

B. Play Clock Operations

The NJFOA and NJSIAA have determined that if a school wishes to use visible play clocks at their facility, the clock will need to be operated either (a) by an official on the field via wireless remote control, or (b) by a NJFOA chapter certified clock operator familiar with play clock rules and official techniques related to play clock administration.

It is anticipated that this section of the manual will undergo revisions as the play clock operations, equipment, and possibly play clock rules evolve.

Instructions for 25/40 second Visible Scoreboard Play Clock Operators

1. Reset the play clock to 40 seconds at the end of each play and start it immediately after a one-second pause:

- A. The ball is declared dead in the field of play;
- B. Incomplete Pass;
- C. The ball is declared dead out of bounds.

The covering official's signals (S7-Dead Ball, S2 – Wind Clock, S3 – Time Out, or S10 – Incomplete Pass) will designate when to start the play clock.

2. Manually set the play clock to 25 seconds, and be prepared to start it on the referee's signal (or snap) when these occur:

- A. Penalty administration.
- B. Charged team time-out
- C. Media time-out
- D. Injury time-out or Helmet comes off player
- E. Measurement
- F. Team B awarded 1st down
- G. Start of a period
- H. Start of possession series in OT
- I. After any kick down where a legal kick occurs
- J. After any score
- K. Other administrative stoppage

3. Special Situations

- A. On a delay of game penalty, do not reset the play clock (:00) until the penalty is completed.
- B. If the play clock hits :00 and there is no delay of game, reset to 40 seconds immediately after the snap, then wait for the appropriate signal to start the play clock.
- C. If the play clocks are not synchronized (show different times), or if one fails, the clocks must be turned off and the field judge will keep the play clock on the field.

- D. The referee is the only official that may reset the play clock by using the arm pump signal. It is common for an official to use this signal to “ask” the referee if he wants to consider resetting the play clock. One arm pump is to reset to 25 seconds. The two-arm pump signal is used to reset the play clock to 40 seconds.
- E. Look for the arm pump signal from the referee if you notice any type of administrative delay while the play clock is running, especially if the ball is spotted after the play clock gets under 25 seconds.
- F. On **kick-offs and free kicks after safety**, the 25 second clock starts on the ready for play by the referee. If there is a delay, the same procedure will be followed. The officials may reset the play clock if the ball blows off the tee. Watch for the arm pump from the referee.
- G. If the **game clock is running and less than 25/40 seconds remain in any period**, do not start the play clock. If the game clock is not running and less than 40 seconds remain in any period, the play clock is used normally. Remember that use of the play clock could alternate multiple times in the last 40 seconds.
- H. If the game clock is started erroneously, it shall be stopped immediately. The play clock should then be stopped. The Field Judge may be asked to help restore time using the remaining time on the play clock. Do not reset the play clock until the signal is given by the referee.

APPENDIX IX – 40-second Play Clock Mechanics & Rules

The following guide is intended to help officials administer the new NFHS play clock rule.

1. The new play clock rule is intended 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.
2. Different game situations will call for either a 40-second or a 25-second play clock to be used.
3. Unless the game clock is stopped for administrative reasons (e.g., B awarded a new series, penalty, injury, clock error, time-out, etc.), the offensive team has 40 seconds after the previous play ends to snap the ball. After such administrative stoppages however, a 25-second play clock is used instead—just as we have used in the past.
4. When a 40-second play clock is used, the ball is ready for play when an official (usually the umpire) spots the ball and steps away to his position. **There is no need for the Referee to sound his whistle or signal the ball ready.** 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.

PLAY 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—but does not sound his whistle (“silent wind”). The referee does not wait for the chains to be set before starting the clock.

On a fourth-down play that results in Team B being awarded a new series/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 once the ball is set ready for play.

PLAY 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 referee signal to indicate the ball is ready for play.

PLAY 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 referee RFP 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 classic example of ‘an administrative stoppage.’

PLAY 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 because of the incomplete pass.

Other administrative issues that would call for a 25-second play clock 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.

Interruption of the play clock/game clock might, at crucial points near the end of a half or of the game might create situations where a strict following of the rules would lead to a distinct disadvantage to either team.

Consider these plays:

PLAY 5: With 0:18 seconds remaining in the game, Team A leading 14-10, the play clock is running and has 14 seconds remaining. A’s ball, 4-10 from his 5-yard line. A Team A player goes to the ground with an apparent severe cramp. Officials stop the clock for the injured player. **RULING:** By rule, once the player is replaced, the referee should reset the play clock to 0:25, and start the game and play clocks on his signal. However, this would effectively allow Team A to run out the clock, where absent the injury, they would have needed run their 4th down play. Referee informs both teams that the play clock will be set to 0:14 (freeze the time) and both the game and play clocks will start on his signal.

