



2026 NCAA FOOTBALL RULES CHANGES

(FBSOC Approval - March 19)

(FCSOC Approval - March 23)

(PROP Approval – April 15)

NCAA Rules Body

- Significant changes for 2026.
- DI rules committee with 15 members – 8 FBS, 4 FCS, 2 SA's and the SRE.
- DI's approval committee is the FBSOC & FCSOC.
- DII & DIII rules committee combined, separate meetings following the DI meetings with the PROP as the approving body.
- SRE's stated goal is to hold the NCAA rules together and not have subdivided playing rules.



Targeting Penalty

(Rules 9-1-3 & 9-1-4 Penalty)

- This change will be an experimental rule for 2026.
- Targeting fouls that are upheld will include a disqualification for the current game, and the rule will eliminate the carryover disqualification for fouls in the second half.
- If a player receives a second Targeting foul within the same season, disqualification for the remainder of the game and the first half of the team's next scheduled game within that season.
- If a player receives a third or subsequent Targeting foul within the same season, disqualification for the remainder of the game and that player will receive an automatic one-game suspension in their team's next scheduled game of that season.
- National Coordinator review available after a players second Targeting foul is confirmed.



Players Uniform and Enforcement

(Rules 1-4-4-h & 1-4-8)

- Leg Coverings: Game socks and/or leg coverings must cover the entire area from the top of the shoe to the bottom of the pants (no skin gap).
- Enforcement includes warning, 5-yard penalty, 15-yard penalty.
- **Not approved by the FBSOC.**



Numbering Exceptions – **Scrimmage Kick Formations** **(Rule 2-16-10 & 7-1-4)**

- Intent of the initial rule introduced in the 1980's was to eliminate players having to change jerseys to cover kicks.
- Teams have developed schemes that make it difficult for the defense to identify the ineligible receivers, which was not the original intent of the rule.
- Current rule leaves a consistency issue with “it must be obvious that a kick will be attempted”.
- Approved by football oversight, final rule language completed with play interpretations.



Numbering Exceptions – Scrimmage Kick Formations

(Rule 2-16-10)

- a. A scrimmage kick formation is a formation with no player other than the potential kicker (or holder) aligned within the frame of the body of the snapper and no player aligned in the clear path from the snapper to the potential kicker (or holder), and with either (1) at least one potential kicker 10 or more yards behind the neutral zone; or (2) a potential holder and potential kicker seven or more yards behind the neutral zone in position for a place kick.
- b. To qualify as a scrimmage kick formation, Team A must either (1) have at least five linemen wearing jerseys numbered 50 through 79; or (2) meet the numbering exception requirements under Rule 7-1-4-a-5.
- c. To qualify as a scrimmage kick formation, it must be obvious that a kick will be attempted.
- d. If Team A is in a scrimmage kick formation at the snap, any action by Team A during the down is deemed to be from a scrimmage kick formation.



Numbering Exceptions – Scrimmage Kick Formations

(Rule 7-1-4)

- If lined up in scrimmage kick formation (Rule 2-16-10), Team A may have fewer than five linemen numbered 50 through 79, subject to the following conditions:
- (a) Team A must have the snapper and two linemen on each side of the snapper, who are lined up in (or touching) the tackle box (2x2 formation) and these five linemen become exceptions to the numbering rule.
- (b) These linemen are ineligible receivers by position and become exceptions to the numbering rule when they line up following the snapper taking his position.
- (c) Once a player is established as a numbering exception, they may not shift or move to another position.
- (d) Any and all such numbering-exception players must be clearly on the line of scrimmage, and all backs must be clearly in the backfield. Otherwise, Team A commits a foul for illegal formation.
- (e) Any and all such players are exceptions to the numbering rule throughout the down and remain ineligible receivers unless they become eligible under Rule 7-3-5 (forward pass touched by an official or a Team B player).



