2026 PIAA Football Preseason Bulletin

SWRI: Dave Blair July Bulletin

PIAA Statewide Rules Interpreter

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2026 PIAA Football Schedule

Heat Acclimatization ..... August 10
First Practice Date.....August 17
First Inter-School/Scrimmage Date..... August 22
First Regular Season Play Date ..... August 28
Last Regular Season Contest Date .....November 9
District Deadline .....November 14

PIAA Football Championships:

First Round ..... November 20 & November 21
Quarterfinals ..... November 27 & November 28
Semi-Finals..... December 4 & December 6

PIAA Football Championship Finals:

Chapman Field, Cumberland Valley HS, Mechanicsburg.....December 10,11, & 12

2026 PIAA Heat Acclimatization Guidelines

For more information on the pre-season heat–acclimatization guidelines, please click the link below.

2026 Football Heat Acclimatization

2026 NFHS Rule Changes

1-5-3c(9) — The committee has approved the wearing of play cards on both the forearm/wrist and belt areas of the body.

9-4-7 — The committee approved new rules language that no player may use the hand(s) to slap the opponent's head.

Rules Reminders:

1-5-1d(5)a - 4, 5 — The committee clarified and restricted attachments on tooth and mouth protectors, effective with the 2026 season.

1-5-2d, 1-5-3c(6) — New arm sleeve specifications developed to guide manufacturers, players and coaches effective with the 2027 season.

2026 NFHS Football Editorial Changes

1-1-8; 1-3-5b; 1-5-1d(5)a - 4, 5; 1-5-3a(2); 2-15-1; 2-32-6; 3-5-7g; 4-1-3; 5-3-1; 5-3-2; 8-2-2; 8-2-3; 8-2-4; 8-2-5; 9-4-3p; 9-8 PENALTY; 10-4-2; 10-4-2b; 10-4-4a; 10-5-3; FOOTBALL FUNDAMENTALS – PENALTY MEASUREMENT (4); RESOLVING TIED GAMES – (3-1); SIX-PLAYER RULES DIFFERENCES; NFHS OFFICIAL FOOTBALL SIGNALS – (21).

2026 PIAA Adoptions and Modifications

Adopt the 2026 NFHS Football Rules Book

Adopt Rule 1-2-3e Request that college and professional football Contest sites mark their fields in accordance with Rule 1-2-3e, inbounds lines. If that is not possible, it is permissible to use college or professional fields with inbounds lines marked at the distance specified by their respective codes.

Adopt Rule 1-3-1 NOTE: specifications for the ball to be used in Contests involving only players below the 9th grade.

Adopt Rule 1-3-7, authorizing the use of supplementary equipment to aid in Contest administration.

Modify Rule 3-5-10b (Concussion Rule), to clarify that “an appropriate health-care professional” is a licensed physician of medicine or osteopathic medicine (MD or DO).

Adopt Rule 3-1-1 NOTE: the Resolving Tied Games (10-Yard Line Overtime) Procedure for use during senior high school varsity football Regular Season and Postseason Contests, as set forth in the NFHS Football Rules Book.

Adopt Rule 3-1-2, running clock, at all levels (varsity, junior varsity, or otherwise) of Competition, upon completion of the first half and one Team gains a 35-point differential over its opponent, the clock shall be stopped only when an official's time-out is taken, a charged time-out is granted, a period ends, or a score occurs.

2026 NFHS Points of Emphasis

Flagrant and Unsportsmanlike Fouls

In high school football, flagrant fouls and unsportsmanlike fouls are serious

rule violations that threaten player safety and the integrity of the game. The National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) places a strong emphasis on sportsmanship and risk minimization because players are still developing physically and emotionally. Game officials play a critical role in identifying and penalizing these fouls to ensure the game is played fairly, safely, and with respect for all participants.

Flagrant fouls are the most severe type of personal foul in high school football. These actions involve intentional, reckless or excessively violent behavior that shows a clear disregard for the safety of others. Flagrant fouls are fouls so severe or extreme that they place an opponent in danger of serious injury. They may also involve violations that are extremely or persistently vulgar or abusive. Examples include fighting, maliciously targeting the head or neck area, striking an opponent, or delivering a violent illegal blindside block or late hit. When a flagrant foul occurs, the penalty is 15 yards and automatic disqualification of the offending player. Removing players who commit flagrant fouls helps prevent serious injuries and stops situations from escalating into further violence.

