



**Montana Officials Association**  
**MHSA 1 South Dakota Avenue**  
**Helena, MT 59601 406-442-6010**

August 2025

**TO: FOOTBALL OFFICIALS REGISTERED WITH THE MONTANA OFFICIALS' ASSOCIATION**

**FROM: SCOTT WILSON, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR**

**RE: FOOTBALL STUDY CLUBS**

This packet contains the six study clubs that will help you prepare for the 2025 football officiating season. Our hope is that these study clubs will be a challenging study tool that you will use for your best interest and that of the coaches and players of Montana. **New this year there will be two statewide virtual study clubs facilitated by MHSA Football Rules Interpreter Travis Huntsinger. The first one will be Wednesday August 13. The second statewide study club will be Wednesday, September 24<sup>th</sup>.**

Association regulations mandate that you attend six study clubs. The MOA expects you to complete each of the six lessons enclosed in a timely manner so that you will be on top of every change and all the rules completely. Please start the outlines before the season commences and note that this year's study clubs are emphasizing mechanics applications.

For those of you not located in the city where the pool is located, or those whose employment prevents the officials from attending study clubs please note the following regulation from the MOA Handbook:

"If an MOA member's employment prevents him/her from attending study clubs the official may receive credit for attendance if he/she complies as follows:

1. Makes prior arrangements with the regional director or head of pool.
2. Completes the study club outlines and presents them to the regional director or head of pool **in advance** of the meetings missed.
3. Exceptions may be made for certain military actions or other extenuating circumstances.
4. An official whose employment requires him/her to be away from home during the week may attend study clubs at an alternate pool location if he/she receives permission from the regional director(s) and the MOA Commissioner.

**PLEASE NOTE: Your regional director must sign your individual study clubs in order for you to receive credit. Football study club attendance must be in the hands of the Directors by December 1<sup>st</sup>. Please send your study clubs to your regional director, not to the MOA office.**

As requested by the regional directors, the mechanics examination is Study Club #1, while the NFHS Football Exam Part 2 has been moved to Study Club #3. We will continue to designate study club #2 to be the Football Mechanics training.

Best of luck to each and every one of you as you approach the season, and don't hesitate to contact us with any ideas about improving the scope and format of these study guides.

SW/ab

**MONTANA OFFICIALS' ASSOCIATION  
FOOTBALL STUDY CLUBS  
LESSON #1  
2025-26**

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

CLUB \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

1) Concussion State Law - Officials' Responsibilities:

The MHSA/MOA requires each official to take the "NFHS Concussion In Sports – What You Need To Know" course each year. That course must be taken after June 1st for the subsequent school year and must be completed before officiating scrimmages or contests. Also, officials are asked to use their best judgment in observing the signs, symptoms and behaviors of a concussion and other possible serious injuries. If there is a player that exhibits signs and symptoms of an injury, officials will make coaches aware of the injured player and call an injury time out. The official should notify the coach by making the following statement:

"Coach, you need to take a look at this player; he/she is exhibiting signs and symptoms of an injury."

Once the official notifies the coach, it is now the coach's responsibility. The official does not need written permission for an athlete to return to play nor does the official need to verify the credentials of the appropriate health-care professional. Youth cannot return to play until they are evaluated by a licensed health care professional and receives written clearance to return to play from the licensed health care professional.

2) Review and discuss the 2025 MHSA / MOA Football Rules Clinic on [www.mhsa.org](http://www.mhsa.org). This clinic must be completed individually by each member of the pool by August 28, 2025.

3) Review and discuss the NFHS overtime procedure. In the MHSA Handbook, review and discuss score differential of 35 points timing procedures and differences in Montana rule for class AA vs. the other 4 classifications.

4) MOA Handbook Changes and reminders for 2025-26 are as follows:

**Changes for 2025:**

1. Mileage has increased from 67 cents per mile last year to 70 cents per mile this year. Per diem for each official, is 16 cents per mile. So, the driver, for a regular season match, would receive 86 cents per mile while the rider official would receive 16 cents per mile.
2. A fee increase for regular season varsity and sub varsity contests has been approved. Regular season varsity game fees will increase to \$90 in 25-26. Sub varsity fees will increase from \$65.00 to \$70.00 per contest in 25-26.
3. Jamboree fees are posted on the mhsa.org website.
4. Post season fees: see handbook for fee schedule.

**Reminders from Previous years:**

1. Football officials may wear either the two-inch striped shirt or 2 ¼ inch striped shirt, as long as the entire crew wears matching shirts, and the shirt must be tucked in.
2. Jackets
  - a. Football officials may wear a standard jacket for warm-ups only, solid black pullover, full zip or button up, unadorned (except for MOA service pins).

- b. At the sub-varsity level only, football officials may wear striped jackets with an MOA patch.
3. Officials who coach **are a member of the coaching staff** are prohibited from working a varsity contest or tournament of his/her gender specific sport in the classification he/she coaches.
4. 5-person mechanics with the umpire in the offensive backfield **will not be allowed** for the 2025 season.
5. Mandates the Head Linesman and Line Judge switch sides and responsibilities at halftime for all varsity games at all classifications and optional for sub-varsity.
6. Study clubs can be conducted via real time video conferencing (which includes, but is not limited to: FaceTime, SKYPE, etc.) with the approval of the Regional Director.
7. Payment of Officials – the MOA Board and MHSA Executive Board approved the **following in** regard to the payment of officials and this payment change was instituted this past year (Previously, it was stated that an official must be paid before the contest unless another of the two payment options was agreed upon. Now, it isn't mandatory to pay before the contest however one of the three following methods must be utilized:
  - 1) All assigned officials may be paid within seven (7) business days of the contest with a check issued by the member school.
  - 2) All assigned officials may be paid with Ref Pay via Arbiter assignment software. A member school has (7) seven business days from the date of the contest to issue payment via Dragonfly.
  - 3) All assigned officials may be paid before the contest with a check issued by the member school. MOA officials are not allowed to accept checks written to other member officials. A member school has seven (7) business days from the date of the contest to reissue appropriate checks to the official(s) who actually worked the contest, if there has been an assigned official change.
8. Pink whistles may be used by officials at contests designated as breast cancer awareness events. Any other uniform modifications for the purpose of supporting a charitable fundraising event must be approved in advance by the MOA Commissioner.
9. MOA exams are now offered exclusively online. All are open book exams. The passing percentage for apprentice and certified remain at 60% and 80% respectively, and the passing percentage for master has increased from 70% to 85%. *Note: The deadline for requesting an upgrade has been reduced from twenty (20) days to seven (7) days prior to the opening of the exam.*

