



ATHLETIC OFFICIALS SERVICE • OFFICIAL'S TRAINING

NFHS Flag Football

Rule 10 — Enforcement of Penalties

Procedure after a foul | Double & multiple fouls | Enforcement spots
Special enforcement rules | Penalty summary (pp. 64–65)



Agenda

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Procedure After a Foul

How fouls get reported, options offered, and decided



2

Double & Multiple Fouls

Offsetting fouls, clean hands, and multi-foul limits



3

Enforcement Spots

Where the penalty is actually marked off



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Special Enforcement Rules

Scoring plays, roughing the passer, and safeties



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Penalty Summary Chart

The full 5-yard / 10-yard / DQ reference (pp. 64–65)





RULE 10 • SECTION 1

Procedure After a Foul

How a foul gets reported to both teams, what options the offended team receives, and when those decisions must be made.



Live-Ball Foul Procedure

STEP 1**Referee notifies both teams at the end of the down**

Officials tell the offended team's designated representative the acceptance/decline options, the number of the ensuing down, distance to be gained, and the status of the ball for each choice.

STEP 2**The distance penalty for any foul may be declined**

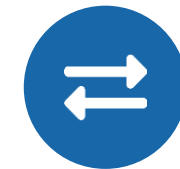
Declining distance is a separate choice from declining the penalty itself — a team can take the other consequences (like a replayed down) without the yardage.

STEP 3**Double fouls need no consultation**

- If the penalty is declined, or it's a double foul, there is no loss of distance.
- On a double foul the penalties simply offset — the representative isn't asked.

STEP 4**Choices are locked in**

Once made, a penalty decision may not be revoked — and it must be made before any charged team timeout is granted.



Dead-Ball Fouls & Foul Combinations

ART. 2**Dead-ball foul (between downs, or before the snap)**

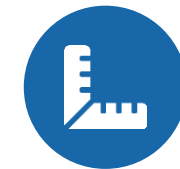
The covering official keeps the ball from becoming live. The referee notifies both teams, and the offended team's representative gets the options and effects, then accepts or declines.

ART. 3**Live-ball foul, then a dead-ball foul by the opponent**

The two penalties are administered separately, in the order the fouls occurred — they are not combined.

ART. 4**Same team fouls live-ball, then dead-ball**

All of that team's fouls on the down may be penalized — they stack against the offending team.

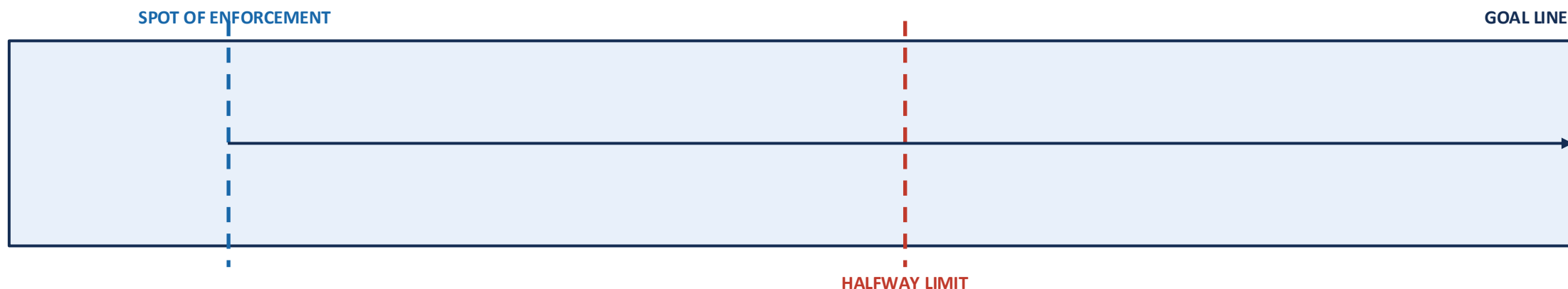


The Half-the-Distance Principle

Enforcement of a penalty can never move the ball more than half the distance from the enforcement spot to the offending team's own goal line.

If the full penalty (5 or 10 yards) would take the ball past that halfway point, the ball is placed halfway between the enforcement spot and the goal line instead.

— ART. 5



A 10-yard penalty from here would normally reach past the limit — so the ball stops at the halfway mark.



Fouls With Automatic Consequences



Fouls by A: Loss of Down

These fouls by the offense cost the right to replay the down.

