

# Rule 12 Player Conduct

## Section 1 Blocking, Use of Hands and Arms

### LEGAL AND ILLEGAL BLOCK

**Article 1: Legal and Illegal Block.** A player of either team may block (obstruct or impede) an opponent at any time, provided that the act is not:

- (a) pass interference (see Rule 8, Section 5, Article 1);
- (b) illegal contact (see Rule 8, Section 4);
- (c) fair catch interference or interference with the opportunity to catch a kick (see Rule 10, Section 1, Article 1);
- (d) clipping against a non-runner (see Section 2, Article 1); or
- (e) an illegal chop block (see Section 2, Article 3); or
- (f) an illegal crackback block (see Section 2, Article 2); or
- (g) an illegal low block during a free kick, scrimmage kick, or after a change of possession (see Section 2, Article 5); or
- (h) unnecessary roughness (see Section 2, Article 6); or
- (i) roughing the passer (see Section 2, Article 9); or
- (j) an illegal cut block (see Rule 8, Section 4, Article 5); or
- (k) roughing the kicker or holder (see Section 2, Articles 10 and 11); or
- (l) offensive (see Section 1, Article 3(c)) or defensive (Section 1, Article 6) holding; or
- (m) illegal use of hands (see Section 1, Article 3(a)); or
- (n) an illegal block in the back above the waist (see Section 1, Article 3(b)); or
- (o) tripping (see Section 1, Article 4(c) and Article 8); or
- (p) an illegal peel back block (see Section 2, Article 4); and
- (q) an illegal blindside block (see Section 2, Article 7(a)(8)).

**Penalty: For illegal use of hands, arms, or body by the offense: Loss of 10 yards.**

### LEGAL BLOCK BY OFFENSIVE PLAYER

**Article 2: Legal Block by Offensive Player.** An offensive player is permitted to block an opponent by contacting him with his head, shoulders, hands, and/or outer surface of the forearm, or with any other part of his body that is not prohibited by another rule.

A blocker may use his arms, or open or closed hands, to contact an opponent on or outside the opponent's frame (the body of an opponent below the neck that is presented to the blocker), provided that he does not materially restrict him. The blocker immediately must work to bring his hands inside the opponent's frame, and as the play develops, the blocker is permitted to work for and maintain his position against an opponent, provided that he does not illegally clip or illegally push from behind.

An offensive player is permitted to use his hands or arms to restrict an opponent:

- (a) If he is a runner. A runner may ward off opponents with his hands and arms. He may also lay his hand on a teammate or push him into an opponent, but he may not grasp or hold on to a teammate; or
- (b) During a loose ball that has touched the ground. An offensive player may use his hands/arms legally to block or otherwise push or pull an opponent out of the way in a personal attempt to recover the ball. See specific fumble, pass, or kick rules and especially 6-2-1; or
- (c) During a kick. A kicking team player may use his hands/arms to ward off or to push or pull a receiver who is legally or illegally attempting to obstruct his attempt to proceed.

### ILLEGAL BLOCKS BY OFFENSIVE PLAYER

**Article 3: Illegal Block by Offensive Player.** It is a foul if an offensive blocker:

- (a) Thrusts his hands forward above the frame of an opponent to contact him on the head, neck, or face (Note: Contact in close-line play that is not prolonged and sustained is not a foul unless the opponent's head is pinned back by direct and forcible contact);

**Penalty: For illegal use of hands by the offense: Loss of 10 yards.**

- (b) Blocks an opponent (from behind) in the back above the opponent's waist, or uses his hands or arms to push an opponent from behind in a manner that affects his movement, except in close-line play.

*Note: The prohibition applies to a player of the kicking team while the ball is in flight during a scrimmage kick.*

The use of hands on the back is not a foul when:

- I. a player of the kicking team is warding off a player of the receiving team while going downfield under a kick, provided that he does not block or push him from behind; or
- II. a player is making a personal attempt to recover a loose ball; or
- III. the opponent turns away from the blocker; or
- IV. both of the blocker's hands are on the opponent's side. (If either hand is on the back, it is a foul.)

**A.R. 12.1** Second-and-10 on B30. A2 pushes B1 from behind above the waist at the B25. Runner A1 is down on B15.  
**Ruling:** Illegal block above the waist. A's ball second-and-15 on B35.

**Penalty: For an illegal block in the back above the waist by the offense: Loss of 10 yards.**

- (c) Use his hands or arms to materially restrict an opponent or alter the defender's path or angle of pursuit. **It is a foul regardless of whether the blocker's hands are inside or outside the frame of the defender's body.** Material restrictions include but are not limited to:
  - I. grabbing or tackling an opponent;
  - II. hooking, jerking, twisting, or turning him; or
  - III. pulling him to the ground.

**Penalty: For holding by the offense: Loss of 10 yards.**

**Blocking Notes:**

1. When a defensive player is held by an offensive player during the following situations, Offensive Holding will not be called:
  - (a) if the runner is being tackled simultaneously by another defensive player;
  - (b) if the runner simultaneously goes out of bounds;
  - (c) if a Fair Catch is made simultaneously;
  - (d) if the action clearly occurs after a forward pass has been thrown to a receiver beyond the line of scrimmage;
  - (e) if the action occurs away from the point of attack and not within close line play;
  - (f) if a free kick results in a touchback;
  - (g) if a scrimmage kick simultaneously becomes a touchback;
  - (h) if the action is part of a double-team block, **unless the defender is taken to the ground.**

**Exception:** Holding will be called if the opponent is blocked to the ground by one or both of the offensive players.

- (i) if, during a defensive charge, a defensive player uses a "rip" technique that puts an offensive player in a position that would normally be holding.

