

**REFEREE.**

**ULTIMATE**

**BOOK:**

**SPECIAL  
TEAMS**

BY JEFFREY BERN

**YOUR COMPLETE  
GUIDE TO THE  
KICKING GAME**



FROM REFEREE AND THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SPORTS OFFICIALS



# ULTIMATE BOOK: SPECIAL TEAMS

YOUR COMPLETE GUIDE  
TO THE KICKING GAME

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***Ultimate Book: Special Teams***  
***Your Complete Guide to the Kicking Game***

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## INTRODUCTION

**WHEN I WAS A YOUNG OFFICIAL**, veterans were constantly harping about being especially alert on kicking plays. "If something screwy is going to happen," they said, "it'll happen on a kick."

After my first dozen or so games, I wondered what all the fuss was about. One team kicked the ball. The other team returned it. Simple.

But my luck finally ran out. Reality came in the form of an onside kick in the middle of the second quarter of a game that the kicking team led by two touchdowns. Working as the official on team R's free-kick line in a crew of three, it was pretty much up to me to sort out whether the ball was touched first by the kicking team, had it gone the requisite 10 yards, who recovered and on and on. I stood there transfixed, unable to remember how I was supposed to act.

I don't remember who was awarded the ball or which of my crewmates asked the key questions that led to whatever decision we made that day. But it became clear to me what everyone was talking about when it came to alertness on kicking plays.

This book will solidify in your mind all of the high school rules related to kicking plays. Because those veterans were right: There's nothing like a messed up kicking situation to ruin your whole darn day.

Jeffrey Stern  
*Referee senior editor*

## CHAPTER 1

# KEY DEFINITIONS

- **STYLES OF KICKS**
- **FREE KICKS**
- **SCRIMMAGE KICKS**

## KEY DEFINITIONS

**IN ORDER TO LEARN AND APPLY ANY RULE**, a complete understanding of the definitions is mandatory. Aspects of the kicking game are no exception.

### **Kick**

A kick is an intentional act. To kick the ball is to contact it with the knee, lower leg or foot. Once the ball is kicked, it continues to be a kick until a player secures possession of it or it becomes dead by rule. A kick is a loose ball. A kick is either in flight (has not yet touched the ground) or is grounded (has touched the ground). As you will learn later in this book, knowing when a kick is in progress and when it is not is important to several facets of the rules.

### **Team and Player Designations**

A kicker is any player who legally punts, drop kicks or place kicks. The word "legally" is important because, when he is carrying out his duties, a kicker receives special protection from contact.

A player becomes a kicker when his knee, lower leg or foot makes contact with the ball. He is still considered to be the kicker until he has had reasonable opportunity to regain his balance. Or, if the play is a free kick, he remains a kicker until one of three things happens:

- He advances five yards beyond the line from which he kicked the ball; or
- The kick has touched the ground; or
- The kick has touched any other player.

A holder is a player who controls the ball on the ground or on a kicking tee. There are definitions to indicate when a player becomes a holder or when he ceases to be a holder. Holders are usually used on scoring kicks, but a holder may also be used on a kickoff to stabilize the ball for the kicker.

The snapper must face the opponent's goalline and have his shoulders approximately parallel to the goalline. In a scrimmage-kick formation, a player remains a snapper until he has had a reasonable opportunity to regain his balance and protect himself or he blocks or moves to participate in the play.

If the play is a legal kick, the team doing the kicking is known as team K. The opponent is team R. That applies any time the ball is legally kicked, even though the nature of a field goal or kick try makes it unlikely the non-kicking team will receive the ball. When the ball is



snapped for a scrimmage play, the team that snaps the ball is team A and the opponent is team B.

The labels team A, team B, team K and team R are used throughout a play. Even if possession changes during a down, those designations remain in place for the sake of simplicity.

Again, for ease of understanding, individuals on the field are labeled using their team designation. For example, K1 is a team K player while R1 plays for team R.

## Styles of Kicks

The ball may be legally kicked one of three ways. To execute a drop kick, a player drops the ball and kicks it when it touches the ground or as it is rising from the ground. Drop kicks take inordinate skill and are rarely seen today.

As of this writing, the last successful drop kick in the NFL was executed Jan. 1, 2006, when New England's Doug Flutie — who was best known as a quarterback and not a kicker — drop kicked a try. It had been 65 years between successful drop kicks. Chicago Bears kicker Ray "Scooter" McLean performed the feat Dec. 21, 1941, in the NFL championship game.

If the ball is dropped and kicked before it hits the ground, it is a punt. A punt may be used for a free kick following a safety or for a scrimmage kick.

For a place kick, the ball is in a fixed position on the ground or on a kicking tee. A holder may hold the ball in place on the ground or on a legal tee. A place kick may be used for a scrimmage kick, a kickoff, a free kick following a safety or for a free kick following a fair catch or awarded fair catch.

## Free Kicks

When a free kick puts the ball in play to start either half or to resume play after a try, field goal or safety, it is also known as a "kickoff." A free kick may also follow a fair catch or awarded fair catch to score a field goal. A kickoff may be a drop kick or a place kick or, if it follows a safety, a punt.

A kickoff is a free kick which puts the ball in play at the beginning of each half of the game, after a successful field goal and after any try. A place kick or a drop kick may be used for the kickoff.

## KEY DEFINITIONS

### Scrimmage Kicks

A scrimmage kick is a punt (a team is voluntarily giving up possession) or a scoring kick (field goal or try). A punt may not score a field goal or a try.

### Fumble and Muff

In order to fumble, a player must first have possession of the ball. A loss of possession other than by handing or passing constitutes a fumble. If the ball becomes loose due an unsuccessful attempt at handing the ball, it is a fumble. An illegal kick is also treated as a fumble. See Chapter 10 for more on illegal kicks.

A muff is similar to a fumble with one important distinction. Whereas a fumble is a loss of player possession, a muff is the failure to gain possession of a loose ball.

### Fair Catch

In some instances, team R will trade its ability to advance a kick in exchange for protection from contact by the opponent. That is called a fair catch.

Fair catches are explained in more detail in Chapter 3.

### Tee

A kicking tee is an optional piece of equipment that may be used on kicks other than punts and drop kicks. A tee must be made of pliable material and may not elevate the lowest point of the ball more than two inches off the ground.

### Out of Bounds

The definitions regarding when a player, other person or the ball is out of bounds are key, especially when it comes to free kicks.

A player or nonplayer (e.g. coach, athletic trainer, substitute, replaced player, etc.) is out of bounds when any part of that individual is touching anything, except for a player or a game official, who is on or outside the sideline or end line.

A loose ball (e.g. kick, muff, etc.) is out of bounds when it touches anything that is out of bounds, including a player or official.

The out-of-bounds spot refers to the yardline where a ball goes out

of bounds. It is the yardline where the foremost point of the ball crossed the sideline. When the out-of-bounds spot is between the goallines, play resumes at the hashmark nearest the sideline where the ball went out of bounds.

### **Line of Scrimmage, Free-Kick Line and Neutral Zone**

The line of scrimmage comes into play when the ball will be put in play by a snap. Actually, there are two lines of scrimmage – one for each team. And they're not lines but planes. Specifically, the line of scrimmage is a vertical plane that extends from sideline to sideline using the end of the ball closest to each team's goalline.

On a free kick, the free-kick line takes the place of the line of scrimmage.

The neutral zone for a free kick is the 10 yards between each team's free-kick line. For a scrimmage down, the neutral zone is the area between the two scrimmage lines – in other words, the length of the football.

If a player of either team enters the neutral zone any time after the ready for play signal and before the snap or free kick, it is a foul for encroachment.

After the snap on a scrimmage down, the neutral zone may be expanded – by as many as two yards – on team R's side of the zone. However, the neutral zone cannot expand into an end zone.

Ordinarily, if team R is first to touch a scrimmage kick, team K may recover and maintain possession. However, if that touching occurs in or behind the expanded neutral zone, the touching by team R is ignored.

Free-kick lines and the neutral zone are explained in greater detail in Chapter 7, Free Kicks, and Chapter 8, Punts.

### **Downing a Kick**

Downing a kick refers to action by team K that brings a scrimmage kick down to an end. The ball becomes dead when a team K player touches or possesses a scrimmage kick after it has come to rest beyond the neutral zone and between the goallines.

### **Batting**

Batting is an intentional act. To bat the ball, a player slaps or strikes the ball with the arm or hand. Batting is illegal except that Team K players may bat a low scrimmage kick in flight which they are attempting to block in or behind the expanded neutral zone; a

## KEY DEFINITIONS

scrimmage kick in flight beyond the neutral zone if no team R player is in position to catch the ball; and may bat toward their own goalline a grounded scrimmage kick which is beyond the neutral zone.

Illegal batting is a foul that carries a 10-yard penalty.

## CHAPTER 2

# FIRST TOUCHING

- FORCED TOUCHING
- EFFECTS OF A FOUL

## FIRST TOUCHING

**WHEN A MEMBER** of team K touches any kick at a time when team K could not retain possession of the ball if it had it at the end of the down, it is called first touching.

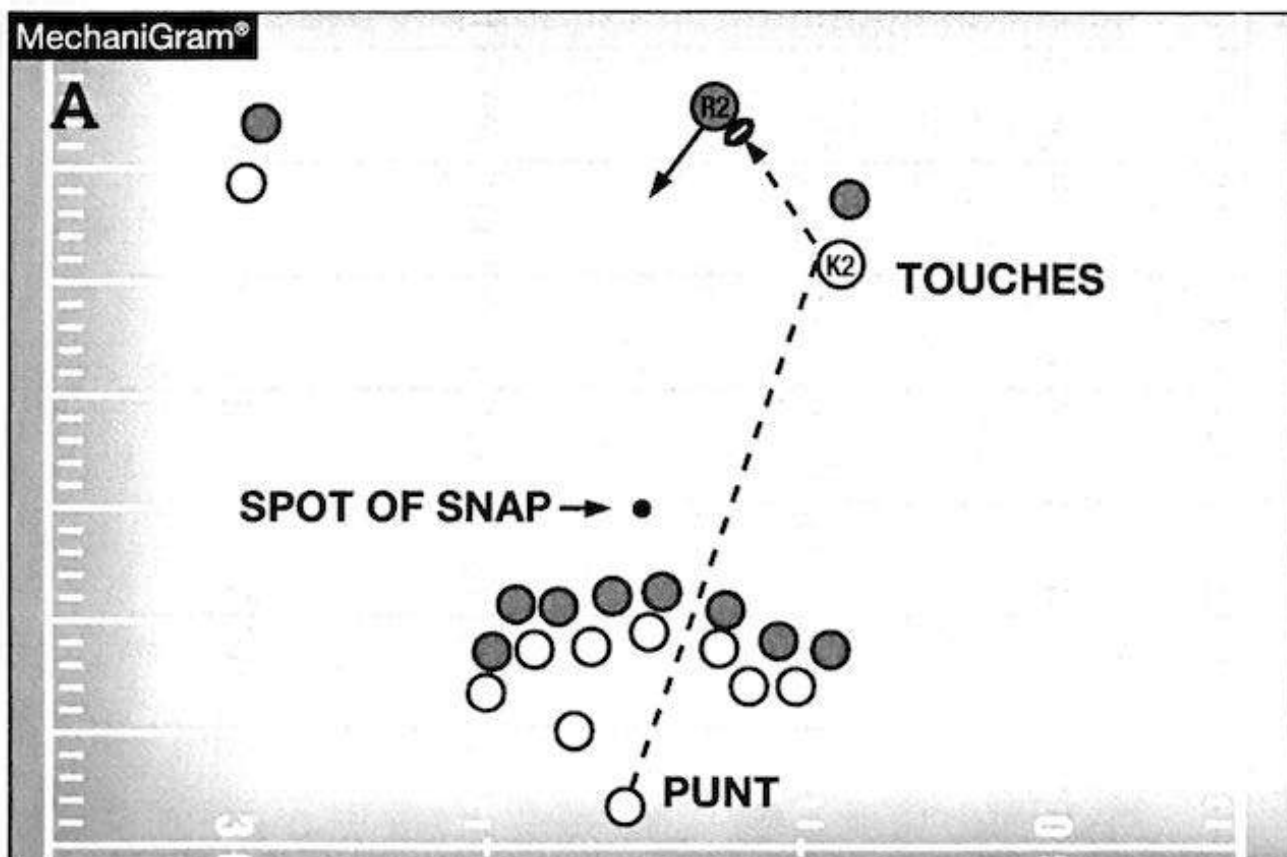
First touching is not a foul but has many of the same characteristics as a foul. On a scrimmage kick, it occurs when a team K player touches a kick that has crossed the neutral zone before the ball is touched by a team R player. First touching cannot occur on a scrimmage kick until the kick is beyond the expanded neutral zone.

First touching of a free kick occurs if team K is first to touch a kick untouched by team R before it crosses team R's free-kick line.

First touching does not cause the ball to become dead. As seen in MechaniGram A, team R may recover the ball and advance. Whether on a free kick or scrimmage kick, first touching gives team R two options:

- Take the ball at the spot of the touching (or any spot if there is more than one spot of first touching).
- Take the result of the play.

The result of the play will dictate which option team R chooses. Here's a typical situation in which first touching is the better option.



The ball remains live on first touching. Thus, team R's advance is legal.

**Play 1:** Fourth and 10 for team K from its own 20 yardline. K1's punt is first touched by K2 at team K's 45 yardline. R3 recovers the loose ball, advances to team K's 40 yardline and fumbles. Prone K4 recovers at team K's 37 yardline. **Ruling 1:** Since team K wound up with the ball, team R will choose the spot of first touching rather than the result of the play. Team R will begin a new series at team K's 45 yardline.

A foul may radically change how team R will react in a first touching situation. If team R touches the kick and thereafter during the down commits a foul, or if the penalty for a foul incurred by either team during the down is accepted, first touching privileges are cancelled.

**Play 2:** Fourth and 10 for team K from its own five yardline. K1 gets off a poor punt that is first touched by K2 at team K's 20 yardline. R3 recovers at team K's 40 yardline and advances to team K's 35 yardline, where he is downed. During R3's run, K4 is flagged for grasping but not twisting R5's facemask. **Ruling 2:** If team R accepts the five-yard penalty for K4's facemask foul, it is enforced from the end of R3's run. That would put the ball at team K's 30 yardline. Team R would be better served to decline the penalty and take the ball at the spot of first touching. It will be team R's ball, first and 10 at team K's 20 yardline.

**Play 3:** Fourth and 10 for team K from its own 20 yardline. K1's punt is first touched by K2 at team K's 45 yardline. R3 recovers the loose ball, advances to team K's 40 yardline and fumbles. K4 recovers and advances to the 50 yardline. During K4's run, K5 is flagged for holding at team K's 30 yardline. **Ruling 3:** Team R will decline the penalty and take the ball at the spot of first touching (team K's 45 yardline).

**Play 4:** Fourth and 12 on team K's 25 yardline. K1's punt hits the ground on team R's 40 yardline. K2 is first to touch the ball at team R's 35 yardline. R3 picks up the ball at his 32 yardline and advances to his 45 yardline, where he fumbles. K4 recovers and the ball is blown dead on team R's 46 yardline. During R3's run, R5 is flagged for a block below the waist at team R's 30 yardline. **Ruling 4:** Whether or not the penalty is accepted, team R loses the right to take the ball at the first touching spot because R5 fouled after R3 touched the kick. The foul occurred during a running play and the basic spot is where the run ended (spot of R1's fumble, his 45 yardline). Because the foul was committed behind the basic spot, it is a spot foul enforced from team R's 30 yardline. Team

## FIRST TOUCHING

K will decline the penalty and keep the ball. If accepted, the penalty would move back the ball to team R's 15 yardline, first and 10 for team R.

For more on penalty enforcement with first touching involvement, see Chapter 6, Penalty Enforcement.

### Forced Touching

If player action such as a muff or block causes an opponent to contact the ball (forced touching), the touching may be ignored.

Touching of a free kick by team R in the neutral zone is ignored if it is caused by a team K player pushing or blocking a team R player into contact with the ball, or a team K player legally batting or muffing the ball into a team R player.

Conversely, touching of a free kick by team K is ignored if it is caused by a team R player pushing or blocking a team K player into contact with the ball.

**Play 5:** K1's free kick from his 40 yardline is rolling at team K's 47 yardline when K2 muffs the ball, which touches R3's leg. K4 recovers the ball. **Ruling 5:** The touching by R3 is considered forced touching and is thus ignored. The ball is dead when K4 recovers. Team R will have the option of taking the ball at the spot of first touching or at the dead-ball spot.

**Play 6:** K1's free kick from his 40 yardline is rolling at team K's 47 yardline R2 legally blocks K3. The block causes K3 to fall into the ball, which is recovered by K4 at the 50 yardline. **Ruling 6:** It will be team K's ball. K3's contact with the ball in the neutral zone was caused by R2's block, thus the touching is ignored.

Touching of a scrimmage kick by team R is ignored if it is caused by a team K player pushing or blocking a team R player into contact with the ball, or a team K player legally batting or muffing the ball into a team R player.

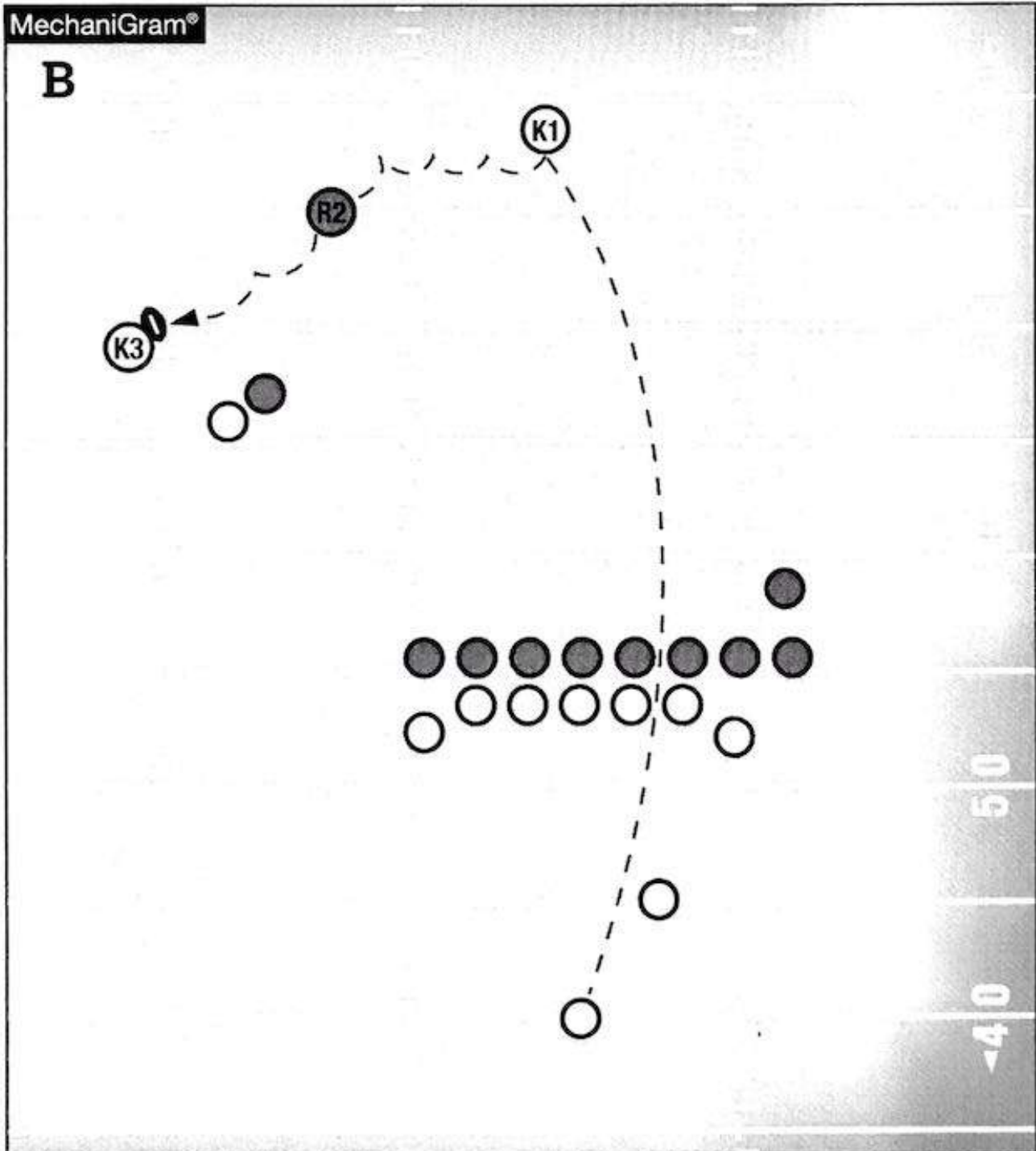
Touching of a scrimmage kick by team K is ignored if it is caused by a team R player pushing or blocking a team K player into contact with the ball.

