PLAY. PERFORM. COMPETE. TOGETHER.

2026 NFHS FOOTBALL RULES POWERPOINT

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2026 NJSIAA Rules Interpretation Team

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- NJFOA Central- Steve Citro
- NJFOA Shore- Bill Surdovel
- NJSIAA/NJFOA South- Mike Bartram

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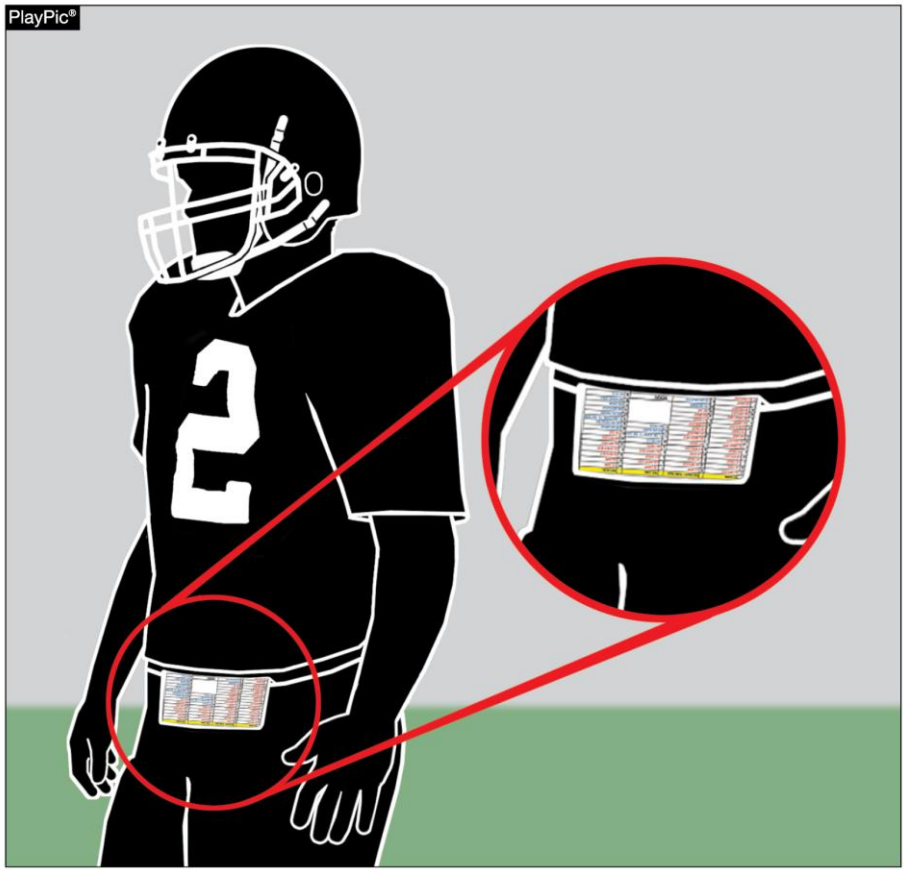
2026 NFHS FOOTBALL RULES CHANGES

PLAY CARDS
RULE 1-5-3c(9)

- "Illegal equipment shall always include but is not limited to:

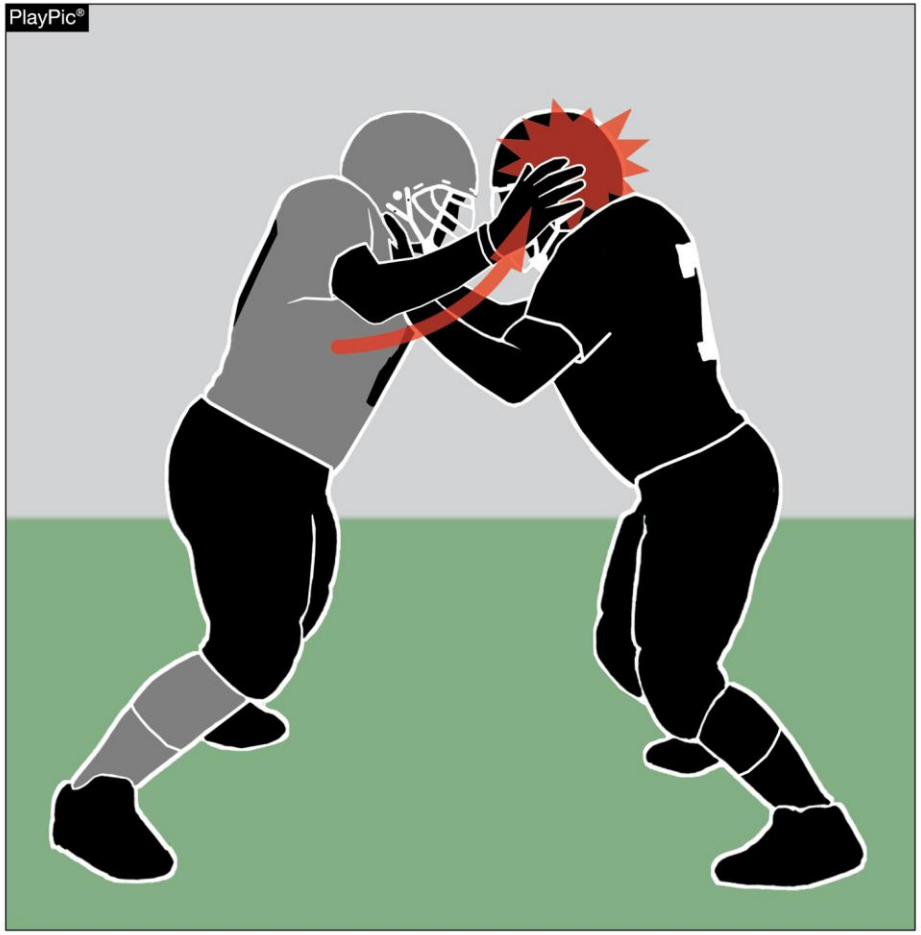
  9. Play cards not worn on the wrist, arm or belt."



LEGAL

HEAD SLAP
RULE 9-4-7

- “No player may use the hand(s) to slap the opponent’s head.”



ILLEGAL

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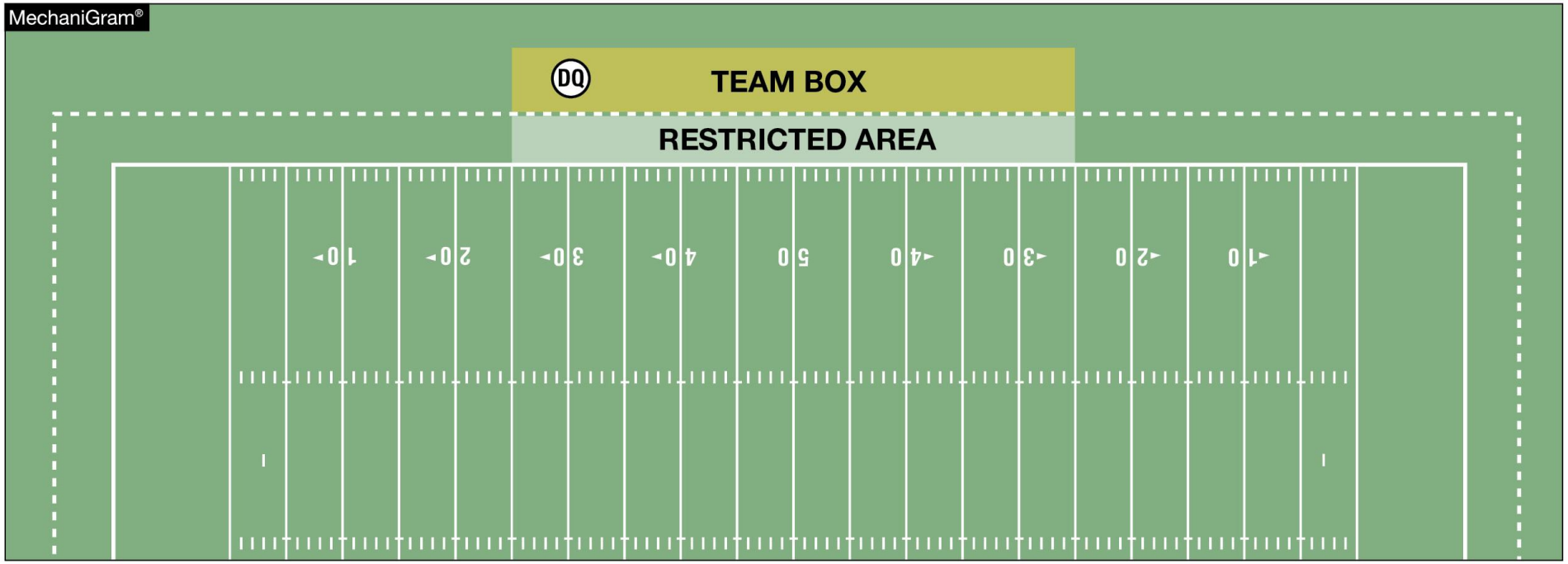
2026 NFHS FOOTBALL EDITORIAL CHANGES

GAME ENDING PROCEDURE RULE 1-1-8

- The game officials' authority extends through the referee's declaration of the end of the fourth period or overtime. The jurisdiction of the game officials is terminated and the final score has been approved when all game officials leave the visual confines of the playing area. The game officials retain clerical authority over the game through the completion of any reports, including those imposing disqualifications, that are responsive to actions occurring while the game officials had jurisdiction. State Associations may intercede in the event of unusual incidents that occur before, during or after the game official's jurisdiction has ended or in the event that a game is terminated prior to the conclusion of regulation play.

