



COLLEGE FOOTBALL OFFICIATING, LLC

BLOCKING BELOW THE WAIST

The rules committee made some important changes to the rule for blocking below the waist for the first time in many years. Here we take a look at the changes, what's new, what's not changed, and some play situations.

Here's the rule:

Rule 9-1-6 (Replaces current 9-1-2-e)

Blocking Below the Waist

ARTICLE 6.

There shall be no blocking below the waist (Rule 2-3-2).

Exceptions:

1. Against the ball carrier.
2. Before a change of possession on scrimmage downs that do not include kicks, blocking below the waist is allowed as follows:
 - (a) Players of the offensive team who at the snap are
 - (1) on the line of scrimmage more than seven yards from the middle lineman of the offensive formation, or
 - (2) in the backfield outside the tackle box, or
 - (3) in motion,may block below the waist **only** along a north-south line or toward the sideline adjacent to them at the snap.
 - (b) Players of the offensive team who at the snap are inside the tackle box or on the line of scrimmage inside the seven-yard limit may block below the waist.
 - (c) Players of the defensive team who at the snap are inside the blocking zone extended to the sideline may block below the waist inside that area until the blocking zone disintegrates (Rule 2-3-6-b) except against a Team A player in position to receive a backward pass.

PENALTY: Administer as a Personal Foul

Notice the addition of the last phrase, regarding a Team A player about to receive a backward pass. The original statement would have legalized something that in previous years was a foul, and that was not the committee's intent.

What's New

1. The default is this: it is illegal to block below the waist. This is a break from the past: now blocking below the waist is an *illegal action* that is permitted ONLY in those circumstances that are specified by rule. This is an important philosophical flip that acknowledges the safety issues and places blocking below the waist in the category of clipping.

2. The line through "the original position of the ball" is no longer part of the rule. Under the new rule the location of the ball at the snap doesn't matter. As we will see, the sideline closer to a player at the snap determines the direction he is allowed to block low.

3. The 10-yard limit is gone. This is a very significant change. In previous years if a block below the waist was illegal 9.5 yards downfield, the same block was legal at 10.1 yards—which made coaching, playing and officiating this rule very difficult. Under the new rule if a block below the waist is illegal, it is illegal everywhere.

4. Reference to "scrimmage kick formation" is gone. Blocking below the waist is illegal throughout a down in which there is free kick or a scrimmage kick...period.

5. Direction of the block: legal north-and-south or toward the original adjacent sideline. If a Team A player is restricted at the snap in blocking below the waist—which means he is a back in motion or outside the tackle box, or a lineman outside the seven-yard limit—then he may legally block below the waist only along the north-south line or at an angle toward the sideline closer to him when the ball was snapped. This stays the same throughout the down, so the officials do not have to keep track of where the ball was snapped or where this player is with respect to that location when he blocks. Put another way, if he blocks low at any angle toward the other sideline it's a foul—anywhere on the field.

6. Defensive players are more restricted than before. The only Team B players who may block below the waist are those who at the snap are in the blocking zone extended—that is, the 6 x 10 yard strip that runs sideline to sideline—and they can do so only until the blocking zone itself disintegrates. This effectively means D-linemen and linebackers. They still aren't allowed to block low on an offensive player in position to receive a backward pass.

What's The Same

1. Backs inside the tackle box and Team A linemen within the seven-yard limit may block low anywhere and anytime. This will be a disappointment to many who want more restrictions on blocking below the waist. Most of the players on Team A will still be able legally to block below the waist in any direction anywhere on the field.

2. Low blocks are still illegal on downs involving kicks—but as noted above the language about “scrimmage kick formation” has been removed. This means that blocking below the waist is not allowed on “quick kicks.”

3. Low blocks are still illegal after changes of possession. As before, once the ball changes hands no one can block below the waist.

PLAY SITUATIONS

1. Third and seven at the A-30. The ball is at the left hash mark. Back A22 is split outside the tackle box to his left, and B40 moves out to cover him. The handoff goes to back A44 who runs up the middle and is tackled at the A-45. As the play develops A22 blocks B40 below the waist at the A-35. The direction of his block is (a) straight ahead along the north-south line; (b) directly toward the sideline to A22’s left; (c) off the north-south line at a slight angle toward the sideline to his right. **RULING:** Because of his position A22 is restricted in how he may legally block below the waist. His adjacent sideline is to his left. (a) Legal block, because it is along the north-south line. (b) Legal block, because it is toward his adjacent sideline. (c) Foul, illegal block below the waist. The block is directed toward the non-adjacent sideline. Fifteen yards at the spot of the foul.