**Play 7:** K1's punt is rolling inside team R's five yardline when R2 is blocked by K3 into the ball. K4 recovers the loose ball at team R's three



yardline. **Ruling 7:** The touching is ignored. Team R will choose to take the ball at its own three yardline, the spot of first touching.

**Play 8:** As seen in MechaniGram B, it's fourth and 10 for team K from team R's own 44 yardline. There is no team R player in position to catch the punt when K1, at team R's 24 yardline, bats the ball toward his own goalline. The ball touches R2's leg and is recovered by K3 at team R's 30 yardline. **Ruling 8:** The ball is dead when K3 recovers it. K1's action is first touching. The touching by R2 is ignored because it was caused by the action of K1. Team R will likely take the ball at the spot where the kick became dead.



The touching by team R is ignored because it is caused by team K's bat.

## FIRST TOUCHING

**Play 9:** Fourth and 10 from team R's 30 yardline. K1's punt is rolling at team R's 10 yardline when K2 legally bats the ball into R3. R4 recovers the loose ball and advances to team R's 20 yardline, where R4 (a) is downed, or (b) fumbles with K5 recovering. **Ruling 9:** R3 is not considered to have touched the ball. K2's bat is first touching. In (a), team R will likely take the result of the play and begin a new series at its own 20 yardline. In (b), team R will likely exercise the first touching option and take the ball at the spot of first touching, team R's 10 yardline.

## CHAPTER 3

# FAIR CATCHES

- VALID FAIR CATCH SIGNALS
- INVALID FAIR CATCH SIGNALS
- ILLEGAL FAIR CATCH SIGNALS

## FAIR CATCHES

**SIMPLY PUT, A FAIR CATCH IS A TRADE-OFF.** By making a fair catch, team R is giving up the ability to advance the ball in exchange for protection from contact.

Protection is granted to a player who gives a valid fair catch signal because he is concentrating on the ball and is unable to fend off or avoid opponents. A fair catch allows the receiver to concentrate on the ball and ignore that herd of opponents bearing down on him.

However, only a receiver who gives a valid signal is afforded the special protection from contact.

See Chapter 4, Kick-Catching Interference and Chapter 6, Penalty Enforcement, for more information.

On a free kick, team R may make a fair catch in or beyond the neutral zone to team R's goalline. A fair catch of a scrimmage kick may be made beyond the neutral zone to team R's goalline. A fair catch can only be made before the kick has touched a team R player or the ground.

### Fair Catch Signals

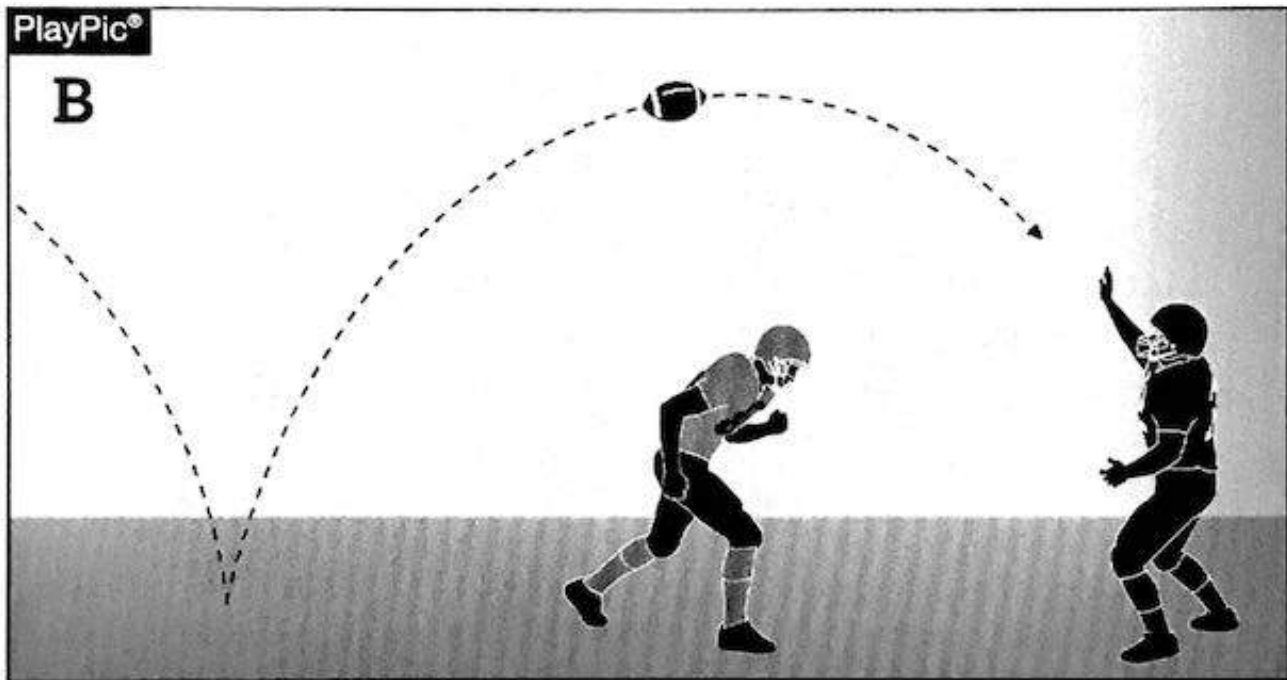
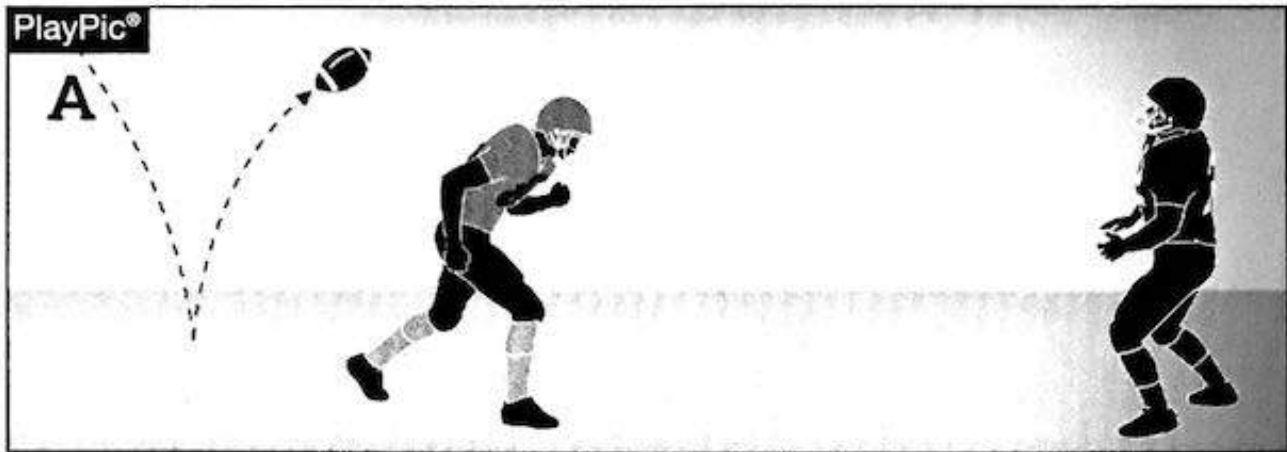
Fair catch signals come in three varieties: valid, invalid or illegal.

Whether a fair catch signal is valid or invalid, the ball becomes dead when it is caught or recovered. No team R player may advance the ball after a valid or invalid fair catch signal has been given by any team R player. However, an illegal signal is a live-ball foul and does not cause the ball to become dead.

In order to make a valid signal, a team R player must raise one arm completely above his head and wave it laterally. The rulebook does not specify how many times the arm must be waved.

An invalid fair catch signal is any signal by a team R player before the kick is caught or recovered that does not meet the requirements of a valid signal. The most common examples of invalid signals are extending the arm without waving it, raising both arms, failing to raise the arm completely above the head or, as seen in PlayPics A and B, a signal given after the ball has been grounded.

In some areas, the "get away" motion is interpreted as an invalid fair catch signal. That movement involves a team R player waving his hands back and forth at chest or waist level, much like an incomplete pass signal given by officials. When given by a receiver, he is warning teammates to vacate the area in which a kick has hit the ground, lest they touch or be touched by the ball and providing team K a chance to recover it. Find out from your assigner or association what philosophy is being used in your area and follow local procedure.



To be valid, a fair catch signal must be given before the kick strikes the ground.

Shading the eyes, as seen in PlayPic C (p.22), is not to be construed as a fair catch signal.

**Play 1:** K1's free kick from his own 40 yardline is high and short. R2 gives a valid fair catch signal while the kick is in flight and catches the ball (a) at team R's 38 yardline, or (b) at team K's 48 yardline. **Ruling 1:** R1 has made a fair catch in both (a) and (b). During a free kick, a fair catch is permitted from in or beyond the neutral zone to team R's goalline.

**Play 2:** As a punt is in flight beyond the neutral zone, R1 gives a valid fair catch signal. R1 muffs the kick but catches it five yards in advance of his muff. **Ruling 2:** Despite the muff, R1 has made a fair catch. The ball is dead when caught and will be put in play at the spot where the catch was completed.

**Play 3:** Fourth and 10 on team K's 20 yardline. K1's punt goes

## FAIR CATCHES



Shading the eyes is not to be construed as a fair catch signal.

straight up into the air just slightly in front of him and remains behind the neutral zone. R2 runs to team K's 15 yardline and there makes a fair catch signal. R2 then catches the kick at team K's 12 yardline and advances for an apparent touchdown. **Ruling 3:** R2's signal was valid, but because he caught the kick behind the neutral zone, it is not a fair catch. Still, the ball becomes dead when R2 catches it and the touchdown is canceled. It will be team R's ball at team K's 12 yardline.

**Play 4:** Fourth and 10 on team K's 30 yardline. K1 punts and R3 signals for a fair catch at his 20 yardline. R4, standing at his 28 yardline, is unaware of R3's signal and attempts to catch the ball. The ball is deflected by R4 and caught by R3. **Ruling 4:** R3's catch is considered a fair catch. Even though R4 touched the ball before the catch, the player who signaled for a fair catch made the catch before the ball hit the ground.

If one or more team R players give a fair catch signal but the catch is made by a teammate, it is not a fair catch. However, the ball becomes dead just as it would after a fair catch.

**Play 5:** R1 and R2 both signal for a fair catch. The punt is short and

is caught by R3. **Ruling 5:** R3 did not make a fair catch, but the ball became dead when it was caught.

Ordinarily, the ball becomes dead if team K recovers a kick. And most of the time, the ball is dead when team R catches or recovers a kick after a fair catch signal has been given. Here is the situation in which neither of those otherwise absolutes applies.

**Play 6:** Fourth and 10 from team K's 20 yardline. K1's punt is high and short. R2 gives a valid fair catch signal at team K's 27 yardline. R2 muffs the ball, which then rebounds behind the neutral zone. K2 recovers the muff and advances to team K's 37 yardline. **Ruling 6:** K2's advance is legal. After a fair catch signal, the ball is dead when team R recovers or catches the kick. Because the recovery took place behind the neutral zone, the ball remains live when team K recovers it.

### Illegal Fair Catch Signal

An illegal fair catch signal is rare. An illegal signal is defined as any signal by a runner after the kick has been caught or recovered. An illegal fair catch signal results in a five-yard penalty.

**Play 7:** R1 gives a fair catch signal immediately after (a) catching, or (b) recovering a kick. **Ruling 7:** In both (a) and (b), R1 is guilty of an illegal fair catch signal. The signal does not cause the down to end.

**Play 8:** R2 gives a fair catch signal just after R1 begins to advance after catching a punt. **Ruling 8:** No foul, because only the runner can give an illegal fair catch signal. Opponents must continue to play and not be deceived by such a signal. Officials must not become confused and whistle the play dead. Remember that under high school rules, no live-ball foul causes the ball to become dead.

### Contact by Team K

The protection granted a team R player who makes a fair catch signal is not absolute. Contacting a team R player who has given a fair catch signal but is positioned so far away from the location of the ball that it is not reasonable to believe he can make a fair catch is not a foul unless the contact is judged to be a personal foul.

However, team K is responsible for knowing when the ball is dead. If a team K player could not have seen a fair catch signal made by the teammate of the player who signaled, there is no foul. By the same

## FAIR CATCHES

token, if the team K player could have seen the signal, he doesn't have carte blanche as far as contact is concerned.

**Play 9:** Fourth and 10 on team K's 20 yardline. While K1's punt is in flight, R2 gives a valid fair catch signal at team K's 45 yardline. R3 catches the kick at team K's 40 yardline and is tackled immediately by K3 before the covering official can sound his whistle. The contact is forceful but does not qualify as a personal foul. R3 fumbles and the ball is recovered by K4. **Ruling 9:** Because R3 did not give a fair catch signal, he is not protected from contact. Since the contact was not a personal foul, there is no foul. It is not a fair catch because R3 did not give a valid signal. The fumble is ignored because the ball was dead when R3 caught it. It will be team R's ball at the spot of recovery.

### Blocking After a Signal

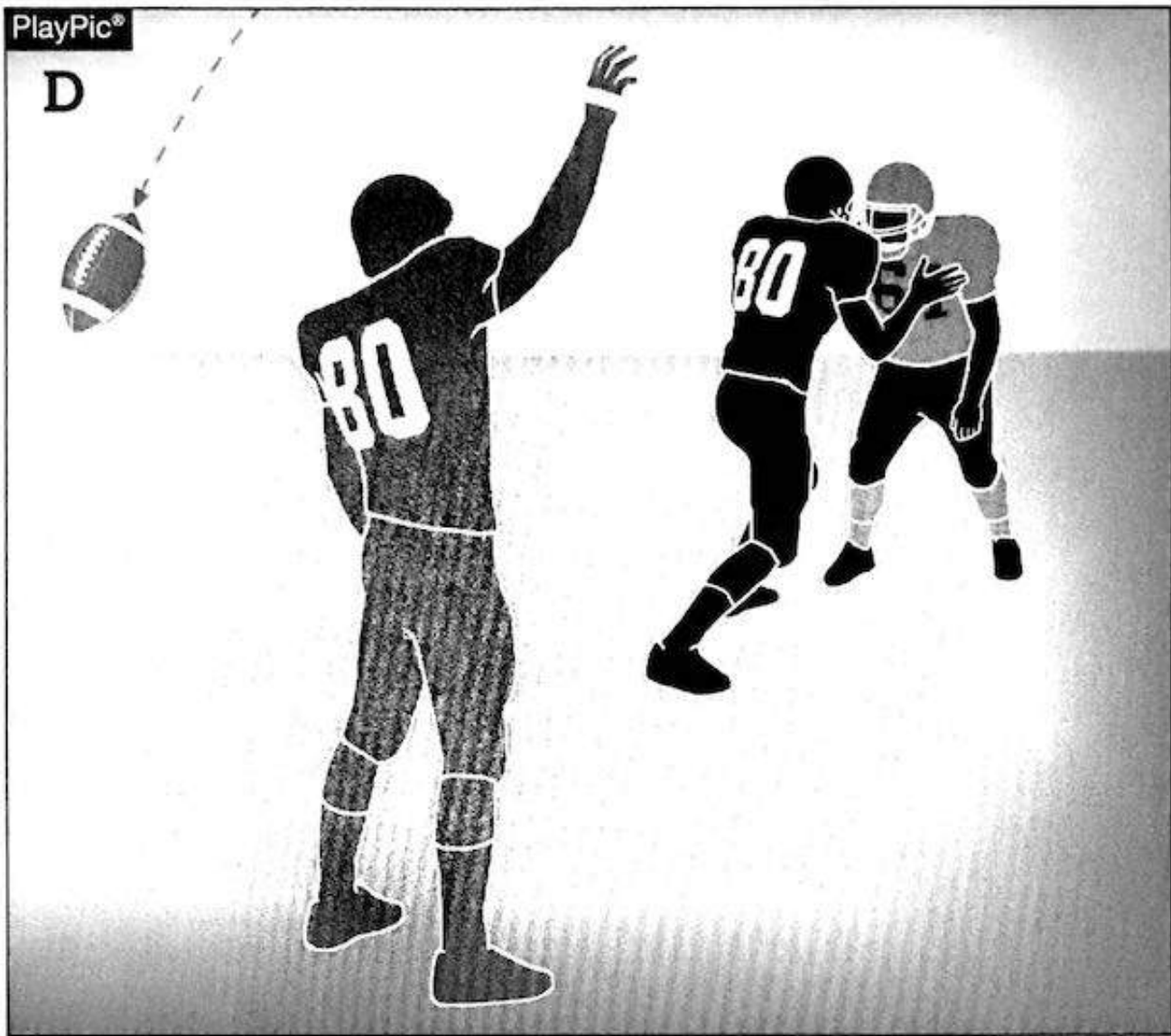
A team R player who has given a fair catch signal (valid or invalid) is prohibited from blocking an opponent until the kick has ended. The rule prohibits the receiver from signaling for a fair catch near his goalline, purposely making no attempt to catch the kick and then blocking an opponent to prevent the opponent from downing the ball before it goes into the end zone. Violations of that rule result in a 15-yard penalty.

**Play 10:** Fourth and 10 on team R's 40 yardline. While K1's punt is in flight, R2 and R3 give valid fair catch signals at team R's 12 yardline. The ball hits the ground at team R's seven yardline. R2 blocks K4, who is attempting to down the ball near team R's goalline. The block is above the waist and from the front. **Ruling 10:** R2 is guilty of an illegal block because he gave a fair catch signal, then blocked before the kick ended.

**Play 11:** Fourth and 10 on team K's 15 yardline. While K1's short punt is in flight, R2 gives a valid fair catch signal at team K's 24 yardline. The ball hits the ground at team K's 17 yardline and is untouched when it ricochets back behind the neutral zone. K3 recovers the ball and begins a legal advance. R2 blocks K4. The block is above the waist and from the front. **Ruling 11:** R2's block is legal because the kick ended when K3 recovered it.

**Play 12:** As seen in PlayPic D, team R's number 80 signals for a fair catch but the ball goes over his head. While the ball is loose, number 80 blocks an opponent. Another team R player recovers the loose ball. **Ruling 12:** The block by number 80 is illegal. Number 80 is prohibited





A team R player who gives a fair catch signal may not block until the kick has ended. Number 80 has fouled.

from blocking until the kick ends. The 15-yard penalty is enforced using post-scrimmage kick enforcement.

### **Awarded Fair Catch**

An awarded fair catch is a penalty enforcement option when team K commits kick-catch interference. For more on awarded fair catches, see Chapter 4, Kick-Catch Interference.

### **Free Kick After Fair Catch**

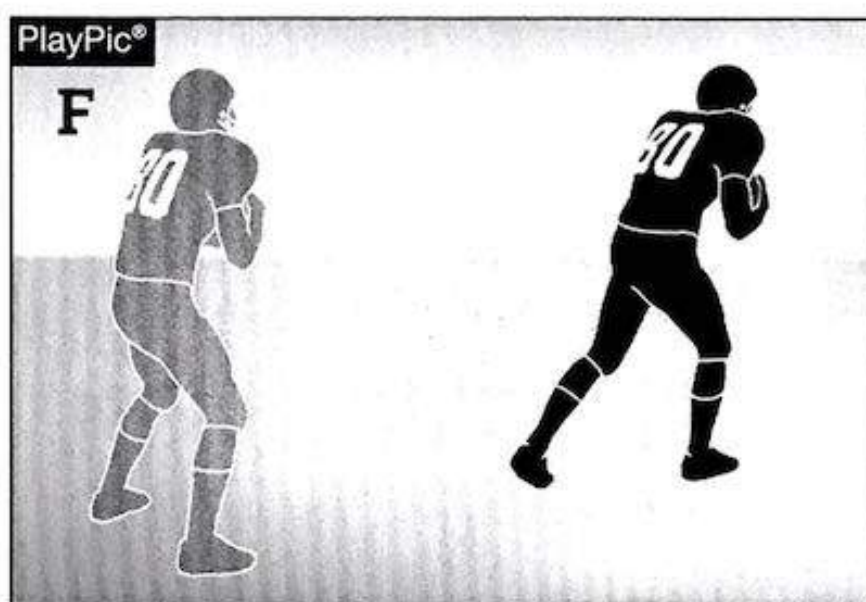
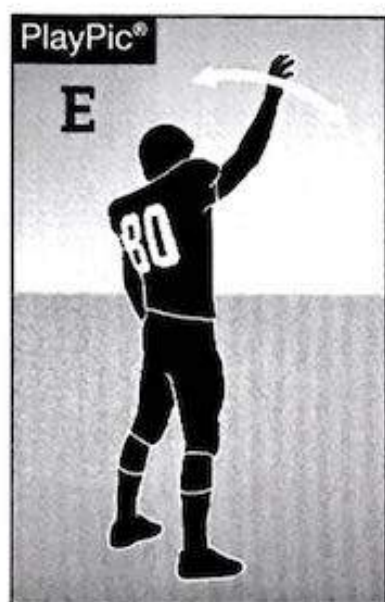
One of team R's options following a fair catch or awarded fair catch is a free kick. For details, see Chapter 9, Scoring Kicks.