In high school football (NFHS rules), unsportsmanlike fouls are non-contact fouls that violate standards of fair play, respect and sportsmanship, while personal fouls are fouls that involve illegal personal contact. Unsportsmanlike fouls are penalized even if they don't directly affect the play, and while they may not be physically violent, they harm the tone of the game. Common examples include:

- taunting,
- threatening gestures or posturing,
- racist comments,
- trash talking,
- excessive or choreographed celebrations,
- aggressively spiking, spinning or throwing the ball high into the air,
- using profanity,
- spitting,
- arguing with game officials, or
- throwing equipment.

Unsportsmanlike fouls can be committed by players, coaches or other team personnel. Each unsportsmanlike foul results in a 15-yard penalty, and a player who commits two such fouls in one game is disqualified.

2026 NFHS Points of Emphasis Cont.

Game officials must consistently penalize both flagrant and unsportsmanlike fouls to maintain control of the game. When these actions go unpunished, players may feel emboldened to act more aggressively or disrespectfully, increasing the risk of fights and injuries. Proper enforcement sends a clear message that dangerous or unsportsmanlike behavior will not be tolerated, helping to keep emotions in check and the game orderly.

Penalizing flagrant and unsportsmanlike fouls is important because high school football is about more than winning; it is about teaching values such as respect, discipline, and responsibility. By enforcing these rules, game officials protect players, promote good sportsmanship, and set a positive example for young athletes. Consistent enforcement helps ensure that high school football remains a safe, competitive and educational experience for everyone involved.

Helping the Runner

Collegiate and professional football rules allow offensive players to pile in behind and directly push the runner. The “tush push” is an example of such a play often used at those levels. Although illegal under NFHS rules, these plays are becoming more common in the high school game. As guardians of the game, it is imperative that all stakeholders work together to remove “illegally helping the runner” from our high school game.

Administrators, coaches and football game officials all have a responsibility to know, respect and teach/enforce the NFHS rules of high school football. Football is a vigorous, physical contact game and, for this reason, much attention is given to minimizing risk of injury to all players. Each respective rules code (NFL, NCAA and NFHS) has rules that coincide with the physical development of competing athletes and their goals for the game.

The NFHS Football Rules Committee focuses on minimizing risk and supporting a balance between offensive and defensive rules. Illegally helping the runner to assist forward progress presents a risk of injury to the runner and others. The additional momentum to a particular offensive player, as opposed to the pile, swings the balance toward the offense in a manner not intended by the rules.

Football game officials should be aware of ruling plays dead when a runner’s forward progress is clearly stopped, and they should penalize actions by offensive teammates who directly contact the runner and push, pull or lift the runner forward in a clear and obvious attempt to keep the runner’s progress moving forward.

Of course, not all contact with the runner is illegal. Game officials should observe and judge an offensive teammate’s actions and the runner’s progress to determine whether a foul for illegally helping the runner is warranted. Although a foul can occur on any play, game officials should especially be alert for this type of action on short-yardage plays near the goal line and line to gain. Remember, pushing the pile is legal; direct contact while pushing, pulling, lifting of the runner to assist forward progress is not.

2026 NFHS Points of Emphasis Cont.

The NFHS Coaches Code of Ethics states: “Coaches shall master the contest rules and shall teach the rules to their team members. Coaches shall not seek an advantage by circumvention of the spirit or letter of the rules. Coaches have a tremendous influence, for good or ill, on the education of the student, and thus shall never place the value of winning above the value of instilling the highest ideals of character.”

If school administrators/athletic directors truly believe that activities are an extension of the classroom, they must be actively involved with programs they supervise and redirect coaches when they observe them teaching prohibited tactics.

Removing “illegally helping the runner” from high school football will, at times, be met with resistance, especially considering the visibility of this type of play at other levels of the game. School administrative support of football game officials, re-focus of coaches and education of players will lead to a smooth transition. All stakeholders must remain committed to trying to minimize risk to all players and maintain the balance between offensive and defensive play.

Sideline Management and Control

Sideline management has become a recurring “point of emphasis” because it improves game safety by keeping game officials, players, coaching staff and other team personnel clear of the active game play areas. It promotes good sportsmanship and professionalism across all levels of play and also prevents unnecessary delays and confrontations that can impact game flow and fairness.

