



**Approved 2021
Playing Rules
and Bylaws**

Approved 2021 Playing Rules Summary

1. By Competition Committee; to amend Rule 16, to eliminate overtime in the preseason.
2. By Competition Committee; to amend Rule 6, Section 1, Article 3, for one year only, to establish a maximum number of players in the setup zone.
4. By Competition Committee, Coaches Subcommittee, and Baltimore; to amend Rule 15, Section 3, Article 9, and Rule 19, Section 2, to permit the Replay Official and designated members of the Officiating department to provide certain objective information to the on-field officials.
5. By Chicago; to amend Rule 11, Section 3, Article 3, to ensure the enforcement of all accepted penalties committed by either team during successive Try attempts.
6. By Los Angeles Rams; to amend Rule 8, Section 1, Article 2, to add a loss of down for a second forward pass from behind the line and for a pass thrown after the ball returns behind the line.
7. By Kansas City Chiefs; to amend Rule 5, Section 1, Article 2, to expand jersey number options for certain positions.

2021 PLAYING RULE PROPOSAL NO. 1

Amend Rule 16 (Overtime Procedures, pg. 36) (new language underlined, deleted language struck through):

SECTION 1 OVERTIME PROCEDURES

ARTICLE 1. SCORE TIED. If the score is tied at the end of the regulation playing time of all ~~preseason~~, regular season, and postseason NFL games, a system of modified sudden-death overtime shall be in effect, pursuant to the following.

ARTICLE 2. END OF REGULATION. At the end of regulation playing time, the Referee shall immediately toss a coin at the center of the field, in accordance with rules pertaining to a usual pregame toss (4-2-2). The visiting team captain is to again call the toss.

ARTICLE 3. EXTRA PERIOD. Following an intermission of no more than three minutes after the end of the regular game, the extra period shall commence.

- (a) Both teams must have the opportunity to possess the ball once during the extra period, unless the team that receives the opening kickoff scores a touchdown on its initial possession, in which case it is the winner, or if the team kicking off to start the overtime period scores a safety on the receiving team's initial possession, in which case the team that kicked off is the winner. If a touchdown is scored, the game is over, and the Try is not attempted.
- (b) If the team that possesses the ball first does not score on its initial possession, the team next scoring by any method shall be the winner.
- (c) If the team that possesses the ball first scores a field goal on its initial possession, the other team (the second team) shall have the opportunity to possess the ball.
 - (1) If the second team scores a touchdown on its possession, it is the winner.
 - (2) If the second team scores a field goal on its possession, the team next scoring by any method shall be the winner.
 - (3) If the second team does not score on its possession, the game is over, and the first team is the winner, subject to (4) below.
 - (4) If the second team loses possession by an interception or fumble, the down will be permitted to run to its conclusion, and all rules of the game will be enforced as customary, including awarding points scored by either team during the down. If the second team scores a touchdown on the down after regaining possession, it is the winner. Only fouls that require the down to be replayed, fouls that negate a score, or palpably unfair acts will be enforced.

Notes:

- (1) *In such situations, if the player who intercepts the pass or recovers the fumble goes to the ground and makes no effort to advance, the covering official will blow his whistle to end the game.*

- (2) *If the second team loses possession by an interception or fumble, but the first team committed a foul prior to the change of possession, the second team's possession has not legally ended, and the game cannot end on the down. However, in certain situations, the second team cannot decline the penalty and accept the result of the play, no matter how beneficial, because it would create a second possession for itself. It must accept the penalty enforcement, which will extend its initial possession.*
- (3) *The situation in (2) may also affect the team that receives the opening kickoff during its first possession. If there is a foul by the second team followed by a double change of possession, and the first team declines the penalty and accepts the result of the play, the second team has had its required possession, and the first team has possession of the ball for the second time and needs only a field goal to win. However, if it accepts the penalty, it will extend its initial possession.*

- (d) A player is in possession when he is in firm grip and control of the ball inbounds (3-2-7). The defense gains possession when it catches, intercepts, or recovers a loose ball.
- (e) The opportunity to possess applies only during kicking plays. A kickoff is the opportunity to possess for the receiving team. If the kicking team legally recovers the kick, the receiving team is considered to have had its opportunity. A punt or field goal attempt that crosses the line of scrimmage and is muffed by the receiving team is considered to be an opportunity to possess for the receiving team. Normal touching rules by the kicking team apply.
- (f) All replay reviews will be initiated by the Replay Official. Coaches' challenges will not be allowed.

ARTICLE 4. OVERTIME IN ~~PRESEASON AND~~ REGULAR SEASON. The following shall apply to overtime games in the ~~preseason and~~ regular season.

