**2024 NFHS Rule Book – Rule 6 – Kicking the Ball and Fair Catch**

**SECTION 1 THE KICKOFF AND OTHER FREE KICKS**

ART. 1 ... For any free kick, a free-kick line, corresponding to a scrimmage line, is established for each team. These lines are always 10 yards apart. Unless moved by a penalty, K's free-kick line is:

a. Its 40-yard line for a kickoff.

b. Its 20-yard line after a safety.

c. The yard line through the spot of the catch after a fair catch.

d. The yard line through the spot of an awarded fair catch.

ART. 2 ... A free kick shall be made from any point between the hash marks and on K's free-kick line. A punt may not be used for a free kick other than after a safety. Once designated, K must kick from that spot. When a punt is used following a safety, the ball must be kicked within one step behind K's free-kick line.

In an emergency, such as a pool of water on K's free-kick line, the referee has authority to move the ball to a playable line, in which case, both free-kick lines are moved to compensate.

ART. 3 ... After the ball is marked ready for play, and until the ball is kicked,

the following formation requirements must be met:

a. No player, other than the kicker and the holder for a place kick, may be beyond his free-kick line; and

b. No K players, other than the kicker, may be more than 5 yards behind the kicking team's free-kick line. A player satisfies this rule when no foot is on or beyond the line 5 yards behind K's free-kick line. If one K player is more than 5 yards behind this restraining line and any other player kicks the ball, it is a foul.

ART. 4 ... At the time the ball is kicked, at least four K players must be on each side of the kicker. (Dead ball foul)

ART. 5 ... Any receiver may catch or recover a free kick in the field of play and advance, unless any R player has given a valid or invalid fair-catch signal. R may catch or recover a free kick in K's end zone.

ART. 6 ... If any K player recovers or catches a free kick, the ball becomes dead. It belongs to him unless it is kick-catching interference and R chooses an awarded fair catch or unless it is first touching. Any K player may recover the ball before it goes beyond R's free-kick line if it is touched first by any receiver. Such touching in the neutral zone by R is ignored if it is caused by K pushing or blocking R into contact with the ball or if K muffs the ball into contact with R. Any K player may recover a free kick if it has both touched the ground and goes beyond the plane of R's free-kick line. The two requirements may occur in any order. If a free kick becomes dead inbounds between the goal lines while no player is in possession, or inbounds anywhere while opponents are in joint possession, the ball is awarded to R.

ART. 7 ... If any K player touches a free kick before it crosses R's free-kick line and before it is touched there by any R player, it is referred to as "first touching of the kick." R may take the ball at the spot of first touching, or any spot if there is more than one spot of first touching, or they may choose to have the ball put in play as determined by the action which follows first touching. Such touching is ignored if it is caused by R pushing or blocking K into contact with the ball. The right of R to take the ball at the spot of first touching by K is canceled if R touches the kick and thereafter during the down commits a foul or if the penalty is accepted for any foul committed during the down.

ART. 8 ... A free kick is not repeated unless:

a. A foul occurs prior to a change of possession and the penalty acceptance requires a replay of the down.

b. There is a double foul.

c. There is an inadvertent whistle during the kick.

ART. 9 ... A free kick shall not be kicked out of bounds between the goal lines untouched inbounds by R. If it is kicked out of bounds and R does not accept a penalty for kick-catch interference on the same kick as in 6-5-4, R has the following choices:

a. Accept a 5-yard penalty from the previous spot and have K rekick;

b. Accept a 5-yard penalty from the succeeding spot;

c. Put the ball in play at the inbounds spot 25 yards beyond the previous spot; or

d. Decline the penalty and put the ball in play at the inbounds spot.

ART. 10 ... If a free kick goes out of bounds between the goal lines touched inbounds by R, the ball is put in play by R at the inbounds spot.

