

RULE 6

Kicks

SECTION 1. Free Kicks

Restraining Lines

ARTICLE 1. For any free kick formation, the kicking team's restraining line shall be the yard line through the most forward point from which the ball shall be kicked, and the receiving team's restraining line shall be the yard line 10 yards beyond that point. Unless relocated by a penalty, the kicking team's restraining line on a kickoff shall be its line 15 yards from the midfield line, and for a free kick after a safety, its 20-yard line.

Free Kick Formation

ARTICLE 2. a. A ball from a free kick formation must be kicked legally and from some point on Team A's restraining line (**Exception:** Rule 6-1-2-c-4) and on or between the hash marks. The referee will declare the ball ready for play when the officials are in position after the kicker has received the ball. **After the ready-for-play signal, the ball may only be relocated after a charged team timeout and before a subsequent kick.** After the ball is ready for play and for any reason it falls from the tee, Team A shall not kick the ball and an official shall sound his whistle immediately.

- b. After the ball has been made ready for play:
1. All players on the kicking team, except the kicker, must be no more than five yards behind their restraining line. A player satisfies this rule when one foot is on or beyond the line five yards behind the restraining line. If one player is more than five yards behind the restraining line and any other player kicks the ball, it is a foul for an illegal formation [S19: IFK]. (**A.R. 6-1-2:VII**)
 2. All players on the kicking team, except the kicker in his kicking motion and the holder for the purposes of holding the ball, must remain behind their restraining line [S18: OFK].
 3. **If a Team A player attempts to kick the ball but misses it (intentionally or accidentally), it is a dead-ball foul for illegal procedure [S19: IFK].**
- c. When the ball is kicked (**A.R. 6-1-2:I-IV**):
1. Each Team A player, except the holder and kicker of a place kick, must be behind the ball [S18: OFK]. (**A.R. 6-1-2:V**)
 2. All Team A players must be inbounds [S19: IFK].
 3. At least four Team A players must be on each side of the kicker [S19: IFK]. (**A.R. 6-1-2:II-IV**)
 4. After a safety, when a punt or drop kick is used, the ball may be kicked from behind the kicking team's restraining line. If a yardage penalty for a live-ball foul is enforced from the previous spot, administration is from the 20-yard line, unless the kicking team's restraining line has been relocated by a previous penalty [S18 or appropriate signal].
 5. All players of Team A must have been between the nine-yard marks after the ready-for-play signal [S19: IFK].

PENALTY – [b3] Dead-ball foul. Five yards from the succeeding spot. [S19: IFK].
[a-c5 except b3] Live-ball foul. Five yards from the previous spot, or five yards from the spot where the subsequent dead ball belongs to Team B, or from the spot where the ball is placed after a touchback [S18 or S19: IFK/OFK]. (A.R. 6-1-2:VI)

6. All Team B players must be inbounds [S19: IFK].

7. All Team B players must be behind their restraining line [S18: OFK].

PENALTY – [c6-c7] Live-ball foul. Five yards from the previous spot [S18 or S19: IFK/OFK].

Approved Ruling 6-1-2

- I. The ball is kicked while teed illegally, punted on a kickoff or kicked from a spot between the hash mark and the nearer sideline. **RULING:** Illegal kick. Dead-ball foul. Penalty — Five yards from the succeeding spot (2-16-1-b). [Cited by 2-16-1-b, 6-1-2-c]
- II. Kicker A11 places the ball on the tee in the centre of the field for a free kick with four teammates to the left side of the ball and six teammates to the right side of the ball. The ball blows off the tee, and A55 — who was lined up to the left of the ball — holds the ball on the tee for right-footed kicker A11. No other Team A players move. When the ball is kicked by A11, A55 is to the kicker's right. **RULING:** Foul by Team A for illegal formation at the kick. Penalty — Five yards from the previous spot or five yards from the spot where the subsequent dead ball belongs to Team B. [Cited by 6-1-2-c-3, 6-1-2-c]
- III. Free-kicker A11 places the ball on the tee just inside the hash mark line on his right. All of his teammates line up to his left. At the ready for play, four Team A players who were on A11's left run to their right and are in the area to A11's right when he kicks the ball. **RULING:** Legal formation. [Cited by 6-1-2-c-3, 6-1-2-c]
- IV. A11 places the ball on the tee for a free kick on the 35-yard line in the centre of the field. A12 lines up near the ball. After the ready for play, A11 starts forward as if to kick the ball, and A12 suddenly crosses in front of him and kicks the ball. When the ball is kicked, A11 is directly behind the ball with three teammates on one side of the ball. A12 plants his non-kicking foot on the same side of the ball as his three teammates. **RULING:** Foul by Team A for illegal formation. Penalty — five yards from the previous spot and rekick if Team B chooses; or five yards from the spot where the subsequent dead ball belongs to Team B. [Cited by 6-1-2-c-3, 6-1-2-c]
- V. Team A is offside during its free kick. B27 has his knee on the ground when he recovers the kick. **RULING:** Foul by Team A for offside. The ball is dead at the spot of the recovery. Penalty — Team B may choose five yards from the previous spot and another free kick, or five yards from the dead-ball spot with a first and 10. B27's recovery started a running play that ended immediately. This scenario also would have been valid if B27 had completed a fair catch. [Cited by 6-1-2-c-1]
- VI. Team A is offside on its free kick and B17 catches the ball at his 15-yard line. B17 returns the ball to his 45-yard line where he fumbles. A67 recovers at the B-47 and runs to the B-35 where he fumbles, with B20 recovering while downed at his 33-yard line. **RULING:** Foul by Team A for offside. Team B may choose to have Team A kick again after a five-yard penalty from the previous spot, or Team B may have a first and 10 at its 38-yard line. [Cited by 6-1-2 Penalty]
- VII. Team A is in its formation to kick off at the A-35. Two players, A33 and A66, are positioned in a four-point stance with their feet on the A-29 and their hands on the A-31. The untouched kick hits the ground in Team B's end zone and is declared dead. **RULING:** Touchback. Team A foul, illegal formation. Team B has two options for accepting the penalty: Put the ball in play at the B-25, after a five-yard penalty at the spot (the B-20) where the dead ball belongs to them; or have Team A re-kick at the A-30 (Rule 6-1-8). [Cited by 6-1-2-b-1]
- VIII. Late in the game with the score tied, Team A lines up to free kick from the A-35. Kicker A10 places the ball down at the right hash for an apparent onside kick. After the referee's ready-for-play signal, A10 approaches the ball and then picks up the ball, runs to the left hash at the A-35, places the ball down and quickly kicks the ball. Team A legally recovers the grounded kick at the A-46. When the ball was kicked, Team A met the requirement of at least 4 players on each side of the kicker. **RULING:** By interpretation,

once the ball's position between the hash marks has been selected by Team A and after the ready-for-play, the ball may be relocated only after a charged team timeout and before any re-kick. Live-ball foul. Five-yard penalty from the previous spot and re-kick. Had Team B recovered at the A-46, an additional option would be for Team B to snap the ball after a five-yard penalty from the A-46.

