

APPENDIX I \ History of Health-Related NFL Playing Rules Changes^a

For an explanation of how rule changes take place, see Chapter 7: The NFL and NFLPA, Section A(ii): Rule Changes.

1955:

- The ball is dead immediately if the runner touches the ground with any part of his body except his hands or feet while in the grasp of an opponent.

1956:

- The ball is dead immediately if a runner touches the ground with any part of his body except his hands or feet after being contacted by a defensive player.
- Grasping the face mask of any opponent except a runner is illegal use of hands. Penalty: Five yards.

1962:

- Grasping the face mask of an opponent is illegal. Penalty: 15 yards.

1966:

- All goal posts must be offset from the goal line.

1971:

- A team will not be charged a timeout for an injured player unless the injury occurs in the last two minutes of either half.

1973:

- A defensive player who jumps or stands on a teammate or who is picked up by a teammate cannot attempt to block an opponent's kick. Penalty: 15 yards.

1974:

- Eligible receivers who take a position more than two yards from the offensive tackle, whether on or behind the line, may not be blocked below the waist at or behind the line of scrimmage.
- No receiver can be blocked below the waist after moving beyond the line of scrimmage.
- An offensive player who is aligned in a position more than two yards laterally outside of the offensive tackle may not contact an opponent below the waist if the blocker is moving toward the position of the ball either at the snap or after it is made, and contact occurs within an area three yards on either side of the

line of scrimmage. This is known as a crackback block. Penalty: 15 yards.

1976:

- A defender cannot place a hand or hands on a teammate to gain additional height in an attempt to block a kick.
- A defender is not permitted to run or dive into a ball carrier who has fallen to the ground untouched.

1977:

- It is illegal for a defensive lineman to strike an opponent above the shoulders (head slap) during his initial charge. (Previously, it was legal only during the first step.)
- The crackback prohibition is extended to running backs who move outside the tight end and back inside to deliver a block below the waist.

1979:

- Mandatory equipment is specified for all players to wear during a game.
- Players on the receiving team are prohibited from blocking opponents below the waist during kickoffs, punts, and field goal attempts.
- The crackback zone is extended from three yards to five yards on either side of the line of scrimmage.
- Officials will declare the ball dead as soon as the quarterback is clearly in the grasp and control of any tackler.
- A player may be penalized for unsportsmanlike conduct for non-contact acts such as throwing a punch or a forearm, or kicking at an opponent.
- It is unnecessary roughness if a tackler uses his helmet to butt, spear, or ram an opponent, or if any player uses the crown or top of the helmet unnecessarily.
- A player in the backfield is prohibited from chopping an outside rusher on a pass play.

1980:

- A Chop block (below the waist) is also prohibited by a tight end against an outside rusher. The prohibition applies to pass plays and any plays in which the player receiving the snap initially shows pass.

^a For rule changes through the year 2012, we relied on an NFL website that lists “NFL rule changes focused on protecting player health and safety[.]” See *Evolution of the Rules: From Hashmarks to Crackback Blocks*, NFL Evolution (Aug. 2, 2013, 01:23 AM), <http://www.nfl.com/news/story/0ap1000000224872/article/evolution-of-the-rules-from-hashmarks-to-crackback-blocks>, archived at <http://perma.cc/WZ8Q-GM43> (discussing rule changes from 1920–2012). For rule changes after 2012, we relied on news articles as indicated.

1981:

- Chop blocks (at or below the knee) are prohibited by interior linemen on passing plays or plays in which a lineman shows an attempt to pass block. If an offensive player who fires out at the snap blocks an opponent at or below the knee, the defender cannot be double-teamed by a teammate of the offensive player.

1982:

- It is illegal for any player to use the crown or top of his helmet against a passer, a receiver in the act of catching a pass, or a runner who is in the grasp of a tackler.

1983:

- All mandatory player equipment must be designed and made by a professional manufacturer and cannot be altered, except by direction of the club doctor.
- A player who uses a helmet he is not wearing as a weapon shall be ejected.
- The chop block rule applies to blocks at “thigh or lower.”

1985:

- During the last two minutes of a half, the play ends when a quarterback kneels or simulates kneeling on the ground.
- The ball is dead when any runner slides to the ground feet first, thereby declaring himself down.

1986:

- Blocking below the waist on punts is prohibited during the entire down.
- The “lure” technique is prohibited. When an offensive tackle shows pass set, a teammate lined up outside him cannot chop a defender who is lined up over the tackle, even if the tackle and defender are not engaged (a “lure”).

1987:

- An offensive lineman may not clip a defender who, at the snap, is aligned on the line of scrimmage opposite another offensive lineman who is more than one position away, when the defender is responding to the flow of the ball away from the blocker. Example: A tackle cannot clip the nose tackle on a sweep to the opposite side.
- It is illegal for the kicking team to block below the waist after a free kick or punt has been made. (Low blocks by the receiving team became illegal in 1979).
- Both teams are prohibited from blocking below the waist after a change of possession.

