

Rule 8 Forward Pass, Backward Pass, Fumble

Section 1 Forward Pass

DEFINITION

Article 1 Definition. It is a forward pass if:

- (a) the ball initially moves forward (to a point nearer the opponent's goal line) after leaving the passer's hand(s); or
- (b) the ball first strikes the ground, a player, an official, or anything else at a point that is nearer the opponent's goal line than the point at which the ball leaves the passer's hand(s).

Note: A ball that is intentionally fumbled and goes forward is a forward pass. A ball that is intentionally muffed, and goes forward or backward, is a batted ball (12-1-8). The direction taken by a fumbled or muffed ball does not affect the application of the rules specific to such acts, unless it is ruled that they are intentional.

When a player is in control of the ball and attempting to pass it forward, any intentional forward movement of his hand starts a forward pass.

- (a) If the passer is attempting to throw a forward pass, but contact by an opponent materially affects him, causing the ball to go backward, it is a forward pass, regardless of where the ball strikes the ground, a player, an official, or anything else.
- (b) If, after an intentional forward movement of his hand, the passer loses possession of the ball as he is attempting to tuck it back toward his body, it is a forward pass. If the player loses possession after he has tucked the ball into his body, it is a fumble.
- (c) If the passer loses possession of the ball while attempting to recock his arm, it is a fumble.

LEGAL FORWARD PASS

Article 2 Legal Forward Pass. The offensive team may make one forward pass from behind the line during each down. If the ball, whether in player possession or loose, crosses the line of scrimmage, a forward pass is not permissible, regardless of whether the ball returns behind the line of scrimmage before the pass is thrown.

Item 1: Illegal Passes. Any other forward pass by either team is illegal and is a foul by the passing team, including:

- (a) A forward pass thrown when the passer is beyond the line of scrimmage.

Note: It is a forward pass from beyond the line of scrimmage if the passer's entire body and the ball are beyond the line of scrimmage when the ball is released, whether the passer is airborne or touching the ground. The penalty for a forward pass thrown from beyond the line is enforced from the spot where the ball is released.

- (b) A second forward pass thrown from behind the line of scrimmage.
- (c) A forward pass thrown after the ball has crossed the line of scrimmage and has returned behind it.
- (d) A forward pass thrown after there has been a change of possession.

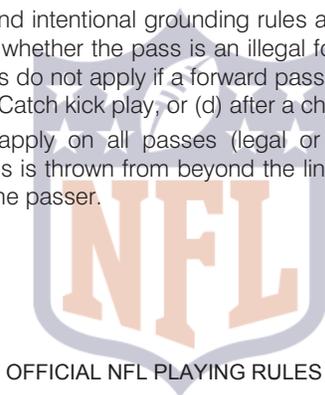
Item 2: Intercepted Illegal Pass. If an illegal pass is caught or intercepted, the ball may be advanced and the penalty declined.

Penalties:

- (a) **For a forward pass from beyond the line: Loss of down and five yards from the spot of the pass. See 14-8-2. See S.N. 3 below.**
- (b) **For a second forward pass from behind the line, or for a forward pass that was thrown after the ball returned behind the line: Loss of five yards.**
- (c) **For a forward pass that is thrown by Team B, or for a forward pass that is thrown by Team A after a change of possession: Loss of five yards from the spot of the pass.**

SUPPLEMENTAL NOTES

- (1) Eligibility, pass interference, and intentional grounding rules apply when a forward pass is thrown from behind the line, regardless of whether the pass is an illegal forward pass. Eligibility, pass interference, and intentional grounding rules do not apply if a forward pass is thrown (a) from beyond the line, (b) on a Free Kick play, (c) on a Fair Catch kick play, or (d) after a change of possession.
- (2) Roughing the passer rules apply on all passes (legal or illegal) thrown from behind the line of scrimmage (12-2-13). If a pass is thrown from beyond the line of scrimmage, unnecessary roughness may apply for action against the passer.



(3) When a distance penalty in Penalty (a) leaves the ball in advance of the necessary line to gain, it is first-and-10 for the offensive team.

(4) See 3-2-3 for the definition of team possession during a forward pass (a loose ball), or for when possession ends.

- A.R. 8.1** Second-and-10 on A40. A forward pass is batted back by a defensive player. The ball goes back in the air to the quarterback behind his line. He throws it again to his end who catches it on the B40 and goes for a score.
Ruling: No score. Second-and-15 on A35.
- A.R. 8.2** Second-and-18 on A4. A second forward pass from behind A's goal line is caught by offensive end A1 at the A8, where he is tackled.
Ruling: Safety. Safety kick A20 or second-and-20 on A2.
- A.R. 8.3** Second-and-10 on A40. A second forward pass from behind the line is intercepted by the defensive team at midfield. A defensive player returns it for a touchdown.
Ruling: Touchdown. Illegal passes may be caught or intercepted.
- A.R. 8.4** A punt is caught on the receiving team's 20-yard line. The player who caught the ball attempts to throw a backward pass, but the ball goes forward and hits the ground. The kicking team falls on it.
Ruling: Illegal forward pass. The ball is dead when it hits the ground. Penalize from the spot of the pass. B's ball first-and-10 on B15 (8-1-2-Pen. c).
- A.R. 8.5** A forward pass is intercepted by a defensive player in his end zone. While in the end zone, he attempts to pass backward. The pass goes forward, hits the ground on the one-yard line and is recovered by the first passing team.
Ruling: Safety. Forward pass not from scrimmage in the end zone.
- A.R. 8.6** Third-and-10 on B35. A second forward pass is thrown from behind the line to Flanker A1. Defensive player B1 interferes with A1 on the B20, but A1 catches it anyway and is downed on the B20.
Ruling: Double foul. Illegal pass by the offensive team and interference by the defensive team. Interference rules apply on the second forward pass from behind the line(14-3-1). A's ball third-and-10 on B35 (replay).
- A.R. 8.7** Third-and-15 on A30. During a forward pass from beyond the line on the A40, offensive player A1 clips on the A40. The pass is incomplete.
Ruling: Choice for defensive team. Loss of down and five from the spot of the pass or loss of 15 from the spot of the pass (unless offensive player fouls behind that spot—spot of foul). A's ball fourth-and-10 on A35 or third-and-20 on A25.
- A.R. 8.8** Third-and-15 on A30. During a forward pass from beyond the line on the A40, defensive player B1 tackles A8 by the facemask on the A40. The ball falls incomplete.
Ruling: Double foul (14-3-1). Replay at the previous spot. A's ball third-and-15 on A30.

