



CFOA 40-second Play Clock Experimental Rule

The following guide is intended to help officials become familiar with the 2016 Colorado Experimental rule. Typically the NFHS allows States to use experimental rules for three years. In many cases, the experimental rule is permanently adopted before the test period ends. Questions should be addressed to your Area Director.

The play clock is used to ensure that each team be given a consistent interval between plays and from game to game. A visible play clock will likely not be available.

Both a 40-second and a 25-second play clock are used. Unless the game is stopped for administrative reasons (e.g., change of possession, penalty, injury, clock error, etc.), the offensive team has 40 seconds to snap the ball after the previous play ends. After administrative stoppages, a 25-second play clock is used. With a 40-second play clock, the ball is ready for play when an official spots the ball and steps away to his position. The 40-second play clock has significantly standardized the time the offense has to put the ball into play in both NCAA and NFL play.

Here are some examples beginning with a common scenario. **Table 1** shows more scenarios.

EXAMPLE 1: A32 runs for a one-yard gain and is tackled inbounds (a) short of, or (b) beyond the line-to-gain. **RULING:** In either case, a 40-second play clock is started immediately when the ball is declared dead. In (a), the game clock continues to run. The referee does not give a ready signal or any other clock signal. In (b), the game clock stops. The referee signals “first down,” the ball is spotted and the referee then signals to start the game clock. The referee does not wait for the chains to be set before starting the clock.

On a fourth-down play that results in a change of possession, the clock is stopped to award Team B a first down, the game clock will stop, and the referee will blow his whistle and signal ready-for-play for a 25-second play clock.

EXAMPLE 2: A11 throws an incomplete pass. **RULING:** A 40-second play clock is started immediately when the ball is declared dead and the game clock stops. The game clock will start on the snap and there is no overt referee signal.

EXAMPLE 3: A24 runs out of bounds (a) short of, or (b) beyond the line-to-gain. **RULING:** In both cases, a 40-second play clock is started immediately when the ball is declared dead and the game clock stops. The game clock will start on the snap and there is no overt referee signal. In (b), the referee signals a first down.

As illustrated in the preceding three examples, if a play ends beyond the line-to-gain without a foul, a 40-second play clock is used. The game clock is still stopped for the ball to be spotted, but that is not considered an administrative stoppage.



The following is a prime example of an administrative stoppage.

EXAMPLE 4: A11 throws an incomplete pass. A79 is flagged for holding. **RULING:** The clock stops for the incomplete pass. After the penalty is administered, the ready-for-play is blown and a 25-second play clock is started. The game clock starts on the snap.

Administrative issues are situations such as the chains getting tangled up or broken, dry ball not brought in time, etc. This stoppage is not intended to allow for additional time needed to break up scraps between players. Statements like “Play clock is running” can be used as an aide to assist in getting players back to huddle.

If the 40-second count is interrupted because there is an appreciable delay in spotting the ball or for reasons beyond the control of the officials, the referee shall stop the game clock and signal (both palms open in an over-the-head pumping motion) that the play clock should be re-set at 25 seconds and started when the ready-for-play signal is given.

Event *	Play Clock Starts at	Game Clock Starts on	Covering Official's Signal	Referee's Signal
Dead ball inbounds	40	Running	S7	None
Dead ball out of bounds	40	Snap	S3	None
Incomplete pass	40	Snap	S10	None
Team A awarded 1st down	40	Signal	S3	S2
Penalty administration	25	Ready	S3	S2
Charged team timeout	25	Snap	S3	S1
Injury/Helmet off	25	Ready	S3	S2
Measurement	25	Ready	S3	S2
Double Change of possession- Team A snaps	40	Ready	S7	S2
Change of possession- Team B snaps	25	Snap	S3	S1
Touchdown	25	N/A	S5	S1
Try, FG, Safety	25	Varies	Varies	S1
Start of each period	25	Snap	N/A	S1
Legal kick	25	Snap	S3	S1
Start of an overtime period	25	N/A	N/A	S1
Other administrative stoppage	25	Ready	S3	S2

* If event does not occur in conjunction with any other event that stops the clock.

