

# Fair Catch



July ??, 2005

John Hoffmann  
referee@bellsouth.net  
(321) 676-2844

# Definitions

- A fair catch is a catch by a receiver, after a valid signal, under conditions in which the receiver forfeits his right to advance the ball in return for protection from being blocked or tackled by an opponent. [2-9-1]
  - **Free kick:** When it is in or beyond the neutral zone to the receiver's goal line.
  - **Scrimmage kick:** When it is beyond the neutral zone to the receiver's goal line.

# Definitions

- A valid fair-catch signal is the extending and lateral waving of one arm, at full arm's length above the head, by any member of the receiving team. [2-9-3]

# Definitions

- An invalid fair-catch signal is any signal by a receiver before the kick is caught or recovered:  
[2-9-4]
  - That does not meet the requirements of a valid signal
  - After the kick has touched a receiver
  - After the kick has touched the ground

# Definitions

- An illegal fair-catch signal is any signal by a runner: [2-9-5]
  - After the kick has been caught
  - After the kick has been recovered

# Definitions

- An awarded fair catch occurs when the offended team chooses to take the ball at the spot of the kick-catching interference rather than accepting the distance penalty (15 yards) {S33} from the previous spot and replaying the down. [2-9-2]



# What About These Signals?

- A signal by a receiver after a free kick has touched the ground?
- A signal by a receiver after a scrimmage kick was muffed by his teammate?
- A signal by a receiver in R' s end zone?
- A signal after a scrimmage kick by a receiver behind K' s line of scrimmage?
- Two signals by two different receivers?
- A signal by the teammate of the runner?

# Invalid Signal Examples

- Limp wave or chest high flick of the hand
- Quick wave-off motion
  - Similar to outfielder calling for a fly ball
- Partially extending the arm and waving one hand in front of the face or chest
- Fully extending and laterally waving both hands above the head
- When a receiver shades his eyes, he must do so with a bent arm and without waving so it cannot be mistaken as a signal



# Fair Catch

- Any receiver may signal for a fair catch while any legal kick is in flight. [6-5-1]
- A receiver shall not give an invalid fair-catch signal. [6-5-7]
  - 5 yard penalty, {S32}
- The runner shall not give an illegal fair-catch signal. [6-5-8]
  - 5 yard penalty, {S32}



# Protection

- Only the receiver who gives a valid signal is afforded protection. [6-5-3]
- Contacting the teammate of a player who has signaled is not a foul unless the contact is judged to be unnecessary roughness [9-4-2-g] or some other type of personal foul. [9-4-2]
  - The same also applies to a receiver who has given an invalid signal
- Protection ends when the kick is touched by a receiver beyond the line or it strikes the ground.

# Blocking

- Any receiver who has given a valid or invalid fair-catch signal is prohibited from blocking until the kick has ended. [6-5-1]
- A receiver who has given a valid or invalid fair-catch signal shall not block an opponent until the kick has ended. [9-3-3]
  - Penalty 15 yards, blocking after signal, {S40}



# Scenarios

- Can a receiver fair catch an illegal kick?
- Is the ball dead when an illegal fair-catch signal is given by the runner?
- Can you give a valid signal before the kick and still get protection?
- Is there a foul for an invalid signal given after an illegal kick is in the air?
- How can the kick end and the down not end?

# Location

- The ball must be beyond the neutral zone when the catch is made. It is insufficient for it to have been beyond the neutral zone.
- Valid signal given, but no fair catch
  - A scrimmage kick is caught behind the line
  - Ball is caught by a player who did not signal

# Dead Ball

- No receiver may advance the ball after a valid or invalid fair-catch signal has been given by any member of the receiving team. [6-5-5]
- If after a receiver signals, the catch is made by a teammate, it is not a fair catch, but the ball becomes dead. [6-5-3]
- Ball becomes dead as soon as any receiver gains possession after a valid or invalid signal
  - It is critical to whistle this dead as soon as the receiver has control of the ball, not before.