**Exception:** Holding will be called if the defender's feet are taken away from him by the offensive player's action.

2. If a blocker fall on or pushes down a defender whose momentum is carrying him to the ground, Offensive Holding will not be called unless the blocker prevents the defender from rising from the ground.
3. If the official has not seen the entire action that sends a defender to the ground, Offensive Holding will not be called.

#### **OTHER PROHIBITED ACTS**

**Article 4: Other Prohibited Acts.** No offensive player may:

- (a) **pull a runner in any direction at any time; or**
- (b) use interlocking interference, by grasping a teammate or by using his hands or arms to encircle the body of a teammate; or
- (c) trip an opponent; or
- (d) push or throw his body against a teammate to aid him in an attempt to obstruct an opponent or to recover a loose ball.

**Penalty: For assisting the runner, interlocking interference, tripping, or illegal use of hands, arms, or body by the offense: Loss of 10 yards.**

**A.R. 12.2** Second and goal on B2. Runner A1 gets to the line of scrimmage and is stopped but A2, who is behind him, pushes him from behind and shoves him over the goal line.  
**Ruling:** Touchdown.

**Article 5: Legal Use of Hands or Arms by Defense.** A defensive player may use his hands, arms, or body to push, pull, or ward off offensive players:

- (a) when he is defending himself against an obstructing opponent while attempting to reach the runner; or
- (b) when an opponent is obviously attempting to block him; or
- (c) in a personal attempt to reach a loose ball that has touched the ground during a backward pass, fumble, or kick; or
- (d) during a forward pass that has crossed the neutral zone and has been touched by any player.

**Exception 1:** An eligible receiver is considered to be an obstructing opponent only to a point five yards beyond the line of scrimmage unless the player who receives the snap demonstrates no further intention to pass the ball (including handing off the ball, pitching the ball, or moving out of the pocket). See Rule 8, Section 4, Articles 1–4 for rules applicable to Illegal Contact with an eligible receiver.

**Exception 2:** See Rule 8, Section 4, Article 5 for rules applicable for an Illegal Cut Block against an eligible receiver.

**A.R. 12.3** Defensive B1 blocks offensive A1 which allows B2 to recover a loose ball.

**Ruling:** Legal block. Cannot use hands unless it is a personal attempt to recover, but may block (12-1-5).

## DEFENSIVE HOLDING

**Article 6: Defensive Holding.** It is a foul for defensive holding if:

- (a) a defensive player tackles or holds any opponent other than a runner, **except as permitted in Article 5**; or
- (b) during a punt, field goal attempt, or Try-kick attempt, a defensive player (B1) grabs and pulls an offensive player out of the way, allowing another defensive player(s) (B2) to shoot the gap (pull and shoot) in an attempt to block the kick, except if the defensive player (B1) is advancing toward the kicker.

*Note: Any offensive player who pretends to possess the ball, and/or one to whom a teammate pretends to give the ball, may be tackled until he crosses the line of scrimmage line between the tackles of a normal tight offensive line.*

**Penalty: For defensive holding: Loss of five yards and an automatic first down.**

**A.R. 12.4** Second-and-10 on B40. Defensive B1 holds offensive end A1 on the line of scrimmage. QB A2 cannot throw the ball and is tackled at the 50.

**Ruling:** Not a forward pass. Enforcement is from the previous spot. A's ball first-and-10 on B35.

**A.R. 12.5** During a pass behind the line (forward or backward), B1 uses his hands on potential receiver A1 who is behind A's line. B1 is not using his hands to ward off A1, to push or pull A1 out of the way in order to get to the runner (passer), or to push or pull him out of the way in an actual attempt to catch or recover a loose ball.

**Ruling:** Holding by the defense. Loss of five yards and first down for Team A.

**Article 7: Illegal Use of Hands by Defense.** It is a foul if a defensive player thrusts his hands forward above the frame of an opponent to contact him on the neck, face, or head (Note: Contact in close-line play that is not prolonged and sustained is not a foul, unless the opponent's head is pinned back by direct and forcible contact.)

**Penalty: For Illegal Use of Hands by the Defense: Loss of five yards and an automatic first down.**

**Article 8: Tripping by Defensive Player.** A defensive player is prohibited from tripping an opponent, including the runner.

**Penalty: For tripping by the defense: Loss of 10 yards and an automatic first down.**

## Section 2 Personal Fouls

### CLIPPING

**Article 1: Clipping.** There shall be no clipping against a non-runner. This does not apply to offensive blocking in close-line play where it is legal to clip above the knee(s), but it is illegal to clip at or below the knee(s). Close-line play is that which occurs in an area extending laterally to the position originally occupied by the offensive tackles and longitudinally three yards on either side of the line of scrimmage. **(See 3–6 close-line play)**

**Exception:** An offensive lineman may not clip a defender above the knees who, at the snap, is aligned on the line of scrimmage opposite another offensive lineman who is more than one position away, and the defender is responding to the flow of the ball away from the blocker.