Numbering Exceptions – Scrimmage Kick Formations (Play Interpretations)

- **Play 1:** On fourth down with potential punter A94 lined up 12 yards behind the snapper, Team A does not have five linemen numbered 50-79 in the game. They line up in a 2 X 2 formation with A33 and A27 to the left of snapper A49, and A8 and A31 to the right. All five players are in the tackle box and A49 has his hands above his knees. A29 is in the shield five yards behind the line of scrimmage. After this initial formation, there is a shift and A29 and A31 switch positions as A49 puts his hands on the ball. A49 snaps the ball and A94 kicks the ball through the end zone for a touchback. **RULING:** Team A commits a foul for Illegal Formation when the ball is snapped. The five players in the 2 X 2 formation (A33, A27, A49, A8, A31) are locked into their positions once they line up after the snapper A49 is in his position. Once established as a numbering exception, A31 may not shift and must remain in his position as a part of the 2 X 2 formation. Note: The position of the snapper's hands is no longer relevant as the new rule now states that players become exceptions to the numbering rule when the snapper takes his position.



Numbering Exceptions – Scrimmage Kick Formations (Play Interpretations)

- **Play 2:** On fourth down with potential punter A94 lined up 12 yards behind the snapper, Team A does not have five linemen numbered 50-79 in the game. They line up in a 3 X 1 formation with A33, A27, and A8 to the left of snapper A49, and A31 to the right. All five players are in the tackle box with no other teammates on the line of scrimmage within the tackle box. A49 snaps the ball and A94 kicks the ball through the end zone for a touchback. **RULING:** Team A commits a foul at the snap for an Illegal Formation. Team A must be in a 2 X 2 formation in order to meet the requirements for numbering exceptions.



Numbering Exceptions – Scrimmage Kick Formations (Play Interpretations)

- **Play 3:** On fourth down with potential punter A94 lined up 12 yards behind the snapper, Team A does not have five linemen numbered 50-79 in the game. They line up in a 2 X 3 formation with A33 and A27 to the left of snapper A49, and A8, A31, and A18 to the right. They have a gunner on each side of the field lined up on the line and three backs (including the punter) in place. Prior to the snap, Team A (a) shifts A33 one yard back off the line of scrimmage, or (b) shifts A18 one yard back off the line of scrimmage. A49 snaps the ball and A94 kicks the ball through the end zone for a touchback. **RULING:** (a) Team A has committed a foul for Illegal Formation since A33 shifted out of the 2 X 2 formation prior to the snap. (b) There is no foul since the 2 X 2 formation remains with A33, A27, A49, A8 and A31 in position and Team A has no more than four backs.



Numbering Exceptions – Scrimmage Kick Formations (Play Interpretations)

- **Play 4:** On fourth down with potential punter A94 lined up 12 yards behind the snapper, Team A lines up with A33 and A50 to the left of snapper A49, and A8 to the right; all four players are in the tackle box. A55 is lined up to the right of A8 (a) with a four-yard split and is not in the tackle box, or (b) with his left foot touching the tackle box. A49 snaps the ball and A94 kicks the ball through the end zone for a touchback. **RULING:** (a) Team A has committed a foul for Illegal Formation since A55 is outside the tackle box and a 2 X 2 formation with those players in or touching the tackle box is required unless five players numbered 50-79 are in the game and lined up on the line of scrimmage. (b) The formation is legal since Team A is in a 2 X 2 formation. Note: Having one to four players numbered 50-79 is effectively not having any 50-79, and does not meet the rule requirement for having five linemen numbered 50-79.



Numbering Exceptions – Scrimmage Kick Formations (Play Interpretations)

- **Play 5:** On fourth down with potential punter A94 lined up 12 yards behind the snapper, Team A does not have five linemen numbered 50-79 in the game. They line up in a 2 X 2 formation with A33 and A27 to the left of snapper A49, and A18 and A31 to the right. Team A has two gunners, A80 and A88. These gunners are on the line of scrimmage wide and to the right of A31 with A88 nearer to the sideline. A33 is uncovered at the snap. A49 snaps the ball and A94 kicks the ball through the end zone for a touchback. **RULING:** This is a legal formation. The players in the 2 X 2 formation are numbering exceptions and are ineligible by position. A tackle position can be left uncovered, but this does not make him an eligible player. The formation is legal, but A80 is not an eligible receiver because he is not on the end of his scrimmage line.



Numbering Exceptions – Scrimmage Kick Formations (Play Interpretations)

- **Play 6:** On fourth down, Team A has a potential punter A94 lined up 12 yards directly behind the snapper and a three-person shield five yards deep that is not aligned within the frame of the snapper. Team A's snapper, A55, is lined up with no other linemen in the tackle box. A80 is lined up wide to the left side of the formation, and wide to the right of the snapper are A60, A65, A70, A75, and A88 who is on the end of the line. A55 snaps the ball and A94 kicks the ball through the end zone for a touchback.
RULING: This is a legal scrimmage kick formation as Team A meets the requirement of having 5 linemen numbered 50-79, no back lined up in the frame of the snapper, and it is obvious a kick will be attempted.