# Dead Ball

- Any advance after ball becomes dead is a delay of game foul
  - No guidelines on the number of allowable steps
  - Be tolerant of a receiver who could not have seen his teammate's signal
- It is a dead ball between series
  - It will be 1st and 10



# Enforcement – Invalid Signal

- During Free Kick
  - Foul during a loose ball play [10-3-1a]
  - If accepted, 5 yards from previous spot
    - Results in a re-kick
- During Scrimmage Kick
  - Probably a post-scrimmage kick foul
  - Spot of invalid signal (spot of foul) is very important



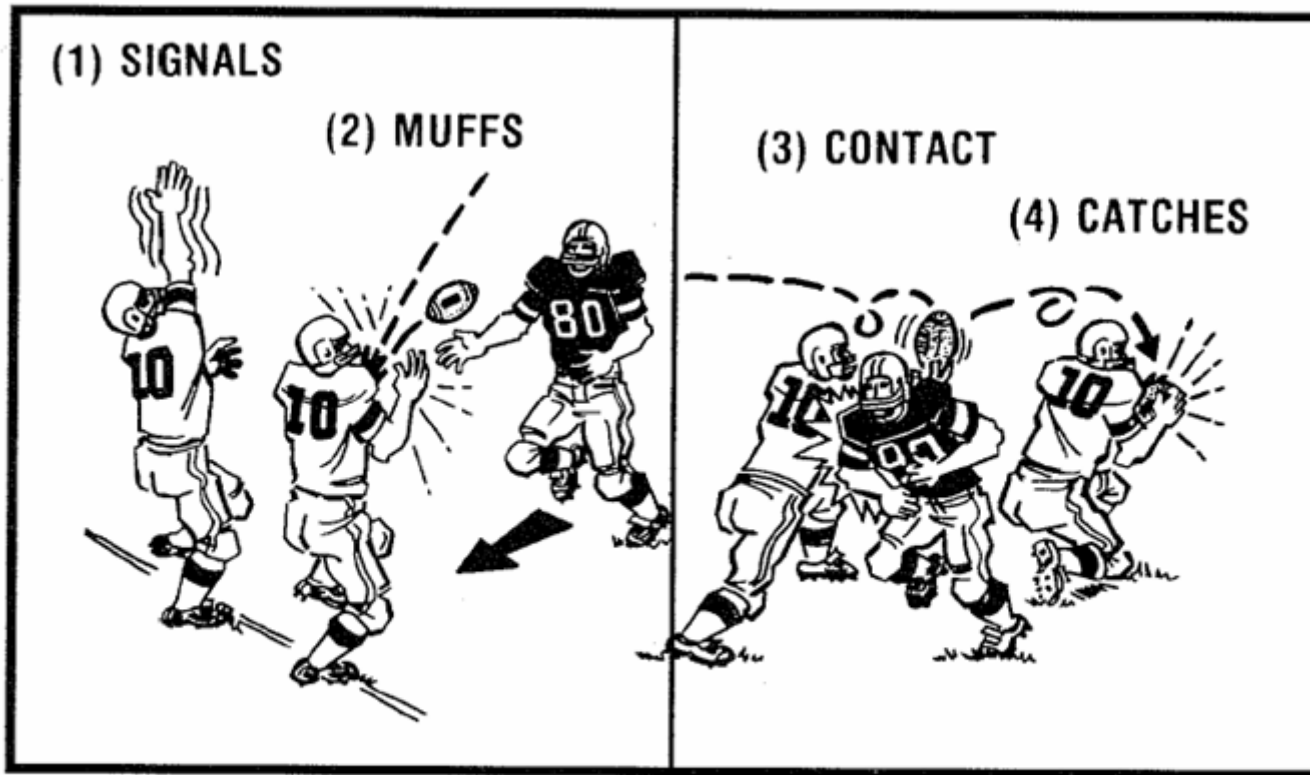
# Enforcement – Illegal Signal

- After Free Kick
  - Foul during a running play [10-3-2]
  - If accepted, 5 yards using all-but-one
    - No re-kick
  - Spot of illegal signal (spot of foul) is very important
- After Scrimmage Kick
  - Not a post-scrimmage kick foul
  - Foul during a running play [10-3-2]
  - If accepted, 5 yards using all-but-one
  - Spot of illegal signal (spot of foul) is very important