DISQUALIFIED PLAYER
RULE 2-32-6

- A disqualified player is a player barred from further participation in a game. A disqualified player can be permitted to remain in the team box area.

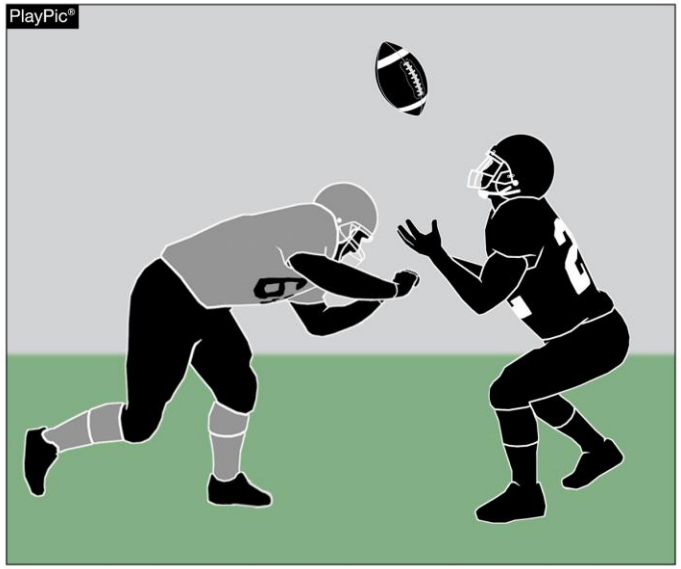


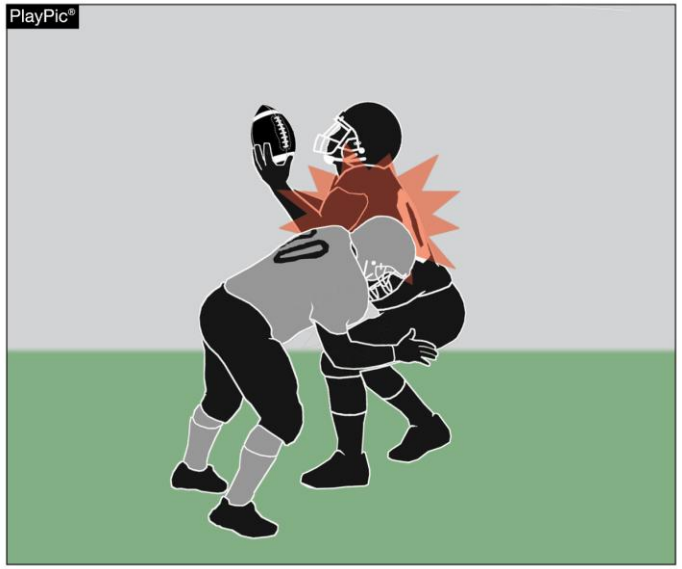
ILLEGAL PERSONAL CONTACT/DEFENSELESS PLAYER RULE 9-4-3p

- No player or nonplayer shall:

  p. Initiate forceful contact against a defenseless receiver as in 2-32-16b, 2-32-16c and 2-32-16e that is not:

  1. Incidental contact as a result of making a play on the ball;
  2. Initiated with open hands; or
  3. An attempt to tackle by wrapping arm(s) around the receiver.

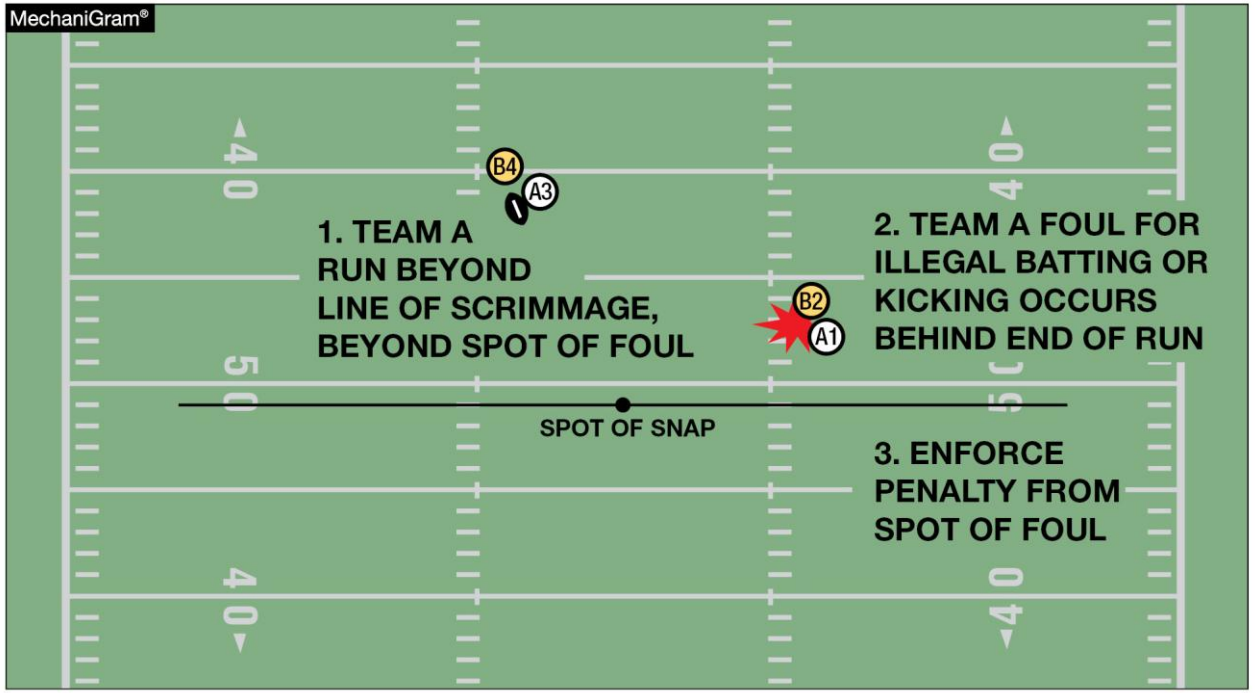




BASIC SPOT
RULE 10-4-4a

- The basic spot is the spot of the foul for:

  a. Illegal batting or illegal kicking by A that occurs behind the basic spot.



NEW DELAY OF GAME SIGNAL

PREVIOUS
DELAY OF GAME SIGNAL

NEW
DELAY OF GAME SIGNAL

2026 NFHS FOOTBALL EDITORIAL CHANGES

1-3-5b	Changed “Head Linesman” to “Head Line Judge.
1-5-3a(2)	Deleted the reference to “opponent.”
2-15-1	Further clarified to make definition more consistent with forward fumble rule that was approved in 2025.
3-5-7g	Replaced “heat and humidity” with “circumstances and conditions” better covers a variety of situations that may create a health risk to players.
4-1-3	Deleted “if elected” from the rule as it was not needed.
5-3-1	Added “ball being” before ready-for-play for clarification.
5-3-2	Changed “Head Linesman” to “Head Line Judge.
8-2-2, 8-2-3, 8-2-4, 8-2-5	Changed “subsequent kickoff” to “succeeding spot” for clarification.

2026 NFHS FOOTBALL EDITORIAL CHANGES

9-8 PENALTY	Added ‘basic spot” to the PENALTY section to give better clarity that unsportsmanlike and nonplayer unsportsmanlike fouls are enforced from the basic spot.
10-4-2	Revised the rules references in the rule.
10-4-2b	Deleted “behind the line of scrimmage” from the rule to eliminate redundancy.
10-5-3	Deleted “and enforcement is from behind its goal line” to eliminate conflicts with recent rules changes to Rule 10-4.
FOOTBALL FUNDAMENTAL – Penalty Measurement (4)	Removed all of the rules references and relaced with “otherwise specified by rule.”
RESOLVING TIED GAMES – (3-1)	Changed “Head Linesman” to “Head Line Judge.
6-Player Rules Differences – Rule 7	Further clarified when a passer becomes eligible if the pass was touched by B.