**Example:** Tackle cannot clip nose tackle on a sweep away.

**Penalty: For clipping: Loss of 15 yards.**

**Item 1: Rolling Up on Legs.** If an offensive player's block (legal or illegal) is followed by the blocker rolling up on the back of the leg(s) of a defender, it is unnecessary roughness, including in close-line play (see 12-2-6-f).

**Item 2: Side Blocks.** If there is a block from the side, or if an opponent turns his back as the block is being made, it is not clipping if the opponent is able to see or ward off the block.

- (1) When a blocker, who is moving in the same direction as an opponent, initially contacts the opponent on his side, and subsequently contacts the opponent below his waist from behind, it is not clipping if the contact is continuous.
- (2) Clipping shall not be called if an official has not observed the blocker's initial contact with an opponent.

**A.R. 12.6** Second-and-10 on B30. B1 is hit from behind, below the waist, at the B25 by A2 throwing his body across the back of B1's legs. Runner A1 is downed on B15.  
**Ruling:** Clipping. A's ball second-and-20 on B40.

### CRACKBACK (ILLEGAL)

**Article 2: Illegal Crackback Block.** It is an Illegal Crackback Block if a defensive player is contacted below the waist within an area five yards on either side of the line of scrimmage, including within close-line play, by an offensive player who is moving toward the position from which the ball was snapped, and:

- (1) The offensive player was aligned more than two yards outside an offensive tackle (flexed) when the ball was snapped; or
- (2) The offensive player was in a backfield position when the ball was snapped and moved to a position more than two yards outside an offensive tackle.

*Note 1: If there is a broken play, significantly changing the original direction, the crackback block is legal. When the change in direction is the result of a designed play (reverse), the restriction remains in effect.*

*Note 2: A player who is protected from a crackback block is also a defenseless player (see Article 7).*

**Penalty: For an illegal crackback block: Loss of 15 yards.**

**A.R. 12.7** Second-and-10 on A40. Flanker A1 sets up five yards outside of offensive tackle A2. At the snap, A1 comes back and crackback blocks B1. Contact is made at the A38 behind the offensive tackle's original position. Runner goes to 50.  
**Ruling:** A's ball second-and-25 on A25. Illegal crackback block. Penalize from previous spot.

**Article 3: Chop Block.** A Chop Block is a block by the offense in which one offensive player (designated as A1 for purposes of this rule) blocks a defensive player in the area of the thigh or lower while another offensive player (A2) engages that same defensive player above the waist.

### Legal Chop Blocks

A Chop Block is a legal block in the following situations on Running Plays.

- (a) **Offensive players** A1 and A2, who are initially aligned adjacent to each another on the line of scrimmage, may chop a defensive player.
- (b) **Offensive players** A1 and A2, who are initially aligned more than one position away from each other on the line of scrimmage, may chop a defensive player when the flow of the play is toward the block.
- (c) A1 is lined up in the backfield at the snap and subsequently chops a defensive player engaged above the waist by A2, and such block occurs outside the area originally occupied by the tight end on either side.

### Illegal Chop Blocks

All other Chop Blocks are illegal, including in the following situations:

#### Forward pass plays and kicking plays:

- (a) A1 chops a defensive player while the defensive player is physically engaged above the waist by the blocking attempt of A2.
- (b) A2 physically engages a defensive player above the waist with a blocking attempt, and A1 chops the defensive player after the contact by A2 has been broken and while A2 is still confronting the defensive player.
- (c) A1 chops a defensive player while A2 confronts the defensive player in a pass-blocking posture but is not physically engaged with the defensive player (a "lure").
- (d) A1 blocks a defensive player in the area of the thigh or lower, and A2, simultaneously or immediately after the block by A1, engages the defensive player high ("reverse chop").

*Note 1: Each of the above circumstances in sub-sections (a) through (d), which describes a chop block foul on a forward pass play, also applies on a play in which an offensive player indicates an apparent attempt to pass block, but the play ultimately becomes a run.*

*Note 2: Each of the above circumstances, which describes a chop block foul on a kicking play, also applies on a play in which an offensive player indicates an apparent attempt to kick protect, but the play ultimately becomes a run.*

#### Running Plays:

- (e) A1 is lined up in the backfield at the snap and subsequently chops a defensive player engaged above the waist by A2, and such block occurs on or behind the line of scrimmage in an area extending laterally to the positions originally occupied by the tight end on either side.

- (f) A1, an offensive lineman, chops a defensive player after the defensive player has been engaged by A2 (high or low), and the initial alignment of A2 is more than one position away from A1. This rule applies only when the block occurs at a time when the flow of the play is clearly away from A1. Example: C and RT on NT on sweep to left.

**Penalty: For an Illegal Chop Block: Loss of 15 yards.**

**Article 4: Illegal “Peel Back” Block.** A player who is aligned in the tackle box when the ball is snapped cannot initiate contact on the side and below the waist against an opponent if:

- (a) the blocker is moving toward his own end line; and
- (b) he approaches the opponent from behind or from the side.