# Enforcement – Awarded Fair Catch

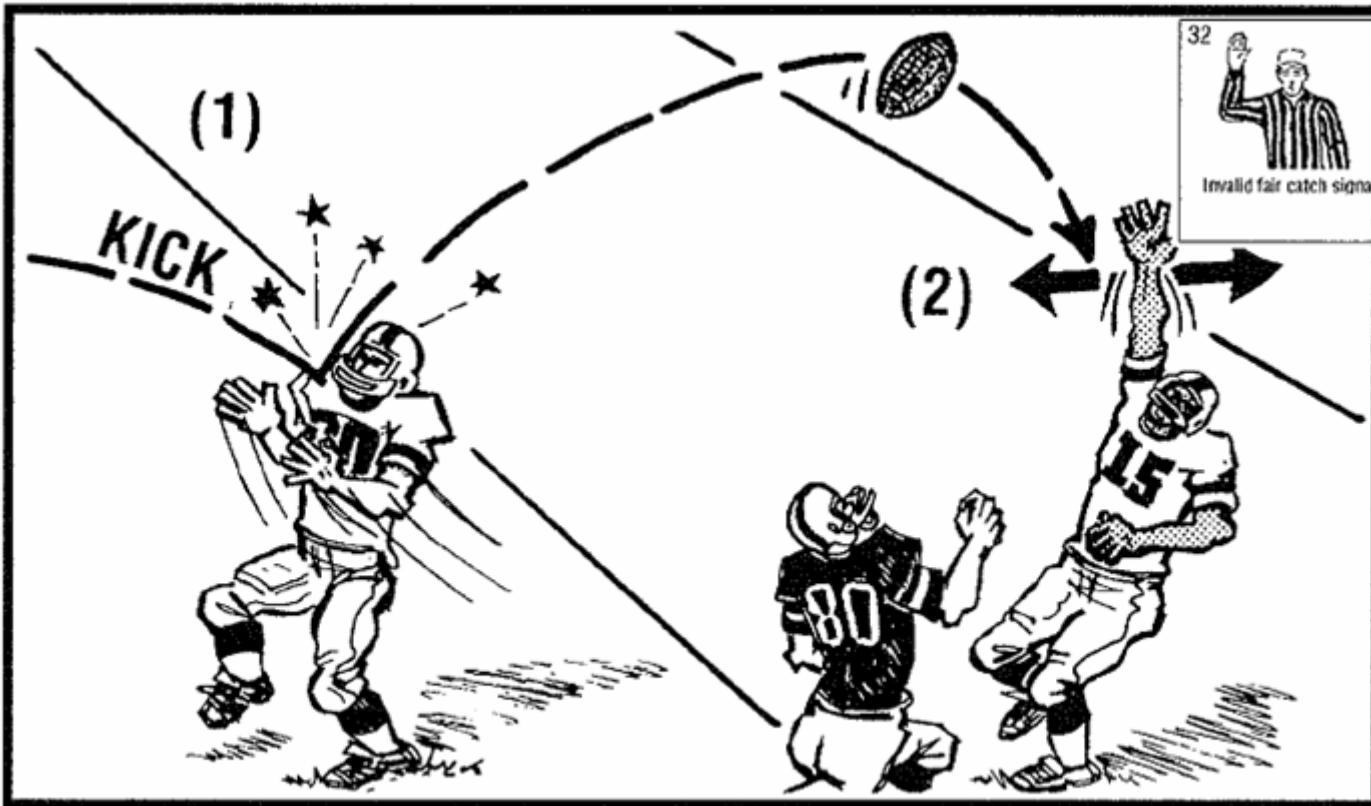
- The captain may choose to free kick or snap anywhere between the inbounds lines on the yard line through the spot of the catch when a fair catch is made or through the spot of interference, when a fair catch is awarded.
- These choices remain if a dead ball foul occurs prior to the down, or a foul or an inadvertent whistle occurs during the down and the down is replayed. [6-5-4]

