

# RULE 4

## Ball in Play, Dead Ball, Out of Bounds

### SECTION 1. Ball in Play – Dead Ball

#### Dead Ball Becomes Alive

ARTICLE 1. After a dead ball is ready for play, it becomes a live ball when it is legally snapped or legally free-kicked. A ball snapped or free-kicked before it is ready for play remains dead. (A.R. 2-16-4:I) (A.R. 4-1-4:I and II) (A.R. 7-1-3:IV) (A.R. 7-1-5:I and II)

#### Live Ball Becomes Dead

ARTICLE 2. a. A live ball becomes a dead ball as provided in the rules, or when an official sounds his whistle (even though inadvertently), or otherwise signals the ball dead. (A.R. 4-2-1:II) (A.R. 4-2-4:I)

- b. If an official sounds his whistle inadvertently or otherwise signals the ball dead during a down (Rules 4-1-3-k, 4-1-3-m and 4-1-3-n):
1. When the ball is in player possession, then the team in possession may elect to put the ball in play where declared dead or repeat the down.
  2. When the ball is loose from a fumble, backward pass or illegal pass, then the team in possession may elect to put the ball in play where possession was lost or repeat the down.

#### *Exceptions:*

- (a) Rule 12.
- (b) If there is a clear catch, recovery or interception of a loose ball in the immediate continuing action after the inadvertent whistle, then the ball belongs to the recovering team at the spot of the recovery and any advance is nullified.
3. During a legal forward pass or a free or scrimmage kick, then the ball is returned to the previous spot and the down repeated.

#### *Exceptions:*

- (a) Rule 12.
  - (b) If there is a clear catch, recovery or interception of the pass or kick in the immediate continuing action after the inadvertent whistle, then the ball belongs to the recovering team at the spot of the recovery and any advance is nullified.
  4. After Team B gains possession on the try or during an extra period, then the try is over or the extra-period possession series is ended.
- c. If a foul or violation occurs during any of the above downs, the penalty or violation privilege shall be administered as in any other play situation if not in conflict with other rules. (A.R. 4-1-2:I and II)

#### Approved Ruling 4-1-2

- l. Fourth and 16 at the 50-yard line, Team A kicks. B1 clips on Team B's 40-yard line, and B2 muffs the kick on the 25-yard line. While the ball is loose, an inadvertent whistle is sounded. **RULING:** If Team A accepts the penalty, penalise Team B from the 50-yard line. Team A's ball, first and 10 on the 35-yard line. If Team A declines the penalty, repeat the down. [Cited by 4-1-2-c]

- II. Fourth and 16 at the 50-yard line. At the snap, B1 is offside. Team A advances the ball to the 30-yard line and fumbles. During the loose ball, an inadvertent whistle is sounded.  
**RULING:** Team A may refuse the penalty and put the ball in play on the 30-yard line, first and 10. [Cited by 4-1-2-c]
- III. Fourth and five at the A-30. During the kick an official inadvertently sounds his whistle.  
**RULING:** Repeat the down. The game clock starts on the snap. (Rule 3-3-2-f)
- IV. What is meant by "otherwise signals the ball dead" in Rule 4-1-2-b? **RULING:** It means an official giving one of the following signals: stop the clock (S3); touchdown/field goal (S5); safety (S6); dead ball (S7); incomplete pass (S10). Such a signal interrupted before the official's arms are held or moved in the correct position is not regarded as a signal.

### Ball Declared Dead

ARTICLE 3. A live ball becomes dead and an official shall sound his whistle or declare it dead:

- a. When it goes out of bounds other than a kick that scores a field goal after touching the uprights or crossbar; when a ball carrier is out of bounds; or when a ball carrier is so held that his forward progress is stopped. When in question, the ball is dead. **(A.R. 4-2-1:II)**
- b. When any part of the ball carrier's body, except his hand or foot, touches the ground or when the ball carrier is tackled or otherwise falls and loses possession of the ball as he contacts the ground with any part of his body, except his hand or foot. **(Exception:** The ball remains alive when an offensive player has simulated a kick or at the snap is in position to kick the ball held for a place kick by a teammate. The ball may be kicked, passed or advanced by rule.) **(A.R. 4-1-3:I)**
- c. When a touchdown, touchback, safety, field goal, or successful try occurs; or when a free kick or a scrimmage kick that is untouched by Team B beyond the neutral zone touches the ground in Team B's end zone **(A.R. 6-3-9:I)**
- d. When, during a try, a dead-ball rule applies. (Rule 8-3-2-d-5).
- e. When a player of the kicking team catches or recovers any free kick or a scrimmage kick that has crossed the neutral zone.
- f. When a free kick, scrimmage kick or any other loose ball comes to rest and no player attempts to secure it.
- g. When a scrimmage kick or a free kick is caught or recovered by any player after a valid or invalid fair catch signal; or when an invalid fair catch signal is made after a catch or recovery by Team B (Rules 2-8-1, 2-8-2 and 2-8-3).
- h. When a return kick or scrimmage kick beyond the neutral zone is made.
- i. When a forward pass is ruled incomplete.
- j. When, before a change of team possession on fourth down or a try, a Team A fumble is caught or recovered by a Team A player other than the fumbler (Rules 7-2-2-a, 7-2-2-b and 8-3-2-d-5).
- k. When a live ball not in player possession touches anything inbounds other than a player, a player's equipment, an official, an official's equipment or the ground (inadvertent whistle provisions apply).
- l. When a simultaneous catch or recovery of a live ball occurs.
- m. When the ball becomes illegal while in play (inadvertent whistle provisions apply).
- n. When a live ball is in possession of an official (inadvertent whistle provisions apply).
- o. When a ball carrier simulates placing his knee on the ground.
- p. When an airborne pass receiver from either team is held so that he is prevented from immediately returning to the ground. **(A.R. 7-3-6:III)**
- q. When a ball carrier's helmet comes completely off.
- r. When all players in the vicinity of the ball stop playing and/or believe it to be dead.

### Approved Ruling 4-1-3

- I. While A1 is holding the ball for a place kick, Team B plays the ball by (a) recovering a loose ball, (b) snatching it from A1 or (c) batting it from his hands. **RULING:** (a) The ball remains alive. (b) The ball remains alive. (c) Fumble, the batting by Team B is legal. [Cited by 2-11-1, 4-1-3-b]
- II. B23 catches a kick but does not advance. No Team A player attempts to tackle B23. (i) B23 places the ball on the ground and walks away from it, or (ii) tosses the ball to an official. **RULING:** The ball is dead when it is clear B23 is not going to advance it (Rule 4-1-3-r).
- III. Team A punts the ball downfield and no Team B player attempts to catch or recover it. A40 touches the ball and stops it rolling but does not secure possession of it. A40 walks away from the ball and no Team B player moves to recover the ball. **RULING:** The ball is dead when it is clear that players in the vicinity of the ball show no interest in recovering it (Rule 4-1-3-f).
- IV. Team A punts the ball downfield and no Team B player attempts to catch or recover it. A40 touches the ball and stops it rolling but does not secure possession of it. A40 walks away from the ball and no nearby Team B player moves to recover the ball. After 2 seconds, B33 shouts "it's still live" and starts running towards the ball, picks it up and advances with it. **RULING:** The ball is dead when it is clear that players in the vicinity of the ball show no interest in recovering it. B33's action occurred after the ball became dead (Rule 4-1-3-f).
- V. 4th and 10 on Team B's 15-yard line. Team A attempts a field goal but the kick is partially blocked. The ball rolls to a stop at Team B's 2-yard line where B15 picks it up but does not advance. A24 stops next to B15 but does not tackle him. After a pause, B15 hands the ball to A24 who advances into the end zone. **RULING:** The ball is dead when it is clear that B15 is not going to advance the ball. Handing the ball to an opponent shows that B15 believes the ball to be dead. Not tackling an opponent shows that A24 believes the ball to be dead. Team B's ball 1st and 10 at their 2-yard line. (Rules 4-1-3-r and 5-1-1-e.)
- VI. 4th and 10 on Team A's 40-yard line. Team A's punt is blocked and does not cross the neutral zone. A84 recovers the ball behind the neutral zone at Team A's 45-yard line, but does not advance. Team B players start leaving the field. **RULING:** The ball is dead when it is clear that A84 is not going to advance it. Team B's ball 1st and 10 at Team A's 45-yard line. (Rules 4-1-3-r and 5-1-1-c.)