COMPLETED OR INTERCEPTED PASS

Article 3 Completed or Intercepted Pass. A player who makes a catch may advance the ball. A forward pass is complete (by the offense) or intercepted (by the defense) if a player, who is inbounds:

- (a) secures control of the ball in his hands or arms prior to the ball touching the ground; and
- (b) touches the ground inbounds with both feet or with any part of his body other than his hands; and
- (c) maintains control of the ball long enough, after (a) and (b) have been fulfilled, to enable him to perform any act common to the game (i.e., maintaining control long enough to pitch it, pass it, advance with it, or avoid or ward off an opponent, etc.).

Note 1: It is not necessary that he commit such an act, provided that he maintains control of the ball long enough to do so.

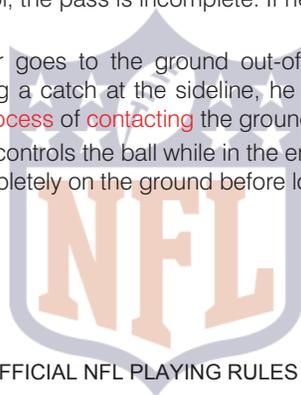
Note 2: If a player has control of the ball, a slight movement of the ball will not be considered a loss of possession. He must lose control of the ball in order to rule that there has been a loss of possession.

If the player loses the ball while simultaneously touching both feet or any part of his body other than his hands to the ground, or if there is any doubt that the acts were simultaneous, it is not a catch.

Item 1: Player Going to the Ground. If a player goes to the ground in the act of catching a pass (with or without contact by an opponent), he must maintain control of the ball throughout the process of contacting the ground, whether in the field of play or the end zone. If he loses control of the ball, and the ball touches the ground before he regains control, the pass is incomplete. If he regains control prior to the ball touching the ground, the pass is complete.

Item 2: Sideline Catches. If a player goes to the ground out-of-bounds (with or without contact by an opponent) in the process of making a catch at the sideline, he must maintain complete and continuous control of the ball throughout the process of contacting the ground, or the pass is incomplete.

Item 3: End Zone Catches. If a player controls the ball while in the end zone, both feet, or any part of his body other than his hands, must be completely on the ground before losing control, or the pass is incomplete.



Note: In the field of play, if a catch of a forward pass has been completed, after which contact by a defender causes the ball to become loose before the runner is down by contact, it is a fumble, and the ball remains alive. In the end zone, the same action is a touchdown, since the receiver completed the catch beyond the goal line prior to the loss of possession, and the ball is dead when the catch is completed.

Item 4: Ball Touches Ground. If the ball touches the ground after the player secures control of it, it is a catch, provided that the player continues to maintain control.

Item 5: Simultaneous Catch. If a pass is caught simultaneously by two eligible opponents, and both players retain it, the ball belongs to the passers. It is not a simultaneous catch if a player gains control first and an opponent subsequently gains joint control. If the ball is muffed after simultaneous touching by two such players, all the players of the passing team become eligible to catch the loose ball.

Item 6: Carried Out of Bounds. If a player, who is in possession of the ball, is held up and carried out of bounds by an opponent before both feet or any part of his body other than his hands touches the ground inbounds, it is a completed or intercepted pass.

INCOMPLETE PASS

Article 4 Incomplete Pass. Any forward pass (legal or illegal) is incomplete and the ball is dead immediately if the pass strikes the ground or goes out of bounds. An incomplete pass is a loss of down, and the ball returns to the previous spot.

Note: If there is any question whether a forward pass is complete, intercepted, or incomplete, it is to be ruled incomplete.

ELIGIBLE RECEIVERS

Article 5 Eligible Receivers. The following players are eligible to catch a forward pass that is thrown from behind the line of scrimmage.

- (a) Defensive players.
- (b) Offensive players who are on either end of the line, provided they either have the numbers of eligible players (1-49 and 80-89) or have legally reported to play a position on the end of the line. See 5-1-2.
- (c) Offensive players who are legally at least one yard behind the line at the snap, provided they either have the numbers of eligible players (1-49 and 80-89) or have legally reported to play a position in the backfield.
- (d) All other offensive players after the ball has been touched by any defensive player or any eligible offensive player.

INELIGIBLE RECEIVERS

Article 6 Ineligible Receivers. All offensive players other than those identified in Article 5 above are ineligible to catch a legal or illegal forward pass thrown from behind the line of scrimmage, including:

- (a) Players who are not on either end of their line or at least one yard behind it when the ball is snapped.
- (b) Offensive players wearing numbers 50-79, unless they have reported a change in their eligibility status to the Referee and have assumed a position on their line or in their backfield as required by Article 5;
- (c) Players who fail to notify the Referee of being eligible when required;
- (d) An eligible receiver who has been out of bounds prior to or during a pass, even if he has re-established himself inbounds with both feet or with any part of his body other than his hands.

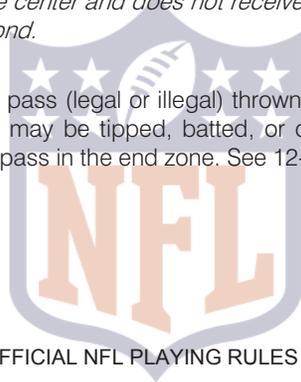
Exception: If an eligible receiver is forced out of bounds by a foul by a defender, including illegal contact, defensive holding, or defensive pass interference, he will become eligible to legally touch the pass (without prior touching by another eligible receiver or defender) as soon as he re-establishes himself inbounds with both feet or with any part of his body other than his hands. See Article 8, Note 3.

- (e) A player who takes his stance behind center as a T-formation quarterback is not an eligible receiver unless, before the ball is snapped, he legally moves to a position at least one yard behind the line of scrimmage or on the end of the line, and is stationary in that position for at least one second before the snap.

Note: If he leaves his position behind the center and does not receive the snap, it is a false start unless he has been stationary for at least one second.

LEGAL TOUCHING

Article 7 Legal Touching. A forward pass (legal or illegal) thrown from behind the line may be touched by any eligible player. A pass in flight may be tipped, batted, or deflected in any direction by any eligible player at any time, including such a pass in the end zone. See 12-1-8.



ILLEGAL TOUCHING OF A FORWARD PASS

Article 8 Illegal Touching of a Forward Pass. It is a foul for illegal touching if a forward pass (legal or illegal), thrown from behind the line of scrimmage:

- (a) is first touched intentionally or is caught by an ineligible offensive player; or
- (b) first touches or is caught by an eligible receiver who has gone out of bounds, either of his own volition or by being legally forced out of bounds, and has re-established himself inbounds.

Penalty: Loss of five yards.

Note 1: If a forward pass (legal or illegal) is caught by an ineligible offensive player, the ball remains alive.

Note 2: The bat of a pass in flight by any player does not end a pass, nor does it change the impetus if the bat sends it in touch.

Note 3: If a player touches the ball after having been out of bounds, but prior to re-establishing himself inbounds with both feet or any part of his body other than his hands, the pass is incomplete, and there is no penalty for illegal touching.