1989:

- A defender (approaching from any direction) who has an unrestricted path to the quarterback is prohibited from flagrantly hitting him in the area of the knee(s).

1990:

- A player who butts, spears, or rams an opponent may be disqualified if the action is flagrant or vicious.

1991:

- Officials will whistle the play dead whenever a defensive lineman clearly penetrates beyond the neutral zone before the ball is snapped and continues unabated toward the quarterback.

1992:

- For the first time the chop block is illegal on some running players: It is illegal on a running play for an offensive player who is lined up in the backfield at the snap to deliberately block a defensive player in the thigh or lower (chop) if the defensive player is engaged by an offensive player who was on the line of scrimmage at the snap. This action is prohibited whether on or behind the line of scrimmage in an area that extends laterally to the position originally occupied by the tight end on either side.
- When a defensive player runs forward and leaps in an attempt to block an extra point or field goal, it is a foul only if the leaping player lands on other players.

1994:

- Defensive players are prohibited from blocking low during a punt, field goal, or extra point attempt (kick), except those defensive players at the snap that are lined up on or inside the normal tight end position. Previously, all players on the defensive team could block low during the field goal or extra point attempt.

1995:

- Protection for defenseless players is clarified and expanded. Since 1982, a defensive player was prohibited from using the crown or top of his helmet against a passer, a receiver in the act of catching a pass, or a runner who is in the grasp of a tackler. The clarification provided that:
 - Defenseless players included a kickoff or punt returner attempting to field a kick in the air, and a player on the ground at the end of a play.
 - Defensive players are prohibited from lowering their heads to make forcible contact with the facemask, or with the “hairline” or forehead part of the helmet, against an opponent, instead of only with the top/crown.
 - Defensive players are prohibited from forcibly hitting the defenseless player’s head, neck, or face with the helmet or facemask.
 - Defensive players are prohibited from launching into a defenseless player in a way that causes the defensive player’s helmet or facemask to forcibly strike the defenseless player’s head, neck, or face, even if the initial contact of the defender’s helmet or facemask is lower than the defenseless player’s neck.
- When tackling a passer during or just after throwing a pass, a defensive player is prohibited from unnecessarily and violently throwing him down and landing on top of him with all or most of the defender’s weight.

1996:

- On running plays, a chop block is prohibited by an offensive player who is aligned more than one position away from the engaged defender when the block occurs away from the flow of the play.
- A defender cannot be chopped even after he has disengaged from an offensive opponent, if he is still confronting the offensive player.
- Prohibition of the “lure” technique is applicable all along the offensive line, instead of only to a player outside a tackle.
- Blocking from behind, at, or below the knees in the clipping zone is prohibited.

2002:

- The Chop block technique is illegal on all kicking plays.
- It is illegal to hit a quarterback helmet-to-helmet any time after a change of possession.

2005:

- It is illegal to grab the inside collar of the shoulder pads to tackle a runner (“horse-collar tackle”).
- Unnecessarily running, diving into, or throwing the body against a player who should not have reasonably anticipated such contact by an opponent is unnecessary roughness. Previously, the rule only protected a player who is out of the play.
- A kicker/punter must not be unnecessarily contacted by the receiving team through the end of the play or until he assumes a distinctly defensive position. An opponent may not unnecessarily initiate helmet-to-helmet contact to the kicker/punter during the kick or during the return.
- An offensive player who is aligned in the tackle box at the snap and moves to a position outside the box is prohibited from initiating contact on the side or below the waist of an opponent if the blocker is moving toward his own end line and approaches the opponent from behind or from the side (“Peel Back Block”). The near shoulder of the blocker must be in front of his opponent’s body.

2006:

- Low hits on the quarterback are prohibited when a rushing defender has an opportunity to avoid such contact.
- Blocks in the back above the waist by the kicking team while the ball is in flight during a scrimmage kick are illegal.
- The definition of a “horse-collar tackle” is expanded to include grabbing the inside collar of the jersey.
- During a field-goal attempt or a try, a defensive player who is within one yard of the line of scrimmage at the snap must have his helmet outside the snapper’s shoulder pad.

2007:

- A block below the waist against an eligible receiver while the quarterback is in the pocket is a 15-yard penalty instead of a 5-yard penalty (an illegal cut block).

2009:

- Teams are not permitted to intentionally form a wedge of more than two players on a kickoff return in an attempt to block for the runner. Penalty: 15 yards.
- The “bunch” formation on kickoffs is eliminated. The kickoff team must have at least three players outside each hash mark, one of whom must be outside the yard-line number.
- It is an illegal “blindside” block if the blocker is moving toward his own endline and approaches the opponent from behind or from the side, and the initial force of the contact by the blocker’s helmet, forearm, or shoulder is to the head or neck area of an opponent. Penalty: 15-yards.
- It is an illegal hit on a defenseless receiver if the initial force of the contact by the defender’s helmet, forearm, or shoulder is to the head or neck area of the receiver. Penalty: 15 yards.
- Clarified rule regarding low hits on passers:
 - A defender cannot initiate a roll or lunge and forcibly hit the passer in the knee area or below, even if he is being contacted by another player.
 - It is not a foul if the defender swipes, wraps, or grabs a passer in the knee area or below in an attempt to tackle him.

