

# RULE 7 Ball in Play, Dead Ball, Scrimmage

## Section 1 Ball in Play

**Article 1: Live Ball.** After the ball has been declared ready for play, it becomes a live ball when it is legally snapped or legally kicked (a free kick or fair catch kick). The ball remains dead if it is snapped or kicked before it is made ready for play.

## Section 2 Dead Ball

**Article 1: Dead Ball Declared.** An official shall declare the ball dead and the down ended:

- (a) when a runner is contacted by a defensive player and touches the ground with any part of his body other than his hands or feet. The ball is dead the instant the runner touches the ground. A runner touching the ground with his hands or feet while in the grasp of an opponent may continue to advance; or

*Note: If, after defensive contact, any part of a runner's leg above the ankle or any part of his arm above the wrist touches the ground, the runner is down.*

- (b) when a runner is held or otherwise restrained so that his forward progress ends; or
- (c) when a quarterback immediately drops to his knee (or simulates dropping to his knee) behind the line of scrimmage; or
- (d) when a runner declares himself down by sliding feet first on the ground. The ball is dead the instant the runner touches the ground with anything other than his hands or his feet; or

*Note: Defenders are required to treat a sliding runner as they would a runner who is down by contact.*

- (1) *A defender must pull up when a runner begins a feet-first slide. This does not mean that all contact by a defender is illegal. If a defender has already committed himself, and the contact is unavoidable, it is not a foul unless the defender commits some other act, such as helmet-to-helmet contact or by driving his forearm or shoulder into the head or neck area of the runner.*
- (2) *A runner who desires to take advantage of this protection is responsible for starting his slide before contact by a defensive player is imminent; if he does not, and waits until the last moment to begin his slide, he puts himself in jeopardy of being contacted.*
- (e) when a runner is out of bounds, or declares himself down by falling to the ground, or kneeling, and making no effort to advance; or
- (f) when an opponent takes a ball that is in the possession of a runner who is on the ground; or

*Note: An opponent may take or grab a ball (hand to hand) in possession of a runner who is on his feet or is airborne.*

- (g) when a forward pass (legal or illegal) is incomplete (see 8-1-4); or
- (h) when any legal or illegal kick touches the receivers' goal posts or crossbar, unless it scores a field goal (see 9-4-2); or
- (i) when a loose ball comes to rest anywhere in the field of play, and no player attempts to recover it; the official covering the play should pause momentarily before signaling that the ball is dead. Any legal (or illegal) kick is awarded to the receivers, and any other ball is awarded to the team last in possession. When awarded to a team behind a goal line, the ball is placed on the one-yard line.
- (j) when any legal or illegal kick is caught or recovered by the kickers, except a scrimmage kick that is kicked from behind the line and is recovered behind the line (not a Try kick). See 9-3-2-Item3 for exception; or
- (k) when the defense gains possession during a Try, or it is obvious a Try-kick will not score; or
- (l) when a touchdown, touchback, safety, field goal, or Try has been made; or
- (m) when any receiver catches or recovers the ball after a fair catch signal (valid or invalid) has been made, provided the ball has not been touched by an opponent, before or after it strikes the ground; or
- (n) when an official sounds his whistle **erroneously** while the ball is still in play, the ball becomes dead immediately;
  - (i) If the ball is in player possession, the team in possession may elect to put the ball in play where it has been declared dead or to replay the down.
  - (ii) If the ball is a loose ball resulting from a fumble, backward pass, or illegal forward pass, the team last in possession may elect to put the ball in play at the spot where possession was lost or to replay the down.
  - (iii) If the ball is a loose ball resulting from a legal forward pass, a free kick, a fair-catch kick, or a scrimmage kick, the ball is returned to the previous spot, and the down is replayed.
  - (iv) If there is a foul by either team during any of the above, penalty enforcement is the same as for fouls during a run, forward pass, kick, fumble, and backward pass.

**A.R. 7.1** Second-and-goal on B2. Runner A1 goes to the line of scrimmage where he is tackled and fumbles. The ball rolls into the end zone when the Referee inadvertently blows his whistle as the ball is loose in the end zone. Defense then falls on the ball.