### **2025 FOOTBALL RULES CHANGES**

**Committee Clarifies and Restricts Attachments on Tooth and Mouth Protectors Effective with the 2026 Season [1-5-1d(5)a - 4, 5 (NEW)]** – Items that are attached to the tooth and mouth protector that do not serve a purpose and function in protecting the teeth or mouth will not be allowed. Items that are a part of the tooth and mouth protector that are a health or risk issue to the player and can pose a danger to themselves or other players, will not be allowed.

**Arm Sleeve Specifications Developed to Guide Manufacturers, Players and Coaches Effective with the 2027 Season [1-5-2d (NEW), 1-5-3c(6)]** – The Sports and Fitness Industry Association (SFIA), in working with the football arm sleeve manufacturers and the NFHS, has developed new football arm sleeve performance specifications to be effective with the 2027 playing season. These new specifications closely align with the current rules for football gloves.

**Electronic Equipment Approved to Permit Non-Audio and Still Images to Assist with Relaying Plays from the Sideline to Players [1-5-3c(2)]** – This change allows for the use of some additional equipment, but continues to preclude in-helmet communication. This would allow for fixed electronic signs with play signals as well as non-audio methods but still would not permit the players between the numbers to watch video.

**Rules Additions Further Prohibit the Use of Video and Audio Devices by Players [1-5-3c(3) (NEW)]** – No player participating in the game will be allowed to wear any type of audio or video device in order to record or transmit audio or video.

**Forward Fumbles Out of Bounds to be Returned to the Spot of the Fumble [3-4-2d (NEW), 3-4-3a, 4-3-1 EXCEPTION (NEW), 8-5-2a EXCEPTION]** – A situation potentially giving an unfair advantage to a fumbling team was revised. When a forward fumble goes out of bounds or is ruled out of bounds between the goal lines, the ball shall be returned to the spot of the fumble.

**Further Clarifications Made to Rule 10-4 in Specific Situations [9-6 PENALTY, 10-4-4b (DELETED)]**  
– The committee continues its revisions and clarifications within the penalty enforcement rules to ensure consistency, particularly among illegal participation fouls.

**Rules for 6-Player Football Revised to Permit Advancement of a Fumbled Snap (Six-Player – Rule 2 and 7,**

**Six-Player – Rule 7)** – The committee clarified that as long as there is a change of possession from the snap receiver to another player on offense, the ball can be advanced beyond the line of scrimmage.

#### **2025 EDITORIAL CHANGES**

1-5-1b(2)b(1); 1-5-1b(3)b(1); 2-32-16d; 2-33-1a, 2; 2-41-9b; 2-41-9c; 6-1-9; 7-2-5b EXCEPTION 2; 9-4-3p (NEW); 9-4 PENALTY; 9-5-1g; 9-8-1g; 9-8-1j; 10-3-1, 2; 10-3-3c; 10-4-2b; 10-4-2d; 10-4-4a; 10-5-3; NINE-, EIGHT-, AND SIX-PLAYER RULES DIFFERENCES; PENALTY SUMMARY, INDEX.

#### **2025 POINTS OF EMPHASIS**

- 1. Illegal and Improperly Worn Player Equipment**
- 2. Sportsmanship**
- 3. Defenseless Player / Targeting**

#### **ILLEGAL AND IMPROPERLY WORN PLAYER EQUIPMENT**

In high school football, players must adhere to specific equipment standards for safety and fairness concerns. Illegal equipment refers to items that are prohibited such as: jewelry; tinted visors; non-compliant eye shade; bands worn around the upper arm, neck or legs; back pads not covered; and sweatbands and uniform adornments, including towels, that do not conform to the rules.

On the other hand, improperly worn equipment pertains to all equipment that is otherwise legal but not worn as intended. Examples include pants not covering the knees as required, tooth and mouth protectors not being worn as play starts, and shoulder pads not properly covered by the jersey. Incorrectly wearing these items can diminish their protective effectiveness and potentially endanger players.

Despite the lack of enforcement at the college level, the NFHS is proud of the work high school players, coaches, and game officials have done to properly enforce all rules that reduce the risk of injury. The rules and regulations governing high school football are designed to reduce the injury risk of players while maintaining the integrity and fairness of the game. These rules, often overlooked by casual spectators, play a crucial role in protecting the athletes and preserving the uniformity of team's appearance. Despite the negative influences by levels of play beyond high school, coaches and game officials must remain vigilant with enforcement of the equipment rules currently in place at the high school level.

Non-compliance with these rules can result in various penalties, ranging from removal of a player for one play for improperly worn equipment, to an unsportsmanlike penalty on the head coach when players are illegally equipped following the pre-game certification.

Chronic violations of the rule for properly worn equipment can significantly impact the game's fairness and safety. Repeated offenses not only jeopardize the individual player's well-being but also negatively impact the pace of the game, and fairness to the opposing team. When players persistently disregard the equipment guidelines, there are several administrative options within current NFHS rules:

- **A delay-of-game penalty would be a logical consequence for persistent offenses that significantly impact the pace of play.**

- **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.**
- **Finally, a coach who demonstrates a lack of interest in supporting these important rules of our sport could be easily judged to be acting in an unsportsmanlike manner.**

Coaches play a pivotal role in addressing chronic violations of equipment rules. They must instill the importance of proper equipment use through consistent reinforcement and education. Additionally, fostering an environment where players hold each other accountable can help minimize infractions. Game officials must also remain vigilant and enforce penalties consistently to deter chronic violations. Issuing temporary removals from the game and escalating penalties for repeated offenses are necessary measures to uphold the integrity of the game.

