



COLLEGE FOOTBALL OFFICIATING, LLC

TEN-SECOND SUBTRACTION FROM THE GAME CLOCK

The making of the rules can be a fascinating process, illustrated perfectly by this new rule. Often one game can grab the attention of the country in such a way that a consensus quickly forms around the need for a rules change. And that's what happened. The story of one of the 2010 bowl games was that the offensive team apparently created an unfair clock advantage that allowed them to kick a game-tying field goal and subsequently win the game in overtime. Largely as a result of that game, the rules committee in 2011 approved a rule that deals with a team gaining a clock advantage by committing a foul late in the game.

Here's the new rule:

Rule 3-4-4 (New Article)

10-Second Subtraction from Game Clock

ARTICLE 4.

a. With the game clock running and less than one minute remaining in either half, if a player of either team commits a foul that causes the clock to stop, the officials may subtract 10 seconds from the game clock at the option of the offended team. The fouls that fall in this category include but are not limited to:

- (1) Any foul that prevents the snap (e.g., false start, encroachment, defensive offside by contact in the neutral zone, etc.);
- (2) Intentional grounding to stop the clock;
- (3) Incomplete illegal forward pass;
- (4) Backward pass thrown out of bounds to stop the clock;
- (5) Any other foul committed with the intent of stopping the clock.

The offended team may accept the yardage penalty and decline the 10-second subtraction. If the yardage penalty is declined the 10-second subtraction is declined by rule.

b. The 10-second rule does not apply if the game clock is not running when the foul occurs or if the foul does not cause the game clock to stop (e.g., illegal formation).

c. After enforcement of the penalty and 10-second subtraction (if any) the game clock starts on the referee's signal.

d. If the fouling team has a timeout remaining it may avoid the 10-second subtraction by using a timeout. In this case the game clock starts on the snap after the timeout.

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The rule has several elements to it, so let's break them down and then look at some examples.

1. The rule applies only if the game clock is running inside one minute of either half.

With one or more minutes in the half the referee has broad discretion about when to start and stop the clock under Rule 3-4-3. It is only when the game clock reads 0:59 or less that this new rule comes into effect, and then only if the game clock is running when the foul is committed. If the previous play had been an incomplete pass, for example, the game clock would not be running so the new rule would not apply.

2. The rule applies equally to either team. We tend to think of the offense as the team trying to manipulate the clock—of the two teams the offense is more in control of the pace of the game—but the rule applies to the defense as well. It may be that the defense is behind and thus wants to get the clock stopped, so it commits a foul—by, say, jumping offside to make contact. The same rule applies to Team B as to Team A. Those familiar with the NFL rule will recognize a difference here: the 10-second subtraction rule in the NFL only applies to Team A.

3. Only those fouls that cause the clock to stop are affected by this rule. There is some confusion on this point, which sometimes arises out of not understanding the difference between a foul and a penalty. For example, if a team commits a false start, the officials shut the play down; this is a foul that stops the clock. But if a team snaps the ball when it has five players in the backfield—an illegal formation—the play continues: this is not a foul that stops the clock. Of course once the ball is dead the clock is stopped, but this is to administer the *penalty*; the clock is not stopped because of the *foul itself*.

4. The 10-second subtraction is not automatic: the offended team has the option. There could be circumstances where the offended team would not want the time taken off the clock, perhaps in the hope that it would get possession of the ball with time remaining. The offended team may accept the yardage penalty and elect not to have time taken off the clock. But if it declines the yardage penalty the 10-second subtraction does *not* apply.

5. Intent is not an issue in applying this rule. It could be that the fouling team does not intend to commit the foul—an unintentional false start is the usual example—but that doesn't matter. The rule applies if the conditions are met, and intent has nothing to do with anything.

6. The fouling team may avoid the 10-second subtraction if it has a timeout to use. It is unlikely that this team would foul in the situation where it has a timeout, but it could happen, so in such a case it could use the timeout and avoid the 10-second subtraction.

PLAY SITUATIONS

1. Second and 10 at the B-30. The game clock is running in the second half. Team A trails by two points and is out of timeouts. After the ball is ready for play lineman A66 commits a false start, and when the officials stop the game clock it reads (a) 13 seconds; (b) 8 seconds. Team B accepts the yardage penalty and the time subtraction. **RULING:** (a) Five-yard penalty with 10 seconds subtracted from the game clock, which is set at 3 seconds. Second and 15 at the B-35. The clock starts on the referee's signal. (b) The game is over. Team B wins.

2. Second and 10 at the B-30. The game clock is running in the second half. Team A trails by two points and is out of timeouts. At the snap Team A has five players in the backfield. A22 carries for a three-yard gain to the B-27. When the ball is declared dead the game clock reads (a) 13 seconds; (b) 8 seconds. **RULING:** (a) and (b) Five-yard penalty, illegal formation. Second and 15 at the B-35. Because the illegal formation is not a foul that causes the clock to stop, the 10-second subtraction does not apply. After the penalty is administered the game clock starts on the referee's signal.

3. Team A is leading 24-21 with less than one minute in the game and the game clock running. With the ball ready for play on third and seven at the B-35, tackle B55 jumps across the neutral zone and contacts A77. The officials shut the play down with the game clock showing 0:38. Team B is out of timeouts. **RULING:** Offside against Team B. Five-yard penalty and a 10-second subtraction from the game clock. The game clock is set at 0:28. Third and two at the B-40. The clock starts on the referee's signal.

4. Team A is in punt formation on fourth and 12 at the A-30. The score is tied with less than one minute remaining in regulation and the game clock is running. Team A is out of timeouts. Guard A66 commits a false start, stopping the game clock at 0:45. **RULING:** This is a situation where Team B might choose to accept the yardage penalty but decline the 10-second subtraction, since they will probably get the ball. If so, it is fourth and 17 at the A-25 and the game clock starts on the snap. If Team B allows the 10-second subtraction along with the five-yard penalty, the game clock starts on the referee's signal. Note that if Team B declines the yardage penalty there is no 10-second subtraction and the game clock starts on the snap.