

NFHS Football Rule 3: Periods, Time Factors and Substitutions.

Key Sections of NFHS Rule 3

ARTICLE 1: LENGTH OF PERIODS AND INTERMISSIONS

- **Playing Time:** A game consists of four 12-minute quarters.
- **Halftime:** The intermission between the second and third quarters is 20 minutes.
- **Between Quarters:** There is a 1-minute intermission between the first and second quarters, and between the third and fourth quarters.
- **Overtime:** If the score is tied at the end of regulation, the game goes to overtime. The NFHS uses a "Kansas Plan" format:
 - Each team gets a series of downs from the opponent's 10-yard line.
 - The order is determined by a coin toss.
 - Each opportunity to score is a "series." Teams alternate series until a winner is determined.
 - All standard rules for tries (PATs) apply after a touchdown.

ARTICLE 2: STARTING AND STOPPING THE CLOCK

This is a critical area for game strategy. The clock starts and stops based on specific events.

When the clock starts on a READY-FOR-PLAY signal:

- After a touchdown or field goal.
- After a safety (on the subsequent free kick).
- After a touchback.
- After a team time-out.

When the clock starts on a SNAP:

- After an incomplete forward pass.
- After a runner goes out of bounds.
- After a penalty is declined.
- After a first down is awarded.

When the clock is stopped (and remains stopped until the snap):

- Following a score.

- When a penalty is accepted.
- When a team is granted a charged time-out.
- When a player is injured.
- When a measurement is taken for a first down.
- When a captain or coach requests and is granted a referee's timeout.
- At the end of a period.

Important Note: In the last two minutes of a half, the clock will start on the *snap* if the runner goes out of bounds. This is a key difference from some other levels of football and is crucial for late-game clock management.

ARTICLE 3: TIME-OUTS

- **Number:** Each team is entitled to three charged time-outs per half. They do not carry over.
- **Length:** A time-out lasts one minute.
- **How to Request:** Only a player or a designated head coach can request a time-out from an official.
- **Referee's Time-out:** The referee may suspend play for any reason (e.g., injury, unusual delay, weather). These are not charged to either team.

ARTICLE 4: DELAY OF GAME

- **25-Second Play Clock:** The offensive team must put the ball in play within 25 seconds after the ball is marked ready for play.
- **Penalty:** 5 yards (Delay of Game).

ARTICLE 5: SUSPENDING PLAY

This covers situations where the game is stopped for extended periods, such as for severe weather or darkness. The rules specify how and when a game can be resumed or terminated.

ARTICLE 6: SUBSTITUTIONS

This section outlines the rules for players entering and leaving the field. Player safety and fair play are the primary concerns.

- **Legal Substitution:** A substitute may enter the field when the ball is dead.

- **Re-Entry:** Any player may leave the game and later re-enter once, provided the substitution is made while the ball is dead. There is no "two-platoon" or limited substitution system in high school football.
- **Illegal Substitution:** A player must be off the field before the snap. If 12 or more players are on the field at the snap, it is a **live-ball foul** for an illegal substitution, penalized 5 yards.
- **Confusion & Deception:** It is illegal for the offense to use tactics designed to confuse the defense with substitutions or simulated substitutions. This is a 5-yard penalty.

ARTICLE 7: EXCESSIVE TIME-OUTS

- If a team uses all of its time-outs and requests another, it is penalized 5 yards for delay of game.
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Key Points of Emphasis for Coaches, Players, and Officials

1. **Clock Management is Critical:** Understanding when the clock starts (on the ready-for-play vs. on the snap) is a fundamental part of late-game strategy, especially inside the two-minute warning.
2. **The 25/40-Second Clock:** The offense must be aware of the play clock at all times. Delay of game is a common and preventable penalty.
3. **Substitution Rules are Liberal but Strict:** While players can freely enter and leave, they **must** do so while the ball is dead and **must** be off the field before the snap to avoid a penalty. Officials are strict about teams hurrying substitutes on and off the field.
4. **12 Players is a Live-Ball Foul:** Having 12 players on the field when the ball is snapped is a penalty, unlike in some other rule sets where it is a dead-ball foul. The play is allowed to continue, and the offended team has the option to accept the result of the play or take the 5-yard penalty.
5. **Overtime Format:** The Kansas Plan overtime is a distinct and exciting part of high school football, providing a clear and fair method to determine a winner.