

NFHS Football Rule 5: Series of Downs, Line to Gain.

Key Sections of NFHS Rule 5

ARTICLE 1: A SERIES OF DOWNS

- **The Basic Rule:** The team in possession of the ball is allowed **four consecutive downs** to advance the ball to the line to gain.
- **A "Series" is Awarded:** A new series of four downs is awarded when a team:
 1. Advances the ball to the line to gain.
 2. Is awarded a new series by a penalty against the opponent.
 3. Is the first team to put the ball in play in an overtime period.

ARTICLE 2: LINE TO GAIN

- **Definition:** The **line to gain** is a line, and the vertical plane through it, that is 10 yards in advance of the spot where the ball was put in play at the start of a series.
- **Establishing a New Line:** Once a team earns a new series of downs, the line to gain is established 10 yards from the new spot where the ball will be put in play (the "succeeding spot").

ARTICLE 3: DOWN AND POSSESSION AFTER A PENALTY

- This article clarifies how penalties affect the down and distance.
- If a live-ball foul is accepted, the down must be replayed.
- The only exception is when a foul occurs during the last down of a period, and the penalty includes a loss of down. In that specific case, the period is not extended.

ARTICLE 4: MEASUREMENT

- A measurement may be requested by a captain or coach to determine if the line to gain has been reached.
 - The referee will order a measurement when in doubt.
 - The measurement is made from the forward point of the ball (as it was declared dead) to the line to gain.
 - **The chain crew:** The chain and rods are official equipment, and their position is final.
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Practical Application: "First and Ten"

This entire rule is the basis for the common football phrase "1st and 10."

1. **1st Down:** A team starts a series with a **1st and 10**. This means it is their first down in a series of four, and they need to advance the ball 10 yards to earn a new series.
 2. **Subsequent Downs:**
 - If they gain 4 yards on first down, the next play is **2nd and 6** (2nd down, 6 yards to go).
 - If they gain 3 yards on second down, it becomes **3rd and 3**.
 - If they gain 2 yards on third down, it becomes **4th and 1**.
 3. **Earning a New Series:**
 - On 4th and 1, if they gain 2 yards, they have advanced the ball beyond the line to gain. The chains are reset, and it is now **1st and 10** again.
 4. **Failing to Advance:**
 - On 4th and 1, if they gain 0 yards, they have failed to reach the line to gain. The ball is turned over to the opposing team at that spot.
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Key Points of Emphasis and Scenarios

1. **The "First Down" Marker:** The forward rod of the chain crew marks the line to gain. When the ball touches or breaks the plane of this rod during a live-ball down, a new series is awarded.
2. **Penalties and Replaying the Down:** If a penalty is accepted during a live-ball play, the down is almost always replayed. For example, a 5-yard defensive offside on a 3rd and 8 play would result in a replay of 3rd down, but now with 3 yards to go (3rd and 3).
3. **Goal Line as Line to Gain:** When a team is inside its opponent's 10-yard line, the goal line becomes the line to gain. A touchdown is scored if the ball breaks the plane of the goal line.
4. **Turnover on Downs:** If a team fails to reach the line to gain on its fourth-down attempt, possession of the ball changes immediately. There is no whistle or signal to start the new possession; the defensive team may take the ball and run with it if they recover a fumble or intercept a pass on that down.