- A.R. 8.9** Third-and-10 on B40. A forward pass from behind the line goes off eligible offensive end A1's hands and flanker back A2 catches it in the end zone.
Ruling: Touchdown.
- A.R. 8.10** While in midair, a receiver firmly takes hold of a pass, but loses possession of the ball when his shoulder lands on the ground with or without being contacted by an opponent.
Ruling: Incomplete pass. Receiver must hold onto the ball when he alights on the ground in order to complete the reception.
- A.R. 8.11** Third-and-10 on B40. On a legal forward pass, eligible end A1 is blocked out of bounds on the B36. He returns to the field of play, catches pass, and scores.
Ruling: No score. The player became an ineligible receiver by going out of bounds. A's ball third-and-15 on B45.
- A.R. 8.12** Third-and-10 on B40. On a legal forward pass, eligible end A1 steps out of bounds on the B20. He returns to the field of play and catches a pass after a defensive player touched it. He scores.
Ruling: Touchdown. Legal play as all ineligible receivers become eligible after the defense touches the ball.
- A.R. 8.13** Third-and-10 on B40. Eligible end A1 touches a legal forward pass on the B35 and the ball is then touched by ineligible receiver A2 on B35. A defensive player intercepts. He runs it back to the B45 where he fumbles and passing Team A recovers.
Ruling: Legal touch. A's ball first-and-10 on B45.
- A.R. 8.14** Second-and-five on B20. A forward pass from behind the line barely touches the crossbar. Eligible offensive end A1 catches the ball in the end zone.
Ruling: No score. The ball is dead immediately upon touching the crossbar (or goal posts). Loss of down from the previous spot. A's ball third-and-five on B20.
- A.R. 8.15** Second-and-10 on B30. A legal forward pass is caught by offensive flanker A1 near the sideline. His second step touches the sideline.
Ruling: Incomplete pass. Both feet have to land inbounds. A's ball third-and-10 on B30.
- A.R. 8.16** Second-and-10 on B30. A legal forward pass is intercepted by defensive player B1. As he lands with the ball in his possession, he straddles the sideline.
Ruling: Incomplete pass. Both feet have to touch inbounds. A's ball third-and-10 on B30.
- A.R. 8.17** Second-and-10 on B30. A legal forward pass is intercepted by defensive player B1 who jumped in from out of bounds to intercept pass. Both feet touch inbounds after interception.
Ruling: Incomplete pass. Both feet have to be inbounds prior to interception. A's ball third-and-10 on B30. See 8-1-8-Note 3.
- A.R. 8.18** Second-and-10 on B30. Eligible offensive A1 jumps in air (behind or beyond line) to receive a forward pass and then passes backward to ineligible offensive A2 before he lands.
Ruling: Legal catch.
- A.R. 8.19** Second-and-20 on A40. Quarterback A1 receives a hand-to-hand snap from center and hands off to back A2 who runs to his right and throws a legal forward pass from behind the line to Quarterback A1. Quarterback A1 catches the pass on the A38 and runs to the 50.
Ruling: A's ball second-and-25 on A35 or A's ball third-and-10 on 50.
- A.R. 8.20** Second-and-10 on A40. A legal forward pass touches ineligible guard A1 behind the line. The ball is then intercepted by a defensive player who returns it to the A20.
Ruling: Pass not incomplete when A1 touched by ball. Pass continues in play. B's ball first-and-10 on A20.
- A.R. 8.21** Second-and-10 on A40. A legal forward pass is intentionally touched by ineligible guard A1 behind the line. The ball is then intercepted by the defensive team which returns it to the A30, fumbles, and the ball is recovered by the passing team at the A28.
Ruling: Five-yard penalty for touching ineligible receiver behind the line. A's ball second-and-15 on A35.
- A.R. 8.22** Second-and-10 on A40. A legal forward pass is intentionally touched by ineligible guard A1 behind the line and is then caught by eligible back A2 who runs to the 50.
Ruling: A's ball second-and-15 on A35.

- A.R. 8.23** Fourth-and-two on B4. A legal forward pass touches ineligible receiver A1 in the end zone and falls incomplete.
Ruling: B's ball first-and-10 on B4 (declined).
- A.R. 8.24** Fourth-and-two on B4. A legal forward pass accidentally touches ineligible receiver A1 on the B3 and falls incomplete.
Ruling: B's ball first-and-10 on B4 (declined).
- A.R. 8.25** Second-and-15 on A8. A legal forward pass is batted back by a defensive player and the ball lands in the end zone. A defensive player falls on it in the end zone.
Ruling: Incomplete pass. A's ball third-and-15 on A8.
- A.R. 8.26** First-and-10 on A30. A legal forward pass is touched simultaneously by two opposing eligible players, A1 and B1. The pass goes in the air where ineligible A2 catches it on the A40 and runs to midfield.
Ruling: A's ball first-and-10 on 50.

Section 2 Intentional Grounding

DEFINITION

Article 1 Definition. It is a foul for intentional grounding if a passer, facing an imminent loss of yardage because of pressure from the defense, throws a forward pass without a realistic chance of completion. A realistic chance of completion is defined as a pass that lands in the direction and the vicinity of an originally eligible receiver.

Item 1: Passer or Ball Outside Tackle Position. Intentional grounding will not be called when a passer, who is outside, or has been outside, the tackle position throws a forward pass that lands at or beyond the line of scrimmage, even if no offensive player(s) have a realistic chance to catch the ball (including when the ball lands out of bounds over the sideline or endline). If a loose ball leaves the area bordered by the tackles, this area no longer exists; if the ball is recovered, all intentional grounding rules apply as if the passer is outside this area.

Item 2: Physical Contact. Intentional grounding should not be called if:

- (a) the passer initiates his passing motion toward an eligible receiver and then is significantly affected by physical contact from a defensive player that causes the pass to land in an area that is not in the direction and vicinity of an eligible receiver; or
- (b) the passer is out of the pocket, and his passing motion is significantly affected by physical contact from a defensive player that causes the ball to land short of the line of scrimmage.

Item 3: Stopping Clock. A player under center is permitted to stop the game clock legally to save time if, immediately upon receiving the snap, he begins a continuous throwing motion and throws the ball directly into the ground.

Item 4: Delayed Spike. A passer, after delaying his passing action for strategic purposes, is prohibited from throwing the ball to the ground in front of him, even though he is under no pressure from defensive rusher(s).

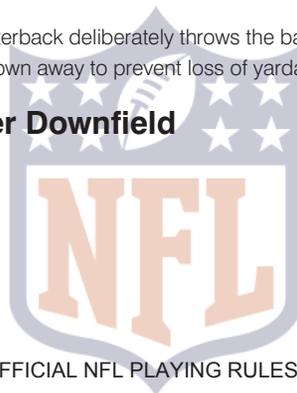
Penalty:

For intentional grounding:

- (a) loss of down and 10 yards from the previous spot; or
- (b) loss of down at the spot of the foul; or
- (c) if the passer is in his end zone when the ball is thrown, it is a safety. See 4-7-1 for actions to conserve time inside one minute of either half.

