



COLLEGE FOOTBALL OFFICIATING, LLC

This year the rules committee passed two new rules that are driven by concern for player safety: protecting offensive linemen on field goal and try attempts, and prohibiting a player from going out of bounds block an opponent. This article discusses the rules and gives some play situations that illustrate how the rules are to be administered.

DEFENSIVE LINEMEN ON FIELD GOAL FORMATIONS

Let's look first at the rule for protecting offensive linemen when it is apparent that there will be a field goal attempt. (Since the try kick attempt is by definition a field goal attempt we don't need to always include both in the description.)

Here's the rule:

Rule 6-3-14 (New article)

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 blocking zone to align shoulder-to-shoulder and move forward together after the snap with primary contact against a single team a player.

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

The purpose of the rule is to prohibit the defensive team from triple-teaming a single offensive lineman. **Note that the last phrase (underlined) in the statement of the rule was not in the original language**—this has been added as a clarification resulting from questions and concerns coming primarily from coaches and coordinators of officials. The idea is that the offensive lineman—typically a guard or tackle—is remaining in place or perhaps dropping back a bit to protect for the kicker rather than charging out to block, so he is in a passive and therefore more vulnerable mode than on most plays. Several coaches on the rules committee reported injuries to offensive resulting from triple-team blocking by the defensive team.

A typical shoulder-to-shoulder alignment of the three players will be something like this: one player in the snapper-guard gap (in coach-speak this is “the A-gap”), the one in the middle head up on the guard, and the third in the guard-tackle gap. The rule is that by starting out shoulder-to-shoulder and then charging forward together to hit the one player—the guard, in this example—they commit a foul. However, if any of the three—most likely either of the two in the gaps—does not go for the guard or does not have him as their primary contact, then there is no foul.

Note that this is not a personal foul. It is essentially a formation foul, although there is more to it than just the formation. But the committee felt that it was not a serious enough issue to make the penalty as severe as that for a personal foul. The penalty for this foul is five yards with the down repeated. If the kick is good Team A will have a decision to make: they may keep the points by declining the penalty, or they may accept the penalty and either repeat fourth down or continue their drive in case the penalty yardage results in a first down.

Here is an important point: the wording of the rule does not require a kick for there to be a foul. The restriction for the defense applies merely if the offense is in a place kick formation, regardless of the actual play.

PLAY SITUATIONS

1. Fourth and 7 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.

In (c) if B55 makes contact with A66 but does so in the process of trying to block the kick, this is not a foul. His contact with A66 is not primary in the sense that he is trying to block the kick and not trying to hit A66.

2. 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.

BLOCKING AN OUT-OF-BOUNDS PLAYER

Next we look at the new rule that prohibits a player from going out of bounds to block an opponent. The principle here is that the game should be played “between the lines” and action out of bounds must not be allowed.

It occasionally happens on punts that a kicking-team gunner moving down the field to cover a punt goes out of bounds to avoid one or more blockers who chase after him and block him after he has gone out of bounds. Up until now this has been legal. It might happen on other plays as well, of course, but most often it is in the kicking game.

Here is the new rule:

Rule 9-1-7-c (New Paragraph)

Late Hit, Action Out of Bounds

ARTICLE 7 c.

It is illegal for any player to initiate a block against an opponent who is out of bounds. The spot of the foul is where the blocker crosses the sideline in going out of bounds.

PENALTY: Administer as a Personal Foul

A few things to note. First, if the block is initiated in bounds and then continues as the players cross the sideline, this is not a foul. There must of course be no unnecessary roughness when the players have gone out of bounds, but the block continued out of bounds is not illegal in itself. Second, if this happens during a kick and the block is by a receiving team player, the kicking team player who goes out of bounds may not return in bounds without committing a foul. Rule 6-3-12 which governs a Team A player returning from out of bounds has not been changed or modified by this new rule. Third, if the foul is by Team B during a punt or field goal attempt the penalty enforcement could come under postscrimmage kick rules.

PLAY SITUATIONS

3. Team A punts on fourth and 10 from its 30-yard line. Gunner A25 steps out of bounds to avoid two defenders (no contact) at the A-40 and does not return inbounds. B37 goes out of bounds at the A-42 and blocks A25. Receiver B18 makes a fair catch at the B-35. **RULING:** Personal foul by B37, blocking an opponent who is out of bounds. Postscrimmage kick enforcement. 15 yards at the end of the kick. First down for Team B at the B-20.

4. Team A punts on fourth and 10 from its 30-yard line. Gunner A25 steps out of bounds to avoid two defenders (no contact) at the A-40. B37 goes out of bounds at the A-42 and blocks A25 who then returns inbounds. Receiver B18 makes a fair catch at the B-35. **RULING:** Fouls by both A25 (returning from out of bounds) and B37 (blocking an out-of-bounds opponent). Under Rule 10-1-4 Exc. 2, the option lies with Team B who may elect offsetting fouls or retention of the ball following completion of the penalty for its foul. Either repeat fourth down at the previous spot, or it is first and 10 for Team B at the B-20.

5. Team A punts on fourth and 10 from its 30-yard line. Gunner A25 is blocked by B37 who initiates the contact inbounds at the A-40 and then continues the action briefly after he and A25 have crossed the sideline. A25 returns inbounds before B18 makes a fair catch at the B-35. **RULING:** Legal play. B37's action is legal because he started his block inbounds and his continued action was not unnecessary roughness. A25 may return inbounds without risk because he was blocked out of bounds.