The high school football player equipment rules are a testament to the sport's commitment to player safety and team unity. This unity extends beyond aesthetics; it reinforces the idea that each player is part of a larger whole, working together toward a common goal. A team's integrity is maintained when no player stands out for the wrong reason. While it may seem like a minor detail, these regulations play a significant role in reducing injury and maintaining the integrity of the game.

### **SPORTSMANSHIP**

Unsportsmanlike conduct is incompatible with the values of education-based athletics. As unsporting acts increase at the college and professional levels, all stakeholders must work together to ensure high school football embodies the highest principles of sportsmanship and fundamental ethics of competition.

The focus of high school football is on the team – not the individual. The “individual over team” emphasis is contrary to the mission of education-based sports.

High school football is a game of extreme emotion played by exceptionally talented teenagers. Game officials should not be overly technical in applying the rules, but they should always be aware of conduct that does not exemplify sportsmanship. In determining whether an action rises to the level of a foul, game officials should allow for brief, spontaneous, emotional reactions at the end of a play. However, game officials should penalize acts that are prolonged, choreographed, and directed at an opponent.

The following actions are unsportsmanlike conduct that should be penalized without warning: demonstrations of violence such as brandishing guns and throat slashes, rehearsed poses, gestures with sexual connotation, dunking the ball over the crossbar, removal of helmet to celebrate or protest, dancing, somersaults or flips, and spiking or spinning the ball. Any act that is clearly intended to taunt, demean or show disrespect to an opponent or the game should be penalized. The actions noted above are unsporting and contrary to the values of education-based athletics. The focus must remain on student-athletes, the values of team success, celebrating victory with class, and enduring loss with dignity.

### **DEFENSELESS PLAYER / TARGETING**

A defenseless player is a player who, because of physical position and focus of concentration, is especially vulnerable to injury. The player remains defenseless until the player's physical position and focus of concentration allows the player to have a chance to protect themselves or brace, at least partially, for contact.

The most common types of defenseless players include passers, receivers, sliding runners, runners whose forward progress is stopped, players out of the play and players who are illegally blocked from the blindside. For added defenseless player clarifications, please refer to 2.32.16 COMMENT and CHART in the 2025 NFHS Football Case Book.

A player is defenseless based on the player's own position and concentration. It is not determined by another player's actions. When the wrap-up tackle was added to the definition of defenseless player as it relates to contact on a defenseless receiver, it created confusion because this highlighted action by another player. Thus, the forceful contact against a defenseless receiver portion of Rule 2 (definitions) has been relocated to Rule 9 (conduct of players/penalty). By moving the wrap-up tackle portion of the defenseless player guidelines to Rule 9, it clearly limits the contact to a defenseless offensive or defensive receiver, to incidental contact that is a result of making a play on the ball, contact initiated with open hands, or an attempt to tackle by wrapping arm(s) around the receiver.

A major focus of the NFHS Football Rules Committee is to promote uniform enforcement of illegal contact on defenseless players across the country. We urge all coaches and game officials to study the rules,

watch and share video, and have discussions with one another about what constitutes legal and illegal contact. Furthermore, a review of targeting provisions is crucial for minimizing risk for all players.

It is imperative that players clearly comprehend what contact is acceptable and be able to recognize when an opponent is considered defenseless. Players must realize that the responsibility for making legal contact resides with the person initiating the contact.

Game officials must demonstrate a broad awareness of what contact is necessary to make a legal block or tackle and contact considered excessive and, in some cases, flagrant. Forceful contact that is avoidable should not be tolerated by coaches or game officials. When in doubt, game officials should throw a flag for illegal personal contact and should be supported in doing so.

The long-term success of high school football is linked to risk minimization. Coaches, game officials, players and administrators share the responsibility to eliminate targeting and illegal contact against defenseless players from our great game.

**OUTLINE MUST BE SIGNED BY ALL PRESENT AND SENT TO YOUR REGIONAL DIRECTOR  
BY DECEMBER 1, 2025**

**MONTANA OFFICIALS' ASSOCIATION  
FOOTBALL STUDY CLUBS  
LESSON #2  
2025-26**

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

CLUB \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

**2025 is a non-print year for the NFHS Football Game Officials Manual.**

**2024-2025 Game Officials Manual Points of Emphasis (See pages 5-8 of the 2024-2025 NFHS Football Game Officials Manual):**

- 1. Pregame Administration**
- 2. Clock Management**
- 3. The Importance of Dead-Ball Officiating**

**2024-2025 NFHS FOOTBALL GAME OFFICIALS' MANUAL POINTS OF EMPHASIS - Review and Discuss:**

**PREGAME ADMINISTRATION**

Many game officials may be under the impression that their job begins at kickoff and ends when the game clock expires. However, efficient administration of a game requires advance planning by the crew to ensure awareness of potential distractions that can cause problems and disrupt the orderly conduct of the game.

Pregame administration begins a few days before the game. The referee, as crew chief, has some added administrative responsibilities. The referee should contact the host school (either the athletic director or designated game administrator) by email or phone a few days prior to the game to confirm the date and time of kickoff. This is particularly important if the game was assigned months – and sometimes years – in advance. Games can and will be cancelled or rescheduled by schools, and members of the officiating crew are usually the last people to know of such changes. Moreover, it is a common business courtesy to contact clients in advance to confirm arrangements.

