

Rule 6 Free Kicks

Section 1 Procedures for a Free Kick

FREE KICK

Article 1 A free kick is a kickoff or safety kick that puts the ball in play to start a free kick down. It must be made from any point on the kicking (offensive) team's restraining line and between the inbounds lines.

- (a) A kickoff puts the ball in play at the start of each half, after a try, and after a successful field goal. A dropkick or placekick may be used for a kickoff.

Note: During a placekick on a kickoff, the kicking team may use a manufactured tee that is one inch in height and approved by the League. Once the ball has been placed on the kicking tee, the kicking tee cannot be moved. If the ball falls off the tee, or the tee is moved, the covering officials must stop play and restart the timing process without penalty to the kicking team. If the ball falls off the tee a second time during the same free kick down, the kicking team then must either use a player to hold the ball or must kick it off the ground. The ball may be placed on the ground leaning against the tee, provided the tee is in its normal upright position.

- (b) A safety kick puts the ball in play after a safety. A dropkick, placekick, or punt may be used for a safety kick. A tee cannot be used for a safety kick.

Penalty: For illegal kick on a free kick down: Loss of five yards.

RESTRAINING LINES

Article 2 The restraining lines for a free kick shall be as follows, unless they are adjusted because of a distance penalty:

- (a) The restraining line for the kicking team shall be its 35-yard line for a kickoff and its 20-yard line for a safety kick.
- (b) The restraining line for the receiving team shall be the yard line 10 yards in advance of the kicking team's restraining line.

FREE KICK FORMATION

Article 3 When the ball is kicked on a free kick down:

- (a) After the ball has been made ready for play, all kicking team (Team A) players other than the kicker must be lined up no more than five yards behind their restraining line; and
- (b) All kicking team players must be inbounds and behind the ball when it is kicked, except:
 - (1) the holder of a placekick (3-23) may be beyond the line, and
 - (2) the kicker may be beyond the line, provided that his kicking foot is not beyond the line.
- (c) At least four players of the kicking team must be on each side of the kicker. At least three players must be lined up outside each inbounds line, one of whom must be outside the yard-line number.

Note: A holder for a free kick counts as one of the required four players, regardless of where he is positioned.

- (d) All receiving team (Team B) players must be inbounds and behind their restraining line until the ball is kicked.

Penalty: For a player being beyond the restraining line when the ball is kicked (offside), a player being out of bounds when the ball is kicked, a kicking team player other than the kicker being more than five yards behind his restraining line, or the kicking team being in an illegal formation when the ball is kicked: Loss of five yards.

- (e) After the ball is kicked, no more than two receiving team players may intentionally form a wedge in an attempt to block for the runner. An illegal wedge is defined as three or more players lined up shoulder-to-shoulder within two yards of each other.

Note: This does not apply when the kicking team lines up in an obvious onside kick formation.

Penalty: For players intentionally forming an illegal wedge: Loss of 15 yards from the spot of the foul.

CATCH OR RECOVERY OF A FREE KICK

Article 4 The following applies to the catch or recovery of a free kick:

- (a) If a player of the receiving team catches or recovers the ball, he may advance.
- (b) If the ball is declared dead while in the simultaneous possession of two opposing players, the ball is awarded to the receiving team.
- (c) A player of the kicking team may legally touch, catch, or recover the ball if:
 - (i) it first touches a receiving team player; or
 - (ii) it reaches or crosses the receiving team's restraining line.
- (d) The ball is dead if it is caught or recovered by a player of the kicking team. If the catch or recovery is legal, the ball belongs to the kicking team at the dead-ball spot.
- (e) If the ball comes to rest inbounds after reaching the receiving team's restraining line and no player attempts to possess it, the ball becomes dead and belongs to the receiving team at the dead-ball spot.

Note: For illegal catch or recovery, see Section 2, Article 4.

FREE KICK CROSSES GOAL LINE

Article 5 It is a touchback if a free kick:

- (a) goes out of bounds behind the receiving team's goal line;
- (b) strikes the receiving team's goal post, uprights, or cross bar; or
- (c) is downed in the end zone by the receiving team.

