

II. The Rules in Depth

Game Length

The game consists of four periods or quarters, each 12 minutes long (Figure 7-1). The teams change goals at the end of the first and third periods during a one minute intermission (3-2-4).

The halftime intermission is 15 minutes followed by a three minute warm-up time. The intermission may be extended up to 20 minutes if the opponents are notified at least five minutes

prior to the start of the game. By mutual agreement of the opposing coaches, the intermission may be reduced to 10 minutes (Table 3-1). The officials are responsible for ensuring the three-minute warm-up time is posted on the clock. The warm-up time cannot be waived even if both coaches agree.

Additional Examples: 1-3.



Figure 7-1

Coin Toss

Before the game, the referee, in the presence of the captains, tosses a coin to be called by the visiting team (3-2-1). The captain must choose "heads" or "tails" before the coin is tossed. The winner of the toss has first choice of the options for the first half. He may

- Defer his choice to the second half;
- Choose whether his team will receive or kick;
- Choose the goal his team will defend.

The captain who does not have first choice will then exercise the remaining option, and back to the deferring captain, if appropriate (3-2-3).

No more than four captains per team may take part in the coin toss. Each state association may establish the time at which the coin toss is held, or simulated on the field. In the absence of state association policy, the coin toss is to be held, or simulated on the field, three minutes before game time.

During the coin toss, no more than four captains from each team can be on the field of play. All other players must be off the field (3-2-2). The penalty is unsportsmanlike conduct (9-8-1g1).

Starting and Stopping the Clock

Starting the Clock

On all free kick downs, the clock starts when the ball is touched other than first touching by Team K (3-4-5), nor does it ever start on the

ready-for-play signal prior to a free kick down. The same applies if the free kick down is replayed.

On a scrimmage down, the clock starts on either the ready-for-play signal or the snap. In most cases, the reason for stopping the clock determines when it starts. On occasion, an event which occurs after the clock is stopped may dictate when it is started. The rule of thumb is the clock starts on the ready. However, there are several situations that call for the clock to start on the snap.

It is important to remember on any given play, there may be more than one reason for the clock to stop, such as awarding a first down to Team A and the ball carrier going out of bounds. Whenever there is more than one reason for stopping the clock, and one of those reasons requires it start on the snap, then starting it on the snap prevails (3-4-2b3). To say it another way, the reasons for starting the clock on the snap "outrank" those for starting it on the ready. Thus, we can classify reasons to stop the clock as "major" and "minor" clock stoppers.

When a major clock stopping event occurs, the clock is next started on the snap. A minor event starts it on the ready-for-play signal. As previously mentioned, if more than one event occurs on a given play, a major event takes precedence.

The major clock stoppers are:

- A period ends;
- A charged timeout;
- A TV timeout, if the clock is stopped for the timeout;
- The ball goes out of bounds;
- A forward pass (legal or illegal) is incomplete;
- Team B is awarded a new series;
- Either team is awarded new series after a legal kick;
- A score or touchback occurs;
- An attempt to *consume* time illegally;
- A delay-of-game penalty is accepted.

The minor clock stoppers are:

- An award of or measurement for a first down;
- An injured player;
- A TV timeout unless the clock is stopped for the timeout;
- To dry or change the game ball;
- A heat/humidity timeout;
- A coach/referee conference;
- Any unusual delay;
- An attempt to *conserve* time illegally;
- A sideline warning;
- Any other official's timeout;
- A dead ball following any penalty except an accepted penalty for a delay of game foul;
- Equipment repair;
- The four-minute warning when there is no visible game clock (3-3-1).

Once these major and minor events are understood, the exceptions presented in the rule book are of no concern. Memorizing the major events will serve you well. Here are some examples.

EXAMPLE 7-1: Team A gains first down yardage on a play which ends on (a) a run out of bounds, or (b) an inbounds run. **RULING:** In (a), the clock will start on the snap. A run out of bounds is a major clock stopper and takes precedence over the official's timeout to award a first down, which is a minor stopper. In (b), the clock will start on the ready. The only reason the clock was stopped was to award a first down.

EXAMPLE 7-2: With the clock running, Team A is flagged for holding on a down which ends on (a) an incomplete pass, or (b) an inbounds run. **RULING:** In (a), the clock will start on the snap. An incomplete pass is a major clock stopper and takes precedence over the penalty enforcement which is a minor stopper. In (b), the clock will start on the ready. The only reason the clock was stopped was for a minor clock stopper - the penalty enforcement.

EXAMPLE 7-3: On fourth down, Team K punts and is flagged for holding as the kick is made. The ball is caught by R2 who is tackled inbounds. **RULING:** If the penalty is accepted, the clock will start on the ready since it was stopped for the penalty and there is no major stopper. If the penalty is declined, the clock will start on the snap, since a new series is awarded to Team B.

An inadvertent whistle is a special case (3-4-2c). Whenever the clock is stopped for an errant toot and the down is replayed, it will start on the ready. Inadvertent whistles are discussed in Chapter 12.

EXAMPLE 7-4: An inadvertent whistle is blown while a Team A pass is in the air. **RULING:** The clock will start on the ready since nothing has occurred to cause it to start on the snap.

Among the reasons for stopping the clock is either team being awarded a first down (3-5-7b), which means either Team A has earned one or Team B has legal possession of the ball when the down ends. However, when Team A is awarded a first down and a kick is not involved, the clock will start on the ready (3-4-2a), as long no other major clock stopper has occurred. Two points to remember: (1) a change of possession does not dictate when the clock starts (it's which team is awarded a new series after the change of possession that matters) and (2) Teams A and B retain their designation throughout the down (2-44-4). Here is the classic example.