The sideline includes the team area and any restricted zones around the field where players and coaches stand during the game. Game officials expect this area to be organized and kept clear of unnecessary personnel. Coaches must remain in the designated team area when interacting with game officials, especially for rule discussions. Leaving that area to step onto the field or challenge calls results in an automatic unsportsmanlike conduct foul. Coaches are generally only allowed to step toward the sideline (into the working area, often a marked 2-yard border) to call offensive or defensive signals after play has stopped

2026 NFHS Points of Emphasis Cont.

Game officials are instructed to strictly enforce NFHS Football Rules when the following behaviors are observed:

- Coaches or team personnel entering the field of play to dispute rulings or address game officials outside the coaching area.
- Prolonged or excessive celebrations or demonstrations that carry onto the field.
- Failing to maintain professional behavior. Coaches and team personnel are expected to set a standard for sportsmanship.
- Game officials shall call fouls for violations of sideline control when they are observed.
- Infractions such as approaching game officials with devices (e.g., to view or review video)

The following is a summary checklist for coaches/teams to follow during a game:

- Remain inside your team area for game official discussions.
- Only move toward the sideline after play is dead, and for signal/play calling.
- Keep non-essential personnel and spectators off the field level.
- Avoid approaching game officials during play or with electronic/video devices.
- Set a professional, sportsmanlike example for the entirety of the contest.

To minimize the risk of all involved, non-players (including substitutes, athletic trainers and coaches) must remain in their team box and out of any restricted areas, especially while the ball is live. Non-players may never be on the field while the ball is live and may only be on the field when the ball is dead in very limited situations. In the excitement of the game, it is not uncommon for substitutes and other non-players to move closer to the sideline beyond their team box area. This inevitably causes coaches to move up into restricted areas and closer to the field- often impeding game officials in their essential duties. Crowding at the sideline puts players, non-players, coaches and game officials in danger of severe injury. Game officials and coaches must be aware of this problem and take the necessary steps to prevent and correct these occurrences. Coaches, substitutes, athletic trainers and others affiliated with the team may be in their team's area, which is out-of-bounds and between the 25-yard lines (unless otherwise approved to be adjusted by state association adopted policy). Their movements and positions are limited by this designated area. The coaches' area extends at least a 2-yard depth out-of-bounds from the sideline. A maximum of three coaches – and only coaches – may be in this area when the ball is dead between plays. However, all coaches must leave this area when the ball is about to become live, such as when the snapper is approaching the ball, and no one may be in this area while the ball is live. The team box area is outside the field, beyond the restricted area and between the 25-yard lines. All coaches and non-players associated with the team may be in this area. A nonplayer may not be outside of this area unless to become a player or return as a replaced player.

2026 NFHS Points of Emphasis Cont.

When nonplayers are outside of the team box area, or anyone is in the restricted area while the ball is live, game officials will give a sideline warning to the team involved. A second offense results in a 5-yard penalty. All subsequent offenses result in 15-yard penalties for unsportsmanlike conduct fouls, which are charged to the head coach. If a game official unintentionally contacts a coach or other nonplayer in the restricted area while the ball is live, the team is assessed a 15-yard penalty for a nonplayer, illegal personal contact foul. As a nonplayer foul, the penalty is enforced from the succeeding spot. A second such offense would result in the head coach's disqualification. Unlike a foul for sideline interference (non-contact, Rule 9-8-1k or 9-8-3), no warning or 5-yard penalty is required in this situation.

Identification of the NFHS Authenticating Mark on Game Balls

The NFHS Authenticating Mark ensures easy identification of inflated and non-inflated balls used in interscholastic competition for which the NFHS writes playing rules. All such balls are required to display the NFHS Authenticating Mark.

The use of conforming equipment is essential to the integrity of contests played under the NFHS rules. This mark helps to promote a level playing field by ensuring consistency in the equipment being used. The mark allows for the development of more sophisticated standards in balls and clearly communicates to administrators, coaches, and game officials that these standards are being met.

Non-compliance with these requirements will be reported to the state association for potential penalties, following the contest. Administrators and coaches play a pivotal role in making sure all inflated and non-inflated balls meet these specifications. They must instill the importance of proper equipment use through consistent reinforcement during the pre-competition certification meeting and throughout the season. Game officials must also remain vigilant and report any non-compliant balls to the state association office.

New PIAA Policy

Unsportsmanlike Conduct Policy PIAA registered officials who observe contestants simulating the firing of a weapon at another person are strongly recommended to consider these actions as unsportsmanlike and enforce associated penalties. Actions directed toward a person should be treated more severely than those that are not. Officials are to use discretion in addressing actions which are intended to embarrass, ridicule or demean others. A review of this point of emphasis shall occur at the pre-contest meeting of contest officials, head coaches and team captains

PIAA Use of Drone Policy

For the purposes of this policy, a drone is any unmanned aerial device ("UAV").

Drones are not permitted above the competition surface or spectator areas during interscholastic Contests, Inter-school Practices and Scrimmages. Drones may not be used to scout opposing team Practices. Member schools may utilize drones for their own school team practice sessions based upon their local school policies.

