play is defined is a must. A loose-ball play is any action that occurs during any of the following:

- any legal kick (after the ball has been kicked)
- a legal forward pass (while the pass is in flight). Note that ILLEGAL forward passes are not considered loose-ball plays.
- a backward pass from in or behind the neutral zone (this includes the snap)
- a fumble that occurs in or behind the neutral zone (Offensive team only).
- any run or runs that precede any of the actions above.

So, if a foul occurs during a loose-ball play (see above), the basic spot for penalty enforcement is always the previous spot. Do not confuse a play where the quarterback drops back to potentially throw a pass and is sacked with a loose-ball play. This is NOT a loose-ball play because the ball was never thrown. It is still considered a running play for penalty enforcement purposes. A play does not become a loose ball play until the ball is actually legally passed, fumbled from in or behind the neutral zone, or legally kicked.

A loose-ball play *ends* when a player from either team catches or recovers the ball or when the ball becomes dead by rule. Once a loose-ball comes into player possession and is beyond the neutral zone, the play is then treated as a running play from that point forward.

Fouls during a running play

A running play is simply any action that is not part of a loose-ball play. If a foul occurs during a running-play, the basic spot is always where the run ends. The end of the run is not always where a runner is downed. If a player fumbles the ball after crossing the neutral zone, the end of the run is where the player lost possession of the ball. If a player throws an illegal forward pass, the end of the run is where the player threw the illegal forward pass (regardless of whether or not he crosses the line of scrimmage).

Fouls During a Scrimmage Kick

In 2003, a new basic spot was added to the rulebook. The new enforcement is commonly referred to as Post-Scrimmage-Kick enforcement (PSK for short). The basic spot is the end of the kick if the all of the following conditions are met during a down with a scrimmage kick (punt or field goal attempt):

- The receiving team commits a foul after the ball has crossed the expanded neutral zone and before it is possessed or becomes dead by rule AND
- The receiving team fouls on their side of the expanded neutral zone AND
- The receiving team has possession of the ball at the end of the down.

The basic spot for PSK enforcement is the end of the kick and the receiving team retains possession of the ball. If all of the conditions for PSK are NOT met, a foul is enforced as a foul during a loose-ball play and the kicking team will have the right to replay the down or will be awarded a first down after the penalty is assessed.

The All-But-One Principle Applied.

All penalties are then enforced using the all-but-one principle. "All-but-one" means that all penalties are marked off from the basic spot (see above how to determine the basic spot). EXCEPT when the offense fouls behind the basic spot. Fouls by the offense behind the basic spot are marked off from the spot of the foul.

Summary

We hope this article helps you understand the all-but-one principle and how penalties are typically enforced. Remember that there are special enforcements for certain fouls and under certain conditions. For further details, please consider other articles on this site dealing with penalty enforcement.