

NEW RULES FOR 2004

There are several new rules in the NFL in 2004.

The NFL Competition Committee spends the early part of the offseason examining existing rules, and suggesting possible changes to the rules. Rules changes are then voted upon by the clubs.

The rules changes this year may not seem major, but as Arizona Cardinals center **FRANK GARCIA** says, “It is our job to know the rules.”

New rules for 2004:

- **Teams will be awarded a third instant replay challenge if they are successful with their first two challenges and have a timeout remaining.** Previously, teams were able to challenge two plays per game, regardless of whether or not the challenges were upheld. The power to challenge plays with less than two minutes left in the first half and five minutes left in the second half still resides with the replay officials in the booth. **Reason for the change:** Will reward teams for making successful challenges.
- **“Prolonged” or “excessive” demonstrations involving two or more players or the possession of foreign object(s) that are not part of the uniform during the game (on the field or sideline) will result in a 15-yard unsportsmanlike conduct penalty.** Previously, such actions resulted in fines but not penalties. **Reason for the change:** Designed to further discourage unsportsmanlike behavior.
- **When the kickoff team is penalized for being offside, the receiving team has an option to enforce the penalty at the previous spot (where the play started) or at the succeeding spot (where the return ended).** Previously, there was only one option in this situation: enforce a five-yard penalty and re-kick from the 25-yard line. **Reason for the change:** Avoids a re-kick in situations where adding yardage to the end of the play is more advantageous.
- **Punts or field goal attempts that travel into the end zone untouched by the receiving team will immediately result in the ball becoming dead.** Previously, the receiving team – or the defense in FG situations – had the opportunity to advance a scrimmage kick after it already bounced in the end zone. **Reason for the change:** Eliminates the confusion that is created when an untouched kick lands in the end zone.
- **Any time a punt/kick returner signals for a fair catch, the ball will automatically be ruled dead unless it touches one of the players from the kicking team.** Previously, any player besides the one who called for the fair catch was free to advance a kick once it hit the ground. **Reason for the change:** Will force the receiving team to completely surrender its right to advance a kick once a fair catch signal is made. Prevents the receiving team from gaining an advantage by signaling for a fair catch, freezing the kicking team, letting the ball bounce, and then advancing.
- **Head coaches can now call time outs directly.** Previously, only players on the field of play could request time outs from officials. **Reason for the change:** Will save time and eliminate the confusion created by having to relay a time out request through a player. But the key here is that the coach must make eye contact with an official, or the timeout will not be granted.
- **A safety kick out of bounds is now among the exceptions that allows a team to extend a period for one more untimed down.** Previously, a period would end in a situation in which a safety kick went out of bounds. **Reason for the change:** Will prevent kickers from deliberately kicking the ball out of bounds after a safety to end a period, depriving the receiving team of an opportunity to make a play.
- **Personal fouls committed by the offense prior to the recovery of a backward pass or a fumble by the defense will be enforced from the dead ball spot.** Previously, the penalty would have to be declined for the change of possession to take place. **Reason for the change:** Since this was already the rule on interceptions, this change has been made to provide more consistency in the application of the rules. There will now be fewer situations in which a personal foul must be declined to retain possession of the ball.
- **Wide receivers are now permitted to wear jersey numbers ranging from 10-19 in addition to the traditional 80-89 numbers.** Previously, receivers were only allowed to wear numbers in the teens if all numbers from 80-89 were already taken. **Reason for the change:** With the increased number of receivers on NFL rosters, there was a shortage of numbers from 80-89.

Point of emphasis for 2004:

- **The illegal contact rule, which is designed to allow wide receivers to run unimpeded pass routes after five yards, will be strictly enforced.** The rule remains the same, but officials will determine whether contact after the five-yard mark has materially affected a receiver’s ability to run the route. Only incidental contact, or legal contact initiated by the wide receiver, is permissible.

Roster change for 2004:

- **The practice squad size for all NFL teams has been expanded to eight players.** Previously, teams carried five players on their practice squads. **Reason for the change:** Will facilitate player development.

...AND WE’RE GOING TO OVERTIME – FOR ITS 30TH YEAR!

Overtime was instituted 30 years ago, and – belying immediately the belief that the team that wins the toss wins the game – the first OT game ended in a 35-35 tie (Denver-Pittsburgh 9/22/74).

Thirty years later, overtime is still alive and well.

“I don’t know what’s better than sudden-death overtime – especially when you win,” says Tennessee Titans cornerback **SAMARI ROLLE**. “It adds a dimension to the game that is hard to match.”

In 2003 there were many overtime machinations:

- The second most overtimes in history were played (23, after 25 in 2002).
- There was at least one overtime game in 11 consecutive weeks (Weeks 2-12), the longest such streak in history.
- The Carolina Panthers became the first team in history to win three overtime games on the road in a season.

TOTAL NUMBER OF OT GAMES(1974-2003)			OT GAMES IN 2003		
Both Teams Had At Least One Possession	261	(72%)	Both Teams Had At Least One Possession	16	(70%)
Team Won Toss & Won Game	189	(52%)	Team Won Toss & Won Game	12	(52%)
Team Lost Toss & Won Game	160	(44%)	Team Lost Toss & Won Game	11	(48%)
Team Won Toss & Drove For Winning Score	102	(28%)	Team Won Toss & Drove For Winning Score	6	(26%)
Ties	16	(4%)	Ties	0	(0%)