



NFHS GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS FOR FOOTBALL GAME AND PLAY CLOCK OPERATORS

GENERAL

- A. The game and play clock operators are integral members of the officiating crew and game administration. Unfair advantages occur when either the clock is not started or stopped correctly by rule. Great care must be exercised to ensure excessive time lag does not occur in starting or stopping the clocks.
- B. The game and play clock operators must be separate individuals and neither should be tasked with operating the scoreboard.
- C. Both clock operators should meet with the Referee and the game officials responsible for timing the game, either on the field or in the game official's locker room at the time specified by the state association. The following shall be discussed:
 - 1. The sequence of pre-game and halftime activities, the time when kickoff will occur, and the length of the halftime intermission.
 - 2. A complete review of the starting and stopping of the clocks in accordance with the playing rules, to include overtime and the running clock procedure (if applicable).
 - 3. The procedure for communication with the operator(s) during the game and adjustment of the clock, if necessary.

GAME CLOCK

- D. The game clock should be started with a countdown to game time as soon as the facility is opened. At least a 60-minute countdown is desirable.
- E. The halftime intermission will start on the Back Judge's or Referee's signal which is given after the players leave the field. The operator will reset the game clock to three minutes for the warm-up period immediately when the halftime intermission expires and start it without any signal by the officiating crew.
- F. If the game clock malfunctions, the operator may give the game officials the official time. The game official responsible for timing will then pick up the correct time on their stopwatch. Should the game clock be subsequently repaired, its use may be resumed at the Referee's discretion.

G. Game Procedures:

1. On all free kicks (kickoffs), the nearest game official(s) will signal the legal touching of the ball by winding the game clock. The game clock does not start on first touching by Team K, kicks into the end zone or kicks that go out of bounds untouched.
2. The game clock operator should react to game clock-stopping events without waiting for a signal (e.g., a pass that is clearly incomplete). If there is any question as to what occurred (e.g. it is uncertain if the runner stepped out of bounds), the game clock operator should wait for a signal. The primary game clock-stopping events are:
 - (a) Following a touchdown, field goal, touchback or safety.
 - (b) When a forward pass hits the ground.
 - (c) When a runner is tackled clearly beyond the line-to-gain (first down) stake.
 - (d) When it is obvious the runner has gone out of bounds. If there is any doubt, the game clock operator should wait for the signal.
 - (e) Following a fourth-down play.
 - (f) At the end of a play where a flag has been thrown.
3. After the game clock has been stopped, the Referee may start it on the ready-for-play signal. If no ready-for-play signal is given, the game clock operator will start it on a legal snap. If the Referee erroneously starts the game clock at the ready, the signal should be honored.
4. After a first down is awarded to Team A where the ball becomes dead inbounds, the Referee will start the game clock when the ball is spotted but will not blow their whistle. This is known as the "silent wind" and the game clock operator should be prepared to quickly start the game clock as soon as the ball is spotted. Usually, the game clock will be stopped for only 3-5 seconds.
5. If the game clock is erroneously stopped, the Referee may start the game clock before the ready-for-play signal.
6. The game clock operator must record the time of all game clock stoppages so if the game clock erroneously runs on a false start when the game clock is stopped, it can be immediately corrected by the game clock operator without instruction from the Referee.
7. The try (extra point) that follows a touchdown is not a timed down.
8. At the end of a quarter, the game clock should not be reset until the Referee declares the period over by facing the press box and holding the ball over their head. If the period is extended for an untimed down, the game clock is kept at 0:00 until all untimed plays are completed and the period is declared to be over.
9. Any game official may signal a time-out; therefore, the game clock operator should be alert to stop the game clock, especially toward the end of a half.

H. Overtime Procedures:

1. If the game is tied at the end of the fourth quarter, the overtime procedure prescribed by the state association shall be used.
2. The game clock operator will put three minutes (3:00) on the game clock and start it on the Referee's signal. When the three-minute intermission expires, the game clock shall be turned off.
3. If subsequent overtime periods are necessary, there is a two-minute intermission between periods. These will be timed by the Back Judge. There is no need to put this time on the game clock as most teams will be ready to play before the two minutes expire.

