

2023
OFFICIAL PLAYING RULES
OF THE
NATIONAL FOOTBALL LEAGUE



Roger Goodell, Commissioner

2023 Rules Changes

Rule-Section-Article

5-1-2	Permits the use of zero (“0”) as a jersey numeral for certain positions. Allows kickers and punters to use any jersey numeral between 0-49 and 90-99.
4-6-3; 4-7-4	Makes the adjustment of the play clock following an Instant Replay reversal consistent with other timing rules.
4-8-2	Prevents the offense from benefitting by an extension of the half as a result of their foul.
8-7-4	Makes the penalty for handing the ball forward to an ineligible receiver behind the line of scrimmage a loss of down and five yards.
9-1-1	Makes the penalty for illegal punts, drop kicks, or placekicks a loss of down and five yards.
10-2-4	Puts the ball in play at the receiving team’s 25-yard line if there is a fair catch on a free kick behind the receiving team’s 25-yard line.
12-2-14	Makes the penalty for tripping a personal foul (15 yards).
12-2-6 and 9	Changes the definition of a launch from a player who “leaves both feet” to a player who “leaves one or both feet”.
12-2-8 and 10	Clarifies the Use of the Helmet rule. Removes the “butt, ram or spear” language from Article 8 and incorporates those actions into the revised Impermissible Use of the Helmet article.
15-1-2	Expands the Replay Official’s jurisdiction to allow for automatic review of a turnover on downs after a failed fourth down attempt.

PREFACE

This edition of the Official Playing Rules of the National Football League contains all current rules governing the playing of professional football that are in effect for the 2023 NFL season. Member clubs of the League may amend the rules from time to time, pursuant to the applicable voting procedures of the NFL Constitution and Bylaws.

Any intra-League dispute or call for interpretation in connection with these rules will be decided by the Commissioner of the League, whose ruling will be final.

Because inter-conference games are played throughout the preseason, regular season, and postseason in the NFL, all rules contained in this book apply uniformly to both the American and National Football Conferences.

Where the word “illegal” appears in this rule book, it is an institutional term of art pertaining strictly to actions that violate NFL playing rules. It is not meant to connote illegality under any public law or the rules or regulations of any other organization.

The word “flagrant,” when used here to describe an action by a player, is meant to indicate that the degree of a violation of the rules—usually a personal foul or unnecessary roughness—is extremely objectionable, conspicuous, unnecessary, avoidable, or gratuitous. “Flagrant” in these rules does not necessarily imply malice on the part of the fouling player or an intention to injure an opponent.

NON-REVIEWABLE PLAYS INVOLVING PENALTIES

A.R. 15.249 Offensive holding

First-and-10 on A30. A2 takes a handoff and runs to the B47 where he is tackled. A7 is called for holding B9 at the A32. Replays show that B9 tripped and was not held.

Ruling: Not reviewable. A's ball first-and-18 on A22.

A.R. 15.250 12 men in offensive huddle

Third-and-1 on B43. Team A has 12 men in the huddle and then A8 runs off the field before the snap. A2 takes a handoff and runs to the B38.

Ruling: Not reviewable. A's ball first-and-10 on B38. Replay cannot review how many players were in the offensive huddle if officials do not rule a dead ball foul for too many players.

A.R. 15.251 Intentional grounding, pass ruled short of line of scrimmage

Third-and-10 on A8. QBA1 rolls out of the pocket to avoid a sack and throws the ball from the end zone to the A10 with no eligible receivers in the area. The Line Judge rules that the ball did not make it back to the line of scrimmage and the Referee throws his flag for intentional grounding.

Ruling: Not reviewable. Safety, SK A20.

A.R. 15.252 Ineligible players downfield

First-and-10 on B20. Back A1 catches a screen pass and runs for a touchdown. Replays show Guard A2 moving downfield at the B15-yard line before the pass.

Ruling: Not reviewable. Touchdown stands.

A.R. 15.253 Palpably unfair act

Third-and-5 on B17. B1 intercepts a pass and is returning it down the sideline. B12 comes off the bench and makes a block that allows B1 to run for a score.

Ruling: Not reviewable. A palpably unfair act is not a reviewable infraction. Whether a player was on the field at the snap is reviewable and can create or remove a foul for illegal substitution.