## FAIR CATCHES

### Delay of Game

No team R player may advance the ball after any team R player has given a valid or invalid fair catch signal. PlayPics E and F illustrate the player who made the fair catch advancing, but the rule restricts any team R player from advancing. The foul results in a five-yard penalty from the spot of the fair catch.

The rules offer no parameters as to how far the player must advance to be guilty of a foul. That is a judgment call for the covering official.



The ball may not be advanced after it is declared dead due to a fair catch. Number 80 is guilty of delay of game.

# CHAPTER 4 KICK- CATCHING INTERFERENCE

- INTERFERENCE EXPLAINED
- PENALTY OPTIONS
- RESTRICTIONS END

## KICK-CATCHING INTERFERENCE

**KICK-CATCHING INTERFERENCE** is one of the most difficult calls for high school officials. Although the rules include some basic parameters, kick-catching interference is purely a judgment call. There is little hard and fast guidance in the rules. For instance, there is no such thing as a "halo" around the receiver which, if penetrated by an opponent, automatically qualifies as interference. In fact, officials should avoid using that phrase in explaining a kick-catching interference call to a coach.

On a free kick, kick-catching interference occurs if the ball is in flight in or beyond the neutral zone to team R's goalline and a team K player touches the ball or obstructs a team R player's path to the ball. Contact is not required to have kick-catching interference.

It is not kick-catching interference if a team K player contacts a team R player in an attempt to ward off a block. Also, there is no foul if team K's contact is caused by being blocked into a team R player or the ball.

On a scrimmage kick, it is kick-catching interference if the ball is in flight beyond the neutral zone to team R's goalline and team K touches the ball or a team R player, or obstructs a team R player's path to the ball. That means a team R player must be in position to make a play on the ball. As with a free kick, contact by team K is excused if it involves warding off a block or being blocked into the opponent or the ball.

Kick-catching interference can occur even when no team R player has given a fair catch signal. Restrictions end after a free kick has been touched by a team R player, or after a scrimmage kick has been touched by a team R player who was clearly beyond the neutral zone at the time of touching.

Team K may catch, touch, muff or bat a scrimmage kick in flight beyond the neutral zone if no team R player is in position to catch the ball.

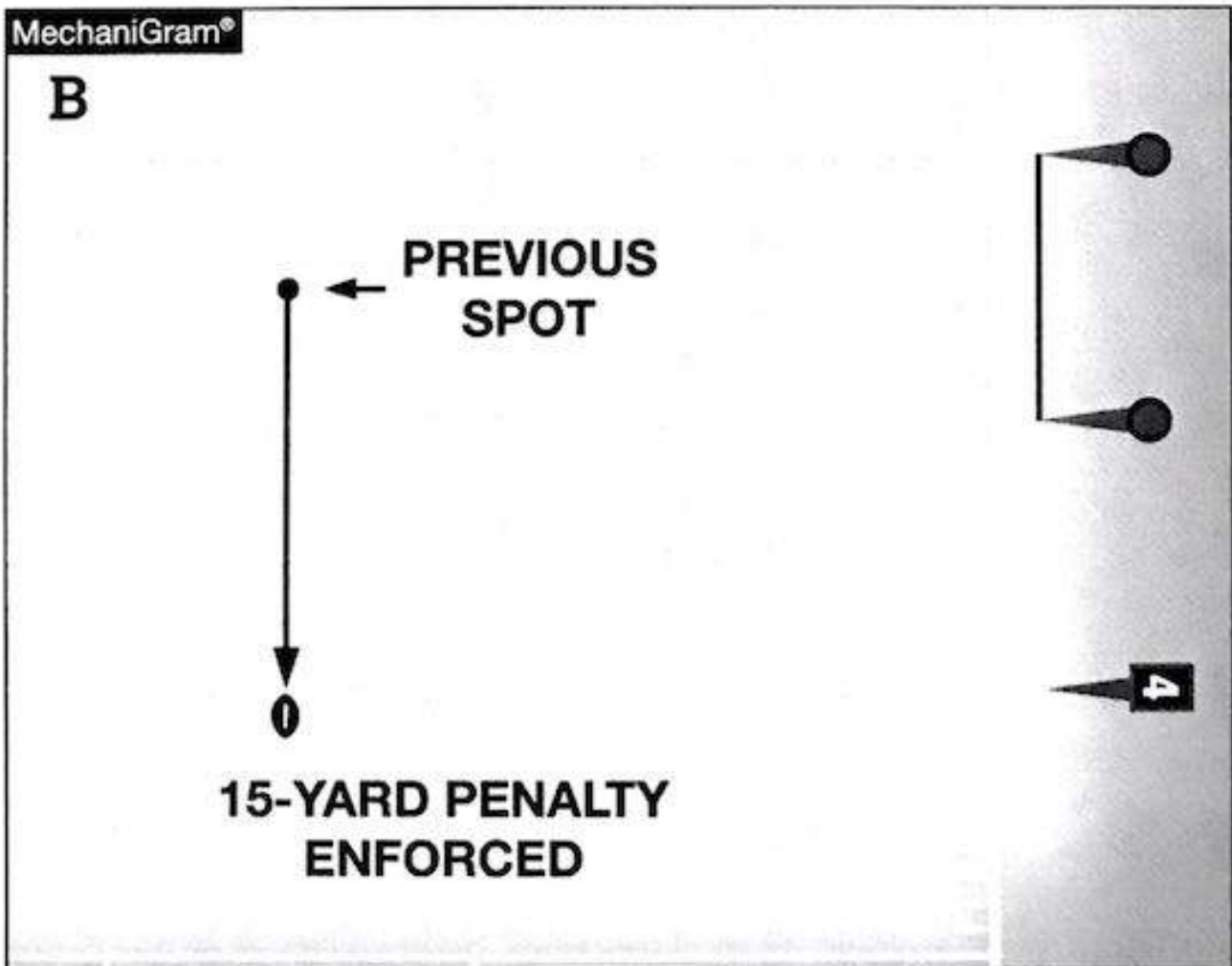
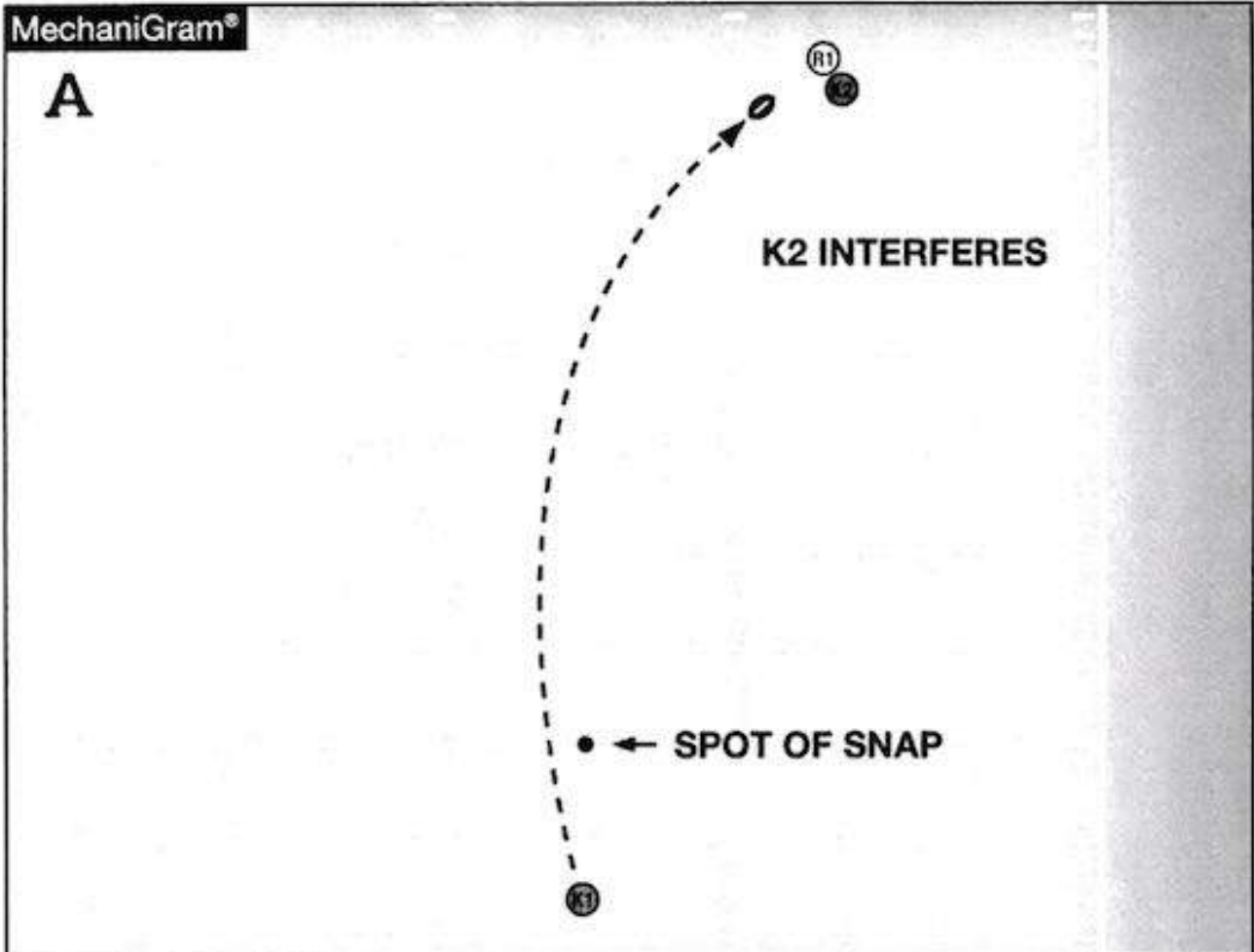
Team R has three options when kick-catching interference occurs:

- As seen in MechaniGrams A and B, choose a rekick after enforcement of a 15-yard penalty from the previous spot.
- Choose an awarded fair catch at the spot of the interference.
- As seen in MechaniGrams C and D (p.30), choose an awarded fair catch after enforcement of a 15-yard penalty from the spot of the foul.

If team R chooses the second or third option, it opens the possibility that a field goal via free kick could be attempted. See Chapter 9, Scoring Kicks, for more information on free kicks following a fair catch or awarded fair catch.

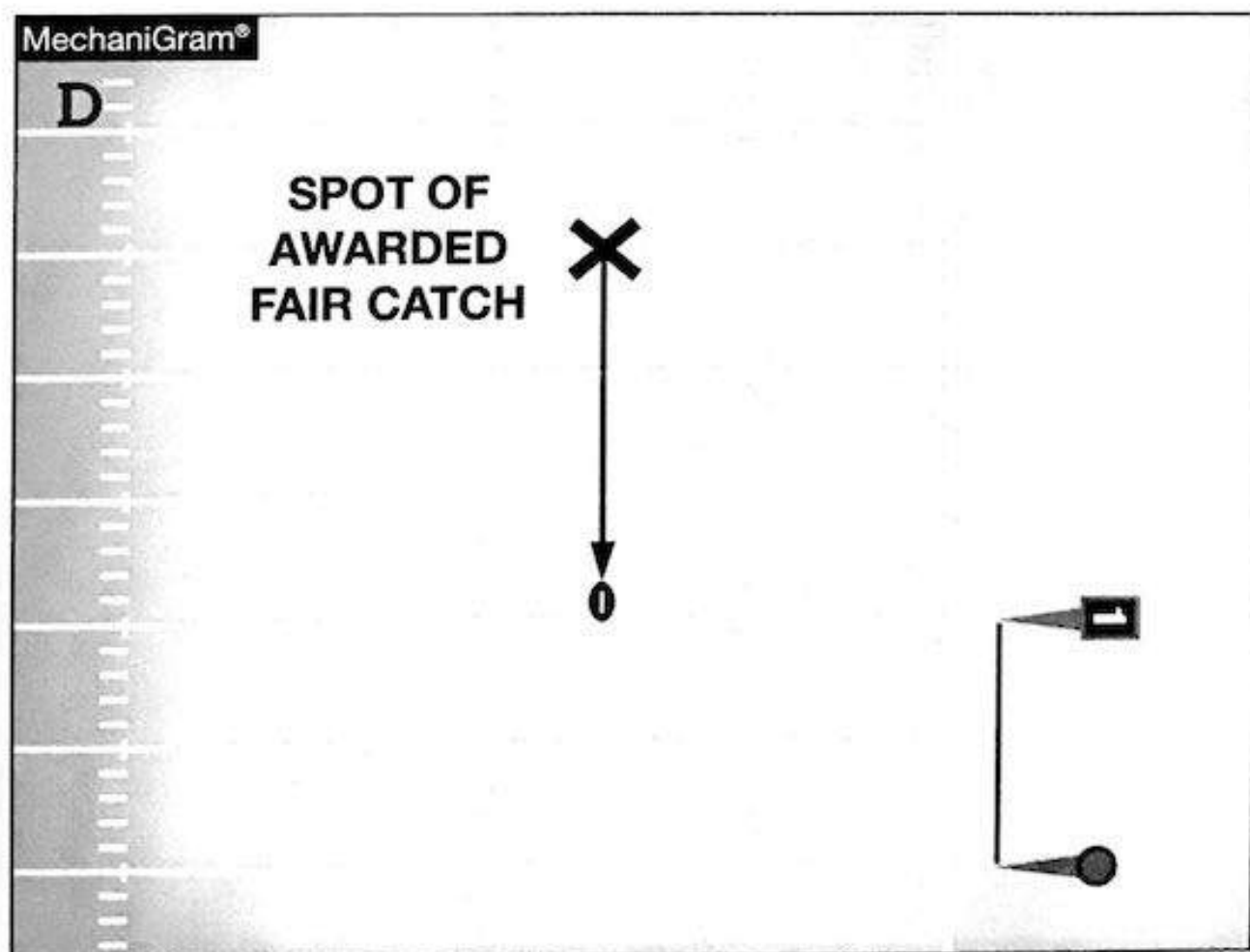
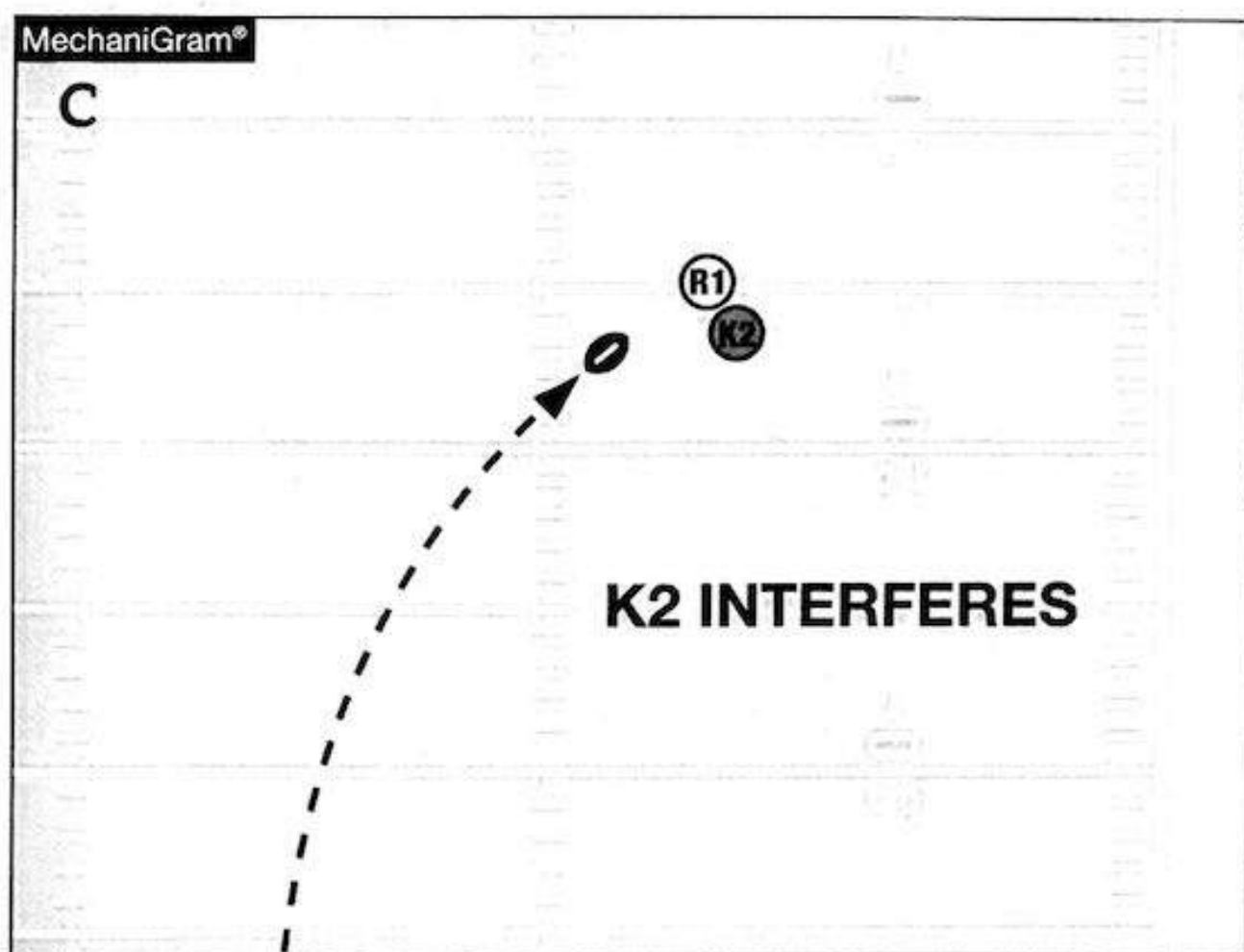
This caseplay illustrates an important difference between free kicks and scrimmage kicks.

# KICK-CATCHING INTERFERENCE



Team K commits kick-catching interference (MechaniGram A). Team K opts to have the penalty enforced from the previous spot (MechaniGram B).

## KICK-CATCHING INTERFERENCE



Team K commits kick-catching interference (MechaniGram C). Team K opts penalty enforced from the spot of an awarded fair catch (MechaniGram D).

**Play 1:** K1's untouched kick is caught by K2 with no team R players in position to catch the kick. The catch is made 35 yards from the spot of the kick. The kick is (a) a free kick, or (b) a scrimmage kick. **Ruling 1:** It is kick-catching interference in (a), but no foul in (b). Team K may catch, touch, muff or bat a scrimmage kick in flight beyond the neutral zone if no team R player is in position to catch the ball, but there is no such exception for free kicks.

Note that kick-catching interference may occur whether or not a receiver gives a fair catch signal.

**Play 2:** Fourth and 10 on team K's 20 yardline. R1 is in position to catch a punt at team K's 45 yardline. R1 (a) gives a valid fair catch signal, or (b) gives no signal. Before R1 can make the catch, K2 contacts R1. The ball strikes the ground and goes out of bounds at team K's 47 yardline. **Ruling 2:** In (a) and (b), K2 is guilty of kick-catching interference. R1 is protected whether or not he gives a fair catch signal.

Here are two examples in which team K could be guilty of kick-catching interference even though there is no contact.

