



2026 FOOTBALL PRESEASON BULLETIN #1

Fair Catch Kick Clarification

One of the major changes this year was the addition of the Fair Catch Kick (FCK), Rule 2-16-11. We have become aware of a potential situation that could cause confusion by teams and officials regarding this FCK and some existing rules in the rulebook, specifically Rule 10-2-5-f which covers restraining lines on free kicks following a touchdown, field goal, or safety. That rule prevents teams from being backed inside their own 5-yard line to start a free kick down.

The specific type of situation that is not addressed in the new rule, but which could occur, is one where the fair catch is made inside Team A's (offense) 15-yard line. This is a very plausible situation when a team has been backed up close to their own goal line and then the punter has a shanked or partially blocked punt. The new Rule 2-16-11 tells us that the two teams must be separated by 10 yards until the ball is kicked on the FCK. The question becomes: Does Rule 10-2-5-f apply and if it does, how do we manage keeping the 10-yard separation while also not making the receiving team line up inside their own 5-yard line?

Rule 2-16-11 creates a new type of kick, the Fair Catch Kick (FCK). While some free kick formation rules are written into the FCK rule, the FCK also includes some parts of the existing scrimmage kick rules. The FCK is, by definition, **not a Free Kick**. Therefore, rule 10-2-5-f does not apply to FCKs. Rule 2-16-11 should be applied without regard for 10-2-5-f. Furthermore, the term "restraining line," defined at Rule 2-12-5, is not used in conjunction with the FCK. The FCK definition uses a new line called the "**Fair Catch Kick line**" which might easily be confused by some to mean restraining line. It is not a "restraining line." If the 10-yard separation between teams means the receiving team ends up inside their end zone, that is where the officials will line them up. It is also noted that since the FCK is not a free kick, the 10-yard separation between Fair Catch Kick lines will apply to both eleven (11) and six (6)-player games.

Play Example 1: Home team is winning 21-20 with 5 seconds left in the half. Home team attempts to punt, snapping from their 3-yard line. The punter kicks the ball high but very short. The visitor's punt returner signals for a fair catch at the home team 9-yard line and completes the catch there. The visiting coach immediately indicates he would like to attempt a FCK.

RULING: His team will be allowed to attempt the kick from the 9-yard line, and the opponent will be lined up 1 yard deep in their own end zone.

Play Example 2: Home team is winning 21-20 with 5 seconds left in the half. Home team attempts to punt, snapping from their 3-yard line. The punter kicks the ball high but very short. The visitor's punt returner signals for a fair catch at the home team 9-yard line. The home team is flagged for kick catch interference (KCI) at the 9-yard line. The ball is muffed but then recovered by either team while grounded at the 12-yard line. The visiting coach immediately indicates he would like to attempt a FCK.



RULING: His team will be allowed to attempt the kick from the 4 ½ yard line where the ball is spotted after the penalty for the KCI. and the opponent will be lined up 5 ½ yards deep in their own end zone. The crew will use the chains to help them determine the 10-Yard separation, as detailed below.

Fair Catch Kick Mechanic

For each Fair Catch Kick attempt, the Down Box shall be placed at the kicking team's Fair Catch Kick line.

If a Fair Catch Kick places the receiving team's Fair Catch Kick line inside their end zone, the **H** shall use the chains to establish the Fair Catch Kick line for the receiving team. Place one stake at the kicking team's Fair Catch Kick line, then extend the chain to its full length toward the receiving team. The Fair Catch Kick line will be at that stake when the chain is fully extended.

For six-player games, the chains will be extended to their full 15-yard length toward the receiving team, then that stake will be placed at the taped spot indicating 10 yards from the other stake.

Numbering Exception Clarification

This year's change for the numbering exception has been clarified to address late substitutions into the 2 X 2 box when Team A has 10 or fewer players on the field. When teams move into a scrimmage kick formation, they sometimes substitute players. A question arose regarding situations where a substitute(s) enters the game after the snapper is in position and other players are in the box but missing one of the required players in the 2 X 2 formation. This situation is addressed below.

Play Example 3: Team A intends to be in a scrimmage kick formation utilizing the numbering exception but has only ten players on the field. The right tackle position is vacant, leaving Team A with an initial 2 X 1 formation. A41 then enters the field lining up at right tackle.

RULING: Legal. Officials should be utilizing proper substitution mechanics upon recognizing only ten Team A players are on the field until the substitution process is complete including Team B's opportunity to match substitutes. If the offense shifted the other interior linemen positions (this would be the 4 in the box around the snapper) from what was originally shown to something different, it would be an illegal formation. Further, if the offense is clearly utilizing the substitution process to deceive their opponent, then Team A has fouled for Unsportsmanlike Conduct.

If you have any questions regarding this memo or any other football-related issue, please email football@taso.org.