

NFHS Football Rule 7: The Snap and Free Kick.

Key Sections of NFHS Rule 7

PART 1: THE SCRIMMAGE DOWN - THE SNAP

The snap is the action that begins a scrimmage down.

ARTICLE 1: BALL READINESS AND ENCROACHMENT

- **The Referee's Signal:** No official shall give the ready-for-play signal until the ball is placed and the referee is satisfied that all players are properly positioned.
- **Encroachment (Dead Ball Foul):** It is an encroachment foul if a player is illegally in the neutral zone **after the ball is marked ready for play and before the snap.**
- **Penalty:** 5 yards.
- **Key Point:** If a defensive player is in the NZ and causes an offensive lineman to move, it is a dead-ball foul on the defense. If an offensive player moves after taking a set position, it is a dead-ball false start on the offense.

ARTICLE 2: POSITION AND ACTION DURING THE SNAP

This defines the legal requirements for the snap itself.

- **The Snapper:**
 - The snapper (usually the center) must have both feet inbounds.
 - The ball must be on the ground, with its long axis horizontal and at right angles to the scrimmage line.
 - The snapper may not have any part of their body in contact with the ground beyond the neutral zone.
- **The Snap:**
 - The snap is the legal passing or handing of the ball backward from its position on the ground.
 - The snap must be a **quick and continuous motion.**
 - The snapper may not lift the ball to simulate a snap (a "fake" snap is illegal).
 - The snap must **immediately leave the snapper's hand(s).** They cannot carry the ball or slide it along the ground.

ARTICLE 3: FALSE START (Dead Ball Foul)

- No offensive player shall make a movement that simulates the start of a play.

- This includes any quick, abrupt movement by a lineman that is not immediately followed by a snap.
- The entire offensive team must be **set for at least one second** before the snap.
- **Penalty:** 5 yards.

ARTICLE 4: OFFSIDE (Live Ball Foul)

- No player of either team may be in the neutral zone or beyond the free-kick line when the ball is snapped or free-kicked.
 - **Exception:** The snapper on a scrimmage down and the kicker on a free kick.
 - If a player is offside at the snap, it is a **live-ball foul**. The play is allowed to continue.
 - **Penalty:** 5 yards.
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PART 2: THE FREE KICK

A free kick is used to start each half, after a try, after a successful field goal, and after a safety.

ARTICLE 1: BALL READINESS AND POSITIONING

- The free-kick line for Team K (kicking team) is its 40-yard line, unless moved by a penalty. A kickoff after a safety is taken from the 20-yard line.
- The free-kick line for Team R (receiving team) is a line 10 yards from the kicking team's free-kick line (Team R's 50-yard line on a standard kickoff).
- **Kicking Team (K) Restrictions:** At the time of the kick, all Team K players must be behind their free-kick line except the kicker and holder.
- **Receiving Team (R) Restrictions:** At the time of the kick, all Team R players must be behind their free-kick line (the 50-yard line).

ARTICLE 2: KICKING THE BALL AND POSSESSION

- The ball must be kicked. It cannot be thrown or pushed.
- A **free kick** can be a place kick or a drop kick.
- The ball is **live** once it has been kicked and has crossed Team K's free-kick line.
- If the ball is touched by Team R and then recovered by Team K, it is a first down for Team K.

ARTICLE 3: FREE-KICK ENCROACHMENT (Dead Ball Foul)

- This is the free-kick equivalent of offsides/encroachment.
- It occurs if a player of either team is beyond their respective free-kick lines **before the ball is kicked**.
- **Penalty:** 5 yards.

ARTICLE 4: FREE-KICK CATCHING FORMATIONS & FAIR CATCH

- Team R may form a "receiving line" no more than two players deep. Players in this line have special protection against blocking.
- A player of Team R may signal for a **fair catch** before the kick is caught. This gives them the right to make a catch without being hit. If they make a fair catch, the ball is dead immediately, and Team R gets the ball at that spot.

ARTICLE 5: FREE-KICK DOWNING

- If a free kick (kickoff) comes to rest and no player attempts to secure it, the ball becomes dead and belongs to the receiving team at that spot.
- If the kick breaks the plane of Team R's goal line, it is a touchback.

Key Points of Emphasis and Common Fouls

1. **Dead Ball vs. Live Ball:** This is the key distinction in Rule 7.
 - **Dead-Ball Fouls (Play is stopped):** False Start, Encroachment, Free-Kick Encroachment.
 - **Live-Ball Fouls (Play continues):** Offside at the snap.
2. **The "Set" Requirement:** The offense must be completely motionless for a full second before the snap. A slight flinch by a wide receiver or lineman is a false start.
3. **Kickoff Alignment:** The most common free-kick foul is Team K (the kicking team) having a player offside (ahead of the 40-yard line) when the ball is kicked.
4. **The "Squib Kick" and "Onside Kick":** These are legal tactics. A squib kick is a short, low kick. An onside kick is any kick that travels less than 10 yards and is then recovered by Team K. The 10-yard rule is crucial: once the kick travels 10 yards, it is a free ball for either team to recover.