

“Targeting” Defined in High School Football in Effort to Reduce Risk of Injury

In an effort to reduce contact above the shoulders and lessen the risk of injury in high school football, the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) Football Rules Committee developed a definition for “targeting,” which will be penalized as illegal personal contact.

The definition of targeting and its related penalty were two of 10 rules changes approved by the rules committee at its January 24-26 meeting in Indianapolis. All rules changes were subsequently approved by the NFHS Board of Directors.

Effective with the 2014 high school season, new Rule 2-43 will read as follows: “Targeting is an act of taking aim and initiating contact to an opponent above the shoulders with the helmet, forearm, hand, fist, elbow or shoulders.”

Bob Colgate, NFHS director of sports and sports medicine and liaison to the Football Rules Committee, said the committee determined – in its continued effort to minimize risk of injury in high school football – that it was important to separate and draw specific attention to this illegal act.

“Taking aim with the helmet, forearm, hand, fist, elbow or shoulders to initiate contact above the shoulders, which goes beyond making a legal tackle, a legal block or playing the ball, will be prohibited,” Colgate said.

A new definition for a “defenseless player” was also added to Rule 2 for risk-minimization purposes. Rule 2-32-16 will read as follows: “A defenseless player is a player who, because of his physical position and focus of concentration, is especially vulnerable to injury.”

In an effort to reduce the risk of injury on kickoffs, the rules committee approved two new requirements in Rule 6-1-3 for the kicking team. First, at least four members of the kicking team must be on each side of the kicker, and, second, other than the kicker, no members of the kicking team may be more than five yards behind the kicking team’s free-kick line.

Rule 6-1-3 also notes that if one player is more than five yards behind the restraining line and any other player kicks the ball, it is a foul. In addition to balancing the kicking team’s formation, the change limits the maximum distance of the run-up for the kicking team.

“The Football Rules Committee’s actions this year reinforce a continued emphasis on minimizing risk within all phases of the game,” said Brad Garrett, assistant executive director of the Oregon School Activities Association and chair of the Football Rules Committee.

In other changes, new language was added to Rule 8-5-1 and states that “the accidental touching of a loose ball by a player who was blocked into the ball is ignored and does not constitute a new force.” In addition, roughing the passer fouls now include all illegal personal contact fouls listed in Rule 9-4-3, which result in automatic first down in addition to a 15-yard penalty.

The remaining changes approved by the Football Rules Committee are as follows:

Rule 1-1-7: Provides state associations authority to require game officials to be on the field more than 30 minutes prior to game time.

Rule 2-24-9: The intent of an illegal kick was clarified. Now, when an illegal kick occurs, the loose ball retains the same status that it had prior to the illegal kick.

Rules 3-3-3 and 3-3-4: With this change, in order to extend or not extend a period with an untimed down, time must expire during the down.

Football is the No. 1 participatory sport for boys at the high school level with 1,115,208 participants in the 2012-13 school year, according to the High School Athletics Participation Survey conducted by the NFHS through its member state associations. In addition, the survey indicated there were 1,660 girls who played football in 2012-13.