The referee should also inquire about parking location, changing facilities (if provided), the name and phone number of a contact person for the crew upon arrival, and whether there are any special activities occurring prior to the game. The referee should inform the school of the approximate arrival time of the crew. The referee should also inquire where the locker rooms are located for each team. This information can be important because some teams go to their locker room or another designated location after warm-up and return to the field just a few minutes before kickoff. If the referee is not aware of the team's location and has not had an opportunity to meet with the team's head coach, the pregame meeting will be rushed if it is held just minutes before kickoff.

Once the referee has contacted the school, the referee should provide the crew with all the information and specify the crew's arrival time if crew members are arriving separately. After the crew has arrived and changed into game uniforms, the referee should lead the crew in a pregame conference.

When the crew takes the field, each crew member has certain responsibilities, as detailed in this manual. Those responsibilities include field inspection, checking player equipment, checking the chain crew equipment and meeting with the chain crew, meeting with the clock operator, meeting with ball helpers, and checking and securing game balls.

Pregame administrative responsibilities should be conducted in a professional manner and should not be taken lightly. If game officials are diligent in conducting their pregame administrative tasks, the game will flow more smoothly and efficiently.

**CLOCK MANAGEMENT**

The rule implementing the 40-second play clock that was passed recently by the NFHS created not only some subtle changes to clock management but also had a direct impact on the pace of play.

Occasionally, clock operators are volunteers, but in most cases, they are hired by the home team and it is not unusual for them to be partisans. The vast majority of operators are ethical, reliable individuals who are burdened with multiple responsibilities. It is common for the game clock operator to also be responsible for maintaining the scoreboard. The latter duty requires the succeeding spot, down and distance to the line-to-gain to be updated promptly after each play. When a team achieves a first down inbounds, the game clock stops and is restarted when the referee signals. That interval should be no more than 3-5 seconds. The problem arises when the referee gives the start-the-clock signal – the “silent wind” – while the clock operator is working on the scoreboard console instead of watching the referee. The clock operator’s briefing should include a request to refrain from changing the scoreboard (down, distance and yard line where the ball is located) until the referee has restarted the game clock.

After a first down inbounds, the ready-for-play occurs when the ball has been spotted and the game official who spotted the ball has stepped away into position. Under no circumstances should the ready be delayed if the chain crew is still moving and is not in position. In such a case, the linesman can drop a beanbag to mark the spot of the snap. In that situation, to ensure the game clock is promptly started, the referee should begin the silent wind when the umpire has possession and is about to spot the ball. That will compensate for the clock operator’s reaction time to the signal and ensure the game clock has been started and is running when the ball is snapped. The prompt starting of the game clock will ensure neither team gets an unfair time advantage especially during the last two minutes of a half. If the spotting of the ball is delayed for any reason e.g., wet ball, exceptionally long gain, etc., the referee can adjust accordingly by slightly delaying the silent wind.

If there is a visible play clock that is not being operated by an on-field official, play clock operators should be certified game officials who are knowledgeable of NFHS play clock rules. Operating the play clock is a more difficult proposition than operating the game clock. The game clock operator can adequately do the job by following on-field signals with only minimal knowledge of NFHS rules. The play clock operator frequently must act without a visible signal from a game official. Knowledge of the situations where a 40-second play clock is required versus a 25-second play clock is essential as is always keeping the referee in view for a play clock re-set signal.

## **THE IMPORTANCE OF DEAD-BALL OFFICIATING**

Dead-ball officiating may be viewed by some game officials as an afterthought and a time to take a break. However, when the ball becomes dead, it is the most critical time for game officials to continue to perform their duties in order to maintain decorum among opponents. Game officials should strive to be excellent dead-ball officials since the likelihood of fouls being committed is at perhaps its highest.

Dead-ball fouls include behavior that is outside of the normally accepted boundaries of football and can involve both players and nonplayers. Some examples are baiting and taunting, fighting, throwing equipment in frustration, verbal abuse of game officials, and initiating contact with an opponent after the play is over. Because this type of behavior tends to gender ill will between opponents, it is imperative that it is immediately recognized by game officials and penalized accordingly.

NFHS football rules penalize unsportsmanlike actions in different ways:

- Illegal personal contact is a category of fouls that involve contact with an opponent. Frequently referred to as a personal foul, illegal personal contact can result in disqualification if the game officials deem the foul to be flagrant. Even though they may involve unsportsmanlike actions, penalties for dead-ball illegal personal contact fouls, with limited exceptions, are always enforced from the succeeding spot, the same way as penalties for unsportsmanlike conduct fouls are enforced. While there are no rules mandating additional penalties for multiple illegal personal contact fouls committed by the same player or nonplayer, good dead-ball officiating will prevent participants from repeatedly
- these types of fouls. Game officials must recognize situations where opponents are likely to commit dead-ball fouls and prevent them from happening through positioning and communication with players.
- Unsportsmanlike conduct fouls, by definition, are non-contact fouls (other than illegal participation) that do not influence a play. The penalties for these fouls are always enforced as dead-ball fouls (i.e., from the succeeding spot). When an unsportsmanlike conduct foul is judged to be flagrant or when any player or nonplayer commits two unsportsmanlike conduct fouls in

the same game, the offender is disqualified. Unsportsmanlike conduct fouls cannot be combined with illegal personal contact fouls to disqualify an offender.

Recognizing unsportsmanlike actions requires game officials to be familiar with and use approved mechanics. Since most dead-ball fouls occur within three seconds of the end of a play, maintaining appropriate distance and angles after a play ensures game officials who do not have runner responsibility will be positioned so that they can monitor areas around the ball. This “Halo Principle” allows effective coverage of all 22 players. Rather than rushing to retrieve the football or focusing on the area around the runner, game officials should gently pinch-in toward the nearest players keeping them within sight and sound until the opponents have separated and teams are on their own side of their line of scrimmage. This is particularly important after a touchdown or try, when multiple players and substitutes are intersecting as they enter or leave the field.