NCAA SCRIMMAGE KICK - JERSEY CHANGE



	<i>LT</i>	<i>LG</i>	<i>C</i>	<i>RG</i>	<i>RT</i>
<i>GAME DAY ROSTER #</i>					
<i>SCRIMMAGE KICK JERSEY</i>					

SECOND TEAM - JERSEY CHANGE

	<i>LT</i>	<i>LG</i>	<i>C</i>	<i>RG</i>	<i>RT</i>
<i>GAME DAY ROSTER #</i>					
<i>SCRIMMAGE KICK JERSEY</i>					

- Mechanics for scrimmage kick formations – players’ jersey change announcement is expedited if a team elects to have 5 players on the line numbered 50 – 79 and presents the Referee in pre-game with the “NCAA Scrimmage Kick – Jersey Change” form. Referee Announcement - **“(Team Name) is making jersey changes for the scrimmage kick formation.”**



Offensive Pass Interference

(Rule 7-3-8-b)

- The penalty for offensive pass interference is being adjusted to 10-yards.
- The rules reserve 15-yard penalties for Personal Fouls and Unsportsmanlike Conduct.
- Defensive pass interference is a spot foul, with a maximum of 15-yards.



Play Clock after IR Review **following the Two-Minute Timeout** **(Rule 3-2-4-c-12)**

- The play clock is set to 25 seconds following an Instant replay review with the following exception:
- After the Two-Minute Timeout in the 2nd or 4th quarters, when the Replay Official stops the game for review, the play clock will be frozen at that point and if the ruling is upheld, it will be restarted following the review when the ball is made ready for play by the Referee's signal.
- If the play clock displays less than 10 seconds when it is frozen, it will be reset to 10 seconds and started when the ball is made ready for play by the Referee's signal.



Modernizing the Unsportsmanlike Conduct Rule (Rule 9-2-1-a)

- The Rules Committee is satisfied with the solid judgement that officials are demonstrating evaluating Unsportsmanlike Conduct.
- Rule 9-2-1 is being adjusted to ensure that officials will continue to use good judgement in **penalizing actions that interfere with orderly game administration, taunting actions that are directed at an opponent, and abusive, threatening, or celebratory actions that are demeaning to the game or an opponent.**
- The list of automatic unsportsmanlike conduct fouls will be minimized (a total of 5 UNS automatics) and will be consistently penalized.



Modernizing the **Unsportsmanlike Conduct Rule** **(Rule 9-2-1-a)**

- Any form of gun violence including brandishing a weapon.
- A slashing of the throat or a nose wipe signal.
- A player removing their helmet after the ball is dead (with exceptions for timeouts and equipment adjustments).
- Dead-ball contact fouls such as pushing, shoving, striking, etc. that occur clearly after the ball is dead and that are not part of the game action.
- After the ball is dead, using forcible contact to push or pull an opponent off the pile.



Additional Coach Replay Challenge

(Rule 12-5-1-b)

- A head coach initiates a challenge by taking a team timeout before the ball is next legally put into play and informing the referee that they are challenging the ruling of the previous play.
- The head coach has two replay challenges per game. If a coach wins at least one of their first two challenges, they are awarded a third challenge.
- A challenge can only be made if the team has a timeout remaining and available and if the challenge is successful, the team's timeout will not be charged.



Fair Catch Kick

(Rule 6-5-1-e)

- Following a fair catch (or awarded fair catch) the ball shall be put in play by a snap by the receiving team at the spot of the catch if the ball is caught.
Optionally, the receiving team may elect to put the ball in play with a Fair Catch Kick if they notify the Referee before the ball is ready for play.
Following the ready for play, there is no option to select a Fair Catch Kick.
- *Following the fair catch, if a Fair Catch Kick is selected by the receiving team, the ball is put in play at the spot of the catch or the succeeding spot after penalties.*
- *Once a Fair Catch Kick is selected by the head coach before the next ready for play, the decision is irrevocable.*
- *If the catch is in a side zone, the ball is transferred into the nearest hash mark. There is no option for Team A to otherwise relocate the ball.*
- *The play clock will be set to 25 seconds, and the game clock starts when the ball is legally kicked.*
- *If the fair catch occurs as time expires in a half, the team is allowed to make the Fair Catch Kick as an untimed down.*



