**2024 NFHS Rule Book**

**2024 NFHS Rule Book – Rule 5 – Series of Downs, Number of Down And Team Possessions After Penalty**

**SECTION 1 SERIES OF DOWNS**

ART. 1 ... The team which next puts the ball in play by scrimmage follow ing a free kick, touchback or fair catch is awarded a series of four consecutively numbered downs in which to advance the ball to the line to gain.

a. Each awarded first down starts a new series of four consecutively numbered downs.

b. The referee shall correct the number of the next down prior to the ball becoming live after a new series of

 downs is awarded and prior to the declaration of the end of any period.

ART. 2 ... A new series of downs is awarded:

a. After a first, second or third down, a new series of downs shall be awarded only after considering the effect of

any act during the down other than nonplayer or unsportsmanlike conduct fouls by A, and any dead-ball foul by B.

b. After a fourth down, a new series of downs shall be awarded only after considering the effect of any act during the down, except a nonplayer or unsportsmanlike foul.

ART. 3 ... When a scrimmage down ends with the ball in the field of play or out of bounds between the goal lines, a new series is awarded to:

a. A, if the ball belongs to A on or beyond the line to gain.

b. B, if the ball belongs to B at the end of any down.

c. B, if at the end of the fourth down, the ball belongs to A behind the line to gain.

d. The team in possession at the end of the down, if there is a change of team possession during the down,

unless the penalty is accepted for a non-post-scrimmage kick foul which occurred before the change of possession.

e. R, if K legally kicks during any scrimmage down and the ball is recovered by R, is in joint possession of opponents, goes out of bounds or becomes dead with no player in possession.

f. The team in possession at the end of the down, if R is the first to touch a scrimmage kick while it is beyond the expanded neutral zone, unless the penalty is accepted for a non-post-scrimmage kick foul which occurred before the kick ended or unless 6-2-7 applies.

g. R at the spot of first touching by K, if K is first to touch the kicked ball beyond the expanded neutral zone before it is touched beyond this zone by R and before it has come to rest.

ART. 4 ... Unless first touched by R beyond the neutral zone, if the kickers recover a scrimmage kick in or behind the neutral zone, the ball remains live and belongs to K and the down counts.

ART. 5 ... When a free kick down ends with the ball in the field of play or out of bounds between the goal lines, a new series is awarded to:

a. R at the inbounds spot if R touches the kicked ball before it goes out of bounds.

b. The team in possession of the ball when the down ends if the ball is recovered beyond R's free-kick line with no first touching by K.

c. R at the spot of recovery if K recovers the kicked ball before it travels the 10 yards to R's free-kick line and before R has touched the ball.

d. R if there is joint possession by Rand Kofa recovered kick.

e. R at the spot of first touching by K if K is the first to touch the kicked ball before it has gone 10 yards.

ART.6 ... In Articles 3g and 5e, the right of R to take the ball at the spot of the 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.

**SECTION 2 DOWN AND POSSESSION AFTER PENALTY**

ART. 1 ... When a penalty is declined, the number of the next down is the same as if the foul had not occurred. If a double foul occurs during a down, the number of the next down is the same as that of the down in which the foul occurred. After a distance penalty, the ball belongs to the team in possession at the time of the foul unless it is a 2-16-2h (post-scrimmage kick) foul or kick-catching interference. Team possession may then change if a new series is awarded.

ART. 2 ... Foul during a scrimmage down and before any change of possession:

a. When a foul occurs during a scrimmage down and before any change of team possession, and before a receiver is first to touch a scrimmage kick while it is beyond the neutral zone, the ball belongs to A or K after enforcement unless:

1. It is a 2-16-2h (post-scrimmage kick) foul;

2. The foul is kick-catching interference; or

3. K fouls and R selects succeeding spot enforcement, per 10-4-2 EXCEPTION.

b. The number of the next down is the same as that of the down during which the foul occurred unless penalty acceptance includes a first down or loss of down, or the enforcement or the advance results in a first down.

c. The loss-of-down aspect of a penalty has no significance following a change of possession or if the line to gain is reached after enforcement.

ART. 3 ... When a foul occurs prior to a scrimmage down, or simultaneously with the snap, the number of the next down after enforcement is the same as the number established before the foul occurred, unless enforcement for a foul by B results in a first down.

ART. 4 ... When a foul occurs prior to or during a free-kick down and before any change of team possession, the down which follows enforcement is a free kick down, unless:

a. R selects succeeding spot enforcement, per 10-2-4 EXCEPTION, or

b. Following a fair catch or an awarded fair catch, a scrimmage down is chosen for the replay.

ART. 5 ... Following a foul, a series of downs ends when:

a. The acceptance of the penalty includes the award of a first down.

b. Acceptance or declination of any penalty leaves A in possession beyond the line-to-gain.

c. Declination of any penalty leaves A in possession behind the line to gain after fourth down.

d. Declination of any penalty leaves B in possession.

e. There is acceptance or declination of the penalty for any foul which occurs after team possession changes during the down.

f. R is first to touch a scrimmage kick while it is beyond the neutral zone, unless a non-post-scrimmage kick foul occurs before the kick ends and the penalty is accepted.

g. Acceptance of a penalty on fourth down which carries a loss of down leaves A in possession behind the line to gain.

ART. 6 ... After a series of downs ends, a new series with first and 10 yards to gain is awarded unless one of the following is involved: a try; a field goal; or a free kick after a safety, fair catch or awarded fair catch. The first down is awarded to the team in possession when the foul occurs unless, declining the penalty leaves the other team in possession, or as in (c) and (f), accepting or declining the penalty leaves the other team in possession after fourth down. (5-2-5c, f)

**SECTION 3 THE LINE TO GAIN AND MEASUREMENTS**

ART. 1 ... The line to gain is 10 yards in advance of the ball's foremost point when a new series of downs is awarded. When a new series of downs is awarded, the penalties for all fouls (including nonplayer and unsportsmanlike) committed prior to the ready-for-play shall be administered before the line to gain is established. The line to gain then remains fixed until the series ends and a new line to gain is established.

ART. 2 ... The referee may call for the head linesman to bring the official line-to-gain equipment on the field for a measurement. Measurement shall be parallel with the sideline and from a convenient yard line to the yard line through the foremost point of the ball when it became dead. The ball shall be placed with its long axis parallel with the sideline before measurement. The inside edge of the foremost rod marks the line to gain when the traditional yardage chain is used.

**NOTE:** A measurement may be requested by the captain prior to the ball being ready for play, but it may be denied if, in the referee's opinion, it is obvious the line to gain has or has not been reached.

ART. 3 ... To start a new series of downs, the inside edge of the rod nearest the goal of the team which is to snap the ball is set on the yard line through the ball's foremost point. To start a new series of downs after:

a. A change of team possession, which does not involve a fourth-down in­ complete forward pass, a safety or touchback, the foremost point of the ball at the time it became dead becomes the rear point when the direction of the offense is changed.

b. A fourth-down incomplete forward pass, the ball is placed at the previous spot, so the rear point becomes the foremost point.

c. A safety or touchback, the foremost point of the ball is placed on the 20 yard line.

ART. 4 ... A ball touching the goal-line plane, when it becomes dead is in the end zone, even though it is moving away from the nearer end line and has its foremost point in the field of play.