- Illegally handing the ball forward
- Illegal forward pass
- Intentional grounding



Fouls by B: Automatic First Down

These fouls by the defense hand A an automatic first down.

- Illegal personal contact (9-4)
- Noncontact unsportsmanlike conduct by players (9-5)
- Noncontact unsportsmanlike conduct by nonplayers (9-8-1)
- Team box / restricted-area violations, 3rd and subsequent (9-8-2, 9-8-3)



Declining Just the Yardage

10.1.1

SITUATION

B1 holds A1 during an unsuccessful try. A's designated representative wants to accept the penalty and replay the down — but wishes to decline the distance penalty, since the team is more comfortable snapping from the previous spot.



What's the ruling?



Declining Just the Yardage

10.1.1

SITUATION

B1 holds A1 during an unsuccessful try. A's designated representative wants to accept the penalty and replay the down — but wishes to decline the distance penalty, since the team is more comfortable snapping from the previous spot.

RULING

This is a legal request. The distance penalty for any foul may always be declined, independent of the other penalty options.



RULE 10 • SECTION 2

Double & Multiple Fouls

What happens when both teams foul on the same down, when a team fouls more than once, and how the “clean hands” rule protects a team that gains possession free of a foul.



What Makes a Double Foul

(a)**No change of possession**

Both teams foul during the same live-ball period and possession doesn't change — unless every foul by R is a post-scrimmage kick foul.

(b)**Possession changes, but the new team fouled first**

The team in possession at the end of the down fouled prior to the final change of possession (again, unless all of R's fouls are post-scrimmage kick fouls).

(c)**Team in final possession accepts the opponent's penalty**

A change of possession occurs, and the team that ends up with the ball chooses to accept the penalty for the opponent's foul at any point in the down.

Result in every case: the penalties cancel and the down is replayed.



Double Fouls in Action

10.2.1 A

SITUATION

During a run by A1, A2 holds B1. A1 then fumbles; B2 catches the loose ball and returns it for a touchdown. While the ball was loose during the fumble, B3 blocks A3.



What's the ruling?



Double Fouls in Action

10.2.1 A

SITUATION

During a run by A1, A2 holds B1. A1 then fumbles; B2 catches the loose ball and returns it for a touchdown. While the ball was loose during the fumble, B3 blocks A3.

RULING

Double foul. Both fouls occurred before the change of team possession, so the penalties cancel and the down is replayed.



Double Fouls in Action

10.2.1 A

SITUATION

During a run by A1, A2 holds B1. A1 then fumbles; B2 catches the loose ball and returns it for a touchdown.

RULING

Double foul. Both fouls occurred before the change of team possession, so the penalties cancel and the down is replayed.

10.2.1 B

SITUATION

A1 lines up in an illegal formation; a pass by A2 is caught by B1. During B1's return there's a blocking foul by B2, then a fumble by B1 is caught by A3.



What's the ruling?



Double Fouls in Action

10.2.1 A

SITUATION

During a run by A1, A2 holds B1. A1 then fumbles; B2 catches the loose ball and returns it for a touchdown.

RULING

Double foul. Both fouls occurred before the change of team possession, so the penalties cancel and the down is replayed.

10.2.1 B

SITUATION

A1 lines up in an illegal formation; a pass by A2 is caught by B1. During B1's return there's a blocking foul by B2, then a fumble by B1 is caught by A3.

RULING

Double foul — even though possession changed, the team that gained final possession (A) had already fouled before gaining it. Penalties cancel; down replayed.



The “Clean Hands” Rule

ART. 2

The team gaining possession last may keep the ball, if:

- Its own foul did not occur before the final change of possession, AND
- It declines the penalty for the opponent's foul (other than a nonplayer or unsportsmanlike foul)

NOTE

The team NOT last in possession waits

It has no penalty options until the team last in possession makes its decision on the earlier foul(s) first.

ART. 3

Same idea on kicking plays

If all of R's fouls are post-scrimmage kick fouls, R may keep the ball by declining K's penalty. K has no options until R decides.



Clean Hands & Kicking Fouls

10.2.2 B

SITUATION

A1's pass is intercepted by B1. During B1's return, A1 and B2 begin fighting; B1 returns the ball deep into A territory.



What's the ruling?



Clean Hands & Kicking Fouls

10.2.2 B

SITUATION

A1's pass is intercepted by B1. During B1's return, A1 and B2 begin fighting; B1 returns the ball deep into A territory.

