**40 Second Play Clock -- A Primer for Officials and Coaches**

The following guide is intended to help officials administer and coaches understand the 40 second play clock rule.

The play clock is used to ensure that each team be given a consistent interval between plays and from game to game.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The following is a prime example of an administrative stoppage.

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

Administrative issues are situations such as the chains getting tangled up or broken, objects on the field, official’s injury 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.

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

\* 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, it is 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.

**When the 40-second play clock is running, the effective ready-for-play is the spotting of the ball.**

**Some Additional Examples**

For the opening kickoff, the BJ hands the ball to the kicker. He goes to his position and raises his arm when ready. The referee blows the ready with a 25-second play clock. The game clock starts if the ball is legally touched.

The kick is caught and returned a few yards. The ball is spotted and the referee blows the ready with a 25-second play clock. The game clock starts on the snap.

1&10. The ball is run up the middle for a five-yard gain. A 40-second play clock starts when the ball is declared dead. The game clock does not stop.

2 & 5. An incomplete pass is thrown. A 40-second play clock starts when the ball is declared dead. The game clock stops and starts on the snap.

3 & 5. The ball is run for a 10-yard gain; the tackle is inbounds. A 40-second play clock starts when the ball is declared dead. The game clock stops for the first down and starts when the ball is spotted. The referee winds the clock, but does not blow his whistle.

1 & 10. A sweep play is run to the right side and the runner is forced out of bounds after a three-yard gain. A 40-second play clock starts when the ball is declared dead. The game clock stops and starts on the snap.

2 & 7. A pass is completed for a 20-yard gain; the tackle is inbounds, but A77 is flagged for holding at the line. The game clock stops to administer the penalty which is accepted. The ball is spotted and the referee blows the ready with a 25-second play clock and starts the game clock.

2 & 17. After a 15-yard run, A22 fumbles and a pile forms; A88 recovers. The game clock is stopped to determine who recovered the fumble. The ball is spotted and the referee blows the ready with a 25-second play clock and starts the game clock.

3 & 2. After either team takes a timeout, the referee blows the ready with a 25-second play clock. The game clock starts on the snap.

3 & 2. A22 runs for no gain, but is injured. The game clock stops and A22 must leave the game for at least one play. The ball is spotted and the referee blows the ready with a 25-second play clock and starts the game clock.

4 & 2. The ball is punted and a fair catch is made. The ball is spotted and the referee blows the ready with a 25-second play clock. The game clock starts on the snap.

**Case Plays**

1. During a down that ends inbounds, B55’s helmet comes off without a helmet foul by Team A. B55 immediately picks up his helmet, puts it on and continues to chase the ball carrier. **RULING**: An illegal participation foul by B55 for continuing to participate after losing his helmet. The clock stops at the end of the down and B55 must leave the game for the next down. After the penalty is enforced, the play clock is set at 25 seconds and both clocks start on the referee’s whistle.

2.Team B trails by three points with 40 seconds remaining in the fourth quarter and the game clock is running. A22 runs and is tackled inbounds short of a first down, but (a) A63’s, or (b) B44’s helmet comes completely off during the play. The game clock reads 0:33. **RULING**: In either case, the play clock will be set at 25 seconds and the game clock is started on the ready. Team A must snap the ball to avoid a delay of game foul.

3. Second and 14 at the A-25. A33 gains six yards and is tackled inbounds. The Line Judge mistakes the back stake for the front stake and erroneously stops the clock. **RULING:** Although a 40-second play clock will start as soon as the ball is dead, the Referee will handle this as an administrative stoppage. As soon as the error is detected, the play clock will be set at 25 seconds and the game clock is started.

4. During the down B77 is injured. A44 is tackled inbounds. When the clock is stopped for the injury, it reads 0:58 in the fourth quarter. **RULING:** The play clock is set to 25 seconds and both clocks are started on the ready.

5. With the game clock running, Team A allows the play clock to run down. **RULING:** Team B may accept or decline a five-yard penalty for delay of game. In either case, the play clock will be set at 25 seconds. If the penalty is accepted, the game clock starts on the snap. If the penalty is declined, the game clock starts on the ready.