Touching and Recovery of a Free Kick; Illegal Touching

ARTICLE 3. a. No Team A player may touch a free-kicked ball until after:

1. It touches a Team B player (**Exception:** Rules 6-1-4 and 6-5-1-b);
2. It breaks the plane of and remains beyond Team B's restraining line (**Exception:** Rule 6-4-1) (**A.R. 2-12-5:I**); or
3. It touches any player, the ground, an official or anything else beyond Team B's restraining line.

Thereafter, all players of Team A become eligible to touch, recover or catch the kick.

- b. Any other touching by Team A is *illegal touching*, a violation that, when the ball becomes dead, gives the receiving team the privilege of taking the ball at the spot of the violation.
- c. If there is an accepted penalty for a live-ball foul by either team, or if there are offsetting fouls, the illegal touching privilege is cancelled. (**A.R. 6-1-3:I**)
- d. Illegal touching in Team A's end zone is ignored.

Approved Ruling 6-1-3

- I. A33 illegally touches a free kick; then he or A44 illegally recovers the kick. **RULING:** Illegal touching by both A33 and A44. Unless there is an accepted penalty or offsetting fouls, Team B may elect to take the ball at any spot of the illegal touching. [Cited by 6-1-3-c]
- II. Team A executes an on-side free kick at the A-35. The untouched kick is at the A-43 when A55 blocks B44 above the waist in the front at the A-46. A28 muffs the ball at the A-44, and after it rolls to the A-46, A88 blocks B22 at the A-42. A20 then recovers the ball at the A-44. **RULING:** The block by A55 is a foul and the touching by A28 is illegal, because Team A is not eligible to touch the ball since it has not gone 10 yards nor has it been touched by Team B. The block by A88 is legal because it occurs after the ball has gone 10 yards. Team A is in legal possession of the ball when A20 recovers it at the A-44. Team B has two options: Decline the penalty for the illegal block and have the ball at the A-44 via the illegal-touching privilege, or cancel the illegal-touching privilege by having Team A re-kick from the A-30 after the five-yard penalty for the block by A55. Note that the dead-ball spot, the A-44, is not an enforcement spot because the ball does not belong to Team B when the down ends (Rule 6-1-12). [Cited by 6-1-12]

Forced Touching Disregarded

ARTICLE 4. a. A player blocked by an opponent into a free kick is not, while inbounds, deemed to have touched the kick. (**A.R. 2-11-4:I**)

- b. An inbounds player touched by a ball either batted or illegally kicked by an opponent is not deemed to have touched the ball (Rule 2-11-4-c).

Free Kick at Rest

ARTICLE 5. If a free kick comes to rest inbounds and no player attempts to secure it, the ball becomes dead and belongs to the receiving team at the dead-ball spot.

Free Kick Caught or Recovered

ARTICLE 6. a. If a free kick is caught or recovered by a player of the receiving team, the ball continues in play (**Exceptions:** Rules 4-1-3-g, 6-1-7, 6-5-1 and 6-5-2). If caught or recovered by a player of the kicking team, the ball becomes dead. The ball belongs to the receiving team at the dead-ball spot, unless the kicking team is in legal possession when the ball is declared dead. In the latter case, the ball belongs to the kicking team.

- b. When opposing players, each eligible to touch the ball, simultaneously recover a rolling kick or catch a free kick, the simultaneous possession makes the ball dead.
- c. A kick declared dead in joint possession is awarded to the receiving team.

Ball Dead in End Zone

ARTICLE 7. a. When a free kick untouched by Team B touches the ground on or behind Team B's goal line, the ball becomes dead and belongs to Team B.

- b. If the result of the free kick is a touchback (Rule 8-6-1) for Team B, they will put the ball in play at their 20-yard line.

Fouls By Kicking Team

ARTICLE 8. Penalties for all fouls by the kicking team during a free kick play other than kick-catch interference (Rule 6-4) may be enforced at the previous spot with the down repeated or at the spot where the subsequent dead ball belongs to Team B, at the option of Team B.

Foul Against Kicker

ARTICLE 9. The kicker of a free kick may not be blocked until he has advanced five yards beyond his restraining line or the kick has touched a player, an official or the ground (Rule 9-1-16-c).

PENALTY – 15 yards from the previous spot [S40: PF-RTK].

Illegal Wedge Formation

ARTICLE 10. a. A wedge is defined as two or more players aligned shoulder to shoulder within two yards of each other.

- b. Free-kick down only: After the ball has been kicked, it is illegal for three or more members of the receiving team intentionally to form a wedge for the purpose of blocking for the ball carrier. This is a live-ball foul, whether or not there is contact between opponents.

PENALTY – Noncontact foul. 15 yards from the spot of the foul, or 15 yards from the spot where the subsequent dead ball belongs to Team B if this is behind the spot of the foul. 15 yards, previous spot with the down repeated if the subsequent dead ball belongs to Team A [S27: IWK].

- c. Formation of the wedge is not illegal when the kick is from an obvious outside kick formation.
- d. There is no foul if the play results in a touchback.

Player Out of Bounds

ARTICLE 11. A Team A player who goes out of bounds during a free kick down may not return inbounds during the down (*Exception:* This does not apply to a Team A player who is blocked out of bounds and attempts to return inbounds immediately).

PENALTY – Live-ball foul. Five yards from the previous spot, or five yards from the spot where the subsequent dead ball belongs to Team B, or from the spot where the ball is placed after a touchback [S19: OBK].

Eligibility to Block

ARTICLE 12. No Team A player may block an opponent until Team A is eligible to touch a free-kicked ball (A.R. 6-1-3:II).