**Ruling:** A's ball second-and-goal on B2 (inadvertent whistle).

**A.R. 7.2** Second-and-10 on A30. Runner A2 fumbles a handoff from Quarterback A1 on the A25. The ball is on the A22 when the Referee inadvertently blows his whistle.  
**Ruling:** A's ball second-and-10 on A30 (replay).

**A.R. 7.3** Second-and-five on A30. During a forward pass, while the ball is in the air, the line judge inadvertently blows his whistle. Prior to the whistle Guard A1 held B1 on the A25.  
**Ruling:** A's ball second-and-15 on A20.

**A.R. 7.4** A forward pass is intentionally touched by ineligible A1 beyond the line after a whistle sounds. The pass is incomplete.  
**Ruling:** Replay down. Touch occurred after whistle.

- (o) when a fumble is recovered or caught by a teammate of the fumbling player, and the fumble occurs on a play that is subject to the "two-minute" or "fourth-down" fumble provisions. See 8-7-5 and 8-7-6; or
- (p) when the ball is out of bounds; or
- (q) If a loose ball in play strikes a video board, guide wire, sky cam, or any other object, the ball will be dead immediately, and the down will be replayed at the previous spot.

*Note 1: If there is not an on-field ruling that the ball struck an object, the Replay Official is empowered to initiate a booth review, even if the event occurs prior to the two-minute warning. If, prior to the two-minute warning, no booth review is initiated by the Replay Official, a coach's challenge is permitted under the established rules for such a challenge.*

*Note 2: In the event the down is replayed, the game clock will be reset to the time remaining when the snap occurred. All penalties will be disregarded, except for personal fouls or Unsportsmanlike Conduct fouls, which will be administered prior to the replaying of the down.*

- (r) when a runner's helmet comes completely off.

*Note: The game clock will not stop when this occurs, and the play clock will be reset to 40 seconds. Penalty enforcement following the play is as ordinary for fouls during runs or kicks.*

**A.R. 7.5** A runner (in full possession of the ball) is contacted by an opponent while he is attempting to gain yardage. The contact causes the runner to hit the ground, at which time the ball comes loose.  
**Ruling:** Play is dead when the impact jars the ball loose. No fumble.

**A.R. 7.6** Second-and-10 on A30. Offensive End A1 catches a legal forward pass on the A40 where he is stopped by B1, but A1 breaks away and goes back to the A38 in an attempt to break loose. He is tackled on the A38 by B2.  
**Ruling:** A's ball third-and-two on A38. No forward progress is given as he was not stopped. He broke away before he was downed.

**A.R. 7.7** Second-and-10 on A30. Both eligible offensive A1 and defensive B1 leap in the air to catch a forward pass and collide during a legal attempt to catch ball on the 50. A1 controls the pass and falls to the ground.  
**Ruling:** Ball is dead at spot. A's ball first-and-10 on the 50.

**A.R. 7.8** Second-and-10 on A30. Runner A1 breaks clear and is on the 50 when he slips and falls down. B1 takes the ball from A1's hands when A1 is on the ground.  
**Ruling:** Blow whistle to kill play. May not take ball unless runner is on his feet. A's ball first-and-10 on the 50.

**A.R. 7.9** Second-and-10 on A30. A backward pass from the A25 hits the ground on the A20 where a defensive player recovers and runs for a score.  
**Ruling:** Touchdown (8-7-1).

**A.R. 7.10** Second-and-goal on B4. Runner A1 gets to the goal line and ball touches goal line when he is tackled. He fumbles and defensive B1 recovers in end zone.  
**Ruling:** Touchdown. Ball dead as soon as ball touches goal line in player possession (11-2-1-a).

**Article 2: Ball Touches Official.** The ball is not dead because it touches an official who is inbounds, or because of a signal by an official other than a whistle.

## Section 3 New Series of Downs

**Article 1: New Series for Team A.** A new series of four scrimmage downs is awarded to Team A when the following conditions exist:

- (a) During a given series, the ball is declared dead in possession of Team A while at or beyond the line to gain; or
- (b) Enforcement of a foul by Team B results in the placement of the ball at or beyond the line to gain, or if the enforcement of a foul awards an automatic first down to Team A; or
- (c) If there is a change of possession during the down, and Team A has possession at the end of the down; or
- (d) The kicking team recovers a scrimmage kick anywhere in the field of play after it first has been touched beyond the line of scrimmage by the receivers. See 9-3-2-Item 1; or
- (e) The kicking team legally recovers a free kick.

