

NFL RULES CHANGES AND WHO THEY FAVOR

Year	Change	Rules Change Favored				
		OFF	DEF	S. TMS	Safety	Admin
1876						
	At the Massasoit convention, the first rules for American football were written.					X
1898						
	A touchdown was changed from four points to five.	X				
1904						
	A field goal was changed from five points to four.		X			
1906						
	The forward pass was legalized.	X				
1909						
	A field goal dropped from four points to three.		X			
1912						
	A touchdown was increased from five points to six.	X				
1933						
	The NFL, which long had followed the rules of college football, made a number of significant changes from the college game for the first time and began to develop rules serving its needs and the style of play it preferred. The innovations from the 1932 championship game included inbounds line or hashmarks and goal posts on the goal lines-were adopted.					X
	The forward pass was legalized from anywhere behind the line of scrimmage.	X				
1941						

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	The league by-laws were revised to provide for playoffs in case there were ties in division races, and sudden-death overtimes in case a playoff game was tied after four quarters. An official NFL Record Manual was published for the first time.					X
1945						
	The inbounds lines or hashmarks were moved from 15 yards away from the sidelines to nearer the center of the field-20 yards from the sidelines.	X				
1946						
	Free substitution was withdrawn and substitutions were limited to no more than three men at a time.	X	X			
	Forward passes were made automatically incomplete upon striking the goal posts.		X			
1948						
	Plastic helmets were prohibited.				X	
	A flexible artificial tee was permitted at the kickoff.			X		
1949						
	Free substitution was adopted for one year.	X	X			
	Unlimited free substitution was restored, opening the way for the era of two platoons and specialization in pro football.	X	X			
1951						
	A rule was passed that no tackle, guard, or center would be eligible to catch a forward pass.		X			

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	The Pro Bowl game, dormant since 1942, was revived under a new format matching the all-stars of each conference at the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum. The American Conference defeated the National Conference 28-27, January 14.					X
1955						
	The sudden-death overtime rule was used for the first time in a preseason game between the Rams and Giants at Portland, Oregon, August 28. The Rams won 23-17 three minutes into overtime.					X
	A rule change declared the ball dead immediately if the ball carrier touched the ground with any part of his body except his hands or feet while in the grasp of an opponent.		X			
1956						
	Grabbing an opponent's facemask (other than the ball carrier) was made illegal.				X	
	Using radio receivers to communicate with players on the field was prohibited.	X	X			
	A natural leather ball with white end stripes replaced the white ball with black stripes for night games.					X
1960						
	The AFL adopted the two-point option on points after touchdown.	X				
1962						
	Both leagues [NFL & AFL] prohibited grabbing any player's facemask.				X	
	The AFL voted to make the scoreboard clock the official timer of the game.					X
1966						

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	Goal posts offset from the goal line, painted bright yellow, and with uprights 20 feet above the cross-bar were made standard in the NFL.			X		X
1967						
	The "sling-shot" goal post and a six-foot-wide border around the field were made standard in the NFL.			X		X
1969						
	The AFL established a playoff format for the 1969 season, with the winner in one division playing the runner-up in the other.					X
1970						
	The merged 26-team league [NFL] adopted rules changes putting names on the backs of players' jerseys, making a point after touchdown worth only one point, and making the scoreboard clock the official timing device of the game.					X
1972						
	The inbounds lines or hashmarks were moved nearer the center of the field, 23 yards, 1 foot, 9 inches from the sidelines.	X				
	The method of determining won-lost percentage in standings changed. Tie games, previously not counted in the standings, were made equal to a half-game won and a half-game lost.					X
1973						