END OF FREE KICK

Article 6 A free kick ends when either team possesses the ball, or when the ball is dead, if that precedes possession. A running play begins when the receiving team establishes possession of the ball.

Section 2 Other Free Kick Fouls

BLOCKING

Article 1

Item 1: Kicking Team. After the ball touches a receiving team player, or has reached the receiver's restraining line, a kicking team player may legally block an opponent, and he may use his hands and arms to push or pull an opponent out of the way in a personal attempt to recover the ball.

Prior to the ball touching a receiving team player or reaching the receiving team's restraining line, he may not block or use his hands or arms against an opponent between the restraining lines, except to push or pull aside a receiver who is actively attempting to obstruct his attempt to proceed downfield.

Regardless of the location of the ball, he may legally block an opponent at or beyond the receiving team's restraining line. **During the kick, the kicking team is subject to the blocking restrictions of the defense.**

Item 2: Receiving Team. After the ball is kicked, receiving team players **are subject to the blocking restrictions of the offense** (see Rule 12, Sections 1-3), and they may use their hands/arms legally to push or pull an opponent out of the way in a personal attempt to recover the ball.

Penalty: For illegal blocking or use of hands by either team: Loss of 10 yards. See 12-2-5 for penalty for a low block.

RUNNING INTO FREE KICKER

Article 2 A player of the receiving team is not permitted to run into the kicker before he recovers his balance. See also **12-2-6h and 12-2-10** for personal fouls against the kicker.

Penalty: For running into the kicker: Loss of five yards.

FREE KICK OUT OF BOUNDS

Article 3 The kicking team may not kick the ball out of bounds or be the last to touch the ball before it goes out of bounds between the goal lines. If the receiving team is the last to touch the ball before it goes out of bounds, the receiving team puts the ball in play at the inbounds spot.

Penalty: For a kickoff out of bounds: The receiving team may elect to take possession of the ball 25 yards from the spot of the kick or at the out-of-bounds spot.

Penalty: For a safety kick out of bounds: The receiving team may elect to take possession of the ball 30 yards from the spot of the kick or at the out-of-bounds spot.

FREE KICK ILLEGALLY TOUCHED

Article 4

Item 1: A player of the kicking team may not touch, catch, or recover the ball before it has reached the receiving team's restraining line, unless it has first been touched by a receiving team player.

Penalty: For illegal touching of a free kick by the kicking team: Loss of five yards, or the receiving team takes possession of the ball at the spot of the illegal touch.

Item 2: If a kicking team player goes out of bounds during the kick, he may not touch or recover the ball beyond the receiving team's restraining line, unless it has first been touched by a receiving team player. If a kicking team player touches the ball before re-establishing himself legally inbounds, it is a free kick out of bounds.

Penalty: For illegal touching of a free kick by the kicking team: Loss of five yards.

SHORT FREE KICK

Article 5 If the ball has not been touched by either team after the kick and rolls dead in the field of play before reaching the receiving team's restraining line, it is a foul.

Penalty: For a short free kick: Loss of five yards.

Section 3 Enforcement of Fouls

ENFORCEMENT FROM PREVIOUS SPOT

Article 1 If there is a foul during a free kick, the normal enforcement is from the previous spot, and the free kick is made again. **However, if the kicking team commits a foul prior to the end of the kick, and the receiving team retains possession**

throughout the down, it will have the option of enforcing the penalty at the previous spot and replaying the down or adding the penalty yardage to the dead-ball spot.

Exceptions:

- (a) A personal foul (blocking) after a fair-catch signal is enforced from the spot of the foul.
- (b) A foul for fair-catch interference is enforced from the spot of the foul.
- (c) A foul for interference with the opportunity to make a catch is enforced from the spot of the foul.
- (d) A foul for an invalid fair catch signal is enforced from the spot of the foul.
- (e) A foul for intentionally forming an illegal wedge, whether during the free kick or during the return, is enforced from the spot of the foul.
- (f) For a free kick out of bounds, see Section 2, Article 3.
- (g) For a free kick illegally touched, see Section 2, Article 4.
- (h) Double fouls are enforced according to the customary rules. See Rule 14.

Note: The dead-ball spot for free kicks that result in a touchback is the 20-yard line.