Persons and/or schools violating this Policy shall be subject to sanctions which may be imposed under Sections 5,6, 7 and/or 9 of ARTICLE XIII, PENALTIES, of the PIAA By-Laws.

Upon timely requests submitted to PIAA, the Executive Director is authorized to grant exceptions to this policy on a case-by-case basis with any host school/facility local policies

Policy Regarding the Use of Eye Shade

The use of eye shade must be worn as a single, solid stroke under the eye. There shall be no numbers, words, logos, symbols or other detail located in the eye shade. The eye shade shall not extend below the cheek bone and extend no further than the width of the eye socket. Players having eye shade that does not meet the standard are to remove it or comply with the PIAA interpretation before participation in the game. If the players do not comply, the officials may impose unsportsmanlike conduct type penalties as determined by their respective rules code.

PIAA Policy

Any Coach and/or adult Team Personnel removed, ejected or disqualified from a Contest who refuses to leave the competition area (out of sight and sound) as directed by the Contest Official will result in a forfeiture of the Contest.

This policy has been adopted by the PIAA Board of Directors in an effort to address poor acting adults who refuse to abide by the applicable rules book and to show support of PIAA officials.

Officials who encounter situations that involve this policy must report the occurrence to the PIAA Officials Department the next business day.

Enforcement Policy/Procedures– Football Uniform Violation

The enforcement of uniform rules is a shared responsibility of the coaches, players, and officials and through the work of all groups the safety of players can be enhanced. This includes but is not limited to: Knee pads fully covering the knee, Jerseys tucked in or to the belt line of the pants, Eye black one single solid stroke, two mouth pieces, etc. (1-5-1 through 6).

Mechanics

1. During the pre-game private meeting with the head coach the referee and another crew official will mention that Player Equipment and Enforcement is a Point of Emphasis this year and their help in enforcing and protecting players would be greatly appreciated.

2. When viewing warmups, officials need to address any players whose uniforms do not comply with the rules. Officials should note those players' numbers on their game card in the event these same players violate during play. Officials will notify the Head Coach prior to the start of the game. (Officials shall be on the field 30 minutes prior to gametime to observe warmups.)

3. At the coaches/captains meeting, again, player safety must be stressed as it relates to uniform violations and that officials are trying to protect players and keep them from injury and within the NFHS rules.

4. When officials notice a violation during play the player needs to be notified of the violation and the player's number recorded on game cards. The player is to be removed for one play and the head coach notified. Player shall not return to the game until the violation has been corrected. This is in accordance with Rules 1-5-5, 1-5-6 and 3-5-10(e).

5. When the same player is noticed a second time for same violation, send them off and have a conversation with the head coach about the violation prior notification to the player. Remind the head coach that another violation by the same player will result in a UNS on the head coach. Record this violation on game cards. This is in accordance with Rules 1-5-5, 1-5-6 and 3-5-10(e).

6. If there is another (third) violation on the same player or if the coach is not responsive to the message above, the head coach will be accessed a UNS and 15-yard penalty in accordance with Rule 9-8-1(h). Record this on official's game cards, this is the first UNS charged to the head coach as it relates to disqualification.

These are only guidelines/suggestions for officials to use if they see fit. There is nothing that prevents an official from strictly enforcing NFHS Football Rule 9-8-1 as written.

PIAA BY-LAWS—DISQUALIFICATIONS: ARTICLE XIII, SECTION 8

PIAA Sportsmanship and Disqualification Policy

Sportsmanship is a foundational value in interscholastic athletics, and actions that demean, intimidate, or injure others are strictly prohibited. The PIAA enforces clear penalties for unsportsmanlike behavior to uphold the educational purpose of high school sports.

A. Mandatory Disqualification – 1 Game Suspension

• Any coach, team personnel, or player ejected from a scrimmage, practice, or contest for unsportsmanlike or flagrant misconduct is:

• Disqualified for the rest of that day, and

• Suspended from the next contest day at the same level (e.g., varsity or JV).

• Coaches may not have any contact with the team at the next contest.

• The school principal must enforce this restriction.

B. Supplemental Disqualification – 2 Game Suspension

• If the ejection involves severe conduct (e.g., physical contact, confrontation, vulgar or racially insensitive language), the suspension is:

• For the remainder of the day, plus

• The next two contest days at the same level of competition.

• The official's authority extends from arrival to departure at the contest site (including parking areas).

Additional Requirements:

• Players must complete the NFHS Sportsmanship course before returning.

