



# Fouls For Rookies

National Federation of State  
High School Associations



Take Part. Get Set For Life.®

Nick Lavid  
and  
Friends



# Fouls

National Federation of State  
High School Associations



- Pre-Snap Infractions
- During the Play
- After the Whistle

Take Part. Get Set For Life.®



# Pre Snap Penalties

- **False Start:** This is arguably the most common penalty in football. It occurs when an offensive player moves abruptly after being set in a stationary position before the snap. For linemen, this can be a flinch or any movement that simulates the start of the play. For backs and receivers, it's any movement forward after they have set. Rookie officials should watch for any jerky or sudden movements by the offense.
- **Encroachment/Offside:** These related fouls involve defensive players illegally crossing the neutral zone before the snap. **Encroachment** is when a defensive player makes contact with an offensive player before the snap. **Offside** is simply being in the neutral zone when the ball is snapped. The head linesman and line judge are primarily responsible for this call and should be vigilant along the line of scrimmage.
- **Delay of Game:** The 40-second play clock is a critical element of modern football. If the offense fails to snap the ball before the play clock expires, it results in a delay of game penalty. The back judge is typically responsible for monitoring the play clock and should give a visual countdown with their arm for the final five seconds.
- **Illegal Formation/Illegal Shift:** The offense must have at least seven players on the line of scrimmage at the snap. After the huddle, only one player is permitted to be in motion at the snap, and they cannot be moving toward the line of scrimmage. Multiple players shifting simultaneously must all come to a complete stop for one second before the snap. These are crucial for the umpire and wings to monitor.





# During the Play

- **Holding (Offensive and Defensive):** This is one of the most frequent and debated calls in football. **Offensive holding** occurs when an offensive player uses their hands or arms to illegally grab, pull, or hook a defender to prevent them from reaching the ball carrier. **Defensive holding** involves a defender illegally restricting an eligible receiver. The key for officials is to look for a material restriction that impacts the play. A simple hand on the shoulder may not be a foul, but a grab of the jersey that pulls a player off their route is.
- **Pass Interference (Offensive and Defensive):** This foul can only occur on a forward pass when the ball is in the air. **Defensive pass interference** involves significant contact by a defender that hinders a receiver's ability to catch the pass. This can include grabbing the arm, playing through the back without going for the ball, or cutting off the receiver's path. **Offensive pass interference** occurs when a receiver pushes off a defender to create separation to catch the pass. Officials must judge whether the contact was incidental or if it materially affected the player's ability to make a play on the ball.





# During the Play

**Personal Fouls:** These are safety-related fouls that carry a 15-yard penalty and are of the utmost importance to call correctly to protect player safety. Rookie officials must be diligent in identifying:

- **Roughing the Passer:** Making forcible contact with the quarterback after the ball has been thrown. Officials must be aware of the "one-step" rule, allowing a defender one step after the release of the ball.
- **Face Mask:** Grasping an opponent's face mask. Even a brief grab can be a foul.
- **Horse-Collar Tackle:** Grabbing the inside back of an opponent's shoulder pads or jersey and pulling them down.
- **Targeting/Illegal Use of Helmet:** Initiating contact with the crown of the helmet or making forcible contact to the head or neck area of a defenseless opponent.



# After the Play

**Unsportsmanlike Conduct:** This broad category includes taunting, excessive celebration, and abusive language towards opponents or officials. It is crucial for rookie referees to set a standard for sportsmanship early in the game.

**Late Hit/Unnecessary Roughness:** Any action that occurs after the whistle has blown and is deemed unnecessary or excessive. This can include piling on the ball carrier after they are down or shoving an opponent after the play has concluded.





## Videos

[https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1U6Z41z4C0J1woK7qwptNTIVQzmCaUpv\\_bG5KD3T0VUI/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1U6Z41z4C0J1woK7qwptNTIVQzmCaUpv_bG5KD3T0VUI/edit?usp=sharing)