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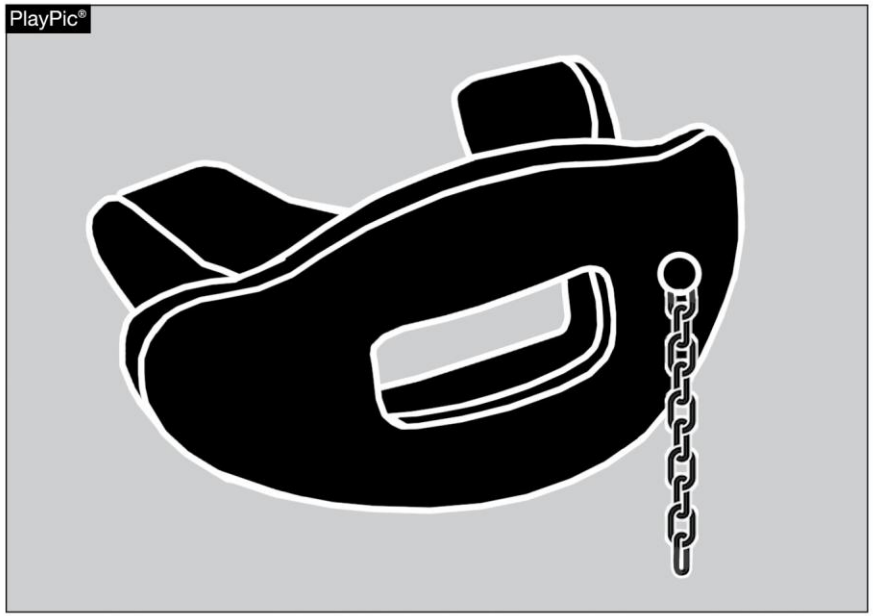
2026 NFHS FOOTBALL RULES REMINDERS

TOOTH & MOUTH PROTECTOR
RULE 1-5-1d(5)a – 4



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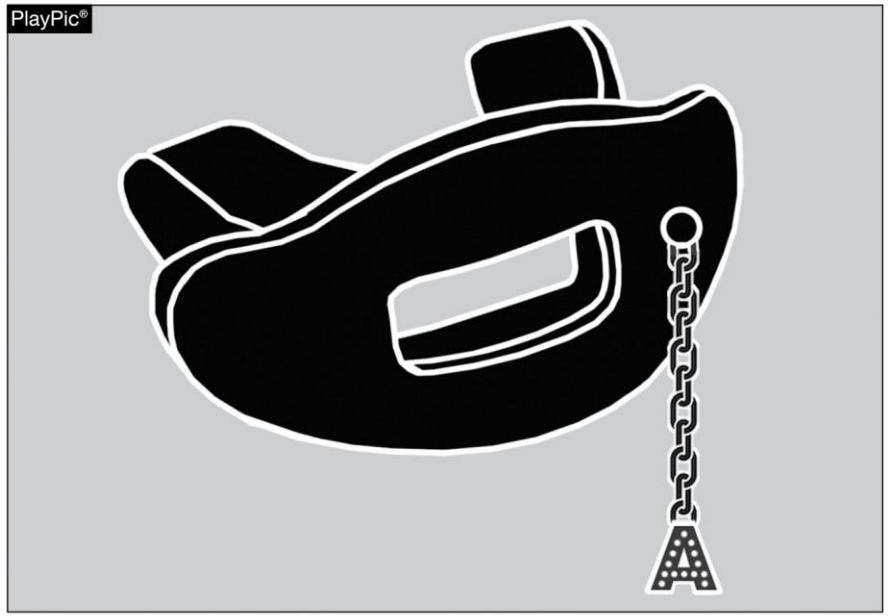
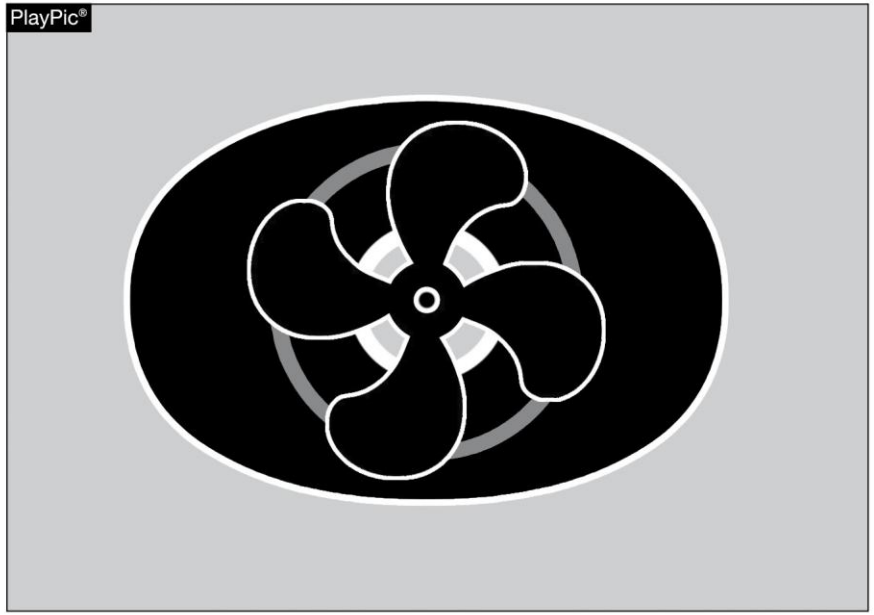


ILLEGAL

Effective **2026**: Tooth and mouth protectors may not include any attachment(s) that do not serve a purpose and function in protecting the teeth or mouth.

TOOTH & MOUTH PROTECTOR
RULE 1-5-1d(5)a – 5



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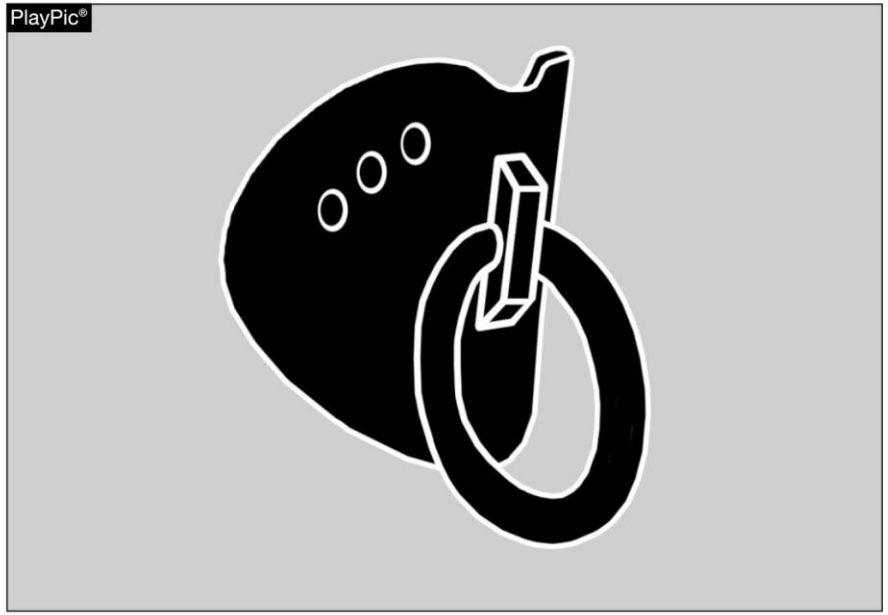
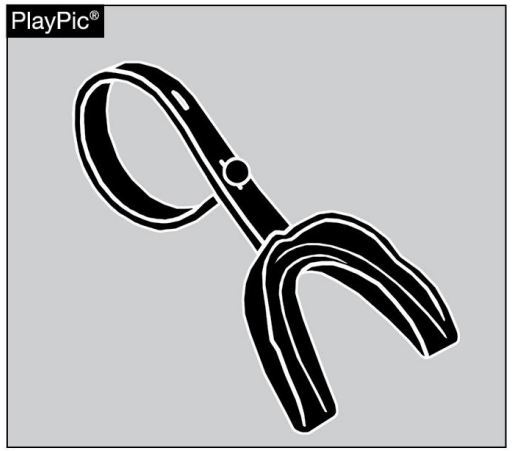


ILLEGAL

Effective **2026**: Tooth and mouth protectors may not include anything on them that is a health or risk issue and can pose a danger to themselves or other players.