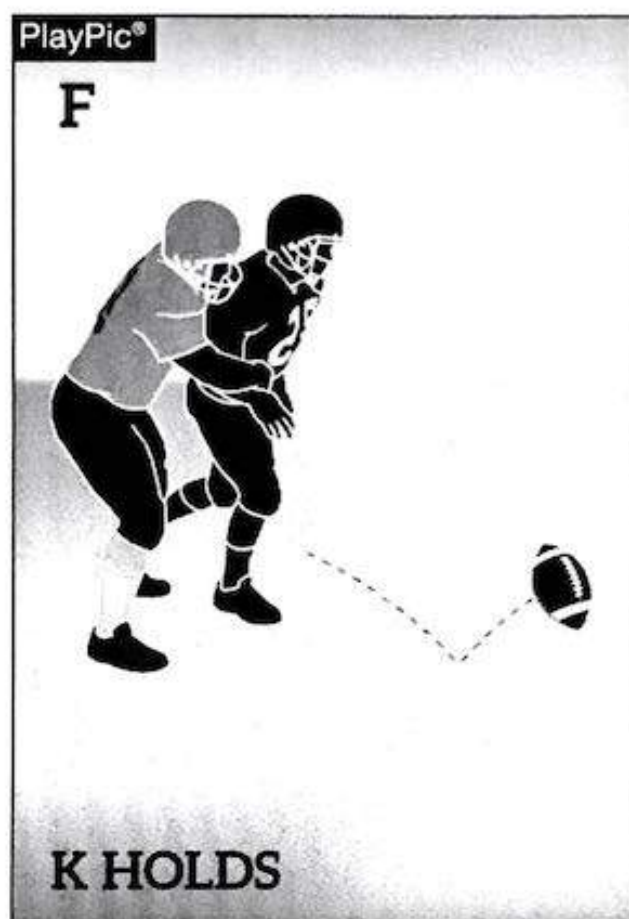
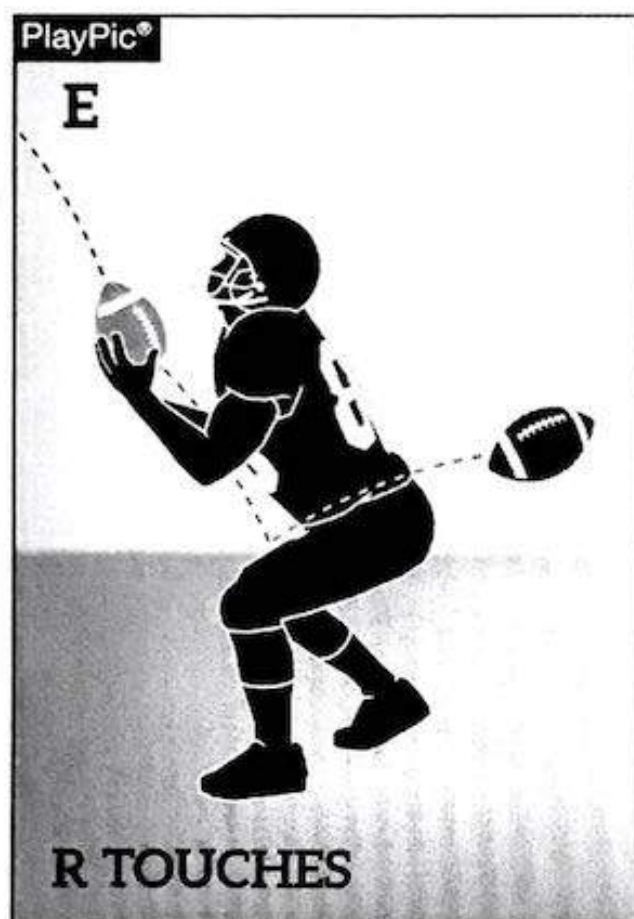
**Play 3:** Fourth and 10 on team K's 20 yardline. R1 is at team K's 45 yardline and is about to catch a punt when K2 waves his hands near R1's face, causing R1 to muff the kick. Team K recovers the loose ball. **Ruling 3:** Waving the hand(s) to obstruct a receiver's vision is called faceguarding. K2 should be flagged for kick-catching interference.

**Play 4:** Fourth down on team K's 40 yardline. K1 punts. Deep receiver R2, realizing the kick is shorter than expected, is running forward to try to reach the kick, but has to go around K3, who came an eyelash short of contact. **Ruling 4:** R2 has the right of way. K3 is guilty of kick-catching interference.

Once team R touches a kick, it is no longer possible for kick-catching interference to occur. However, team K could be guilty of a different foul.

**Play 5:** Team K punts on fourth and 10 from team K's 20 yardline. R1 gives a valid fair catch signal at team K's 45 yardline. R1 muffs the ball. After the muff but before R1 can react, K2 forcibly drives the front of

## KICK-CATCHING INTERFERENCE



Because the team K player in PlayPic F was not attempting to recover the loose ball, he is not allowed to restrict the opponent.

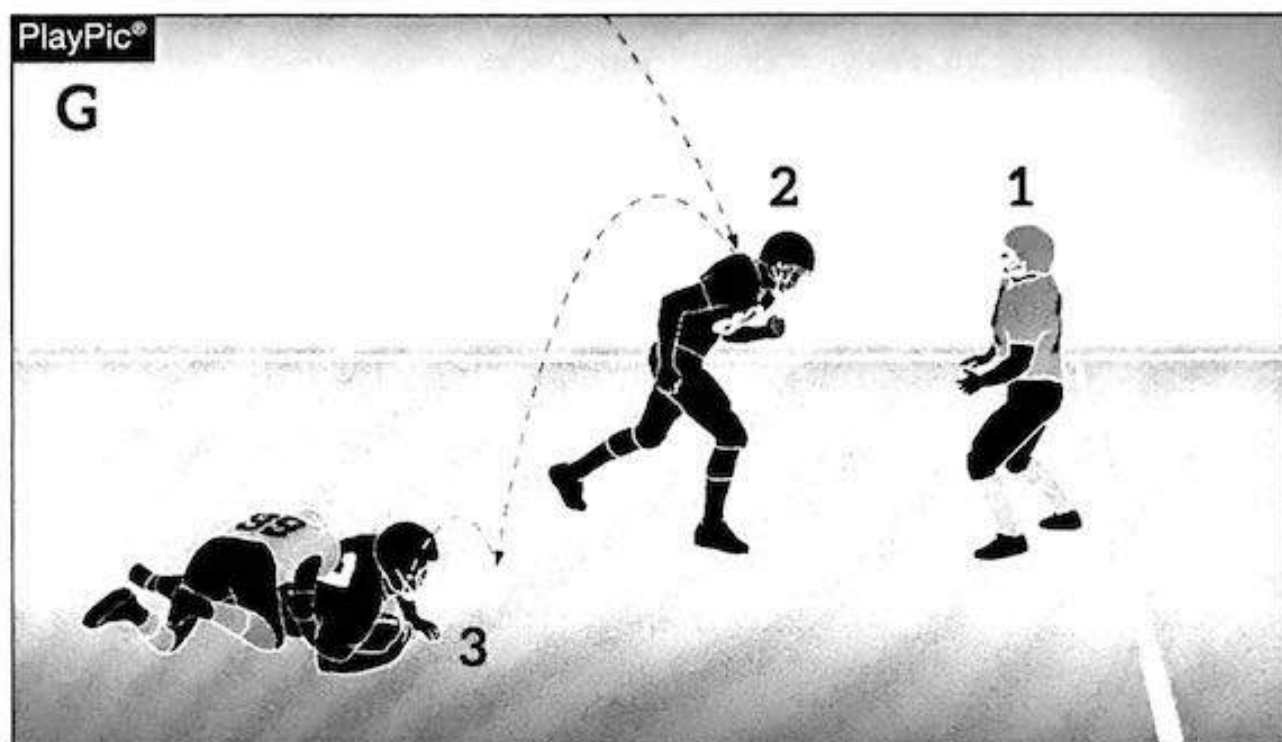
his helmet into R1's chest. **Ruling 5:** K2 is guilty of illegal helmet contact but not kick-catching interference. If the covering official rules K2's act is flagrant, K2 is disqualified. See Chapter 8, Scrimmage Kicks, for details on how the penalty is enforced.

**Play 6:** As seen in PlayPic E, R1 muffs the ball on a punt. R1 moves in an attempt to recover it, but while the ball is loose after the muff, K2 holds R1 (PlayPic F). **Ruling 6:** K2 is guilty of holding. A defensive player may push, pull or ward off an opponent in an actual attempt to get at a loose ball. However, K2 was trying to keep R1 from recovering rather than trying to recover the ball himself. The 10-yard penalty occurred during a loose-ball play and is enforced from the previous spot.

Kick-catching interference can be an intentional or unintentional act. Here is an example of the latter.

**Play 7:** As seen in PlayPic G, R1 is in position to catch the punt when the ball strikes K2's shoulder. K3 recovers the loose ball. **Ruling 7:** K2 has committed kick-catching interference. Team R may choose one of the penalty enforcement options.





A team R player is in position to catch the kick (1). Team R may not touch the ball or team R. Being touched by the ball (2) is the same as touching it. Team K's recovery in (3) is negated due to kick-catching interference.

It is possible for kick-catching interference and first touching to occur on the same play.

**Play 8:** A free kick from team K's 40 yardline is high and comes down over team K's 45 yardline, where it is muffed in flight by K2. The loose ball is recovered by K3 on team R's 40 yardline. **Ruling 8:** That is first touching as well as kick-catching interference by K2. Team R may choose one of the penalty enforcement options or take the ball at the spot of first touching.

**Play 9:** Fourth and 10 on team R's 30 yardline. R1 is at his own 10 yardline and waiting to catch the kick. Before R1 can touch the ball, K2 bats the ball backward (toward his own goalline). The ball goes out of bounds at team R's five yardline. **Ruling 9:** K2 is guilty of kick-catching interference and first touching, but not illegal batting. Team R may choose one of the penalty enforcement options.

Contact by an opponent that results in a team K player contacting a receiver nullifies what would otherwise be kick-catching interference.

**Play 10:** Team K punts on fourth and 10 at its own 20 yardline. R1 is in position to catch the kick at team K's 45 yardline. R3 blocks K4,

## KICK-CATCHING INTERFERENCE

which causes K4 to contact R1. **Ruling 10:** K4 is exempt from kick-catching interference because he was blocked into R1.

Interference restrictions are in play even if a team R player gives an invalid fair catch signal.

**Play 11:** Team K punts on fourth and 10 at its own 20 yardline. R1 is in position to catch the kick and gives an invalid fair catch signal at team K's 45 yardline. K2 contacts R1, causing R1 to muff the ball. While the ball is loose after the muff, K2 tackles R1, preventing R1 from recovering the kick. K3 recovers the loose ball. **Ruling 11:** K2 is guilty of kick-catching interference and holding, but those fouls are offset by the invalid fair catch signal. The down is replayed from the previous spot.

In order to benefit from interference restrictions, team R players must be judged to have a reasonable opportunity to catch the kick. Unless the contact rises to the level of a personal foul, contact on that team R player is not illegal.

**Play 12:** Team K punts on fourth and 10 on team K's 20 yardline. R1 is on the hashmark at team K's 45 yardline on the line judge's side of the field. The ball is kicked to team K's 35 yardline near the sideline on the opposite side of the field. R1 gives a fair catch signal. K2 pushes R1 to the ground. R3 makes a fair catch at team K's 37 yardline. **Ruling 12:** Because R1 did not have a reasonable opportunity to make a fair catch, and since K2's contact did not qualify as a personal foul, there is no foul on the play.

**CHAPTER 5**  
**FORCE,**  
**TOUCHBACKS**  
**AND THE**  
**MOMENTUM**  
**EXCEPTION**

- **GOALLINE PLANE**
- **DOWNING A KICK**
- **NEW FORCE**

## FORCE, TOUCHBACKS AND THE MOMENTUM EXCEPTION

**A DOWN IN WHICH A KICK OCCURS MAY END IN A NUMBER OF WAYS.** Most of the time, the sequence will be kick-catch-return-tackle. But when a goalline is involved, the number of possible outcomes increases. In those cases, touchbacks and safeties become part of the conversation.

In order to understand how a safety is scored or a touchback occurs, the concept of force must be addressed. For the most part, this book will deal only with force resulting from a kick.

Initial force occurs when the ball is carried, fumbled, kicked, snapped or passed so that it goes from the field of play and breaks the plane of a goalline. The player who carries, fumbles, kicks, snaps or passes the ball is considered responsible for providing the initial force. Force is not a factor on kicks going into team R's end zone. Those kicks always result in a touchback, regardless of which player supplied the force.

After a kick has been grounded, a new force may result from the ball being batted, illegally kicked or muffed. In those cases, the player who batted, illegally kicked or muffed the ball is responsible for the new force. Note that the ball must be grounded in order for a new force to occur.

In order to properly rule on touchbacks and safeties, it is also important to remember the definition regarding when a kick ends. A kick ends when it is caught or recovered by a player or when the ball otherwise becomes dead by rule (e.g. going out of bounds, is downed, etc.). Neither first touching nor a muff cause the ball to become dead; in those situations, the ball remains a kick until it is caught, recovered or becomes dead by rule.

### Touchback

If the ball enters a team's own end zone and becomes dead there, and the opposing team is responsible for the force or new force that put it into the end zone, the result is a touchback. After a touchback, the team whose goalline is involved will resume play by snapping the ball from its own 20 yardline.

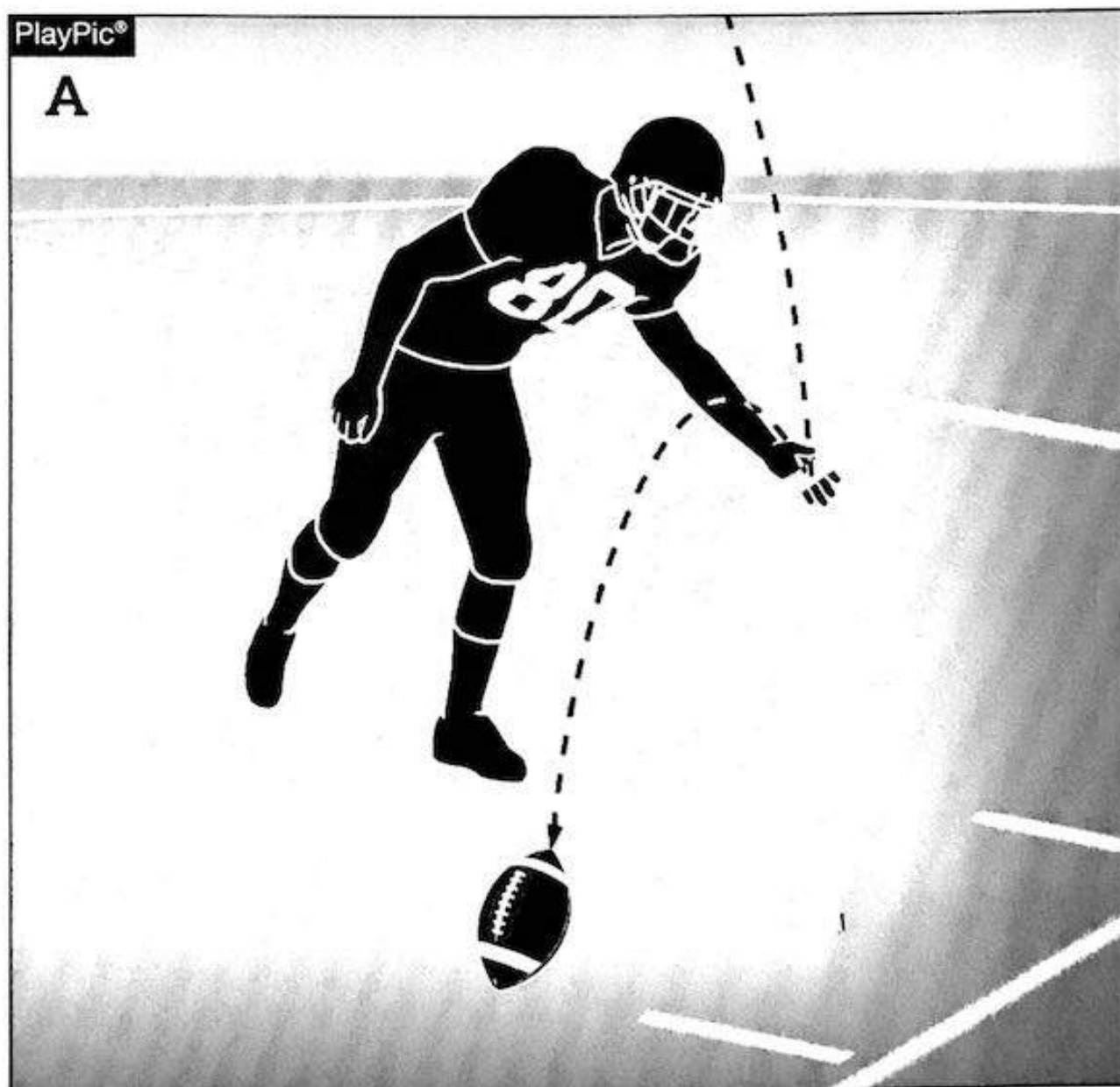
Kicking situations that result in a touchback:

- When a free kick, punt or grounded field-goal attempt breaks the plane of team R's goalline.
- When a field-goal attempt is in flight when it touches a team K player in team R's end zone.
- When a field-goal attempt breaks the plane of team R's goalline and is unsuccessful.

## FORCE, TOUCHBACKS AND THE MOMENTUM EXCEPTION

**Play 1:** K1's punt, field goal attempt or free kick is muffed by R1 on his five yardline. The ball rolls into team R's end zone and is recovered there by (a) K7, or (b) R2. **Ruling 1:** The ball is dead as soon as it breaks the plane of the goalline. As a result, both players recovered balls that were already dead. The result in (a) and (b) is a touchback.

**Play 2:** K1's punt, field goal attempt or free kick rolls to a stop on team R's five yardline. R2 attempts to recover, but muffs the ball so that it rolls into team R's end zone where the ball is recovered by a player of either team. **Ruling 2:** The ball is dead the moment it breaks the goalline plane. The result is a touchback. The muffing by R2 did not change the status of the ball; it was still a kick.



It is legal for a team K player to bat a scrimmage kick toward his own goalline if no team R player is in position to catch it.

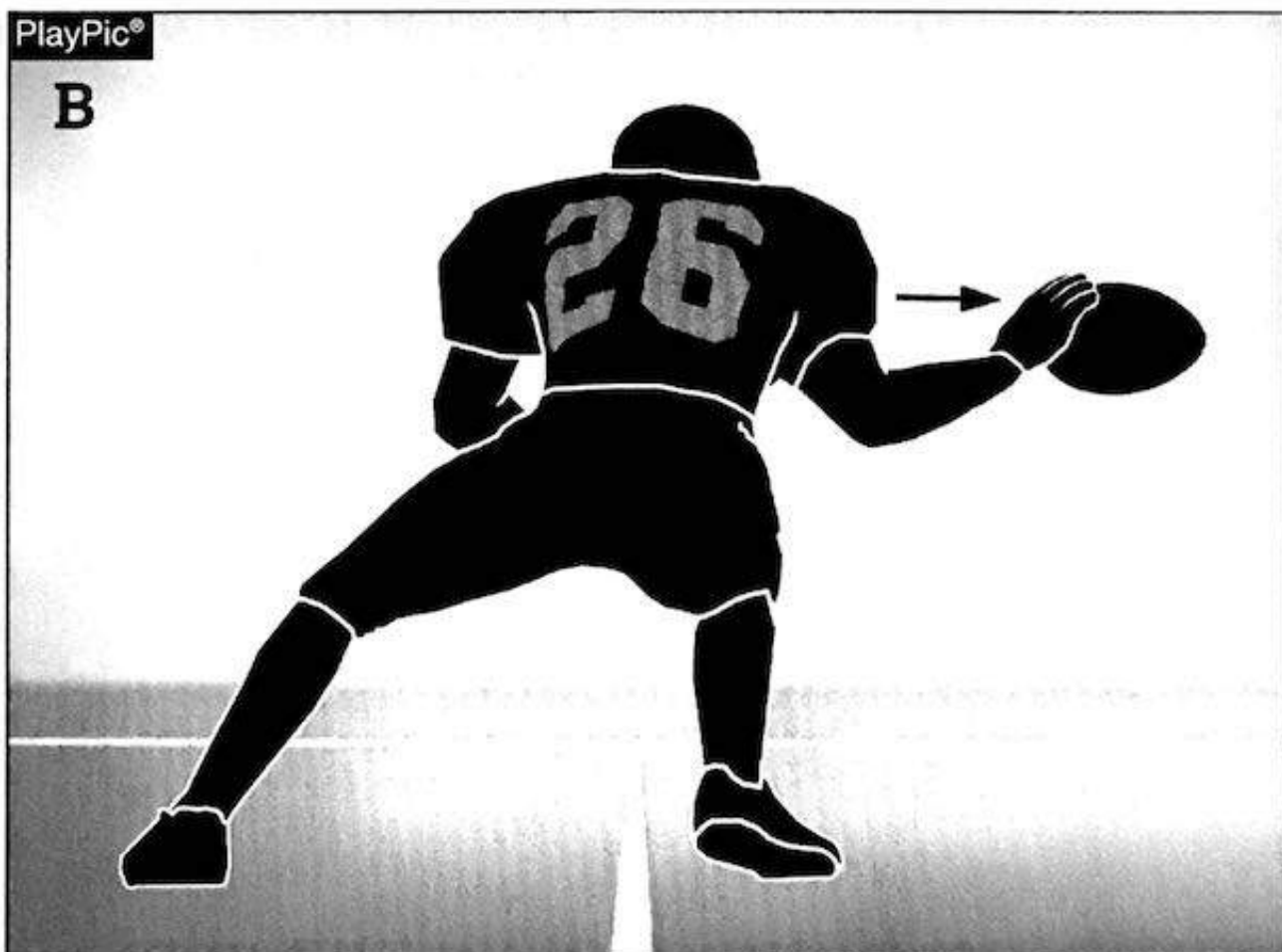
## FORCE, TOUCHBACKS AND THE MOMENTUM EXCEPTION

A punter may be adept at kicking the ball so it goes out of bounds inside team R's five yardline. That is often referred to as a "coffin corner kick" because it forces team R to start a new series deep in its own territory.

