

Penalty Enforcement: Spots & All but One

One of the keys to becoming a football official is understanding Penalty Enforcement. In particular, it's understanding from what "spot" the yardage for a particular penalty will be enforced.

You Must Know These Two Spots

1) The Spot of the Foul

This is easy. The spot of the foul is always where a foul occurred and is marked with a yellow penalty flag. There should never be any question where a foul occurred because it is marked.

2) The Basic Spot

This is more nuanced. The basic spot is determined by the action that occurred during the down:

Fouls That Occur	The Basic Spot
During a Running Play	End of the run
During a Loose Ball Play	Previous spot
During a Scrimmage Kick	Where the kick ended
Simultaneous with the Snap	Previous spot (always enforced from here)

Running Play

A running play is simply any action that is not part of a loose ball play.

Loose Ball Play

A loose-ball play is any action that occurs during any of the following:

- After the ball has been kicked
- A legal forward pass that is in flight
NOTE: Illegal forward passes are not considered loose-ball plays
- A backward pass from in or behind the neutral zone (this includes the snap)
- A fumble that occurs in or behind the neutral zone (Offensive team only)
- Any run or runs that precede any of the actions above (e.g. if the quarterback is scrambling, looking to make a pass, but never throws the ball, it is a running play. If at any point the quarterback throws the ball after scrambling, it is a loose ball play).

FUN FACT: All Dead Ball penalties are enforced from the succeeding spot in order of occurrence.

The All-But-One Principal

All Live Ball penalties are enforced using the all-but-one principle. "All-but-one" means that all penalties are marked off from the basic spot EXCEPT when the offense fouls behind the basic spot. Fouls by the offense behind the basic spot are marked from the spot of the foul.