TOOTH & MOUTH PROTECTOR RULES 1-5-1d(5)a – 4, 5



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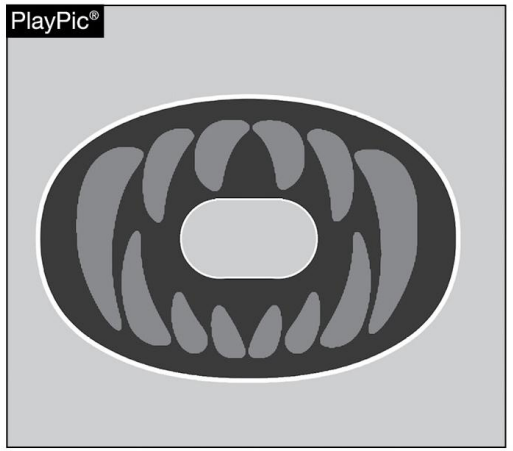

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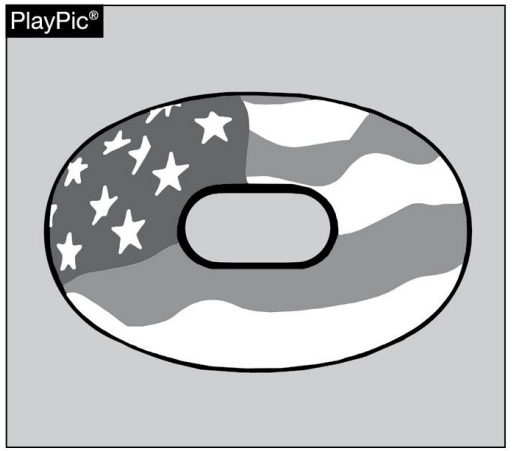
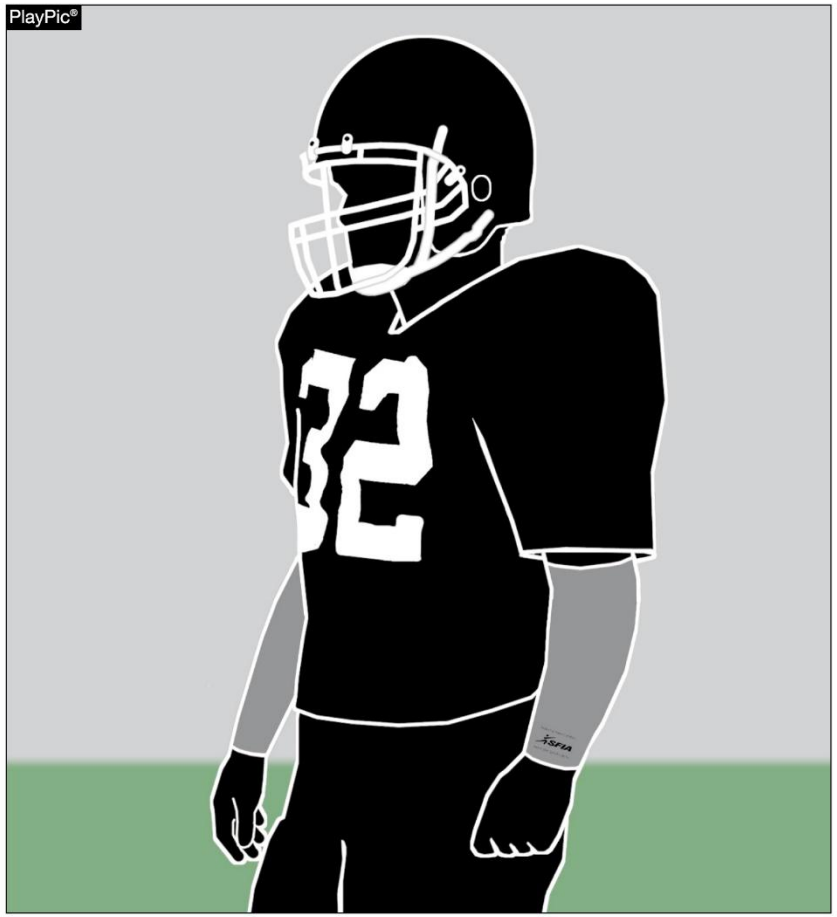


LEGAL

These tooth and mouth protectors neither include any attachment(s) that does not serve a purpose and function in protecting the teeth or mouth, nor anything that is a health or risk issue posing a danger and are not impacted by this rule change.

ARM SLEEVES
RULES 1-5-2d, 1-5-3c(6)

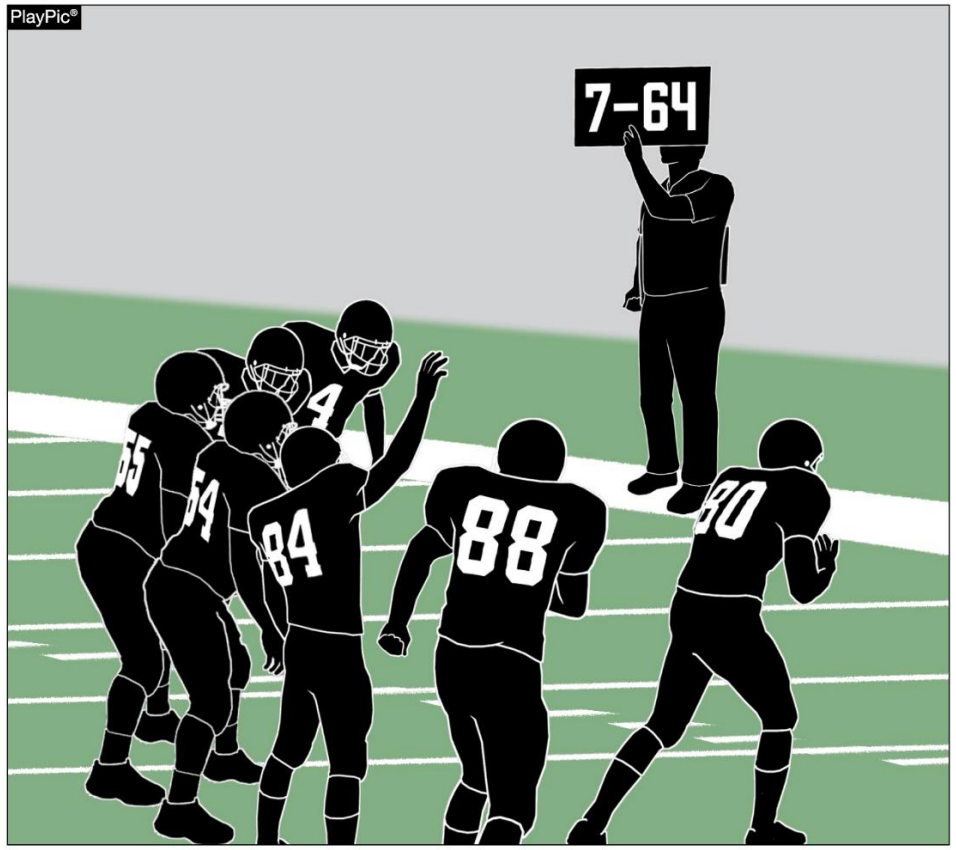


Effective 2027: Arm sleeves, whether attached to a shirt or unattached, manufactured to enhance contact with the football or opponent must meet the SFIA Specification at the time of manufacture.

ARM SLEEVES
RULES 1-5-2d, 1-5-3c(6)

Effective 2027: Arm sleeves must have a permanent, exact replica of the SFIA arm sleeve seal (meets SFIA Specification), that must be visible and appear legibly on the exterior of the arm sleeve.

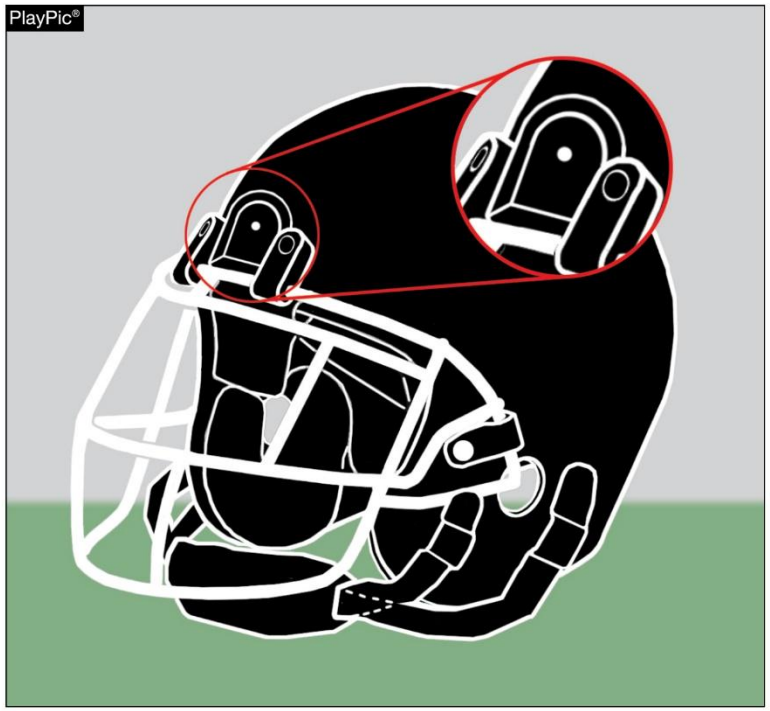
ELECTRONIC SIGNS
RULE 1-5-3c(2)