PLAY CLOCK

- I. After a play, the play clock starts at 40 seconds unless there is an administrative stoppage. The play clock should be started when a down ends by rule, but if there is any doubt, the play clock operator should wait for the appropriate signal which will be either S3 (time-out), S7 (dead ball - one arm straight up) or S10 (incomplete pass).
- J. When a legal snap occurs, the play clock is immediately set to 40 seconds. If the play clock is still running after the play starts, it can be reset to 40 seconds during the play. There is plenty of time to reset it to 25 at the end of the down, if necessary, since a 25-second play clock is used only after an administrative stoppage.
- K. If the 40-second play clock runs below 20 seconds and the football has not yet been set on the ground ready for the next down, the play clock operator must be alert for the Referee to reset (pump-up) the clock to 25 seconds. The Referee's signal for this is a pumping motion with one hand up (pushing the sky). The same pumping motion with both hands indicates that the play clock will be reset to 40 seconds.
- L. The following situations result in a 25-second play clock (exceptions noted):
 - 1. Any foul occurs** (40 seconds if only a defensive player);
 - 2. Play is stopped for an injured player** (40 seconds if only a defensive player);
 - 3. Play is stopped to address an equipment issue** (40 seconds if only a defensive player);
 - 4. Any down that involves a score;
 - 5. Either team is granted a time-out;
 - 6. Any down that includes a legal kick followed by a new series;
 - 7. A measurement for a first down;
 - 8. Team possession changes during or after a down;
 - 9. The beginning of any period;
 - 10. An inadvertent whistle occurs; and
 - 11. There is an untimed down.

**** - If both teams have any combination of #1, #2 and/or #3, the 25-second play clock is used.**
- M. The play clock shall be turned off (or set to 40) whenever it would start with more time than what is remaining in any quarter and the game clock is running or would start on the ready-for-play signal. The reason for this is to avoid confusion over the amount of time remaining to snap the ball.

EXAMPLE 1: A running play ends inbounds with 12 seconds remaining in the quarter and there is a flag on the play. After disposition of the penalty, the game clock will start on the ready and the offense will have 12 seconds to put the ball in play. The quarterback should not be able to view a play clock that starts at 25 seconds.

EXAMPLE 2: A running play ends inbounds on first down with 38 seconds remaining in the quarter. The game clock keeps running, but a 40-second play clock does not start. The second-down play is an incomplete pass which stops the game clock with 17 seconds remaining and there is a flag on the play for offensive holding. After disposition of the penalty, the game clock will start on the snap. A 25-second play clock will start because the game clock is not running.

- N.** If the play count is interrupted, whether it is because of a malfunction or for an official's discretionary time-out, it must be reset to 25 seconds. It is not reset to 40 seconds unless there is an administrative stoppage and the rule mandates 40 seconds (e.g., defensive foul). The play clock will never resume at an interrupted count. When a malfunction occurs, the game clock must also be stopped and will restart on the snap.
- O.** If the play clock does not start on time, it should be started as soon as it is noticed. The Back Judge will have a backup clock. If the play clock continues to malfunction, the Referee may direct that it be turned off. The play clock count will then be kept on the field with the Back Judge signaling the last ten seconds of the count.
- P.** If the play clock gets to zero prior to the snap or free kick and a foul for delay of game is called, it is left at zero until the penalty is enforced, then reset. If there is no flag, immediately reset the play clock to 40 seconds.
- Q.** The play clock is used during overtime.
- R.** If a running clock rule applies, it is recommended the visible play clocks be turned off.

PLAY CLOCK/GAME CLOCK PROCEDURES				
Event	Play Clock	Game Clock	Covering Official's Signal [^]	Referee's Signal
Dead Ball Inbounds	40	Running	S7	None
Dead Ball Out of Bounds	40	Snap	S3	None
Incomplete Pass	40	Snap	S10	None
Team A Awarded 1st Down	40	Signal	S3	Wind
Penalty Administration *	40/25	Ready	S3	Wind
Charged Team Time-out	25	Snap	S3	Chop
Injury / Helmet Off / Equipment Issues *	40/25	Ready	S3	Wind
Measurement	25	Ready	S3	Wind
Double Change of Possession – Team A Snaps	40	Ready	S7	Wind
Change of Possession - Team B Snaps	25	Snap	S3	Chop
Touchdown	25	N/A	S3	Chop
Try, Field Goal, Safety	25	Varies **	Varies **	Chop
Start of Each Period	25	Snap	Varies	Chop
Legal Kick	25	Snap	S3	Chop
Start of Overtime Period	25	N/A	N/A	Chop
Other Administrative Stoppages ***	25	Ready	S3	Wind
* See Rule 3-6-1a(1)e Exceptions for Defensive Injuries, Equipment Issues and Fouls (Set to 25 if both teams cause the stoppage)				
** The Game Clock Will Start on the Legal Touch of a Free Kick				
*** Includes Inadvertent Whistle and Period Extension				
[^] See the Current NFHS Football Rules Book for the NFHS Official Football Signals				

***FINAL – 4-10-26**