• Coaches/team personnel must complete both:

• NFHS Sportsmanship course

• NFHS Teaching and Modeling Behavior course

• Proof of completion must be submitted to the PIAA District Chair.

• This two-game disqualification overrides the one-game suspension in Section A.

Key Notes for Officials:

• Ejections now apply to scrimmages as well as contests.

• Officials must submit a Disqualification Report (DQ Form) for all instances, including those occurring during scrimmages.

This policy reinforces accountability and promotes respectful conduct across all levels of high school athletics

PIAA BY-LAWS—DISQUALIFICATIONS: ARTICLE XIII, SECTION 8

Supplemental Disqualification Clarification and Examples

The Supplemental Disqualification (2-game suspension) is not intended for standard "Rules of the Game" violations (e.g., handballs, illegal slides). Those still fall under the standard 1-game disqualification. The PIAA has created the Supplemental Disqualification as an additional tool for officials to address serious unsportsmanlike behavior, supporting improved game conduct and assisting with official recruitment and retention.

Key Points:

Officials do not choose between a 1- or 2-game DQ. The offender's actions determine the type of disqualification. If the behavior matches Supplemental criteria (e.g., profanity, physical contact, taunting), a 2-game DQ is automatically required. Officials are not responsible for enforcing penalties; schools handle enforcement. Supplemental DQ jurisdiction only applies to coaches and players, not spectators or parents.

Supplemental DQ Examples (2-Game Suspension Required):

- Coach banging on the officials' locker room door after a game and using profanity.
- Coach storms the field during a game, yelling profanities at an umpire.
- Player yells "Hey Ref, you suck" after a legal tackle.
- Football coach uses foul language and makes physical contact with an official after a game.

Officials must:

- Inform the coach/player of the Supplemental DQ.
- File a Supplemental Disqualification Report within 24 hours.
- Immediately contact the school's athletic director after the incident (if possible).

Standard DQ Example (1-Game Suspension):

A player commits a rules-based infraction, like a handball that denies a goal, resulting in a red card.

Jurisdiction Limitation:

Incidents involving spectators or parents fall outside the Supplemental DQ rule.

Officials should report such behavior to the host athletic director, but cannot issue disqualifications to fans.

Final Clarification:

The official determines if an ejection is necessary, but whether it results in a 1- or 2-game suspension is based solely on the offender's behavior as defined in the PIAA rules.

This policy ensures serious misconduct is addressed consistently and gives officials support in managing unsporting behavior at all levels.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Use of O2O Communication Devices

Officials should use O2O (official-to-official) communication devices to enhance crew communication and improve game management. However, these devices are not intended for non-game-related conversation. Remember, O2O channels are not private—anyone nearby may overhear what is said. Always speak professionally and avoid saying anything you wouldn't want heard by players, coaches, or fans.

Appropriate uses include:

- Sharing player numbers or foul information across the crew
- Assisting with communication to coaches or officials on the opposite side of the field

Marking Game Balls

While marking game balls is a common part of pregame duties, officials should be mindful of how they mark them. If placing a crew identification mark:

- Avoid large, excessive markings
- Do not use broad-tipped Sharpies
- Use a fine-point Sharpie or ballpoint pen
- A small and simple mark—like the Referee's initials—is sufficient Avoid including dates or large symbols, as these balls may be reused in future contests and markings should not become a distraction.

Clapping and Signal Calling

While quarterbacks may legally clap their hands to signal a snap, officials— particularly the Referee (R)—should monitor for exaggerated clapping. This often occurs in short-yardage situations or critical moments of a game and may simulate action to draw the defense offside. Such actions should be treated like a head bob or other deceptive movement. When exaggerated clapping is clearly used to simulate the start of play, the offense should be penalized for a False Start.

Officials Information

RECOMMENDATION OF A WRITTEN CONTRACT

PIAA member schools should enter into written (paper or electronic) contracts with the officials retained by the schools or assigned by an assignor to officiate regular season contests. The terms of such contracts must not violate the PIAA Constitution and By-Laws, Policies and Procedures and Rules and Regulations. Registered sports officials are independent contractors and therefore, are NOT employees of PIAA, the school, or the assignor.

PIAA CONFLICT OF INTEREST POLICY FOR ALL SPORTS

PIAA has a written policy regarding conflict of interest. This policy is in all of our post regular season officiating contracts and is contained in the PIAA Athletic Officials' Manual for all officials to view. An official will remove themselves from a contest if they find that they have any personal association with any of the competitors or coaches on any team, with the competitors' school, or with the competitors' community, such as being a relative of a competitor, or being an employee or a relative of a competitor in the competitors school district, or a resident of the competitors' community.