RULING

B ("clean hands", last to gain possession) may decline the penalty for A1's foul and keep the ball after enforcing its own penalty. Both A1 and B2 are disqualified for fighting regardless.



Clean Hands & Kicking Fouls

10.2.2 B

SITUATION

A1's pass is intercepted by B1. During B1's return, A1 and B2 begin fighting; B1 returns the ball deep into A territory.

RULING

B ("clean hands", last to gain possession) may decline the penalty for A1's foul and keep the ball after enforcing its own penalty. Both A1 and B2 are disqualified for fighting regardless.

10.2.3

SITUATION

K1's punt is caught by R1, who advances. During the run, R2 blocks illegally at K's 30, and K2 trips R2.



What's the ruling?



Clean Hands & Kicking Fouls

10.2.2 B

SITUATION

A1's pass is intercepted by B1. During B1's return, A1 and B2 begin fighting; B1 returns the ball deep into A territory.

RULING

B ("clean hands", last to gain possession) may decline the penalty for A1's foul and keep the ball after enforcing its own penalty. Both A1 and B2 are disqualified for fighting regardless.

10.2.3

SITUATION

K1's punt is caught by R1, who advances. During the run, R2 blocks illegally at K's 30, and K2 trips R2.

RULING

Because possession changed and R2's foul came after, R may decline the penalty for K2's tripping and keep the ball (1st & 10 at the 40). Accepting it instead creates a double foul and a replay.



Multiple Fouls & Dead-Ball Enforcement

ART. 4

Multiple fouls by the same team, same down

Two or more live-ball fouls (not nonplayer/unsportsmanlike) by one team: only ONE penalty may be enforced. The offended team picks which — or declines all of them.

ART. 5a

Dead-ball / nonplayer / unsportsmanlike fouls stand alone

Enforced separately, in the order they occurred — never paired with a live-ball foul to create a double or multiple foul.

ART. 5b

Exception: both teams foul dead-ball / unsportsmanlike

An equal number of those 10-yard fouls offset; anything left over is enforced separately, in order. Disqualified players are removed either way.



Offsetting Fouls & a Scoring Play

10.2.5 A

SITUATION

3rd & 10 on B's 30; A1 is downed at B's 23. Immediately after, B1 commits a dead-ball personal foul, and A2 fouls B1 right back.



What's the ruling?



Offsetting Fouls & a Scoring Play

10.2.5 A

SITUATION

3rd & 10 on B's 30; A1 is downed at B's 23. Immediately after, B1 commits a dead-ball personal foul, and A2 fouls B1 right back.

RULING

The distance penalties for the dead-ball fouls cancel. The down counts — now 4th & 3 from B's 23. A flagrant act still means disqualification.



Offsetting Fouls & a Scoring Play

10.2.5 A

SITUATION

3rd & 10 on B's 30; A1 is downed at B's 23. Immediately after, B1 commits a dead-ball personal foul, and A2 fouls B1 right back.

RULING

The distance penalties for the dead-ball fouls cancel. The down counts — now 4th & 3 from B's 23. A flagrant act still means disqualification.

10.2.5 B

SITUATION

A1 scores on a long touchdown run. Before the score, B1 committed a live personal foul; after the score, A1 commits unsportsmanlike conduct for celebrating.



What's the ruling?

Discuss as a crew, then click to reveal



Offsetting Fouls & a Scoring Play

10.2.5 A

SITUATION

3rd & 10 on B's 30; A1 is downed at B's 23. Immediately after, B1 commits a dead-ball personal foul, and A2 fouls B1 right back.

RULING

The distance penalties for the dead-ball fouls cancel. The down counts — now 4th & 3 from B's 23. A flagrant act still means disqualification.

10.2.5 B

SITUATION

A1 scores on a long touchdown run. Before the score, B1 committed a live personal foul; after the score, A1 commits unsportsmanlike conduct for celebrating.

RULING

The offsetting rule doesn't apply — B's foul was live-ball, not dead-ball. A keeps the score and chooses where to enforce B's foul; B then decides on A's foul. Each is enforced separately, in order.



RULE 10 • SECTIONS 3–4

Enforcement Spots

Before marking off a penalty, officials classify the play, then choose the correct reference point on the field. Section 3 defines the plays; Section 4 defines the spots.

Loose-Ball Play

Running Play

End of the Run



The Enforcement Spot Toolkit

Rule 10 uses five reference points to answer “where does the penalty get marked off?”