Understanding the need to eliminate unsportsmanlike actions from the game, properly and consistently penalizing unsportsmanlike conduct and illegal personal contact and using NFHS-approved football game officials’ mechanics and officiating philosophies are all critical steps to improve sportsmanship in high school football.

- I. Discuss the following topics about coaches which were in a recent publication in regard to “DEALING WITH HEAD COACHES”:

### **Dealing with Head Coaches**

1. Make eye contact. A coach wants to be assured that he has your attention. Don’t act distracted.
2. Never call coaches by their first names. They’ll feel most comfortable, particularly in front of their players, simply by being called “coach.” If you know their last name, it is all right to say mister.
3. Show respect to get respect. That means using formal language, keeping communication brief, adopting a neutral tone and avoiding any personal remarks. Stick to the issue at hand in a straightforward way.
4. Ask them to deal with problem players. Be sure to identify the problem in explicit terms, without making the player to be an evil person. Sometimes that is hard to do, but can be accomplished with a careful choice of language.
5. Remain calm under all circumstances. If a coach moves toward you to “get in your face”, pivot sideways so that you are shoulder-to-shoulder. It is hard for someone to speak in an aggressive, confrontational way when the proximity between parties is side-by-side.
6. Let coaches have their say. When a coach approaches to protest or argue, adopt an instant “listening mode” and let the aggrieved individual finish his remarks. Do not interrupt.
7. Use non-confrontational body language. To be aware of body posture, facial expression, head tilt and arm position, one must say, “I am going to appear receptive and contemplative. I can think best and measure my words that way. I am determined to not escalate the problem.”
8. If you make a mistake, admit it. A simple apology is sufficient; do not elaborate or rationalize (i.e., make excuses).
9. When coaches raise their voice, lower yours. A soft voice has a way of triggering a reciprocal soft reply.
10. Get both coaches together. Sometimes there is a need to reach a uniform agreement in a joint consultation. Weather problems in an outdoor situation are examples. Other issues could include clock problems or difficulties with game equipment.
11. Support fellow officials. Never betray partners by showing that you doubt their judgment. Instead indicate faith in someone else’s decision by saying the partner had a better view of a more favorable angle than the responding official or protester.
12. Acknowledge the coach: “I hear what you’re saying.” “I understand” or “I see what you mean” are equally effective. If the next sensible step is to confer with a partner over a controversy, make that next move firmly.
13. Give praises when proper; promote sportsmanship. When a coach makes a gesture of consideration for the opponents or toward the officials, be sure to acknowledge it. Sometimes a smile and a nod of the head are enough.
14. Determine from where the coach is coming. Put yourself in their shoes just as you would in trying to understand a player’s viewpoint. That means having some insight about a coach’s motivation

and overall goal. Sometimes how the coach will be viewed in the eyes of players and team supporters is the primary stimulus for behavior.

15. Keep your ego under control. Often a mere glance will carry a significant message, whether it's negative or positive, whether it is meant to curtail dialogue or to encourage it. A quizzical expression can signal a desire for additional input, whereas a frown may denote closure.
16. Give the coach the benefit of the doubt, but be sure there is doubt. If you are uncertain about the accuracy of a ruling, make a decision and tell the coach what you believe is correct. Avoid being too adamant about a rule interpretation. Someone has defined the word positive as "being wrong at the top of your voice."
17. Permit the coach to disengage. Recognize (through facial expression, body language, and terminating vocal patterns) when it is time to cease a dialogue. Nothing is gained by insisting on the last word.
18. Don't use your hands when talking to a coach. Your gestures will reveal more than you'll want to convey.

Remember that a coach's job depends on many factors and doing your best is one of them. He prepares hard for many hours, so you should work hard in being consistent and fair. Help the coach to be a better coach by allowing him to coach and not be overly concerned with officiating. Listen to him, answer his questions honestly, and provide him the respect that he deserves, within the spirit and intent of the rules, and you will reduce his anxieties about the one aspect of the game that he cannot control and should not be focused on—officiating. Refereeing a game is not brain surgery but managing people in a highly emotional environment takes constant awareness and skills. The most successful officials have these skills. Practice the above skills and take the time use them every game when an opportunity arises. You'll be surprised at the results.

## **Dealing with Assistant Coaches**

Discuss how your pool deals with assistant coaches that are an issue on the sideline.

**OUTLINE MUST BE SIGNED BY ALL PRESENT AND SENT TO YOUR REGIONAL DIRECTOR  
BY DECEMBER 1, 2025**

MONTANA OFFICIALS' ASSOCIATION  
FOOTBALL STUDY CLUBS  
LESSON #3  
2025-26

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

CLUB \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

I. Recommendations for Study Club #3

A. That the NFHS Football Examination Part I be taken by the pool at home or in a manner appropriate to the pool. If taken at home we suggest answers be discussed orally as a group at the next meeting.

II. Discuss any problems, clarifications, concerns, or ideas that occurred while administering the major rule changes from last year.

III. Review and discuss all of the following new NFHS rule changes for last year:

**2024 FOOTBALL RULES CHANGES**

**Clarified Home Team Uniform Requirement For Each Player [1-5-1b(3)]** — The jerseys of the home team shall all be the same dark color(s) that clearly contrasts with white.

**2024 EDITORIAL CHANGES**

Football Helmet Warning Statement; 1-3-1b; 1-3-1g; 1-3-1i(5); 1-5-1a(1); 1-5-1b(2), (3); 1-5-1c(5); 1-5-1d(5)a; 1-5-2b; 1-5-3b(6); 1-5-3c(6); 1-7(7); 1-8; 2-8; 2-32-16; 5-2-4; 7-2 PENALTY; TABLE 7-5; 9-2 PENALTY; 9-5-1g; 9-8-1j; 9-8 PENALTY; 10-3-1c NOTE; 10-4; 10-5; TABLE 10-4; PENALTY SUMMARY; NFHS OFFICIAL FOOTBALL SIGNALS.