COMMENT: Officials accepting assignments for contest at their local school where they live, or have a relative competing, place themselves in a compromising position in the performance of their duties as a registered official. Every decision and judgment is open to criticism and places the official in a compromising position where it brings into question the integrity and actions of the official. This is an indefensible position for the official and assignments of this nature are not to be taken or accepted by PIAA registered sports' officials. Extreme cases of emergency and situations that may be completely unavoidable are the only exceptions to this policy.

Visors

Officials are reminded that visors being worn by players during competition are now legal by NFHS football rules provided they meet two criteria as detailed in Rule 1-5-3,c-4. An eye shield attached to the helmet that is (a) constructed of a molded rigid material or (b) is clear without the presence of any tint. This alleviates the paperwork from principals signing off on the use of these items for their players and the officials having to review them before the contest.

Officials Information Cont.

Official Coin Toss

When the official coin toss is held prior to the game's ceremonial coin toss, it is recommended to have the official coin toss, in the home team end zone or midfield, 30 minutes prior to contest with the Head Coaches and Captains' of each team. Officials are to read the PIAA Sportsmanship Message at this time and get legally equipped confirmation from each head coach.

Give the visiting speaking captain their option of taking heads or tails before the coin is tossed. Once you have the result of the toss, give the winner of the toss their options. After the winner of the toss selects their option, give the other team their options of which way they want to kick.

After Halftime – Eliminate ceremonial toss to press box and just go to each respective sideline and give instructions to line-up for kickoff based on your pre-game coin toss decisions

Fifth Quarters

Officials are not authorized to remain on the field in an officiating capacity if schools agree to play extended quarters. This is contrary to authorized playing time for junior high and senior high competition. This type of action may place officials in liability jeopardy since these type of activities violate the standard of play for length of games/quarters in the NFHS football rules book and the PIAA By-laws.

Common Sense Officiating

With all the dialogue of concussions and the prevention of injuries, officials are requested to use prudent judgment in the handling of players who appear injured during playing action. If a player exhibits any signs of a concussion, or is injured in any manner, officials should do their due diligence in requesting the team's coaching staff or team medical personnel evaluate the player(s) involved. This is priority communication between the officials and the coaching staff. Please ensure that any player who appears injured must be evaluated by the team's medical personnel. Safety of players is priority one and before we remove any player from a contest, make sure the team's medical personnel are involved with the decision making.

CONCUSSION MANAGEMENT PROTOCOL FOR OFFICIALS

Concussion Management continues to be a very important point of emphasis in every interscholastic sporting activity. Any athlete who exhibits signs, symptoms, or behaviors consistent with a concussion (such as a loss of consciousness, headache, dizziness, confusion, or balance problems) shall be immediately removed from the contest and shall not return to play until cleared by the appropriate healthcare professional.

When sending an athlete out of a contest, the official should advise the head coach that the player is being removed from competition due to the athlete exhibiting concussion like symptoms.

Neither officials, nor coaches, are expected to "diagnose" a concussion, as that is the responsibility of an appropriate health-care professional. The game official is not responsible for the sideline evaluation or management of the athlete after he or she is removed from play.

The responsibility of further evaluating and managing the symptomatic athlete falls upon the head coach, appropriate health-care professional or other individual designated by the school administrators.

The official does not need written permission for an athlete to return nor does the official need to verify the credentials of the appropriate health-care professional.

If a player returns to the competition the official should just monitor them in the same manner prior to them being sent out originally.

Those wishing to learn more on this topic can register and attend a course sponsored by NFHS by using this link: https://nfhslearn.com/courses/concussion-in-sports-2

UNIVERSAL HYGIENE PROTOCOL FOR ALL SPORTS

- Shower immediately after every competition and practice.
- Wash all workout clothing after each practice.
- Wash personal gear (knee pads and braces) weekly.
- Do not share towels or personal hygiene products (razors).
- Refrain from full body cosmetic shaving.

SHARED RESPONSIBILITY AND FOOTBALL HELMET WARNING STATEMENT

Athletes who participate in the sport of football accept the risk of injuries. However, athletes also have the right to assume that those who are responsible for the conduct of the sport, i.e., administrators, coaches and athletic trainers, have taken reasonable precautions to minimize the risk of significant injury. Refinements in the playing rules, the development of risk minimization guidelines and the establishment of equipment standards have helped to reduce significant injuries. However, to legislate safety via the rules book and equipment

standards are never a complete answer. All who are involved with participation in the sport of football share in the responsibility of minimizing the sport's inherent risks?