ART. 2

Previous Spot

Where the down began —
the default spot unless an
exception applies



ART. 4

Spot of the Foul

The exact spot where the
illegal act occurred



ART. 5

Succeeding Spot

Where the next down
would otherwise start



ART. 6

End of the Run

Where the run or related
run ended



ART. 7–8

Special Spots

14-yard line or goal line on
change-of-possession
scores



Previous Spot & Spot of the Foul



Previous Spot (default)

Used unless an Art. 4 exception applies, including:

- A foul simultaneous with the snap or scrimmage kick
- A foul during a loose-ball play
- A legal kick down ended by an inadvertent whistle before either team gains possession
- A run ending behind the line with no change of possession
- An unsportsmanlike foul for illegal equipment (9-8-1h)



Spot of the Foul

The penalty is marked exactly where the act occurred, including:

- Illegal batting/kicking by A behind the line during a loose-ball play
- Illegal forward pass (7-5-2c) or intentional grounding (7-5-2d)
- A foul by the team in possession behind the end of the run, after a change of possession
- Any foul by A in its own end zone where the penalty is accepted



Succeeding Spot & End of the Run



Succeeding Spot

Where the next down would otherwise start:

- An unsportsmanlike foul (except illegal equipment)
- A dead-ball foul
- A nonplayer foul
- A change-of-possession foul that ends in a touchback
- May instead be the subsequent starting spot per 8-2-2 through 8-2-5



End of the Run

Where the run or related run ended:

- A foul by B when the run ends beyond the line of scrimmage
- A foul beyond the end of the run, after a change of possession
- A foul by A beyond the line, when the run ends beyond it and the foul comes before the run ends



Special Spots: 14-Yard Line & Goal Line

ART. 7**14-yard line**

Used for change-of-possession fouls where the opponent forced the ball across the new-possession team's goal line, the related run ends in the end zone, and it's followed by a loose ball — regardless of where that loose ball becomes dead.

ART. 8**Goal line**

Used for change-of-possession fouls on running plays where the team now in possession is itself responsible for forcing the ball across its OWN goal line, and the run ends in the end zone.



Enforcement Spots in Action

10.3.1

SITUATION

3rd & 10 from B's 30. A1 snaps, runs wide, and pitches to A2, who's downed at B's 10. (a) Holding by B1 during the pitch, or (b) a personal foul by B2 during the flag pull.



What's the ruling?



Enforcement Spots in Action

10.3.1

SITUATION

3rd & 10 from B's 30. A1 snaps, runs wide, and pitches to A2, who's downed at B's 10. (a) Holding by B1 during the pitch, or (b) a personal foul by B2 during the flag pull.

RULING

(a) Previous spot — A's ball, 1st & 10 at B's 20 if accepted. (b) The foul happened during a running play, so it's the end of the run — A's ball, 1st & goal at B's 5.



Enforcement Spots in Action

10.3.1

SITUATION

3rd & 10 from B's 30. A1 snaps, runs wide, and pitches to A2, who's downed at B's 10. (a) Holding by B1 during the pitch, or (b) a personal foul by B2 during the flag pull.

RULING

(a) Previous spot — A's ball, 1st & 10 at B's 20 if accepted. (b) The foul happened during a running play, so it's the end of the run — A's ball, 1st & goal at B's 5.

10.3.3

SITUATION

B1 intercepts A's pass at the A10 and returns it for an apparent touchdown. B2 blocks illegally in A's end zone after the pick, but before the score.



What's the ruling?



Enforcement Spots in Action

10.3.1

SITUATION

3rd & 10 from B's 30. A1 snaps, runs wide, and pitches to A2, who's downed at B's 10. (a) Holding by B1 during the pitch, or (b) a personal foul by B2 during the flag pull.

RULING

(a) Previous spot — A's ball, 1st & 10 at B's 20 if accepted. (b) The foul happened during a running play, so it's the end of the run — A's ball, 1st & goal at B's 5.

10.3.3

SITUATION

B1 intercepts A's pass at the A10 and returns it for an apparent touchdown. B2 blocks illegally in A's end zone after the pick, but before the score.

RULING

The enforcement spot is the end of the run — which is the goal line. Result: B's ball, 1st & goal at A's 10-yard line.



Previous Spot & Change-of-Possession Fouls

10.4.2 B

SITUATION

3rd & 20 from A's 20. A1 completes a pass to A2, who gains to B's 10 — but B1 was detected holding before the catch.



What's the ruling?