Failing that, team K players may try to keep the ball in the field of play to prevent a touchback. Team K may legally bat toward its own goalline a grounded kick that is beyond the neutral zone. It is also legal for team K to bat toward its own goalline a scrimmage kick in flight if no team R player is in position to catch the ball. A legal bat is depicted in PlayPic A (p.37). Note that such batting also qualifies as first touching by team K. That could be a factor depending on what happens on the rest of the play.

In high school football, the position of the ball and not a player's feet determine whether or not the ball has broken the plane of the goalline. The situation is most often seen when a team K player tries to down a scrimmage kick or bat it back into the field of play before it reaches the end zone and results in a touchback.

As seen in PlayPic B, even though the team K player has one foot in team R's end zone, the ball has not broken the plane when he bats it



Even though number 26's left foot is in team R's end zone, the ball remains live because it has not broken the plane of team R's goalline.

## FORCE, TOUCHBACKS AND THE MOMENTUM EXCEPTION

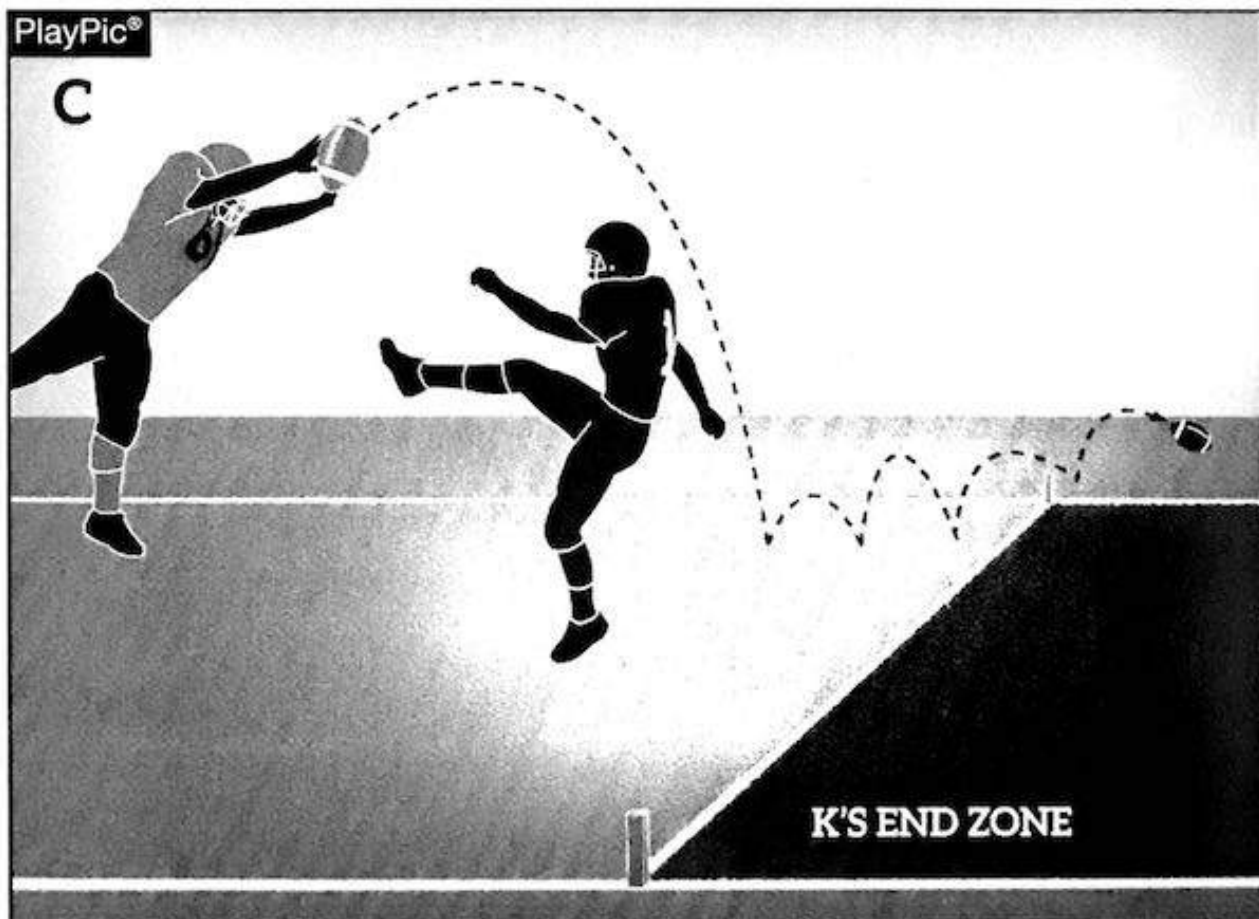
toward his own goalline. Therefore, the bat is legal and the ball remains live.

### Safety

A safety is worth two points. After a safety, the team that did not score kicks off from its own 20 yardline. A punt, dropkick or placekick may be used. For a placekick, a tee may be used.

In order for a safety to occur through play, the ball must become dead (including out of bounds) in a team's own end zone and a player from that team must have provided the force.

**Play 3:** As seen in PlayPic C, it's fourth and 10 on team K's 10 yardline. R1 blocks team K's punt at team K's two yardline. The ball bounds into team K's end zone, where (a) it goes out of bounds, or (b) is recovered by K3. **Ruling 3:** In (a) and (b), it is a safety. Team R scores two points. Even though R1's block caused the ball to change direction and wind up in team K's end zone, the kick – not the block – is considered



The kick, not the block, caused the ball to go out of bounds in team K's end zone. The result is a safety.

## FORCE, TOUCHBACKS AND THE MOMENTUM EXCEPTION

to have provided the force. Note: If team R were to recover the ball in team K's end zone, it would be a touchdown.

**Play 4:** Fourth and 10 on team K's 10 yardline. K1's punt is in flight and untouched when R2 muffs the ball at team K's 17 yardline. The ball rolls into team K's end zone, where (a) it goes out of bounds, or (b) is recovered by K3. **Ruling 4:** In (a) and (b), it is a safety. Team R scores two points. The kick – not the muff – is considered to have provided the force. Note: If team R were to recover the ball in team K's end zone, it would be a touchdown.

### Momentum Exception

The momentum exception helps prevent a "cheap safety." The momentum exception applies when a team R player secures possession of a kick between his five yardline and his goalline and his original momentum carries him into the end zone where the ball remains in the end zone and is declared dead in the end zone in his team's possession or the ball goes out of bounds in the end zone. If the momentum exception applies, it is team R's ball at the spot where possession was gained.

**Play 5:** As seen in MechaniGram D, R1 catches or recovers a kick on his own three yardline. His original momentum carries him into his end zone, where the ball becomes dead. **Ruling 5:** The momentum exception applies. It will be team R's ball on its three yardline.

**Play 6:** As seen in MechaniGram E, R1 catches or recovers a kick on his own three yardline. His original momentum carries him into his end zone. R1 runs laterally in the end zone before he is tackled or downs the ball. **Ruling 6:** Because the ball never returned to the field of play, the criteria for the exception have been met. It will be team R's ball at its own three yardline.

Two phrases in the exception are crucial. The first is "original momentum." When a team R player catches or recovers a kick at or inside his own five yardline and takes the ball into his end zone, the covering official must decide if the team R player gathered himself and went into the end zone on his own accord or if his momentum was the cause.



# FORCE, TOUCHBACKS AND THE MOMENTUM EXCEPTION

MechaniGram®

**D**

**3. BALL BECOMES DEAD IN TEAM R'S END ZONE**

**4. TEAM R'S BALL, 1ST AND 10 AT ITS OWN 3 YARDLINE**



**2. MOMENTUM TAKES HIM INTO HIS OWN END ZONE**

**1. R1 CATCHES OR RECOVERS KICK AT HIS OWN 3 YARDLINE**

The covering official must drop a beanbag at the spot of the catch or recovery in case the momentum exception comes into play.

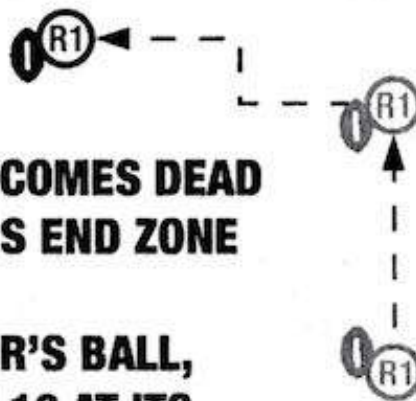
MechaniGram®

**E**

**3. R1 RUNS AROUND THE END ZONE WITHOUT EVER LEAVING IT**

**4. BALL BECOMES DEAD IN TEAM R'S END ZONE**

**5. TEAM R'S BALL, 1ST AND 10 AT ITS OWN 3 YARDLINE**

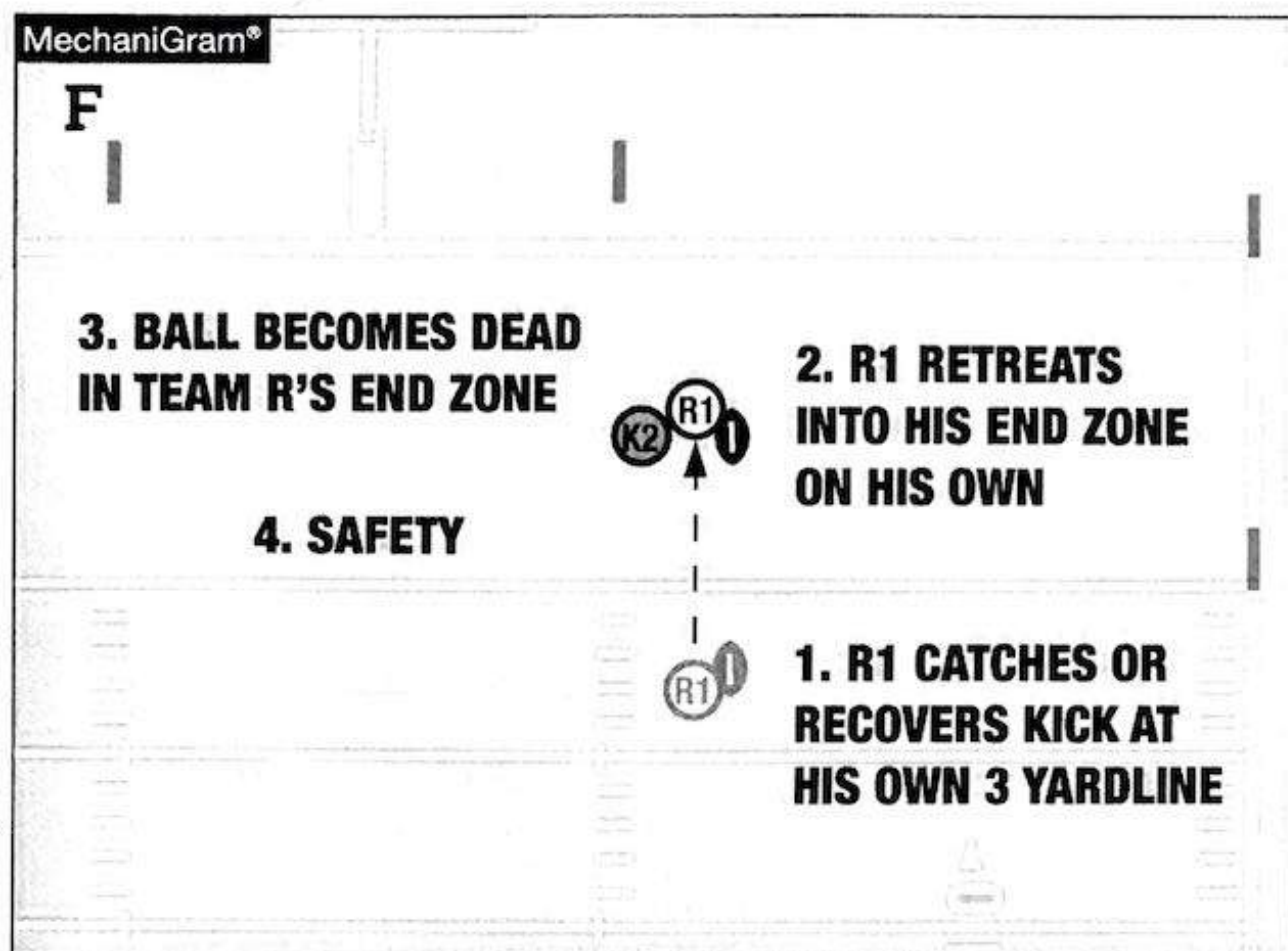


**2. MOMENTUM TAKES HIM INTO HIS OWN END ZONE**

**1. R1 CATCHES OR RECOVERS KICK AT HIS OWN 3 YARDLINE**

The momentum exception applies if the ball remains in the end zone. R1 may attempt to advance but risks losing the option of the exception.

## FORCE, TOUCHBACKS AND THE MOMENTUM EXCEPTION



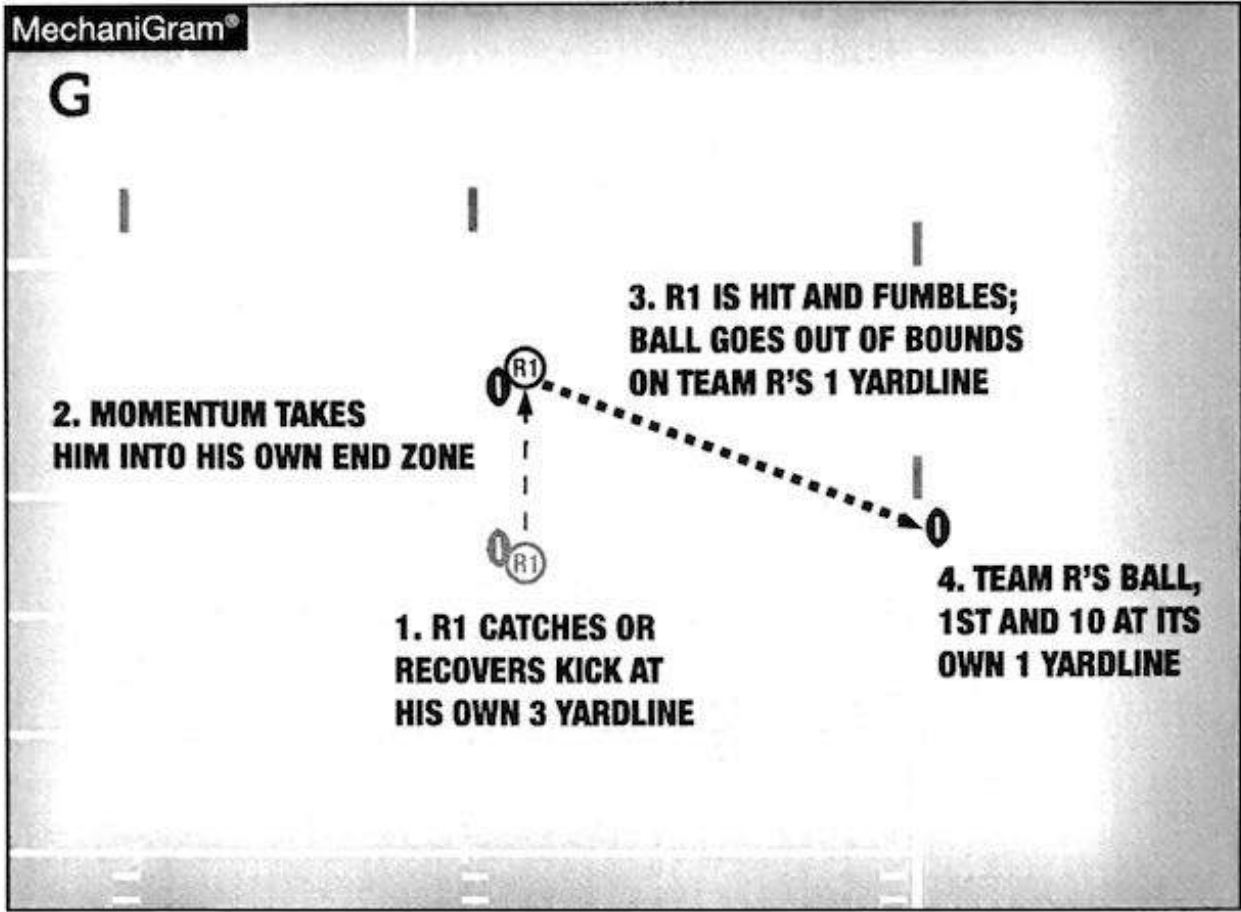
The momentum exception does not apply because R1 entered his end zone on his own.

**Play 7:** As seen in MechaniGram F, R1 is standing on his own three yardline when he catches or recovers a kick. R1 tries to avoid being downed by retreating into his own end zone. He is tackled there by K2. **Ruling 7:** That is a safety. The momentum exception doesn't apply when the player enters his own end zone on his volition.

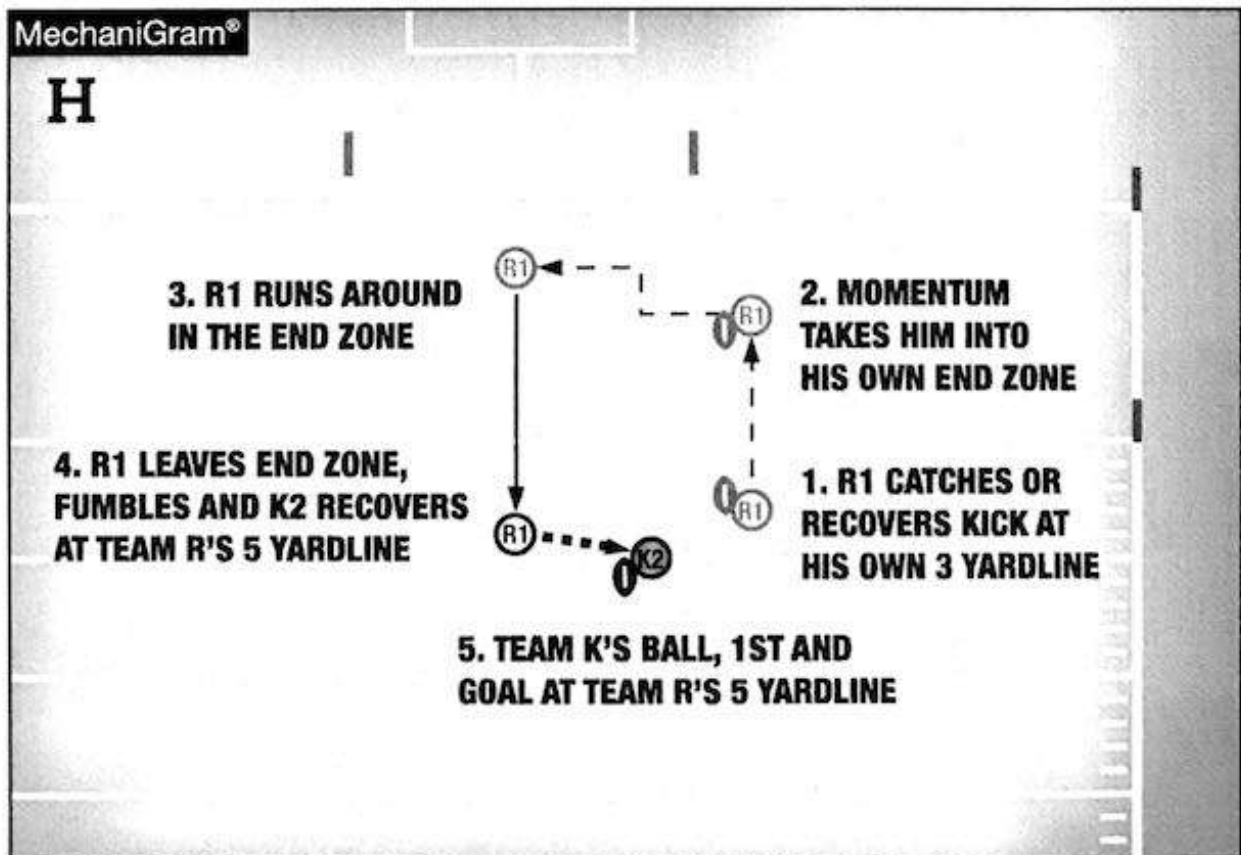
The other key phrase is "remains in the end zone and is declared dead in the end zone in his team's possession or it goes out of bounds in the end zone." Team R loses the benefit of the momentum exception if the ball returns to the field of play, as illustrated in the following examples.