*Note: If the near shoulder of the blocker contacts the front of his opponent’s body, the “peel back” block is legal.*

**Penalty: For illegal “peel back” block: Loss of 15 yards.**

**Article 5: Blocking Below the Waist on Kicks and Changes of Possession.** Blocks below the waist are prohibited in the following situations:

- (a) By players of either team after a change of possession; or
- (b) By players of the kicking team after a Free Kick, Safety Kick, Fair Catch Kick, Punt, Field Goal Attempt, or Try Kick; or
- (c) By players of the receiving team during a down in which there is a Free Kick, Safety Kick, Fair Catch Kick, Punt, Field Goal Attempt, or Try Kick.

**Penalty: For illegally blocking below the waist: Loss of 15 yards.**

**A.R. 12.8** Third-and-6 on B26. B1 intercepts a forward pass in the end zone and runs it out to the B31. During B1’s run, A2 blocks B3 low from the side at B28, so that A4 could tackle B1 at the B31.

**Ruling:** Illegal block. B’s ball first-and-10 on B46.

**Article 6: Unnecessary Roughness.** There shall be no unnecessary roughness. This shall include, but will not be limited to:

- (a) Using the foot or any part of the leg to strike an opponent with a whipping motion;
- (b) contacting a runner when he is out of bounds;

*Note: Defensive players must make an effort to avoid contact. Players on defense are responsible for knowing when a runner has crossed the boundary line, except in doubtful cases where he might step on a boundary line and continue parallel with it.*

- (c) a player of the receiving team who has gone out of bounds contacting a kicking team player out of bounds **during the kick**. If this occurs on a kick from scrimmage, post-possession rules will apply if appropriate (9-5-1);
- (d) running, diving into, or throwing the body against or on a runner who has **declared himself down by going** to the ground untouched and has made no attempt to advance, or **falling upon any prostrate player** either before or after the ball is dead (**see 7-2-1-d**);
- (e) **throwing the runner into the ground after the ball is dead**;
- (f) unnecessarily running, diving into, cutting, or throwing the body against or on a player who (i) is out of the play or (ii) should not have reasonably anticipated such contact by an opponent, before or after the ball is dead;
- (g) if an offensive player’s block (legal or illegal) is followed by the blocker rolling up on the back of the leg(s) of a defender, including in close-line play;
- (h) a kicker/punter, who is standing still or fading backward after the ball has been kicked, is out of the play and must not be unnecessarily contacted by the receiving team through the end of the down or until he assumes a distinctly defensive position. **However, a kicker/punter is a defenseless player through the conclusion of the down (see Article 7)**;
- (i) using any part of a player’s helmet (including the top/crown and forehead/“hairline” parts) or facemask to butt, spear, or ram an opponent violently or unnecessarily;
- (j) grabbing a helmet opening of an opponent and forcibly twisting, turning, or pulling his head.

**Penalty: For unnecessary roughness: Loss of 15 yards. The player may be disqualified if the action is judged by the official(s) to be flagrant. If the foul is by the defense, it is also an automatic first down.**

*Note: When in question about a roughness call or potentially dangerous tactics, the covering official(s) should always call unnecessary roughness.*

**A.R. 12.9** Third-and-20 on A30. Runner A1 runs to the A33, where he is tackled by B1, who hooks his fingers under the front of the runner’s helmet, but not his facemask, and forcibly twists his head.

**Ruling:** 15 yards for unnecessary roughness. It is an automatic first down. A’s ball first-and-10 on A48.

**Article 7: Players in a Defenseless Posture.** It is a foul if a player initiates unnecessary contact against a player who is in a defenseless posture.

- (a) Players in a defenseless posture are:

- (1) A player in the act of or just after throwing a pass;
  - (2) A receiver attempting to catch a pass; or who has completed a catch and has not had time to protect himself or has not clearly become a runner. If the receiver/runner is capable of avoiding or warding off the impending contact of an opponent, he is no longer a defenseless player;
  - (3) A runner already in the grasp of a tackler and whose forward progress has been stopped;
  - (4) A kickoff or punt returner attempting to field a kick in the air;
  - (5) A player on the ground;
  - (6) A kicker/punter during the kick or during the return (Also see Article 6(g) for additional restrictions against a kicker/punter);
  - (7) A quarterback at any time after a change of possession (Also see Article 8(f) for additional restrictions against a quarterback after a change of possession);
  - (8) A player who receives a “blindside” block when the **offensive** blocker is moving toward or parallel to his own end line and approaches the opponent from behind or from the side, and
  - (9) A player who is protected from an illegal crackback block (see Article 2);
  - (10) **The offensive player who attempts a snap during a Field Goal attempt or a Try Kick.**
- (b) Prohibited contact against a player who is in a defenseless posture is:
- (1) Forcibly hitting the defenseless player’s head or neck area with the helmet, facemask, forearm, or shoulder, **even if the initial contact of the defender’s helmet or facemask is lower than the passer’s neck, and** regardless of whether the defensive player also uses his arms to tackle the defenseless player by encircling or grasping him; or
  - (2) Lowering the head and making forcible contact with the top/crown or forehead/“hairline” parts of the helmet against any part of the defenseless player’s body; or
  - (3) Illegally launching into a defenseless opponent. It is an illegal launch if a player (i) leaves both feet prior to contact to spring forward and upward into his opponent, and (ii) uses any part of his helmet (including the top/crown and forehead/“hairline” parts) to initiate forcible contact against any part of his opponent’s body. Note: This does not apply to contact against a runner, unless the runner is still considered to be a defenseless player, as defined in Article 7 above.