MISCELLANEOUS SITUATIONS

INITIATING REPLAY REVIEW

A.R. 15.254 Play ruled score

First-and-10 on B12. With 4:02 remaining in the second quarter, QBA1's pass to A80 is ruled complete in the end zone for a TD. Replays show the ball hit the ground before A80 possessed it.

Ruling: Reviewable. Incomplete pass, A's ball second-and-10 on B12. Reset the clock to the time when the ball hit the ground. Only the Replay Official can initiate a review of this play since the ruling on the field resulted in a score.

A.R. 15.255 Play ruled turnover

First-and-10 on A30. With 10:00 remaining in the second quarter, QBA1's pass is ruled intercepted by B3 at the A45. Replays show the ball hit the ground before B3 possessed it.

Ruling: Reviewable. Incomplete pass, A's ball second-and-10 on A30. Reset the game clock to the time when the ball hit the ground. Only the Replay Official can initiate a review of this play since the ruling on the field resulted in an interception.

A.R. 15.256 Multiple aspects to review

First-and-10 on A30. With 10:00 remaining in the second quarter, back A2 fumbles at the A45 and it is returned by B4 to the A5. Replays show that after recovering the fumble, B4 was down by contact at the A45.

Ruling: Reviewable. B's ball first-and-10 on A45, reset the clock to the time when B4 was down by contact. The ruling on the field was a fumble recovered by the defense. Although that is not in question, only the Replay Official can initiate a review of this play. Once the review is initiated, replay will look at all reviewable aspects of the play.

A.R. 15.257 Play not ruled score

Third-and-goal on B4. In the third quarter, back A2 takes a handoff and runs to the goal line where he is hit and driven backward. The officials spot the ball short of the goal line and make it fourth down. Replays show the ball broke the plane of the goal line.

Ruling: Reviewable. Touchdown, KO A35, reset the clock to the time of the touchdown. Since the ruling on the field did not result in points for either team, the Team A coach must challenge the ruling outside two minutes of either half.

A.R. 15.258 Foul negates score

Fourth-and-goal on B8. With 3:43 remaining in the fourth quarter, QBA1's pass to A8 is ruled complete in the end zone, but A7 is penalized for offensive holding. Replays show that the ball hit the ground before A8 possessed it.

Ruling: Reviewable. Incomplete pass, B's ball first-and-10 on B8, decline holding foul. Only the Replay Official can initiate a review of this play since the ruling on the field was a touchdown nullified by a penalty.

A.R. 15.259 Play not ruled turnover

Fourth-and-10 on A30. With 10:00 remaining in the second quarter, Team A's punt grazes the left leg of B19 and is then recovered by A44 at the B30. The officials rule that B19 did not touch the ball and award possession to B.

Ruling: Reviewable. A's ball first-and-10 on B30. The ruling on the field was that the scrimmage kick was not touched by B, so the Team A coach must challenge outside two minutes.

A.R. 15.260 Line to gain on fourth down

Fourth-and-2 on B41. With 3:43 remaining in the fourth quarter, back A2 takes a handoff and runs to the B39 where he is hit and driven backward. The officials spot the ball at the B39½ and award possession to Team B.

Ruling: Reviewable. A's ball first-and-10 on B39, and wind on the ready. Only the Replay Official can initiate a review of this play because the on-field ruling was a turnover on downs.

A.R. 15.261 Onside kick

With 2:40 remaining in the fourth quarter, Team A attempts an onside kick from the A35. A19 is the first to touch the ball at the A44 and then recovers it at the A46. The officials award possession to Team A.

Ruling: Reviewable. B's ball first-and-10 on A44. ITK. Team B's coach must challenge this play outside two minutes of either half. The Replay Official is not responsible for initiating a review during a free kick before the two-minute warning, but is responsible for challenging the play if there is a turnover or score during a subsequent run.

TIMING OF CHALLENGE**A.R. 15.262 Double Challenge**

Second-and-10 on B35. With 12:00 remaining in the fourth quarter, QBA1 rolls out and throws a pass to A2 at the back of the end zone that is ruled incomplete. Team A challenges that the pass was complete, but replays show that A2 only got one foot down inbounds and the call on the field is upheld. While the Referee is making his announcement, a new replay comes up that shows the QB stepping on the sideline at the B40 before releasing the pass. Team B challenges the play.