**Article 2: New Series for Team B.** A new series of four scrimmage downs is awarded to Team B when the following conditions exist:

- (a) Team A fails to advance the ball to the line to gain during a series of downs, or
- (b) There is a change of possession during the down, and Team B has possession at the end of the down, or has been awarded possession at the end of the down; or

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- (c) When the ball is declared dead in possession of the receiving team after a free kick, scrimmage kick, or fair-catch kick.

**Article 3: Forward Part of Ball.** The forward part of the ball in its position when it is declared dead in the field of play shall be the determining point in measuring any distance gained or lost. The ball shall be rotated so that its long axis is parallel to the sidelines before measuring, while maintaining the forward most point.

*Note: When an airborne player of either team completes a catch or interception inbounds after an opponent has driven him backward, the ball is declared dead, and forward progress is awarded at the spot where the player established firm grip and control of the ball while in the air.*

- A.R. 7.11** Second-and-10 on B30. Runner A1 goes to the B25 where he is tackled, fumbles, and defensive player B1 recovers and runs to B28. B1 fumbles and A2 recovers on the B28 where he is downed.  
**Ruling:** A's ball first-and-10 on B28. The ball is dead in the offensive team's possession after having been in the defensive team's possession during same down.
- A.R. 7.12** Second-and-10 on B30. Quarterback A1 throws an incomplete pass. Defensive tackle held the tight end A2 on the line of scrimmage.  
**Ruling:** A's ball first-and-10 on B25. Foul by defense is automatic first down for offensive team unless otherwise specified in 14-8-5.
- A.R. 7.13** Fourth-and-10 on A30. A punted ball is muffed by receiver B1 on the B35. A kicking team player A1 recovers on the B30.  
**Ruling:** A's ball first-and-10 on the B30. Kicking team recovers kick first touched by receiver beyond line. The ball is dead when recovered by A1 (9-3-2-Item 1).
- A.R. 7.14** Fourth-and-10 on A30. Punt is first touched by kicking team player A1 on B35 and then muffed by receiver B1. Kicker A2 recovers on B30.  
**Ruling:** B's ball first-and-10 on B35. Illegal touch. It was first touched by the kickers and not the receiving team (9-3-2-Item 2).
- A.R. 7.15** Fourth-and-10 on A30. A punt is blocked and rolls beyond line to A35 where receiver B1 tries to recover but muffs it back to the A28 where kicker A1 falls on it.  
**Ruling:** A's ball first-and-10 on A28. Ball first touched beyond line by receiver (9-3-2-Item 1).

## Section 4 Action at or Before the Snap

**Article 1: Ball Ready for Play.** After the neutral zone has been established (ball is made or declared ready for play), an offensive player may not make a false start, a defensive player may not encroach (initiate contact with a member of the offensive team) or commit a neutral zone infraction, and no player of either team may be offside when the ball is put in play.

**Article 2: False Start.** It is a False Start if the ball has been placed ready for play, and, prior to the snap, an offensive player who has assumed a set position charges or moves in such a way as to simulate the start of a play, or if an offensive player who is in motion makes a sudden movement toward the line of scrimmage. Any quick abrupt movement by a single offensive player, or by several offensive players in unison, which simulates the start of the snap, is a false start.

### Exceptions:

- (a) This does not apply to an offensive player under the center who turns his head or shoulders, unless the movement is an obvious attempt to draw an opponent offside.

*Note: See 4-6-5-d, page 22, for actions by a defensive player who attempts to cause an offensive player to commit a false start.*

**Item 1: Interior Lineman.** It is a False Start if an interior lineman (tackle to tackle) takes or simulates a three-point stance, and then changes his position or moves the hand that is on the ground.

**Item 2: Change of Stance.** An interior lineman who is in a two-point stance is permitted to reset in a three-point stance or change his position, provided that he resets prior to the snap.

**Item 3: Eligible Receiver.** If an eligible receiver who is on the line changes his stance, or moves to another position on the line or in the backfield, he must reset prior to the snap.

