



2024 FOOTBALL POINTS OF EMPHASIS

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.

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