

## NEW NFL RULES FOR 2007

A number of 2007 playing-rules changes were adopted by NFL owners at the NFL Annual Meeting in late March.

Following are the changes, with comments from the co-chairman of the NFL Competition Committee, **RICH MC KAY**:

- **INSTANT REPLAY:** Made a permanent rule. "We think instant replay has been an accepted part of our game now for a number of years," says McKay. "It's worked quite well." Also, high-definition replay equipment will be installed in NFL stadiums.
- **INSTANT REPLAY:** Also made permanent in the replay system were "down-by-contact" as a reviewable play and each review being limited to a maximum of 60 seconds.
- **SPIKING OF BALL:** It will now be a five-yard penalty for a player to spike or throw the ball after a down has ended, except for after a touchdown. "We did not think this type of spiking was good for sportsmanship or the administration of the game by officials," says McKay.
- **PLAYER SAFETY:** It will now be a 15-yard penalty (rather than five yards) for a player to block below the waist against an eligible receiver while the quarterback is in the pocket. However, when a player who receives the snap fumbles or muffs the ball, the restrictions on the defensive team relative to illegal contact and illegal cutblock will end.
- **TWO-MINUTE WARNING/10-SECOND RUNOFF:** The requirement that the offense has to be behind in the score or the score has to be tied for a 10-second clock runoff to be exercised against the offense for an excess timeout with two minutes to go in the first half or in the game has been eliminated. Now a 10-second runoff will take place no matter what the game situation. Any possible advantage for the offense (e.g., the old rule would not require a 10-second runoff if it were ahead) has been eliminated. The defense has the option to decline a 10-second runoff (which will give it more time should it get the ball back).
- **CLOCK STOPPAGE:** Two exceptions were added to the rule that dictates that the play clock be restarted at the time at which it was stopped prior to the snap. Now an instant replay review prior to the two-minute warning will reset the clock at 25 seconds (as has been the case with other stoppages such as a penalty), as will an instant replay review after the two-minute warning that results in a reversal. These changes will make the administration of the rule more consistent.
- **PACE OF GAME:** The foul for unintentional touching of a forward pass by an interior lineman has been eliminated. It was felt that no advantage was gained by the offense on such a play and elimination of the rule would speed up the game.
- **CROWD NOISE:** The five-yard penalty against the defense for excessive crowd noise has been eliminated. The penalty had not been called in many years.

There will be **points of emphasis** on certain rules this season (although the rules themselves have not changed):

- **Illegal contact and defensive holding** will continue to be strictly enforced. After five yards, if a receiver attempts to evade a defender, the defender cannot make contact that impedes the receiver in any way, as long as the quarterback is in the pocket with the football. Grabbing the jersey or any other part of a receiver's uniform is a foul for defensive holding and will be called. The only time defensive holding will not be called is if the ball is already in the air to another receiver. When an official sees illegal contact, he will look to the quarterback. If the quarterback is out of the pocket or if the ball is already in the air to another receiver, illegal contact will not be called.
- The Competition Committee reviewed the **definition of a score** and how to call an **airborne runner crossing over the goal line pylon**. In previous seasons, an airborne runner had to get any part of his **body** inside or over the goal line pylon before he touched out of bounds to be awarded a score. This was not consistent with spotting the ball elsewhere. Now an airborne runner must get any part of the **football** to pass over or inside the goal line pylon before he touches out of bounds to be awarded a score. This will make the rule easier to understand and consistent everywhere along the sideline.
- **Taunting** will continue to be a point of emphasis, particularly aggressive acts. These acts will result in a 15-yard penalty.

Although they are not playing-rule changes, two procedures for coaching employment also were changed:

- Assistant coaches on Super Bowl teams may now interview for a **second time** with a club for its head-coaching position during the off-week after the championship game. "We wanted to make sure that coaches on Super Bowl teams did not feel it was a disadvantage," says McKay.
- Clubs now have the exclusive right to an assistant coach's contract through the **second** Tuesday after their season has ended or last playoff game, rather than the **third** Tuesday as in the past.