



NEWS RELEASE

NATIONAL FEDERATION OF STATE HIGH SCHOOL ASSOCIATIONS

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Changes Made in Spearing Rule, Uniforms in High School Football

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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INDIANAPOLIS, IN (January 31, 2006) — Removal of the word “intentional” from the spearing rule and new requirements for the visiting team’s jersey beginning in 2010 highlighted high school football rules changes this year.

The spearing and jersey rules changes were among 15 changes approved by the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) Football Rules Committee at its January 21-22 meeting in Indianapolis. The rules subsequently were approved by the NFHS Board of Directors. The NFHS Football Rules Committee is composed of one voting member from each NFHS state high school association that uses NFHS football rules, as well as representatives of the NFHS Coaches Association and NFHS Officials Association.

In Rule 2-40, the rules committee voted to eliminate “intentional” from the spearing wording in the hopes that all illegal helmet contact, which includes spearing, will be called by officials. With reducing the risk of injury of student-athletes the foremost concern, the committee believes this change in wording will continue the “no-tolerance” policy toward illegal use of the helmet in high school football.

“Removing ‘intentional’ from the definition of spearing eliminates the official’s burden of reading ‘intent’ into a clearly unsafe act before imposing the appropriate rule infraction penalty,” said Brad Cashman, executive director of the Pennsylvania Interscholastic Athletic Association and chair of the NFHS Football Rules Committee. “The NFHS Football Rules Committee is to be commended for its continuing efforts to find ways to take the head out of football.”

This year marks the 30th anniversary of the rule change that made initial contact with the head while blocking or tackling illegal in high school football. Since 1977, fatalities in high school football have followed a single-digit trend that is in large part due to the annual data collection and recommendations made in the Annual Survey of Football Injury Research to help reduce the incidence of

serious injury. Prior to the rule change in 1976, about 20 direct fatalities occurred annually; in the past 10 years, the average has been about four annually.

“With more than one million student-athletes participating in football each year, the committee acknowledges that injuries will occur,” said Jerry Diehl, NFHS assistant director and liaison to the rules committee, “but with the continued strong emphasis on risk minimization, the goal is to reduce that risk as much as possible.”

Because of increasing amounts of color in visiting team’s “light” jerseys, beginning in the 2010 season, more stringent requirements will take effect that will eliminate confusion as to which jerseys are dark and which are light. The revised rule will require the yoke and the body of the visiting team’s jersey to be white and will dictate the areas of the jersey that can have adornments and accessory patterns. Those areas will be stripes on the sleeves, a border around the collar and cuffs, and a side seam (from the underarms to the top of the pants) 4 inches in width.

“Approximately 10 years ago, the NFHS Football Rules Committee began liberalizing the ‘jersey rule’ by removing basic restrictions on decorations and other limitations,” Cashman said. “An unintended consequence of such liberalization has been the often-reported ‘blending’ of the dark-colored home team jerseys and the light-colored visiting team jerseys, creating confusion on the part of players, officials and spectators. Beginning in 2010, that confusion should be eliminated.”

Diehl said that manufacturers have been asking for more direction with regard to the changes in uniform design. The four-year phase-in period will allow this change to be implemented during the normal uniform replacement cycle, thus minimizing the financial impact on schools. He also noted that this change will allow the home team to wear some of the newer styles of jerseys, and, over the course of a season, will be fair to all teams.

In addition to the 15 changes approved at this year’s meeting, two other significant rules dealing with risk management that were approved at last year’s meeting take effect with the 2006 season. Beginning next season, all helmets shall be secured with a four-snap chin strap, and a colored tooth and mouth protector (not clear or white) will be required.

In other 2006 changes, three rules dealing with participation were approved by the committee. A definition was established in Rule 2 noting that participation is “any act or action by a player or non-player that has an influence on play.” The committee revised Rule 3-7-6 to state that “during a down, a replaced player or substitute who enters the field but does not participate, constitutes illegal substitution.” Diehl said that previously the penalty was too severe against an individual who simply stepped on the field and didn’t participate or attempt to participate in the play.

Rule 9-6-4a was revised to state that “when any player, replaced player or substitute enters and participates during a down, it shall be considered illegal participation.”

The rules committee modified the 9-yard marks, which were approved last year for 11-player football, for six-player, eight-player and nine-player games. In those other three versions of football, 7-yard marks, 12 inches in length and 4 inches in width, shall be located 7 yards from each sideline. The 7-yard marks shall be marked so that each successive 10-yard line bisects the 7-yard marks. These marks shall not be required if the field is visibly numbered.

The Football Rules Committee appointed a subcommittee to better address modifications necessary in the other three forms of the game of football. Diehl said this subcommittee should be beneficial to those states that sponsor six-player, eight-player or nine-player football.

Among the points of emphasis approved by the committee is one dealing with the proper procedures for handling apparent concussions. This point of emphasis will be included in all NFHS rules books in 2006-07.

The action plan for handling apparent concussions states that if one suspects that a player has a concussion, the following steps should be taken: 1) remove athlete from play; 2) ensure that the athlete is evaluated by an appropriate health-care professional and don't try to judge the seriousness of the injury yourself; 3) inform the athlete's parents or guardians about the known or possible concussion and give them the fact sheet on concussion; and 4) allow the athlete to return to play only with permission from an appropriate health-care professional.

Other changes approved by the committee:

Rule 1-2-3g – Advertising and/or commercial markings on the field of play are prohibited; however, this change permits advertising in the end zones.

Rule 1-3-5b – The official line-to-gain and down indicators shall be operated approximately 6 feet outside the sideline, where facilities permit.

Rule 1-5-1f2 – Beginning in 2008, when measuring the length of a non-removable cleat, the measurement shall be from the tip of the cleat to the sole of the shoe.

Rule 1-6-2 – Phones and headsets may be used by coaches and other non-players. Players may only use phones and headsets during authorized sideline conferences.

Rule 2-6-2a – One or more team members and one or more coaches may confer directly in front of the team box within 9 yards of the sideline for an authorized sideline conference.

Rule 2-31-8 – A player becomes a kicker when a knee, lower leg or foot makes contact with the ball.

Rule 4-2-2 – A holder may rise and catch or recover an errant snap and immediately return a knee(s) to the ground and place the ball for a kick or again rise to advance, hand, kick or pass.

Rule 7-2-8 – Any player on offense on his line of scrimmage may not advance a planned loose ball in the vicinity of the snapper.

Rule 7-5-10, 13 – The act of illegally touching the ball by an ineligible player carries the same penalty whether the act occurs behind, in or beyond the line of scrimmage.

In terms of participants, football is the No. 1 sport for boys at the high school level. Combined with 25,669 participants in six-player, eight-player and nine-player football, a total of 1,071,163 boys participated in high school football in 2004, according to the 2004-05 High School Athletics Participation Survey conducted by the NFHS. Eleven-player football (1,045,494) ranks fourth in terms of school sponsorship for boys with 13,671 high schools sponsoring the sport. In addition, 1,627 girls participated in football (1,473 in 11-player) during the 2004 season.

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