



Week 7 notes

- **Pace of Game** - It starts with getting the ball into the U promptly, but never are we to compromise our observation of the players at the end of a play. Officiate till the players separate. The hash marks are not a barrier for the U, show some hustle, get involved and get the ball spotted. The R and the U are most responsible for the pace, the tempo, and if they are not active, the players and coaches will follow their lead. Keep the game moving. Penalty enforcement is a crew mechanic, prompt enforcement moves the game along, keeps the clock running and the coaches will move on to the next play. Lengthy conferences after a foul can reduce our credibility if they occur too often. However, the primary goal is to “get it right”. Do not rush through a complicated enforcement. Use preliminary signals as often as possible.
- **Expanded Neutral Zone** – Can it be expanded up to 2 yards into the end zone? Answer: YES unless it is during a scrimmage kick. Rule 2-28-2 now reads: (Changes highlighted in grey)
ART 2 The neutral zone may be expanded up to a maximum of 2 yards behind the defensive line of scrimmage, **inside the boundary lines** during any scrimmage down. **If a scrimmage kick occurs, the neutral zone shall not be expanded into the end zone.**

This is a 2022 rule change that was not mentioned in the NFHS Rule Changes. Instead, it was listed as an editorial change which it is clearly not. The old rule used to have the term “in the field of play” as a limit to ENZ. That wording has been replaced by the wording above.

In addition, Rule 6-2-6 was changed to:

ART 6 The touching of a low scrimmage kick by any player is ignored if the touching is in or behind the expanded neutral zone. **If a scrimmage kick occurs, the neutral zone shall not be expanded into the end zone.**

Big thanks to Jeff Osborne for bringing this to my attention.

- **The Use of the Whistle** – It is our local, state and national mechanic to not blow our whistles unless we see the ball in possession, and progress stopped or the player down by rule. We do not want inadvertent whistles!
- **Inadvertent Whistles** –
 1. If during legal forward pass, snap is in flight, or during a legal kick – replay the down.
 2. If the ball is in player possession, that team has the choice of possession at the dead ball spot, or replay the down.
 3. The same two options for the team last in possession if following a backward pass, fumble or illegal forward pass or illegal kick.
 4. Accepted penalties take precedence over an IW

- **New Flank Mental Mechanic** – I got this from California State CIF Rules Interpreter Steve Coover, I've been using it myself as HL for the past few games and it's really useful. When a pass is thrown and caught/possessed, there are 3 possible outcomes.

1. The pass was thrown forward beyond the line of scrimmage. The flank the ball is coming toward should mentally say to himself "Forward/Ahead". If the opposite flank gets a good look, he should do the same.
2. The pass was thrown forward behind the line of scrimmage. The flank the ball is coming toward should mentally say to himself "Forward/Behind". If the opposite flank gets a good look, he should do the same.
3. The pass was thrown backward (both Flanks should punch backward)

When in doubt, and there is potential OPI blocking beyond the Expanded Neutral Zone (ENZ) while the ball is in flight, the BJ should throw his flag. If the blocking was determined to be in or behind the ENZ then the flag should be picked up.

This mechanic is only needed for short passes near the LOS or clearly behind the LOS.

- **React or Process** - Instructions to timers should always include some guidance regarding the timer observing the signals of the game officials. Timers should not react to what they see such as an incomplete pass, or a step out of bounds, etc. Timers need to process what they see and stop the clock accordingly after seeing officials signal. The extra fraction of a second is appropriate. Process is important, and the same for us as officials. Anticipate the play, never anticipate a call. Quick whistles or signals when for example we see a knee down, a quick reaction will only lead to an inadvertent whistle or an incorrect judgement at some point. See the play, PROCESS what you see and then whistle, then signal as appropriate.
- **Game Clock** – Reminder, at the beginning of our dead ball routine we must all check the game clock for accuracy. When we are questioned about game time (maybe the clock continued to run when it wasn't supposed to) and we don't have an answer we lose our credibility with fans, players and coaches. Much of this happens inside of 5 minutes in the half or the game, but you can't just turn on and off this responsibility. You have to do it each and every snap. Finish observing the action of the players at the end of each play, then a quick look at the clock to check its status. Have a plan each week on how you will communicate with the clock operator so we can quickly reset the game clock if necessary. Resetting the game clock can demonstrate our thoroughness and our professionalism.
- **From Week 5's Weekly Bull....Food For Thought** – 3rd and 9 at the R14-yard line with 20 seconds remaining. K's field goal attempt is blocked and the ball is recovered by K26 at the R20-yard line. What is the status of the clock? Running? Stopped? Whose ball? Answer below. If you haven't already researched this, take a moment, and get your answer from the rule book.

BTW I got this wrong. I thought it would be R 1/10 at the R20 clock stopped (buzzer sound **WRONG!**)

Answer: K 4/15 at the R20 clock running. Rule Reference 5-1-4:

ART 4 Unless first touched by R beyond the neutral zone, if the kickers recover a scrimmage kick in or behind the neutral zone, the ball remains live and belongs to K and the down counts.

So how did I get screwed up? I confused this situation with the same situation but the ball goes out of bounds. In that case the Rule Reference is 6-2-7

ART 7 When any scrimmage kick is out of bounds between the goal lines or becomes dead inbounds between the goal lines while no player is in possession, or inbounds anywhere while opponents are in joint possession, the ball is awarded to R. Following an out-of-bounds kick, the ball is put in play at the inbounds spot unless R chooses a spot of first touching.

- **Back Judge Mechanics on scrimmage kicks (Punts)**

Last week there were 2 instances of KCI during a scrimmage kick that were not called by the Back Judge. Both Back Judges, who are excellent officials, were incorrectly positioned. I'm convinced that was the reason the foul was missed.

First let's talk about what KCI is. It's covered in Rule 6-5-6 and the rule covers KCI on free kicks and scrimmage kicks:

ART 6 While any free kick is in flight in or beyond the neutral zone to the receiver's goal line or any scrimmage kick is in flight beyond the neutral zone to the receiver's goal line, K shall not:

- a. Touch the ball or R, unless blocked into the ball or R, or to ward off a blocker; or
- b. Obstruct R's path to the ball.

This prohibition applies even when no fair catch signal is given, but it does not apply after a free kick has been touched by a receiver, or after a scrimmage kick has been touched by a receiver who was clearly beyond the neutral zone at the time of touching.

EXCEPTION: K may catch, touch, muff or bat a scrimmage kick in flight beyond the neutral zone if no player of R is in position to catch the ball.

In both cases, K obstructed or contacted the R receiver. In both cases, the ball was touched by K in flight. The 6-5-6 exception does not apply in either case.

As I said the BJ's were incorrectly positioned. Our mechanics manual states:

V. BACK JUDGE

- a. Position slightly behind and to the side of the deepest receiver on the same side of the field as the HEAD LINESMAN (approximately 7-10 yards to the side and 3-5 yards behind the receiver but always within the hash marks). If the position of the ball at the snap, and the position of the returner, places you outside the hash marks on the HEAD LINESMAN'S side of the field, adjust your starting position to the LINE JUDGE'S side of the field (approximately 7-10 yards to the side and 3-5 yards behind the receiver but always within the hash marks. If two receivers, field position may require you to take a position between the receivers. On kicks from inside the receiving team's 40-yard line, take a position on the goal line at the sideline. When the ball is possessed, move to a position in the middle of the field keeping the runner between you and the sideline. You are responsible for coverage of runner from an inside-out view favoring the chains side of the field, if possible