- A.R. 8.27** Second-and-20 on A4. A quarterback drops back into his end zone. Just before he is tackled in his end zone, he intentionally grounds the ball by throwing a pass directly in front of him. A defensive player falls on it.
Ruling: Intentional grounding. Safety.
- A.R. 8.28** Second-and-10 on A30. Quarterback intentionally grounds ball forward as he stands on A16 to keep from being tackled.
Ruling: Loss of down at spot of foul as quarterback is more than 10 yards behind the line. Third-and-24 on A16.
- A.R. 8.29** Second-and-10 on B20. Quarterback deliberately throws the ball out of bounds to stop the game clock.
Ruling: The pass was not thrown away to prevent loss of yardage. A's ball third-and-10 on B20.

Section 3 Ineligible Player Downfield



LEGAL AND ILLEGAL ACTS

Article 1 Legal and Illegal Acts. On a scrimmage play during which a legal forward pass is thrown, an ineligible offensive player, including a T-formation quarterback, is not permitted to move more than one yard beyond the line of scrimmage before the pass has been thrown.

Item 1: Legally Downfield. An ineligible player is not illegally downfield if, after initiating contact with an opponent within one yard of the line of scrimmage during his initial charge:

- (a) he moves more than one yard beyond the line while legally blocking or being blocked by an opponent; or
- (b) after breaking legal contact with an opponent more than one yard beyond the line of scrimmage, he remains stationary until a forward pass is thrown; or
- (c) after losing legal contact with an opponent more than one yard beyond the line of scrimmage, he is forced behind the line of scrimmage by an opponent, at which time he is again subject to normal blocking restrictions for an ineligible offensive player.

Note 1: If an offensive player moves beyond the line while legally blocking or being blocked by an opponent, an eligible offensive player may catch a pass between them and the line of scrimmage.

Item 2: Illegally Downfield. An ineligible offensive player is illegally downfield if:

- (a) he moves more than one yard beyond the line of scrimmage without contacting an opponent; or
- (b) after losing contact with an opponent within one yard of the line of scrimmage, he advances more than one yard beyond the line of scrimmage; or
- (c) after losing contact with an opponent more than one yard beyond the line of scrimmage, he continues to move in any direction.

Penalty: For ineligible offensive player downfield: Loss of five yards from the previous spot.

AFTER PASS IS THROWN

Article 2: After Pass Is Thrown. After the ball leaves the passer's hand, ineligible pass receivers can advance more than one yard beyond the line of scrimmage, or beyond the position reached by their initial charge, provided that they do not block or contact a defensive player, who is more than one yard beyond the line of scrimmage, until the ball is touched by a player of either team. Such prior blocking and/or contact is pass interference if it occurs in the vicinity of where the ball is thrown.

A.R. 8.30 Second-and-10 on A30. Center A1 blocks his man and drives him to the A32 where he loses contact. He then moves laterally to his right before the ball is thrown and completed to eligible end A2 who is downed on the A45.

Ruling: Ineligible man moved laterally beyond the line after losing contact. Loss of 5 yards. A's ball second-and-15 on A25 (8-3-1).

A.R. 8.31 Second-and-10 on A30. Ineligible offensive tackle A1 charges, driving lineman B1 back from his line. The pass is completed on the A45.

Ruling: Not ineligible player downfield. A's ball first-and-10 on A45 (8-3-1).

Section 4 Legal and Illegal Contact With Eligible Receivers

LEGAL CONTACT WITHIN FIVE YARDS

Article 1 Legal Contact Within Five Yards. Within five yards of the line of scrimmage, a defensive player may chuck an eligible receiver in front of him. The defender is allowed to maintain continuous and unbroken contact within the five-yard zone, so long as the receiver has not moved beyond a point that is even with the defender.

ILLEGAL CONTACT WITHIN FIVE YARDS

Article 2 Illegal Contact Within Five Yards. Within the five-yard zone, if the player who receives the snap remains in the pocket with the ball, a defender may not make original contact in the back of a receiver, nor may he maintain contact after the receiver has moved beyond a point that is even with the defender.

ILLEGAL CONTACT BEYOND FIVE-YARD ZONE

Article 3 Illegal Contact Beyond Five-Yard Zone. Beyond the five-yard zone, if the player who receives the snap remains in the pocket with the ball, a defender may use his hands or arms only to defend or protect himself against impending contact caused by a receiver. If the receiver attempts to evade the defender, the defender cannot initiate contact that redirects, restricts, or impedes the receiver in any way.

INCIDENTAL CONTACT BEYOND FIVE-YARD ZONE

Article 4 Incidental Contact Beyond Five-Yard Zone. Beyond the five-yard zone, incidental contact may exist between receiver and defender as long as it does not materially affect or significantly impede the receiver, creating a distinct advantage.

ILLEGAL CUT BLOCK

Article 5 Illegal Cut Block. It is an illegal cut block if:

- (a) an eligible receiver who takes a position more than two yards outside of his own tackle (a flexed receiver) is blocked below the waist; or
- (b) an eligible receiver who is lined up on or behind the line of scrimmage and is within two yards of his tackle is blocked below the waist after he crosses the line of scrimmage.

Note: An eligible receiver, whether lined up on or behind the line of scrimmage, who is within two yards of his tackle may be blocked below the waist at or behind the line of scrimmage.

DEFENSIVE HOLDING

Article 6 Defensive Holding. It is defensive holding if a player grasps an eligible offensive player (or his jersey) with his hands, or extends an arm or arms to cut off or encircle him. See 12-1-6.

SUPPLEMENTAL NOTE:

- (1) Any offensive player who pretends to possess the ball, and/or one to whom a teammate pretends to give the ball, may be tackled providing he is crossing his scrimmage line between the offensive tackles of a normal tight offensive line.

END OF RESTRICTIONS

Article 7 End of Restrictions. If the quarterback or the receiver of the snap demonstrates no further intention to pass the ball (i.e., hands off or pitches the ball to another back, throws a forward or backward pass, loses possession of the ball by a muff that touches the ground or a fumble, or if he is tackled, the restrictions on the defensive team prohibiting illegal contact, an illegal cut block, or defensive holding against an offensive receiver will end. If the quarterback leaves the pocket area with the ball in his possession, the restrictions on illegal contact and an illegal cut block both end, but the restriction on defensive holding remains in effect.

If a team presents an apparent punting formation, defensive acts that normally constitute illegal contact (chuck beyond five yards, etc.) are permitted, provided that the acts do not constitute defensive holding.

