



**Approved 2020
Playing Rules
and Bylaws**

Approved 2020 Playing Rules Summary

2. By Philadelphia; to amend Rule 15, Section 2, to make permanent the expansion of automatic replay reviews to include scoring plays and turnovers negated by a foul, and any successful or unsuccessful Try attempt.
8. By Competition Committee; expands defenseless player protection to a kickoff or punt returner who is in possession of the ball but who has not had time to avoid or ward off the impending contact of an opponent.
9. By Competition Committee; prevents teams from manipulating the game clock by committing multiple dead-ball fouls while the clock is running.

2020 PLAYING RULE PROPOSAL NO. 2

Amend Rule 15, Section 2 (Instant Replay, pg. 62) (new language underlined):

ARTICLE 2. REPLAY OFFICIAL REQUEST FOR REVIEW. Only the Replay Official or the Senior Vice President of Officiating or his or her designee may initiate a review of a play:

- (a) that begins after the two-minute warning of each half;
- (b) throughout any overtime period;
- (c) when points are scored by either team;
- (d) that is a successful or unsuccessful Try attempt; and
- (e) when on-field officials rule:
 - (1) an interception by an opponent;
 - (2) a fumble or backward pass recovered by an opponent or that goes out of bounds through the opponent's end zone;
 - (3) a scrimmage kick touched by the receiving team and recovered by the kicking team; or
 - (4) a disqualification of a player.

Such plays may be reviewed regardless of whether a foul is committed on the play that, if accepted, would negate the on-field ruling.

The Replay Official may only challenge a play until the next legal snap or kick. The Replay Official may consult with a designated member of the Officiating department at the league office regarding whether to challenge a play.

Submitted by Philadelphia

Effect: Makes permanent the 2019 additions to the list of plays subject to automatic review.

Reason: Competitive equity.

2020 PLAYING RULE PROPOSAL NO. 8

Amend Rule 12, Section 2, Article 9 (Players in a Defenseless Posture, pg. 48) (new language underlined, deleted language struck through):

ARTICLE 9. PLAYERS IN A DEFENSELESS POSTURE. It is a foul if a player initiates unnecessary contact against a player who is in a defenseless posture.

(a) Players in a defenseless posture are:

- (5) A runner already in the grasp of a tackler and whose forward progress has been stopped.
- (6) A kickoff or punt returner attempting to field a kick in the air who has not had time to clearly become a runner. If the player is capable of avoiding or warding off the impending contact of an opponent, he is no longer a defenseless player.
- (7) A player on the ground.

(b) Prohibited contact against a player who is in a defenseless posture is:

- (1) forcibly hitting the defenseless player's head or neck area with the helmet, facemask, forearm, or shoulder, even if the initial contact is lower than the player's neck, and regardless of whether the defensive player also uses his arms to tackle the defenseless player by encircling or grasping him;
- (2) lowering the head and making forcible contact with any part of the helmet against any part of the defenseless player's body; or
- (3) illegally launching into a defenseless opponent. It is an illegal launch if a player (i) leaves both feet prior to contact to spring forward and upward into his opponent, and (ii) uses any part of his helmet to initiate forcible contact against any part of his opponent's body. (This does not apply to contact against a runner, unless the runner is still considered to be a defenseless player, as defined in Article 9.)

Notes:

- (1) *The provisions of (b) do not prohibit incidental contact by the mask or helmet in the course of a conventional tackle or block on an opponent.*
- (2) *A player who initiates contact against a defenseless opponent is responsible for avoiding an illegal act. This includes illegal contact that may occur during the process of attempting to dislodge the ball from an opponent. A standard of strict liability applies for any contact against a defenseless opponent, even if the opponent is an airborne player who is returning to the ground or whose body position is otherwise in motion, and irrespective of any acts by the defenseless opponent, such as ducking his head or curling up his body in anticipation of contact.*

Penalty: For unnecessary roughness: Loss of 15 yards and an automatic first down. The player may be disqualified if the action is judged by the official(s) to be flagrant.

Submitted by Competition Committee

Effect: Expands defenseless player protection to a kickoff or punt returner who is in possession of the ball but who has not had time to avoid or ward off the impending contact of an opponent.

Reason: Player safety.

