

2018 NFL Rules Changes

The NFL is committed to protecting its players from unnecessary risk, while keeping the game fair, competitive and exciting.

The [NFL Competition Committee](#) receives and considers input from coaches, general managers, owners, current players and NFL Legends, the NFL Players Association, medical personnel and the media, and conducts hours of discussion and film study before recommending changes to any rule.

During this process, the Committee asks several questions about each potential rule change:

- Does the change improve the game?
- How will it be officiated?
- How will it be coached?
- How can the player play by the rule?

Learn more about the [NFL Competition Committee](#).

There was a particular emphasis placed on player protection, which resulted in rules changes and points of emphasis to reduce risk and prevent injury.

The league reviews changes with players, coaches and officials during training camp and the NFL Officiating Clinic to help everyone adapt to the rules changes and points of emphasis. The Officiating Department also provides training videos for players and coaches with specific examples.

2018 NFL Rules Changes

Use of Helmet

The most significant change for 2018 is the new Use of Helmet rule. The rule states that it is a foul if a player lowers his head to initiate and make contact with his helmet against an opponent. This rule pertains to all players on the field, and to all areas of the field.

Visit the searchable [2018 NFL Rulebook](#).

The officiating standards for the Use of Helmet rule are:

- Lowering the head (not to include bracing for contact)

- Initiating contact with the helmet to any part of an opponent. Contact does not have to be to an opponent's head or neck area — lowering the head and initiating contact to an opponent's torso, hips, and lower body, is also a foul.
- Making contact on an opponent (both offense and defense)

Players can be ejected for use of helmet fouls — and all ejections will be reviewed by senior officials in Art McNally GameDay Central in New York. The standards for ejection are, if:

- The player lowers his helmet to establish a linear body posture prior to initiating and making contact with the helmet;
- The player delivering the blow had an unobstructed path to his opponent; and if
 - The contact was clearly avoidable

Kickoff Rules

Owners voted to change the kickoff rules for the 2018 season. The Committee will reevaluate the effects of the changes in the offseason.

New kickoff rules for the 2018 NFL season.

Beginning this season:

- The kickoff team must have five players on each side of the ball and cannot line up more than one-yard from the restraining line. For example, the kicking team will line up at the 34-yard line for a kickoff from the 35-yard line.
- At least two players must be lined up outside the yard-line number and two players between the inbounds lines (hash marks) and the yard-line number.
- At least eight players of the receiving team must be lined up in the 15-yard “setup zone” prior to kickoff; only three receiving-team players can remain outside of the setup zone.
- No wedge blocks are permitted. A wedge block is defined as “two or more players intentionally aligning shoulder-to-shoulder within two yards of each other, and who move forward together in an attempt to block for the runner.” Players initially lined up in the setup zone may still double-team a block if it is not a wedge block.
- Until the ball is touched or hits the ground, no player on either the receiving or kicking team may block within the 15-yard area from the kicking team's restraining line. On an onside kick, the kicking team may not block in the first 10 yards.
- The ball is dead if it is not touched by the receiving team and touches the ground in the end zone (touchback).

Visit the NFL rulebook to see the official language for the 2018 kickoff rules.

Catch Rule

Owners voted to simplify the standards of a catch. There are now three main requirements for completing a catch. The player must:



Owners voted to simplify the standards of a catch.

- Have control of the ball
- Get two feet or another body part down
- Make a football move, such as a third step, reaching or extending for the line-to-gain, or having the ability to perform such an act

A player no longer must control the ball through the ground for a completed catch, and movement of the ball does not automatically result in loss of control. If a player loses control of the ball, it is an incomplete pass if the ball hits the ground before he regains control, or if he regains control out of bounds.

A receiver is considered defenseless throughout the entire process of a catch, up until the player is capable of avoiding or warding off impending contact.

