

To: All Athletic Directors, Football Coaches and Football Officials

From: Dusty Young, Associate Director
Dana Pappas, Commissioner of Officials

Subject: Football Points of Emphasis and Clarification for the
2013 Season from the NMAA Football Rules Interpreters

Date: September 23, 2013



Several years ago, the NMAA has developed a statewide rules interpreters program for all sports. The purpose of the rules interpreters program is to assist our officials in the consistent application of rules throughout the state and to ensure that coaches and officials are on the same page relative to football rules. In addition, the five individuals serving as rules interpreters will be the go-to contacts for rules interpretations for our coaches and officials. Their contact information is supplied at the end of this memo.

The points of emphasis for the 2013 football season are listed below. We have separated the document into NMAA Specific Rules and Policies and NFHS Rules and Points of Emphasis:

NMAA SPECIFIC RULE AND POLICY REMINDERS

During the first several weeks of the season, our office has received questions from coaches and officials that we feel are prudent to share statewide distribution. Those items are as follows:

- 1) **Bands Playing During Football Games** – School Administrators and coaches that have active bands should work with and instruct the band directors to be careful when the band is playing that they do not play so loudly that the opposing teams cannot hear their signals. While bands certainly improve the atmosphere of the game they should not be disruptive to the opposing team.

Following is an example with a ruling that is supported by the NFHS Rule 9-9 (page 74) for each of you to discuss with your band directors and possible band members prior to your upcoming games. This message in no way is intended to take away from your bands playing and representing your schools during your games however it is intended to improve sportsmanship where applicable.

Play: As team A's quarterback is trying to call signals, team B's band is playing so loudly that team A players cannot hear their quarterback, who turns to the referee and asks for help. Does the referee have jurisdiction over the band?

Ruling: Under the NFHS rules this falls under the category of unfair acts. The referee has the discretion to initially issue a warning or penalize team B. The penalty may range from a delay of game (5 yards) to an unsportsmanlike foul (15 yards) or to forfeiture of the game.

Penalty: Unfair Act - the referee enforces any penalty he considers equitable including the award of a score or forfeiture of the game.

- 2) **Player Celebrations** – We have received a couple of calls regarding player celebrations after a score. In particular, the questions have revolved around players “chest bumping” after they score a touchdown. It is the opinion of the office that if two players spontaneously bump chests after a touchdown is scored and then head to the sidelines (or line up for the PAT), no penalty should be assessed so long as the celebration is not choreographed, excessive or done in a taunting fashion toward opponents. A spontaneous chest bump is no more celebratory than a “high five” between players and does not fall under “excessive celebration.” However, if the celebration is excessive, prolonged or an attempt to focus attention upon himself, the player will be penalized 15 yards for unsportsmanlike conduct.

The following items are policies, procedures and rules previously sent out to member schools and officials but worth the reminder in the infancy of the 2013 season:

LIGHTNING POLICY:

The following procedures will be put in place for handling contests lightning disturbances from the 2013 NFHS Football Rulebook (page 98, Appendix E):

The purpose of these guidelines is to provide a default policy to those responsible for making decisions concerning the suspension and restarting of contests based on the presence of lightning. The preferred sources from which to request such a policy for your facility would include your state high school association and the nearest office of the National Weather Service.

Proactive Planning

1. Assign staff to monitor local weather conditions before and during events.
2. Develop an evacuation plan, including identification of appropriate nearby shelters.
3. Develop criteria for suspension and resumption of play:
 - a. When thunder is heard, or a cloud-to-ground lightning bolt is seen, the thunderstorm is close enough to strike your location with lightning. Suspend play and take shelter immediately.
 - b. Thirty-minute rule. Once play has been suspended, wait at least 30 minutes after the last thunder is heard or flash of lightning is witnessed prior to resuming play.
 - c. Any subsequent thunder or lightning after the beginning of the 30-minute count, reset the clock and another 30-minute count should begin.
4. Hold periodic review for appropriate personnel.

NOTE: These lightning delay procedures are for all contests, varsity, sub-varsity and mid school.

GAME INTERRUPTION POLICY (NMAA Handbook, Section 7.10.2)

In the event that a game must be interrupted because of conditions which make it impossible to continue play (i.e. lightning, darkness, power outage etc..) the head official/referee shall declare it an official game if one complete half, or more, of the game has been played; based upon the NFHS definition of a regulation game.

If less than one half of the game has been played, and it is a district game/post season game, the game must be rescheduled from the point of interruption/suspension of play.

If less than one half of the game has been played, and it is a non-district game, the participating schools must mutually agree to reschedule the game from the point of interruption/suspension of play or the game will be considered a non-game.

Note: If one complete half or more of the game has been played in a post-season game, it will be left up to the discretion of the tournament director and or the NMAA Executive Director to determine if the game is played to its entirety.

MERCY RULE

The mercy rule in New Mexico, which appears in NMAA Handbook Section 7.15.1I, applies to ALL classifications (6-man through 5A) and all levels of competition (varsity, sub-varsity and middle school). It is as follows:

- 1) When a team is ahead at half-time by 35 or more points or becomes 35 or more points ahead in the second half, the clock will not stop during out of bounds, incomplete passes, first downs or change of possessions. The clock only stops for **time-outs (officials or team), scores**. If the point differential becomes less than 35 points, regular timing resumes.
- 2) When a team is ahead at half-time by 50 or more points or becomes 50 or more point ahead in the second half, the game is ended.

