**2024 NFHS Rule Book – Rule 7**

**SECTION 1 BEFORE THE SNAP**

ART. 1 ... The snapper may be over the ball, but his feet must be behind the neutral zone and no part of his person, other than a hand(s) on the ball, may be beyond the foremost point of the ball.

ART. 2 ... The snapper may lift the ball for lateral rotation but may not rotate

end-for-end or change the location or fail to keep the long axis of the ball at right angles to the line of scrimmage.

ART. 3 ... Following the ready-for-play and after touching the ball, the snapper shall not:

a. Remove both hands from the ball.

b. Make any movement that simulates a snap.

c. Fail to clearly pause before the snap.

d. Following adjustment, lift or move the ball other than in a legal snap.

ART. 4 ... An illegal snap or other snap infraction causes the ball to remain dead.

ART. 5 ... No player, other than the snapper, shall encroach on the neutral zone after the ball is ready for play by touching the ball or an opponent or by being in the neutral zone to give defensive signals.

ART. 6 ... Following the ready for play and after the snapper has placed his hand(s) on the ball, encroachment occurs if:

a. Any other player breaks the plane of the neutral zone;

b. A defensive player makes contact with the ball prior to the end of the snap; or

c. A defensive player makes contact with the hand(s) or arm(s) of the snapper prior to the snapper releasing the ball.

ART. 7 ... After the ball is ready for play and before the snap begins, no false start shall be made by any A player. It is a false start if:

a. A shift or feigned charge simulates action at the snap.

b. Any act is clearly intended to cause B to encroach.

c. Any A player on his line between the snapper and the player on the end of his line, after having placed a hand(s) on or near the ground, moves his hand(s) or makes any quick movement.

ART. 8 ... If a false start causes B to encroach, only the false start is penalized.

ART. 9 ... No defensive player shall use disconcerting acts or words prior to the snap in an attempt to interfere with A's signals or movements.

**PENALTY**: Arts. 1, 5, 6 - Encroachment - (S7-18) - 5 yards; Arts. 2, 3 - snap infraction (S7-19) - 5 yards; Art. 7 - false start - (S7-19) - 5 yards; Art. 9 - disconcerting act- (S7-23) - 5 yards.

**SECTION 2 FORMATION/POSITION, NUMBERING AND ACTION AT THE SNAP**

ART. 1 ... After the ready-for-play, each player of A who participated in the previous down and each substitute for A must have been, momentarily, between the 9-yard marks, before the snap.

ART. 2 ... The players on each side of and next to the snapper may lock legs with the snapper, but any other A lineman must have each foot outside the closest foot of the player next to him at the snap. A's players may stand, crouch, or kneel.

ART. 3 ... Of the players of A who are not on their line at the snap only one may penetrate the vertical plane through the waistline of his nearest teammate who is on his line. He must have his hands in position to receive the ball if it is snapped between the snapper's legs, but he is not required to receive the snap. Any other player(s) must be in legal position as a back. (2-32-3)

ART. 4 ... A snap shall be such that the ball immediately leaves the hand or hands of the snapper and touches a back or the ground before it touches an A lineman. A scrimmage down must start with a legal snap. An illegal snap causes the ball to remain dead.

ART. 5 ... Player formation and numbering requirements include:

a. No more than four A players may be backs and only one A player may penetrate the vertical plane through the waistline of his nearest teammate who is on his line as in 7-2-3; and

b. At the snap, at least five A players on their line of scrimmage must be numbered 50-79.

**EXCEPTIONS:**

1. On first, second or third down, when A sets or shifts into a scrimmage-kick formation as in 2-14-2a, the snapper may be a player numbered O to 49 or 80 to 99. If Team A has the snapper in the game under this exception, Team A shall have four players wearing numbers 50-79 on its line of scrimmage. The snapper in the game under this exception must be between the ends and is an ineligible forward-pass receiver during that down unless the pass is touched by B (7-5-6b).