- (a) There shall be a maximum of one 10-minute period, even if the second team has not had an opportunity to possess the ball or if its initial possession has not ended. If the score is tied at the end of the period, the game shall result in a tie.
- (b) Each team shall be entitled to two timeouts, and if there is an excess timeout, the usual rules shall apply (4-5). The general provisions for the fourth quarter of a game, including timing, shall apply.

ARTICLE 5. OVERTIME IN POSTSEASON. The following shall apply to overtime games in the postseason:

- (a) If the score is tied at the end of a 15-minute overtime period, or if the second team's initial possession has not ended, another overtime period will begin, and play will continue, regardless of how many 15-minute periods are necessary.
- (b) Between each overtime period, there shall be a two-minute intermission, but there shall be no halftime intermission after the second period. At the beginning of the third overtime period, the captain who lost the coin toss prior to the first overtime period shall have the first choice of the two privileges in 4-2-2, unless the team that won the coin toss deferred.
- (c) At the end of the first and third extra periods, etc., teams must change goals in accordance

with 4-2-3.

- (d) Each team is entitled to three timeouts during a half. If there is an excess timeout, the usual rules shall apply (4-5).
- (e) At the end of a second overtime period, timing rules shall apply as at the end of the first half. At the end of a fourth overtime period, timing rules shall apply as at the end of the fourth quarter.
- (f) At the end of a fourth overtime period, there will be another coin toss pursuant to Section 1, Article 2, and play will continue until a winner is declared.

ARTICLE 6. DISQUALIFIED PLAYERS. Disqualified player(s) shall not re-enter during any extra period or periods in the ~~preseason~~, regular season, and postseason.

ARTICLE 7. GENERAL AND SPECIFIC RULES APPLY. Except as provided for above, all other general and specific rules shall apply during any extra period or periods in the ~~preseason~~, regular season, and postseason.

Submitted by Competition Committee

Effect: Eliminates overtime in the preseason.

Reason: Game presentation; Pace of play.

2021 PLAYING RULE PROPOSAL NO. 2

For one year only, amend Rule 6, Section 1, Article 3 (Free Kick Formation, Page 24) (new language underlined, deleted language struck through):

ARTICLE 3. FREE KICK FORMATION. When the ball is kicked on a free down:

- (a) From the time the kicker begins his approach to the ball and until the ball is kicked,
- (1) all kicking team players other than the kicker must be lined up with at least one foot on the yard line that is one yard behind their restraining line, and both feet must remain on the ground until the ball is kicked; and
 - (2) no more than five players of the kicking team may be on either side of the ball; and
 - (3) at least two players (other than a holder) must be lined up inbounds between the sideline and the bottom (outside) of the yard-line number, and at least two players (other than a holder) must be lined up between the top (inside) of the yard-line number and the inbounds lines.

Note: A holder for a free kick counts as one of the required five players on either side of the ball, regardless of where he is positioned. The holder is never counted as one of the required two players between the inbounds line and the top (inside) of the numbers, regardless of where he is positioned.

- (b) All kicking team players must be inbounds and behind the ball when it is kicked, except:
- (1) the holder of a placekick (3-18-1-Item 2) may be beyond the line, and
 - (2) the kicker may be beyond the line, provided that his kicking foot is not beyond the line.
- (c) Until the ball is kicked, all receiving team (Team B) players must be inbounds and behind their restraining line, and at least eight, but no more than nine, players must be positioned between their restraining line and a spot 15 yards behind their restraining line (the “setup zone”). (See Section 2, Article 1, Item 2-b).

Penalty: For a player being beyond the restraining line when the ball is kicked (offside), a player being out of bounds when the ball is kicked, or either team being in an illegal formation when the ball is kicked: Loss of five yards.

- (d) Prior to the ball being touched by the receiving team or the end of the kick, it is a foul if a kicking team player voluntarily goes out of bounds (without being contacted by a receiving team player) to avoid a block.

Penalty: For voluntarily going out of bounds without contact: Loss of 5 yards.

Submitted by Competition Committee

Effect: For one year only, establishes a maximum number of players in the setup zone.

Reason: Provides excitement and competition.

2021 PLAYING RULE PROPOSAL NO. 4

Amend Rule 15, Section 3, Article 9 (Game Administration, Page 66), and Rule 19, Section 2 (Game Administration Support From NFL Officiating Staff, Page 73) (new language underlined, deleted language struck through):

RULE 15 INSTANT REPLAY

ARTICLE 9. GAME ADMINISTRATION. The Replay Official and designated members of the Officiating department may consult with on-field officials, or conduct a replay review, or advise the game officials on specific, objective aspects of a play when clear and obvious video evidence is present, ~~and/or to address~~ game administration issues, including, but not limited to:

- (a) penalty enforcement;
- (b) the proper down;
- (c) spot of a foul; ~~and~~
- (d) the game clock;
- (e) possession;
- (f) completed or intercepted pass;
- (g) touching of a loose ball, boundary line, goal line, or end line;
- (h) location of the football or a player in relation to the boundary line, the line of scrimmage, the line to gain, or the goal line; or
- (i) down by contact (when a player is not ruled down by contact on the field).

