



## NOT A WAIST OF TIME

Simplified Blocking Rule Is the Only NFHS Change for 2021

By Jeffrey Stern

By adding a subsection to an existing rule, the NFHS Football Rules Committee clarified the components of a legal block below the waist. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the committee's annual meeting took place virtually Jan. 11-12.

According to rule 2-17-2c, a legal block below the waist occurs when:

- All players involved in the blocking are on the line of scrimmage and in the zone at the snap.
- The contact is in the zone.
- The block is an immediate, initial action following the snap.

The last phrase is the new aspect of the rule. Adding that subsection means officials are no longer required to determine the location of the ball when the blocks occur. The timing of

the block as described in rule 2-17-2c is the key.

If the blocker takes a backward step at the snap, he cannot block low. A block of an opponent lined up in an adjacent gap may be legal in a normal offensive formation; however, if the offensive formation has wide splits, the block is likely to be illegal. The initiation of the block and the block itself must be a continuous motion.

BOB MESSINA



No player in this photo may legally block below the waist. Under the new NFHS rule, legal blocks below the waist must occur in the free-blocking zone, by players who were on their line and in the zone at the snap and the block must be an immediate, initial action. For all of these players, the window for blocks below the waist has closed.

In the following examples, all players involved in the blocking are on their line of scrimmage and in the free-blocking zone at the snap, and all blocks occur in the free-blocking zone.

**Play 1:** Immediately after the snap,

A1 blocks B2 above the waist. A1 disengages and blocks B3 below the waist. **Ruling 1:** A1's block on B2 is legal. However, it is illegal for A1 to block B3 below the waist because the block was not an immediate, initial action following the snap.

**Play 2:** A1 is in shotgun formation, seven yards behind the line of scrimmage. After the snap, (a) A2 blocks B3 below the waist and the block is an immediate, initial action, or (b) A2 rises, retreats slightly as if to go in traditional pass blocking protection, then dives and blocks B3 below the waist. **Ruling 2:** In (a), the block below the waist is legal. In (b), it is an illegal block below the waist because it was not an immediate action.

**Play 3:** During a running play to the left, A1 crosses through the free-blocking zone and blocks B2 from the side below the waist in leading interference for a reverse. **Ruling 3:** Illegal block by A1 because the block below the waist was not an immediate, initial action following the snap.

**Play 4:** Immediately after the snap, A1 and A2 block B3 below the knees from the front. **Ruling 4:** The combination or multiple block is legal if all contact is an immediate, initial action following the snap.

**Play 5:** A1 is in a three-point stance. B2 is positioned in the gap off A1's shoulder. Immediately at the snap, A1 (a) takes one inside step and blocks B2 below the waist, or (b) needs two steps to reach B2 before he blocks below the waist. **Ruling 5:** Legal block in (a) but illegal block below the waist in (b).

**Play 6:** B1 is in a two-point stance in front of A2. Immediately at the snap, A2 blocks B1, whose hands are (a) above, or (b) below his waist. A2 continues the block below B1's waist. The action is continuous. **Ruling 6:** Illegal block below the waist in (a) because the initial block is with the hands, which are above the waist. A legal block in (b) because the immediate block is with the hands, which are below the waist and the block below the waist immediately follows that block.

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## SIDELINE

### (Not) Many Happy Returns



By adjusting rules regarding free kicks, the NCAA hoped to decrease the number of returns, aiding in risk management. Statistics for FBS games through Nov. 21 showed that 44 percent of kicks ended in traditional touchbacks and 13 percent resulted in fair catches with the ball next snapped from team R's 25 yardline. Returns occurred on 40 percent of kickoffs. Kicks out of bounds and onside kicks accounted for the remaining percentage.

## BY THE NUMBERS

# 318-12

Results of a vote (with six abstentions) by the New Jersey State Interscholastic Athletic Association (NJSIAA) that opened the door for state championship games for the first time. The first games could come at the end of the 2022 season. In 1931, the NJSIAA voted not to sponsor a state football tournament, even though it does in every other sport it sponsors. Attempts to change the constitution failed in the past, including in 2011 and 2015.

SOURCE: NORTHJERSEY.COM

## DID YOU KNOW?

The NCAA was first to offer the option for the team winning the coin toss to defer its option to the second half. The rule was instituted in 1983. The NFHS followed suit the next year. But the rule is fairly new in the NFL, which didn't adopt the rule until 2008.