Ruling: Reviewable. Both teams can challenge the same play. A's ball third-and-15 on the B40, reset the clock to the time when the QB stepped out of bounds, and start on the snap. A team cannot challenge the same play twice. It is important that all reviewable aspects of a play are confirmed by replay regardless of what is being challenged. Team A is charged with a challenge and a timeout.

A.R. 15.263 Next legal snap

First-and-10 on A20. In the third quarter, A2 catches a pass at the A45. Before the next snap, Tackle A5 false starts. Replays show that the ball hit the ground before A2 caught it.

Ruling: Reviewable. Play can be reviewed up until the next legal snap. Incomplete pass, A's ball second-and 10 on A20, reset the clock to the time the ball hit the ground, and the penalty for false start is ignored. Only Team B can challenge the ruling in this situation since it did not commit the foul that prevented the next snap.

A.R. 15.264 Try

First-and-10 on B15. At the start of the play there is 2:02 remaining in the second quarter. A2 catches a pass in the end zone that is ruled a TD with 1:53 left on the clock. Team A then attempts a two-point conversion and QBA1 is ruled down short of the goal line. Replays show that the ball broke the plane before he was down.

Ruling: Reviewable, two-point conversion is good, KO A35. Only the Replay Official can initiate a review of a Try, whether successful or unsuccessful.

A.R. 15.265 Double foul that prevents the snap

First-and-10 on B30. A pass to A2 is ruled incomplete near the goal line. Before the next legal snap, A5 commits a false start and B1 commits a personal foul when he forcibly shoves A5 to the ground. Replays show that A2 caught the pass.

Ruling: The ruling of incomplete pass is not reviewable. A's ball, first-and-10 on B15. Although Team A's foul is disregarded as part of the 5-15 penalty enforcement, both teams committed a foul that prevented a snap, so neither team can challenge the previous play.

PENALTY ENFORCEMENT AFTER REVERSAL**A.R. 15.266 UNR/UNS enforcement**

First-and-10 on A30. QBA1 throws a low pass that is ruled intercepted by B2 at the A43-yard line. B2 returns the ball to the A10-yard line where he is tackled by the facemask by A3. Replays show that the ball hit the ground before B2 intercepted it.

Ruling: Reviewable. A's ball second-and-25 on A15, reset the clock to the time when the ball hit the ground. Pass is incomplete but the facemask penalty must be enforced. This applies to any UNR or UNS foul, and it is enforced as a dead ball penalty. Only the Replay Official can initiate a review of this play.

A.R. 15.267 UNR/UNS enforcement with a double foul

First-and-10 on A30. QBA1 throws a low pass that is ruled intercepted by B2 at the A43-yard line. B2 returns the ball to the A10-yard line. During the return, B4 blocked A5 low at the A23-yard line. Replays show that the ball hit the ground before B2 intercepted it. Team A was in an illegal formation at the snap.

Ruling: Reviewable. A's ball, first-and-10 on A45. Pass is incomplete, reset the clock to the time when the ball hit the ground and the low block must be enforced. It combines with the live ball illegal formation to create a 5-15 enforcement. Only the Replay Official can initiate a review of this play.

A.R. 15.268 Penalty not enforced after reversal

First-and-10 on A30. QBA1 throws a low pass that is ruled intercepted by B2 at the A43-yard line. B2 returns the ball to the A10-yard line and during his return B5 is called for an illegal block above the waist. Replays show that the ball hit the ground before B2 intercepted it.

Ruling: Reviewable. A's ball second-and-10 on A30, reset the clock to the time when the ball hit the ground. Only UNR/UNS fouls are enforced in this situation. Only the Replay Official can initiate a review of this play.

REPLAY SYSTEM

A.R. 15.269 Loss of communication

Second-and-10 on B30 with one minute remaining in the second quarter. QBA1 throws a pass to A3 at the B15 near the sideline and the pass is ruled incomplete. Replays show that the receiver had two feet in bounds with possession of the ball. The Replay Official initiates a review and as the Referee is coming over to the monitor, officials at the stadium lose communications with the League office.

Ruling: A's ball first-and-10 on B15. The Referee is to stay at the monitor for one minute while communications are being repaired. If communications are not restored in one minute, then the Referee will conduct the review with the Replay Official. If communications are repaired within the one-minute time frame, then the League office will review the play as customary.