PENALTY – Live-ball foul. Five yards from the previous spot, or five yards from the spot where the subsequent dead ball belongs to Team B, or from the spot where the ball is placed after a touchback [S19: IBK].

SECTION 2. Free Kick Out of Bounds

Kicking Team

ARTICLE 1. If a free kick goes out of bounds between the goal lines untouched by an inbounds player of Team B, it is a foul. (A.R. 6-2-1:I-II) (A.R. 4-2-1:III)

PENALTY – Live-ball foul. Five yards from the previous spot; or five yards from the spot where the subsequent dead ball belongs to Team B; or the receiving team may put the ball in play 30 yards beyond Team A’s restraining line at the hash mark [S19: KOB].

Approved Ruling 6-2-1

- I. A kickoff from Team A’s 35-yard line goes out of bounds untouched by Team B, and Team A has illegally touched the kick. **RULING:** Team B has four options: it may snap the ball at the spot of the illegal-touching violation; accept a five-yard penalty from the previous spot with Team A kicking from the 30-yard line; put the ball in play at the inbounds spot on its 35-yard line; or put the ball in play at the inbounds spot five yards from where the ball went out of bounds (Rule 6-1-8). [Cited by 6-2-1]
- II. Team A is offside or commits a substitution infraction, and the kickoff from the 35-yard line goes out of bounds after it has been touched by Team B. **RULING:** For either the offside foul or the substitution foul, Team B may elect to have the kick repeated at Team A’s 30-yard line, or snap the ball at the inbounds spot five yards from where the ball went out of bounds (Rule 6-1-8). [Cited by 6-2-1]

Receiving Team

ARTICLE 2. If a free kick goes out of bounds between the goal lines, the ball belongs to the receiving team at the hash mark. If a free kick goes out of bounds behind the goal line, the ball belongs to the team defending that goal line. (A.R. 6-2-2:I-IV)

Approved Ruling 6-2-2

- I. A free kick from Team A’s 35-yard line, untouched by Team B, goes out of bounds between the goal lines, and Team A was offside. **RULING:** Team B has these options: it may accept a five-yard penalty at the previous spot with Team A re-kicking from the 30-yard line; snap the ball at its 35-yard line at the inbounds spot; or snap the ball at the inbounds spot five yards from where the ball went out of bounds. [Cited by 6-2-2]
- II. A free kick from Team A’s 35-yard line, untouched by Team B, goes out of bounds between the goal lines, and Team A fouled after the ball went out of bounds. **RULING:** Team B has the choice of Team A kicking again after a five-yard penalty followed by a 15-yard penalty, or putting the ball in play at the inbounds spot either on the 50-yard line or at the inbounds spot 20 yards beyond the spot where the ball went out of bounds. [Cited by 6-2-2]
- III. A free kick in flight strikes a Team B player who is in his end zone and the ball then goes out of bounds at the three-yard line. **RULING:** Team B’s ball, first and 10, on the three-yard line at the inbounds spot. [Cited by 6-2-2]
- IV. Free kick at the A-35. B17 leaps from inbounds and is the first player to touch Team A’s free kick when he grasps the ball while airborne. He then lands out of bounds with the ball in his control. **RULING:** Not a foul for free kick out of bounds. B17 is inbounds when he touches the kick. Team B will have the ball at the yard line where B17 crossed the sideline (Rule 2-27-15). [Cited by 6-2-2]

SECTION 3. Scrimmage Kicks

Behind the Neutral Zone

- ARTICLE 1. a. A scrimmage kick that fails to cross the neutral zone continues in play. All players may catch or recover the ball behind the neutral zone and advance it. **(A.R. 6-3-1:I-III)**
- b. The blocking of a scrimmage kick by an opponent of the kicking team who is not more than three yards beyond the neutral zone is considered to have occurred within or behind that zone (Rule 2-11-5).

Approved Ruling 6-3-1

- I. After a punt travels five yards beyond the neutral zone, B33 touches the ball. It then rebounds behind the zone, where A33 recovers it in the field of play. **RULING:** The ball is dead when recovered and may not be advanced. First down for Team A (Rules 6-3-3 and 6-3-6-a). Clock starts on the snap following a legal kick down. [Cited by 2-16-7-b] [Cited by 6-3-1-a]
- II. Team A's untouched punt or field goal attempt goes beyond the neutral zone in flight, is blown back by the wind and first touches the ground, a player or an official behind the neutral zone. **RULING:** By rule, the kick is not considered to have crossed the neutral zone until it has touched the ground, a player, an official or anything beyond that zone. Any scrimmage kick may be advanced after catch or recovery by Team B, or after catch or recovery by Team A in or behind the neutral zone if the kick had not crossed the neutral zone (Rule 2-16-7). [Cited by 2-16-7-b, 6-3-1-a]
- III. A1 interferes with B1's opportunity to catch a kick when a scrimmage kick fails to cross the neutral zone. **RULING:** Interference with the opportunity to catch a kick does not apply (Rule 6-4-1), and all players are eligible to touch, recover and advance the ball. Therefore, any player legally may push an opponent in an actual attempt to get at the ball (Rule 9-3-3-c-3); but no player may hold an opponent to prevent his reaching the ball, or in an attempt to permit a teammate to reach it (Rules 9-1-5 Exception 3 and 9-3-6 Exception 3). [Cited by 2-16-7-b] [Cited by 6-3-1-a, 6-4-1-a]
- IV. Team A's punt from behind its own goal line crosses the neutral zone into the field of play, strikes a Team B player and rebounds back across Team A's goal line where A32 recovers. **RULING:** Safety (Rules 6-3-3, 6-3-6-a and 8-5-1-a). [Cited by 2-16-7-b] [Cited by 6-3-6-a, 8-5-1-a]

Beyond the Neutral Zone

- ARTICLE 2. a. No inbounds player of the kicking team shall touch a scrimmage kick that has crossed the neutral zone before it touches an opponent. This is *illegal touching*, a violation that, when the ball becomes dead, gives the receiving team the privilege of taking the ball at the spot of the violation (**Exception:** Rule 6-3-4) **(A.R. 2-12-2:I) (A.R. 6-3-2:I)**.
- b. This privilege is cancelled if there is an accepted penalty for a live-ball foul by either team **(A.R. 6-3-2:I-IV) (A.R. 6-3-11:I-III)**.
- c. The privilege is cancelled if there are offsetting fouls.
- d. Illegal touching in Team A's end zone is ignored. Illegal touching on a try results in no score. Illegal touching in an extra period results in team possession ending.