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	A jersey numbering system was adopted, April 5: 1-19 for quarterbacks and specialists, 20-49 for running backs and defensive backs, 50-59 for centers and linebackers, 60-79 for defensive linemen and interior offensive linemen other than centers, and 80-89 for wide receivers and tight ends. Players who had been in the NFL in 1972 could continue to use old numbers.						X
1974							
	Sweeping rules changes were adopted to add action and tempo to games: one sudden-death overtime period was added for preseason and regular-season games.						X
	The goal posts were moved from the goal line to the end lines.		X				
	Kickoffs were moved from the 40- to the 35-yard line.	X					
	After missed field goals from beyond the 20, the ball was to be returned to the line of scrimmage.		X				
	Restrictions were placed on members of the punting team to open up return possibilities.	X		X			
	Roll-blocking and cutting of wide receivers was eliminated; the extent of downfield contact a defender could have with an eligible receiver was restricted.	X					
	Wide receivers blocking back toward the ball within three yards of the line of scrimmage were prevented from blocking below the waist.		X				
	The penalties for offensive holding, illegal use of the hands, and tripping were reduced from 15 to 10 yards	X					
1976							

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	Owners adopted the use of two 30-second clocks for all games, visible to both players and fans to note the official time between the ready-for-play signal and snap of the ball.		X			X
1977						
	A 16-game regular-season, 4-game preseason was adopted to begin in 1978.					X
	A second wild-card team was adopted for the playoffs beginning in 1978, with the wild-card teams to play each other and the winners advancing to a round of eight postseason series.					X
	Rule changes were adopted to open up the passing game and to cut down on injuries.	X			X	
	The head slap was outlawed.	X	X			
	Offensive linemen were prohibited from thrusting their hands to an opponent's neck, face, or head.		X			
	Wide receivers were prohibited from clipping, even in the legal clipping zone.		X			
	Defenders were permitted to make contact with eligible receivers only once.	X				
1978						
	The NFL continued a trend toward opening up the game. Rules changes permitted a defender to maintain contact with a receiver within five yards of the line of scrimmage, but restricted contact beyond that point. The pass-blocking rule was interpreted to permit the extending of arms and open hands.	X				
1979						

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	NFL rules changes emphasized additional player safety. The changes prohibited players on the receiving team from blocking below the waist during kickoffs, punts, and field-goal attempts; prohibited the wearing of torn or altered equipment and exposed pads that could be hazardous; extended the zone in which there could be no crackback blocks; and instructed officials to quickly whistle a play dead when a quarterback was clearly in the grasp of a tackler.	X			X	
1980						
	Rules changes placed greater restrictions on contact in the area of the head, neck, and face.				X	
	Under the heading of "personal foul," players were prohibited from directly striking, swinging, or clubbing on the head, neck, or face. Starting in 1980, a penalty could be called for such contact whether or not the initial contact was made below the neck area.				X	
1988						
	At the NFL annual meeting in Phoenix, Arizona, a 45-second clock was also approved to replace the 30-second clock. For a normal sequence of plays, the interval between plays was changed to 45 seconds from the time the ball is signaled dead until it is snapped on the succeeding play.	X				X
1990						
	The NFL revised its playoff format to include two additional wild-card teams (one per conference).					X
1994						

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	There is now a 2 point conversion following touchdowns (teams now have the option of passing or running for two points or kicking for one after a TD).	X				
	The starting point of all kickoffs will be the kicking teams 30 yard line (moved back 5 yards).	X				
	Kickoff tees used can be no more than one inch in height (previously 3 inches).			X		
	A neutral zone infraction has been clarified (officials are to immediately blow their whistles whenever a defender enters the neutral zone causing the offensive player(s) directly opposite to move, this is considered a penalty on the defense. If there is no immediate reactional movement by the offensive player(s), there is no foul. (The neutral zone is defined as the space the length of the ball between the offense and defense line of scrimmage).	X				
	All field goals attempted and missed when the spot of the kick is beyond the 20 yard line, the defensive team taking possession will get the ball at the spot of the kick.		X			
	On any field goal attempted and missed with the spot of the kick is on or inside the 20, the ball will go to the defensive team taking possession at the 20.		X			