S1 is the ready-for-play signal and S2 is the start-the-clock signal, S3 is stop the clock, S7 is “dead ball - start play clock,”, S10 is incomplete pass.

Table 1



Additional Examples

1. During a down that ends inbounds, B55's helmet comes off without a helmet foul by Team A. B55 immediately picks up his helmet, puts it on and continues to chase the ball carrier. **RULING:** An illegal participation foul by B55 for continuing to participate after losing his helmet. The clock stops at the end of the down and B55 must leave the game for the next down. After the penalty is enforced, the play clock is set at 25 seconds and both clocks start on the referee's whistle.
2. Team B trails by three points with 40 seconds remaining in the fourth quarter and the game clock is running. A22 runs and is tackled inbounds short of a first down, but (a) A63's, or (b) B44's helmet comes completely off during the play. The game clock reads 0:33. **RULING:** In either case, the play clock will be set at 25 seconds and the game clock is started on the ready. Team A must snap the ball to avoid a delay of game foul.
3. Second and 14 at the A-25. A33 gains six yards and is tackled inbounds. The Line Judge mistakes the back stake for the front stake and erroneously stops the clock. **RULING:** Although a 40-second play clock will start as soon as the ball is dead, the Referee will handle this as an administrative stoppage. As soon as the error is detected, the play clock will be set at 25 seconds and the game clock is started.
4. During the down B77 is injured. A44 is tackled inbounds. When the clock is stopped for the injury, it reads 0:58 in the fourth quarter. **RULING:** The play clock is set to 25 seconds and both clocks are started on the ready.
5. With the game clock running, Team A allows the play clock to run down. **RULING:** Team B may accept or decline a five-yard penalty for delay of game. In either case, the play clock will be set at 25 seconds. If the penalty is accepted, the game clock starts on the snap. If the penalty is declined, the game clock starts on the ready.

Mechanics



Responsibilities. The 40-second play clock is maintained by the Back Judge in a 5-man crew and by the Referee in a 4-man crew. The play clock starts as soon as the play ends and the ball is dead. The covering official will raise his arm straight up for two seconds to indicate the 40-second play clock should start.

Starting the play clock. One arm raised will be used to signify the play has ended and the 40-second play clock is to be started. The signal is S7 (Dead-ball foul) in the CFOA Mechanics Manual. The signal is only used when there is no other clock signal. If the play is ruled out of bounds or a first down is gained inbounds, the covering official will only signal to stop the game clock. On an incomplete pass, the covering official will only signal incomplete pass. Those signals also serve to start the 40-second play clock.

Re-set. If the play clock is interrupted, it will always be reset to 25 seconds. The signal is both arms with open palms pumped into the air – “push the sky” (Crew Signal “L” with both arms). If the ball is not spotted with approximately 20 seconds remaining on the play clock, the referee will re-set the play clock.

Countdown. When a visible play clock is not available, the following signaling technique will be used for the benefit of coaches and players for both a 40-second and 25-second play clock. In a 5-man crew, the signaling official will be the Back Judge and for a 4-man crew, it will be the Referee.

The arm will be raised with 10 seconds remaining and kept raised up to the five-second mark at which time each second will be chopped. In a 4-man crew, the Referee will also verbalize the count to the quarterback e.g., “10 seconds.”

Chain crew. When the 40-second count applies, the ball can be snapped as soon as it is spotted. That requires the “box man” to hustle to the next spot after instructed by the Linesman. If the box is not in place when the snap is imminent, the Linesman will drop a bean bag to indicate the placement of the box. Under no circumstances will the play clock be re-set to 25-seconds because of a slow chain crew.

First down inbounds. When a first down is gained and the play ends inbounds, the clock stops to award the new series but the 40-second play clock starts when the ball becomes dead (it is not an administrative stoppage). Although the ball normally can be snapped as soon as it is spotted, in this special case, it cannot be snapped until the game clock is re-started. Thus the Umpire will stand over the ball to prevent a snap until the Referee signals the game clock to start and the Umpire confirms it has started.

If the clock operator does not respond, the Referee may blow his whistle to get the clock operator’s attention. Such a whistle does not re-set the play clock. If the clock operator still doesn’t respond, the Referee will signal timeout and re-set the play clock to 25 seconds.