2. On fourth down or during a kick try, when A sets or shifts into a scrimmage-kick formation, any A player numbered O to 49 or 80 to 99 may take the position of any A player numbered 50 to 79. A player in the game under this exception must assume an initial position on his line of scrimmage between the ends and he remains an ineligible forward-pass receiver during that down unless the pass is touched by B (7-5-6b).

c. Players of the same team shall not participate during the same down while wearing identical numbers.

d. B players may be anywhere on or behind their line of scrimmage.

ART. 6 ... After a huddle or shift, all players of A shall come to an absolute stop and shall remain stationary simultaneously without movement of hands, feet, head, or body for at least one second before the snap.

ART. 7 ... Only one A player may be in motion at the snap and then only if such motion is not toward his opponent's goal line. Except for the player "under the snapper," as outlined in Article 3, the player in motion shall be at least 5 yards behind his line of scrimmage at the snap if he started from any position not clearly behind the line and did not establish himself as a back by stopping for at least one full second while no part of his body is breaking the vertical plane through the waistline of his nearest teammate who is on the line of scrimmage.

ART. 8 ... Any A player on his line of scrimmage may not advance a planned loose ball in the vicinity of the snapper.

**PENALTY**: Arts. 1, 2, 3, 5a - Illegal formation - (S19)- 5 yards; Art. 4- illegal snap - (S7-19) - 5 yards; Art. 5b, c, d - illegal numbering - (S19) - 5 yards; Art. 6 - illegal shift - (S20) - 5 yards; Art. 7 - illegal motion - (S20) - 5 yards; Art. 8 - planned loose-ball infraction - (S19) - 5 yards.

**SECTION 3 HANDING THE BALL**

ART. 1 ... Any player may hand the ball backward at any time.

ART. 2 ... No player may hand the ball forward except during a scrimmage down before a change of possession, provided both players are in or behind the neutral zone and it is to:

a. A lineman who has clearly faced his end line by moving both feet in a half­ turn and is at least 1 yard behind his line when he receives the ball.

b. A back or a teammate who, at the snap, was on an end of his line and was not the snapper nor adjacent to the snapper.

ART. 3 ... During a scrimmage down after a change of team possession, no player may hand the ball forward to a teammate.

**PENALTY**: Arts. 2, 3 - Illegal handing - (S35-9) - 5 yards and loss of down. The loss-of-down penalty does not apply when there has been a change of team possession.

**SECTION 4 FUMBLE AND BACKWARD PASS**

ART. 1 ... During any down, any player in possession may make a backward pass or may lose player possession through a fumble.

ART. 2 ... If a fumble or a backward pass is caught or recovered by any player, he may advance.

ART. 3 ... The ball belongs to the passing or fumbling team unless lost after fourth down if a fumble or a backward pass:

a. Goes out of bounds between the goal lines; or

b. Becomes dead inbounds while no player is in possession; or

c. Becomes dead inbounds while opponents are in joint possession.

ART. 4 ... If a fumble or a backward pass is out of bounds behind a goal line, the ball belongs to the team defending that goal and the result is either a touch­ back or a safety.

**SECTION 5 FORWARD-PASS CLASSIFICATION**

ART. 1 ... It is a legal forward pass, if during a scrimmage down and before team possession has changed, a player of A throws the ball with both feet of the passer in or behind the neutral zone when the ball is released. Only one forward pass may be thrown during the down. .

ART. 2 ... An illegal forward pass is a foul. Illegal forward passes include:

a. A pass after team possession has changed during the down.

b. A pass from beyond the neutral zone.

c. A second and subsequent forward pass(es) thrown during a down.

d. A pass intentionally thrown into an area not occupied by an eligible offensive receiver, or thrown incomplete to save loss of yardage or to conserve time.

**EXCEPTIONS:**

1. It is legal for a player positioned directly behind the snapper to conserve time by intentionally throwing the ball forward to the ground immediately after receiving the snap that has neither been muffed nor touched the ground.