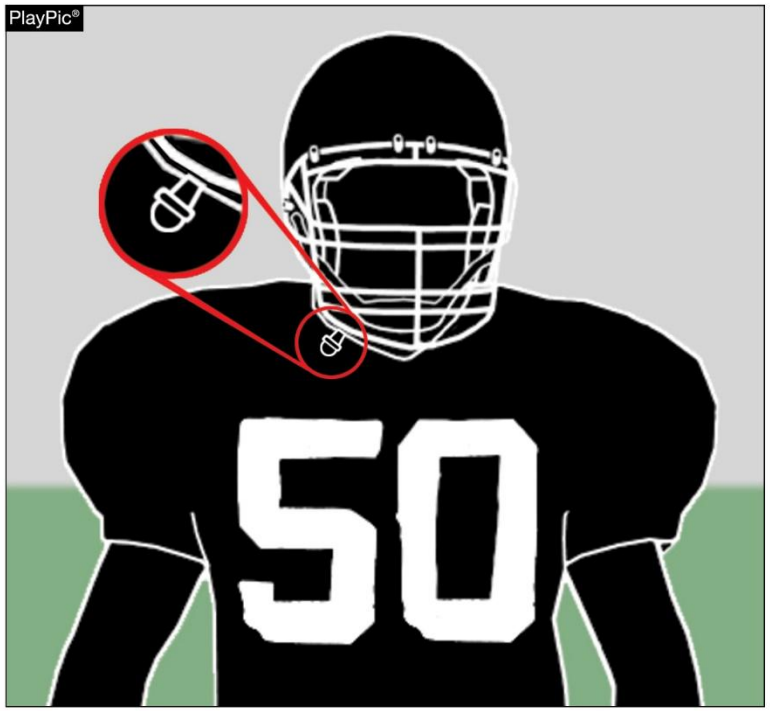
LEGAL

Fixed electronic signs (non-audio) with play signals are allowed to communicate from the sideline.

ILLEGAL EQUIPMENT
RULE 1-5-3c(3) (NEW)



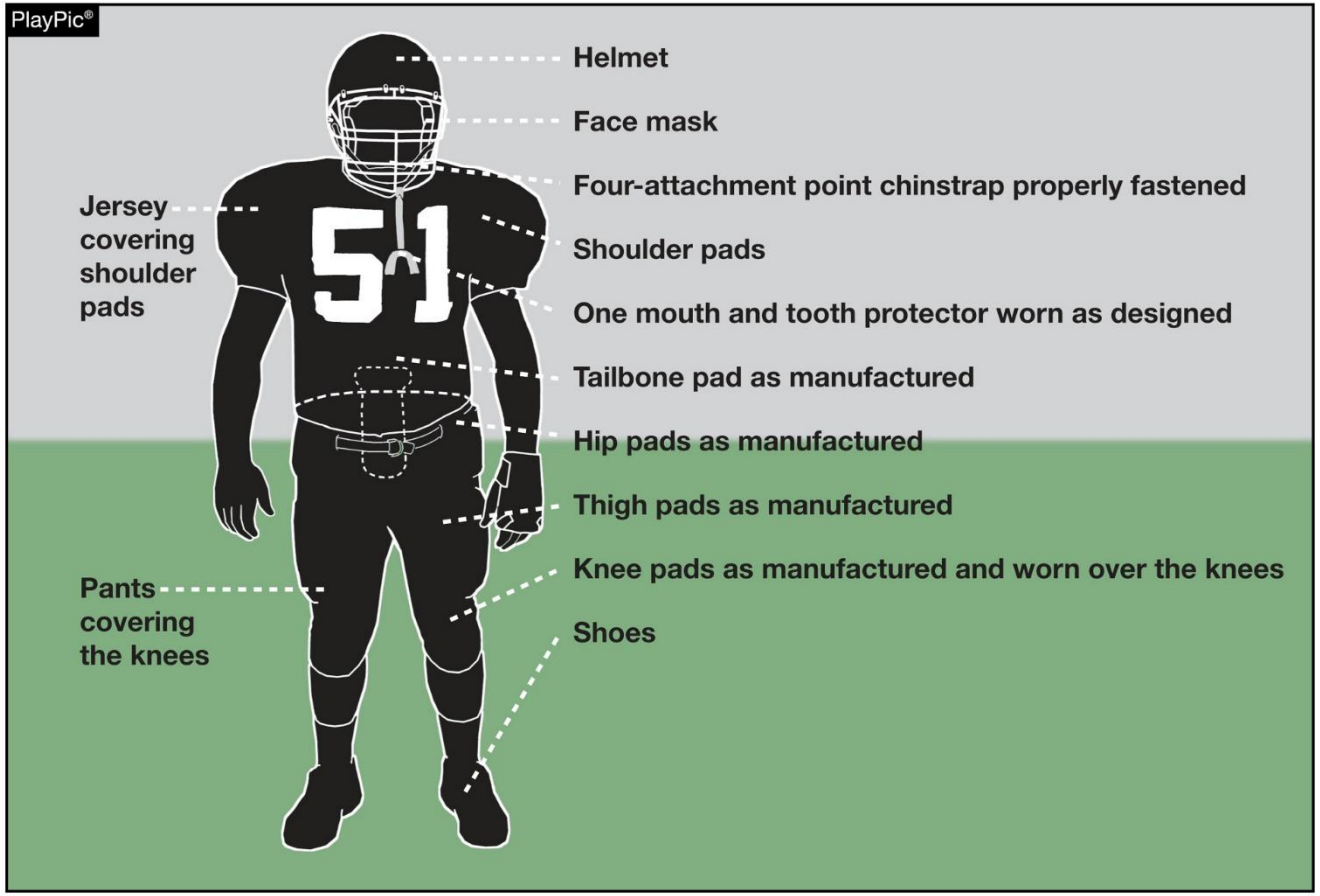
ILLEGAL



ILLEGAL

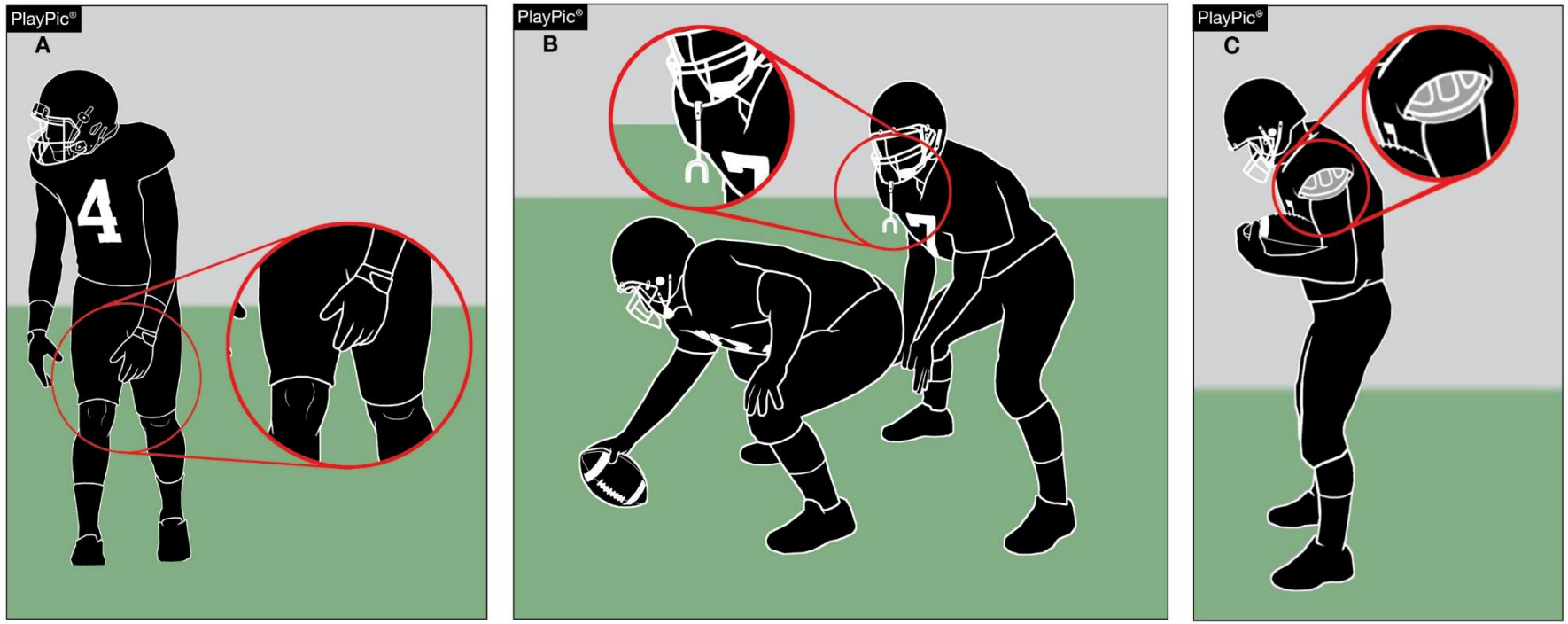
Any video (camera) device or audio (microphone) worn by a player during the game is illegal.