**Play 8:** As seen in MechaniGram G, R1's original momentum carries him into his end zone after he catches or recovers a kick at his own three yardline. R1 then fumbles while in the end zone and the fumbled ball goes out of bounds on team R's one yardline. **Ruling 8:** Team R cannot avail itself of the momentum exception because the ball did not become dead in its own end zone. It will be team R's ball at its own one yardline.

## FORCE, TOUCHBACKS AND THE MOMENTUM EXCEPTION



If the ball goes out of bounds between the goallines, team R loses the exception and takes possession at the out of bounds spot.



It will be team R's ball at the spot where R1 was downed. In order for the exception to apply, the ball must become dead in team R's end zone.

## FORCE, TOUCHBACKS AND THE MOMENTUM EXCEPTION

**Play 9:** B1's original momentum carries him into his end zone after he intercepts team A's forward pass at team B's three yardline. While running with the ball in the end zone, B1 fumbles. The ball rolls to the two yardline, where it is muffed by B2, rolls back into the end zone and is recovered by B3. **Ruling 9:** Team A scores a safety. When the ball was fumbled into the field of play, momentum was canceled. B2's muff provided a new force into team B's end zone. When it became dead there in team B's possession, the result is a safety.

A fair catch signal adds another dimension to a potential momentum situation.

**Play 10:** Team K punts on fourth and 10 from team R's 45 yardline. R1 gives a fair catch signal at team R's 10 yardline. R1 muffs the ball, which bounces toward team R's goalline. R1 recovers at his own one yardline and his momentum takes him into the end zone, where he is downed. **Ruling 10:** It is team R's ball on the one yardline, but not because of the momentum exception. The ball became dead when R1 recovered following the fair catch signal.

Once the ball returns to the field of play, the momentum exception no longer applies.

**Play 11:** As seen in MechaniGram H (p.43), R1's original momentum carries him into his end zone after he catches or recovers a kick at his own three yardline. R1 then advances into the field of play. He is hit and fumbles at his own five yardline, where K2 recovers. **Ruling 11:** That is a legal recovery. Team K will start a new series, first and goal at team R's five yardline. Once R1 brought the ball back into the field of play, team R no longer had the protection of the momentum exception.

## CHAPTER 6

# PENALTY ENFORCEMENT ON KICK PLAYS

- POST-SCRIMMAGE KICK ENFORCEMENT
- PREVIOUS SPOT ENFORCEMENT
- FREE KICK OUT OF BOUNDS

## PENALTY ENFORCEMENT ON KICK PLAYS

**WHEN A FOUL OCCURS DURING A KICK PLAY**, enforcement may take one of several forms. The spot of enforcement depends on the type of kick, which team fouled and at what point during the play the foul occurred.

### Fouls on Free Kicks

The basic enforcement spot for fouls during a free kick is the previous spot. Because by definition the kick ends when it is caught or recovered, fouls that occur after the kick ends are part of a running play. Those penalties are enforced from the basic spot.

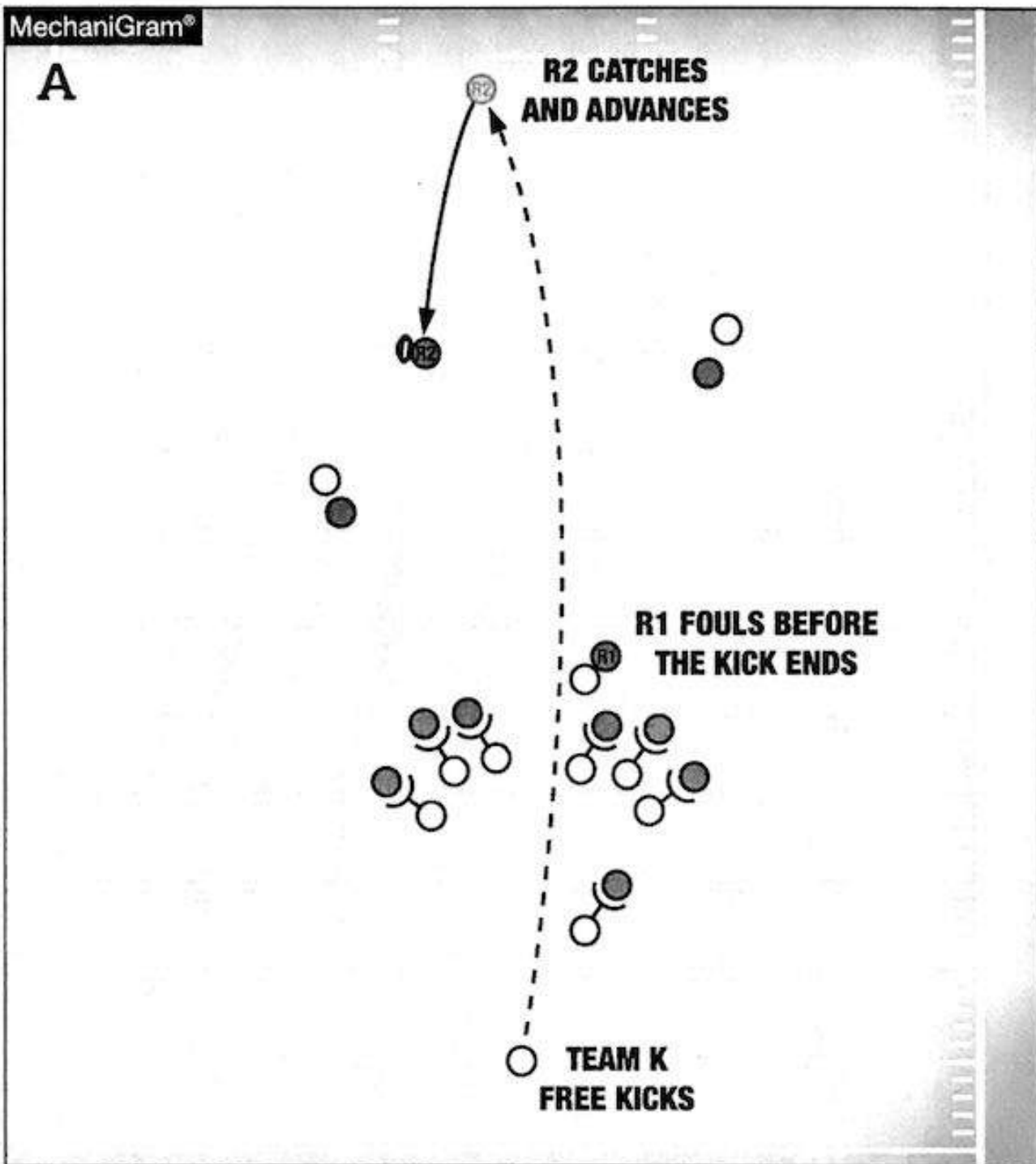
**Play 1:** Team K free kicks from its own 40 yardline. R1 catches the kick on his own five yardline and returns it to team R's 40 yardline. During the run, R2 clips at team R's 10 yardline. **Ruling 1:** Fouls that occur after the receivers recover or catch the free kick are fouls during a running play. Enforce team R's foul from the spot of the foul because it's behind the end of the run.

Fouls that occur before the ball is kicked (e.g. encroachment) are dead-ball fouls enforced from the previous spot.

Consider actual possession of the kicked ball when deciding whether a foul happened before or after the change of possession.

**Play 2:** As seen in MechaniGram A (p. 46), team K free kicks from its own 40 yardline. R1 holds while the ball is in flight. R2 catches the ball on team R's five yardline and returns it to team R's 20 yardline. **Ruling 2:** If the penalty is accepted, team K will rekick from the 50 yardline after the 10-yard penalty is enforced from the previous spot. If team K declines, it's team R's ball, first and 10 at team R's 20 yardline.

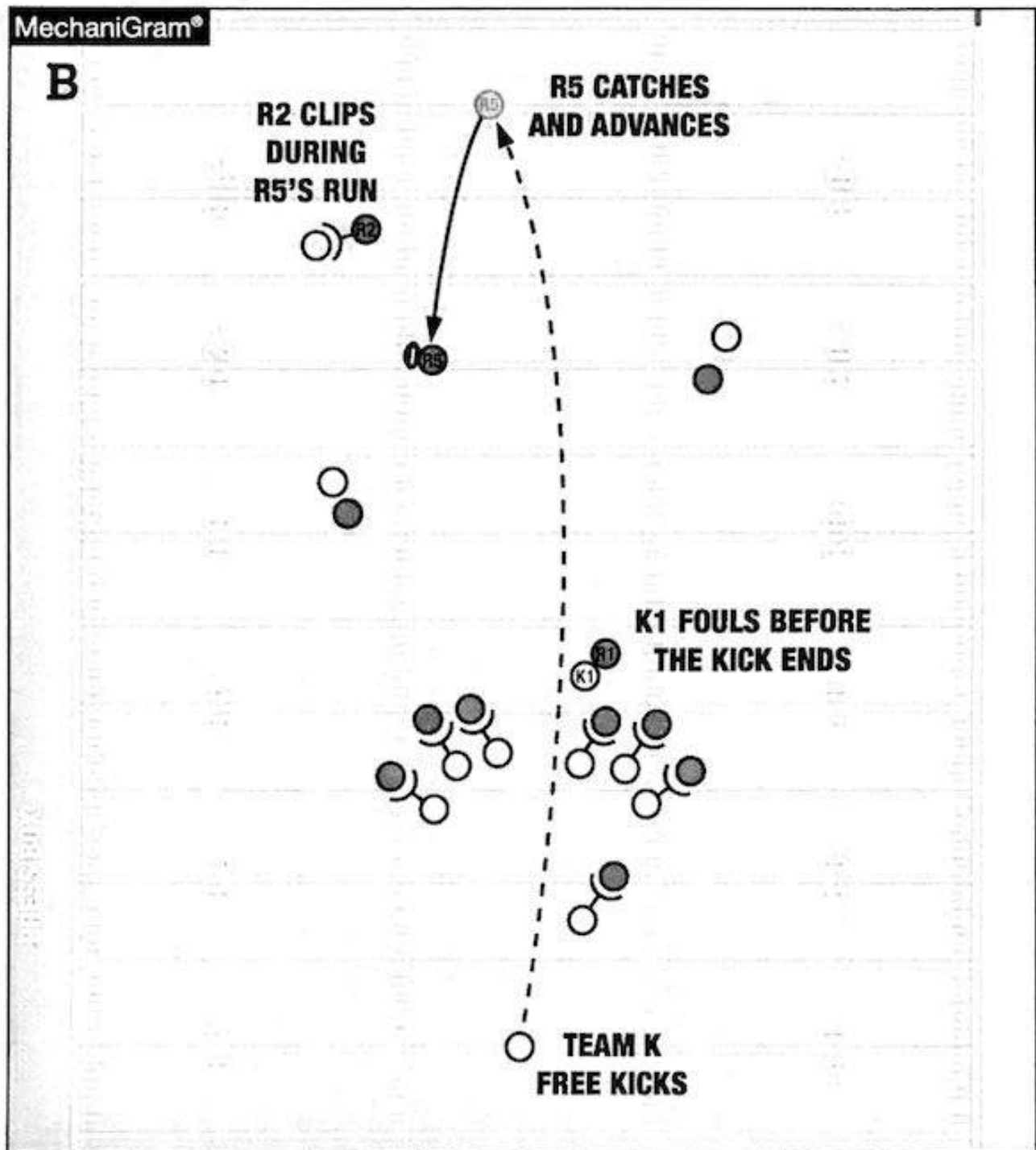
In 2018 NFHS added an enforcement option for team K fouls other than kick-catching interference (KCI). Team R may choose to penalize team K from the succeeding spot if team K will not be next to put the ball in play or if the next play is not a team R try. If so, team R may have the penalty enforced on the try but not the succeeding kickoff or succeeding spot in overtime. If the kick ends in a touchback, the "end of the run" is considered to be the 20 yardline and the penalty may be enforced from that spot. The reason for the exception regarding KCI is that the penalty may be enforced from the spot of the foul as opposed to the succeeding spot.



Team R fouled while the free kick was in flight. Team K will likely choose enforcement from the previous spot.

**Play 3:** Team K free kicks from its own 40 yardline. K1 is flagged for (a) holding R2 at the 50 yardline while the kick is in flight, or (b) interfering with R3's attempt to catch the kick. R3 returns the ball to team R's 15 yardline. **Ruling 3:** In (a), team R may choose to have the 10-yard penalty enforced from the end of R3's run, or choose enforcement from the previous spot and a replay of the down. In (b), team R may choose to have an awarded fair catch after a 15-yard penalty is enforced from the spot of K1's interference, a 15-yard penalty enforced from the previous spot or the result of the play.

## PENALTY ENFORCEMENT ON KICK PLAYS



Team R fouled with "clean hands." Team R can decline the penalty for team K's foul and keep the ball after enforcement of the penalty for its foul.

### Both Teams Foul

If both teams commit live-ball fouls during a kick, the penalties cancel and the kick down is replayed.

**Play 4:** Team K free kicks from its own 40 yardline. While the ball is in flight, K1 grabs R2's facemask and R3 clips K4. R5 catches the kick on his own five yardline and returns it to team R's 40 yardline. **Ruling 4:** Both fouls occurred before the change of possession, so there is no option. The penalties cancel. Team K will rekick from its own 40 yardline.



However, if team K's foul occurs during the kick and team R's foul is during the run, it is not automatically offsetting fouls.

**Play 5:** As seen in MechaniGram B, team K free kicks from its own 40 yardline. While the ball is in flight, K1 grabs R1's facemask. R5 catches the kick on his own five yardline and returns it to team R's 20 yardline. During the run, R2 clips at team R's 14 yardline. **Ruling 5:** Team R gained possession with "clean hands." Team R can decline team K's foul, in which case team K would accept the penalty for team R's foul, which is enforced from the spot of the foul. Due to half-the-distance enforcement, that would result in first and 10 for team A from its own seven yardline. If team R accepts the penalty for team K's foul, the down is replayed.

## **Free Kick Out of Bounds**

The rule regarding a free kick out of bounds is one of the oldest in the book. It went unchanged for more than 40 years. Originally, if team K kicked the ball out bounds, team R was awarded the ball 10 yards behind its free-kick line (usually its own 40 yardline). In 1985, the rule was changed to give team R the option of accepting a five-yard penalty from the previous spot and a rekick, or taking the ball where it went out of bounds. In most cases, because kickoffs were carrying well beyond team K's free-kick line, team R's only realistic option was to choose a rekick. In 1992, the notion of giving team R the ball a designated distance from the previous spot was reintroduced. This time, the distance was placed at 25 yards from the previous spot.

Before 2000, team K committed a foul if it was the last to touch a kick that went out of bounds. It didn't matter if team R touched the kick before the touching by team K. With the amended rule, officials no longer had to judge which team was last to touch the kick before it went out of bounds. As long as team R touched the ball between the time of the kick and the time it went out of bounds, team K could not be guilty of a kick out of bounds.

With the aforementioned 2018 rule change, if a free kick goes out of bounds in the field of play (between the goallines) without being touched inbounds by team R, team R may choose to put the ball in play 25 yards beyond the previous spot, choose a rekick after enforcement of a five-yard penalty from the previous spot or take the ball after a five-yard penalty is enforced from the spot the ball went out of bounds.

If the free kick goes out of bounds between the goallines after it has been touched inbounds by team R, team R gets the ball at the inbounds spot.

## PENALTY ENFORCEMENT ON KICK PLAYS

When a free kick goes out of bounds and team R chooses to take the ball at the inbounds or spot or 25 yards beyond the previous spot, the ball is put in play at the nearest hashmark. Team R does not have the option of having the ball placed anywhere between the hashmarks. Automatically placing the ball in the middle of the field is incorrect procedure on the part of the officials.

**Play 6:** R1 muffs a kickoff on his 15 yardline. The ball deflects off an official or another player who is straddling the sideline at team R's 10 yardline. The ball rolls out of bounds. **Ruling 6:** It will be team R's ball at the spot it went out of bounds, team R's 10 yardline. A person straddling the sideline is considered to be out of bounds. The ball is dead when it touches a player or official who is out of bounds.

**Play 7:** K1's free kick is bouncing when it is controlled by airborne K2, who comes to the ground out of bounds at team R's 30 yardline. **Ruling 7:** K2 caused the ball to become dead when he landed out of bounds. Because team R did not touch the ball while it was loose, that is a foul for a kick out of bounds. Because the kick was out of bounds, K1 cannot be called for kick-catching interference.

**Play 8:** A free kick is in flight over out of bounds territory when it is touched by R1. When R1 touches the ball, (a) both of his feet are inbounds, or (b) he is straddling the sideline, when he reaches through the plane of the sideline. R1 cannot gain possession and the ball strikes the ground out of bounds at team R's 18 yardline. **Ruling 8:** In (a), the ball wasn't considered out of bounds until it struck the ground. R1 is deemed to have caused it to go out of bounds. It will be team R's ball at its own 18 yardline. In (b), R1 was out of bounds when he touched the ball. In that case, team K is considered to have caused the ball to go out of bounds. Team R will likely opt for a new series 25 yards from the previous spot, but may choose a rekick after enforcement of a five-yard penalty from the previous spot or a new series after enforcement of a five-yard penalty from the out-of-bounds spot.

There is a situation in which the option for team R to take the ball 25 yards from the previous spot is not available. If team K kicks off from on or inside team R's 25 yardline and the free kick is out of bounds, team R may only choose the remaining options.

**Play 9:** A series of penalties against team R has resulted in team K kicking off from team R's 20 yardline. K1's free kick is untouched when it goes out bounds at team R's eight yardline. **Ruling 9:** Team R may take the ball at its own eight yardline or choose enforcement of a five-yard penalty and a re-kick from team R's 25 yardline.

## Fouls on Scrimmage Kicks

The same enforcement option for team K fouls during a free kick (except for kick-catching interference) applies for scrimmage kicks.

Most fouls by team R during the kick play qualify for post-scrimmage kick (PSK) enforcement. PSK applies if team R fouls on team R's side of the expanded neutral zone prior to the end of a scrimmage kick (other than a try or successful field goal) that crosses the neutral zone, if team K does not have possession of the ball when the down ends.

