



COLLEGE FOOTBALL OFFICIATING, LLC

TOO MANY PLAYERS ON THE FIELD

When either team has more than eleven players on the field before, during or after the snap, it can present real problems for the officials. This is becoming more and more an issue as teams increasingly are using no-huddle offenses. Usually this means some milling around by offensive players coming and going and confusion on the part of the opponent as to how to set up its defense. Furthermore the rules have made a distinction between “illegal substitution” as a dead-ball foul (five-yard penalty) and “illegal participation” (15-yard penalty) if a team plays the down with more than eleven players. Over time it has become interpreted like this: if the officials can get the play shut down before the snap, a team having too many players is assessed a five-yard penalty; but if the officials are unable to stop play the foul is illegal participation and the team incurs a 15-yard penalty. It hardly seems fair to penalize a team an extra 10 yards because of the officials.

Two rule changes this year are intended to address the inequity and reduce some confusion these rules present: (1) The foul for “illegal participation” has been eliminated; and (2) infractions involving too many players are called “illegal substitution” and carry a five-yard penalty.

Here is the rule:

Rule 3-5-3

More Than Eleven Players on the Field

a. Team A may not break the huddle with more than 11 players nor keep more than 11 players in the huddle or in a formation for more than three seconds. Officials shall stop the action whether or not the ball has been snapped.

b. Team B is allowed to briefly retain more than 11 players on the field to anticipate the offensive formation, but it may not have more than 11 players in its formation if the snap is imminent. Whether the snap is imminent or has just occurred, the officials shall stop the action.

PENALTY--[a-b] Dead-ball foul. Five yards at the succeeding spot. [S22]

c. If officials do not detect the excessive number of players until during the down or after the down is over, the infraction is treated as a live-ball foul.

PENALTY--Live-ball foul. Five yards at the previous spot. [S22]

Some things to note:

1. **The term “illegal participation” is no longer used.** This label has long been identified with a 15-yard penalty, so things are perhaps less confusing with the term removed.
2. **It is very important that the officials shut the play down before or quickly after the snap if at all possible.** When the offense is at fault we have been doing this very well for a number of years. But our response to defensive infractions has been less successful and certainly not as consistent.
3. **It is still possible that the officials might not detect the 12th player** until well into the down or until after the down is over. Or the defense might be trying to get its extra player off the field and he doesn't make it to the sideline until the ball is already in play. The rule takes these possibilities into account by the live-ball foul in paragraph c.

PLAY SITUATIONS

1. Team A is substituting players and the umpire stands over the ball to allow Team B to match up. The umpire moves to his position when it is apparent that Team B is not attempting to make adjustments, but Team B has 12 players in its formation. Clearly the snap is imminent, so two deep officials sound their whistles and drop their flags. **RULING:** Team B substitution infraction, dead-ball foul. Five –yard penalty.
2. Team A is substituting players and the umpire stands over the ball to allow the Team B to match up. The umpire moves to his position when it is apparent that Team B is not attempting to make adjustments, but Team B has 12 players in its formation. The officials detect the extra player but are unable to shut the play down before the ball is snapped. **RULING:** Even if the ball has just been snapped, the officials should whistle the play dead and penalize Team B for a dead-ball foul, illegal substitution.
3. Team B plays the down with 12 players but the officials do not get the players counted until well into the down or until after the ball is dead. **RULING:** Live-ball foul by Team B, illegal substitution. Five-yard penalty at the previous spot.

BALL CARRIER'S HELMET COMES OFF: DON'T STOP THE CLOCK

For a number of years the rule has said that when a ball carrier loses his helmet during a play, the ball is declared dead and the game clock is stopped. Starting in 2011 the clock will not stop, although the ball still is declared dead. Thus a ball carrier's helmet coming off is effectively the same as the ball carrier's knee touching the ground. Note also that the play clock is set at 40 seconds, just as after any other scrimmage play.

This change is made by deleting Rule 3-3-2-e-10. You may want to note this in your 2009-10 book, as the deletion will not be obvious as a change in the new 2011-12 edition.

PLAY SITUATIONS

1. Late in the second half ball carrier A22 is tackled and his helmet pops off as his head hits the ground. The game clock reads 0:04 seconds when the ball is declared dead.

RULING: The ball is dead when A22's helmet comes off but the officials do not signal the game clock to stop. Time in the half will likely expire before Team A snaps the ball.

2. Late in the second half ball carrier A22 is tackled and his helmet pops off as his head hits the ground on the sideline. The game clock reads 0:04 seconds when the ball is declared dead. **RULING:** The ball is dead and the game clock stops because A22 went out of bounds. The game clock starts on the snap because there are fewer than two

minutes in the half.