If an eligible receiver who is in the backfield changes his stance, or moves to another position in the backfield that is closer to the line of scrimmage or to a position on the line, he must reset prior to the snap. (For a backfield player who is moving parallel to or away from the line of scrimmage, see Article 7.)

**Item 4: Player Under Center.** It is legal for a player who has taken a position under or behind the center to go in motion, whether he has placed his hands under center, on his knees, or on the body of the center. However, it is a False Start if the action is quick and abrupt. If the player fails to come to a complete stop **for at least one second** prior to the ball being snapped, **it is an illegal shift. See 7-4-8.**

**Item 5: Shotgun Formation.** A player who is in position to receive the snap in shotgun formation is permitted to shift his feet prior to the snap, but any quick and abrupt movement is a False Start. **This includes thrusting his hands forward when there is not a simultaneous snap.**

**Item 6: Attempt to Draw Offside.** Any obvious attempt by the quarterback or other player in position to receive the snap to draw an opponent offside is a False Start.

**Penalty: For a False Start: Loss of five yards from the line of scrimmage. The foul is enforced prior to the snap.**

*Note: The official shall blow his whistle immediately. The penalty for a False Start shall be enforced regardless of whether the snap is made.*

**A.R. 7.16** Second-and-10 on the B40. Quarterback A1 bobs his head in an exaggerated manner prior to the snap and draws the defense into the neutral zone.  
**Ruling:** Penalize five yards for false start. Blow the whistle immediately.

**A.R. 7.17** Second-and-10 on A30. Offensive team breaks from huddle and all linemen except Tackle A1 assume a three-point stance. Tackle A1 rests his elbows on his knees in a crouched position. After a second, A1 assumes a three-point stance. When he started his move to a three-point stance, defensive B1 charges across line and contacts Tackle A1.  
**Ruling:** Penalize B1 for encroachment. A1's move was legal. Blow the whistle immediately. A's ball second-and-five on A35.

**A.R. 7.18** Second-and-10 on A30. Offensive interior lineman moves his feet abruptly after taking a three-point stance to make himself more comfortable. The ball is then snapped and defensive player B1 gets quarterback A2 to fumble and B1 recovers on A25.  
**Ruling:** False start. Blow whistle immediately on lineman's movement.

**A.R. 7.19** Third-and-10 on A30. Quarterback A1 places his hands on side of snapper. Ball goes through A1's legs to Back A2 who completes a pass to the A40.  
**Ruling:** Backward pass. A's ball first-and-10 on A40.

**Article 3: Encroachment.** It is Encroachment if a defensive player enters the neutral zone and contacts an offensive player or the ball prior to the snap, or if he interferes with the ball during the snap. The play is dead immediately.

**Penalty: For Encroachment: Loss of five yards from the line of scrimmage. The foul is enforced prior to the snap.**

**Article 4: Neutral Zone Infraction:** It is a Neutral Zone Infraction when:

- (a) a defender moves beyond the neutral zone prior to the snap and is parallel to or beyond an offensive lineman, with an unabated path to the quarterback or kicker, even though no contact is made by a blocker; officials are to blow their whistles immediately; or
- (b) a defender enters the neutral zone prior to the snap, causing the offensive player(s) in close proximity (including a quarterback who is under center) to react (move) immediately to protect himself (themselves) against impending contact; officials are to blow their whistles immediately. If there is no immediate reaction by the offensive player(s) in close proximity, and the defensive player returns to a legal position prior to the snap without contacting an opponent, there is no foul. A flexed or split receiver is considered to be in close proximity if he is lined up on the side of the ball on which the violation occurs; other offensive players are considered to be in close proximity if they are within two-and-one-half positions of the defender who enters the neutral zone. If the defender is directly over the center, a quarterback under center, the center, and the guards and tackles on both sides of the center are considered to be within close proximity; if the defender is in a gap, the two offensive players on either side of the gap are considered to be within close proximity (including a quarterback under center, if applicable); or
- (c) a player, after he has received a warning, enters into the neutral zone. It is a foul, even if he returns to a legal position prior to the snap without contacting an opponent or causing a reaction (movement) by an offensive player in close proximity.