Fair Catch Kick

(Rule 6-5-1-e)

- *The fair catch kick line for the kicking team is the most forward point of the spot of the fair catch (or awarded fair catch), or the succeeding spot after penalties.*
- *The fair catch kick line for the receiving team is the yard line 10 yards in advance of the kicking team's fair catch kick line.*
- *The formation requirements for a fair catch kick will follow Free Kick rules (Rule 6-1-2-a, b and c).*
- *The kick must be a field goal place kick with a holder (no tee) or a drop kick, and if the kick passes over the crossbar and through the uprights, a field goal is scored and 3 points are awarded to the kicking team.*
- *If the Fair Catch Kick is unsuccessful, all rules pertaining to scrimmage kicks and the Next Play provisions of an unsuccessful field goal apply.*
- *The receiving team may return the kick if it is possessed in the field of play or caught in the end zone. If the unsuccessful kick is untouched by the receivers, then they will take over and snap the ball at the previous spot (the spot of the kick), or the 20-yard line, in accordance with the Next Play provisions.*
- *An awarded fair catch occurs when the offended team chooses to take the ball after enforcement of kick-catching interference to a receiving team player that has given a valid signal for a fair catch.*





2026 NCAA FOOTBALL MAJOR EDITORIAL CHANGES

Major Editorial Changes

- Rule 1-4-6-d Align insignia size to match NCAA commercial logo legislation.
- Rule 1-4-6-g Outline requirements of helmet attachments that enhance player safety.
- Rule 1-4-11-b Clarified coach-to-player communications during free kicks.
- Rule 3-2-4-b-3 Standardized referee mechanic to reset the play clock.
- Rule 3-5-2-e Penalty for Team A substitution fouls made clear.
- Rule 12-3-6-i Provided additional clarification on fouls after a replay overturn.





2026 NCAA FOOTBALL MAJOR CCA MECHANICS CHANGES

2026 Major Mechanics Changes

- Mechanics for Fair Catch Kick have been developed. R – with the Kicker, the U & CJ on Team A's restraining line, the SJ on Team B's restraining line, the HL & LJ at the goal line pylons, and the FJ & BJ under the goal post.
- Mechanics for scrimmage kick formations – players' jersey change announcement to be expedited if a team elects to have 5 players on the line numbered 50 – 79 and presents the Referee with the "NCAA Scrimmage Kick – Jersey Change" form. Referee Announcement - **"(Team Name) is making jersey changes for the scrimmage kick formation."**
- Unbalanced Team A Field Goal Formation: The Center Judge lines up to Team A's tackle-over side of the formation.
- Onside Kick – current experimental mechanic with the HL & LJ on Team A's restraining line being evaluated.