Approved Ruling 6-3-2

- I. Team A illegally touches its kick; then after Team B has touched it, Team A recovers. **RULING:** Touching by Team A after Team B has touched the kick is legal; and, in order to get the ball, Team B must take it where Team A illegally touched it. Unless illegal touching is also illegal recovery by the kicking team and no fouls are involved, the receiving team may play the ball with the assurance that it may later elect the ball at any spot of illegal touching. [Cited by 6-3-2-a, 6-3-2-b]
- II. During a scrimmage kick, A1 commits a touching violation, after which B1 recovers, advances and fumbles. A2 recovers the fumble and, during the advance, B2 holds, trips or slugs.

RULING: Team A may have the ball where left by the penalty for Team B's foul; but if Team A declines the penalty, Team B will have the ball by electing the touching violation. B2 is disqualified if flagged for slugging. [Cited by 6-3-2-b]

- III. Team A's punt goes beyond the neutral zone and is first touched by A80, then picked up by B40, who runs five yards and fumbles. A20 picks up the fumble and scores. During A20's run, B70 holds. **RULING:** The score does not count. Five- and 10-yard penalties are not administered on the try or the succeeding kickoff. The penalty for Team B's foul is declined by rule because there is no enforcement spot. The ball belongs to Team B at the spot of illegal touching (Rule 10-2-5-a-2). [Cited by 10-2-5-a-2, 6-3-2-b]
- IV. Team A's punt goes beyond the neutral zone and is first touched by A80, then picked up by B40, who runs five yards and fumbles. B70 holds during B40's run. A20 picks up the fumble and scores. **RULING:** The score does not count. Five- and 10-yard penalties are not administered on the try or the succeeding kickoff. Because the illegal touching provides an enforcement spot, the penalty for Team B's foul may be enforced, per Rule 5-2-4. The ball belongs to Team B, either at the spot of illegal touching if Team A declines the penalty, or at the spot after the enforcement if Team A accepts the penalty (Rules 10-2-2 and 10-2-5-a-2). [Cited by 10-2-5-a-2, 6-3-2-b]

All Become Eligible

ARTICLE 3. When a scrimmage kick that has crossed the neutral zone touches a player of the receiving team who is inbounds, any player may catch or recover the ball (Rule 6-3-1-b) (*Exceptions:* Rules 6-3-4 and 6-5-1-b).

Forced Touching Disregarded

- ARTICLE 4. a. A player blocked by an opponent into a scrimmage kick that has crossed the neutral zone shall not, while inbounds, be deemed to have touched the kick. (**A.R. 6-3-4:I-V**) (**A.R. 2-11-4:I**)
- b. An inbounds player touched by a ball either batted or illegally kicked by an opponent is not deemed to have touched the ball. (Rule 2-11-4-c) (**A.R. 6-3-4:II**).

Approved Ruling 6-3-4

- I. Team A punts from its own 30-yard line. The untouched kick is bouncing at Team B's three-yard line when A3 blocks B1 into the ball, forcing it through the end zone and over the end line. **RULING:** Touchback. Since A3 blocked B1 into the ball, B1 is deemed not to have touched it (Rule 2-11-4). Impetus is from the kick, not from B1's touching (Rule 8-7-1). [Cited by 6-3-4-a]
- II. Team A's long field goal attempt is first touched when A1 bats the rolling ball backward into nearby B1. **RULING:** Illegal touching by A1. Team B is not deemed to have touched the ball (Rules 2-11-4 and 8-4-2-b). [Cited by 6-3-4-a, 6-3-4-b, 8-4-2-b-2]
- III. During a scrimmage kick, the untouched ball is at rest on the Team B three-yard line when B22 blocks A80 into the ball, forcing it into the end zone where it touches the ground. **RULING:** The ball is dead when it touches the ground in the end zone. Touchback — Ignore touching by A80 (Rule 2-11-4). By rule, neither team has touched the kicked ball (Rule 8-6-1-b). [Cited by 6-3-4-a, 8-6-1-b, 8-7-2-a]
- IV. As the punted ball rolls along the ground, punt receiver B22 is blocking A88 to prevent him from downing the ball. The two players are still engaged when the ball bounces into B22's leg. A44 recovers at the B-30. **RULING:** Team A's ball, first and 10 at the B-30. This is not forced touching. Although B22 was in contact with A88 when he touched the ball, this touching was not caused by the contact (Rule 2-11-4). The game clock starts on the snap. [Cited by 6-3-4-a]
- V. As a punt rolls along the ground, A44 blocks B33 into the ball, which bounces away and strikes B48 in the leg. Team A recovers. **RULING:** Team A's ball, first and 10 at the spot of recovery. Although the touching by B33 is forced, that by B48 is not (Rule 2-11-4). B48's touching of the ball allows Team A to recover legally (Rule 6-3-4-a). [Cited by 6-3-4-a]

Catch or Recovery by Receiving Team

ARTICLE 5. If a player of the receiving team catches or recovers a scrimmage kick, the ball continues in play (*Exceptions:* Rules 4-1-3-g, 6-3-9, 6-5-1 and 6-5-2). (**A.R. 8-4-2:V**)

Catch or Recovery by Kicking Team

ARTICLE 6. a. If a player of the kicking team catches or recovers a scrimmage kick that has crossed the neutral zone, the ball becomes dead. (**A.R. 6-3-1:IV**) The ball belongs to the receiving team at the dead-ball spot, unless the kicking team is in legal possession when the ball is declared dead. In the latter case, the ball belongs to the kicking team (*Exception:* Rule 8-4-2-b).

b. If opposing players who are each eligible to touch the ball simultaneously catch or recover a scrimmage kick, the simultaneous possession makes the ball dead. A kick declared dead in joint possession of opposing players is awarded to the receiving team (Rules 2-4-4 and 4-1-3-l).

Out of Bounds Between Goal Lines or at Rest Inbounds

ARTICLE 7. If a scrimmage kick goes out of bounds between the goal lines, or if it comes to rest inbounds and no player attempts to secure it, the ball becomes dead and belongs to the receiving team at the dead-ball spot (*Exception:* Rule 8-4-2-b).

Out of Bounds Behind Goal Line

ARTICLE 8. If a scrimmage kick (other than one that scores a field goal) goes out of bounds behind a goal line, the ball becomes dead and belongs to the team defending that goal line (Rule 8-4-2-b).