Illegal Batting and Kicking the Ball

It is an illegal bat if:

- Any player bats or punches a loose ball in the field of play toward his opponent's goal line
- Any player bats or punches a loose ball (that has touched the ground) in any direction, if it is in either end zone
- An offensive player bats a backward pass in flight toward his opponent's goal line.

A forward pass in flight may be tipped, batted, or deflected in any direction by any eligible player at any time. No player may deliberately kick a loose ball or a ball that is in a player's possession.

Other rules changes for 2018 include:

- The spot of the next snap following a touchback on a free kick to the 25-yard line was made permanent.
- A designated member of the Officiating Department may instruct on-field game officials to disqualify a player for a flagrant non-football act when that foul is called on the field.
- The team that scores a winning touchdown at the end of regulation is no longer required to kick the extra point or go for a two-point conversion.
- In overtime, if the team that possesses the ball first scores a field goal on its initial possession and the second team loses possession by an interception or fumble, the down will be permitted to run to its conclusion, including awarding points scored by either team during the down.

2018 NFL Points of Emphasis

Sportsmanship



The Competition Committee continues to emphasize the importance of sportsmanship.

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ILLEGAL CONTACT AND OTHER ACTS DOWNFIELD

Illegal Contact will be more strictly enforced this season. The rule states that beyond five yards “a defender cannot initiate contact with a receiver who is attempting to evade him,” and that “a defender may use his hands or arms only to defend or protect himself against impending contact by a receiver.” Otherwise, only incidental contact is permitted.

Both offensive and defensive pass interference will also be strictly enforced, including:

- Contact that restricts the opponent’s opportunity to make the catch;
- Playing through the back of an opponent;
- Grabbing an opponent’s arm;
- Extending an arm across the body of an opponent;
- Cutting off the path of an opponent by making contact;
- Hooking an opponent;

- Shoving or pushing off to create separation.

Protection of Runners Who Give Themselves Up

The Committee clarified the protections for sliding quarterbacks and any runner who gives himself up:



Explore the [NFL Video Rulebook](#).

- If a runner (including a quarterback) gives himself up, then he is down where the first body part touches the ground. The runner should not benefit from additional yardage after the first body part touches. Defenders do not have to go down to initiate contact to stop a runner from gaining more yards after he contacts the ground.
- Quarterbacks and all runners must give themselves up early, and if a defender has committed to a tackle, contact may occur. However, that contact cannot be late or to the head or neck area of the player who gave himself up.
- A quarterback does not have to slide feet first to be considered to be giving himself up. Regardless whether the slide is feet first or head first, as long as he gives himself up, he should receive the protections afforded to him as a player in a defenseless posture.

PROTECTION OF QUARTERBACKS

The Committee reviewed hits on quarterbacks inside and outside the pocket. In some instances, the defender used all or part of his body weight to land on the quarterback immediately after the ball was thrown. These actions put the quarterback at risk for injury. The Officiating Department will emphasize that the defender is responsible for avoiding landing on the quarterback when taking him to the ground.

PROTECTION OF THE SNAPPER ON PAT/FIELD GOAL



The Officiating Department will emphasize that fouls are will be called when defenders initiate contact to the head or neck area of the snapper.

While there is no rule change, the Officiating Department will emphasize in 2018 that fouls are will be called when defenders initiate contact to the head or neck area of the snapper.

GUNNERS GOING OUT OF BOUNDS

On punt plays, officials will strictly enforce that gunners must demonstrate an immediate effort to take an angle to return inbounds once they are in the white border. Gunners running in the white border often put players, coaches and sideline personnel at risk. If a gunner does not show that he is immediately taking an angle to return inbounds, a foul will be called.

USE OF OFFICIALS' WHISTLE

Officials will immediately blow the whistle when the play is over or when a runner's forward progress has been stopped. Players should attempt to avoid any contact after the whistle is blown. Unnecessary and forcible contact to an opponent after the whistle has been blown will result in an unnecessary roughness penalty.