**2023 CFOA Football Bulletin II**

**September 4, 2023**

To: Commissioners, Board Interpreters, Curriculum reps, CIAC and league reps, media.

From: Bill Riccio, Jr. State Interpreter

Re: Questions, reminders.

1. Questions
2. Rule 7-5-2 on p. 63 of the Rulebook (table on p. 64) is creating some confusion regarding the snap. We cannot conflate Exc. 1 with Exc. 2. They are different in purpose and intent.
3. Exc. 1 has to do with “spiking” the ball to stop the clock. The requirements are: 1) the player receiving the snap must be BEHIND the snapper (either hand-to-hand or shotgun); 2) the snap must not be muffed or hit the ground. In either case spiking the ball is an illegal pass. This rule intends to allow sacrificing a down to stop the clock.
4. Exc. 2 has three requirements: 1) the passer possesses the ball beyond the Free-Blocking Zone; 2) the pass reaches the neutral zone or neutral zone extended outside the boundary lines; 3) the passer is the only player to possess the ball after the snap ends.

**Note: There is no restriction as to the snap being muffed or hitting the ground.**

This rule intends to allow sacrificing the down to stop the clock or save the yardage.

1. Regarding Rule 7-5-2 and ineligibles downfield, each state has adopted its own interpretation, and ours is to pick up the flag on Exc. 2. This is under the ‘no harm, no foul” principle. Umpires (and the wings) should make sure where their ineligibles are at the time of the throw but wait until the play establishes itself. While ineligibles cannot be downfield at the time the ball is thrown, it is not a foul until the ball crosses the neutral zone.
2. TJ Calabrese from Central asked the question whether illegal touching of a forward pass is a previous spot enforcement or spot foul.

My answer was it depends on what you call it.

“Illegal touching” is no longer considered an "illegal pass." NFHS got rid of that a while ago. And so, the previous spot is the enforcement under the new rule with the concurrent loss of down. Caveat: If you consider it thrown into an area not occupied by an eligible, then may be called an illegal pass under the rule, or illegal touching. So, if it is just a touch by a lineman, who makes a mistake it is one thing. If it is a major error, it could be another.

Play 1: 3/7 B-40. A11 throws a pass in the direction of receiver A34, and the ball is muffed by him. A67, seeing the ball might be intercepted by B44, bats the ball down, making it incomplete. Ruling:  4/12 from B-45. Illegal touching, previous spot enforcement.

Play 2: 3/7 B-40. A11 gets rushed and under duress, does not get out of the FBZ extended, and throws the ball toward the line of scrimmage, trying to get rid of it, from the B-45, where A67, attempts to catch it and muffs it. Ruling: Illegal pass, spot of pass enforcement. 4/17 at 50.

We have an illegal pass under the grounding rule and illegal touching, but the illegal touch rule is enforced from the previous spot, while the intentional grounding rule is from the spot of the pass.

The ruling official would have to make the determination, and might opt for illegal touching in both instances, but if there is no receiver in the area, and the ball is just thrown away, he could opt for grounding.

1. Kick Receivers and KCI – We all know the term SHOK (Stuff Happens on Kicks). Receivers of kicks are to be given an uninhibited path to make a catch.
2. If the ball is short, it is up to the players of the kicking team to know where the ball is. Obstructing the path to the ball is a foul for kick-catch interference (KCI).
3. Buzzing a receiver in a way that inhibits making a catch is KCI.
4. While we do not have a solid definition, allowing the receiver room to extend his arms to make a catch is the standard. If an opponent is in that space and the receiver is unable to make the catch because of it, we have KCI.

**Note:** If the ball is caught, no harm no foul. Covering officials should wait until the play is determined before throwing a flag.

1. **Reminders**
2. **Inside two minutes –** Remember, if fouls are committed inside two minutes, and the only reason the clock is stopped is penalty enforcement, the offended team has the option of starting the clock on the snap.
3. **Pants covering knees –** This pre-season we have seen an increase in players wearing their pants legs above their knees. During the pre-game walk and while spot-checking equipment during warm-ups, coaches should be made aware of players who are violating the rule. Those players cannot participate until they comply. QBs and kickers are the biggest offenders.
4. **Three-Minute Warm-Up –** Remind ECOs if both teams are on the field, the three-minute warm-up can begin, even if there is time left in the halftime. Referees should signal the ECO by putting up three fingers and giving the wind signal. Remember also, the teams do not have to warm up during the three minutes, we must provide the time, however.
5. **Keeping the sideline clear –** Three coaches are allowed in the restricted area (formerly known as the coaches’ box) between plays to relay instructions; however, once the “snap is imminent” the coaches are to leave the area, giving the official a clear path.
6. Officials should be working in that area at the start of every play, preferably at the back line. If a sideline warning is warranted, it should be done by throwing the flag, and the R giving the sideline warning signal (Signal 15).
7. If contact is made with a coach as in Rule 9-4-8 penalty: 15 yards from the succeeding spot; a second offense results in disqualification of the head coach as well as the distance penalty.

If we have communication with the sidelines throughout and keep reminding the team to stay back – with the help of a “get back” coach, we should have no problem. If you call the sideline warning, do it early. Do not wait until a pivotal point of the game.

1. **Bands –** Bands may play while the team they represent has the ball. If the opponent has the ball a band should refrain from playing while play is continuing. Playing at timeouts or between downs is permissible. Leagues may have more stringent rules and officials should be made aware.
2. **Phones going down –**Officials should not get involved if phones go down on one sideline or the other. Leagues usually have rules concerning that. The most the officials should do is inform the opposing sideline that phones are out on the other side.
3. **Medical personnel requirement –** Officials should not get involved in this aspect of game management. Each league, and, in many cases, each town has written policies. Game management should alert the officials if medical personnel are not on site, and it is required to hold up the game. Officials should, otherwise, not get involved, presuming the league or town requirements are met. Do not put yourself in the middle.

Dress rehearsals are over, the curtain goes up Thursday, Friday, or Saturday. Slow whistles, slow flags. Have fun out there.

Bill Riccio