### Ball Ready for Play

ARTICLE 4. No player shall put the ball in play before it is ready for play. (**A.R. 4-1-4:I and II**)

**PENALTY – Dead-ball foul for delay of game. Five yards from the succeeding spot [S21].**

### Approved Ruling 4-1-4

- I. Snapper A1 snaps the ball before the ball is made ready for play. A2 muffs the snap and B1 recovers the ball. **RULING:** Dead ball foul, Team A delay of game. Penalty – Five-yards from the succeeding spot, Team A's ball. The ball does not become alive, and all action should be stopped immediately by the game officials. [Cited by 2-2-4-b, 4-1-1, 4-1-4, 7-1-1-a]
- II. Kicker A1 kicks off before the referee has declared the ball ready for play. **RULING:** Dead ball foul. Penalty – Five yards from the succeeding spot. The ball does not become alive, and all action should be stopped immediately by the game officials. [Cited by 2-2-4-b, 4-1-1, 4-1-4, 7-1-1-a]

### Play-Clock Count

ARTICLE 5. The ball shall be put in play within 40 or 25 seconds after it is made ready for play (Rule 3-2-4), unless, during that interval, play is suspended. If play is suspended, the play-clock count will start again.

**PENALTY – Dead-ball foul for delay of game. Five yards from the succeeding spot [S21].**

## SECTION 2. Out of Bounds

### Player Out of Bounds

- ARTICLE 1. a. A player is out of bounds when any part of his person touches anything, other than another player or game official, on or outside a boundary line (Rule 2-27-15). **(A.R. 4-2-1:I and II)**
- b. An out-of-bounds player who becomes airborne remains out of bounds until he touches the ground in bounds without simultaneously being out of bounds.
- c. A player who touches a pylon is out of bounds.

### Approved Ruling 4-2-1

- I. An inbounds ball carrier bumps into or is touched by a player or game official on the sideline. **RULING:** The ball carrier is not out of bounds. [Cited by 4-2-1-a]
- II. Ball carrier A1 is running inbounds near the sideline when he is contacted by a squad member of Team B, who is on the sideline. **RULING:** Rule 4-2-1 states a player is out of bounds when any part of his person touches anything other than a player or an official. Penalty – 15 yards or other unfair-action game administration-interference penalties (Rules 9-2-3 and 9-2-5). [Cited by 4-1-2-a, 4-1-3-a, 4-2-1-a, 9-2-3-c]
- III. Team A executes an on-side kick at the A-35. A33 is running near the sideline and steps out of bounds at the A-45. At the A-47 he leaps and bats the ball forward, and it rolls out of bounds at the A-49. **RULING:** Foul against Team A for free kick out of bounds at the A-47. Airborne A33 is out of bounds when he touches the ball because he has not established himself in bounds after going out of bounds. Not a foul for batting the ball forward because the ball is dead as soon as A33 touches it (Rule 4-2-3-a). [Cited by 6-2-1]

### Held Ball Out of Bounds

ARTICLE 2. A ball in player possession is out of bounds when either the ball or any part of the ball carrier touches the ground or anything else that is out of bounds, or that is on or outside a boundary line except another player or game official.

### Loose Ball Out of Bounds

- ARTICLE 3. a. A ball not in player possession, other than a kick that scores a field goal, is out of bounds when it touches the ground, a player, a game official or anything else that is out of bounds, or that is on or outside a boundary line.
- b. A ball that touches a pylon is out of bounds behind the goal line.
- c. If a live ball not in player possession crosses a boundary line and then is declared out of bounds, it is out of bounds at the crossing point.

### Out of Bounds at Forward Point

- ARTICLE 4. a. If a live ball is declared out of bounds and the ball does not cross a boundary line, it is out of bounds at the ball's most forward point when it was declared dead. **(A.R. 4-2-4:I) (Exception: Rule 8-5-1-a, (A.R. 8-5-1:I)).**
- b. A touchdown is scored if the ball is inbounds and has broken the plane of the goal line (Rule 2-12-2) before or simultaneous with the ball carrier going out of bounds.
- c. A receiver who is in the opponent's end zone and contacting the ground is credited with a completion if he reaches over the sideline or end line and catches a legal pass.
- d. The most forward point of the ball when declared out of bounds between the goal lines is the point of forward progress. **(A.R. 8-2-1:I) (A.R. 8-5-1:VII) (Exception: When a ball carrier is airborne as he crosses the sideline, forward progress is determined by the position of the ball as it crosses the sideline. (A.R. 8-2-1:II-III and V-IX))**

**Approved Ruling 4-2-4**

- I. A player with one foot out of bounds behind a goal line touches a loose ball in the field of play.  
**RULING:** Ball is out of bounds and dead at its most forward point in the field of play. If this loose ball was an untouched free kick, it is a free kick out of bounds and a foul. Penalty – Five yards from the previous spot or Team B's ball 30 yards beyond Team A's free kick line.  
[Cited by 4-1-2-a, 4-2-4-a]