Touching Ground On or Behind Goal Line

ARTICLE 9. If a scrimmage kick untouched by Team B beyond the neutral zone touches the ground on or behind Team B's goal line, the ball becomes dead and belongs to Team B (Rule 8-4-2-b). (**A.R. 6-3-9:I-II**)

Approved Ruling 6-3-9

- I. A33 illegally touches a punt and the ball then rolls into Team B's end zone, where Team B recovers and advances the ball into the field of play. **RULING:** The ball is dead when it strikes the ground in the end zone. Team B may choose a touchback or take the ball at the spot of Team A's illegal touching (Rule 4-1-3-c). [Cited by 4-1-3-c, 6-3-9]
- II. A punt goes into Team B's end zone untouched by Team B beyond the neutral zone. Either (a) Team A or (b) Team B commits a personal foul after the ball touches the ground in the end zone. **RULING:** Touchback. Dead-ball foul after the touchback. Team B's ball, first and 10 on the (a) 35-yard line or (b) 10-yard line after enforcement of the penalty at Team B's 20. [Cited by 6-3-9]
- III. A Team B player touches a scrimmage kick in flight in Team B's end zone and Team A downs the ball in the end zone. **RULING:** Team A touchdown (Rules 6-3-3 and 8-2-1-d). [Cited by 8-2-1-d]

Legal and Illegal Kicks

ARTICLE 10. a. A legal scrimmage kick is a punt, drop kick or place kick made according to rule.

b. A return kick is an illegal kick, a live-ball foul that causes the ball to become dead (Rule 2-16-8).

PENALTY – For a return kick (live-ball foul): five yards from the spot of the foul [S31: KIK].

- c. A scrimmage kick made when the kicker's entire body is beyond the neutral zone is an illegal kick, a live-ball foul that causes the ball to become dead.

PENALTY – For an illegal kick beyond the neutral zone (live-ball foul): Five yards from the previous spot and loss of down [S31 and S9: KIK].

- d. No device or material may be used to mark the spot of a scrimmage place kick or elevate the ball. This is a live-ball foul at the snap.

PENALTY – Five yards from the previous spot [S19: KIK].

Loose Behind the Goal Line

ARTICLE 11. If a scrimmage kick untouched by Team B after crossing the neutral zone is batted in Team B's end zone by a player of Team A, it is a violation for illegal touching (Rule 6-3-2). The spot of the violation is Team B's 20-yard line. This is a special case of batting in the end zone and is not a foul. (A.R. 6-3-11:I-V) (A.R. 2-12-2:I)

Approved Ruling 6-3-11

- I. Team A snaps at the 50-yard line and punts. The kick is untouched beyond the neutral zone when A88 reaches across Team B's goal line and bats the ball back into the field of play, and it rolls out of bounds at the B-4. **RULING:** No foul for batting the ball in the end zone. Illegal touching. The spot of the violation is the B-20. Team B's ball, first and 10 at the B-20. [Cited by 6-3-11, 6-3-2-b, 9-4-1-c]
- II. Team A snaps at the 50-yard line and punts. The kick is untouched beyond the neutral zone when A88 reaches across Team B's goal line and bats the ball back into the field of play. B22 recovers at the B-2 and advances to the B-12 where A66 tackles him by pulling his facemask. **RULING:** No foul for batting in the end zone. Illegal touching. Team B may accept the penalty for the facemask foul, which cancels the illegal touching privilege, and have first and 10 at the B-27. [Cited by 6-3-11, 6-3-2-b]
- III. Team A snaps at the 50-yard line and punts. The kick is untouched beyond the neutral zone when A88 reaches across Team B's goal line and bats the ball back into the field of play. B22 muffs the ball at the B-2 and A43 recovers it at the B-6. While the ball is loose B77 holds A21 at the B-10. **RULING:** Team A may cancel the illegal touching privilege by accepting the holding penalty, which is enforced at the previous spot with the down repeated. Postscrimmage kick rules do not apply to B77's foul since Team B will not next put the ball in play (Rule 10-2-3). [Cited by 6-3-11, 6-3-2-b]
- IV. Team A snaps at the 50-yard line and punts. During the kick, B77 clips at Team B's 25-yard line. The untouched kick is batted backward by Team A out of bounds from the end zone and goes out of bounds on the two-yard line. **RULING:** No foul for batting the ball in the end zone. Illegal touching. B77's clipping foul is governed by postscrimmage kick rules (Rule 10-2-3). Team A will accept the penalty, which cancels the illegal touching privilege. The penalty is enforced at the postscrimmage kick spot, the B-20, half the distance to the goal line. Team B's ball at the B-10. [Cited by 6-3-11]
- V. Team A snaps at the 50-yard line and punts. The kick is untouched beyond the neutral zone when A88 reaches across Team B's goal line and bats the ball back into the field of play, and it rolls out of bounds at the B-4. During the kick, A55 blocks below the waist. **RULING:** No foul for batting the ball in the end zone. Illegal touching. The spot of the violation is the B-20. Team B may accept the penalty for blocking below the waist, which is enforced either at the previous spot with the down repeated or at the B-4. If Team B declines the penalty, the illegal touching gives the ball to Team B, first and 10 at the B-20. [Cited by 6-3-11]

Out of Bounds Player

ARTICLE 12. No Team A player who goes out of bounds during a scrimmage kick down may return inbounds during the down (**Exception:** This does not apply to a Team A player who is blocked out of bounds and attempts to return inbounds immediately).

PENALTY – Live-ball foul. Five yards from the previous spot or five yards from the spot where the subsequent dead ball belongs to Team B. [S19: OBK].

Approved Ruling 6-3-12

- I. A88 is running near the sideline to cover a punt when he steps on the sideline and then returns inbounds to continue down the field. He tackles the kick returner at the B-30. **RULING:** Foul by A88 for returning inbounds during the scrimmage kick down. Five-yard penalty. Team B may have the down repeated after the penalty or put the ball in play at the B-35.

