



2022 FOOTBALL POINTS OF EMPHASIS

SPORTSMANSHIP

Good sporting behavior is one of the fundamental ingredients to the continued success and enjoyment of education-based high school sports and activities. In fact, in the 103-year history of organized high school sports in the United States, good sportsmanship has been one of the most important outcomes of high school activity programs.

NFHS playing rules are written to encourage sportsmanship. Participation in these programs should promote respect, integrity and sportsmanship. However, for these ideals to occur, everyone involved in these programs must be doing their part.

The NFHS is concerned that unsporting behavior in education-based athletics has increased across all sports. As a result, the NFHS has made sportsmanship the No. 1 Point of Emphasis for the 2022-23 school year.

Sportsmanship, or good sporting behavior, is about treating one another with respect and exhibiting appropriate behavior. It is about being fair, honest and caring. When these types of appropriate behavior occur, competitive play is more enjoyable for everyone.

Coaches set the tone during football games with their display of sportsmanship. If these individuals act in a sportsmanlike manner, their behavior sets the tone for players, spectators and others. If coaches, however, are complaining constantly about the decision of game officials, spectators are more likely to do the same.

There must be a collaborative, working relationship between game officials and game administration to promote good sportsmanship and safely conduct the game. Everyone has their roles to play in creating a positive, sportsmanlike atmosphere at games.

Game officials should focus on the actions of players, coaches and other sideline personnel. A positive, open line of communication between game officials and coaches ultimately results in a better game for everyone involved.

Game officials, however, should never engage with spectators who are exhibiting unsporting behavior. Once the game begins, school administration is responsible for dealing with unruly spectators. A proactive approach by school administration includes monitoring the behavior of spectators and intervening as needed.

If spectators are using demeaning or profane language at game officials – or at others in the stands – those individuals should be removed from the game by school administration.

In recent years, a heightened level of unsportsmanlike behavior has been occurring by spectators at high school football games, and it must be stopped. The use of demeaning language, or hate speech, by students, parents and other fans must cease.

High school football and other activities exist to lift people up, not demean or tear people down. The goal is to treat everyone fairly and treat each other with respect. Any speech or harassment that is insulting, demeaning or hurtful will not be tolerated.

High schools must establish a culture that values the worth of every single person – both players on the school’s team and players on the opposing team. There must be a no-tolerance policy regarding behavior that shows disrespect for another individual.

Good sports win with humility, lose with grace and do both with dignity. It takes the efforts of everyone every day to ensure that sportsmanship remains one of the top priorities in education-based activity programs.

In providing an optimal experience to players, fans, coaches and game officials, the NFHS has continually made sportsmanship a priority. Players and coaches are the most visible exhibitors of good sportsmanship. The behavior of coaches and players sets the tone for fans, game officials and others. There is no place in scholastic sports for language that defames, demeans, abuses or bullies another competitor, teammate, game official or fan. Language of this nature should not be tolerated in the school building, at games or at practice. Education-based athletics, and specifically high school football, should serve as an example of how intense competition and civility can coexist.

Coaches and players must represent their schools and communities as ambassadors of good sporting behavior beginning with pregame activities and concluding with end-of-game procedures. Game officials are charged with enforcing NFHS football rules and penalizing unsportsmanlike behavior.

Communities are often defined by their treatment of, and interaction with, visiting teams and their fans. Foul language and inflammatory speech are not acceptable displays of sportsmanship and good sporting behavior.

Sportsmanship is a basic, vital component of education-based athletics. The lessons learned, humility, respect and integrity are the cornerstones of sportsmanship. Those lessons do not include the acceptance of profane or foul language. Those same lessons are forged and exhibited long before they are on display in the spotlight of the athletic arena. More importantly, they remain in place long after the final whistle of athletic competition. Good sports make sportsmanship a priority.

TARGETING / DEFENSELESS PLAYER

The NFHS Football Rules Committee feels coaches, game officials and players have all worked together to recognize and remove most targeting fouls from the game, but considerable work still needs to be done understanding/penalizing illegal defenseless player contact. As stakeholders in the game, removing needless contact from football should be prioritized by coaches, game officials and players.

Targeting is an act by any player who takes aim and initiates contact against an opponent above the shoulders with the helmet, forearm, hand, fist, elbow or shoulders. A defenseless

player is a player, who, because of his physical position and focus of concentration, is especially vulnerable to injury. For added defenseless player clarification, please refer to 2.32.16 COMMENT in the 2022 NFHS Football Case Book.

Since defenseless players are especially vulnerable to potential injury, coaches should use video, on-field demonstrations, and establish zero tolerance of this illegal contact during practice and games to help players realize the importance of contacting players legally.

Game officials must have a clear understanding of the guidelines for defenseless player contact (Rule 9-4-3g). They must diligently observe all action and watch for illegal contact against players who are deemed defenseless. Any player contacting a defenseless player is responsible to make legal contact. Game officials must draw a distinction between contact necessary to make a legal block or tackle and that which is excessive. When there is a question in the game officials' mind about the severity of contact, the contact should be deemed excessive.

Legal contact is required by players at all times. It is imperative that players have a clear understanding of what contact is acceptable and be able to recognize when players are considered defenseless. Players must realize that when contacting any player, the responsibility for making legal contact resides with the person making the contact. Forceful contact that is avoidable should be considered unnecessary.

To ensure the long-term success of high school football, risk minimization must remain a priority for all stakeholders of the game. Coaches, game officials and players must understand the importance of removing unnecessary contact from the game. A concerted effort must be made by all to eliminate targeting and illegal defenseless player contact from football.

LEGAL UNIFORMS AND EQUIPMENT

The purpose of the NFHS Football Equipment Rules is to ensure the safety and protection of both the player wearing the equipment and their opponent. Due to the potential for injury, it is essential that game officials strictly enforce equipment rules and that coaches support that enforcement.

The head coach is primarily responsible for the legality of a team's equipment. Prior to the start of each game, the head coach must verify to the referee and another game official that all players are legally equipped in compliance with the rules and that no illegal equipment will be used. Most equipment violations can be prevented by the coaching staff communicating the equipment rules to players prior to the teams arriving at the game.

During pregame duties, game officials should take time to spot-check players for illegal or improperly worn equipment and alert players and coaching staffs of any potential violations. Game officials should not allow any players to participate until all equipment issues have been resolved.

Prior to the ball becoming live, game officials through normal observations should verify that each player is properly and legally equipped. If a player is observed to not meet proper equipment rules, the play clock should be stopped and the equipment violation addressed.

Different rules will apply to enforcement depending if the stoppage was for illegal, improperly worn or missing equipment.

Unless halftime or overtime intermission occurs, any time the play clock is interrupted for improperly worn or missing equipment by a player, the player is to be removed from the game for at least one play. Examples of improperly worn equipment include but are not limited to: Knee pads that do not cover the player's knees; shoulder pads that are not fully covered by the jersey; undershirts not tucked in that extend below the top of the waistline of the pants; and failure to wear a tooth or mouth protector. If any equipment becomes improperly worn during play, correction must be made before continued player participation is allowed. The player would not be required to be removed from the game if the repair can be made promptly and does not delay the ready for play by more than 25 seconds.

Any time a player is found participating with illegal equipment, the player is to be removed from the game and the head coach should be penalized for unsportsmanlike conduct. Examples of illegal equipment include but are not limited to: Eye shade that is not a solid stroke or includes words, numbers, logos or other symbols; eye shields that are not clear (without the presence of any tint); play cards not worn on the wrist or arm; and uniform adornments (exemptions are legal towels and sweatbands properly worn).

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