**2024 POINTS OF EMPHASIS**

- 1. Sportsmanship and Altercation Prevention and Protocol**
- 2. Player Equipment and Enforcement**
- 3. Formations**

**SPORTSMANSHIP AND ALTERCATION PREVENTION AND PROTOCOL**

The National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS), state associations, coaches and game officials across the country are concerned as unsporting behavior in education-based athletics continues to escalate across all sports. A commitment to a collaborative, working relationship to promote good sportsmanship and teach and enforce NFHS rules and state association expectations is paramount to continue to safely conduct the game.

Everyone associated with high school football has a role to play in creating a positive, sportsmanlike atmosphere at games. The NFHS must continue to address poor sporting behavior and promote the value of good sportsmanship. State associations must clearly set expectations in regard to unsportsmanlike behavior and enforce association rules regarding violations of those expectations. School administrators and coaches must teach, promote, model and set clear standards of behavior for themselves, players and fans. School administrators and coaches should also ensure that additional personnel on the sideline, outside the team box, adhere to set standards of sportsmanship. Game officials must fairly and consistently enforce NFHS rules in all aspects related to unsporting behavior by coaches and participants. Players and parents must model respect for coaches and game officials' decisions, opponents and adhere to and promote the set expectations regarding sportsmanship.

Everyone involved must clearly understand that education-based athletics is an extension of the classroom and is about more than just winning and losing, getting scholarships and gaining accolades. Education-based athletics is about learning, and the conduct and actions of everyone involved should reflect this.

In order to prevent unsportsmanlike issues from escalating please consider the following preventive protocols.

### **Fight or Altercation Protocol**

Most fights end quickly. Fights that escalate beyond the initial incident tend to do so because others run toward the fight. Running toward a fight normally contributes to the escalation of the altercation.

1. Prepare before it happens. Make sure to instruct and even practice what to do in case an altercation occurs.
  - a. Assign specific coaches or administrators to run to the altercation to assist with breaking it up.
  - b. Assign specific coaches to immediately step off the sideline and turn their attention to keeping the players on the sideline.
  - c. Team members already on the field should distance themselves from the altercation.
  - d. Educate all participants about the penalties associated with fighting, leaving the team area, taunting, using offensive gestures, and other unsportsmanlike acts.
  - e. Instruct your video crew to continue to record or to start recording if an altercation occurs.
  - f. Know where security is stationed.
  - g. Keep all non-essential people off the sideline and preferably behind a fence or barrier.
2. If an altercation does occur, execute the above plan.
3. Once the participants are separated, keep them separated until play can safely resume or until administrators and game officials decide how to proceed.
4. Do not allow teams to simultaneously use the same exits or occupy the same areas following an altercation or chippy contest.

### **Handshake Line Protocol**

1. Administrators/security from both schools should be stationed on the field in close proximity to the handshake line.
2. One team should be on the right and the other team should be on the left. Players from one team should not be allowed to walk down both sides of the line.
3. Absolutely no non-essential personnel should be allowed on the field or sidelines until both teams have reached a designated area after completion of the handshake line.
4. A coach or administrator should be stationed at the end of the handshake line to direct the players who have completed the line to a designated area on their end of the field. Do not allow the players to continue to the opposing sideline or to the other end of the field.
5. Have one or more coaches at the front of the line and one or more at the end of the line.

Improving the current state of the game regarding the prevalence of unsporting behavior requires that everyone involved commit to addressing the issue. Civility, even in the midst of intense competition, matters.

### **PLAYER EQUIPMENT AND ENFORCEMENT**

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.

The use of knee pads is an area targeted for emphasis. Due to potential injury, it is essential that players only be allowed to participate if their pants and knee pads comply with the rules. Pants must completely cover the knees, and knee pads must be worn over the knee. In pregame duties, game officials should be watchful and proactive in addressing potential equipment, and more specifically, knee pad issues. Players

often wear pants that slide up and expose the knee during movement. Game officials should communicate with coaches and/or players and ensure that only legally and properly equipped players are allowed to participate – noncompliance results in nonparticipation.

It is the shared responsibility of the coaches, players and game officials to closely monitor equipment issues and act in accordance with NFHS football playing rules on this subject. The specific areas of concern include the wearing of mandatory equipment by each player at all times while the ball is live, properly wearing any mandatory/legal equipment as intended by the manufacturer, and avoiding the use of any illegal equipment at any time by any player. It must be noted that NFHS Football Rules 3-5-10e and 9-8-1h directly address the correct enforcement for violations of these specific equipment rules. Coaches, game officials and players should work together and support the safety of all participants by ensuring that NFHS football equipment and uniform rules are followed.

## **FORMATIONS**

Over the past several years, there has been a considerable decline by many teams in their efforts to line up legally. There has also been a decrease by game officials with enforcement of illegal formations, especially involving offensive linemen. Linemen are legally on the line of scrimmage when they face their opponent's goal line and have head or foot breaking the imaginary plane through the waist of the snapper. It has become fairly common to see guards or tackles line up a yard or two off the ball to aid in pass blocking or pulling. Doing so provides a significant advantage for the offense and should be addressed at the first opportunity by coaches and game officials.

A back is an "A" player who has no part of his body breaking the plane of the waist of the nearest teammate who is on the line of scrimmage. Formations become illegal when backs are not clearly in the backfield. If an offensive player lines up by intersecting the waistline of the tackle, but not the center, Team A has committed an illegal formation foul because all Team A players must be a lineman or back. Receivers who wish to line up as a back should have "daylight" between the rear end of the nearest lineman and their nearest body part. Communicating with the line of scrimmage official on your side of the field is the best way to avoid a formation foul.

All coaches should spend time learning and periodically reviewing the current NFHS football playing rules so they can effectively pass correct information on to their players. Someone on the coaching staff should be assigned to monitor player compliance and understanding of formation rules during practice and game play. Early and consistent communication between coaches, players and game officials will permit the game to proceed with less disruption to the flow.