ILLEGAL AND IMPROPERLY WORN PLAYER EQUIPMENT



To support the safety of all participants, players must wear equipment and uniforms that are properly fitted and worn as intended by the manufacturer. Before starting each game, the head coach must verify that all players are properly and legally equipped. Allowing players to use illegal equipment or to wear required equipment improperly could subject the coach to a penalty.

ILLEGAL AND IMPROPERLY WORN PLAYER EQUIPMENT



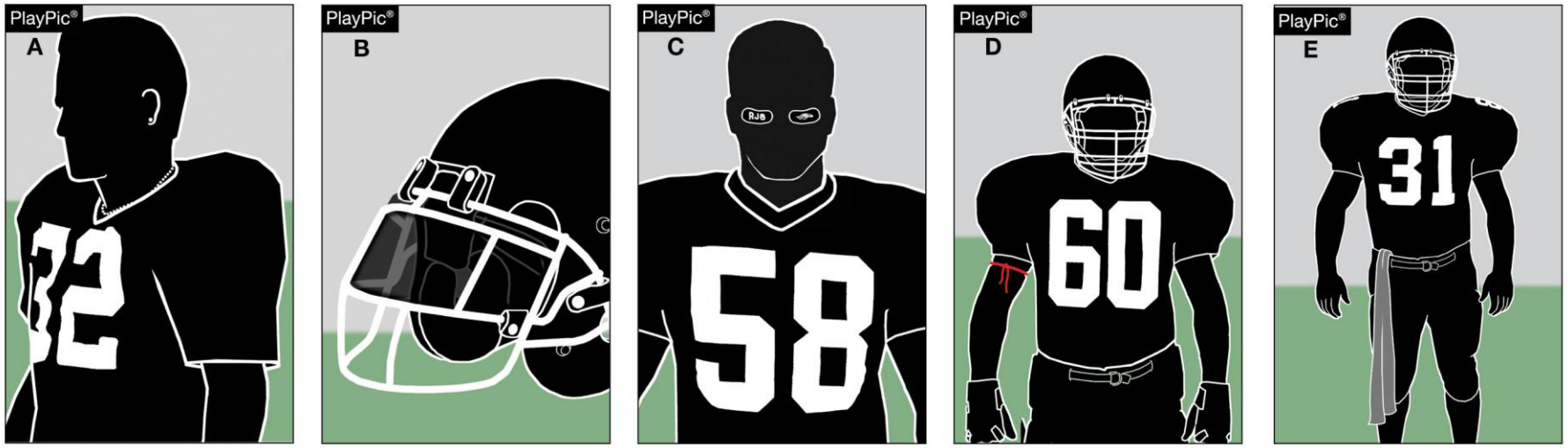
Improperly worn equipment pertains to all equipment that is otherwise legal but not worn as intended. Examples include pants not covering the knees, tooth and mouth protectors not being worn as play starts and shoulder pads not properly covered by the jersey.

NJSIAA Guidance for IMPROPERLY WORN PLAYER EQUIPMENT

- When players are found to have required equipment missing or worn improperly, per Rule 1-5-4, players shall be replaced for at least one down
- **HOWEVER**, when players *persistently* disregard the equipment guidelines, there are several administrative options within current NFHS rules

Situation	Penalty	Example
• Persistent violations that significantly impact the pace of play	• Delay of Game	• Sending 2 or more players from the same team off on the same down • Sending players off from the same team multiple times during a possession
• Chronic violations of equipment rules by players could result in an unsportsmanlike conduct foul being assessed under Rule 1-5-3c(10) and 9-8-1h, for equipment not worn as intended by the manufacturer.	• USC (under Rule 1-5-3c(10) and 9-8-1h) charged to the offending Player	• When a player is in violation more than 3 times
• Coach who demonstrates a lack of interest in supporting these important rules of our sport	• USC charged to the Head Coach	• When the game is stopped 4 or more times for players who are in violation during a game

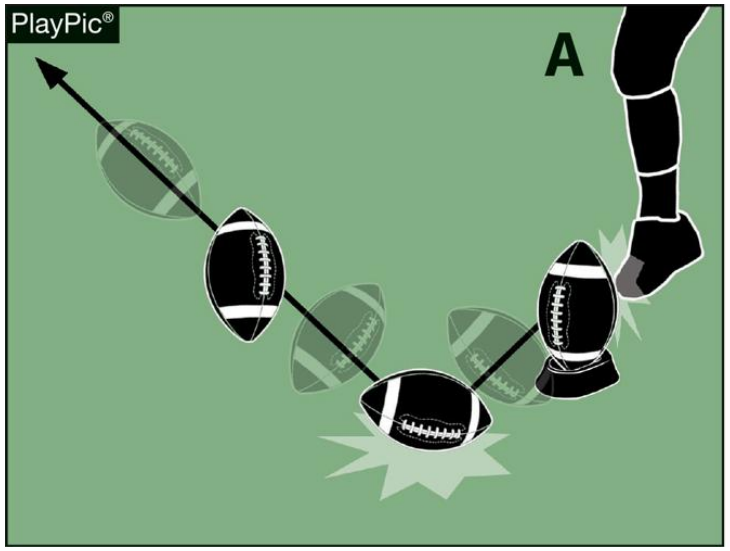
ILLEGAL AND IMPROPERLY WORN PLAYER EQUIPMENT

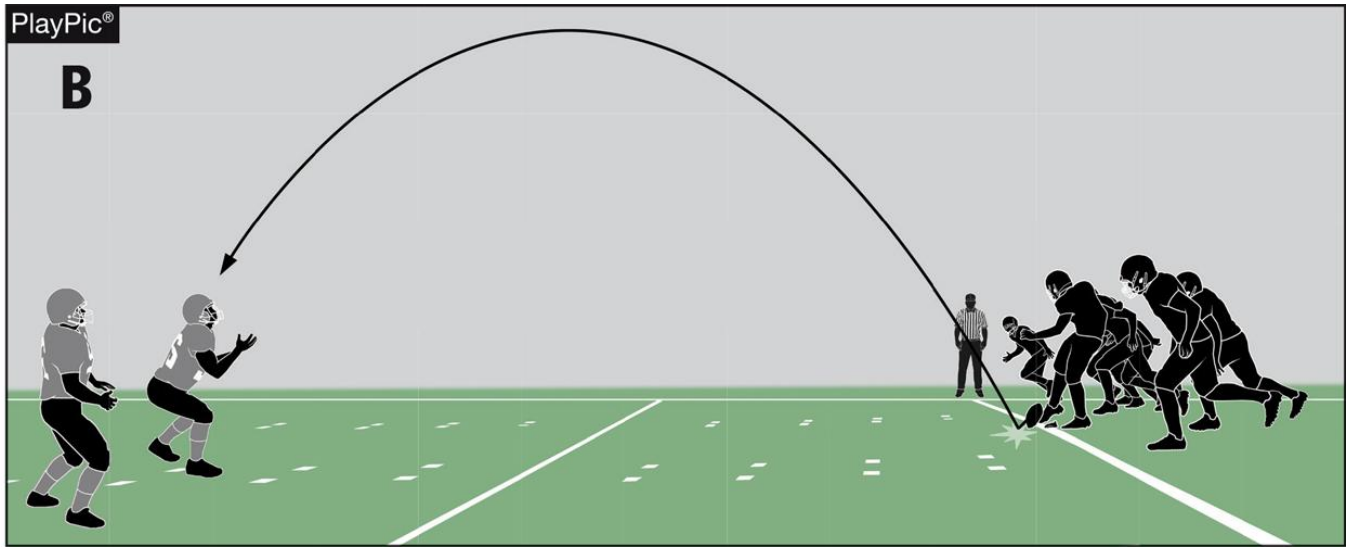


Illegal (prohibited) equipment includes jewelry (A), tinted visors (B), non-compliant eye shade (C), bands worn around the upper arm, neck or legs (D), and uniform adornments like towels that do not conform to rules (E).

POP-UP KICK
RULES 2-24-10; 6-1-11; 6-1 PENALTY

- A pop-up kick is a free kick in which the kicker drives the ball immediately to the ground, the ball strikes the ground once and goes into the air in the manner of a ball kicked directly off the tee. Such kicks are penalized as a dead-ball foul.