Fouls By Kicking Team

ARTICLE 13. Penalties for all fouls by the kicking team other than kick-catch interference (Rule 6-4) during a scrimmage kick play (except field goal attempts) in which the ball crosses the neutral zone may be enforced either at the previous spot with the down repeated (*Exception:* Penalty option is a safety for fouls in Team A's end zone) or at the spot where the subsequent dead ball belongs to Team B, at the option of Team B. (**A.R. 6-3-13:I-III**)

Approved Ruling 6-3-13

- I. Team A punts on fourth and seven at the A-35. At the snap Team A has five players in the backfield. The kick is partially blocked and goes out of bounds at the A-45. **RULING:** Foul for illegal formation. Team B may have the ball, first and 10 at the A-40 after the five-yard penalty is enforced at the A-45 (the dead-ball spot) or have the penalty enforced at the previous spot with fourth down repeated at the A-30. [Cited by 6-3-13]
- II. Team A punts on fourth and seven at the A-35. At the snap Team A has five players in the backfield. The kick is partially blocked, does not cross the neutral zone and is returned by B88 to the A-28 where he is tackled. **RULING:** Team B may decline the penalty and have the ball at the A-28 or have the penalty enforced at the previous spot with fourth down repeated at the A-30. [Cited by 6-3-13]
- III. Team A punts on fourth and seven at the A-35. At the snap Team A has five players in the backfield. The kick is partially blocked, crosses the neutral zone, goes back behind the neutral zone and rolls out of bounds at the A-32. **RULING:** Team B may have the ball, first and 10 at the A-27 after the five-yard penalty is enforced at the A-32 (the dead-ball spot) or have the penalty enforced at the previous spot with fourth down repeated at the A-30. [Cited by 6-3-13]
- IV. Fourth and 15 at the A-5. Punter A88 is in his end zone when he kicks the ball. Tackle A77 is flagged for holding in the end zone. Team B returns the ball to the B-45. **RULING:** Team B has the option of having possession after the penalty is enforced at the B-45 or accepting the penalty for a safety. (Rule 10-2-4)

Defensive Linemen on Place Kicks

ARTICLE 14. If Team A is in a formation to attempt a place kick (field goal or try), it is illegal for three Team B players on their line of scrimmage inside the free-blocking zone to align shoulder-to-shoulder and move forward together after the snap with primary contact against a single Team A player (**A.R. 6-3-14:I-II**).

PENALTY – Live-ball foul. Five yards, previous spot [S19: IFD].

Approved Ruling 6-3-14

- I. Fourth and seven at the B-20. Team A is in a formation to attempt a field goal. Defensive linemen B55, B57, and B78 are shoulder to shoulder. B57 is head up on right guard A66 while B55 and B78 are in the gaps on A66's left and right shoulders, respectively. After the ball is snapped all three move forward together. (a) The three make their primary contact against A66; (b) B55 and B57 contact A66, and B78 drives at the right offensive tackle; (c) B57 and B78 make their blocks against A66 but B55 leaps to try to block the kick. **RULING:** (a) Foul. Five-yard penalty. If Team A accepts the penalty they will have fourth and two at the B-15. (b) and (c) No foul. The action by the Team B players does not involve primary contact against a single player, and hence the play is legal. [Cited by 6-3-14]
- II. Fourth and four at the B-20. Team A is in a formation to attempt a field goal. Team A has five players in the backfield. Defensive linemen B55, B57, and B78 are shoulder to shoulder. B57 is head up on right guard A66 while B55 and B78 are in the gaps on A66's left and right shoulders, respectively. After the ball is snapped all three move forward together.

The three make their primary contact against A66. The holder takes the snap, gets to his feet, and completes a pass to eligible A88 who is tackled at the B-10. **RULING:** Foul by Team A, illegal formation. Foul by Team B, triple team against an offensive lineman. The fouls offset and the down is repeated. [Cited by 6-3-14]

SECTION 4. Opportunity to Catch a Kick

Interference with Opportunity

- ARTICLE 1. a. If an inbounds player of the receiving team is located where he could catch a free kick or a scrimmage kick that is beyond the neutral zone, and if he is attempting to do so, he must be given an unimpeded opportunity to catch the kick (**A.R. 6-3-1:III**) (**A.R. 6-4-1:V, VI and IX**).
- b. It is an interference foul if, before the receiver touches the ball, a Team A player enters the area defined by the width of the receiver's shoulders and extending one yard in front of him. When in question it is a foul. (**A.R. 6-4-1:X-XIII**)
- c. This protection ends when the kick touches the ground (*Exception:* Free kick, Rule 6-4-1-f below), when any player of Team B muffs or touches a scrimmage kick beyond the neutral zone, or when any player of Team B muffs or touches a free kick in the field of play or in the end zone (*Exception:* Rule 6-5-1-b). (**A.R. 6-4-1:IV**)
- d. If interference with a potential receiver is the result of a player being blocked by an opponent, it is not a foul.
- e. It is an interference foul if the kicking team contacts the potential receiver before, or simultaneous to, his first touching the ball (**A.R. 6-4-1:II, III and VIII**). When in question, it is an interference foul.
- f. During a free kick, a player of the receiving team in position to receive the ball has the same kick-catch and fair-catch protection whether the ball is kicked directly off the tee or is immediately driven to the ground, strikes the ground once and goes into the air in the manner of the ball kicked directly off the tee.
- g. If contact by Team A is deemed to be a targeting foul (Rules 9-1-3 and 9-1-4) or any other personal foul that interferes with the receiver's opportunity to catch a kick, it may be ruled either as interference or as a targeting or personal foul. The 15-yard penalty is enforced at the spot where the dead ball belongs to Team B or at the spot of the foul, at the option of Team B.

PENALTY – For foul between the goal lines: Receiving team's ball, first down, 15 yards beyond the spot of the foul for an interference foul [S33: KCI]. For foul behind the goal line: Award a touchback and penalise from the succeeding spot. Flagrant offenders shall be disqualified [S47: DSQ].

