

NFHS Football Rule 2: Definitions.

Crucial Definitions in NFHS Rule 2

A

- **Backward Pass:** A pass thrown with its initial direction parallel to or toward the runner's own goal line. It is also known as a "lateral." A backward pass that hits the ground is *live* and can be recovered and advanced by either team.
- **Blocking:** The act of obstructing or opposing a player with contact. Key sub-definitions include:
 - **Blocking Below the Waist:** A block where initial contact is below the waist. This is heavily restricted.
 - **Blocking in the Back:** A block against an opponent other than the runner who is initially facing his own goal line, from the back and above the waist.
- **Bona Fide Team:** A group of players who have regularly scheduled practices and games under the direction of a designated coach.

C

- **Catch:** Securing control of a live ball in flight. For a catch, the receiver must have:
 1. **Firm grip and control** of the ball.
 2. **Both feet** or any other part of the body (except the hands) inbounds.
 3. **Performed an act common to the game** (e.g., tuck the ball, take a step, turn upfield). Simply possessing the ball while falling to the ground is not a catch.
- **Clipping:** Blocking an opponent from behind, at or below the waist. It is a more severe penalty than blocking in the back.
- **Contact:** The touching of another person. This is a key definition for determining fouls like pass interference.

D

- **Dead Ball:** A ball that is not live. A dead ball cannot be advanced, and a live ball becomes dead when a play ends (e.g., runner is down, ball goes out of bounds, a score, or an incomplete pass).
- **Double Foul:** Fouls by both teams during the same live-ball period, with neither foul being committed before the snap or after the ball is dead.

F

- **Force:** The energy created by a player who carries the ball from the field of play into the end zone, or by a kick, pass, or fumble that sends the ball into the end zone. This is critical for determining safeties vs. touchbacks.
- **Forward Pass:** A pass thrown with its initial direction toward the opponent's goal line. A team is only allowed one forward pass per down, and it must be thrown from behind the line of scrimmage.
- **Foul:** A rule infraction for which a penalty is prescribed.
- **Fumble:** The loss of player possession of the ball *before* he is down or the ball becomes dead. A fumble is a *live ball*.

H

- **Huddle:** Two or more players of the same team grouped together before a down.

I

- **Inbounds Spot:** The point where the ball becomes dead between the hash marks. This is a crucial spot for starting the next play.
- **Interception:** The catching of a forward or backward pass by a player of the defensive team.

K

- **Kick:** Legally striking the ball with the foot or leg.
 - **Free Kick:** A kick used to start each half and after a try or field goal. This includes a kickoff.
 - **Scrimmage Kick:** A kick during a scrimmage down (a punt, field goal attempt, or drop kick).

L

- **Live Ball:** A ball that is legally in play.
- **Loose Ball:** A live ball not in player possession. This includes passes, fumbles, and kicks.

N

- **Neutral Zone:** The space between the two free-kick lines during a free kick, and the space between the forward and backward points of the ball during a scrimmage down.

It is established when the ball is marked ready for play. **No player, except the snapper on a scrimmage down, may be in the neutral zone before the ball is snapped or free-kicked.**

P

- **Passer:** The player who throws a legal forward pass. He is a defenseless player.
- **Player Designation:**
 - **A:** The player who snaps the ball.
 - **B:** The offensive player who receives the snap (almost always the quarterback).
 - **U:** Any other offensive player.
- **Possession:** When a player or team has control of the ball.

R

- **Runner:** The player in possession of a live ball.

S

- **Scrimmage Down:** A down that begins with a snap. This is the vast majority of plays.
- **Snap:** The legal passing or handing of the ball backward from its position on the ground to a back. This action starts a scrimmage down.
- **Spot:** The place where the ball is dead, or where an official places the ball for the next play.
- **Stance:** The position of a player before the snap.
 - **Lineman Stance:** At least one hand must be in contact with the ground.
- **Strips:** Removing the ball from the possession of a runner by a defensive player. This is a legal act and causes a fumble.

T

- **Touchback:** When a team gains possession of the ball behind its own goal line, and the ball became dead there, provided the impetus came from an opponent. The ball is next put in play at the team's own 20-yard line.
 - **Tripping:** Using the foot or leg to obstruct an opponent (below the knee).
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Key Points of Emphasis

1. **Catch vs. Interception:** The same standard for a "catch" applies to both a receiver and a defender. There is no separate, easier standard for an interception.
2. **Force is a Key Concept:** Understanding "impetus" (the force that puts the ball into the end zone) is vital for correctly awarding a touchdown, safety, or touchback.
3. **Neutral Zone:** This is a foundational concept for many penalties like offsides, encroachment, and false starts.
4. **Player Designation (A, B, U):** These designations are used throughout the rule book to define legal and illegal actions for specific players, especially regarding blocking and roughing the passer.