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	The 11 players on the receiving team are prohibited from blocking below the waist during a play in which there is a kickoff, safety kick, punt, field goal attempt or extra point kick with one exception, immediately at the snap on these plays those defenders on the line of scrimmage lined up on or inside the normal tight end position can block low.		X	X		
1995						
	The emergency (third) quarterback may now enter the game in just the fourth quarter, regardless if the other two quarterbacks are able to play. This means that if the third string quarterback enters the game, the first and/or second quarterback may re-enter, unlike the past two seasons where the emergency quarterback would only play off the first two were unable to resume play.	X				X
	Quarterbacks may now receive communication from the bench via a small radio transmitter in their helmets. This proposal was originally run on a test basis last year during the preseason, but was scrapped.	X				
1996						
	The five-yard contact rule will be enforced more stringently.	X				
	Hits with the helmet or to the head by the defender will be flagged as personal fouls and subject to fines. This is being done to protect the offense, particularly the quarterback.	X				
1997						

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		OFF	DEF	S. TMS	Safety	Admin
	When a team fakes a punt and throws the ball downfield, pass interference calls on the two outside defenders who are actually trying to block a coverage man from getting downfield and might not even know the ball has been thrown have been eliminated.	X				
	No player may remove his helmet while on the playing field. Doing so will result in a 15-yard unsportsmanlike conduct penalty. Exceptions are during timeouts and between quarters. (The NFL has done this in an effort to "reduce taunting and over exuberant celebrations" and also "in the name of safety.")				X	
1998						
	The coin toss will be called before the coin itself is tossed (this is a mid-season change).					X
	Tinted visors are banned from players' facemasks except for medical need.					X
	A team will be penalized immediately for having twelve players in a huddle even if the 12th player goes straight to the sideline as the huddle breaks.		X			
	A defensive player can no longer flinch before the snap to draw movement from an offensive linemen.	X				
	Instant Replay was turned down again.					X
1999						
	Instant replay returns with a challenge system.					X
	Clipping is now illegal around the line of scrimmage just as it is on the rest of the field.		X			
2000						

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	Instant replay renewed with the same rules.					X
	Celebrations limited to one player. Fines will be assessed for celebrations by two or more players.					X
	Off-Field supervisory titles eliminated, preventing coaches from changing teams without becoming head coach, or "in cases where it's written into individual contracts."					X
	Off-Field consolidation of the sport's internet presence into NFL.com. Teams would evenly split the proceeds.					X
	Anyone wearing an eligible number (1-49 and 80-89) can play at quarterback without having to check in with the referee.	X				
2001						
	Instant replay renewed for three years with the same rules.					X
	Fumble recoveries will be awarded at the spot of the recovery, not where the player's momentum carries him.	X	X			
	Protecting the passer will be emphasized even more.	X				
	Taunting rules will be tightened, with 15-yard unsportsmanlike-conduct penalties flagged.					X
	Bandannas and stocking caps are out, but skullcaps with the team colors and logos are OK.					X
2002						
	A player who touches a pylon remains in-bounds until any part of his body touches the ground out-of-bounds.	X				
	Continuing-action fouls now become dead-ball fouls and will result in the loss of down and distance.		X			

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	Any dead-ball penalties by the offense after they have made the line to gain will result in a loss of 15 yards and a new first-and-10 series.		X			
	The act of batting and stripping the ball from player possession is legalized.		X			
	The chop-block technique is illegal on kicking plays.		X	X		
	It is illegal to hit a quarterback helmet-to-helmet anytime after a change of possession.		X			
	After a kickoff, the game clock will start when the ball is touched legally in the field of play; the two-minute exception is eliminated.	X		X		
	Inside of two minutes, the game clock will not stop when the player who originally takes the snap is tackled behind the line of scrimmage.		X			
2003						
	Officials will be kept together as a single crew during the playoffs. This is a change from past seasons when "all-star" officiating crews worked the post season.					X
2004						
	Instant replay was extended for five years and adjusted to give teams an extra challenge if both previous challenges were successful.					X
	"Flamboyant" celebrations will be penalized automatically for 15 yards.					X
	Wide receivers allowed to wear numbers 11-19 for the increased amount of retired numbers, as well as more players at wide receiver and tight end (who also wear numbers in the 80s) coming into the league.					X
2005						