The coach is responsible for pregame verification that in addition to other required equipment, all players have a helmet which met National Operating Committee on Standards for Athletic Equipment (NOCSAE) standards when manufactured and each helmet has an exterior warning label. While important, the fact the athletes are wearing certified helmets is only the first step. The athletes involved must be aware of all the basic principles of head and neck injury prevention.

Helmet Warning Statement

Since 1985 the NOCSAE football helmet standard has required a warning label on the outside of the helmet to inform each player of these risks and responsibilities. The warning label must use language that conveys the following information:

Officials Uniform

1. The PIAA Official's Emblem must be worn on the upper left sleeve of the official's standard shirt when officiating in all PIAA sponsored games.

2. All PIAA-registered officials must wear identical uniforms during a contest.

3. Required uniform for football officials:

• Hat - Black fitted baseball cap with white piping. The referee shall wear a solid white fitted baseball cap.

• Shirt – Black-and-white vertically striped, long or short-sleeve knit shirt shall be worn. The shirts shall have either 1-inch stripes or a state association adopted shirt with a maximum of 2 ¼ - inch stripes, a black knit cuff, and Byron collar. All games officials are to wear the same type shirt.

• Belt - Black leather, if worn, 1¼ to 2 inches wide.

• Pants - Black – Tailored black pant with white stripe on outside of leg only. Knickers are precluded from the official uniform.

• Shoes - Solid Black or Predominantly Black with some white, cleaned, and shined.

• Jacket - Black and white vertically striped jacket (not to be worn during the game).

• Lanyard - Black.

• Whistle - Black finger style (recommended). Turtleneck - Black or white (if needed).

The wearing of jewelry (except wedding bands and medical-alert bracelets) and wrist watches (except as a required timing device) is prohibited. Smoking and/or tobacco chewing is prohibited.

PIAA sports' officials may display an American flag (maximum size 2 by 3 inches) on the right sleeve of their uniform shirt approximately three inches down from the shoulder seam.

GUIDELINES ON HANDLING PRACTICES AND CONTESTS DURING LIGHTNING OR THUNDER DISTURBANCES

These guidelines provide a default policy to those responsible or sharing duties for making decisions concerning the suspension and restarting of practices and contests based on the presence of lightning or thunder. The preferred sources from which to request such a policy for your facility would include your state high school activities association and the nearest office of the National Weather Service.

PROACTIVE PLANNING

1. Assign staff to monitor local weather conditions before and during practices and contests.

2. Develop an evacuation plan, including identification of appropriate nearby safer areas and determine the amount of time needed to get everyone to a designated safer area:

a. A designated safer place is a substantial building with plumbing and wiring where people live or work, such as a school, gymnasium or library. An alternate safer place from the threat of lightning is a fully enclosed (not convertible or soft top) metal car or school bus.

3. Develop criteria for suspension and resumption of play:

a. When thunder is heard or lightning is seen*, the leading edge of the thunderstorm is close enough to strike your location with lightning. Suspend play for at least 30 minutes and vacate the outdoor activity to the previously designated safer location immediately.

b. 30-minute rule. Once play has been suspended, wait at least 30 minutes after the last thunder is heard or lightning is witnessed* prior to resuming play.

c. Any subsequent thunder or lightning* after the beginning of the 30-minute count will reset the clock and another 30-minute count should begin.

d. When independently validated lightning-detection devices or mobile phone apps are available, this technology could be used to assist in making a decision to suspend play if a lightning strike is noted to be within 10 miles of the event location. However, you should never depend on the reliability of these devices and, thus, hearing thunder or seeing lightning* should always take precedence over information from a mobile app or lightning-detection device.

*– At night, under certain atmospheric conditions, lightning flashes may be seen from distant storms. In these cases, it may be safe to continue an event. If no thunder can be heard and the flashes are low on the horizon, the storm may not pose a threat. Independently verified lightning detection information would help eliminate any uncertainty.

4. Review the lightning safety policy annually with all administrators, coaches and game personnel and train all personnel.

5. Inform student-athletes and their parents of the lightning policy at

start of the season.