Penalty: For illegal contact or holding by the defense: Loss of five yards and automatic first down.

Penalty: For illegal cut block: Loss of 15 yards and automatic first down.

Section 5 Pass Interference

DEFINITION

Article 1 Definition. It is pass interference by either team when any act by a player more than one yard beyond the line of scrimmage significantly hinders the progress of an eligible receiver's opportunity to catch the ball. Pass interference can only occur when a forward pass is thrown from behind the line of scrimmage, regardless of whether the pass is legal or illegal, or whether it crosses the line.

Defensive pass interference rules apply from the time the ball is thrown until the ball is touched. See Article 2 for prohibited acts while the ball is in the air.

Offensive pass interference rules apply from the time the ball is snapped until the ball is touched. See Article 2 for prohibited acts while the ball is in the air and Article 4 for prohibited acts prior to the pass.

PROHIBITED ACTS

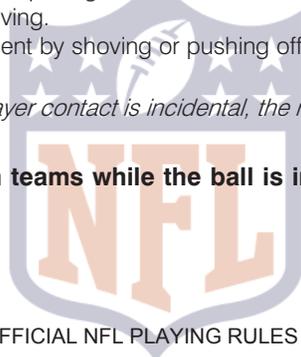
Article 2 Prohibited Acts by both teams while the ball is in the air. Acts that are pass interference include but are not limited to:

- (a) Contact by a player who is not playing the ball that restricts the opponent's opportunity to make the catch.
- (b) Playing through the back of an opponent in an attempt to make a play on the ball.
- (c) Grabbing an opponent's arm(s) in such a manner that restricts his opportunity to catch a pass.
- (d) Extending an arm across the body of an opponent, thus restricting his ability to catch a pass, and regardless of whether the player committing such act is playing the ball.
- (e) Cutting off the path of an opponent by making contact with him, without playing the ball.
- (f) Hooking an opponent in an attempt to get to the ball in such a manner that it causes the opponent's body to turn prior to the ball arriving.
- (g) Initiating contact with an opponent by shoving or pushing off, thus creating a separation in an attempt to catch a pass.

Note: If there is any question whether player contact is incidental, the ruling should be no interference.

PERMISSIBLE ACTS

Article 3 Permissible Acts by both teams while the ball is in the air. Acts that are permissible by a player include but are not limited to:



- (a) Incidental contact by an opponent's hands, arms, or body when both players are competing for the ball, or neither player is looking for the ball. If there is any question whether contact is incidental, the ruling shall be no interference.
- (b) Inadvertent tangling of feet when both players are playing the ball or neither player is playing the ball.
- (c) Contact that would normally be considered pass interference, but the pass is clearly uncatchable by the involved players, except as specified in 8-3-2 and 8-5-4 pertaining to blocking downfield by the offense.
- (d) Laying a hand on an opponent that does not restrict him in an attempt to make a play on the ball.
- (e) Contact by a player who has gained position on an opponent in an attempt to catch the ball.

Note 1: When the ball is in the air, eligible offensive and defensive receivers have the same right to the path of the ball and are subject to the same restrictions.

Note 2: Acts that do not occur more than one yard beyond the line of scrimmage are not pass interference, but could be defensive holding (see 12-1-6).

Note 3: Whenever a team presents an apparent punting formation, defensive acts that normally constitute pass interference are permitted against the end man on the line of scrimmage, or against an eligible receiver behind the line of scrimmage who is aligned or in motion more than one yard outside the end man on the line, provided that the acts do not constitute illegal holding. Defensive holding, such as tackling a receiver, still can be called and result in a five-yard penalty from the previous spot, if accepted. Offensive pass interference rules still apply.

OTHER PROHIBITED ACTS BY THE OFFENSE

Article 4 Other Prohibited Acts By the Offense. Blocking downfield by an offensive player prior to a pass being thrown is offensive pass interference.

Note: It is also pass interference by the offense to block a defender beyond the line while the pass is in the air, if the block occurs in the vicinity of the player to whom the pass is thrown.

Penalty: Pass interference by the defense: First down for the offensive team at the spot of the foul. If the interference is also a personal foul (12-2), the 15-yard penalty for such a foul is also enforced, either from the spot of the foul (for interference), or from the end of the run if the foul for pass interference is declined. If the interference is behind the defensive goal line, it is first down for the offensive team on the defense's one-yard line, or, if the previous spot was inside the two-yard line, halfway between the previous spot and the goal line.

Penalty: Pass interference by the offense: Loss of 10 yards from the previous spot.

A.R. 8.32 Second-and-10 on A30. On a swing pass from behind the line, a defensive man blocks eligible end A1 on the A32 while the ball is in the air. The pass is incomplete behind the line.

Ruling: Defensive pass interference. It is defensive pass interference regardless of whether the pass crosses the line once the ball is thrown. A's ball first-and-10 on A32.

A.R. 8.33 Second-and-10 on A30. Eligible tight end A1 goes across the line at the snap and blocks defensive player B1 on the A35 before eligible flanker A2 catches the ball on the A34. Flanker A2 goes to the A45.

Ruling: Offensive pass interference. Cannot block beyond the line prior to the ball being touched. A's ball second-and-20 on A20.

A.R. 8.34 Second-and-10 on A30. Eligible offensive player A1 touches the ball on the A45 and the ball goes off his hands. Defensive player B1 then blocks eligible A2 and prevents him from catching the ball on the 50.

Ruling: Legal block. The ball was touched. No pass interference. A's ball third-and-10 on A30.

A.R. 8.35 Second-and-10 on A30. On a quick pass over the center, defensive player B1 touches the ball on the A35 and it goes high in the air. Defensive player B2 is about to catch the ball when offensive end A1

Ruling: Legal play as the ball was touched by the defense. Interference rules ended when defensive player touched the pass. A's ball first-and-10 on A45.

A.R. 8.36 Second-and-10 on A30. Eligible offensive player A1 and B1 both make a bona fide attempt to catch a pass on the A45. There is contact between them and the pass falls incomplete on the A45.

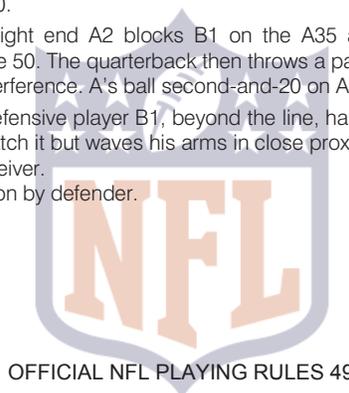
Ruling: Incomplete pass. Legal play as it was a simultaneous and bona fide attempt by opposing players. A's ball third-and-10 on A30.