Approved Ruling 6-4-1

- I. A Team A player catches a free kick very near receiver B25, thus preventing him from making the catch. **RULING:** Kick-catch interference. Penalty — 15 yards from the spot of the foul.
- II. A Team B player, about to catch a scrimmage kick, is tackled before the ball arrives, but catches the kick while he is falling. **RULING:** Kick-catch interference. Penalty — 15 yards from the spot of the foul. Disqualification of the Team A player if the contact is flagrant. If the foul is between the goal lines, enforcement is from the spot of the foul and Team B puts the ball in play by a snap; if behind Team B's goal line, award a touchback and penalise from the succeeding spot. The ruling would be the same had the kick been muffed or fumbled. The ruling also applies on an unsuccessful field goal attempt since Team B touched the ball beyond the neutral zone. [Cited by 6-4-1-e]
- III. While a kick is in flight beyond the neutral zone, A1 is standing or running between the ball and B1. (a) The ball strikes A1 while B1 is in a position to catch the ball. (b) B1, in attempting to catch the ball, bumps into A1. **RULING:** (a) and (b) Kick-catch interference. Penalty — 15 yards at the spot of the foul. [Cited by 6-4-1-e]

- IV. A player of Team B, attempting to catch a kick (no fair catch signal), muffs the ball that is then touched by an opponent who was not interfering with the opportunity of the receiver when he was in position to make the catch. **RULING:** Not interference. In the absence of a fair catch signal, protection against interference with the opportunity to catch a kick ends when any player of Team B muffs the ball. [Cited by 6-4-1-c]
- V. A Team A player beyond the neutral zone first touches or catches a scrimmage kick that no receiver could have caught while it was in flight. **RULING:** Illegal touching but not interference. [Cited by 6-4-1-a]
- VI. B25 is standing at the B-35 in position to catch a punt. As the ball is on its downward flight, A88 runs by B25 very close to his side, causing B25 to adjust his position before catching the ball. A88 does not make contact and does not penetrate the one-yard area directly in front of B25. **RULING:** Foul by A88, interference with the opportunity to catch the kick. 15 yards, spot of the foul. Even though B25 catches the ball, A88's action causes him to move away from his original location and thus interferes with his opportunity to make the catch. [Cited by 6-4-1-a]
- VII. B10 signals for a fair catch, muffs the ball and then catches it. **RULING:** If B10 has an opportunity to catch the kick after the muff, he must be given an unimpeded opportunity to complete the catch. If B10 catches the muffed kick, the ball is dead where he first touched it.
- VIII. Fourth and 10 at the 50-yard line. B17 is at Team B's 20-yard line and in position to catch Team A's high scrimmage kick. During the downward flight of the ball, A37 contacts B17 viciously and flagrantly before he touches the ball. A37 did not alter his speed or make any attempt to elude B17. **RULING:** Team A flagrant personal foul, interference with the opportunity to catch a kick. Penalty — 15 yards from the spot of the foul. A37 is disqualified. [Cited by 6-4-1-e]
- IX. Team A's ball, fourth and 10 at the 50-yard line. Team A's windblown scrimmage kick is on its downward flight at Team B's 30-yard line. B18, starting at the 20-yard line, must detour around A92 at the 25-yard line to make the catch at the 30-yard line. **RULING:** Foul by A92 for interference with the opportunity to catch a kick. Penalty — 15 yards from the spot of the foul, which is the 25-yard line. [Cited by 6-4-1-a]
- X. Punt receiver B44 is standing at his 30-yard line in position to catch the kick. Defender A11 races down the field to cover the punt and reaches a point about a foot directly in front of B44 as the ball descends. B44 makes the catch without having to adjust his position or manner of catching the ball because of the presence of A11, who does not pull back to give B44 more room. **RULING:** Foul for kick-catch interference. A11 entered the one-yard area directly in front of receiver B44. 15-yard penalty. [Cited by 6-4-1-b]
- XI. Punt receiver B22 is at the B-30 awaiting the punt as it makes its downward flight and his teammate B88 is three yards in front of him at the B-33. Down field to cover the kick, A44 legally blocks B88 into B22 just as the ball reaches him. The ball hits B22 in the shoulder and bounces away. Team A recovers at the B-25. **RULING:** Team A's ball, first and 10 at the B-25. This is not kick-catch interference. The action by A44 is against B88 who is not in position to catch the kick, and not against B22. Thus A44 is not deemed to have interfered with B22's opportunity to catch the ball. B22's touching of the ball allows Team A to recover legally. [Cited by 6-4-1-b]
- XII. Fourth and five at the A-30. Punt receiver B22 is in position to catch the kick at the B-30. He does not signal. A88 is within a yard of B22, at his side, but does not make contact with B22 when he catches the kick at the B-30. B22 is tackled at the B-32. A88's presence does not cause B22 to make any adjustment to his position or his manner of catching the ball. **RULING:** Legal play; no kick-catch interference. A88 is closer than one yard to B22 but is not directly in front of him. He does not affect B22's opportunity to catch the ball. First and 10 for Team B at the B-32. [Cited by 6-4-1-b]
- XIII. B44 is in position to catch a punt at the B-25. While the ball is still very high in the air and well before it comes close to B44, A88 runs directly in front of B44 within a yard but is not near him when the ball arrives. B44 catches the punt and is tackled. **RULING:** No foul. Although A88 penetrates the one-yard region directly in front of the receiver, this is so early in the action that there is no interference with B44's opportunity to catch the kick. [Cited by 6-4-1-b]

SECTION 5. Fair Catch

Dead Where Caught

- ARTICLE 1. a. If a Team B player makes a fair catch, the ball becomes dead where caught and belongs to Team B at that spot.
- b. If a Team B player makes a valid fair catch signal, the unimpeded opportunity to catch a free or scrimmage kick continues if this player muffs the kick and still has an opportunity to complete the catch. If he (or another Team B player) subsequently catches the kick, the ball is placed where he first touched it. This protection terminates when the kick touches the ground. (A.R. 6-5-1:I-II)
- c. Rules pertaining to a fair catch apply only when a scrimmage kick crosses the neutral zone or during free kicks.
- d. The purpose of the fair catch provision is to protect the receiver who, by his fair catch signal, agrees he or a teammate will not advance after the catch. (A.R. 6-5-5:III)
- e. The ball shall be put in play by a snap by the receiving team at the spot of the catch if the ball is caught (*Exception:* Rules 6-5-1-b, 7-1-1-c and 8-6-1-b).

Approved Ruling 6-5-1

- I. After a valid or invalid signal, B1 muffs the punt and B2, who did not signal, catches the kick. **RULING:** The ball is dead when B2 catches it and the ball is placed where B1 first touched it. [Cited by 6-5-1-b, 6-5-3-a]
- II. B1 has a foot out of bounds when he gives a valid or invalid signal. He then catches the kick inbounds. **RULING:** There is no rule against a receiver going out of bounds during a kick. The inbounds catch is legal, and the ball is dead. [Cited by 6-5-1-b]
- III. During a free kick, B21 signals for a fair catch at the B-5. B21 muffs the kick but immediately recovers the ball at the B-5. **RULING:** Not a completed Fair Catch. Team B ball, first and 10 at the B-5.

