



Player Equipment Changes Highlight 2025 High School Football Rules Revisions

Four revisions dealing with player equipment in high school football were among the eight changes recommended by the NFHS Football Rules Committee at its January 12-14 meeting in Indianapolis. All recommended changes were subsequently approved by the NFHS Board of Directors.

The Football Rules Committee is composed of one member from each NFHS member state association that uses NFHS playing rules, along with representatives from the NFHS Coaches Association and NFHS Officials Association.

One of the equipment changes next year will permit some additional electronic communication with players during games; however, in-helmet communication is still not allowed. A change in Rule 1-5-3c(2) will permit fixed electronic signs with play signals as well as non-audio methods. However, players between the numbers still are not permitted to watch video.

In the same Rule 1-5-3c(3), another new item was added to the illegal equipment listing. Any audio (microphone) or video (camera) device worn by a player during the game is not permitted. No player participating in the game is allowed to wear any device that would record or transmit audio or video.

The remaining player equipment changes focus on tooth and mouth protectors and arm sleeves. The committee approved two new additional requirements in Rule 1-5-1d(5) for tooth and mouth protectors, which are required in high school football. Tooth and mouth protectors a) shall not include any attachment(s) that do not serve a purpose and function in protecting the teeth or mouth, and b) shall not include anything that is a health or risk issue and could pose danger to themselves or other players.

A new item was added to Rule 1-5-2d regarding a change in arm sleeve specifications. The new language, effective with the 2027 season, states that “arm sleeves, whether attached to a shirt or unattached, manufactured to enhance contact with the football or opponent, must meet the SFIA specification at the time of manufacture. Arm sleeves must have a permanent, exact replica of the SFIA arm sleeve seal (meets SFIA specification), that must be visible and appear legibly on the exterior of the arm sleeve.”

The Sports and Fitness Industry Association (SFIA), in working with football arm sleeve manufacturers and the NFHS, has developed the new football arm sleeve performance specifications to be effective with the 2027 season. The new specifications closely align with the current NFHS rules for football gloves.

“One of our responsibilities is to properly respond to advancements in equipment and technology. Through deliberate research, debate and input from the NFHS Sports Medicine Advisory

Committee (SMAC) and engineers, we are confident the rule changes regarding equipment are a positive move for our game," said Steve Roberts, chair of the NFHS Football Rules Committee and associate executive director of the Arkansas Activities Association.

In other changes approved by the Football Rules Committee, a new exception was added to Rule 4-3-1 regarding when a loose ball goes out of bounds. Previously, the out-of-bounds spot was the yard line where the foremost point of the ball crossed the sideline. Now, when a forward fumble goes out of bounds or is ruled out of bounds between the goal lines, the ball shall be returned to the spot of the fumble.

Bob Colgate, editor of the NFHS Football Rules Book and director of sports and sports medicine for the NFHS, said the committee made the change because the previous rule potentially provided an unfair advantage to the fumbling team.

The committee also approved a deletion in Rule 10-4-4b which continues the committee's revisions in the penalty enforcement rules to ensure consistency, particularly among illegal participation fouls.

Finally, the rules committee made a revision in the Six-Player Football Rules that clarifies that as long as there is a change of possession from the snap receiver to another player on offense, the ball can be advanced beyond the line of scrimmage.

A complete listing of the football rules changes will be available on the NFHS website at www.nfhs.org. Click on "Activities & Sports" at the top of the home page and select "Football." The print version of the 2025 Football Rules Book will be available for purchase in May at www.NFHS.com, and the digital version will be available in the same timeframe via NFHS Digital at www.NFHS.org.

According to the 2023-24 NFHS High School Athletics Participation Survey, 11-player football is the most popular high school sport for boys with 1,031,508 participants in 13,788 schools nationwide. In addition, there were 38,948 boys who participated in 6-, 8- and 9-player football, along with 4,295 girls in all four versions of the game for a grand total of 1,074,751. There also were 42,955 participants in girls flag football in 2023-24.