



COLLEGE FOOTBALL OFFICIATING, LLC

INTENTIONAL GROUNDING

A passer is at risk of being flagged for intentional grounding if he throws a forward pass into an area where there is no eligible receiver. Over time the rules makers have gone back and forth on this question: if there is a receiver in the area must he have a “reasonable opportunity” to make the catch? Early on simply having a receiver in the area was enough to avoid the flag—whether he could have actually caught the ball made no difference. Then several years ago the rules committee added the requirement of “reasonable opportunity.”

And now the need for a “reasonable opportunity” has been removed again: **beginning in 2011, the passer can legally “ground” the ball if he throws it into an area where there is an eligible teammate—period.** The eligible receiver does not need to have a chance of catching the ball.

Here’s the rule:

Rule 7-3-2-f and h

A forward pass is illegal if:

f. The passer to conserve time throws the ball forward into an area where there is no eligible Team A receiver.

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h. The passer to conserve yardage throws the ball forward into an area where there is no eligible Team A receiver.

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All other elements of the intentional grounding rule remain unchanged.

PLAY SITUATIONS

1. A12 takes the direct snap and drops straight back to pass. Under a heavy rush and unable to find an open receiver downfield, he dumps the ball off. It lands a few yards in front of him. Back A33 is blocking for A12 and not looking back to see the ball, which lands in his general direction but a few yards away from him. **RULING:** Legal play, if the referee judges that A33 satisfies the requirement of being “in the area.”

2. With about one minute to go in the first half Team A runs a play that calls for quarterback A12 to sweep around end to reach the line to gain and then step out of bounds to stop the clock. A12 takes the snap and starts his sweep but before he can turn the corner and get out of bounds the line backer comes up to tackle him. Seeing that he will be unable to get out of bounds to stop the clock, and still behind the neutral zone, A12 tosses the ball forward in the general direction of end A88 who never sees the ball. It lands several feet behind A88. **RULING:** Legal play, assuming that the referee rules that A88 is close enough to be considered in the area.

AIRBORNE BALL CARRIER: EXTENDING THE GOAL-LINE PLANE

For a number of years we have made a distinction between a ball carrier who goes airborne voluntarily—e.g., he intentionally dives for the pylon—and one who is in the air because of contact by an opponent. Effective in 2011, **there is no distinction between the ball carrier who dives on his own and the one who goes into the air on contact by an opponent.** They are both airborne players. In addition, the concept of the goal-line plane is altered slightly, but significantly. For a ball carrier to score a touchdown, we know that the ball in his possession must break the plane of the goal line. But the interpretation of the plane of the goal line now is this: **The goal-line plane runs between the pylons and includes the entire pylon. This plane does not extend beyond the pylons except in two specific cases: when a ball carrier touches the pylon, and when a ball carrier touches the ground in the end zone.** In the new 2011-12 rule book you will find this change in two places: **Rule 2-12-2 (definition of goal line)** and in **Rule 8-2-1-a (how a touchdown is scored).**

Previously we extended the goal-line plane if a ball carrier went into the air because of contact by an opponent, and we did not extend it if he dived on his own. But now it doesn't matter how he got into the air. What does matter is whether he touches either the pylon or the ground in the end zone. If he doesn't do either of these, the plane is not extended—no matter how he got into the air.

PLAY SITUATIONS

1. Ball carrier A22 dives for the goal line at the B-1. The ball in his possession (a) touches the pylon; (b) goes over the top of the pylon; (c) crosses the goal line inside the pylon. A22 then first contacts the ground out of bounds three yards beyond the goal line. **RULING:** (a), (b) and (c) Touchdown in all three. The ball in A22's possession has broken the plane of the goal line in all three scenarios.

In Play 1 it is important to remember that the pylon is in the end zone out of bounds and the plane of the goal line includes the pylon, so these three situations satisfy the definition of a touchdown.

2. Ball carrier A22 heads for the right-hand pylon at the goal line. At the B-2 he dives or is blocked into the air by an opponent. The ball in A22's right hand crosses the sideline

at the B-1 and passes outside the pylon, and then A22 (a) touches the pylon with his foot or left hand; (b) first touches the ground out of bounds three yards beyond the goal line. **RULING:** (a) Touchdown. The goal-line plane is extended since A22 touches the pylon. (b) Not a touchdown. The goal-line plane is not extended because A22 did not touch either the pylon or the ground in the end zone. The ball is ruled out of bounds at the B-1.

In previous years A22 in (b) would have scored a touchdown **if he had been blocked into the air but not if he had dived on his own. Now there is no distinction between the two.**

3. Ball carrier A22 heads for the right-hand pylon at the goal line. The ball in his right hand crosses the extension of the goal line outside (i.e., to the right of) the pylon, and then A22 steps (a) on the goal line; (b) on the sideline inches short of the goal line. **RULING:** (a) Touchdown. The goal-line plane is extended because A22 touches the ground in the end zone. (b) Not a touchdown. The goal-line plane is not extended. The ball is ruled out of bounds at the crossing point.

4. Ball carrier A22 heads for the right-hand pylon at the goal line. The ball is in his right hand. His foot hits the pylon just before the ball crosses (a) the pylon or (b) the extension of the goal line just to the right (outside) of the pylon. **RULING:** (a) and (b) No touchdown in either case. Because the pylon is out of bounds the ball is dead when A22's foot hits it. Thus in both cases the ball is dead before it crosses the goal line.