



# Columbia Football Officials Association

## Don't Believe Everything You Hear

Many coaches, players, and fans confuse NFL rules with college and high school football rules.

Falsehoods may also survive from rules that were changed long ago or the myth may have its origin from backyard football games.

- **Touching the face mask is a foul**- In order for a foul to occur, the face mask, helmet opening, or chin strap must be grasped, turned, twisted, or pulled. It is a five yard penalty for incidental grasping and a 15 yard penalty for twisting, turning, or pulling. A related mistaken belief is that a runner cannot commit a facemask foul. In that regard the rules regarding the runner are the same as for everyone else.
- **Contact is required for pass interference**- There can be noncontact interference, but only if it is face guarding. The defender's intent is not a factor. Intent to impeded or hinder the receiver is not interference in and of itself. If a player who is not playing the ball contacts an opponent, pass interference is the proper call, but lacking contact, simply not playing the ball is not a foul.
- **A bad snap removes the punter's protection**- Many believe the punter has no protection if the snap hits the ground or is dropped. In reality, a defensive player may not block, tackle, or charge into the kicker or holder of a scrimmage kick unless it is not reasonably certain a kick will be made and the contact is unavoidable. If the contact is slight and is partially caused by the movement of the kicker, it is also excused. Incidental contact is never a foul. Whether the snap is bad or is otherwise muffed does not determine if a foul will occur. The key is the ensuing action. If the defense is making a bona fide effort to get to a loose ball or to tackle a player who has just recovered the ball or who appears as if he is simply going to run the ball, but ends up contacting a player who has made a belated kick, the contact is not a foul. Again, the primary criteria is whether or not the contact is unavoidable. The penalty for roughing is 15 yards and an automatic first down. There is a lesser penalty: Running into the kicker results in a penalty of five yards and no automatic first down. Running into occurs when the kicker or holder is displaced but not roughed.
- **All crackback blocks are illegal**- That fallacy is primarily attributable to the fact the term is not defined in the NFHS Football Rules Book. Contrary to popular belief, a crackback block is not necessarily an illegal block, but simply a block by a player who blocks back toward the spot of the snap. It's important to recognize the crackback block can be a block from in front or behind, and either above or below the waist. If the crackback is in front and above the waist, it will always be a legal block. Remember, even if the player being blocked is in eligible receiver, there cannot be pass interference behind the neutral zone. Only offensive linemen in the free-blocking zone may clip in the zone and only above the knees. Crackbacks are usually initiated by a wide receiver or flankers who are outside the zone. Consequently any crackback that is clipping is illegal. Blocking below the waist may take place within the free blocking zone provided the blocker was on the line, stationary and in the zone at the snap and the player being blocked was also on the line and in the zone at the snap. In most cases, crackbacks below the waist are illegal blocks.

- **The defense can't be penalized for clipping**- Defensive players generally don't throw blocks, thus the opportunity for the defense to clip is limited. The rules regarding clipping are virtually the same regardless which side of the ball a player lines up on. However, it is legal to block a runner below the waist from behind.
- **It is illegal to throw a forward pass underhanded**- When such a pass hits the ground, some believe the ball remains live and is treated as a fumble. There is also a misconception that it's illegal to throw a forward pass in any manner other than side armed or overhanded. Many refer to that play as a "forward lateral."
- **The ball isn't dead until the whistle blows**- That myth is sometimes invoked as an excuse for a late hit. The only whistle that causes the ball to become dead is an inadvertent whistle. On other occasions, the whistle merely draws everyone's attention to a ball which is already dead. In fact the rules clearly provide that "No player shall pile on any player who is lying on the ground" or "charge into... an opponent after the ball is clearly dead either in or out of bounds." Those rules were adopted in the interest of player safety and are specifically intended to protect a downed player or one who is not expecting contact.
- **If Team touches a kickoff before the ball goes 10 yards, it's a foul**- Close, but not quite right. First touching is a violation, not a foul. The spot of the touching must be bean bagged because the receiving team may have the option to take the ball at that spot. Team R may take the ball at the spot of first touching unless Team R touches the ball and thereafter during the down commits a foul, or if the penalty is accepted for any foul committed during the down. If team R retains the right to take the ball at the spot of such touching, the only other alternative is to accept the results of the play. Team R does not have the option to have Team K re-kick after a five yard penalty.
- **Roughing the Passer only applies to the Quarterback**- The halfback option play is not frequently run, but when it is, the halfback is often tackled after he throws the ball. After all, for the play to succeed, the defense must believe a run is in progress. A passer is a player who throws a legal forward pass. The player's designated position at the snap has no bearing on the protection he receives. If a halfback throws a pass, he continues to be a passer until the pass ends or until he moves to participate in the play. Defensive players must make a definite effort to avoid charging into him.
- **The penalty for an ineligible receiver downfield includes a loss of down**- That rule was in effect from 1985-1987 and has existed at various times in both NCAA and NFL rules, but is currently not in any of those codes. Ineligible Team A players may not go beyond the expanded neutral zone until a forward pass that crosses the neutral zone is thrown. The penalty is five yards and is enforced under the all-but-one principle.