2. Third and seven at the A-30. The ball is at the left hash mark. Back A22 is lined up inside the tackle box just behind the right tackle. Tight end A88 is on the line six yards to the left of the snapper in a balanced-line formation. The handoff goes to back A44 who runs up the middle and is tackled at the A-45. As the play develops A22 blocks B40 below the waist at the A-35 and A88 blocks B55 below the waist at the A-40. **RULING:** These blocks are legal regardless of their location or direction because at the snap both A22 and A88 are positioned such that they are not restricted from blocking below the waist.

3. Third and seven at the A-30. The ball is at the left hash mark. Back A22 is split outside the tackle box to his left, and B40 moves out to cover him. The handoff goes to back A44 who sweeps around the right end and is tackled at the B-45. As the play develops B40 runs to his left to follow the play and A22 chases him. At the A-45 beyond the right hash mark A22 overtakes B40 and blocks him below the waist at the side or front. The direction of this block is (a) toward the left sideline; (b) directly along the north-south line; (c) slightly off the north-south line toward the right sideline. **RULING:** Because of his position A22 is restricted in how he may legally block below the waist. His adjacent sideline is to his left. (a) Legal block, because it is toward A22’s adjacent sideline. (b) Legal block, because it is along the north-south line. (c) Foul, illegal block below the waist. The block is directed toward the non-adjacent sideline. Fifteen yards at the spot of the foul. ***NOTE:** In previous years this block would have been legal because it is directed away from the original position of the ball. Under the new rule the original position of the ball does not matter. A22 may not block low in a direction away from his adjacent sideline.*

4. Third and seven at the A-30. Split end A88 is on his scrimmage line wide to the right side, eight yards from the middle lineman. During a running play A88 blocks below the waist against B66, the block directed toward A88's left. This block occurs (a) at the A-39; (b) at the A-41. **RULING:** (a) and (b) Foul, illegal block below the waist. Because of his position at the snap A88 is restricted in blocking below the waist. His adjacent sideline is to his right. Since in each case the block is directed away from his adjacent sideline, it is illegal. *NOTE: In previous years the action in (b) would have been legal because it occurs beyond the 10-yard limit. The 2011 rule change erases the 10-yard limit.*

5. Third and seven at the A-30. Split end A88 is on his scrimmage line wide to the right side, eight yards from the middle lineman. Linebacker B55 is directly in front of A88, at the A-32. After the snap before the ball leaves the blocking zone B55 blocks below the waist (a) against A88 at the line of scrimmage or (b) against back A22 who is at the A-28 in position to receive a backward pass from the quarterback. **RULING:** (a) Legal block. At the snap B55 is in the blocking extended and his block occurs before the blocking zone disintegrates. (b) Foul, illegal block below the waist against a Team A player in position to receive a backward pass. Fifteen yards at the basic spot, plus automatic first down.

6. Third and seven at the A-30. Team A is in a balanced-line formation with the ball at the left hash mark. Back A22 sets up outside the tackle box to the left. As quarterback A11 under center begins to call signals A22 starts in motion to his right. At the snap A22 is five yards directly behind A11 and serves as A11's lead blocker on a sweep to the right. At the A-31 A22 blocks below the waist against defensive end B99; the direction of the block is toward the right sideline. **RULING:** Foul, illegal block below the waist. Because A22 is in motion at the snap he is restricted in blocking below the waist, even though he is inside the tackle box. His adjacent sideline is to his left (the near sideline at the snap) and his low block is made toward the right sideline.

7. Punter A38 is in deep punt formation with three personal protectors positioned five yards in front of him. Defensive end B81 blocks one of the personal protectors below the waist. The play is (a) a punt; (b) a fake with A38 carrying the ball on a sweep. **RULING:** In both cases B81 should be flagged for an illegal block below the waist. (a) The block takes place during a down involving a kick. (b) The block by B81 occurs after the blocking zone disintegrates.

8. A11 is lined up in a shotgun formation, five yards deep. He quick-kicks the ball. During the down any player blocks an opponent below the waist. **RULING:** Foul, illegal block below the waist. By default blocking below the waist is a foul, and this situation does not fit any of the exceptions.