Previous Spot & Change-of-Possession Fouls

10.4.2 B

SITUATION

3rd & 20 from A's 20. A1 completes a pass to A2, who gains to B's 10 — but B1 was detected holding before the catch.

RULING

B1's foul happened during a loose-ball play, so it's enforced from the previous spot if accepted. A will obviously decline — the completed pass already gained more and earned a first down. Holding can't be tacked onto the end of the run.



Previous Spot & Change-of-Possession Fouls

10.4.2 B

SITUATION

3rd & 20 from A's 20. A1 completes a pass to A2, who gains to B's 10 — but B1 was detected holding before the catch.

RULING

B1's foul happened during a loose-ball play, so it's enforced from the previous spot if accepted. A will obviously decline — the completed pass already gained more and earned a first down. Holding can't be tacked onto the end of the run.

10.4.5

SITUATION

B1 intercepts a pass in B's own end zone and is downed trying to advance it out. During the run, B2 blocks A1 at B's 4-yard line.



What's the ruling?



Previous Spot & Change-of-Possession Fouls

10.4.2 B

SITUATION

3rd & 20 from A's 20. A1 completes a pass to A2, who gains to B's 10 — but B1 was detected holding before the catch.

RULING

B1's foul happened during a loose-ball play, so it's enforced from the previous spot if accepted. A will obviously decline — the completed pass already gained more and earned a first down. Holding can't be tacked onto the end of the run.

10.4.5

SITUATION

B1 intercepts a pass in B's own end zone and is downed trying to advance it out. During the run, B2 blocks A1 at B's 4-yard line.

RULING

Basic spot is the 20. If accepted, it's enforced at the spot of the foul — B's ball, 1st & 10 from B's 2. If declined, B's ball, 1st & 10 from B's 20.



RULE 10 • SECTION 5

Special Enforcement Rules

A handful of fouls don't follow the normal playbook — scoring plays, roughing the passer, and fouls committed by the offense inside its own end zone all carry their own options.



Fouls With Special Provisions

ART. 1**These fouls carry their own enforcement options**

- Unfair acts (9-9)
- A foul by the opponent of the scoring team on a successful try (8-3-5, 8-4-4)
- Fouls occurring during or after a touchdown scoring play (8-2-2 through 8-2-5)
- Roughing the passer (9-4-4)
- K's fouls during a scrimmage-kick down, before the kick ends (10-4-2 Exception)

ART. 2**A score can be wiped out**

If the penalty is accepted for A's foul (other than nonplayer/unsportsmanlike) on a down that produced a successful try or touchdown, the score is nullified.

ART. 3**A foul in A's own end zone can be a safety**

An illegal forward pass thrown from the end zone — or any other accepted foul committed there by the offense — results in a safety.



Special Enforcement in Practice

10.5.3

SITUATION

3rd & 15 from B's 35; A1's pass is intercepted at B's 25 by B1, who returns it for an apparent touchdown. During the return, A1 kicks B2.



What's the ruling?



Special Enforcement in Practice

10.5.3

SITUATION

3rd & 15 from B's 35; A1's pass is intercepted at B's 25 by B1, who returns it for an apparent touchdown. During the return, A1 kicks B2.

RULING

B may (a) keep the touchdown and enforce the penalty on the try or at the subsequent starting spot, or (b) decline it. Either way, A1 is disqualified for the kick.



Special Enforcement in Practice

10.5.3

SITUATION

3rd & 15 from B's 35; A1's pass is intercepted at B's 25 by B1, who returns it for an apparent touchdown. During the return, A1 kicks B2.

RULING

B may (a) keep the touchdown and enforce the penalty on the try or at the subsequent starting spot, or (b) decline it. Either way, A1 is disqualified for the kick.

10.5.4

SITUATION

Last timed down of the half. A1 retreats into A's own end zone to pass and is downed there, with holding in the end zone by (a) A2, or (b) B1.



What's the ruling?



Special Enforcement in Practice

10.5.3

SITUATION

3rd & 15 from B's 35; A1's pass is intercepted at B's 25 by B1, who returns it for an apparent touchdown. During the return, A1 kicks B2.

RULING

B may (a) keep the touchdown and enforce the penalty on the try or at the subsequent starting spot, or (b) decline it. Either way, A1 is disqualified for the kick.

10.5.4

SITUATION

Last timed down of the half. A1 retreats into A's own end zone to pass and is downed there, with holding in the end zone by (a) A2, or (b) B1.