*Note: During the last two minutes of a half, after the ball has been spotted for the succeeding down at the line of scrimmage and the offense is legally set, if the ball is snapped before all members of the defensive team have taken their proper position on the line of scrimmage, play shall be stopped immediately, and the defensive team penalized five yards for a neutral zone infraction.*

**Penalty: For a Neutral Zone Infraction: Loss of five yards from the line of scrimmage. The foul is enforced prior to the snap.**

**Article 5: Offside.** A player is offside when any part of his body is in or beyond the neutral zone when the ball is put in play.

**Penalty: For offside: Loss of five yards.**

**A.R. 7.20** Second-and-10 on B30. Defensive tackle B1's initial charge into neutral zone makes offensive guard A1 directly across from him flinch and draw back.  
**Ruling:** Blow the whistle immediately. Penalize B1 for a neutral zone infraction. A's ball second-and-5 on B25.

**A.R. 7.21** Second-and-10 on B30. Defensive back B1 runs toward the line of scrimmage as if he is going right over guard A1. He stops on the defensive side of the neutral zone but guard A1 in a three-point stance picks up.  
**Ruling:** Penalize offensive A1 for false start. A's ball second-and-15 on B35. Blow the whistle immediately.

**A.R. 7.22** Second-and-10 on A30. Defensive player B1 jumps across the line and contacts offensive player A1 prior to the snap.  
**Ruling:** Blow whistle immediately and kill play. A's ball second-and-five on A35. Encroachment.

**A.R. 7.23** Second-and-10 on B35. The offensive team uses a double shift. At the start of the second shift, a defensive player B1 charges into the neutral zone and is in the neutral zone at the snap.  
**Ruling:** A's ball second-and-5 from B30. Defensive offside.

**A.R. 7.24** Second-and-5 on 50. The offensive team uses a double shift. At the start of the second shift, defensive player B1 charges into the neutral zone and makes contact.  
**Ruling:** A's ball first-and-10 on B45. Encroachment.

**A.R. 7.25** Third-and-7 on B25. Offensive upback A2 moves abruptly (simulating the snap) when he goes in motion prior to the snap.  
**Ruling:** A's ball third-and-12 on B30. Blow whistle immediately. False start.

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**Article 6: Complete Stop.** All offensive players are required to come to a complete stop and be in a set position simultaneously for at least one second prior to the snap.

**Article 7: Illegal Motion.** When the ball is snapped, one player who is lined up in the backfield may be in motion, provided that he is moving parallel to or away from the line of scrimmage. No player is permitted to be moving toward the line of scrimmage when the ball is snapped. All other players must be stationary in their positions.

**Penalty: For a player illegally in motion at the snap: Loss of five yards.**

**A.R. 7.26** Third-and-one on the B40. Quarterback A1 stops about a foot behind the center and then moves forward and takes the snap and goes to the B38.

**Ruling:** Illegal motion. Cannot be moving forward at snap. A's ball third-and-six on B45.

**A.R. 7.27** At the snap offensive back A1 is on the line of scrimmage and in motion along line.

**Ruling:** A1 is illegally in motion as he was not playing a backfield position.

**A.R. 7.28** The offensive Team A has eight players on the line. End A1 on line runs behind line to lead interference and at the snap is three yards behind the line.

**Ruling:** Illegal motion as end A1 was not playing in a backfield position at the snap. The distance behind the line at the snap has no bearing on the validity of this situation.

**A.R. 7.29** After a huddle or shift, offensive halfback A1 assumes a position on the end of the line and offensive end A2 assumes a position one yard behind the line (no change in their eligibility status). End A2 only in motion parallel to line at snap.

**Ruling:** End A2 legally in motion as he was playing in a backfield position at the snap.

**A.R. 7.30** After a huddle or shift, Halfback A1 assumes a position on the end of the line and End A2 assumes a position one yard behind the line (no change in their eligibility status). Halfback A1 only is in motion parallel to line at snap.

**Ruling:** A1 illegally in motion as he was not playing in a backfield position at the snap.

**Article 8: Shifts.** The offensive team is permitted to shift and have players in motion multiple times before the snap. However, after the last shift, all players must come to a complete stop and be in a set position simultaneously for at least one second.