2. It is legal for a player to conserve yardage by intentionally throwing an incomplete forward pass if all of the following conditions are met:

a. The passer has possessed the ball beyond the lateral boundary of the free-blocking zone as established at the snap;

b. The pass reaches the neutral zone, including the extension beyond the side­line; and

c. The passer is the only player to possess the ball after the snap ends.

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| **Table 7-5-2** | |
| **Summary of Legal and Illegal Forward Passes** | |
| **LEGAL FORWARD PASSES** | **ILLEGAL FORWARD PASSES** |
| From in or behind the neutral zone. | a. After team possession has changed during the down. |
|  | b. A pass from beyond the neutral zone. |
| c. A second and subsequent forward pass(es) thrown during a down. |
| d. A pass intentionally thrown into an area not occupied by an eligible offensive receiver, or thrown incomplete to save loss of yardage or to conserve time.  **EXCEPTION 1:** It is legal for a player positioned directly behind the snapper to conserve time by intentionally throwing the ball forward to the ground immediately after receiving the snap that has neither been muffed nor touched the ground.  **EXCEPTION 2**: It is legal for a player to conserve yardage by intentionally throwing an incomplete forward pass if all of the following conditions are met:  a. The passer has possessed the ball beyond the lateral boundary of the free-blocking zone as established at the snap; b. The pass reaches the neutral zone, including the extension beyond the sideline; and  c. The passer is the only player to possess the ball after the snap ends. |

ART. 3 ... If the penalty for an illegal forward pass is accepted, measurement is from the spot of such forward pass. If the offended team declines the distance penalty, it has the choice of having the down counted at the spot of the illegal incomplete forward pass or (if the illegal forward pass is caught or intercepted) of having the ball put in play as determined by the action which followed the catch.

ART. 4 ... A forward pass, legal or illegal, is complete and the ball may be advanced when caught by any player of A or B. If a forward pass is caught simultaneously by two opponents, the ball becomes dead and belongs to the passing team.

ART. 5 ... A forward pass, legal or illegal, is incomplete and the ball becomes dead when the pass touches the ground or goes out of bounds. It is also incomplete when a player in the air possesses the pass and alights so that his first contact with the ground or with anything other than a player or game official is on or outside a boundary. When an incompletion occurs the down counts unless the pass is after a change of possession. If the pass is legal, the passing team next snaps the ball at the previous spot, unless lost after fourth down.

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| **Table 7-5-4, 5** | |
| **Summary of Completed and Incompleted Forward Passes** | |
| **COMPLETED FORWARD PASS** | **INCOMPLETE FORWARD PASS** |
| a. Pass caught by the passer's eligible receiver; ball remains live. | a. Pass which touches the ground. |
| b. Pass caught by the passer's ineligible receiver; ball remains live. | b. Pass which goes out of bounds. |
| c. Any intercepted pass; ball remains live. | c. Pass possessed by a player who is in the air but first touches the ground out of bounds (Ball becomes dead in all of these cases). |
| d. Pass simultaneously caught by opponents; ball becomes dead. |  |

ART. 6 ... Pass eligibility rules apply only to a legal forward pass. The following players are eligible pass receivers:

a. All A players eligible by position and number including those who, at the time of the snap, are on the ends of their scrimmage line or legally behind the line (possible total of six) and are numbered 0-49 or 80-99. (7-2-Sb EXCEPTION 2)

b. All A players become eligible when B touches a legal forward pass.

c. All B players are eligible.

d. A player who is eligible at the start of the down remains eligible throughout the down.

ART. 7 ... Pass interference restrictions only apply beyond the neutral zone and only if the legal forward pass, untouched by B in or behind the neutral zone, crosses the neutral zone. Pass interference restrictions are in effect for all A and B players until the ball is touched or the pass is incomplete.