*Note 1: The provisions of (2) do not prohibit incidental contact by the mask or helmet in the course of a conventional tackle or block on an opponent.*

*Note 2: A player who initiates contact against a defenseless opponent is responsible for avoiding an illegal act. This includes illegal contact that may occur during the process of attempting to dislodge the ball from an opponent. A standard of strict liability applies for any contact against a defenseless opponent, even if the opponent is an airborne player who is returning to the ground or whose body position is otherwise in motion, and irrespective of any acts by the defenseless opponent, such as ducking his head or curling up his body in anticipation of contact.*

**Penalty: For unnecessary roughness: Loss of 15 yards and an automatic first down. The player may be disqualified if the action is judged by the official(s) to be flagrant.**

**Article 8: Initiating Contact with the Crown of the Helmet.** It is a foul if a runner or tackler initiates forcible contact by delivering a blow with the top/crown of his helmet against an opponent when both players are clearly outside the tackle box (an area extending from tackle to tackle and from three yards beyond the line of scrimmage to the offensive team’s end line). Incidental contact by the helmet of a runner or tackler against an opponent shall not be a foul.

*Note: The tackle box no longer exists once the ball leaves the tackle box.*

**Penalty: Loss of 15 yards. If the foul is by the defense, it is also an automatic first down. The player may be disqualified if the action is flagrant.**

## **ROUGHING THE PASSER**

**Article 9: Roughing the Passer.** Because the act of passing often puts the quarterback (or any other player attempting a pass) in a position where he is particularly vulnerable to injury, special rules against roughing the passer apply. The Referee has principal responsibility for enforcing these rules. Any physical acts against passers during or just after a pass which, in the Referee’s judgment, are unwarranted by the circumstances of the play will be called as fouls. The Referee will be guided by the following principles:

- (a) Roughing will be called if, in the Referee’s judgment, a pass rusher clearly should have known that the ball had already left the passer’s hand before contact was made; pass rushers are responsible for being aware of the position of the ball in passing situations; the Referee will use the release of the ball from the passer’s hand as his guideline that the passer is now fully protected; once a pass has been released by a passer, a rushing defender may make direct contact with the passer only up through the rusher’s first step after such release (prior to second step hitting the

ground); thereafter the rusher must be making an attempt to avoid contact and must not continue to “drive through” or otherwise forcibly contact the passer; incidental or inadvertent contact by a player who is easing up or being blocked into the passer will not be considered significant.

- (b) A rushing defender is prohibited from committing such intimidating and punishing acts as “stuffing” a passer into the ground or unnecessarily wrestling or driving him down after the passer has thrown the ball, even if the rusher makes his initial contact with the passer within the one-step limitation provided for in (a) above. When tackling a passer who is in a defenseless posture (e.g., during or just after throwing a pass), a defensive player must not unnecessarily or violently throw him down and land on top of him with all or most of the defender’s weight. Instead, the defensive player must strive to wrap up the passer with the defensive player’s arms.
- (c) In covering the passer position, Referees will be particularly alert to fouls in which defenders impermissibly use the helmet and/or facemask to hit the passer, or use hands, arms, or other parts of the body to hit the passer forcibly in the head or neck area (see also the other unnecessary roughness rules covering these subjects). A defensive player must not use his helmet against a passer who is in a defenseless posture—for example, (1) forcibly hitting the passer’s head or neck area with the helmet or facemask, **even if the initial contact of the defender’s helmet or facemask is lower than the passer’s neck, and** regardless of whether the defensive player also uses his arms to tackle the passer by encircling or grasping him; or (2) lowering the head and making forcible contact with the top/crown or forehead/“hairline” parts of the helmet against any part of the passer’s body. This rule does not prohibit incidental contact by the mask or non-crown parts of the helmet in the course of a conventional tackle on a passer.
- (d) A defensive player is prohibited from clubbing the arm of a passer during a pass or just after a pass has been thrown; however, a defensive player may grasp, pull, or otherwise make normal contact with a passer’s arm in attempting to tackle him;
- (e) A rushing defender is prohibited from forcibly hitting in the knee area or below a passer who has one or both feet on the ground, even if the initial contact is above the knee. It is not a foul if the defender is blocked (or fouled) into the passer and has no opportunity to avoid him;

*Note 1: A defender cannot initiate a roll or lunge and forcibly hit the passer in the knee area or below, even if he is being contacted by another player.*

*Note 2: It is not a foul if the defender swipes, wraps, or grabs a passer in the knee area or below in an attempt to tackle him.*

- (f) A passer who is standing still or fading backward after the ball has left his hand is obviously out of the play and must not be unnecessarily contacted by **an opponent** through the end of the **down** or until the passer becomes a blocker, or a runner, or, in the event of a change of possession **during the down**, until **he** assumes a distinctly defensive position. However, at any time after the change of possession, it is a foul if (i) an opponent forcibly hits the quarterback’s head or neck area with his helmet, facemask, forearm, or shoulder, or (ii) if an opponent lowers his head and makes forcible contact with the top/crown or forehead/“hairline” parts of his helmet against any part of the quarterback’s body. This provision (ii) does not prohibit incidental contact by the mask or the helmet in the course of a conventional block.
- (g) When the passer goes outside the pocket area and either continues moving with the ball (without attempting to advance the ball as a runner) or throws while on the run, he loses the protection of the one-step rule provided for in (a) above, and the protection against a low hit provided for in (e) above, but he remains covered by all the other special protections afforded to a passer in the pocket (b, c, d, f, and g), as well as the regular unnecessary roughness rules applicable to all player positions. If the passer stops behind the line and clearly establishes a passing posture, he will then be covered by all of the special protections for passers.
- (h) The Referee must blow the play dead as soon as the passer is clearly in the grasp and control of any tackler behind the line, and the passer’s safety is in jeopardy;