Revised and Approved January 2021

NFHS Official Football Signals

NFHS OFFICIAL FOOTBALL SIGNALS

1 Ball ready for play
*Untimed down

2 Start clock

3 Time-out
Discretionary or injury time-out
(followed by tapping hands on chest)

4 TV/radio time-out

5 Touchdown, Field goal,
Point(s) after touchdown

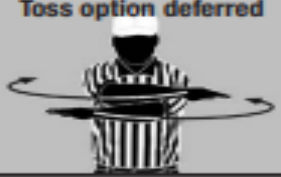
6 Safety

7 Dead ball foul, Touchback
(move side to side)

8 First down

9 Loss of down

10 Incomplete
forward pass
Penalty declined
No play, no score
Toss option deferred



11 Legal touching of
forward pass or
scrimmage kick

12 Inadvertent whistle

13 Disregard flag

14 End of period

15 Sideline warning

16 First touching
Illegal touching

17 Reset play clock
to 25 seconds
(Use both hands to have play clock reset to 40 seconds)

18 Encroachment

19 False start
Illegal formation
Free kick infraction

20 Illegal shift
(2 hands)
Illegal motion (1 hand)

21 Delay of game

22 Substitution
infraction

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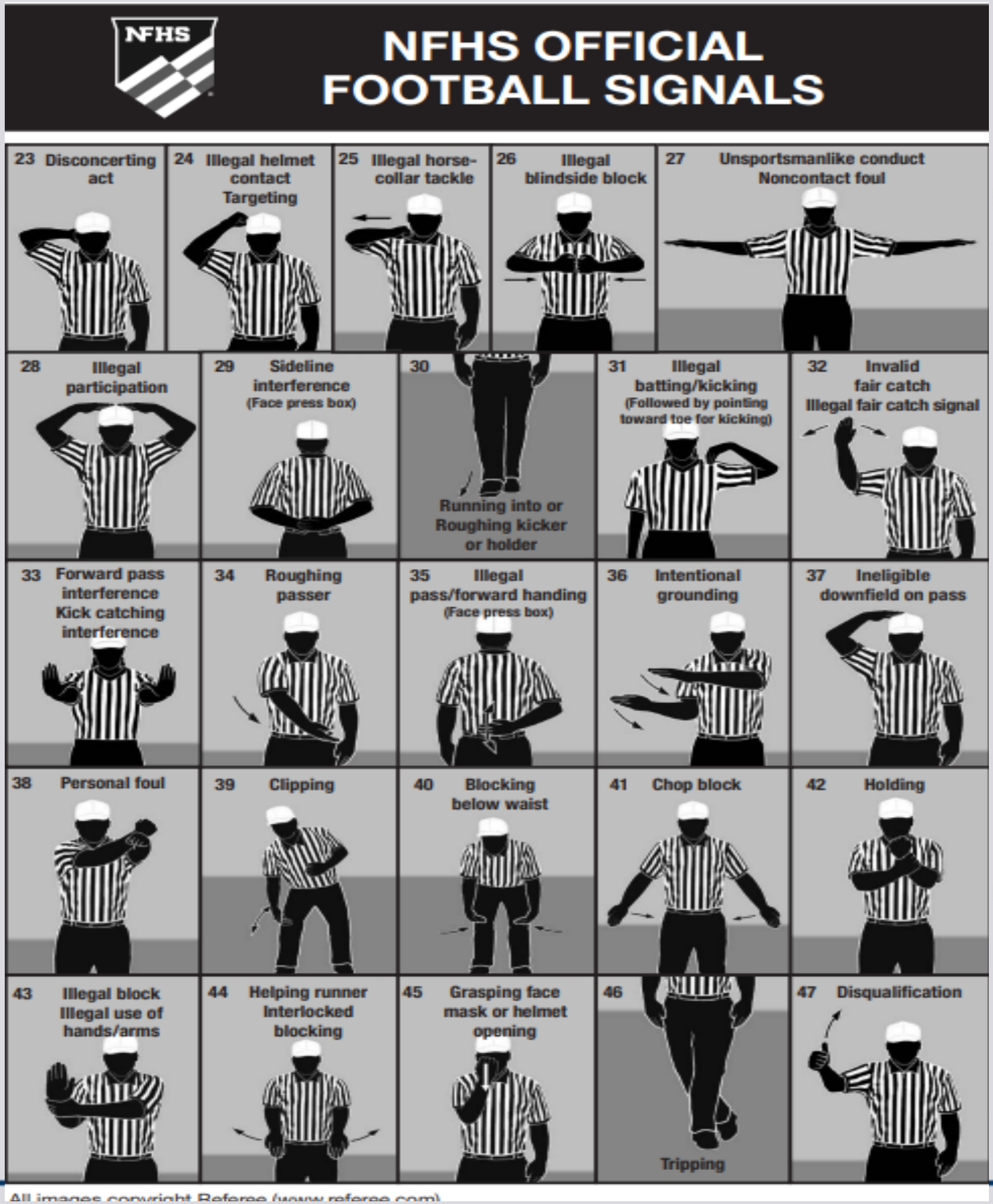
2026

NFHS Official Football Signals



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