



MASSACHUSETTS INTERSCHOLASTIC  
ATHLETIC ASSOCIATION



# MIAA Football Rules 2019

## NFHS Rules Notes

MIAA high school football has a new set of rules this fall and many fans will want to do their homework. This year instead of playing by NCAA rules, MIAA member schools will be using National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) rules. NFHS rules are created for the high school athlete and are approved by 50 state associations across the country. The rules are designed to improve player safety and recognize the skill level and experience of high school athletes. But the change will require your patience, and maybe a little homework.

Before you voice disapproval with an official's call this season, remember, the official just may be right. Here are a few notable rule differences between NCAA and NFHS rules. More information is available on the MIAA website.

- 1) Offense commits a live ball foul the enforcement at times will be at the spot of the foul or where the play ends. This is a major difference. For example, an offensive lineman holds a defensive player in the offensive backfield. The penalty yardage will be applied from where the foul occurred in the backfield, not from the line of scrimmage.
- 2) Personal foul and unsportsmanlike conduct penalties in high school football do not carry an automatic first down, they are just 15-yard penalties. Also, in high school football, defensive pass interference no longer carries the automatic first down either – just the 15-yard penalty. In many instances the 15-yard penalty may also result in a first down but the first down is not automatic. Only roughing penalties (kicker, snapper, holder & passer) have an automatic first down application with the yardage penalty.
- 3) There are no “free fouls” in high school football, meaning if the defense enters the neutral zone before the snap this is a foul and all play is stopped. In this instance, the defense cannot retreat to avoid a penalty. If a foul is committed and observed, it will be called when it occurs
- 4) If the defense commits a foul during a live ball (i.e. defensive holding or pass interference) and the offense scores on the play, the penalty can be enforced on the try or succeeding kickoff.
- 5) In high school rules, a kicked ball – punt, kickoff or field goal attempt – that crosses the plane of the goal line becomes dead. There is no return or any other play of the football once it crosses the goal line.
- 6) There is no “outside the tackle box” for the quarterback in high school football. In NCAA and NFL levels, if a quarterback is outside of the tackle, the

quarterback can throw the ball away – as long as it crosses the line of scrimmage – in an effort to avoid a sack. At the high school level, there is no such rule. If a quarterback intentionally throws the ball out of bounds with no receiver in the area, it doesn't matter whether he is outside the tackle box or not. It's a penalty for intentional grounding.

- 7) Blocking below the waist is only permitted in what is called the Free Blocking Zone (FBZ), “when the ball is in the FBZ”. The FBZ is defined as an area 3 yards either side of the line of scrimmage and 4 yards either side of the ball.

## EDUCATIONAL ATHLETICS

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