**Penalty: For Roughing the Passer: Loss of 15 yards and an automatic first down; disqualification if flagrant.**

*Note 1: When in doubt about a roughness call or potentially dangerous tactic against the quarterback, the Referee should always call roughing the passer.*

*Note 2: See 8-6-2 for personal fouls prior to completion or interception.*

**Article 10: Roughing/Running into the Kicker.** No defensive player may run into or rough a kicker who kicks from behind the line unless such contact:

- (a) is incidental to and occurs after the defender has touched the kick in flight;
- (b) is caused by the kicker’s own motions;
- (c) occurs during a quick kick or a rugby-style kick;
- (d) occurs during or after a run behind the line;
- (e) occurs after the kicker recovers a loose ball on the ground; or

- (f) occurs because a defender is pushed or blocked (causing a change of direction) into the kicker; or
- (g) is the result of a foul by an opponent.

**Item 1: Roughing the kicker.** It is a foul for roughing the kicker if a defensive player:

- (a) contacts the plant leg of the kicker while his kicking leg is still in the air; or
- (b) slides into or contacts the kicker when both of the kicker's feet are on the ground. It is not a foul if the contact is not severe, or if the kicker returns both feet to the ground prior to the contact and falls over a defender who is on the ground.

*Note: When in doubt, it is a foul for roughing the kicker.*

**Item 2: Running into the Kicker.** It is a foul for running into the kicker if a defensive player:

- (a) contacts the kicking foot of the kicker, even if the kicker is airborne when the contact occurs; or
- (b) slides under the kicker, preventing him from returning both feet to the ground.

**Penalties:**

- (1) For roughing the kicker: Loss of 15 yards from the previous spot (personal foul) and an automatic first down. The player may be disqualified if the action is flagrant.**
- (2) For running into the kicker: Loss of five yards from the previous spot (not a personal foul). There is not an automatic first down.**

**A.R. 12.10** Kicker A1 in punt formation muffs a snap. He recovers on the ground and then kicks. A1 is run into, blocked, or tackled by B1 who had started his action when A1 first recovered.  
**Ruling:** Legal action by B1.

**A.R. 12.11** Fourth-and-12 on B30. On a field-goal attempt which is not good, receiver B1 runs into the kicker without touching the ball.  
**Ruling:** A's ball fourth-and-7 on B25. Running into the kicker. If the field goal had been good, no penalty would be enforced on the succeeding kickoff, since it was not a personal foul.

**Article 11: Roughing the Holder.** It is a foul for roughing the holder if a defensive player forcibly contacts the holder of a place kick, unless the contact:

- (a) is incidental and occurs after the defender has touched the kick in flight;
- (b) is caused because a defender is blocked into the holder; or
- (c) occurs after the holder recovers a ball that has touched the ground.

**Penalty: For roughing the holder: Loss of 15 yards from the previous spot (personal foul) and an automatic first down. The player may be disqualified if the action is flagrant.**

**SUPPLEMENTAL NOTES**

- (1) Any unnecessary roughness committed by defensive players is roughing the kicker or holder. The severity of the contact and the potential for injury are to be considered.
- (2) When two defensive players are making a bona fide attempt to block a kick from scrimmage (punt, drop kick, and/or placekick), and one of them runs into the kicker or holder after the ball has left the kicker's foot at the same instant the second player blocks the kick, the foul for running into the kicker or holder shall not be enforced, unless in the judgment of the Referee, the player running into the kicker or holder was clearly the direct cause of the kick being blocked.

**Article 12: Striking, Kicking, or Kneeing Opponents.** All players are prohibited from:

- (a) striking an opponent with his fists;
- (b) kicking or kneeling an opponent; or
- (c) striking, swinging at, or clubbing the head, neck, or face of an opponent with the wrist(s), arm(s), elbow(s), or hand(s).

**Exceptions:** Contact to the head, neck, or face of an opponent with the palm of the hand is permitted by a defensive player:

- (1) who is attempting to ward off an offensive player at the line of scrimmage, provided that it is not a repeated act against the same opponent during any one contact; or
- (2) in a personal attempt to recover a loose ball.

**Penalty: For fouls in (a) through (c): Loss of 15 yards. If any of the fouls is judged by the official(s) to be flagrant, the offender may be disqualified as long as the entire action is observed by the official(s). If the foul is by the defense, it is also an automatic first down.**

**Article 13: Striking With Forearms or Elbows.** A player in blocking shall not strike an opponent below the shoulders with his forearm or elbows by turning the trunk of his body at the waist, pivoting, or in any other way that is clearly unnecessary.

**Penalty: For striking an opponent below the shoulders with the forearm or elbow: Loss of 15 yards. If the foul is by the defense, it is also an automatic first down.**

**A.R. 12.12** Second-and-10 on A30. Defensive player B1, on his initial charge, head slaps an offensive tackle on the helmet once with his open hand trying to get at runner A1. A1 is downed on the A35.  
**Ruling:** Illegal. A's ball first-and-10 on the 50.