NCAA SCRIMMAGE KICK - JERSEY CHANGE



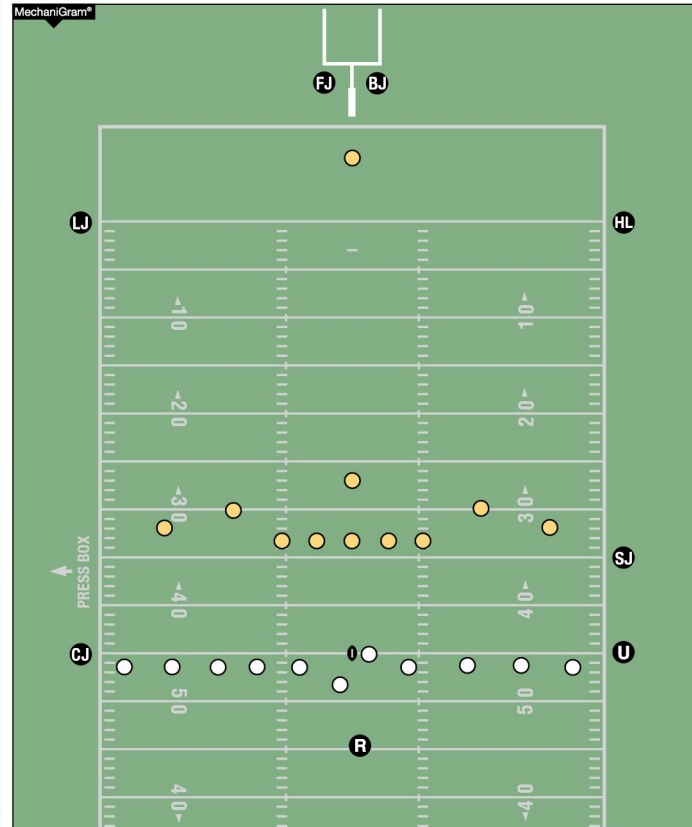
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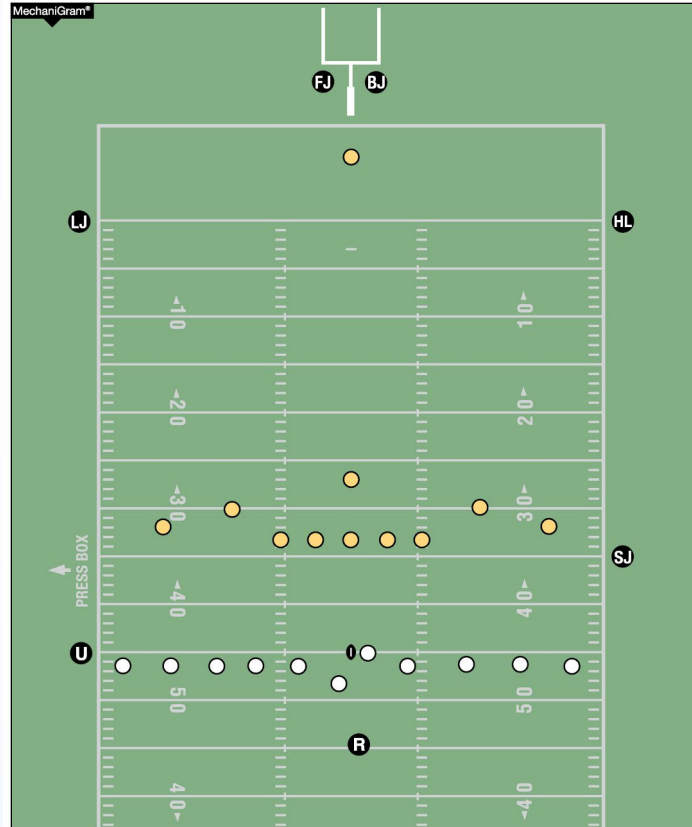
Fair Catch Kick

(Mechanics – Crew of 8)



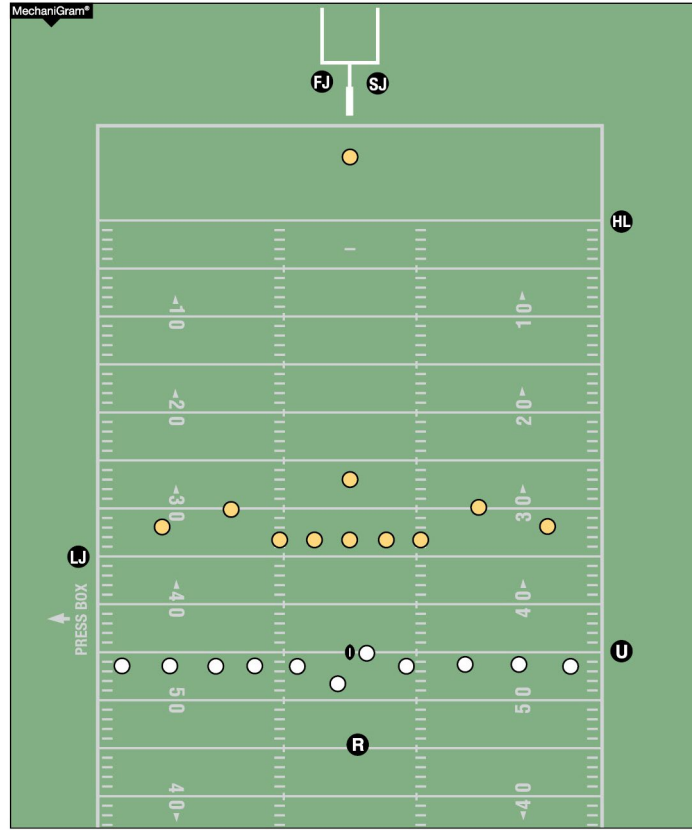
Fair Catch Kick

(Mechanics – Crew of 7)