ART. 11 ... A pop-up kick is illegal. (Dead Ball Foul)

**PENALTY:** Arts. 2, 11 - Free-kick infraction - (S7-19) - 5 yards; Art. 3a - encroachment- (S7-18) - 5 yards; Arts. 3b, 4 - free kick infraction - (S7-19) - 5 yards; Art. 9 - free kick out of bounds - (S19) - 5 yards and re-kick, 5 yards from the succeeding spot, or put it in play at the inbounds spot 25 yards beyond the previous spot if previous spot on midfield side of R25.

**SECTION 2 SCRIMMAGE KICKS**

ART. 1 ... K may punt, drop kick, or place kick from in or behind the neutral zone before team possession has changed. It is not necessary to be in a scrimmage kick formation to execute a legal scrimmage kick. K may not punt, drop kick, or place kick from beyond the neutral zone. R may not punt, drop kick, or place kick.

ART. 2 ... Any receiver may catch or recover a scrimmage kick in the field of play and advance, unless it is during a try, or unless any R player has given a valid or invalid fair-catch signal. R may catch or recover a scrimmage kick in K's end zone.

ART. 3 ... Any K player may catch or recover a scrimmage kick while it is in or behind the neutral zone and advance, unless it is during a try.

ART. 4 ... Any K player may catch or recover a scrimmage kick while it is beyond the neutral zone or the expanded neutral zone, provided such kick has been touched by a receiver who was clearly beyond the neutral zone at the time of touching. Such touching is ignored if it is caused by K pushing or blocking R into contact with the ball or it is caused by K legally batting or muffing the ball into R. Such catch or recovery by K beyond the neutral zone causes the ball to become dead. (6-5-6 EXCEPTION)

ART. 5 ... When any K player touches a scrimmage kick beyond the expanded neutral zone to R's goal line before it is touched beyond the neutral zone by R and before the ball has come to rest, it is referred to as "first touching of the kick" and the place is the "spot of first touching." Such touching is ignored if it is caused by R pushing or blocking K into contact with the ball.

If any K player touches a scrimmage kick in this manner, R may take the ball at the spot of first touching, or any spot if there is more than one spot of first touching, or they may choose to have the ball put in play as determined by the action which follows first touching. The right of R to take the ball at spot of first touching by K is canceled if R touches the kick and thereafter during the down commits a foul or if the penalty is accepted for any foul committed during the down.

ART. 6 ... The touching of a low scrimmage kick by any player is ignored if the touching is in or behind the expanded neutral zone. If a scrimmage kick occurs, the neutral zone shall not be expanded into the end zone.

ART. 7 ... When any scrimmage kick is out of bounds between the goal lines or becomes dead inbounds between the goal lines while no player is in possession, or inbounds anywhere while opponents are in joint possession, the ball is awarded to R. Following an out-of-bounds kick, the ball is put in play at the inbounds spot unless R chooses a spot of first touching.

**PENALTY:** Art. 1 - Illegal kick - (S31) -10 yards.

**SECTION 3 TOUCHBACK**

ART. 1 ... It is a touchback if any free kick or scrimmage kick:

a. Which is not a scoring attempt, or which is a grounded three-point field-goal attempt, breaks the plane of R's goal line, unless R chooses a spot of first touching by K.

b. Which is a three-point field-goal attempt, in flight touches a K player in R's end zone, or after breaking the plane of R's goal line is unsuccessful.

ART. 2 ... If any free kick or scrimmage kick becomes dead in the kicker's end zone while no player has possession, it is a safety or touchback, as in 8-5-2 and 3.

