



## **2017 NFHS FOOTBALL POINTS OF EMPHASIS**

### **Responsibility on Players to Avoid Illegal Contact**

With a continued emphasis on minimizing risk in high school football, it is imperative for coaches to continue educating their student-athletes regarding the importance and responsibility of avoiding illegal contact. With the recent implementation of NFHS football rules prohibiting targeting, illegal contact on defenseless players, illegal blindside blocks, illegal pop-up kicks and other illegal personal contact fouls, the NFHS is reiterating its focus on player safety. Players are ultimately responsible for using legal blocking and tackling techniques, and coaches have a responsibility to emphasize the use of legal contact. Therefore, unnecessary contact with opponents who are clearly out of the play, or contact that is excessive and unnecessary, have no place in the game of football. These unnecessary hits are unsafe acts and the techniques cannot be tolerated by those responsible for the game of football. Coaches need to exercise leadership in eliminating illegal contact and game officials must act decisively to penalize illegal contact to minimize the risk of injury to players.

### **Illegal Helmet Contact**

While wearing a football helmet can never guarantee the elimination of head and neck injuries, coaches at all levels of football have increased their focus on reducing these types of injuries as much as possible. One of the biggest efforts in this endeavor is to eliminate direct helmet-to-helmet contact and to minimize any other contact both with and to the helmet.

Coaches and game officials must continue to be diligent in promoting the elimination of direct contact to and with the helmet through consistent adherence to proper and legal coaching techniques and through strict enforcement of playing rules and game administration.

The No. 1 responsibility for game officials must be player safety. Any initiation of contact with the helmet is illegal; therefore, these fouls must be penalized consistently and without warning. Player safety is simply a matter of attitude, technique, attention and supervision. Proper coaching techniques and consistent enforcement of illegal helmet contact by game officials will be a positive step toward reinforcing player safety.

### **Sideline Management and Control, Professional Communication Between Coaches and Game Officials**

Sideline management and consistent enforcement of the rules pertaining to the restricted area and the team box continue to be an issue in many areas of the country. The restricted

area is the area extending two yards outside the perimeter of the entire field (i.e., outside both sidelines and end lines). This restricted area is designated by the restraining line. The team box is the area immediately outside the restricted area between the 25-yard lines on each side of the field. With limited exceptions, nonplayers are not permitted in the restricted area at any time during the game. Nonplayers include coaches, team personnel, spectators, game administrators and members of the media. During a dead-ball interval, no more than three coaches are permitted in the restricted area directly in front of the team box. No one may be in the restricted area when the ball is live.

The restricted area is designated to make the sidelines safer for everyone and to allow game officials ample room to work. If the restricted area is not clearly delineated or not enforced by game administration, coaches or game officials, individuals in the restricted area are at risk for injury during or after a play.

Game administration is required to enforce the restricted area beyond the boundaries of the team boxes. No one should be in this area including media, photographers, statisticians, school boosters, cheer squads, pep bands, security personnel and medical staff.

Coaches are encouraged to instruct team personnel of the parameters and boundaries of the team box, and to effectively communicate the requirements to stay in the team box at all times. Coaches are also required to remain outside the restricted area when the ball is live, and no more than three coaches are in the coaches' area when the ball is dead.

Game officials must consistently enforce the rules pertaining to the coaches' area and restricted area and other sideline violations that occur during the game. Effective enforcement begins with respectfully communicating expectations to coaches and game administration prior to the start of the game. Violations of the restricted area should immediately result in the beginning of the progression of the penalties prescribed in Rule 9-8. Violations of the unsportsmanlike conduct rules should immediately result in a 15-yard penalty and a disqualification of the offender if flagrant, or if it is the offender's second such foul. Examples of such conduct include the actions listed in Rule 9-8-1. A coach or a nonplayer on the field of play is enforced as an unsportsmanlike conduct foul rather than a violation of the restricted area.

Coaches, game administration and game officials are reminded that the primary purpose of high school activities is to teach student-athletes how to become responsible adults. All adults involved in a contest should recognize they are teacher-coaches and teacher-officials, and that their use of professional and courteous communication sets a positive example for the student-athletes to follow, and is crucial in creating an optimal and meaningful learning environment. Game officials and coaches should always work together in a professional manner to ensure all rules are communicated, understood and enforced.

### **Proper Enforcement of Penalties for Violations of the Equipment Rules**

All players are required to wear properly fitted equipment and uniforms that are worn in the manner intended by the manufacturer, as specified in the rules. The purpose of equipment rules is to promote the safety and protection of both the player wearing the equipment and his opponent. Players may not wear any equipment/adornments that are deemed illegal.

In addition, it is the responsibility of head coaches to ensure players have been issued properly fitted equipment and have been instructed in its proper use and verify this requirement to game officials prior to each contest. Due to the potential for injury, game officials must strictly enforce equipment and uniform rules.

There are three types of fouls associated with improper equipment: (1) failure to properly wear required equipment, (2) failure to wear or use legal and/or required equipment, and (3) wearing illegal equipment. The first foul occurs when the required equipment is present, but is not worn properly. The penalty for this foul is a 5-yard penalty, and it can be either a dead-ball foul (if the foul occurs when the snap is imminent) or a live-ball foul (if a player is observed removing or discarding required equipment during a down). Examples of such fouls include, but are not limited to, unsnapped chin straps, tooth and mouth protectors that are dangling, or jerseys that do not fully cover the shoulder pads. If game officials observe any improperly worn equipment during a dead-ball period, they should use preventive officiating and tell the player to make a correction. However, if the snap is imminent and equipment is not properly worn, the game official should blow the whistle to prevent the snap from occurring and a dead-ball foul should be called. The second foul occurs when a player is missing any required equipment. That foul is an unsportsmanlike conduct foul charged to the head coach (Rule 9-9). The third foul occurs when a player wears illegal equipment. Examples of this type of foul include, but are not limited to, the wearing of cleats that exceed ½ inch, or the presence of a sticky substance on a player's uniform. If a player is detected wearing illegal equipment, his head coach is charged with an unsportsmanlike conduct foul under Rule 9-9.

If any equipment becomes illegal or defective during the game, correction must be made before the player continues to participate. Examples include chin strap snaps which break off of the helmet or a jersey that slides up over the top of the shoulder pad. If the correction can be made within 25 seconds and without the assistance of a team attendant, an official's time-out may be called to perform such correction. Alternatively, a team may request a charged time-out to perform the correction. However, if correction cannot be completed within 25 seconds, or during a charged time-out, the player may not continue to participate until correction is made.

**\*\*As of June 15, 2017**