**A.R. 12.13** Second-and-10 on A30. Defensive player B1, on his initial charge, head slaps an offensive tackle on his helmet repeatedly with his open hand in trying to get at a runner. The runner is downed on the A35.  
**Ruling:** Illegal. Loss of 15 yards. A's ball first-and-10 on the 50.

**Article 14: Twisting, Pulling, or Turning the Facemask.** No player shall **grasp and control**, twist, turn, push, or pull the facemask of an opponent in any direction.

*Note: If a player grasps an opponent's facemask, he must immediately release it. If he does not immediately release it and controls his opponent, it is a foul.*

**Penalty: For twisting, turning, pushing, pulling, or controlling the mask: Loss of 15 yards. The player may be disqualified if the action is flagrant. If the foul is by the defense, it is also an automatic first down.**

**A.R. 12.14** Third-and-10 on A30. Runner A1 runs to the A33, where he is tackled by B1, who incidentally grasps A1's facemask on the tackle, but it is not a twist, turn, or pull.  
**Ruling:** A's ball, fourth-and-seven, on A33. No Foul.

**Article 15: Horse-Collar Tackle.** No player shall grab the inside collar of the back or the side of the shoulder pads or jersey pads or jersey, and pull the runner **toward the ground**. This does not apply to a runner who is in the tackle box or to a quarterback who is in the pocket.

*Note: It is not necessary for a player to pull the runner completely to the ground in order for the act to be illegal. If his knees are buckled by the action, it is a foul, even if the runner is not pulled completely to the ground.*

**Penalty: For a Horse-Collar Tackle: Loss of 15 yards and an automatic first down.**

**Article 16: Use of Helmet as a Weapon.** A player may not use a helmet that is no longer worn by anyone as a weapon to strike, swing at, or throw at an opponent.

**Penalty: For illegal use of a helmet as a weapon: Loss of 15 yards and automatic disqualification. If the foul is by the defense, it is also an automatic first down.**

**Article 17: Illegal Cut Block.** See Rule 8, Section 4, Article 5.

### Section 3 Unsportsmanlike Conduct

**Article 1: Prohibited Acts.** There shall be no unsportsmanlike conduct. This applies to any act which is contrary to the generally understood principles of sportsmanship. Such acts specifically include, among others:

- (a) Throwing a punch, or a forearm, or kicking at an opponent, even though no contact is made.
- (b) Using abusive, threatening, or insulting language or gestures to opponents, teammates, officials, or representatives of the League.
- (c) Using baiting or taunting acts or words that engender ill will between teams.
- (d) Prolonged or excessive celebrations or demonstrations by an individual player. Players are prohibited from engaging in any celebrations or demonstrations while on the ground. A celebration or demonstration shall be deemed excessive or prolonged if a player continues to celebrate or demonstrate after a warning from an official.
- (e) Two or more players engaging in prolonged, excessive, premeditated, or choreographed celebrations or demonstrations.
- (f) Possession or use of foreign or extraneous object(s) that are not part of the uniform during the game on the field or the sideline, or using the ball as a prop.
- (g) Unnecessary physical contact with a game official.
- (h) Removal of his helmet by a player in the field of play **or the end zone** during a celebration or demonstration, or during a confrontation with a game official or any other player.

**Exceptions:** It is not a foul if:

- I. a timeout has been called for reasons of injury, television break, or charged team timeout; or
- II. it is between periods.

*Note 1: Under no condition is an official to allow a player to shove, push, or strike him in an offensive, disrespectful, or unsportsmanlike manner. Any such action must be reported to the Commissioner.*

**Penalty: (for a through h): Loss of 15 yards from the succeeding spot or whatever spot the Referee, after consulting with the crew, deems equitable. If the foul is by the defense, it is also an automatic first down.**

*Note 2: Violations of (b) or (c) (above), which occur before or during the game, may result in disqualification in addition to the yardage penalty. Any violations at the game site on the day of the game, including postgame, may result in discipline by the Commissioner. Any violation of (g) above may result in disqualification and also will include discipline by the Commissioner. An official must see the entire action for a player to be disqualified.*

*Note 3: Violations of (b) will be penalized if any of the acts are committed directly at an opponent. These acts include, but are not limited to: sack dances; home run swing; incredible hulk; spiking the ball; spinning the ball; throwing or shoving the ball; pointing; pointing the ball; verbal taunting; military salute; standing over an opponent (prolonged and with provocation); or dancing.*

*Note 4: Violations of (c) will be penalized if any of the acts occur anywhere on the field. These acts include, but are not limited to: throat slash; machine-gun salute; sexually-suggestive gestures; prolonged gyrations; or stomping on a team logo.*

*Note 5: Violations of (d) will be penalized if they occur anywhere on the field other than the bench area.*

*Note 6: If any foreign object(s) are deemed a safety hazard by the game officials, in addition to a yardage penalty, the player will be subject to ejection from the game, whether he uses the object or not.*