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	The "horse-collar tackle", in which a defender grabs inside the back or side of an opponent's shoulder pads and pulls that player down, is prohibited.	X				
	Peel-back blocks (where an offensive player blocks a defender who is moving back toward the direction of his own end zone) below the waist and from the back are now illegal.		X			
	Unnecessary roughness would be called for blocks away from the play on punters or kickers, similar to the same protection quarterbacks have after interceptions.			X	X	
	When time is stopped by officials prior to the snap for any reason while time is in, the play clock resumes with the same amount of time that remained on it - with a minimum of 10 seconds. Previously, the play-clock would be reset to 25 seconds.		X			
	During field goal and extra point attempts, the defensive team will be penalized for unsportsmanlike conduct if it calls consecutive timeouts in an attempt to "ice" the kicker. Previously, the second timeout request was only denied by officials, and thus could be used to distract the kickers.			X		
	Players cannot run, dive into, cut, or throw their bodies against or on an opponent who is out of the play or should not have reasonably anticipated such contact.				X	
	If the defensive team commits a dead ball foul following the end of the half, the offensive team may choose to extend the period for one more play. Previously, the half automatically ended without the defensive team being penalized.	X				

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	During a punt, if the kicking team illegally touches the ball inside the 5-yard line, the receiving team has the option of either treating the result as a touchback or replaying the down with a 5-yard penalty against the kicking team. Previously, the receiving team's only options were either the latter or taking over possession at the spot of the foul. This change prevents an ineligible player from keeping a kick from entering the end zone and becoming a touchback.	X		X		
	If the kicking team commits a penalty, the receiving team can have the option of adding five yards to the return or taking a penalty and forcing the kicking team to re-kick the ball. Previously they could take the latter or decline the penalty.	X				
	If a team calls for an instant replay challenge after it has used all its challenges or is out of timeouts, it will be assessed an unsportsmanlike conduct penalty. The penalty will also be assessed if a team calls for a challenge inside of two minutes of either half or overtime, when only the replay assistant can initiate reviews. Previously, the request was only denied by the Referee. This change was made to prevent head coaches from constantly stopping the game for any reason, including to just argue with the Referee.					X

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	Teams are only able to request an instant replay challenge by tossing their red flag to get the attention of officials. The league decided to do away with the electronic pager/vibrating alert system used by head coaches because practically all of them always used their red flags instead of their pagers anyway. (However, the replay assistant will still use the pagers to notify the officials of a replay request).					X
2006						
	End zone celebrations are more restricted. Players cannot celebrate by using any type of prop, or do any act in which they are on the ground. Players may still spike, spin the ball, or dunk it over the goal posts. Dancing in the end zone is also permitted as long as it is not a prolonged or group celebration.					X
	Defenders are prohibited from hitting a passer in the knee or below unless they are blocked into him. This rule was enacted in response to the previous season's injuries.	X			X	
	Down-by-contact calls can now be reviewed by instant replay to determine if a player fumbled the ball before he was down, and who recovered it. Previously, these plays could not be reversed once officials blew the whistle.	X				
	The "horse-collar tackle" rule enacted during the previous 2005 season is expanded. Players are now prohibited from tackling a ball carrier from the rear by tugging inside his jersey. Previously, it was only illegal if the tackler's hand got inside the player's shoulder pads.	X			X	

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		OFF	DEF	S. TMS	Safety	Admin
	To reduce injuries, defensive players cannot line up directly over the long snapper during field goal and extra point attempts.			X	X	
2007						
	The instant replay system, used since the 1999 season, was finally made a permanent officiating tool. Previously, it was renewed on a biennial basis.					X
	The system has also been upgraded to use high-definition technology. However, the systems at Texas Stadium (Dallas Cowboys), RCA Dome (Indianapolis Colts), and Giants Stadium (New York Giants and Jets) will not receive the HDTV updates since those stadiums will be replaced over the next few years.					X
	The amount of time allotted for the referee to review a play was reduced from 90 seconds to one minute.					X
	After a play is over, players who spike the ball in the field of play, other than in the end zone, will receive a 5-yard delay of game penalty.		X			
	Forward passes that unintentionally hit an offensive lineman before an eligible receiver will no longer be an illegal touching penalty, but deliberate actions are still penalized.	X				
	Roughing-the-passer penalties will not be called on a defender engaged with a quarterback who simply extends his arms and shoves the passer to the ground.		X			