Fair Catch Kick

(Mechanics – Crew of 6)





2026 SCRIMMAGE KICK NUMBERING EXCEPTIONS

★ QUICK VISUAL GUIDE FOR COACHES & OFFICIALS ★

2026 amendment to 2025 NCAA rules



1 WHAT STARTS THE EXCEPTION?

- 1 SNAPPER TAKES HIS POSITION
- 2 THE 2 x 2 PLAYERS LINE UP AFTER THE SNAPPER
- 3 NOW THEY BECOME NUMBERING EXCEPTIONS AND ARE LOCKED IN

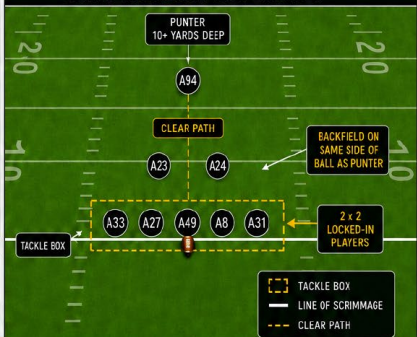
THE SNAPPER'S HAND POSITION IS NO LONGER THE TRIGGER.

2 LEGAL 2 x 2 FORMATION

- 2 ON EACH SIDE OF SNAPPER
- ALL 5 IN OR TOUCHING THE TACKLE BOX
- ALL 5 ON THE LINE OF SCRIMMAGE
- BACKS CLEARLY BEHIND THE LINE

NO BACK MAY ALIGN WITHIN THE SNAPPER'S FRAME EXCEPT THE POTENTIAL KICKER OR HOLDER.

LEGAL SCRIMMAGE KICK EXAMPLE



3 ★ THE BIG 2026 EMPHASIS ★

- 1 THE SNAPPER'S POSITION IS THE TRIGGER.
- 2 THE SNAPPER'S HAND POSITION NO LONGER MATTERS.
- 3 THE 2 x 2 PLAYERS ARE LOCKED IN ONCE THEY LINE UP AFTER THE SNAPPER TAKES HIS POSITION.

4 LEGAL VS. ILLEGAL EXAMPLES

A LEGAL TRUE 2 x 2	B ILLEGAL 3 x 1 IS NOT 2 x 2	C ILLEGAL LOCKED-IN PLAYER SHIFTS	D LEGAL EXTRA PLAYER MOVES; 2 x 2 STAYS INTACT	E LEGAL UNCOVERED TACKLE IN THE 2 x 2	F LEGAL FIVE LINEMEN NUMBERED 50-79
Legal 2 x 2 All five on the line. Backs clearly behind.	Not two on each side of the punter.	Once established, a numbering-exception player may not move to another position.	The extra player (A18) moves. The 2 x 2 remains intact.	A33 is uncovered. Still part of the 2 x 2 and eligible by position.	Five eligible linemen (50-79). Numbering exceptions not needed.
✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓

4 LEGAL VS. ILLEGAL EXAMPLES

A LEGAL TRUE 2 x 2	B ILLEGAL 3 x 1 IS NOT 2 x 2
Legal 2 x 2. All five on the line. Backs clearly behind.	Not two on each side of the punter.
✓	✗

C ILLEGAL LOCKED-IN PLAYER SHIFTS	D LEGAL EXTRA PLAYER MOVES; 2 x 2 STAYS INTACT	E LEGAL UNCOVERED TACKLE IN THE 2 x 2	F LEGAL FIVE LINEMEN NUMBERED 50-79
BEFORE SNAP AFTER SNAP	Once established, a numbering-exception player may not move to another position.	The extra player (A18) moves. The 2 x 2 remains intact.	Five eligible linemen (50-79). Numbering exceptions not needed.
✗	✓	✓	✓

WHAT A LEGAL 2 x 2 LOOKS LIKE



- ✓ 2 on each side of punter
- ✓ All 5 in or touching tackle box
- ✓ All 5 on the line of scrimmage
- ✓ Backs clearly behind the line

THIS IS THE STANDARD.

KEY RULES: 2-16-10 and 7-1-4-a-5(a)-(e)

PURPOSE: Stop scrimmage-kick numbering exceptions from disguising eligible receivers.