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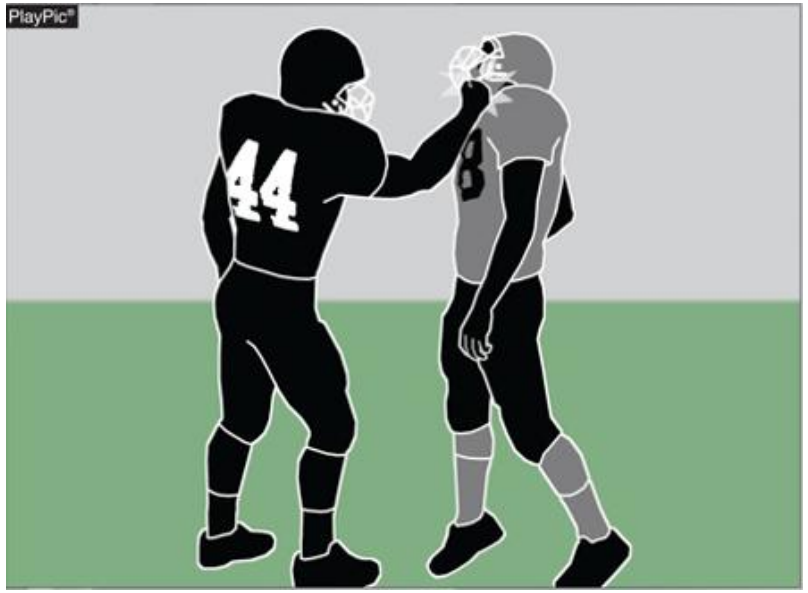
2026 NFHS FOOTBALL POINTS OF EMPHASIS

2026 NFHS FOOTBALL POINTS OF EMPHASIS

1. Flagrant and Unsportsmanlike Fouls
2. Helping the Runner
3. Sideline Management and Control
4. Identification of the NFHS Authenticating Mark on Game Balls

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.
- Game officials must consistently penalize both flagrant and unsportsmanlike fouls to maintain control of the game.



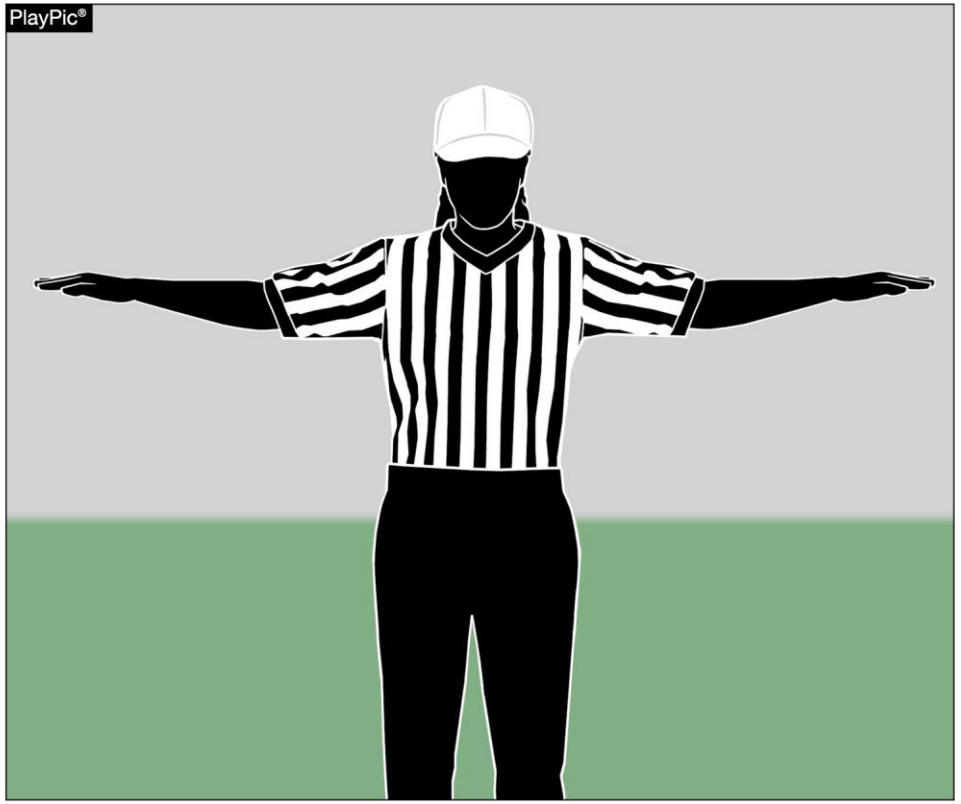
FLAGRANT AND UNSPORTSMANLIKE FOULS

- Flagrant fouls are the most severe type of personal foul in high school football.
- A foul so severe or extreme that it places an opponent in danger of serious injury, and/or involves violations that are extremely or persistently vulgar or abusive conduct.
- These actions involve intentional, reckless or excessively violent behavior that shows a clear disregard for the safety of others. Examples include fighting, maliciously targeting the head or neck area, striking an opponent, or delivering a violent illegal blindside block or late hit.
- Disqualification if any foul is judged by the game official to be flagrant.

PERSONAL FOUL

FLAGRANT AND UNSPORTSMANLIKE FOULS

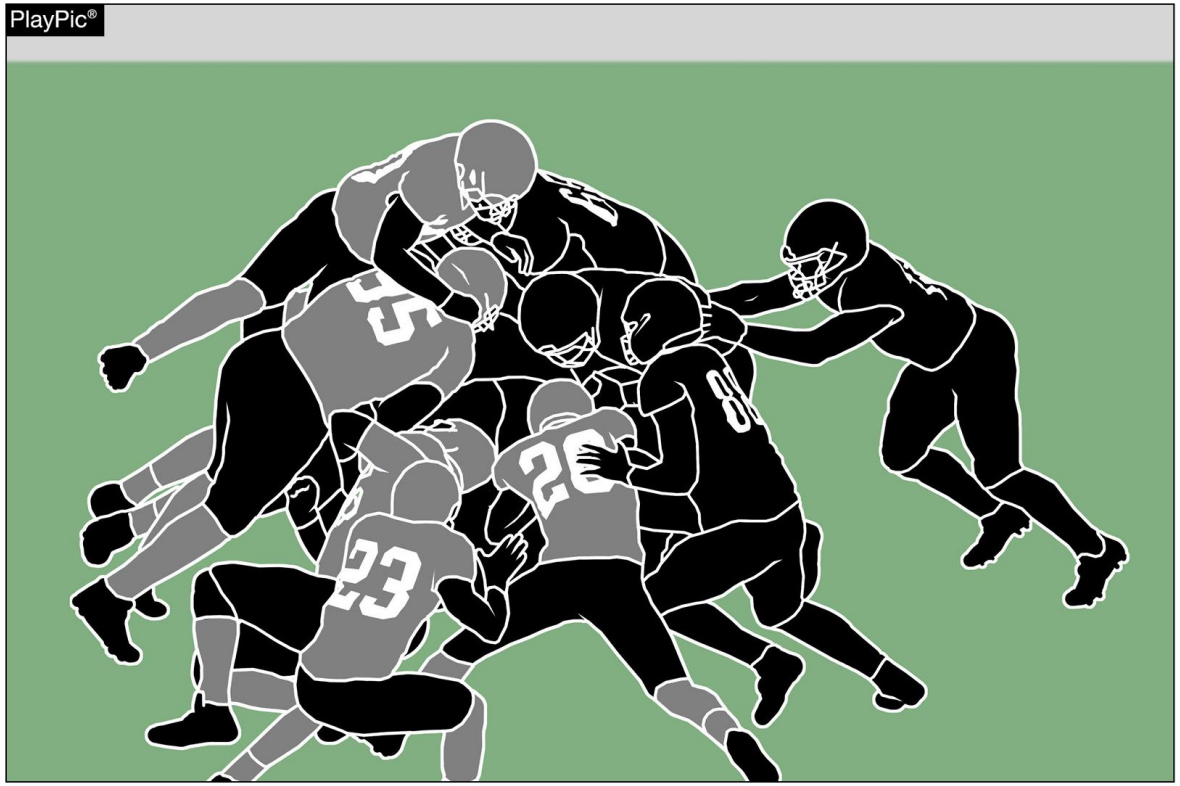
- Unsportsmanlike fouls are non-contact fouls that violate standards of fair play, respect and sportsmanship.
- Common examples include taunting, threatening gestures or posturing, racist comments, trash talking, excessive or choreographed celebrations, aggressively spiking, spinning or throwing the ball high into the air, using profanity, spitting, arguing with game officials, or throwing equipment.



UNSPORTSMANLIKE CONDUCT
NONCONTACT FOUL

HELPING THE RUNNER

- 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 competitive balance toward the offense in a manner not intended by the rules.



