

NFHS Football Rule 9: Conduct of Players and Others Subject to the Rules.

Key Sections of NFHS Rule 9

Rule 9 is divided into two main articles, which are further broken down into specific fouls.

ARTICLE 1: PERSONAL FOULS

These are fouls that involve illegal contact or acts that endanger player safety. Most personal fouls carry a **15-yard penalty** and, importantly, include an **automatic first down** if committed by the defense.

Key Personal Fouls include:

- **Roughing the Passer (9-4-3):** A defensive player must make a definite effort to avoid charging into a passer after it is clear the ball has been thrown. They cannot tackle the passer at the knee or below. Contact to the head is illegal.
- **Roughing the Kicker (9-4-5):** Running into or roughing the kicker/holder of a scrimmage kick. "Running into" is a 5-yard penalty; "roughing" is a 15-yard penalty. The defender must contact the ball or have a clear chance to block the kick to avoid this foul.
- **Roughing the Snapper (9-4-6):** Similar protection is given to the snapper on a scrimmage kick play until they have time to assume a defensive posture.
- **Blocking Below the Waist (9-3-4):** A block where initial contact is below the waist. This is illegal in most situations, especially by players in the free-blocking zone at the snap.
- **Chop Block (9-3-7):** A combination block by two or more players against an opponent other than the runner, with one block high and one block low. This is an extremely dangerous and illegal block.
- **Clipping (9-3-2):** Blocking an opponent from behind and at or below the waist.
- **Facemask (9-4-2):** Grasping and twisting, turning, or pulling the facemask, helmet opening, or chin strap of an opponent. **Note:** In NFHS, *any* grasping of the facemask is a 5-yard penalty; a twist or pull is a 15-yard penalty.
- **Horse-Collar Tackle (9-4-3-i):** Grabbing the inside back or side collar of the shoulder pads or jersey and immediately pulling the runner down.
- **Targeting (9-4-3m):** This is a major point of emphasis. It is an act of taking aim and initiating contact against an opponent with the crown of the helmet. **Penalty:** 15 yards and the player is **disqualified**.
- **Unnecessary Roughness (9-4-3):** Any act of roughness that is not necessary, such as violent contact after the ball is dead, or a tackle that is excessively violent.

ARTICLE 2: UNSPORTSMANLIKE CONDUCT FOULS

These are fouls that violate the principles of sportsmanship. They can be committed by players, substitutes, coaches, or anyone else affiliated with the team. The penalty is **15 yards**.

Key Unsportsmanlike Conduct Fouls include:

- **Taunting, Baiting, or Trash Talking (9-5-1a):** Any act or word that is intended to embarrass, ridicule, or demean an opponent.
 - **Celebrations (9-5-1c):** Any delayed, excessive, or prolonged act by which a player attempts to focus attention upon themselves. Celebrations *with a teammate* are allowed, but celebrations *directed at an opponent* are taunting and illegal.
 - **Using Profanity, Insulting, or Vulgar Language (9-5-1b).**
 - **Fighting (9-5-1e):** Striking or attempting to strike an opponent with the hand, arm, fist, or leg. **Penalty:** 15 yards and the player is **disqualified**.
 - **Grasping an Opponent's Facemask or Helmet Opening (9-4-2):** This is a 15-yard penalty.
 - **Removing a Helmet (9-5-1g):** A player shall not remove their helmet before they are in the team area (bench). This is a 15-yard penalty.
 - **Foul by a Non-Player (Coach, etc.):** Two unsportsmanlike conduct fouls by a non-player result in that person's **disqualification**.
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Key Points of Emphasis and Penalty Enforcement

1. **Automatic First Down:** Nearly all defensive personal fouls result in an automatic first down for the offense. This is a huge consequence beyond the 15 yards.
2. **Disqualification (Ejection):** Certain fouls carry an automatic disqualification:
 - **Targeting**
 - **Fighting**
 - **Flagrant Unsportsmanlike Conduct**
3. **The "Two-Strike Rule" for Players:** A player who commits two unsportsmanlike conduct fouls in the same game is **disqualified**.
4. **Dead Ball vs. Live Ball:** Unsportsmanlike conduct can occur during a dead ball (e.g., after a play is over). The penalty is enforced from the succeeding spot (usually the next snap).

5. **Safety and Sportsmanship are Paramount:** The philosophy behind Rule 9 is clear. The NFHS prioritizes player safety (through rules against targeting, clipping, etc.) and the promotion of good sportsmanship (through rules against taunting and profanity) above all else.
6. **Helmet as a Weapon:** The rule against "spearing" (using the helmet as a weapon) is strictly enforced under the unnecessary roughness and targeting rules.