A.R. 8.37 Second-and-10 on A30. Tight end A2 blocks B1 on the A35 as the quarterback is looking for an open receiver. A2 then runs to the 50. The quarterback then throws a pass which A2 catches as no one is near him.

Ruling: Offensive pass interference. A's ball second-and-20 on A20.

A.R. 8.38 Second-and-10 on A30. Defensive player B1, beyond the line, has his back to the ball during a forward pass. He makes no attempt to catch it but waves his arms in close proximity to an eligible opponent on the A45, but there is no contact with receiver.

Ruling: No foul. Legal action by defender.



- A.R. 8.39** Fourth-and-1 on B4. Offensive end A1 pushes a defensive player out of the way in the end zone to catch a legal pass.
Ruling: Loss of 10 yards from previous spot. A's ball fourth-and-11 on B14.
- A.R. 8.40** Second-and-10 on B30. A defensive player pushes eligible offensive player A1 out of the way in the end zone and catches a pass. He returns it to the 50.
Ruling: Defensive pass interference in the defensive end zone. A's ball first-and-goal on B1.
- A.R. 8.41** Fourth-and-10 on B15. On a fake field goal attempt place-kick holder A1 stands up and throws a pass to eligible end A2 who pushes defensive player B1 out of the way in the end zone to catch the pass there.
Ruling: Offensive pass interference. A's ball fourth-and-20 on B25.
- A.R. 8.42** Second-and-10 on A30. A defensive player clips eligible offensive player A1 on the A45 as he is about to catch a pass. The pass falls incomplete on the 50.
Ruling: Interference is also a personal foul and penalize for both. A's ball first-and-10 on B40.
- A.R. 8.43** Second-and-10 on A30. During a pass, defensive player B1 grabs the facemask of offensive eligible player A1 on the A35. The ball is thrown to the 50 where defensive B2 interferes with eligible A2. The pass falls incomplete.
Ruling: Additional yardage would have been tacked on if the personal foul (face mask) was the pass interference at the 50 or if the pass had been completed. A's ball first-and-10 on 50.

Section 6 Enforcement of Fouls

ENFORCEMENT SPOT

Article 1 Enforcement Spot. If there is a foul by either team from the time of the snap until a forward pass thrown from behind the line ends, the penalty is enforced from the previous spot.

Exceptions:

- (a) Pass interference by the defense is enforced from the spot of the foul.
- (b) If there is a personal foul or unsportsmanlike foul by the defense prior to completion of a forward pass thrown from behind the line, enforcement is pursuant to 8-6-2 below.
- (c) If there is a personal foul or unsportsmanlike foul by the offense prior to interception of a forward pass thrown from behind the line, enforcement is pursuant to 8-6-3 below.
- (d) It is a safety when the offensive team commits a foul behind its own goal line.

PERSONAL FOUL OR UNSPORTSMANLIKE FOUL BY DEFENSE

Article 2 Personal Foul or Unsportsmanlike Foul by Defense Prior to Completion. When the defense commits a personal foul or unsportsmanlike foul prior to a completion of a legal forward pass thrown from behind the line, the foul will be enforced from the previous spot or the dead-ball spot, whichever is more advantageous to the offense.

Exception: If the passing team is fouled and loses possession after a completion, enforcement is from the previous spot, and the ball will be retained by the passing team after enforcement of the personal foul.

PERSONAL FOUL OR UNSPORTSMANLIKE FOUL BY OFFENSE

Article 3 Personal Foul or Unsportsmanlike Foul by Offense Prior to Change of Possession. When the offense commits a personal foul or unsportsmanlike foul prior to an interception, or the recovery by the defense of a backward pass or fumble, a 15-yard penalty will be enforced from the dead-ball spot.

Exception: If the intercepting or recovering team loses possession after the interception or recovery, enforcement is from the spot where the interception or recovery occurred, and the ball will be retained by the intercepting or recovering team after the enforcement for the personal foul.

Note: When the dead-ball spot is normally a touchback, enforcement is from the 20-yard line.

- A.R. 8.44** Third-and-10 on A30. During a run prior to an incomplete pass, offensive player A1 holds a defensive player on the A25.
Ruling: Choice for defense. Fourth-and-10 on A30 or third-and-20 on A20 (from previous spot).
- A.R. 8.45** Third-and-10 on A30. During a run prior to an intended pass by quarterback A1, defensive player B1 holds flanker A2 on the A45. Quarterback A1 doesn't throw the ball and is downed on the A20.
Ruling: Enforce from the previous spot. A's ball first-and-10 on A35.
- A.R. 8.46** Third-and-10 on A40. Defensive player B1 roughs the passer prior to a pass completion to eligible end A1 on the B45. A1 runs to the B40 where he is downed.
Ruling: Personal foul prior to completion of a legal forward pass. Fifteen-yard penalty enforced from the spot where the ball is dead. A's ball first-and-10 on B25.
- A.R. 8.47** Third-and-10 on A40. A defensive player roughs the passer as he throws a short swing pass to back A1 who is downed on the A35. The foul is prior to the completion of the pass.
Ruling: Enforce from the previous spot as the usual penalty on a pass. A's ball first-and-10 on B45.

- A.R. 8.48** Third-and-10 on A40. Offensive guard A1 clips defensive player B1 as he tries to reach the passer. B2 intercepts the pass and returns it to the A30.
Ruling: Enforce from the spot where the ball is dead. Personal foul prior to interception. B's ball first-and-10 on A15.
- A.R. 8.49** Third-and-10 on A40. Defensive player B1 roughs the passer prior to a completed pass to end A1 on the 50. A1 runs to the B40 where he is tackled, fumbles and the defensive team recovers on the B35.
Ruling: Personal foul prior to completion. Enforce from the previous spot and the ball reverts to the offended team. A's ball first-and-10 on the B45.
- A.R. 8.50** Third-and-10 on A30. B1 intercepts a forward pass at the B30, runs to the B35, fumbles and Team A recovers. Prior to **the** pass, A3 crackbacks on A26.
Ruling: B's ball first-and-10 on B45.
- A.R. 8.51** Third-and-10 on A40. Defensive player B1 roughs the passer prior to a completion to eligible end A1 on the B40. A1 goes for a score.
Ruling: Touchdown. Loss of 15 on the kickoff. Kick off on A45. See 14-1-14.
- A.R. 8.52** Second-and-10 on A30. During a forward pass the ball goes off eligible end A1's fingers and flanker A2 catches it on the B40. The defensive team was offside.
Ruling: A's ball first-and-10 on B40.
- A.R. 8.53** Second-and-10 on A30. A forward pass is caught by ineligible tackle on A28. B1 was offside.
Ruling: Penalties offset. Second-and-10 on A30.
- A.R. 8.54** Second-and-10 on A30. A forward pass is caught by ineligible A2 beyond the line. Prior to or during the pass, defensive player B1 strikes A1.
Ruling: Disqualify B1. A's ball first-and-10 on A45 (14-3-1-Exc. 1).