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	During situations where crowd noise becomes a problem (when it becomes too loud that it prevents the offensive team from hearing its signals), the offense can no longer ask the referee to reset the play clock.		X			
	It is necessary to have the ball touch the pylon or break the plane above the pylon to count as a touchdown. Previously, a player just had to have some portion of his body over the goal line or pylon to count a touchdown.		X			
	A completed catch is now when a receiver gets two feet down and has control of the ball. Previously, a receiver had to make "a football move" in addition to having control of the ball for a reception.	X				
	Players will be subject to a fine from the league for playing with an unbuckled chin strap. Officials will not penalize for chin strap violations during a game.				X	
2008						
	One defensive player will be allowed to wear a radio similar to the one worn by the quarterback to communicate with the coaching staff.		X			
	The "force-out" rule on catches made near the sidelines has been eliminated. A receiver now must come down with the ball and both feet in bounds for a pass to be ruled complete; previously, passes would be ruled complete if the receiver was pushed by a defender while in the air and the official judged that he would have come down in bounds had he not been pushed.		X			

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		OFF	DEF	S. TMS	Safety	Admin
	The 5-yard incidental grabbing of the face mask penalty has been eliminated, though intentional grabbing of the face mask will remain a 15-yard penalty.				X	
	Teams that win the opening coin toss now have the option to defer the decision until the start of the second half, the same as in college football.			X		
	Field goal attempts that bounce off the goal post are now reviewable under instant replay. This change followed a decision during the previous season during a Browns-Ravens game when Phil Dawson's game-tying field goal hit an upright, then the crossbar and the back of the goal post.			X		
	Legal forward hand offs that touch the ground and attempted snaps when the ball hits the ground before the quarterback touches it are now considered fumbles; previously, forward hand offs were treated as incomplete passes, while a snap that hit the ground before the quarterback touched it was a five-yard illegal procedure penalty.		X			
2009						
	The rule regarding balls in play that strike an object such as a video board or a guy wire: In addition for the down being replayed, the game clock will also be reset to the time when the original play was snapped. This change currently only applies for this year, allowing the league to have the option of ordering the video displays to be raised for next season.					X

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	In November the United States Congress held hearings regarding NFL players on the field receiving concussions and other major injuries. Strong recommendations were made to the commissioner, and on December 2, 2009 NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell issued a memo effective immediately stating, in part: "Once removed for the duration of a practice or game, the player should not be considered for return-to-football activities until he is fully asymptotic, both at rest and after exertion, has a normal neurological examination, normal neuropsychological testing, and has been cleared to return by both his team physician(s) and the independent neurological consultant."				X	
	A blindside block cannot be initially delivered by a helmet, forearm or shoulder to an opponent's head or neck.		X			
	The initial contact to the head of a defenseless receiver is also prohibited.	X				
	A defensive player on the ground may no longer lunge or dive at the quarterback's lower legs.	X				
	On kickoffs, a blocking wedge cannot consist of more than two players.	X		X		
	During onside kickoff attempts, the kicking team cannot have more than five players bunched together.		X			
	Loose balls that could have been the result of a fumble or an incomplete pass are now subject to video review.	X	X			