NOTE: Timing in a game may be adjusted, by mutual consent of both head coaches and the referee. Pursuant to NFHS Football Rule 3-1-3, a period or periods may be shortened in any emergency by agreement of the opposing coaches and the referee. By mutual agreement of the opposing coaches and the referee, any remaining period may be shortened at any time or the game terminated.

POINTS AFTER TOUCHDOWN(S) AT THE END OF A GAME:

If a team scores a touchdown that puts it up 50 or more points in the second half, the PAT attempt is not needed.

TIE-BREAKER PROCEDURES AT THE END OF THE GAME

The tie-breaking procedures in the National Federation rulebook are used in all games at all levels (varsity, sub-varsity and middle school) between New Mexico schools, as well as out-of-state guests, with the results determining the winner. See NMAA Handbook 7.15.1H.

3-MINUTE WARM-UP CLOCK CLARIFICATION

The 3-minute warm-up starts immediately when half-time ends. Teams must be on the field at 0:00. The opportunity for the 3-minute warm-up begins then. Coaches will meet with officials at the beginning of the 3-minute warm-up.

PRE-GAME TIME MANAGEMENT

School home site administration is asked to assist in managing time prior to kickoff. Introductions, singing or playing of the National Anthem and any other ceremonies need to take place prior to kickoff. If a game is scheduled to start at 7:00 p.m., all pre-game festivities should already be completed by kickoff.

NFHS POINTS OF EMPHASIS AND RULES REMINDERS

2013 NFHS FOOTBALL POINTS OF EMPHASIS (See NFHS Football Rulebook, pages 82-87 for detailed information about the points of emphasis):

- 1) Prohibition on Contact to and with the Helmet
- 2) Reconditioning and Recertification of Football Equipment
- 3) Free Blocking Zone Enforcement – Consistent Enforcement of Blocking Below the Waist

2013 NFHS FOOTBALL MAJOR RULES CHANGES: Below are the major rules changes for the 2013 football season that the committee felt needed to be addressed in this document. Please refer to the NFHS rulebook for complete information:

- 1) **Solid colored towels now legal** (*NFHS Rulebook 1-5-3a(5)a*) - The committee modified the rule regarding the authorized wearing of a moisture-absorbing towel. Towels that are one solid color may now be worn, as long as they are not the color of the football or penalty flag. The towel cannot have no more than one visible manufacturer's logo/trademark, which cannot exceed 2 ¼ square inches in any dimension. Towels worn by teammates must be the same color. Previously, the towel could only be white and unmarked.
- 2) **Use of communication devices expanded** (*NFHS Rulebook 1-6*) - The committee has expanded use of communication devices to allow, coaches, players and nonplayers to use any form of available communication technology during authorized conferences outside the 9-yard marks (7-yard marks in nine-, eight- and six-player competition), on the sidelines and during the halftime intermission period. Use of communication devices by players except during conferences outside the 9-yard marks continues to be prohibited
- 3) **Definition of catch clarified** (*NFHS Rulebook 2-4-1*) - The committee clarified the definition of a catch. An airborne player who has forward progress stopped inbounds and is carried out of bounds by an opponent before contacting the ground is awarded a catch at the spot of forward progress.
- 4) **Loss of helmet after the down clarified** (*NFHS Rulebook 3-5-10d*) - The committee clarified that if the helmet comes completely off during subsequent dead-ball action related to the down, and is not directly attributable to a foul by the opponent, the player must leave the game for at least one down (unless half-time or overtime intermission occurs). An official's time-out shall be called.
- 5) **Kick catching interference penalty added** (*NFHS Rulebook 6-5-6 PENALTY*) - The committee added a 15-yard penalty to the existing option of accepting an awarded fair catch for kick-catch interference. The option to try a scoring free kick after an awarded fair catch remains.
- 6) **Pass interference penalties revised** (*NFHS Rulebook 7-5-10 PENALTY*) - This rule change removes the automatic first down for defensive pass interference and the loss of down for offensive pass interference. The 15-yard penalty provision remains for both fouls.
- 7) **Score on a try clarified** (*NFHS Rulebook 8-3-3*) - The committee clarified that the touchdown scoring team is the only team that can score on a try.
- 8) **Blocking on free kicks revised** (*NFHS Rulebook 9-3-8c NEW*) - A new provision added to the existing rule stipulates the kicking team may initiate contact once the receiving team has initiated a block within the neutral zone.
- 9) **Initiating contact with a helmetless opponent is now an illegal personal contact foul** (*NFHS Rulebook 9-4-3l NEW*) - In the interest of minimizing risk, the committee added a new illegal personal contact foul. This foul is charged to any player who initiates contact with an opposing player whose helmet has come completely off.
- 10) **Players continuing without a helmet is now illegal participation** (*NFHS Rulebook 9-6-4g NEW*) - Continuing with focus on risk minimization, the committee determined that a helmet-less player shall not block, tackle or otherwise participate beyond the immediate action in which the player is engaged when the helmet came completely off. The penalty would be a live-ball, basic-spot foul.

2013 FOOTBALL RULES INTERPRETERS

The football rules interpreters for the 2013 season are:

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If you have rules questions, you are asked to call or email the individual in your region of the state for clarification and interpretation. Thank you for your attention to this information. If you have questions or if you need additional information on the rules interpreters program, please feel free to contact us. Have a great season!