Section 7 Backward Pass and Fumble

BACKWARD PASS

Article 1 Backward Pass. A runner may throw a backward pass at any time (3-22-4). Players of either team may advance after catching a backward pass, or recovering a backward pass after it touches the ground.

Exception: See actions to conserve time (4-7-1).

Note: A direct snap from center to a player in the backfield, a muffed hand-to-hand snap, or a snap that is untouched by a player who is in position to receive a hand-to-hand snap are backward passes, and the ball remains alive.

- A.R. 8.55** Fourth-and-10 on A40. A high snap from center glances off the kicker's hands as he muffs the ball on the A28. The ball rolls to the A25. A defensive player picks it up and goes for a score.
Ruling: Touchdown.
- A.R. 8.56** A's ball fourth-and-10 on B20. Direct snap from center on an attempted field goal glances off placekicker holder's hands at the B27. Field goal kicker recovers the ball at B30 and runs for a touchdown.
Ruling: Legal touchdown.

BACKWARD PASS OUT OF BOUNDS

Article 2 Backward Pass Out of Bounds. If a backward pass goes out of bounds between the goal lines, the ball is dead (7-6-2-a), and it is next put in play at the inbounds spot. Rule 11 governs if a backward pass is declared dead behind the goal line.

FUMBLE

Article 3 Fumble. A fumble is any act, other than a pass or kick, which results in a loss of player possession.

Exception: If a runner intentionally fumbles forward, it is a forward pass (3-22-2).

Item 1: Recovery and Advance. Any player of either team may recover or catch a fumble and advance, either before or after the ball strikes the ground.

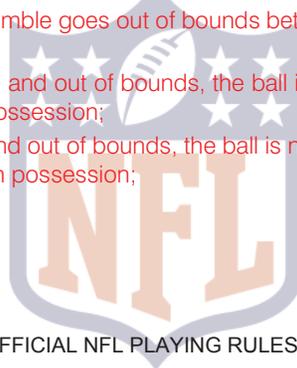
Exceptions:

- (a) Fourth-down fumble. See 8-7-5 below.
- (b) Fumble after two-minute warning. See 8-7-6 below.

Item 2: Legal Recovery. For a legal recovery of a fumble, see Rule 3, Section 2, Article 7.

Item 3. Out of Bounds. When a fumble goes out of bounds between the goal lines, the following shall apply:

- (a) If a fumble goes backward and out of bounds, the ball is next put in play at the inbounds spot by the team that was last in possession;
- (b) If a fumble goes forward and out of bounds, the ball is next put in play at the spot of the fumble by the team that was last in possession;



- (c) If a ball is fumbled in a team's own end zone and goes forward into the field of play and out of bounds, it will result in a safety, if that team provided the impetus that put the ball into the end zone (See Rule 11, Section 5, Article 1 for exception for momentum). If the impetus was provided by the opponent, the play will result in a touchback;
- (d) Notwithstanding any of the above, when there has not been a change of possession during the down, and the spot of the ball is not at or beyond the line to gain after fourth down, the ball is awarded to Team B at the spot that the ball is declared dead.

Item 4. Out of Bounds in End Zone. When a fumble goes out of bounds in the end zone, the following shall apply:

- (a) If a ball is fumbled in the field of play, and goes forward into the opponent's end zone and over the end line or sideline, a touchback is awarded to the defensive team; or
- (b) If a ball is fumbled in a team's own end zone or in the field of play and goes out of bounds in the end zone, it is a safety, if that team provided the impetus that sent the ball into the end zone (See 11-5-1 for exception for momentum). If the impetus was provided by the opponent, it is a touchback.

A.R. 8.57 Second-and-goal on B4. Runner A1 fumbles at line of scrimmage where ball rolls out of bounds:

- a) at one-yard line.
Ruling: A's ball third-and-goal on B4.
- b) over end line.
Ruling: B's ball first-and-10 on B20.

A.R. 8.58 Second-and-14 on A2. Runner A1 fumbles in end zone. Ball rolls out of bounds.

- a) at one-yard line.
Ruling: Safety.
- b) in end zone.
Ruling: Safety.

A.R. 8.59 Second-and-14 on A2. B1 intercepts a forward pass on the A20, runs to the A3, and fumbles. The ball rolls into the end zone. A1 picks up the ball in the end zone, is tackled there, and fumbles ball in end zone. The ball rolls out of bounds over the end line.

Ruling: Touchback. A's ball first-and-10 on A20. (See 7-5-6-e).

A.R. 8.60 Third-and-12 on B22. B1 intercepts forward pass in end zone. Tries to run it out and fumbles in end zone. Ball rolls out of bounds:

- a) on B3.
Ruling: Touchback (see 7-5-6-d).
- b) over the end line
Ruling: Touchback (see 7-5-6-e).

HANDING BALL FORWARD

Article 4 Handing Ball Forward. No player may hand the ball forward except to an eligible receiver who is behind the line of scrimmage.

- (a) Loss of player possession by unsuccessful execution of attempted handing is a fumble charged to the player that last had possession.
- (b) A muffed handoff (legal or illegal) is a fumble, and the ball remains alive.

Penalty: For handing the ball forward beyond the line of scrimmage: Five yards and loss of down from the spot of the foul.

Penalty: For handing the ball forward to an ineligible receiver behind the line of scrimmage or not from scrimmage: Loss of five yards.

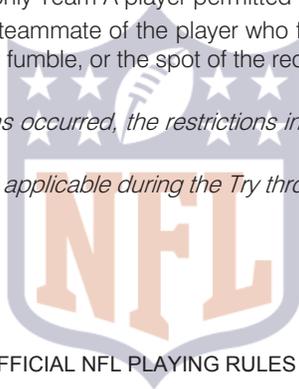
FOURTH DOWN FUMBLE

Article 5 Fourth Down Fumble. If a fourth-down fumble occurs during a play from scrimmage:

- (a) The ball may be advanced by any member of the defensive team.
- (b) The player who fumbled is the only Team A player permitted to recover and advance the ball.
- (c) If the recovery or catch is by a teammate of the player who fumbled, the ball is dead, and the spot of the next snap is the spot of the fumble, or the spot of the recovery if the spot of the recovery is behind the spot of the fumble.

Note 1: After a change of possession has occurred, the restrictions in (b) and (c) are no longer in effect for the remainder of the down.

Note 2: The restrictions in (b) and (c) are applicable during the Try throughout the game.