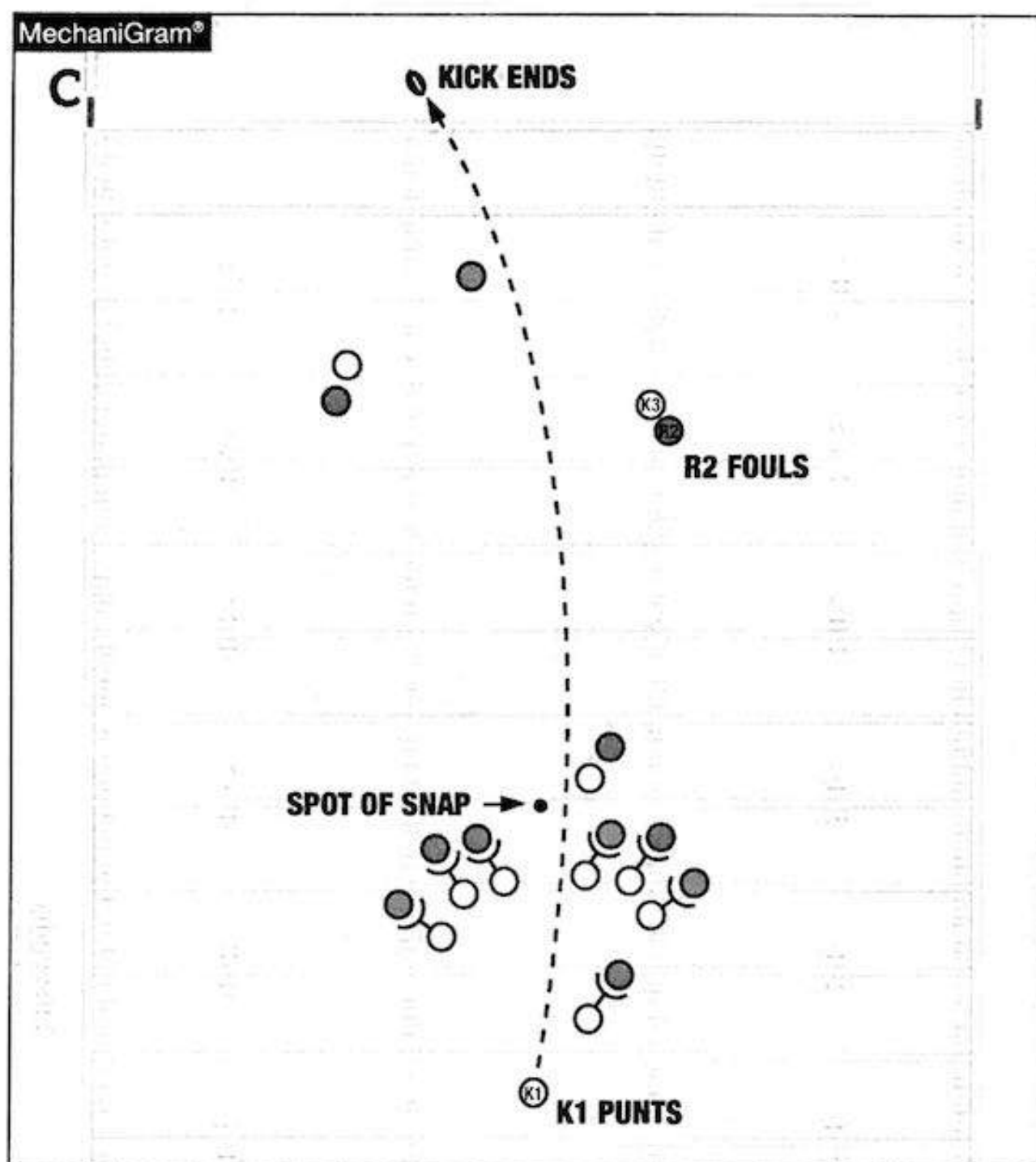
**Play 10:** Team K punts on fourth and three from its own 20 yardline. Team K is flagged for (a) an illegal formation, or (b) holding while the kick is in flight. The play ends with R1 making a fair catch at team K's 45 yardline. **Ruling 10:** In (a) and (b), team R could choose to have the penalties enforced from the previous spot and a replay of the down, or have the penalties enforced from the end of the kick.

**Play 11:** R1 returns K2's scrimmage kick for a touchdown and (a) during the kick, K commits a holding foul, or (b) during the runback, K commits a foul for blocking below the waist. **Ruling 11:** In (a), the succeeding spot from this play is the goalline. Since the foul occurred before the change of possession, there is no option to enforce the distance penalty from the succeeding kickoff. In (b), because the foul occurred on a play in which a touchdown was scored after the change in possession, team R can count the touchdown and have the foul enforced on the try or on the succeeding kickoff.

**Play 12:** Fourth and three on the 50 yardline. R1 gives an invalid fair catch signal at his 20 yardline while the punt is in flight. R1 then catches the kick at his 15 yardline. **Ruling 12:** Team K would likely accept the five-yard penalty, which is assessed from the PSK spot (team R's 15 yardline) and results in team R's ball, first and 10 on team R's 10 yardline.

**Play 13:** It is fourth and 10 for team K from its own 20 yardline. While K1's punt is in flight, R2 blocks K3 below the waist at the 50 yardline. R4

## PENALTY ENFORCEMENT ON KICK PLAYS



When PSK applies and the result of the play is a touchback, team R's 20 yardline is the spot of enforcement.

muffs the ball at team R's 45 yardline, where prone K5 recovers. **Ruling 13:** R2's block is illegal and occurred before the kick ended. However, PSK does not apply because team K was in possession at the end of the down. Team K will decline the penalty and start a new series, first and 10 at team R's 45 yardline.

If PSK does not apply, team R fouls are enforced from the previous spot.

**Play 14:** Fourth and 10 for team K from its own 20 yardline. While K1's punt is in flight, R2 blocks K3 below the waist at team K's 18 yardline.

R4 makes a fair catch at the 50 yardline. **Ruling 14:** R2's block is illegal. Because the spot of the foul is behind the expanded neutral zone, PSK does not apply. The penalty is marked off 15 yards from the previous spot. That gives team K a new series at its own 35 yardline.

If PSK applies and the kick results in a touchback, team R's 20 yardline is the basic spot.

**Play 15:** As seen in MechaniGram C, it's fourth and 10 for team K from team R's 40 yardline. While K1's punt is in flight, R2 blocks K3 below the waist at team R's 18 yardline. The untouched kick lands in team R's end zone. **Ruling 15:** PSK applies. Because the kick resulted in a touchback, team R's 20 yardline is the basic spot. Because the spot of the foul is behind the basic spot, that is the spot of enforcement. It will be team R's ball, first and 10 from its own nine yardline.

On successful field goals, team K may have the penalty for team R fouls enforced from the previous spot or the succeeding spot. Team R fouls during an unsuccessful field goal are enforced under PSK or from the previous spot, depending on which applies.

**Play 16:** Fourth and 10 for team K from team R's 25 yardline. K1's attempted field goal is short, but R2 is flagged for grasping but not twisting K3's facemask at team R's 10 yardline. The untouched kick (a) lands in team R's end zone, or (b) comes to rest on team R's four yardline. **Ruling 16:** PSK applies in both cases. In (a), the result of the play is a touchback and the basic spot is team R's 20 yardline. The five-yard penalty is enforced from the spot of the foul because that is behind the PSK spot. That will leave team R with first and 10 from its own five yardline. In (b), the basic spot is the end of the kick, team R's four yardline. Because the foul occurred beyond the basic spot, the penalty is enforced from the basic spot, yielding first and 10 for team R from its own two yardline.

On a kick try, penalties for team R fouls are enforced from the basic spot.

**Play 17:** Due to a penalty, team K is attempting a try from team R's 18 yardline. K1's attempted kick try is short, but R2 is flagged for grasping but not twisting K3's facemask at team R's 10 yardline. The untouched kick (a) lands in team R's end zone, or (b) comes to rest on team R's four yardline.

## PENALTY ENFORCEMENT ON KICK PLAYS

**Ruling 17:** PSK does not apply on a try. If team K accepts the penalty in (a) or (b), enforcement is from the previous spot. Team K will next snap the ball from team R's 13 yardline.

Live-ball fouls that occur after the kick ends are simply fouls during a running play.

**Play 18:** Fourth and 10 for team K from its own 20 yardline. K1's punt is caught by R2 at team K's 45 yardline and he advances to team K's 35 yardline. During R2's run, a foul occurs at team K's 30 yardline. The foul is (a) clipping by R3, or (b) grasping and twisting the facemask by K4. **Ruling 18:** The fouls occurred during a running play. In (a), the penalty is enforced from the end of the run. It will be team R's ball, first and 10 at the 50 yardline. In (b), the penalty is added to the end of the run. It will be team R's ball, first and 10 at team K's 20 yardline.

### Kick-Catching Interference

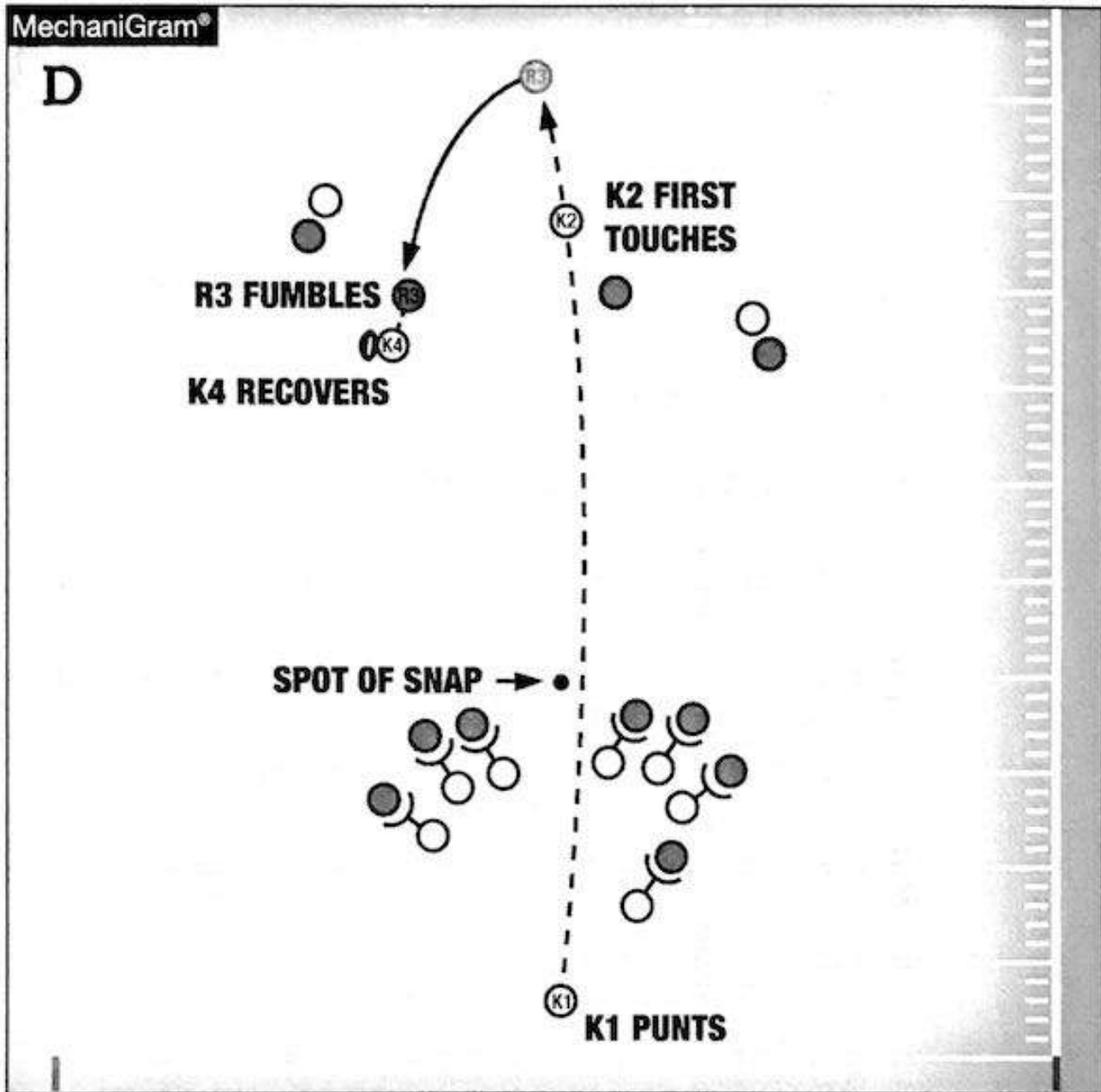
If team K commits kick-catching interference, team R has three options: an awarded fair catch at the spot of the interference, enforcement from the previous spot, or an awarded fair catch along with a 15-yard penalty. See Chapter 4, Kick-Catching Interference, for more details.

### First Touching

First touching can add a confusing twist to penalty enforcement on scrimmage kicks. However, it is not difficult once you understand the fundamentals of first touching.

First touching is not a foul but has many of the same characteristics as a foul. It occurs when a team K player touches a scrimmage kick that has crossed the neutral zone before the ball is touched by a team R player. First touching gives team R the privilege of taking the ball at that spot of the touching. There cannot be first touching by team K in team R's end zone because the ball is dead once it breaks the plane of team R's goalline.

**Play 19:** As seen in MechaniGram D, it is fourth and 10 for team K from its own 20 yardline. K1's punt is first touched by K2 at team K's 45 yardline. R3 recovers the loose ball, advances to team K's 40 yardline and fumbles. Prone K4 recovers at team K's 37 yardline. **Ruling 19:** Team R will choose the spot of first touching rather than the result of the play. Team R will begin a new series at team K's 45 yardline.

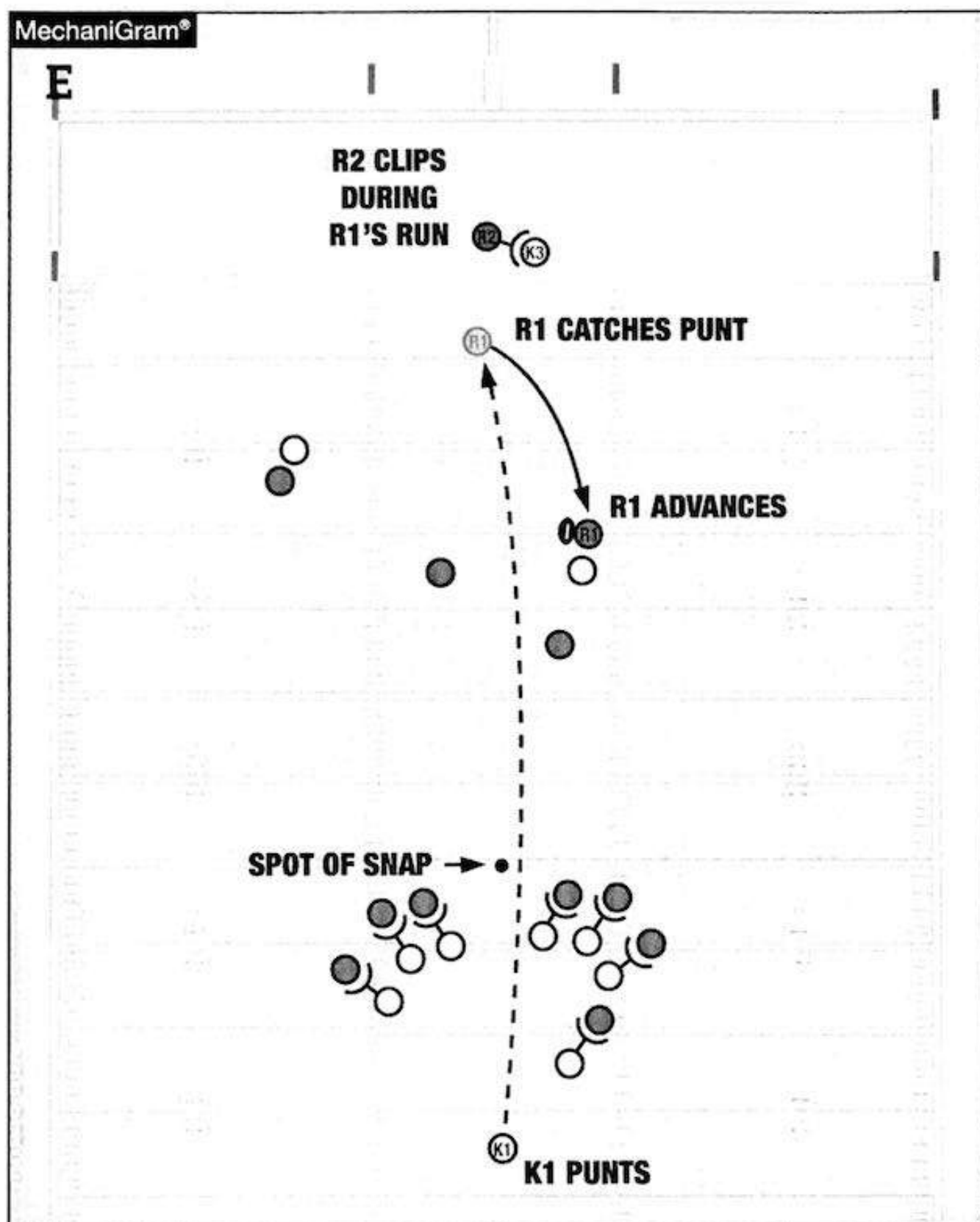


In order to keep the ball, team R must take the ball at the spot of first touching.

If team R touches the kick and thereafter during the down commits a foul, or if a penalty incurred by either team during the down is accepted, first touching privileges are cancelled.

**Play 20:** Fourth and 10 for team K from its own 20 yardline. K1's punt is first touched by K2 at team K's 45 yardline. R3 recovers the loose ball, advances to team K's 40 yardline and fumbles. K4 recovers and advances to the 50 yardline. During K4's run, K5 is flagged for holding at team K's 30 yardline. **Ruling 20:** If team R declines the penalty, it will take the ball at the spot of first touching (team K's 45 yardline). Accepting the penalty negates team R's ability to take the ball at the spot of first touching. However, it will force team K to start its new series at its own 20 yardline.

## PENALTY ENFORCEMENT ON KICK PLAYS



The first touching option is negated if team R fouls after touching the kick. Because the foul occurred in team R's end zone, the result is a safety.

If each team fouls during a down in which there is a change of possession and all team R fouls have PSK enforcement, team R may retain the ball. In order for that to happen, team R must decline the penalty for team K fouls (other than nonplayer or unsportsmanlike).



**Play 21:** K1's untouched punt rolls into team R's end zone. While the ball is in flight, R2 clips K3. The foul occurs (a) in team R's end zone, (b) at team R's six yardline, or (c) team R's 24 yardline. **Ruling 21:** In all three cases, the play results in a touchback and the basic spot is team R's 20 yardline. In (a), team K scores a safety because the spot of the foul is behind the basic spot and the foul occurs in team R's end zone. In (b), the foul occurs behind the basic spot. The penalty is enforced from the spot of the foul. The result is first and 10 from team R's three yardline. In (c), the foul occurred beyond the basic spot. The penalty is enforced from the basic spot, yielding first and 10 for team R from its 10 yardline.

**Play 22:** As seen in MechaniGram E, R1 catches a punt at his own four yardline. He advances to his own 10 yardline, where he is downed. During the run, R2 clips K3 in team R's end zone. **Ruling 22:** Safety. Team R's foul is behind the end of the run and is in team R's end zone.

### Carryover Penalties

Some penalties for fouls that occur during scoring plays can be carried over to the succeeding kickoff.

