

# **MAY THE FORCE BE WITH YOU**

## Force under NFHS Rules

Force is of significance only when the ball crosses the goal line and only when it goes from the field of play into the end zone. The initial force results from a carry, fumble, kick, pass, or snap. A new force cannot be imparted to a ball in flight, but once it is grounded a new force may result from a bat, illegal kick, or muff. Merely touching, deflecting, or being struck by a ball does not provide a new force.

## Bullet Summary

- Force is only involved in one direction: from the field of play, across goal line, into the end zone
- Once the ball is in the end zone, no new force may be exerted onto the ball
- No new force may be exerted on a kicked ball that eventually goes into R's end zone

## Definitions

These definitions can be found under Rule 2.

### **SECTION 13 FORCE**

ART. 1 . . . Force is the result of energy exerted by a player which provides movement of the ball. The term force is used only in connection with the goal line and in only one direction, i.e., from the field of play into the end zone. Initial force results from a carry, fumble, kick, pass or snap. After a fumble, kick or backward pass has been grounded, a new force may result from a bat, an illegal kick or a muff.

ART. 2 . . . Responsibility for forcing the ball from the field of play across a goal line is attributed to the player who carries, snaps, passes, fumbles or kicks the ball, unless a new force is applied to either a kick, fumble or backward pass that has been grounded.

ART. 3 . . . The muffing or batting of a pass, kick or fumble in flight is not considered a new force.

ART. 4 . . . Force is not a factor:

- a. On kicks going into R's end zone, since these kicks are always a touchback regardless of who supplied the force.
- b. When a backward pass or fumble is declared dead in the end zone of the opponent of the player who passed or fumbled, with no player possession.

### **SECTION 2 BATTING**

Batting is intentionally slapping or striking the ball with the arm or hand.

### **SECTION 18 FUMBLE**

A fumble is any loss of player possession other than by handing, passing or legal kick.

### **SECTION 24 KICKS**

ART. 1 . . . A kick is the intentional striking of the ball with the knee, lower leg or foot.

### **SECTION 27 MUFF**

A muff is the touching of a loose ball by a player in an unsuccessful attempt to secure possession.

## Example Plays

1. Team A ball 1/10 at the a-4 (going out). The QB to RB exchange is fumbled. The ball is nearly at rest at the a-2. Linebacker B56 in an attempt to scoop up the ball deflects the ball into the end zone. The ball crosses the goal line and goes out the side of the end zone. It is the judgment of the covering official that the ball would clearly not have crossed the goal line on its own.
2. Team A ball 1/10 at the a-4 (going out). The QB to RB exchange is fumbled. The ball is bouncing at the a-2. Linebacker B56 in an attempt to scoop up the ball deflects the ball into the end zone. The ball crosses the goal line and goes out the side of the end zone. The covering official has some level of doubt as to whether or not the moving ball would have stayed out of the end zone on its own.
3. Team A ball 1/10 at the a-4 (going out). The QB to RB exchange is fumbled. The ball is nearly at rest in the middle of the end zone. Linebacker B56 attempts to fall on the ball, but the ball squirts free and out the back of the end zone. It is the judgment of the covering official that the ball would clearly not have gone out of the end zone on its own.
4. Team A ball 1/10 at the a-4 (going out). The QB to RB exchange is fumbled. The ball is nearly at rest in the middle of the end zone. The prone QB is about to secure the ball when linebacker B56 intentionally kicks the ball away from the QB's hands. The ball goes out the back of the end zone.
5. Team K ball ("K" for kicking team) 4/5 at the r-15 (going in). Team K attempts a field goal. The ball is partially blocked by linebacker R56 ("R" for return team) at or near the line of scrimmage. The ball bounces to the r-2 yard line and is nearly at rest when R23 mistakingly believes he needs to cover the loose ball. R23 attempts to fall on the ball, but the ball squirts free and it goes into the end zone where K5 immediately falls on it. It is the judgment of the covering official that the ball would clearly not have crossed the goal line on its own.
6. Team K ball at the r-35 (going in). Team K punts the ball high and deep. The ball hits at the r-4 and bounces straight up in the air. In hopes of getting a touchback, return player R23 jumps into the air and with volleyball serve style, hits the ball toward his own goal line. The ball goes out the back of the end zone.

## Answers

1. The muff of the grounded fumble nearly at rest is a new force. Result of play is a touchback. A's ball 1/10 at the a-20, clock on snap.
2. When there is any doubt, there is no new force. The fumble is the last force on the ball. Result of the play is a safety. A kicks from the a-20.
3. The fumble is the force that brought the ball across the goal line. B's muff in the end zone cannot be a new force. Result of the play is a safety. A kicks from the a-20.
4. The fumble is the force that brought the ball across the goal line. B's kick in the end zone cannot be a new force. Result of the play is a safety. However, B56 has committed an illegal kicking foul and there should be a flag down in the end zone. Team A will accept the penalty, nullifying the safety. The penalty is enforced from the previous spot because this is a loose ball play (fumble behind the neutral zone). A's ball 1/10 at the a-19, clock on snap.
5. A new force may not be exerted onto kicks into R's end zone. Result of the play is a touchback. The ball is dead the moment it crossed the goal line plane. R's ball 1/10 at the r-20, clock on snap.
6. A new force may not be exerted onto kicks into R's end zone. Result of the play is a touchback. The ball is dead the moment it crossed the goal line plane. However, R's action is illegal batting and there should be a flag down at the r-4 yard line. The foul was on R beyond the neutral zone and during the window between the snap and the end of kick so penalty enforcement falls under post-scrimmage kick (PSK) rules. The basic spot is the r-20 due to the touchback. The spot of the foul is behind the basic spot. Therefore, the enforcement spot is the spot of the foul. Half the distance yields R ball 1/10 at the r-2, clock on snap.

**Note to NCAA Officials:** Plays 1, 5, and 6 yield different answers under NCAA rules.