Nothing in this Article precludes a Head Coach or Replay Official from initiating a challenge or review otherwise allowed under Rule 15, Section 1.

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RULE 19 OFFICIALS

SECTION 2 ~~GAME ADMINISTRATION SUPPORT FROM NFL OFFICIATING STAFF.~~

The Replay Official and designated members of the Officiating department at the League office may consult with the on-field officials to provide objective information regarding on-field rulings and on the correct application of playing rules, ~~including appropriate assessment of penalty yardage, proper down, and status of the game clock.~~ In addition, if the designated members of the Officiating department determine that a foul for a football or non-football act called on the field is flagrant, then they can instruct the on-field officiating crew to disqualify the player(s) who committed the foul. Those players who were not penalized, but who engaged in football or non-football acts that were determined to be flagrant and directly related to the foul called on the field, may also be disqualified by designated members of the Officiating department. The determination

that a foul is flagrant must be based on the available video provided on the television broadcast, and the designated members of the Officiating department must instruct the officiating crew to disqualify the identified player(s) before the ball is next legally put in play. The Officiating department does not have the authority to instruct the on-field game officials to assess a penalty against a player.

Submitted by Competition Committee, Coaches Subcommittee, and Baltimore

Effect: Permits the Replay Official and designated members of the officiating department to communicate to the Referee certain objective and administrative aspects of the game.

Reason: Competitive equity.

2021 PLAYING RULE PROPOSAL NO. 5

Amend Rule 11, Section 3, Article 3 (Fouls Committed During Try, Page 43-44) (new language underlined, deleted language struck through):

ARTICLE 3. FOULS COMMITTED DURING TRY.

If a foul results in a retry, Team A will have the option to enforce the penalty from the spot where it attempted the try (previous spot) or from the yard line for the other try option, the location of which is determined by any previously enforced penalty, if applicable.

Submitted by Chicago

Effect: Ensures the enforcement of all accepted penalties committed by either team during successive Try attempts.

Reason: Competitive equity.

2021 PLAYING RULE PROPOSAL NO. 6

Amend Rule 8, Section 1, Article 2 (Legal Forward Pass, Page 31) (new language underlined, deleted language struck through):

ARTICLE 2. LEGAL FORWARD PASS. The offensive team may make one forward pass from behind the line during each down. If the ball, whether in player possession or loose, crosses the line of scrimmage, a forward pass is not permissible, regardless of whether the ball returns behind the line of scrimmage before the pass is thrown.

Item 1. Illegal Passes. Any other forward pass by either team is illegal and is a foul by the passing team, including:

(a) A forward pass thrown when the passer is beyond the line of scrimmage.

Note: It is a forward pass from beyond the line of scrimmage if the passer's entire body and the ball are beyond the line of scrimmage when the ball is released, whether the passer is airborne or touching the ground. The penalty for a forward pass thrown from beyond the line is enforced from the spot where the ball is released.

(b) A second forward pass thrown from behind the line of scrimmage.

(c) A forward pass thrown after the ball has crossed the line of scrimmage and has returned behind it.

(d) A forward pass thrown after there has been a change of possession.

Item 2. Intercepted Illegal Pass. If an illegal pass is caught or intercepted, the ball may be advanced and the penalty declined.

Penalties:

(a) **For a forward pass from beyond the line: Loss of down and five yards from the spot of the pass. See S.N. below.**

(b) **For a second forward pass from behind the line, or for a forward pass that was thrown after the ball returned behind the line: Loss of down and five yards from the previous spot.**

(c) **For a forward pass that is thrown after a change of possession: Loss of five yards from the spot of the pass.**

Submitted by Los Angeles Rams

Effect: Modifies penalty to add a loss of down for a second forward pass from behind the line and for a pass thrown after the ball returns behind the line.

Reason: Competitive equity.