ART. 8 ... Pass interference restrictions on a legal forward pass begin for:

1. A with the snap.
2. B when the ball leaves the passer's hand.

ART. 9 ... Pass interference restrictions on a legal forward pass end for:

a. All eligible A players when the pass has been touched by any player.

b. All ineligible A players when B touches the pass, however it is not pass interference for ineligible A players to use hands and arms in a legal block to ward off an opponent.

c. All B players when the pass has been touched by any player.

d. All players when the pass is incomplete.

ART. 10 ... It is forward-pass interference if any player of A or B who is beyond the neutral zone interferes with an eligible opponent's opportunity to move toward, catch, or bat the pass.

ART. 11 ... It is not forward pass interference if:

a. Unavoidable contact occurs when two or more eligibles are making a simultaneous, bona fide attempt to move toward, catch or bat the pass.

b. Contact by A is immediately made on a B lineman and the contact does not continue beyond the expanded neutral zone.

c. Contact by B is obviously away from the direction of the pass.

ART. 12 ... Ineligible A players may not advance beyond the expanded neutral •

zone on a legal forward pass play before a legal forward pass that crosses the neutral zone is in flight. If B touches the pass in or behind the neutral zone, this restriction is terminated.

ART. 13 ... An ineligible A player has illegally touched a forward pass if he bats, muffs, or catches a legal forward pass, unless the pass has first been touched by B.

**PENALTY**: Art. 2a - Illegal forward pass - (S35) - 5 yards; Arts. 2b, c - Illegal forward pass - (S35-9) - 5 yards plus loss of down; Art. 2d - intentional grounding - (S36-9) - 5 yards plus loss of down; Art. 10 - Pass interference - (S33)-15 yards. Art. 12 - Ineligible downfield - (S37)- 5 yards. Art: 13 - Illegal touching

- (S16-9) - 5 yards plus loss of down. ·

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| **TABLE 7-5** | | |
| **SUMMARY OF FOULS THAT CAN OCCUR DURING FORWARD PASS PLAYS AND**  **THEIR PENALTIES AND ENFORCEMENT SPOTS** | | |
| **FOUL** | **PENALTY** | **ENFORCEMENT SPOT** |
| **1. Illegal Forward Pass (7-5-2)** | a: Loss of 5 yards  b, c & d: Loss of 5 yards and loss of down | **End of Run** |
| a. Pass after team possession has changed during the down. |
| b. Pass from beyond the neutral zone. |
| c. A second or subsequent forward pass during the down. |
| d. Pass intentionally thrown into an area not occupied by eligible offensive receiver, or in­tentionally thrown incomplete to save loss of yardage or conserve time. |
| **EXCEPTION 1**: It is legal for a player positioned directly behind the snapper to con­ serve time by intentionally throwing the ball forward to the ground immediately after re­ceiving the snap that has neither been muffed nor touched the ground. |
| **EXCEPTION 2**: It is legal for a player to con­serve yardage by intentionally throwing an incomplete forward pass if all of the following conditions are met: a. The passer has possessed the ball beyond the lateral boundary of the free-blocking zone as established at the snap; b. The pass reaches the neutral zone including the extension beyond the sideline; and c. The passer is the only player to possess the ball after the snap ends. |
| **2. Forward Pass Interference (7-5-10)**  Restrictions apply only to a legal pass, untouched by B in or behind the neutral zone which crosses the neutral zone and interference may occur only beyond the neutral zone.  a. A hinders B. (Restriction begins with the snap.)  b. B hinders A. (Restriction begins when the pass is thrown.) | a: Loss of 15 yards b: Loss of 15 yards | **Previous Spot Previous Spot** |
| **3. Ineligible Receiver Downfield (7-5-12)**  Ineligible A players may not advance across the expanded neutral zone before a legal forward pass which crosses the neutral zone is in flight unless touched by B in or behind the neutral zone. | Loss of 5 yards | **Previous Spot** |
| **4. Illegal Touching by Ineligible (7-5-13)**  A forward pass, batted, muffed, or caught by an ineligible A player who is behind, in or beyond the neutral zone. | Loss of 5 yards and loss of down | **Basic Spot** |