If any eligible backfield player goes in motion (one at a time) after the last shift and comes to a complete stop, there is no requirement for a full second pause before a second player can legally go in motion.

However, if the first player has not come to a complete stop when the second player goes in motion, it is another shift and requires another simultaneous stop for at least one second by all players.

**It is also an illegal shift if a player under or behind center goes in motion and fails to come to a complete stop for at least one full second prior to the snap, or before a second player goes in motion.**

*Note: The offensive team must present a legal formation both before and after a shift.*

**Penalty: For an illegal shift: Loss of five yards.**

**A.R. 7.31** Team A shifts and comes to a stop for one second. Offensive End A1 then goes out along his line and stops. Back A2 then moves and the ball is snapped less than one second after End A1 stops.

**Ruling:** Legal play. Movement of End A1 and Back A2 are not simultaneous.

**A.R. 7.32** After a shift or a huddle, the offensive players come to a stop and remain stationary. Before the lapse of one second, Back A1, who did not shift or huddle, starts and is in motion backward at snap.

**Ruling:** Illegal shift. All eleven players must come to an absolute stop for one second.

## Section 5 Position of Players at the Snap

**Article 1: Offensive Team.** The offensive team must be in compliance with the following at the snap:

(a) It must have seven or more players on its line (3-18-1); and

(b) **Eligible receivers must be on both ends of the line, and all of the players on the line between them must be ineligible receivers.**

(c) No player may be out of bounds.

*Note: Offensive linemen may lock legs.*

**Penalty: For illegal formation by the offense: Loss of five yards.**

**A.R. 7.33** Fourth-and-10 on B35. On a field-goal attempt, Tackle A1 and Guard A2 lock their legs as they line up. The field goal is good.

**Ruling:** Field goal good, no foul.

## Section 6 Putting the Ball in Play

**Article 1: Ball in Play.** The offensive team must put the ball in play with a snap at the spot where the previous down ended, unless the enforcement of a penalty moves the ball to another spot or the down ended outside the inbounds lines. If a fair-catch kick is chosen after a fair catch, 10-2-4 and 11-4-3 apply.

**Article 2: Snap at Inbounds Spot.** The ball is next put in play (snap) at the inbounds spot by the team entitled to possession (7-1-1 and 2 and 7-4-1) when:

(a) a loose ball is out of bounds between the goal lines;

**Exception:** The ball is next put in play at the previous spot if a forward pass is incomplete.

(b) a runner is out of bounds between the goal lines;

(c) the ball is dead in a side zone;

(d) the ball is placed in the side zone as the result of a penalty enforcement; or

(e) a fair catch is made or awarded in a side zone.

**Article 3: Restrictions for Snapper.** The snap (3-31) may be made by any offensive player who is on the line of scrimmage but must conform to the following provisions:

- (a) The snap must start with the ball on the ground, with its long axis horizontal and at right angles to the line.
- (b) It is not necessary that the snap be between the snapper's legs, but it must be one quick and continuous motion of the hand or hands of the snapper. The ball must leave or be taken from his hands during this motion.
- (c) The snapper may not snap the ball after it is ready for play until all of the officials have had a reasonable time to assume their normal stances. If this occurs, the ball remains dead, and no penalty is assessed unless it is a repeated act after a warning (delay of game).

**Penalty: For illegally snapping the ball: Loss of five yards from the line of scrimmage.**

**Article 4: Legal Snap.** A snap is a backward pass. The snap must be received by a player who is not on the line at the snap, unless the ball first strikes the ground. If the ball first strikes the ground, or is muffed by an eligible backfield receiver, or **quarterback under center**, it can be recovered and advanced by any player.

**Penalty: For snapping the ball to an ineligible snap receiver: Loss of five yards from the line of scrimmage. The whistle shall be blown immediately.**

**A.R. 7.34** Fourth-and-10 on A30. The snap first touches the ground and goes off Kicker A1's hands. A defensive player picks it up on the A20 and scores.

**Ruling:** Touchdown. (8-7-1)

**A.R. 7.35** Fourth-and-10 on A30. Snap is high and punter A1 jumps high and muffs the ball, which rolls to the A20. A defensive player B1 picks up the ball on the A20 and scores.

**Ruling:** Touchdown. (8-7-1)