2010:

- During a field-goal attempt, punt, or try-kick, a defensive team player, who is within one yard of line of scrimmage at snap, must have his entire body outside the snapper’s shoulder pads.
- A player who has just completed a catch is protected from blows to the head or neck by an opponent who launches.
- All “defenseless players” are protected from blows to the head delivered by an opponent’s helmet, forearm, or shoulder.
- Kickers and punters during the kick and return, and quarterbacks after a change of possession, are protected from blows to the head delivered by an opponent’s helmet, forearm, or shoulder, instead of just helmet-to-helmet contact.
- The ball is declared dead at the spot if a runner’s helmet comes completely off.

2011:

- The restraining line for the kicking team is moved from the 30- to the 35-yard line in an effort to increase touchbacks.
- All kicking team players other than the kicker must be lined up no more than five yards behind their restraining line, eliminating the 15–20 yard running “head start” that had become customary for many players.
- The list of “defenseless players” is expanded to include a kicker/punter during the kick or during the return, a quarterback at any time after a change of possession, and a player who receives a “blindside” block when the blocker is moving toward his own endline and approaches the opponent from behind or from the side. Previously, these players were protected against blows to

the head, but not against blows delivered by an opponent with the top/crown or forehead/"hairline" parts of the helmet against other parts of the body.

- A receiver who has completed a catch is a "defenseless player" until he has had time to protect himself or has clearly become a runner. A receiver/runner is no longer defenseless if he is able to avoid or ward off the impending contact of an opponent. Previously, the receiver who had completed a catch was protected against an opponent who launched and delivered a blow to the receiver's head.

2012:

- The list of "defenseless players" is expanded to include defensive players on crackback blocks, making it illegal to hit them in the head or neck area.
- Players are required to wear protective knee and thigh pads beginning with the 2013 season.

2013:¹

- Ball-carriers who grab and twist, turn or pull on an opponent's face mask, or grab the face mask and use it to control an opponent will be penalized 15 yards.
- "Peel back" blocks are illegal inside the tackle box. Previously they were only illegal outside the tackle box.
- Ball-carriers and tacklers cannot lead with the crown of their helmets when both players are outside of the tackle box.
- Long-snappers, while in the act of snapping the ball, are considered defenseless players.

2014:²

- Blockers cannot hit an opponent in the side of the legs. Rule previously only prohibited blockers from hitting an opponent in the back of the legs.

2015:³

- Defensive players prohibited from pushing teammates at the line of scrimmage when the offense is in punt formation.
- Offensive players prohibited from engaging in peel back blocks.
- Wide receivers are given defenseless player protection when a pass is intercepted.
- Running backs prohibited from chop blocking a defensive player engaged above the waist by another offensive player outside the tackle box.
- Allows the athletic trainer in the press box designated for spotting injuries to stop the game if a player appears to have suffered a concussion.

2016:⁴

- Prohibited all forms of the chop block.
- On a one-year trial basis, any player who is penalized twice in one game for certain types of unsportsmanlike conduct fouls is ejected.
- On a one-year trial basis, any touchback resulting from a kickoff will give the receiving team the ball at the 25-yard line (as opposed to the 20-yard line under the prior rule).
- Expanded the horse collar tackle rule to also prohibit grabbing the jersey at the name plate or above and pulling a runner to the ground.

Endnotes

1 Brian McIntyre, *2013 NFL Rule Changes Include Elimination of 'Tuck Rule', Peel-Back Blocks*, Yahoo! Sports (Aug. 6, 2013 3:03 PM), <http://sports.yahoo.com/blogs/shutdown-corner/2013-nfl-rule-changes-elimination-tuck-rule-peel-190327171.html>, archived at <http://perma.cc/8RL7-C3S9>.

2 Michael David Smith, *Five Rules Changes Get NFL Owners' Approval at League Meeting*, ProFootballTalk (Mar. 26, 2014, 10:11 AM), <http://profootballtalk.nbcsports.com/2014/03/26/five-rules-changes-pass-as-nfl-owners-vote-at-league-meeting/>, archived at <http://perma.cc/CV3R-TWXN>.

3 Michael David Smith, *NFL Passes Five Player Safety Rules*, ProFootballTalk (Mar. 24, 2015, 3:06 PM), <http://profootballtalk.nbcsports.com/2015/03/24/nfl-passes-five-player-safety-rules/>, archived at <http://perma.cc/WNT9Z-3CU8>.

4 Lorenzo Reyes, *NFL approves automatic ejection rule and touchbacks moved to 25-yard line for 2016*, USA Today, Mar. 23, 2016, <http://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/nfl/2016/03/23/rule-changes-automatic-ejections-touchback-25-yard-line/82158540/>, archived at <https://perma.cc/SAN7-KC3C>.