RULING

(a) Safety — B scores 2 either way since both the run and the foul ended in the end zone; if accepted, the half ends with no untimed down. (b) B's foul, if accepted, is enforced from the previous spot and the period IS extended with an untimed down.



NFHS RULE BOOK, PP. 64–65

Penalty Summary

The complete reference chart: every foul, its rule citation, and its official signal — organized by loss of 5 yards, loss of 10 yards, and fouls carrying disqualification.



Loss of 5 Yards

PENALTY SUMMARY		
LOSS OF 5 YARDS		
Foul	Reference	Signal
Delay of game	3-6-2, 3-6-4	7-21
Illegal substitution	3-7	22
Encroachment	7-1-1, 7-1-5, 7-1-6, 7-1-7	7-18
Snap infraction	7-1-2, 7-1-3, 7-2-3	7-19
False start	7-1-8, 7-1-9	7-19
Disconcerting act	7-1-11	7-23
Illegal formation	7-2-1; 7-2-2b, c	19
Numbering violation	7-2-2a	19
Illegal shift or illegal motion	7-2-4, 7-2-5	20
Illegally handing ball forward (also loss of down)	7-3-2, 7-3-3	30-9
Illegal forward pass (by A; also loss of down)	7-5-2	30-9
Illegal forward pass (by B)	7-5-2	30
Intentional grounding (also loss of down)	7-5-2d	31-9
Helping runner	9-1	35
Sideline interference	9-8-1k	7-26
Attendant illegally on field	9-8-2	19
Nonplayer outside of the team box, but not on field	9-8-3	7-26

Source: NFHS Flag Football Rules Book, Penalty Summary, p. 64



Loss of 10 Yards

LOSS OF 10 YARDS		
Foul	Reference	Signal
Kick-catching interference	6-3	28
Forward-pass interference	7-5-10	28
Illegal blocking technique	9-3-1	34
Interlocked blocking	9-2-1a	35
Holding	9-2-1b; 9-2-3c	33
Runner grasping a teammate	9-2-2a	34
Illegal use of hands or arms	9-2-3a, b, d, e	34
Flag guarding	9-2-2b, c	38
Charging into an opponent obviously out of the play (also first down if by defense)	9-4-3b	32
Hurdle an opponent (also first down if by defense)	9-4-3c	32
Tripping (also first down if by defense)	9-4-3i	36
Roughing passer (also first down)	9-4-4	32-29-8
Illegal personal contact in restricted area (also first down if by defense)	9-4-5	32-26
Unsportsmanlike conduct by player or nonplayer (also first down if by defense)	9-5, 9-8-1	24
Illegal participation	9-6	25
Illegal kicking or batting the ball	9-7	27
Sideline interference (third and subsequent) (also first down if by defense)	9-8-3	26
Nonplayer illegally on field	9-8-3	24
Unfair acts	9-9	24

Source: NFHS Flag Football Rules Book, Penalty Summary, p. 65



Disqualification With Certain 10-Yard Penalties

DISQUALIFICATION ASSOCIATED WITH CERTAIN 10-YARD PENALTIES		
Foul	Reference	Signal
Fighting by player or nonplayer (also first down if by defense)	9-4-1	32-37
Intentionally contacting a game official (also first down if by defense)	9-4-2	32-37
Striking, kicking, kneeing (also first down if by defense)	9-4-3h	32-37
Any act if unduly rough or flagrant (give proper signal and follow with 37) (also first down if by defense)	9-4	37
A second unsportsmanlike foul by player or nonplayer (also first down if by defense)	9-5, 9-8	24-37
A substitute leaving team box during a fight (also first down if by defense)	9-8-1i	24-37
Illegally tampering with flag belt or flags	9-8-1h	24-37

Source: NFHS Flag Football Rules Book, Penalty Summary, p. 65

Key Takeaways



Options first, decision once

Every foul gets explained fully before either team decides — and that decision can't be revoked.



Clean hands protects the team that earned it

A team that gains possession without fouling can decline the opponent's penalty and keep the ball.



The spot depends on the play, not just the foul

Previous spot, spot of the foul, succeeding spot, end of run, or a special spot — know which applies.



Half-the-distance always wins

No penalty ever pushes the ball past halfway to the offending team's own goal line.



Know the chart cold

5 yards, 10 yards, or disqualification — the Penalty Summary on pp. 64–65 is your fastest reference in the moment.



Questions & Discussion

Rule 10: Enforcement of Penalties — NFHS Flag Football

Athletic Officials Service · Prepared for official's training