No Advance

ARTICLE 2. No Team B player shall carry a caught or recovered ball more than two steps in any direction after any Team B player gives a valid or invalid fair catch signal. (A.R. 6-5-2:I-III)

PENALTY – Dead-ball foul, delay of game. Five yards from the succeeding spot [S7 and S21: DOG].

Approved Ruling 6-5-2

- I. B1 gives a fair catch signal before a muff by B2, and then B1 catches or recovers the kick and advances. **RULING:** Because of B1's signal, the ball is dead where caught or recovered. Two steps are permitted to enable B1 to come to a stop or to regain balance. A third or subsequent step inbounds is subject to penalty from where the ball is caught or recovered. If B1 is tackled, the tackle is disregarded unless deemed unnecessarily rough or is so late that the tackler should know that there was no intention to advance. If the kick is caught or recovered by Team B in the end zone, it is a touchback. If B1 is tackled before completion of a third step, only the tackler has fouled. [Cited by 6-5-2]
- II. Team A punts. After signalling for a fair catch on his 20-yard line, B1 deliberately lets the ball strike the ground where B2 recovers the bouncing ball and advances to Team B's 35-yard line. **RULING:** The ball is dead at the spot of recovery. Advance is illegal. Penalty — Five yards from the succeeding spot, the spot of recovery. Team B's ball, first and 10 (Rule 5-2-7). [Cited by 6-5-2]
- III. Punt receiver B22 gives an invalid fair catch signal by a brief flick of his upraised hand. He catches the ball at the B-35 and sprints to the B-40 where he is tackled. **RULING:** The ball is dead where caught. Foul for delay of game by B22; five-yard penalty from the dead-ball spot. No foul by the tackler, as clearly B22 gave the appearance of being a ball carrier. First and 10 for Team B at the B-30. [Cited by 6-5-2]

Invalid Signals: Catch or Recovery

- ARTICLE 3. a. A catch after an invalid signal is not a fair catch, and the ball is dead where caught or recovered. If the signal follows a catch or recovery, the ball is dead when the signal is first given. **(A.R. 6-5-1:I)**
- b. Invalid signals beyond the neutral zone apply only to Team B.
- c. An invalid signal beyond the neutral zone is possible only when the ball has crossed the neutral zone (Rule 2-16-7). **(A.R. 6-5-3:I)**

Approved Ruling 6-5-3

- I. A1 or B1 signals for a fair catch beyond the neutral zone during a kick that does not cross the neutral zone. **RULING:** Any signal by Team A is ignored. Team B may not make a fair catch signal because the ball did not cross the neutral zone. However, the ball is dead when caught or recovered (Rules 2-8-1-a and 4-1-3-g). [Cited by 6-5-3-c]
- II. On a free kick, B17 makes an invalid signal for a fair catch near the sideline, muffs the ball, and it goes out of bounds. **RULING:** Team B's ball, first and 10 at the hash mark.
- III. A scrimmage kick strikes the ground beyond the neutral zone and bounces high into the air and B1 signals for a fair catch. **RULING:** Invalid signal. The ball is dead when recovered. [Cited by 2-8-3-b]
- IV. B1 catches a scrimmage kick beyond the neutral zone and then signals for a fair catch. **RULING:** Invalid signal. The ball is dead where the signal first was given. [Cited by 2-8-3-b]
- V. Team A's scrimmage kick is rolling beyond the neutral zone when B17 alerts his teammates to stay away from the ball by a "get away" signal. **RULING:** Invalid signal. The ball is dead by rule when either team recovers. [Cited by 2-8-3-b]

- VI. While a free kick is in the air, B21 gives a waving signal that does not meet all the requirements of a valid fair catch signal. The ball is caught by: (a) B21 at the B-5; or (b) B44 at the B-5. **RULING:** The ball is dead when caught. (a) and (b) Team B ball, first and 10 at the 5-yard line.

Illegal Block or Contact

ARTICLE 4. A player of Team B who has made a valid or invalid signal for a fair catch and does not touch the ball shall not block or foul an opponent during that down. **(A.R. 6-5-4:I and II)**

PENALTY – Free kick: Receiving team's ball 15 yards from the spot of the foul [S40: IBK]. Scrimmage kick: 15 yards, postscrimmage kick enforcement [S40: IBK].

Approved Ruling 6-5-4

- I. B1 gives either a valid or invalid fair catch signal and does not touch a punt. While the untouched ball is loose in the field of play, he blocks an opponent (a) in the field of play beyond the neutral zone or (b) in Team B's end zone. **RULING:** (a) If the ball crosses the neutral zone and Team B has possession when the down ends, Team B is penalised 15 yards from the postscrimmage kick enforcement spot. (b) Safety. The ruling is the same on an unsuccessful field goal attempt. [Cited by 6-5-4]
- II. B1 signals at the 50-yard line and does not touch a punt. While the ball is rolling on the ground at Team B's 45-yard line, B1 illegally uses his hands in an attempt to get to the ball and the ball is declared dead in Team B's possession. **RULING:** Penalty — 15 yards, postscrimmage kick enforcement. The ball belongs to Team B (Rule 10-2-3). [Cited by 6-5-4]

No Tackling

ARTICLE 5. No player of the kicking team shall tackle or block an opponent who has completed a fair catch. Only the player making a fair catch signal has this protection **(A.R. 6-5-5:I and III)**.

PENALTY – Dead-ball foul. Receiving team's ball 15 yards from the succeeding spot [S7 and S38: PF-UNR].

Approved Ruling 6-5-5

- I. B1 and B2 each signal. B1 muffs, and B2 is about to catch the muffed ball when A1 grabs and pulls him to the ground. **RULING:** Not interference, but holding. Penalty — 10 yards from the previous spot or from the spot where the subsequent dead ball belongs to Team B. [Cited by 6-5-5]
- II. B22 makes a fair catch and is tackled before he has carried the ball more than two steps. **RULING:** Foul by the tackler. Penalty — 15 yards from the succeeding spot.
- III. B1 catches the punt after B3 signals for a fair catch. **RULING:** The ball is dead when and where caught. B1 is not entitled to catch protection but is entitled to the same protection he has after any other dead ball (Rule 6-5-1-d). [Cited by 6-5-1-d, 6-5-5]