Game officials should monitor pre-game warm-up and communicate (through coaches) to allow them to correct borderline or illegal formation issues they have observed. Once the contest begins, preventive officiating skills should be used at the earliest opportunity to allow coaches to make adjustments before formation issues become egregious. However, formations that clearly and obviously do not meet the specifications of NFHS Football Rules 2-32-3, 2-32-9 and 7-2 must be penalized as fouls without warning.

- 5) Answer and discuss all questions on the 2024 Officiating Mechanics Examination. We recommend that you complete it orally as a group. Please contact the office if you note any errors. The MOA expects all officials to "go by the book" – the NFHS Football Officials' Manual.
- IV. Answer and discuss all questions on the 2025 NFHS Football Exam Part I. We recommend that you complete it orally as a group. **The Exam was sent as a PDF to the pool leader.**

**OUTLINE MUST BE SIGNED BY ALL PRESENT AND SENT TO YOUR REGIONAL DIRECTOR  
BY DECEMBER 1, 2025.**

**MONTANA OFFICIALS' ASSOCIATION  
FOOTBALL STUDY CLUBS  
LESSON #4  
2025-26**























NAME \_\_\_\_\_

CLUB \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

- I. Review and discuss the articles listed in the Football Preseason Guide 2025 which was included in your football packet. (Please review the plays and rulings for each rule change area if they are provided).
- a. Forward Fumbles Lead The Way – Page 1-2
  - b. Illegal Participation Penalty Enforcement Revised– Page 3
  - c. Tooth and Mouth Protectors Changes Coming – Page 3
  - d. Arm Sleeve Specifications Introduced – Page 4
  - e. Six-Player Football Advances – Page 4
  - f. 2025 Editorial Changes – Page 4
  - g. Flashback: 2024 Rule Changes – Page 5-6
  - h. 2025 NFHS Football Points of Emphasis – Page 7-9
  - i. Try a Try Again? – Page 9
  - j. Penalties That Include a First Down – Page 10
  - k. Returned to Sender – Page 11
  - l. Players as Game Officials' Partners – Page 12
  - m. Rare Rulings Well Done– Page 12
  - n. Officials Time-outs – Page 13
  - o. Technology Options Expanded – Page 14
  - p. Halftime Intermission May be Shortened Due to Weather – Page 15
  - q. Body Slam – Page 15
- II. Review and discuss the NFHS Signal Chart:
























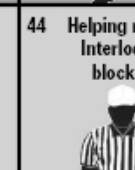



# NFHS OFFICIAL FOOTBALL SIGNALS

<p>1 Ball ready for play *Untimed down</p> 	<p>2 Start clock</p> 	<p>3 Time-out Discretionary or injury time-out (followed by tapping hands on chest)</p> 		
<p>4 TV/radio time-out</p> 	<p>5 Touchdown, Field goal, Point(s) after touchdown</p> 	<p>6 Safety</p> 	<p>7 Dead ball foul, Touchback (move side to side)</p> 	
<p>8 First down</p> 	<p>9 Loss of down</p> 	<p>10 Incomplete forward pass Penalty declined No play, no score Toss option deferred</p> 	<p>11 Legal touching of forward pass or scrimmage kick</p> 	<p>12 Inadvertent whistle</p> 
<p>13 Disregard flag</p> 	<p>14 End of period</p> 	<p>15 Sideline warning</p> 	<p>16 First touching Illegal touching</p> 	<p>17 Reset play clock to 25 seconds (Use both hands to have play clock reset to 40 seconds)</p> 
<p>18 Encroachment</p> 	<p>19 False start Illegal formation Free kick infraction</p> 	<p>20 Illegal shift (2 hands) Illegal motion (1 hand)</p> 	<p>21 Delay of game</p> 	<p>22 Substitution infraction</p> 

All images copyright Referee (www.referee.com)



# NFHS OFFICIAL FOOTBALL SIGNALS

23 Disconcerting act 	24 Illegal helmet contact Targeting 	25 Illegal horse-collar tackle 	26 Illegal blindside block 	27 Unsportsmanlike conduct Noncontact foul 
28 Illegal participation 	29 Sideline interference (Face press box) 	30 Running into or Roughing kicker or holder 	31 Illegal batting/kicking (Followed by pointing toward toe for kicking) 	32 Invalid fair catch Illegal fair catch signal 
33 Forward pass interference Kick catching interference 	34 Roughing passer 	35 Illegal pass/forward handing (Face press box) 	36 Intentional grounding 	37 Ineligible downfield on pass 
38 Personal foul 	39 Clipping 	40 Blocking below waist 	41 Chop block 	42 Holding 
43 Illegal block Illegal use of hands/arms 	44 Helping runner Interlocked blocking 	45 Grasping face mask or helmet opening 	46 Tripping 	47 Disqualification 

All images copyright Referee (www.referee.com)

III. Review the Play Clock Procedures Chart:

PLAY CLOCK/GAME CLOCK PROCEDURES				
Event	Play Clock	Game Clock	Covering Official's Signal <sup>^</sup>	Referee's Signal
Dead Ball Inbounds	40	Running	S7	None
Dead Ball Out of Bounds	40	Snap	S3	None
Incomplete Pass	40	Snap	S10	None
Team A Awarded 1st Down	40	Signal	S3	Wind
Penalty Administration *	40/25	Ready	S3	Wind
Charged Team Time-out	25	Snap	S3	Chop
Injury / Helmet Off / Equipment Issues *	40/25	Ready	S3	Wind
Measurement	25	Ready	S3	Wind
Double Change of Possession – Team A Snaps	40	Ready	S7	Wind
Change of Possession - Team B Snaps	25	Snap	S3	Chop
Touchdown	25	N/A	S3	Chop
Try, Field Goal, Safety	25	Varies **	Varies **	Chop
Start of Each Period	25	Snap	Varies	Chop
Legal Kick	25	Snap	S3	Chop
Start of Overtime Period	25	N/A	N/A	Chop
Other Administrative Stoppages ***	25	Ready	S3	Wind
* See Rule 3-6-1a(1)e Exceptions for Defensive Injuries, Equipment Issues and Fouls (Set to 25 if both teams cause the stoppage)				
** The Game Clock Will Start on the Legal Touch of a Free Kick				
*** Includes Inadvertent Whistle and Period Extension				
<sup>^</sup> See the Current NFHS Football Rules Book for the NFHS Official Football Signals				