- (i) Using acts or words by the defensive team that are designed to disconcert an offensive team at the snap. An official must blow his whistle immediately to stop play.
- (j) Concealing the ball underneath the uniform or using any article of equipment to simulate a ball.
- (k) Using entering substitutes, legally returning players, substitutes on sidelines, or withdrawn players to confuse opponents, including lingering by players leaving the field after being replaced by a substitute and an offensive player lining up or going in motion less than five yards from the sideline in front of his team's designated bench area. However, an offensive player is permitted to line up less than five yards from the sidelines on the same side as his team's player bench, provided he is not in front of the designated bench area. See 5-2-2.
- (l) Attempting to conserve time inside one minute of either half by repeatedly violating the substitution rule while the ball is dead and time is in. See 4-7-2.
- (m) More than two successive delay-of-game penalties (after warning) during the same down.
- (n) Jumping or standing on a teammate or opponent to block or attempt to block an opponent's kick.
- (o) Placing a hand or hands on a teammate or opponent to gain additional height to block or attempt to block an opponent's kick.
- (p) Picking up a teammate to block or attempt to block an opponent's kick.
- (q) Running forward and leaping in an obvious attempt to block a field goal or Try Kick and landing on players, unless the leaping player was originally lined up within one yard of the line of scrimmage when the ball was snapped.
- (r) Goal-tending by a defensive player leaping up to deflect a kick as it passes above the crossbar of a goalpost. The referee may award three points for a palpably unfair act (12-3-3).
- (s) A punter, placekicker, or holder who simulates being roughed or run into by a defensive player.
- (t) If a member of the kicking team is forced out of bounds, or goes out of bounds voluntarily, and does not attempt to return inbounds in a reasonable amount of time.
- (u) Attempting to call an excess or illegal timeout to "freeze" a kicker prior to a field goal attempt or a Try Kick when:
  - I. a team has already been charged a timeout during the same dead ball period; or
  - II. a team has exhausted its three charged team timeouts that are permitted in a half.

If an attempt is made to call a timeout in these situations, the officials shall not grant a timeout, play will continue, and a penalty for unsportsmanlike conduct shall be enforced after the down has been completed. The penalty shall also be enforced if a timeout is inadvertently granted.

*Note: The Referee (or another official) will notify the Head Coach (i) that two charged timeouts by the same team in the same dead ball period are not permitted, and (ii) when he has exhausted his three charged team timeouts in a half.*

**Penalty: For unsportsmanlike conduct (i) through (u): Loss of 15 yards from:**

- (a) the succeeding spot if the ball is dead.**
- (b) the previous spot if the ball was in play.**

**If the infraction is flagrant, the player is also disqualified. If the foul is by the defense, it is also an automatic first down.**

**Article 2: Fouls to Prevent Score.** The defense shall not commit successive or repeated fouls to prevent a score.

**Penalty: For successive or repeated fouls to prevent a score: If the violation is repeated after a warning, the score involved is awarded to the offensive team.**

**Article 3: Palpably Unfair Act.** A player or substitute shall not interfere with play by any act which is palpably unfair.

**Penalty: For a palpably unfair act: Offender may be disqualified. The Referee, after consulting his crew, enforces any such distance penalty as they consider equitable and irrespective of any other specified code penalty. The Referee may award a score. See 15-1-6.**

## Section 4: Illegal Bats and Kicks

**Article 1: Illegal Bat.** It is an illegal bat if:

- (a) a player of either team bats or punches a loose ball in the field of play toward his opponent's goal line; or
- (b) a player of either team bats or punches a loose ball (that has touched the ground) in any direction, if it is in either end zone; or
- (c) an offensive player bats a backward pass in flight toward his opponent's goal line.

**Penalty: For illegal batting or punching the ball: Loss of 10 yards. For enforcement, treat as a foul during a backward pass or fumble (see 8-7-7). If the foul is by the defense, it is an automatic first down.**

**Article 2: Legal Bat.** A forward pass in flight may be tipped, batted, or deflected in any direction by any eligible player at any time.

*Note: If a forward pass that is controlled by a player prior to completing the catch is thrown forward, it is an illegal bat. If it is caught by a teammate or intercepted by an opponent, the ball remains alive. If it is not caught, the ball is dead when it hits the ground.*

**Article 3: Illegally Kicking Ball.** No player may deliberately kick a loose ball or a ball that is in a player's possession.

**Penalty: For illegally kicking the ball: Loss of 10 yards. If by Team A before possession changes during a scrimmage down: Loss of down and loss of 10 yards. For enforcement, treat as a foul during a backward pass or fumble (see 8-7-7). If the foul is by the defense, it is an automatic first down.**

### SUPPLEMENTAL NOTES

- 1) If a loose ball is unintentionally touched by any part of a player's leg (including the knee), it is not considered kicking and is treated as touching.
- 2) If the penalty for an illegal bat or kick is declined, the procedure is the same as though the ball had been muffed. However, if the act (impetus) sends the ball behind a goal line, 3-15-3 applies.
- 3) The penalty for Articles 1 and 3 does not preclude a penalty for a palpably unfair act. See Palpably Unfair Act (12-3-3).
- 4) The ball is not dead when an illegal kick is recovered.

**A.R. 12.15** Second-and-15 on A2. Quarterback A1 fumbles a snap in the end zone. While the ball is loose on the ground there, A1 deliberately kicks it. The ball is last touched by B1 before going out of bounds on A's 2-yard line.  
**Ruling:** Safety. See 8-7-3-Item 3-c and 11-5-1.