

Game Clock / Play Clock Procedures

The following is a set of instructions for the clock operators to assist with the rule change to the play clock that now involves a 40 / 25 second possibility for a delay of game. They include the instructions for the 40 second and the 25 second play clock to be used if and when visible play clocks are available.

NOTE to the play clock operator: starting the 40 second play clock “immediately” is to be interpreted as starting the 40 seconds as quickly as the covering official signals the end of the down using signal #3 (time-out) or signal #7 (dead ball with one arm straight up) or signal #10 (incomplete pass). These are the 3 most common signals you should expect at the end of a down prior to the 40 second play clock starting.

The following addresses the play situations that require the 40 second option.

1. The team A (offense) runner is stopped in bounds short of a first down. The **game clock** continues to run and the **40 second play clock** is started immediately except at the end of a 4th down.
2. The team A (offense) runner is stopped in bounds beyond the line-to-gain (first down). The **game clock** is stopped for the first down and the **40 second play clock** is started immediately. The Referee will then restart (wind) the **game clock** (no whistle involved) as quickly as the football is placed on the ground and ready for play.
3. The team A (offense) runner OR a team A fumble OR a team A backward pass goes out of bounds. The **game clock** is stopped and the **40 second play clock** is started immediately. The **game clock** will not start again until the next legal snap.
4. A team A (offense) legal, forward pass is incomplete. The **game clock** is stopped and the **40 second play clock** is started immediately. The **game clock** will not start again until the next legal snap.

There is no signal/whistle from the referee during the 40 seconds except to restart the game clock following a first down inbounds using a silent wind of the game clock. The umpire shall place the ball on the ground and move quickly to his/her position prepared to use a ‘stop sign’ and the snapper’s first name if the ready-for-play is delayed. If there is no delay, the ball is now ready-for-play.

It is important to note that none of the situations listed above involve an administrative stop / interruption in play. All of those possibilities are addressed below.

Administrative Stoppages / Interruptions

It is always possible for the situations that are listed below to occur during the game that are common **administrative issues / interruptions** to the normal flow of play. Please note that this list does not necessarily include every possibility.

NOTE to the play clock operator: Every situation listed below with 2 exceptions will result in a 25 second play clock that is **NOT** started immediately at any time, but you will wait until the situation has been addressed and the referee will then utilize signal #1 which is the common ready-for-play signal (with his whistle sounded) or signal #2 (wind) which restarts both clocks (with his whistle sounded).

Game Situations:

- *either team **scores**
- *any **foul** occurs
- *either team is granted a **timeout** *
- *an inadvertent whistle
- *an **untimed down**
- *a **measurement**
- *play is stopped for a **medical issue (40 second play clock** if it is a defensive player)
- *play is stopped to address an **equipment issue (40 second play clock** if it is a defensive player)
- *any down that includes a **legal kick** followed by a **new series**
- ***team possession changes** during or after a down
- *the **beginning of any period**

This list includes most every common 25 second play clock situation, but an extremely rare situation is also a possibility (a dog runs across the field; the lights go out; weather conditions).

General Statements:

1. Always set the **play clock** back to 40 during a down in progress. You will have plenty of time to change it back to 25 at the end of the down if that becomes necessary.
2. The common ready-for-play whistle/signal is **not** used for a **40 second play clock**.
3. It is very important that the same individual in the press box is not responsible for both clocks!!! **An official on the field with be responsible for the play clock if and when visible play clocks are not available to be used.**
4. Important reminders: **do not** use a horn at any time for any reason; **always** use a 25 second play clock for an extra point(s) try or for any free kick; and the **game clock** operator must always be ready for the Referee to wind/start the **game clock** when it is stopped. It will always start on a legal snap if it is not already running.

FINALLY, the play clock operator must always be ready for the Referee to reset the 40 second play clock back to 25 seconds if and when the 40 seconds has run down past and below 25 seconds and the football is still not yet on the ground ready for the next down. The Referee's signal for this is a pumping motion with one hand up and down near his head. This same pumping motion with both hands is a reset to 40 seconds.

GAME CLOCK REMINDERS

Our 2019 NFHS football rule changes brought about a significant change to our **play clock** rules. We now have the possibility of a 40 second or 25 second play clock, but you must remember that the **game clock rules did not change at that time.**

Let's review those here. This first section details the reasons for the **game clock** to be stopped at the end of a down or between downs and it **will not** start again until the next legal snap (other than a try) or the legal touching of a free kick.

- *A forward pass (legal or illegal) is incomplete.
- *A live ball goes out of bounds (in possession or loose).
- *A change of team possession occurs during or after the down.
- *Either team is awarded a new series following any legal kick.
- *A delay of game penalty is accepted.
- *A period ends.
- *A charged time-out is granted.
- *Any score occurs.
- *A fair catch is made.
- *A touchback occurs.
- *Rule 3-4-6 is enforced.

There may be other reasons to stop the clock as well, but if one of these occur, do not wind the game clock!

This next section details the reasons for the **game clock** to be stopped at the end of a down or between downs and it **will** start again (**wind the clock**) on the ready-for-play **if and only if** none of the reasons above occurred. It is certainly possible for the game clock to stop for multiple reasons, but the only time the game clock remains stopped is when one of the reasons from list above has occurred. Think in terms of this second list as **temporary clock stoppages**.

- *A foul has occurred.
- *An inadvertent whistle occurs.
- *A measurement
- *Team A earns a first down (a kick or a change of possession was not involved).
- *The game is stopped to correct **any** equipment issue.
- *The game is stopped to attend to **any** medical issue.
- *The game is stopped as a result of a weather delay or some other unusual delay.

Remember that we do have game action that does **not** include the game clock at all. An **untimed down**, a **try for point(s)** and any **overtime period** will not involve the game clock.

It is important to remember the recent rule change that allows the offended team to have the **game clock** started on the snap rather than on the ready for play if and only if the foul occurred inside the final 2 minutes of either half, the penalty is accepted and the clock was supposed to start on the ready.