

# Rule 6 is titled "Dead Ball, Live Ball, and Series of Downs."

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## Key Sections of Rule 6

### Article 1: Dead Ball

A dead ball is a ball that is not in play. The game clock is not running (unless it's under specific late-game timing rules). A ball becomes dead immediately, and the down (play) ends, when:

- A runner is **out of bounds** or **declared down** (when any part of his body, other than his hand or foot, touches the ground).
- A **forward pass** strikes the ground or goes out of bounds (**incomplete pass**).
- Any **legal kick** (punt, field goal attempt) comes to rest and no player attempts to advance it, or it goes out of bounds.
- A **touchdown, field goal, touchback, or safety** is scored.
- A **ball carrier** has their **forward progress** stopped, even if they are not taken to the ground.
- A **fumble** goes forward out of bounds. (A backward fumble that goes out of bounds is spotted where it went out).
- An official **sounds their whistle** accidentally. The down is replayed.

### Article 2: Live Ball

A live ball is a ball that is in play. The down is in progress, and the game clock is running. A ball becomes live when it is **legally snapped or free-kicked** (as on a kickoff).

- **Encroachment:** It is a dead-ball foul (5-yard penalty) if a player, other than the snapper, enters the neutral zone and makes contact with an opponent or the ball is snapped. This is different from the NFL's "neutral zone infraction," which is a live-ball foul.

### Article 3: Series of Downs (The "Down and Distance" System)

This is the core of American football. A team has four consecutive downs (plays) to advance the ball.

- **A new series is awarded** when a team advances the ball to or beyond the **line-to-gain** (often called the "first-down marker").

- The line-to-gain is established **10 yards** from the spot where the team began its series of downs, except after a penalty that is accepted.
- If a team fails to advance the ball to the line-to-gain in four downs, possession is awarded to the opposing team at the spot where the ball was declared dead at the end of the fourth down.

#### Article 4: Force

This is a critical concept, especially when determining whether a safety or touchback is called.

- **Definition:** Force is the result of energy exerted by a player which gives momentum to the ball.
- **Key Application:** If a ball is in or behind a team's own end zone, the determining factor for a safety or touchback is **which team imparted the force** that sent the ball there.
  - **Example 1 (Safety):** A runner is tackled in his own end zone. The defense's force caused the ball to be in the end zone. Result: **Safety** (2 points for the defense).
  - **Example 2 (Touchback):** A defensive player intercepts a pass at his own 2-yard line, his momentum carries him into his own end zone, and he is downed there. The force was provided by the offense's pass. Result: **Touchback**. The ball is placed at the 20-yard line.
  - **Example 3 (New Force):** A punt is caught by a player at his own 5-yard line. He retreats into his end zone and is tackled. The initial force was from the kick, but the runner **created a new force** by his own action. Result: **Safety**.

#### Common Penalties and Situations under Rule 6

- **Encroachment:** As mentioned above, a 5-yard penalty from the previous spot.
- **Illegal Snap:** A live-ball foul that occurs if the snapper does not snap the ball correctly (e.g., quick, continuous motion) or if a player under center simulates the start of a play. This is a 5-yard penalty.

#### Summary

In short, **NFHS Rule 6** defines the fundamental "heartbeat" of a football game:

1. **When does a play start and stop?** (Live Ball / Dead Ball)
2. **How many chances does an offense get?** (Series of Downs)
3. **Who is responsible for the ball being in the end zone?** (Force)