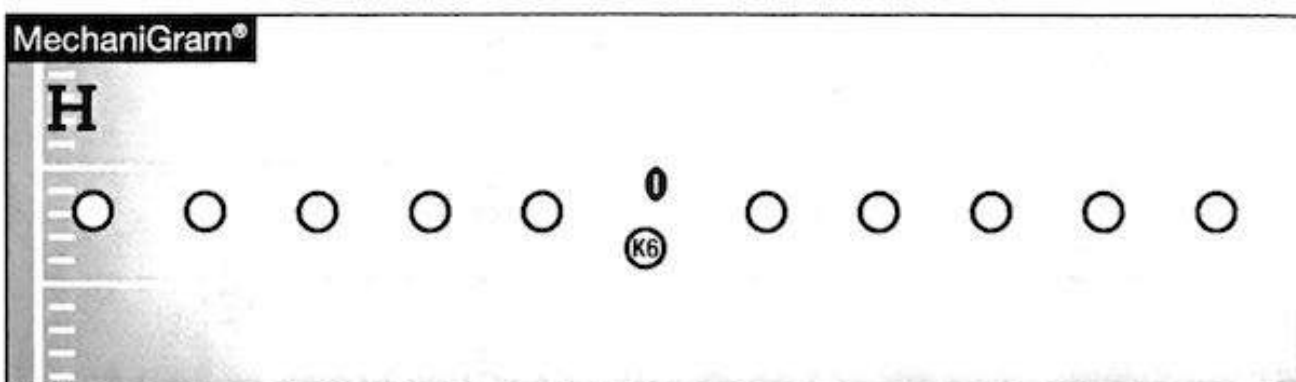
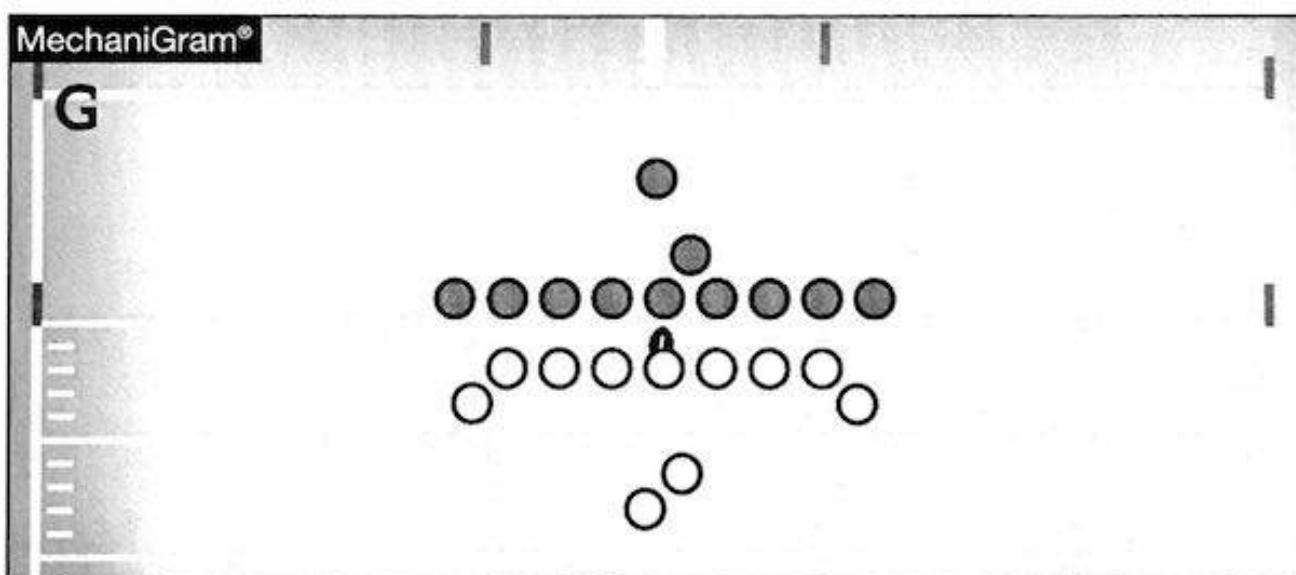
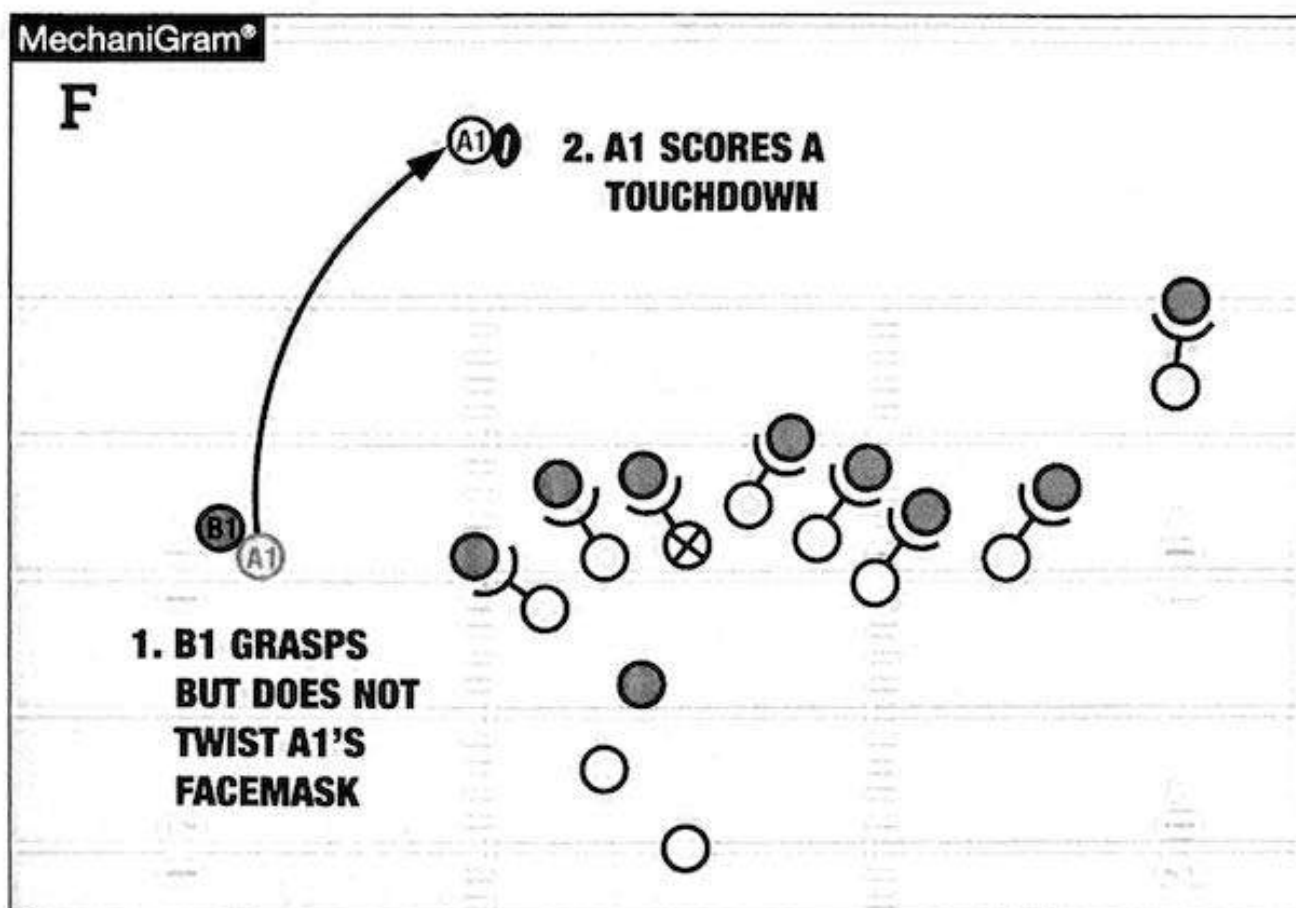
The team scoring a touchdown may choose to have the penalty enforced on the ensuing free kick or on the try. Penalties for live-ball fouls committed by the non-scoring team on a successful field goal or try may carry over to the succeeding kickoff.

The option applies if team B commits a live-ball foul on a play on which team A scores a touchdown, or if team A commits a live-ball foul after a change of possession and team B scores. However, if the foul is by team A before the change of possession and team B gains possession and then scores, team B must decline team A's foul to keep the score.

Dead-ball fouls committed after the touchdown is scored but before the next ready signal, and unsportsmanlike conduct fouls occurring during or after the down, can be enforced on the try or can carry over to the kickoff. However, they may not carry over to overtime.

**Play 23:** A1's pass is intercepted by B1 and returned for a touchdown. A2 grasps but does not twist B1's facemask (a) before, or (b) after B1 intercepts. **Ruling 23:** In (a), the foul occurred before the change of possession. Team B must decline the penalty to keep the touchdown. In (b), because the foul occurred after the change, team B may choose enforcement on the try or on the ensuing kickoff.

## PENALTY ENFORCEMENT ON KICK PLAYS



The penalty for a foul by the opponent of the scoring team may be enforced on the try or on the subsequent kickoff.

**Play 24:** A1's pass from scrimmage results in a touchdown. During A1's run, B1 is flagged for rouging the passer. Team A's captain chooses to have the penalty enforced on the subsequent kickoff. During the successful try, B2 is flagged for roughing the kicker. **Ruling 24:** Team A may choose to have the roughing penalty enforced from the previous spot and replay the try, or have the penalty enforced on the subsequent kickoff. If team A chooses the latter, it will kick off from team B's 30 yardline after both penalties are enforced.

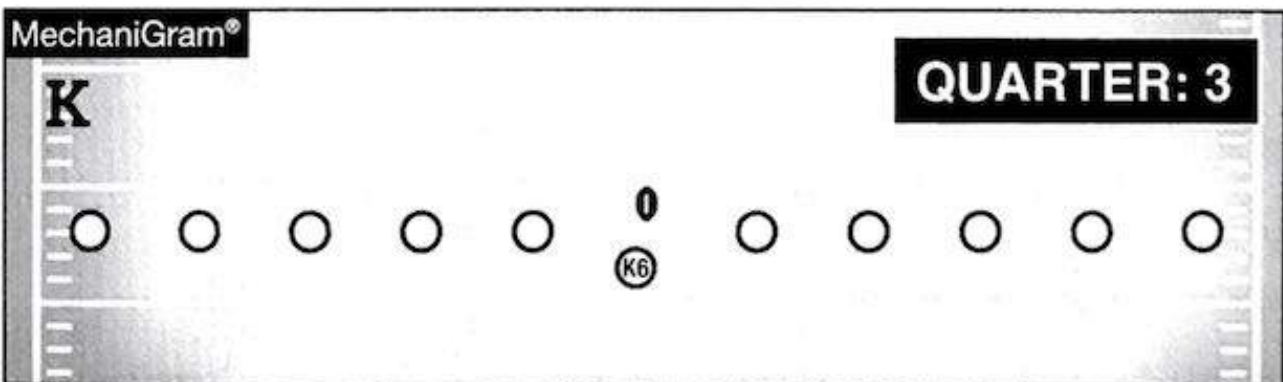
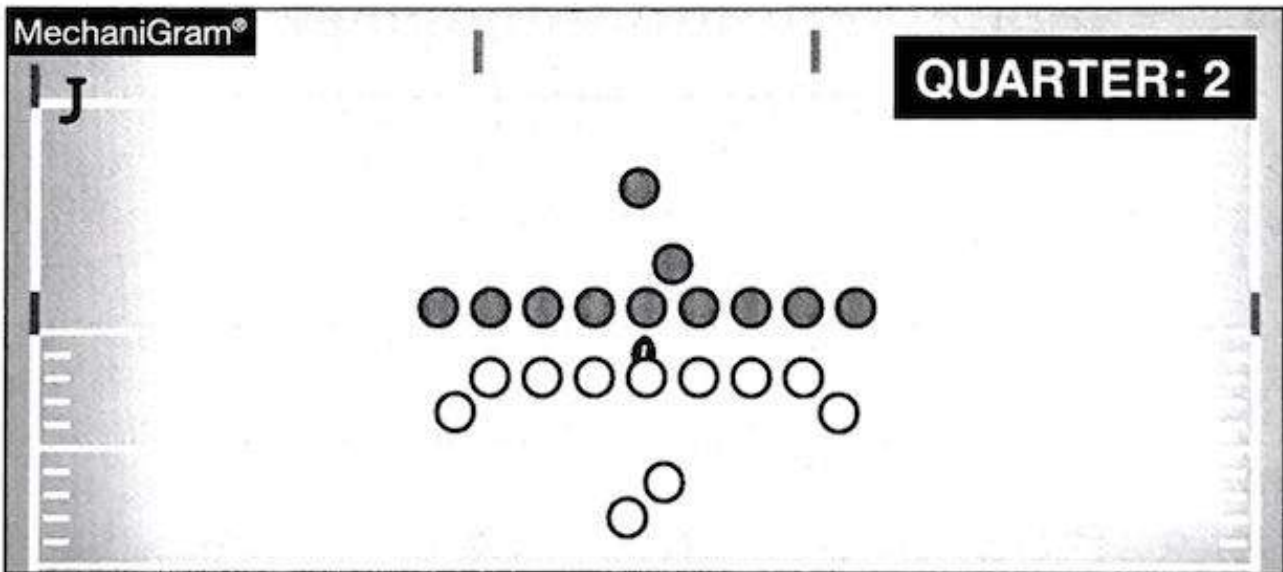
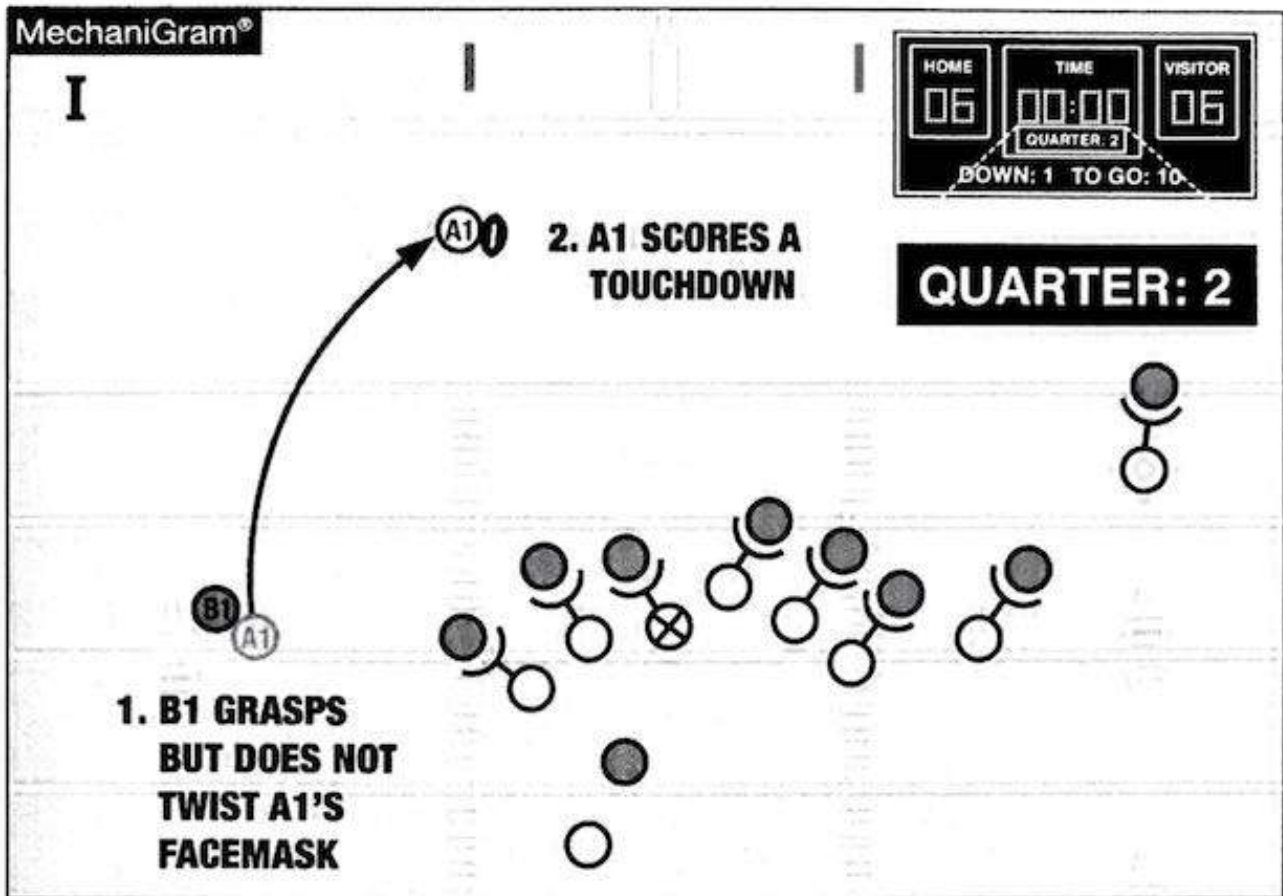
**Play 25:** As seen in MechaniGram F, A1's run from scrimmage results in a touchdown. During A1's run, B1 is flagged for grasping but not twisting A1's facemask. **Ruling 25:** The touchdown counts. Team A may choose to have the penalty enforced on the try (MechaniGram G), or choose to have the penalty carry over to the kickoff (MechaniGram H).

**Play 26:** A1's run from scrimmage results in a touchdown. During A1's run, B1 grasps but does not twist A1's facemask. Team A chooses to have the five-yard penalty enforced on the succeeding kickoff. On the successful try, A2 is flagged for (a) a live-ball, or (b) a dead-ball personal foul. **Ruling 26:** In (a), if team B wants to accept the penalty committed by A2, it must be enforced on the try. The down would be replayed with the ball being snapped from team B's 18 yardline. The penalty for B1's foul will still be enforced on the ensuing kickoff; team A is not allowed to reconsider its option. In (b), a live-ball foul on one team and a dead-ball foul on the other cannot result in a double foul. The penalties are enforced on the kickoff in the order of occurrence. The penalty for B1's foul moves the ball to team A's 45 yardline. The penalty for A2's foul moves the ball back to team A's 30 yardline, and team A will kick off from that spot.

Assuming no change of possession, the only team A fouls that may carry over to the kickoff or succeeding spot in overtime are dead-ball fouls or live-ball fouls treated as dead-ball fouls.

**Play 27:** A1 taunts B2 on a play that results in a (a) touchdown, or (b) two-point try. **Ruling 27:** In (a), team B has the option of having the penalty enforced on the try or the subsequent kickoff. In (b), the penalty carry overs to the kickoff.

# PENALTY ENFORCEMENT ON KICK PLAYS



When the opponent of the scoring team fouls on a play that results in a touchdown on the last timed down of a period, the penalty be enforced on the try with the period extended, or on the kickoff which begins the next period.

## **Last Timed Down of the First, Second or Third Quarter**

If a carry over foul on a score occurs on the last timed down of the first, second or third quarter and the team elects to have the penalty enforced on the kickoff, the period is extended for the try only, not the kickoff. The kickoff is the first play of the next quarter.

**Play 28:** Team A scores a touchdown during the last timed down of the second quarter. Team A's attempted two-point try is successful and B1 is flagged for roughing the passer. **Ruling 28:** If team A accepts the penalty, it will be enforced from the succeeding spot, which will be the kickoff to begin the third quarter. Note that if the touchdown were scored on the last timed down of the first or third quarters, the kickoff would occur after the teams change ends for the second or fourth quarter.

**Play 29:** As seen in MechaniGram I, team A scores a touchdown during the last timed down of the second quarter. During the play, B1 is flagged for grasping but not twisting A1's facemask. **Ruling 29:** Team A may choose to have the penalty enforced on the try as an untimed down and an extension of the second quarter (MechaniGram J), or from the succeeding spot, which will be the kickoff to begin the third quarter (MechaniGram K). Note that if the touchdown were scored on the last timed down of the first or third quarters, the kickoff would occur after the teams change ends for the second or fourth quarter.

If the opponent of the scoring team fouls during the touchdown-scoring play and the scoring team chooses enforcement on the next kickoff, and the same team commits a live-ball foul on the try, the scoring team may choose to have both penalties enforced on the next kickoff.

**Play 30:** In the middle of the third quarter, A1's run from scrimmage results in a touchdown. During A1's run, B1 is flagged for grasping but not twisting A1's facemask. Team A's captain chooses to have the penalty enforced on the subsequent kickoff. During the successful try, B2 is flagged for roughing the kicker. **Ruling 30:** Team A may choose to have the roughing penalty enforced from the previous spot and replay the try, or have the penalty enforced on the subsequent kickoff. If team A chooses the latter, it will kick off from team B's 40 yardline.

If, on the last timed down of a period, enforcement of an accepted penalty results in a safety, the period is not extended for the ensuing kickoff. The teams change goals and the free kick is the first play of the next quarter.

## PENALTY ENFORCEMENT ON KICK PLAYS

**Play 31:** First and 10 for team A from its own three yardline. Quarterback A1 drops back into his own end zone, which is on the north end of the field. A flag is thrown for (a) A2's holding foul in the end zone on A1's incomplete pass, (b) A1's illegal forward pass from the end zone, or (c) B3's roughing the passer on A1's incomplete pass. Time for the first or third quarter expires during the down. **Ruling 31:** In (a) and (b), if team B accepts the penalty, the result is a safety. Team B scores two points and the second or fourth period begins with team A's free kick from the 20 yardline at the south end of the field. In (c), if team A accepts the penalty, it is enforced 15 yards from the previous spot and includes an automatic first down. The period is extended for an untimed down.

### Last Timed Down of Fourth Quarter

It is possible for the scoring team to carry over to the overtime a penalty for a live-ball foul by the opponent that occurs during a field goal or try on the last timed down of the fourth quarter.

**Play 32:** On the last timed down of the fourth period, team K kicks a field goal that ties the game. Team R is flagged for a live-ball foul. **Ruling 32:** Team K may choose a replay of the down or may choose to have the penalty enforced from the succeeding spot (the first play of overtime).

If a touchdown is scored on the last timed down of the fourth quarter and the opponent of the scoring team commits a live-ball foul, the penalty cannot carry over.

**Play 33:** As seen in MechaniGram L, on the last timed down of the fourth quarter, A1 scores a touchdown to reduce its deficit to one point. During A1's run, B2 is flagged for grasping but not twisting A1's facemask. **Ruling 33:** The penalty must be enforced on the try as there will be no subsequent kickoff (MechaniGram M).

Add a foul on the subsequent try and you have another permutation.

**Play 34:** On the last timed down of the fourth quarter, A1 scores a touchdown to reduce its deficit to one point. During A1's run, B2 is flagged for grasping but not pulling A1's facemask. During the successful kick try, B3 roughs the kicker. **Ruling 34:** Team A may only have the penalty for the opponent's foul on the touchdown-scoring play enforced on the try; it cannot carry over to the overtime. However, team A could choose to have the penalty for B3's roughing on the try enforced from the previous spot