2020 PLAYING RULE PROPOSAL NO. 9

Amend 4, Section 3, Article 2 (pg. 13) (new language underlined, deleted language struck through):

ARTICLE 2. SCRIMMAGE DOWN. Following any timeout (3-37-1), the game clock shall be started on a scrimmage down when the ball is next snapped, except in the following situations:

* * * * *

(e) If the game clock is stopped after a down in which there was a foul by either team, following enforcement or declination of a penalty, the game clock will start as if the foul had not occurred, except that the clock will start on the snap if:

- (1) the foul occurs after the two-minute warning of the first half;
- (2) the foul occurs inside the last five minutes of the second half; ~~or~~
- (3) the offense commits a dead-ball foul during the fourth quarter or overtime that is accepted;
or
- (4) a specific rule prescribes otherwise.

Submitted by Competition Committee

Effect: Prevents teams from manipulating the game clock by committing multiple dead-ball fouls while the clock is running.

Reason: Conserve game time.

Approved 2020 Bylaws Summary

2. By League Office; increases the number of players that may be designated for return from two to three. Incorporates interpretations applicable to bye weeks during the regular season and postseason.

2020 BYLAW PROPOSAL NO. 2

Amend Article XVII, Section 17.16 (C) of the Constitution and Bylaws to read (new language underlined, deleted language struck through):

Reserve/Injured

17.16 The following rules govern Reserve/Injured:

- (C) **Designated Free Activation from Reserve Injured and Reserve Non-Football Injury/Illness.** During each season a team will be permitted to return ~~two~~ three players from either the Reserve/Injured or the Reserve/Non-Football Injury/Illness List to its 53-player Active/Inactive List. Such players must have suffered a major football-related injury or non-football-related injury or illness (defined as an injury that renders the player physically unable to practice or play football for a period of at least six weeks [42 calendar days] from the date that the injury or illness occurred) after reporting to training camp and must have been placed on the applicable Reserve List after 4:00 p.m., New York time, on the day after the final roster reduction. A player who is eligible to return must be noted as “Designated for Return” on the first day that he returns to practice.

A player is ineligible to practice until six weeks have elapsed since the date he was placed on Reserve, and is not eligible to return to the Active/Inactive List until eight weeks games have elapsed since the date he was placed on Reserve. (A regular season bye week does not count as a game. Conversely, a postseason bye week counts as a game.) The business day (prior to 4:00 p.m., New York time) that a player is placed on Reserve counts as the first day.

At any time after the conclusion of the sixth week that a player has been on Reserve/Injured or Reserve/Non-Football Injury/Illness, a club is permitted to return him to practice for a period not to exceed 21 calendar days, provided that the club has notified the Player Personnel department of the League office that the player has been Designated for Return, which information shall be promulgated to clubs on that day’s Personnel Notice. Provided that the player has been on Reserve/Injured or Reserve/Non-Football Injury/Illness for at least eight games from the date he was placed on Reserve, a club is permitted to return him to its Active/Inactive List at any time during the 21-day practice period, or prior to 4:00 p.m., New York

time, on the day after the conclusion of the 21-day period. After a club has designated ~~two~~ three players for return from its applicable Reserve List, no other players on Reserve/Injured or Reserve/Non-Football Injury/Illness shall be permitted to practice or to return to the club's 53-player Active/Inactive List.

If a player is not returned to the Active/Inactive List prior to 4:00 p.m., New York time, on the day after the conclusion of the 21-day period, he is not eligible to return to that club's Active/Inactive List for the remainder of the season and postseason. If the club elects to continue to carry the player on Reserve/Injured or Reserve Non-Football Injury/Illness, whichever is applicable, the player shall not be permitted to practice or to participate in team or individual drills (contact or non-contact) during the remainder of the season, including postseason. Such players are limited to non-contact rehabilitative work under the supervision of the club's trainer or physician. Pads and helmets are prohibited during such rehabilitative activities. Such players are permitted to attend team meetings, and may also attend, but not participate in, practice sessions.

Submitted by League Office

Effect: Increases the number of players that may be designated for return from two to three. Incorporates interpretations applicable to bye weeks during the regular season and postseason.

Reason: Greater roster flexibility.