

Rule 10 Opportunity to Catch a Kick, Fair Catch

Section 1 Opportunity to Catch a Kick

INTERFERENCE

Article 1 During a scrimmage kick that crosses the line of scrimmage, or during a free kick, members of the kicking team are prohibited from interfering with any receiver making an attempt to catch the airborne kick, or from obstructing or hindering his path to the airborne kick, and regardless of whether any signal was given.

Item 1: Contact with Receiver. It is interference if a player of the kicking team contacts the receiver, or causes a passive player of either team to contact the receiver, before or simultaneous to his touching the ball.

Item 2: Right of Way. A receiver who is moving toward a kicked ball that is in flight has the right of way. If opponents obstruct his path to the ball, or cause a passive player of either team to obstruct his path, it is interference, even if there is no contact, or if he catches the ball in spite of the interference, and regardless of whether any signal was given.

Penalties:

- (a) **For interference with the opportunity to make a catch when a prior signal has not been made: Loss of 15 yards from the spot of the foul, and the offended team is entitled to put the ball in play by a snap from scrimmage. See 4-8-2-g.**
- (b) **For interfering with a fair catch after a signal: Loss of 15 yards from the spot of the foul. A fair catch is awarded even if the ball is not caught. See Section 2, Article 4.**

Section 2 Fair Catch

DEFINITION

Article 1 A Fair Catch is an unhindered catch of an airborne scrimmage kick that has crossed the line of scrimmage, or of an airborne free kick, by a player of the receiving team who has given a valid fair catch signal.

FAIR CATCH SIGNAL

Article 2

Item 1: Valid Fair-Catch Signal. A fair-catch signal is valid if it is made while the kick is in flight by a player who fully extends one arm above his helmet and waves it from side to side. A receiver is permitted to legally raise his hand(s) to his helmet to shield his eyes from the sun, but is not permitted to raise them above his helmet except to signal for a fair catch.

Item 2: Invalid Fair-Catch Signal. If a player raises his hand(s) above his shoulder(s) in any other manner, it is an invalid fair-catch signal. If there is an invalid fair-catch signal, the ball is dead when caught or recovered by any player of the receiving team, but it is not a fair catch. (The ball is not dead if it touches an opponent before or after it strikes the ground. See Article 3b).

Note: A fair-catch signal given behind the line of scrimmage on a scrimmage kick is ignored and is neither valid nor invalid.

Penalty: For an invalid fair-catch signal: Loss of five yards from the spot of the signal.

Item 3: Muff. After a valid fair-catch signal, the opportunity to catch a kick does not end if the ball is muffed. The player who signaled for a fair catch must have a reasonable opportunity to catch the muffed ball before it hits the ground without interference by members of the kicking team, and regardless of whether the ball strikes another player or an official.

Penalty: For interference with the opportunity to make a fair catch after a muff: A fair catch is awarded at the spot of the interference even if the ball is not caught.

Item 4: Intentional Muff. An intentional muff forward prior to a catch in order to gain ground is an illegal act (see 12-1-8).

Item 5: Illegal Block. Until the ball touches a teammate or an opponent, a player who makes a valid or invalid fair-catch signal is prohibited from blocking or initiating contact with a player of the kicking team.

Penalty: For an illegal block after a fair-catch signal: Loss of 15 yards from the spot of the foul.



RESTRICTIONS

Article 3

- (a) If a player of the receiving team makes a valid fair-catch signal, and the ball is not touched by a player of the kicking team, the following apply:
 - (1) If he catches the ball, it is dead immediately, and it is a fair catch. If he muffs the ball, but catches it before it touches the ground, it is also a fair catch. After a fair catch, the ball is next put in play by the receiving team at the dead-ball spot (or at the succeeding spot after enforcement of any applicable penalties). See Article 4.
 - (2) If he recovers the ball after it strikes the ground, it is dead immediately, but it is not a fair catch.
 - (3) If the ball is caught or recovered by a teammate who did not make a valid faircatch signal, the ball is dead immediately, but it is not a fair catch. The ball will next be put in play by a snap by the receiving team at the dead-ball spot (or at the succeeding spot after enforcement of any applicable penalties).
- (b) If the ball touches a player of the kicking team, before or after it strikes the ground, any player of the receiving team may catch or recover it and advance. If a player of the receiving team who has given a valid fair-catch signal catches the ball before it hits the ground and elects not to advance the ball, it is a fair catch.
- (c) a receiver has made a fair catch, an opponent is prohibited from blocking or tackling him, or causing a passive player of either team to contact him. Incidental contact is not a foul.

Penalty: For illegal contact with a player who has made a fair catch: Loss of 15 yards from the dead-ball spot and disqualification if flagrant (snap or free kick).

PUTTING BALL IN PLAY AFTER FAIR CATCH

Article 4 After a fair catch is made, or is awarded as the result of fair catch interference, the receiving team has the option of putting the ball in play by either:

- (a) a fair-catch kick (drop kick or placekick without a tee) from the spot of the catch (or the succeeding spot after enforcement of any applicable penalties) (3-9-1 and 11-4-3), or
- (b) a snap from the spot of the catch (or the succeeding spot after enforcement of any applicable penalties).

Note: A receiver may make or be awarded a fair catch in his end zone. If there is fair-catch interference or illegal contact with the receiver after he has made a fair catch, the 15-yard penalty is enforced from the receiver's 20-yard line, and the option for a fair-catch kick is awarded.

EXTENSION OF A PERIOD

Article 5 If time expires during a play in which a player has signaled for a fair catch, the following shall apply:

- (a) If the player makes a fair catch, the receiving team may elect to extend the period with a fair-catch kick, but does not have the option to extend the period by a snap from scrimmage.
- (b) If the kicking team interferes with a receiver who has signaled for a fair catch, the receiving team will be awarded a 15-yard penalty and the option to extend the period by attempting a fair-catch kick or by a snap from scrimmage.