2021 PLAYING RULE PROPOSAL NO. 7

Amend Rule 5, Section 1, Article 2 (Players Numbered By Position, Page 64) (new language underlined, deleted language struck through):

ARTICLE 2. PLAYERS NUMBERED BY POSITION. All players must wear numerals on their jerseys in accordance with Rule 5, Section 4, Article 3, Item 3. Such numerals must be by playing position, as follows:

- (a) quarterbacks, punters, and placekickers: 1–19;
- ~~(b) running backs and defensive backs: 20–49;~~
- ~~(b)(c) running backs, full backs, tight ends, H-backs, and wide receivers: 1–49 and 80–89~~
- ~~(e)(d) centers and offensive linemen: 50–79;~~
- ~~offensive guards and tackles: 60–79;~~
- ~~(d) wide receivers: 10–19 and 80–89;~~
- ~~(e) tight ends and H-backs: 40–49 and 80–89;~~
- ~~(f)(e) defensive linemen: 50–79 and 90–99;~~
- ~~(g)(f) linebackers: 40–59 and 90–99.~~

If a player changes his position during his playing career in the NFL, and such change moves him from a position as an ineligible pass receiver to that of an eligible pass receiver, or from a position as an eligible pass receiver to that of an ineligible pass receiver, he must be issued an appropriate new jersey numeral. A change in jersey numeral is not required if the change is from an ineligible position to another ineligible position, or from an eligible position to another eligible position, provided that the player has participated at least one season at his position prior to the change.

Any request to wear a numeral for a special position not specified above (~~e.g., H-back~~) must be made to the Commissioner. During the preseason period when playing rosters are larger, the League will allow duplication and other temporary deviations from the numbering scheme specified above, but the rule must be adhered to for all players during the regular season and postseason. Clubs must make numerals available to adhere to the rule, even if it requires returning to circulation a numeral that has been retired or withheld for other reasons. See 5-3-1 for reporting a change of position.

Submitted by Kansas City

Effect: Expands jersey number options for certain positions.

Reason: Flexibility in assigning jersey numbers.

Approved 2021 Bylaws Summary

2. By Competition Committee; to amend Article XII, Section 12.4 of the Constitution and Bylaws to require clubs to submit tryouts and visits to the League office throughout the entire year; however, such transactions will only be reported to clubs from the start of training camp through the conclusion of the Super Bowl, unless it is with a Restricted or Unrestricted Free Agent.

2021 BYLAW PROPOSAL NO. 2

Amend Article XII, Section 12.4 of the Constitution and Bylaws to reflect the following (new language underlined, deleted language struck through):

Rules and Regulations

12.4 (A) After the ~~first mandatory roster reduction in the preseason~~start of the first training camp in the League and for the remainder of the season, a member club is permitted to transport a free agent player to its home city or any other site for two visits, one for the purpose of a tryout and/or physical examination, the other for a physical examination only. A player may not visit the same club more than two times unless, following the player's most recent visit to that club, the player signs an NFL Player Contract with another club and that contract is subsequently terminated. A visit for the purpose of a physical examination is limited to one day only, while a visit for a tryout and physical examination is limited to two days, but the tryout portion of the two-day visit must be completed in one day. The involved player or players shall not be on the club's practice field at the same time as regular practice or any on-field activities being conducted. Clubs are prohibited from conducting tryouts of players at the stadium on game day, even if the tryout occurs prior to or during the official warm-up period that begins one hour prior to kickoff. The club shall be allowed a maximum of two players from its Active List to participate with the tryout player during his tryout. The player's presence with the club must be reported to the League office prior to the completion of the visit. The League, in turn, shall promulgate all such visits to member clubs.

Beginning the day after the Super Bowl, tryouts for free agent players are not limited in duration, but must not exceed a few days, and other members of the squad are permitted to participate, subject to collectively bargained restrictions. The player's presence with the club must be reported to the League office prior to the completion of the visit; however, the transactions will not be shared with member clubs, unless they are with Restricted or Unrestricted Free Agents.

During any tryout conducted at any time, Helmets and protective pads for elbows and knees are permitted for tryouts; all other pads are prohibited. ~~The involved player or players shall not be on the club's practice field at the same time as regular practice or any on-field activities being conducted. The club shall be allowed a maximum of two players from its Active List to participate with the tryout player during his tryout. Multiple tryouts of the same player in the same session by a club are prohibited unless, following the most recent tryout, the player is placed under contract and released by another club in the League.~~

Nothing in this subsection is to be interpreted in any way as a modification of Section 17.4(B) of this Constitution and Bylaws, and therefore such player may not participate in practice with the playing squad. No remuneration of any kind, except normal travel and lodging expenses, may be paid to such player while not under contract. Players tried out under this rule are not subject to the provisions of Section 17.4(C), which restrict the return to a former club.

The above restrictions also apply to any tryouts and/or physical examinations conducted for or administered to free agent players at any location, even if the club does not transport the player to the site.

Submitted by Competition Committee

Effect: Requires clubs to submit tryouts and visits to the League office throughout the entire year; however, such transactions will only be reported to clubs from the start of training camp through the conclusion of the Super Bowl, unless it is with a Restricted or Unrestricted Free Agent.

Reason: Provides more comprehensive information and increased transparency.