FUMBLE AFTER TWO-MINUTE WARNING

Article 6 Fumble After Two-Minute Warning. If a fumble by either team occurs after the two-minute warning:

- (a) The ball may be advanced by any opponent.
- (b) The player who fumbled is the only player of his team who is permitted to recover and advance the ball.
- (c) If the recovery or catch is by a teammate of the player who fumbled, the ball is dead, and the spot of the next snap is the spot of the fumble, or the spot of the recovery if the spot of the recovery is behind the spot of the fumble.

A.R. 8.61 Second-and-10 on B14. On last play of game Team A is behind by 4 points. Quarterback A1 falls back to pass, fumbles, and ball eventually winds up in B's end zone. A2 falls on it.
Ruling: No score. Game over.

A.R. 8.62 Fourth-and-four on B9. Offensive player A1 fumbles (forward unintentionally) on the B9. A1 recovers and goes to the B4.
Ruling: Legal advance as the fumbling player recovered. A's ball first-and-goal on B4.

A.R. 8.63 Fourth-and-four on B9. Offensive player A1 fumbles on the B9 (forward unintentionally). His teammate A2 recovers on the B7 and goes to the B4.
Ruling: Player other than the fumbling player recovered. The spot of the snap is the spot of the fumble (B9). B's ball first-and-10 on B9.

A.R. 8.64 Fourth-and-four on B9. Offensive player A1 fumbles on the B9 and A2 recovers on the B12 and goes to the B4.
Ruling: Other player than the fumbler recovered and spot of next snap is the spot of recovery as it is behind the spot of the fumble. B's ball first-and-10 on B12.

A.R. 8.65 Fourth-and-four on B9. Offensive player A1 fumbles on the B9. Defensive player B1 touches the ball and then offensive player A2 recovers on the B7.
Ruling: Ball is returned to spot of fumble (B9). B's ball first-and-10 on B9.

A.R. 8.66 Fourth-and-four on B9. A1 fumbles on the B9 and the ball rolls out of bounds on the B4 without any player touching it.
Ruling: The ball is next put in play at the spot of the fumble. B's ball first-and-10 on B9.

ENFORCEMENT SPOT DURING A BACKWARD PASS OR FUMBLE

Article 7 Enforcement Spot During a Backward Pass or Fumble. When a foul occurs during a backward pass or fumble, the basic spot of enforcement is the spot of the backward pass or fumble.

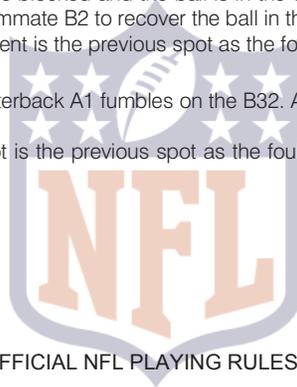
Exceptions:

- (a) Behind the Line. When the spot of the backward pass or fumble is behind the line (including in A's end zone), if either team fouls, the spot of enforcement is the previous spot, even if B's foul is in A's end zone. If Team A fouls in its own end zone during a backward pass or fumble, the enforcement of the penalty results in a safety.
- (b) Beyond the Line. When the spot of the backward pass or fumble is beyond the line, and the spot of an offensive foul is behind the spot of the backward pass or fumble:
 - (i) If the foul occurs beyond the line of scrimmage, the spot of enforcement is the spot of the foul; or
 - (ii) If the foul occurs behind the line of scrimmage, the spot of enforcement is the previous spot; or
 - (iii) If the spot of the foul is in A's end zone, enforcement of the foul results in a safety.
- (c) For enforcement when the offense commits a personal foul or unsportsmanlike foul prior to the recovery by the defense of a backward pass or fumble, see Section 6, Article 3 above.

A.R. 8.67 First-and-10 on A40. Runner A1 advances to the 50 where he passes backward. During the backward pass A2 holds on the A45. The ball goes out of bounds on the A48.
Ruling: Enforcement is from the spot of the foul as it is behind the basic spot (14-1-5-d). A's ball first-and-15 on A35.

A.R. 8.68 Fourth-and-15 on A8. A punt is blocked and the ball is in the end zone when defensive player B1 pushes A1 out of the way to allow his teammate B2 to recover the ball in the end zone.
Ruling: The spot of enforcement is the previous spot as the foul by the defense occurred behind this line. A's ball first-and-10 on A13.

A.R. 8.69 Second-and-10 on B30. Quarterback A1 fumbles on the B32. A defensive player bats the loose ball in flight to the B40 where A1 recovers.
Ruling: The enforcement spot is the previous spot as the foul is behind the line. Illegal bat (12-1-8). A's ball first-and-10 on B20.



- A.R. 8.70** Second-and-10 on B30. Quarterback A1 passes backward and a defensive player bats the pass in flight. The ball goes to the B40 where A1 recovers.
Ruling: Legal bat (12-1-8-c). A's ball third-and-20 on B40.
- A.R. 8.71** Second-and-10 on B30. A backward pass or fumble hits the ground on the B35 and a defensive player bats the ball to the B40 where he recovers.
Ruling: Illegal bat of a loose ball. Enforcement is from the previous spot as it is behind the line. A's ball first-and-10 on B20.
- A.R. 8.72** B1 intercepts a forward pass in his end zone and advances to his 2-yard line where he fumbles. B1 recovers. During the fumble B2 fouls:
a) in his end zone.
Ruling: Safety. Enforcement is from the spot of the foul as it is not from scrimmage. See 11-5-1 and 14-1-11-b.
b) on his 5-yard line.
Ruling: B's ball first-and-10 on B1. Enforcement is from the spot of the fumble.
- A.R. 8.73** Third-and-15 on B30. B1 intercepts a pass in the end zone and runs it out to the B20 where he throws a backward pass which hits the ground on the B15. A1 recovers on the ground and scores.
Ruling: Legal recovery and advance by A1. Touchdown Team A (8-7-1).
- A.R. 8.74** A backward pass or fumble by offensive Team A on its 4-yard line comes to rest on the 2-yard line. Offensive player A1 blocks B1 into the ball and causes it to cross the goal line.
a) A2 recovers in the end zone.
Ruling: Safety if A2 is downed in the end zone. May advance if he can (3-15-3, Note).
b) B2 recovers in the end zone.
Ruling: Touchdown.
- A.R. 8.75** Second-and-10 on B30. A ball is handed forward by quarterback to eligible receiver A2 who is behind his line. Receiver A2 muffs ball and defensive player B recovers on the B35 and goes to the 50.
Ruling: Legal advance. It is not a forward pass (3-13-1-b.), and it is treated as a fumble. B's ball first-and-10 on 50.
- A.R. 8.76** Second-and-10 on B30. A ball is handed backward (no daylight) to ineligible receiver A1 on the B35. A1 muffs the ball and B1 recovers and goes to the 50.
Ruling: Legal recovery. A ball which is handed backward from one player to another (no daylight) and is dropped, shall be treated as a fumble. Either team may recover and advance. B's ball first-and-10 on 50.