**OUTLINE MUST BE SIGNED BY ALL PRESENT AND SENT TO YOUR REGIONAL DIRECTOR  
BY DECEMBER 1, 2025**

**MONTANA OFFICIALS' ASSOCIATION  
FOOTBALL STUDY CLUBS  
LESSON #5  
2025-26**

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

CLUB \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

Recommendations for Study Club #5

Discussion Items:

1. Discuss your protocol in regard to making decisions regarding all weather situations (Lightning, Smoke, etc.)
2. Discuss the process of disqualifying or ejecting a coach, a player, or a fan. Who must be notified of this ejection within 48 hours?
3. Discuss the guidelines for "when in question" principles would be applied.
4. Review how one should carry the whistle as well as the process for sounding the whistle. What 2-3 situations would necessitate a different sounding of the whistle? Discuss the process when an inadvertent whistle occurs.

I. **Discuss and review the following information from Referee magazine on strategies for preparing yourself mentally to officiate:**

Just as strenuous as being physically fit to officiate are the mental requirements of the game. Rules knowledge is vitally important, but knowledge alone is not good enough. Application of the rules is crucial. Knowing what to do when a situation arises in a game and doing it in a timely manner are the marks of a good official. Approach the mental side in the same way you do the physical: Conditioning! Rules knowledge is the foundation – you need instantaneous recall on the field. Here are ways to mentally condition:

- Basic studying
- Self Tests
- Engage in conversation with others about the rules and about football itself – much can be obtained and retained in an informal setting with friends, co-workers and associates
- Communicate with everyone involved in the game – from your supervisor, to your partners, to the coaches and players
- Listen well to others – absorb and react to those things that are important; dismiss those that aren't
- LISTEN – ASSESS – REACT – RESOLVE
- When reacting – be strong but not overbearing
- Speak to be heard and respected – practice that before you get to the game – make your tone and your volume level work for you
- Create a personalized demeanor on the field – establish a respectful and approachable persona – your mannerisms will speak for you
- Cultivate a high level of mental tenacity – the norm in officiating is to be faced with unpredictable and unusual problems – if you face each and every problem as a welcome challenge, you can be mentally prepared to handle them effectively
- Learn from each and every situation
- Create a mental library from which you can draw when needed
- Do less criticizing and more recognizing
- Have a pregame conference with yourself – including getting the proper rest to be mentally sharp, leaving all outside diversions and problems at the door and focusing totally on football.

**OUTLINE MUST BE SIGNED BY ALL PRESENT AND SENT TO YOUR REGIONAL DIRECTOR  
BY DECEMBER 1, 2025**

**MONTANA OFFICIALS' ASSOCIATION**  
**FOOTBALL STUDY CLUBS**  
**LESSON #6**  
**2025-26**

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

CLUB \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

A. Review your group's season.

- I. Are there any specific problems in your area schools that should be addressed? i.e. field concerns, locker rooms, security, game times, poor sportsmanship, crowd control, etc.
- II. Are there any football rules or mechanics changes your group would like to see? Evaluate the new rule changes for this past year. The rules or mechanics changes must be in writing to the MOA/MHSA office by November 1, 2025.
- III. What issues does your group believe are important universal issues that need to be addressed by all officials' pools throughout the state? **Please send those items to Scott Wilson at the MHSA office so they may possibly be included for rules clinics and study clubs.**
- IV. Does your group have any suggestions in addressing the issues in III?
- V. Discuss potential MOA "Hall of Fame" candidates in your area. Application forms are available from your regional director, the MOA/MHSA office or downloadable at <https://www.mhsa.org/page/show/5834243-hall-of-fame>. They must be routed through your regional director and to the MOA office before April 1<sup>st</sup>.
- VI. Discuss methods of evaluating fellow MOA members. Are the methods working properly and positively? Should you start a new method if you're not evaluating at the present time? Do these methods work for "upgrading"? Are they fair to all of your levels? Are you allowing anybody to upgrade? Are you methods for not allowing an upgrade fair?
- VII. For everyone's benefit, review dues deadlines and upgrading procedures and requirements. Be aware of the importance of notifying the MOA office of address changes. Know the "dues due" date.
- VIII. How many prospective officials did you have in your pool this year? Discuss and evaluate your methods of recruitment.
- IX. You have an obligation to read the MOA Handbook. All officials should be aware of the governing body's rules and regulations. Any changes you'd like to see should be directed to your regional director for the council's meeting in December.
- X. Take time to discuss your pool's assignment practices. Is your method fair to all involved? What areas may need some improvement or change in relation to assignment of officials?
- XI. Take time to evaluate your individual performance as an official this year. Incorporate your own personal reflections and observations from crew members and fellow officials.

- XII. Discuss some items concerning what an official can do in the off-season to prepare for next year. Include in the discussion off-season exercise programs, reviewing video of games done, attending a camp (if possible), National Federation Officials' Education etc.
- XIII. Are there any items, issues or clarifications that possibly would benefit all officials by being included in our officials' publication, **The Official Word**?
- XIV. Discuss and evaluate your pool's methods of retaining officials.

**OUTLINE MUST BE SIGNED BY ALL PRESENT AND SENT TO YOUR REGIONAL DIRECTOR  
BY DECEMBER 1, 2025**