# Simplified & Illustrated (2-9-1)



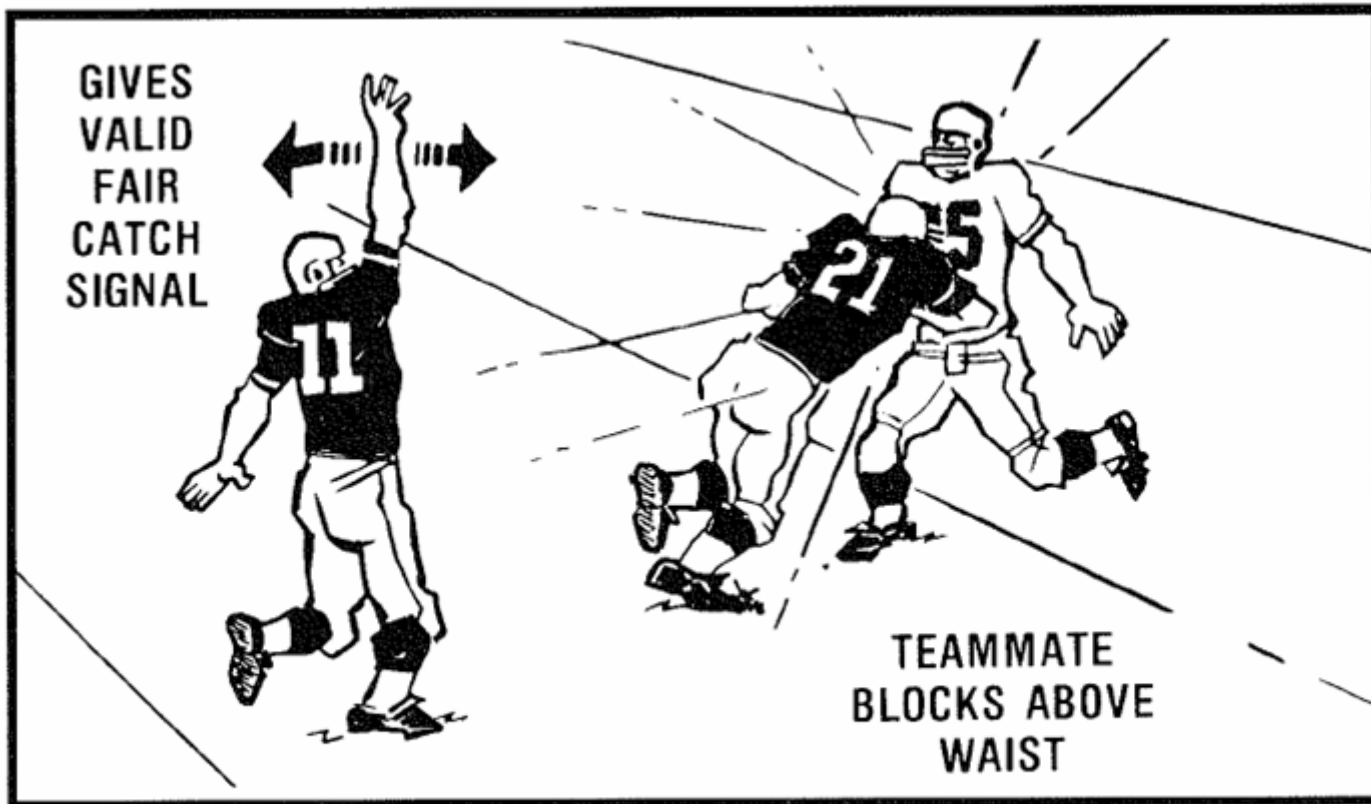
**2-9-1** The prohibition against contacting a player who has given a valid fair-catch signal ceases when the kick is muffed. When No. 10 catches the ball in (4), it is a fair catch. The contact in (3) is ignored. The captain may choose to snap or free kick anywhere between the inbounds lines on the yard line through the spot of the catch.

# Simplified & Illustrated (2-9-4)



**2-9-4** A signal given after the kick has touched a receiver or after it has touched the ground is an invalid fair-catch signal. The ball becomes dead as soon as the kick is caught or recovered. The foul will be enforced as a post-scrimmage kick foul.

# Simplified & Illustrated (6-5-1)



**6-5-1** This is a legal block by No. 21 even though No. 11 may not advance if the kick is caught or recovered as a valid fair-catch signal was given. However, No. 11 may not block until the kick ends because he has signaled.

## Example #1

**SITUATION:** Receiver R11 is standing on his 30 yard line and is struck on the shoulder by a punt that is beyond the neutral zone. After the ball has hit R11, R22 signals for a fair catch while standing on his 25 yard line. The ball then rolls out of bounds at the receivers 20 yard line.

**RULING:** A foul by R22 for an invalid fair catch signal. The five-yard penalty is enforced under post-scrimmage kick rules (EOK). Receivers ball 1st and 10 on their 15 yard line.

## Example #2

**SITUATION:** Kickers punt and R33 signals for a fair catch. His teammate R44 catches the ball and is immediately tackled cleanly by a kicking team member. R44 fumbles when hit and the ball is recovered by the kicking team.

**RULING:** Ball became dead when caught by R44 and regardless of when the whistle was blown, R44 fumbled a dead ball. No recovery by the kickers. The tackle by the kickers is not a foul because R44 did not signal for a fair catch.

## Example #3

**SITUATION:** Receiver R55 gives a fair catch signal just as teammate R66 begins to advance after catching a punt.

**RULING:** Legal. Only the runner (R66) can give an illegal fair catch signal.



## Example #4

**SITUATION:** Receiver R77 signals for a fair catch while the kick is in flight but the ball lands five yards in front of him. Kicker K88 blocks R77 out of the way before anyone else touches the ball.

**RULING:** Legal. The protection for R77 ended when the kick struck the ground. The same would occur if R77 had muffed the kick in the air and was then blocked by K88.