HELPING THE RUNNER

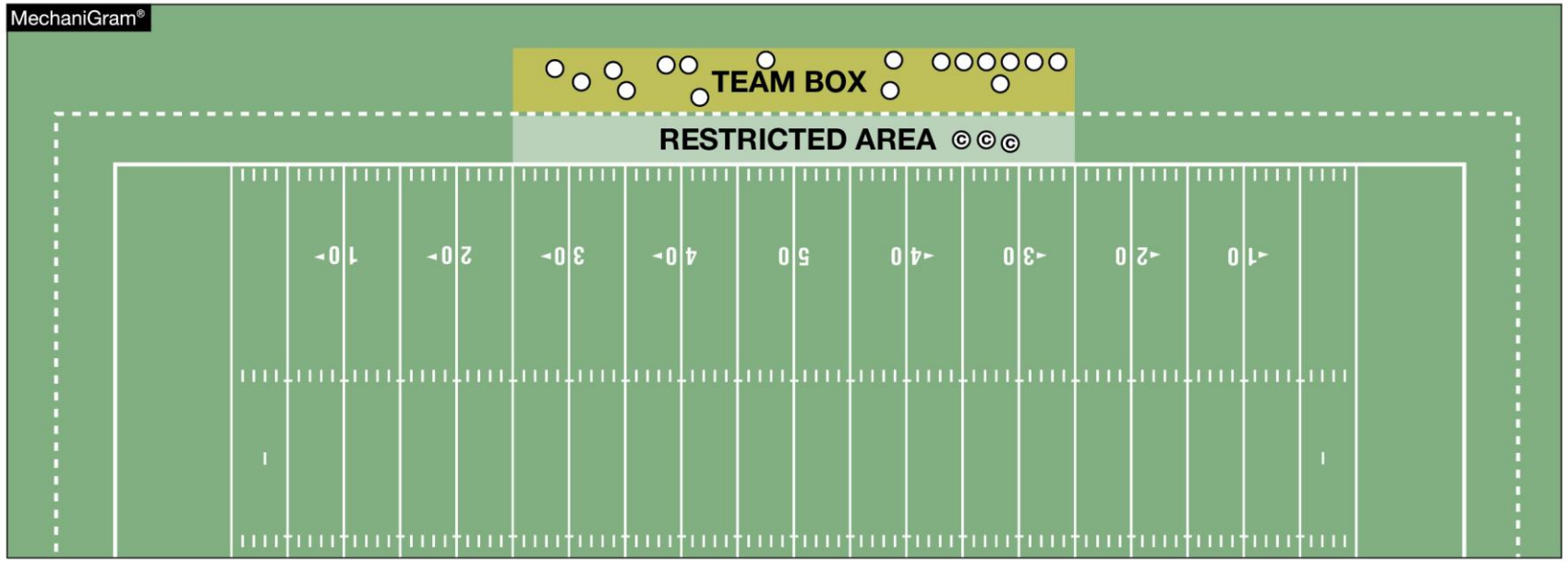
- Although direct contact with the runner is illegal under NFHS rules, these types of plays are becoming more common in the high school game. As guardians of the game, it is imperative that all stakeholders work together to remove “illegally helping the runner” from our high school game.

HELPING THE RUNNER

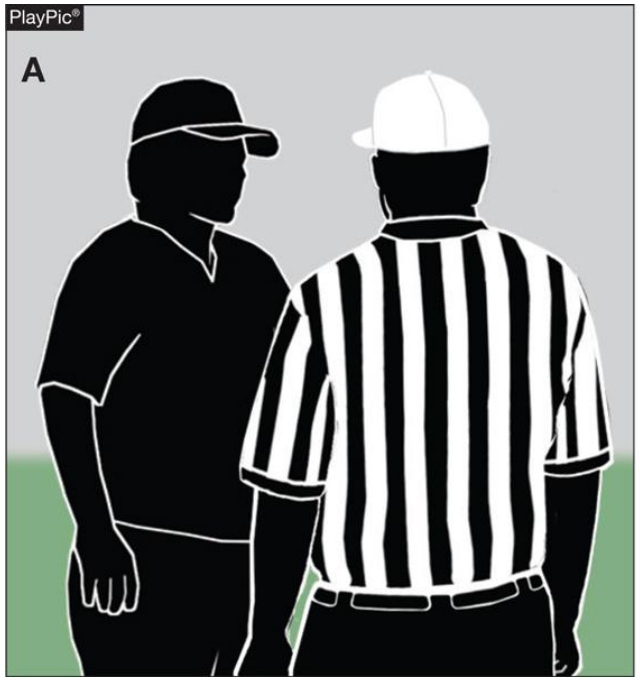
- Although a foul can occur on any play, game officials should especially be alert for this type of action on short-yardage plays near the goal line and line to gain. Remember, pushing the pile is legal; direct contact while pushing, pulling, lifting of the runner to assist forward progress is not.

SIDELINE MANAGEMENT AND CONTROL

- Sideline management has become a recurring “point of emphasis” because it improves game safety. To minimize the risk of all involved, non-players must remain in their team box and out of any restricted areas, especially while the ball is live. The coaches’ area is a minimum of a 2-yard belt between the front of the team box and the sideline, and becomes the restricted area when the ball is live. A maximum of three coaches – and only coaches – may be in this area when the ball is dead between plays.



SIDELINE MANAGEMENT AND CONTROL



- Game officials are instructed to strictly enforce NFHS Football Rules when coaches or team personnel enter the field of play to dispute rulings or address game officials outside the coaching area.

SIDELINE MANAGEMENT AND CONTROL

- Sideline management and control promotes good sportsmanship and professionalism across all levels of play, and also prevents unnecessary delays and confrontations that can impact game flow and fairness.

IDENTIFICATION OF 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.

NFHS Authenticating Mark Update

Old Logos

Current Logo

Specifications

- Do not use the NFHS Authenticating Mark without prior written approval from the NFHS
- This mark is for use of licensees only.

Minimum size

- **Inflatable Balls** - 2 ½“ in length (Basketball, Football, Soccer, Volleyball, and Water Polo)
- **Non-Inflatable Balls** - 1 ¼" in length (Baseball, Field Hockey, Ice Hockey Puck, Lacrosse, and Softball)
- On a ball or puck, the NFHS mark may be smaller than manufacturer’s logo, but should be placed in proximity to the manufacturer’s name for easy identification. Allow enough space around the mark so it can be easily recognized as distinct and separate.
- Reproduce the mark only from the vector artwork provided on Direct Licensing Hub. Do not copy, scan art electronically or use as a template to redraw the symbol.

Note: If sizing or specifications do not work well in your particular design situation, contactK12 Licensing.

Football

Old Size

Current Size

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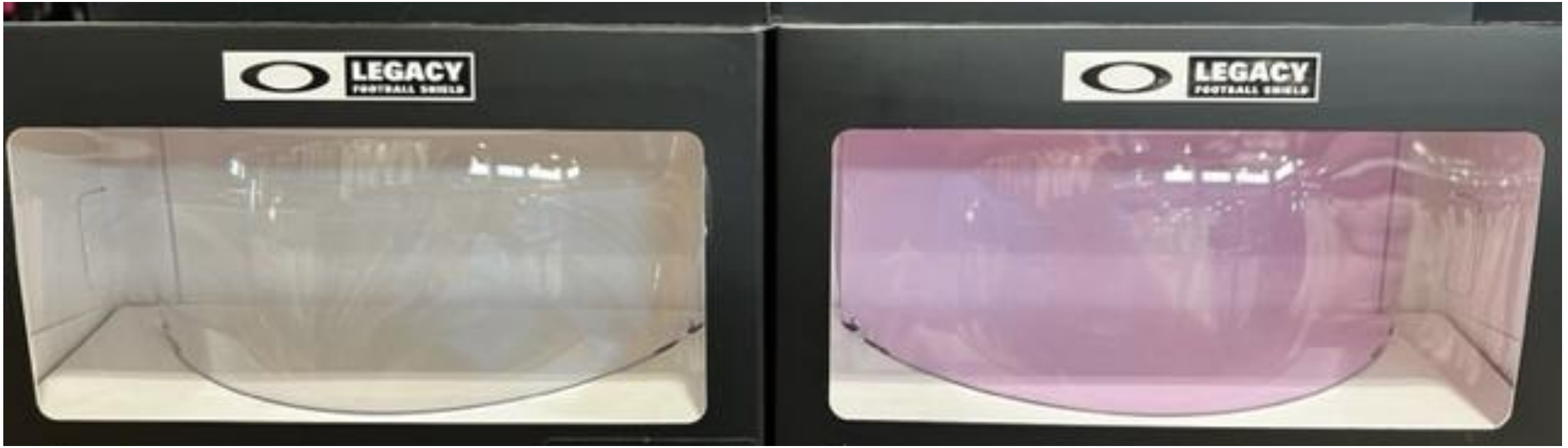
2026 NFHS FOOTBALL RULES REMINDERS and EQUIPMENT ITEMS

OAKLEY FOOTBALL VISOR (PRIZM CLEAR)



LEGAL **ILLEGAL**

FOOTBALL HELMET COVERS

- **Permissible by current NFHS Football Rules**

GUARDIAN CAPS

SAFR PRO TECH

Q-COLLAR

- **Permissible by current NFHS Football Rules**

PATELLAR TENDON STRAPS

- **Patellar tendon straps are permissible by current NFHS Football Rules and is not considered an illegal equipment adornment.**

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2026-27 NFHS FOOTBALL INFORMATION

2027 NFHS FOOTBALL RULE CHANGE PROPOSAL ONLINE FORM

Due to me:

October 15, 2026

Must be submitted to your state association office for approval.

Thank You

National Federation of State High School Associations

NFHS.org Phone # 317-972-6900 Email

@NFHS1920 @NFHS_org