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	Video replay can be used to determine if a loose ball stayed in bounds or hit the sideline.	X	X			
	If an onside kick does not go 10 yards, goes out of bounds, or is touched illegally at anytime during the kick, the ball is immediately awarded to the receiving team. This amends a rule that was first implemented during the 2003 season.	X		X		
	On all fumbles and laterals that go out of bounds, the clock will immediately start when the referee signals ready for play instead of waiting until next snap.		X			
	The draft order has been reworked to reflect playoff results, not regular-season results.					X
	There's a new waiver period during the first two weeks of training camp, and the postseason waiver period will begin after the NFL's final game, whether it's the Pro Bowl or the Super Bowl.					X
2010						
	A play will now be whistled dead if a ball-carrier loses his helmet while still in possession of the football. The ball will be spotted at the point where the player loses his helmet (player safety).		X	X		
	During field goals and punts, opposing defensive players cannot line up directly over the center. They must have their entire body outside the snapper's shoulder pads (player safety).	X		X		

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	After the half has expired, dead ball personal fouls by the offense or defense will be enforced on the succeeding kickoff, i.e. no more untimed downs (makes the enforcement more consistent for both offense and defense).	X	X			
	If a punt returner signals for fair catch, muffs the punt and the ball is caught by the punting team before it hits the ground, a fair catch is awarded to the receiving team at the spot of the interference (i.e. it's not a fumble). But the punting team is no longer penalized for attempting to catch a muffed fair catch (current penalty is too severe).	X		X		
	If a replay review inside the final minute of a half results in a ruling reversal – and the correct ruling would have kept the game clock running – officials will run 10 seconds off the game clock before play is started again (competitively more fair).		X			
	Officials will call more 15 yard penalties for spearing or launching at a defenseless player. Defenseless players are players who: Just threw a pass; attempt to catch a pass; are in the grasp; attempting a kick; on the ground at the end of the play (player safety).	X			X	
	If a loose ball strikes a video board, guide wire, sky cam or other object, the ball will be dead immediately and replayed from the previous spot.	X				

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	In the regular season, the sudden-death overtime rules will apply. But in the playoffs, only a touchdown on the initial drive will end the game. If the receiving team kicks a field goal, the other team gets a chance to match the score. If a team fumbles a punt or kickoff, it is considered an opportunity to score. Also, all replay reviews will be initiated by referees (moving spot of kickoff and increased accuracy of kickers has created an unanticipated advantage).	X	X			
	Centers are now allowed to wear uniform Nos. 50-79; defensive linemen can wear 50-79 and 90-99; linebackers can wear 50-59 and 90-99 (accounting for hybrid players).					X
2011						
	Increase chance of suspension for suspension for flagrant hits (as opposed to just the increase in fines in 2010).				X	
	Move kickoff to 35-yard line, and bringing touchback out to 25. No changes for touchbacks on any other plays (e.g. punts), with ball coming out to 20.			X		
	Make all scoring plays reviewable. Replay official would order replays on any touchdowns, field goals, safeties and extra points without the coaches needing to challenge. Similar to current system for final two minutes of each half and overtime.	X				
	Outlawing wedge on kickoffs; all blocking wedges were reduced to two players in 2009.	X				

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	The NFL's new safety guidelines, approved in May, prohibit "forcibly hitting the neck or head area" of any player. They also prohibit hits against a player in a "defenseless posture," which was redefined as the following: A player in the act or just after throwing a pass; A receiver attempting to catch a pass or one who has not completed a catch and hasn't had time to protect himself or hasn't clearly become a runner; A runner whose forward progress has been stopped; A kickoff or punt returner attempting to field a kick in the air; A player on the ground at the end of a play; A kicker/punter during a return; A quarterback any time after a turnover; A player who receives a blindside block when the blocker is moving toward his own end-line and approaches the opponent from behind or the side.	X			X	
2012						
	Overtime procedures changed so a team can not win the game by a field goal on the first possession. The opposing team will also get a possession to tie the score or win the game. Exceptions are if the team with the first possession scores a touchdown or gives up a safety.					
	All plays resulting in a turnover will be reviewed by the replay official.	X	X			
	Too many players on the field results in a deadball foul.	X				
	Illegally kicking a loose ball results in a loss of down.	X	X			
	A player receiving a crackback block is considered a defenseless player and the contact will result in a 15 yard penalty.	X				