PLAY 6: Team A is leading in the last minute of the game and is attempting to run time off the clock. Team B has no time-outs remaining and is looking to conserve time. Following Team A’s short gain or kneel down on third down, a Team B player is on the ground, apparently injured. **RULING:** Allowing this as an ‘administrative’ stoppage would conserve 15 seconds for Team B. Referee double pumps a 40-second game clock to start on his ready-for-play signal.

Table 1 – Play Clock “Cheat Sheet”

| Event * | Play Clock Starts at | Game Clock Starts | Covering Official’s Signal | Referee’s Signal |
|--|----------------------|-------------------|----------------------------|------------------|
| Dead ball inbounds behind line to gain | 40 | Running | S7 | None |
| Runner or loose ball out of bounds | 40 | Snap | S3 | None |
| Incomplete pass | 40 | Snap | S10 | None |
| Team A awarded 1st down inbounds | 40 | Signal | S3 | Wind |
| Penalty administration | 25 | Ready | S3 | Wind & Whistle |
| Charged team timeout | 25 | Snap | S3 | Chop & Whistle |
| Injury/Helmet off | 25 | Ready | S3 | Wind & Whistle |

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|---|----|----------|----------|----------------|
| Measurement | 25 | Ready | S3 | Wind & Whistle |
| Double Change of possession- Team A snaps | 40 | Ready | S7 | Wind |
| Change of possession- Team B snaps | 25 | Snap | S3 | Chop & Whistle |
| Touchdown | 25 | N/A | S5 | Chop & Whistle |
| Try, FG, Safety | 25 | Varies** | Varies** | Chop & Whistle |
| Start of each period | 25 | Snap | N/A | Chop & Whistle |
| Down during which a legal kick occurs | 25 | Snap | S3 | Chop & Whistle |
| Start of an overtime period | 25 | N/A | N/A | Chop & Whistle |
| Other administrative stoppage *** | 25 | Ready | S3 | Wind & Whistle |

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

** The game clock will start on the free kick by rule.

*** Includes inadvertent whistle and period extension.

S3 is stop the clock, S7 is “dead ball - start play clock,” S10 is incomplete pass.

Notes:

1. If B intercepts then fumbles and A recovers (A-B-A), use a 40-sec play clock.
2. On a 4th down fake punt, if A is short of line-to-gain, it is a 25-sec play clock because B snaps next.
3. On a 4th down fake punt, if A is beyond line-to- gain, it is a 40-sec play clock; same as any other first down for A.

If there is an appreciable delay in spotting the ball and the play clock is down to 20 seconds, the play clock should be reset to 25 seconds. When there is no visible play clock the referee should approximate this interval and use his best judgment. When in doubt, reset the play clock. The referee will do this by stopping the game clock (if running) and signaling (one palm open in an over-the-head pumping motion) that the play clock should be re-set at 25 seconds. The game clock will start by rule either on the ready-for-play signal or the snap.

When the 40-second play clock is running, the ready-for-play occurs with the spotting of the ball. The impacted rules are: 2-25-1 (establishment of the line of scrimmage), 2-28-1 (establishment of the neutral zone), 2-26-5 (establishment of the line-to-gain), 2-8 and 7-1-5 (encroachment), 5-3-1 (designation of a new series), 7-1-3 (snapper restrictions), 7-1-7 (false start), and 7-2-1 (nine-yard mark compliance).

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 expire. **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 Field Judge in a 6-man crew and by the Back Judge in a 5-man crew. The 40-second play clock starts as soon as the play ends and the ball is dead.

Starting the play clock. The covering official's signal will designate when to start the play clock. When the ball is declared dead, the play clock starts when the following signals are given (only one signal is used):

- a. The dead ball signal (S7) to indicate the play has ended inbounds. The covering official will raise his arm straight up for two seconds.
- b. The start-the-clock signal (S2) to indicate the play has ended inbounds near the sideline.
- c. The stop-the-clock signal (S3) to indicate the play has ended out of bounds.
- d. The incomplete pass signal (S10).

Re-set. If the play clock is interrupted, it will always be reset to 25 seconds. The signal is one arm with open palm pumped into the air – "push the sky". If the ball is not spotted with

approximately 20 seconds remaining on a 40-second play clock (referee's judgment), the referee will re-set the play clock to 25 seconds and whistle in the ready-for-play.

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. The Field Judge will come on to the field with 10 seconds remaining and raise his arm overhead. At the five second mark, he will begin to "chop" (count down) the remaining five 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 (this 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, tells the offense "Ball's ready!" and backs off to his pre-snap position.

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.