**SECTION 4 SUMMARY OF SCRIMMAGE KICK AND FREE-KICK ACTIVITIES**

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| **Table 6-4** | |
| **RESULT OF ACTIVITIES DURING SCRIMMAGE KICKS AND FREE KICKS** | |
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| **Scrimmage Kick** | **Free Kick** |
| 1. Kick recovered beyond the neutral zone may be advanced only by R. | 1. A kickoff, including the kick following a safety, cannot score a field goal. |
| 2. Kick recovered in or behind the neutral zone may be advanced by either team. | 2. Kick following a fair catch or awarded fair catch may score a field goal. |
| 3. Kick not recovered by either team belongs to R. | 3. Kick may not be advanced by K. |
| 4. Kick jointly recovered by R and K be- longs to R. | 4. Kick not recovered by either team be- longs to R. |
|  | 5. Kick jointly recovered by R and K belongs to R. |
| **NOTE:** K is in team possession during a kick. A kick ends when a player gains possession or when the ball becomes dead by rule. R gains possession of the ball when a player of R catches or recovers the live ball. | |
| **IF THE KICK BECOMES DEAD IN R'S END ZONE** | |
| Touchback in all cases unless a field goal is scored. | |
| **IF THE KICK BECOMES DEAD IN K'S END ZONE** | |
| **If the force is:** | **Then the ruling is:** |
| **1.** The kick or any other new force by K. | **1.** Safety, if the kick is out of bounds or K has possession, including when the ball is loose, or Touchdown if R is in possession. |
| **2.** A new force by R. | **2.** Touchback, if the kick is out of bounds, or K has possession, including when the ball is loose, or Touchdown if R is in possession. |

**SECTION 5 FAIR CATCH**

ART. 1 ... Any receiver may signal for a fair catch while any legal kick is in flight. Any receiver who has given a valid or invalid fair-catch signal is prohibited from blocking until the kick has ended.

ART. 2 ... It is a fair catch, and the ball is dead if any receiver gives a valid fair­catch signal, as in Article 1, and he catches a free kick in or beyond the neutral zone to R's goal line, or a scrimmage kick beyond the neutral zone to R's goal line.

ART. 3 ... Only the receiver who gives a valid signal is afforded protection. If, after a receiver signals, the catch is made by a teammate, it is not a fair catch, but the ball becomes dead.

ART. 4 . .. The captain may choose to free kick or snap anywhere between the hash marks:

a. on the yard line through the spot of the catch when a fair catch is made;

b. through the spot of interference, when a fair catch is awarded; or

c. at the succeeding spot when the distance penalty for kick-catch interference is accepted following an awarded fair catch and the down is not replayed.

These choices remain if a dead-ball foul occurs prior to the next down, or a foul or an inadvertent whistle occurs during the next down and the down is replayed.

ART. 5 . .. No receiver may advance the ball after a valid or invalid fair-catch signal has been given by any R player.

ART. 6 ... While any free kick is in flight in or beyond the neutral zone to the receiver's goal line or any scrimmage kick is in flight beyond the neutral zone to the receiver's goal line, K shall not:

a. Touch the ball or R, unless blocked into the ball or R, or to ward off a blocker; or

b. Obstruct R's path to the ball.

This prohibition applies even when no fair-catch signal is given, but it does not apply after a free kick has been touched by a receiver, or after a scrimmage kick has been touched by a receiver who was clearly beyond the neutral zone at the time of touching.

**EXCEPTION**: K may catch, touch, muff or bat a scrimmage kick in flight beyond the neutral zone if no player of R is in position to catch the ball.

ART. 7 ... A receiver shall not give an invalid fair-catch signal.

ART. 8 ... The runner shall not give an illegal fair-catch signal.

**PENALTY**: Art. 1 - Blocking after giving a valid or invalid signal - (S43) - 15 yards; Art. 5 - delay of game - (S7-21) - 5 yards; Art. 6 - kick-catching interference - (S33) - R may accept the results of the play, an awarded fair catch atter enforcement of a 15-yard penalty from the spot of the foul, or a 15-yard penalty from the previous spot and a replay of the down; Art. 7 - Invalid fair catch signal (S32) - 5 yards; Art. 8 - Illegal fair catch signal (S32) - 5 yards.