

2017 LHSAA EXPERIMENTAL LEGAL GROUNDING RULE

INTRODUCTION

For the 2017 football season, LHSAA will implement a new rule that would allow a passer to legally throw the ball away when he is outside of the area commonly referred to as either the “pocket” or the “tackle box.” The Louisiana Football Coaches requested this rule change, and LHSAA submitted a proposal to NFHS. NFHS did not adopt the proposal, but it authorized LHSAA to experiment with the rule proposal.

PURPOSE AND INTENT OF THE RULE

The intent of the new rule, which is an exception to the general prohibition against intentional grounding, is to allow the player who first possesses the ball after the snap an opportunity to legally throw the ball away beyond the line of scrimmage after he has left the pocket. The rule is geared to promote player safety.

RULE

Definition of “pocket”:

The “pocket” is defined as the area bounded by the outside edges of the normal tackle positions on each side of the center, the line of scrimmage, and Team A’s end line.

Rule 7-5-2(e) Exception 2 (NEW) to read as follows:

It is legal for a passer to save loss of yardage by throwing a forward pass so that the ball crosses or lands beyond the neutral zone if: (a) the passer was the first player to possess the ball following the snap; (b) the passer left the pocket prior to passing the ball; and (c) no other player possessed the ball prior to the pass.

ELEMENTS TO LEGALLY THROW THE BALL AWAY

To be able to legally throw the ball away:

1. The passer must be the first player to possess the ball after the snap;
2. The passer must leave the pocket before passing it;
3. The ball must cross or land beyond the neutral zone.
4. No other player can possess the ball before the pass is thrown.

The “pocket” is bounded by the following:

1. Team A’s line of scrimmage.
2. Team A’s end line.
3. The outside edges of the normal position of Team A’s tackles, which is approximate to the lateral edges of the free-blocking zone—four yards laterally on either side of the spot of the snap.

PHILOSOPHIES

1. When in question as to whether the passer is outside of the pocket, he is outside of the pocket.
2. When in question as to whether the ball has crossed the neutral zone, the ball has crossed the neutral zone. Do not be technical.
3. When the only reason the ball did not cross the neutral zone was because of a player or obstruction by equipment or non-players at or near the sideline, the ball is considered to have crossed the neutral zone.
4. When the passer is legally throwing the ball away and the ball lands near or beyond the sideline and in advance of the neutral zone, there is no foul for ineligible receivers being downfield.

CASE PLAYS

1. A – 1/10 @ A-20. QB A9 receives a direct snap and drops straight back seven yards. Under a rush, he rolls to his right outside the pocket and throws the ball so that it lands (a) out-of-bounds at the A-25; or (b) in-bounds at the A-25 with no Team A player in the area. **RULING:** Legal play. In both situations, the ball has crossed the neutral zone.
2. A – 1/10 @ A-20. QB A9 receives a direct snap and drops straight back seven yards. Under a rush, he rolls to his right outside the pocket and throws the ball which lands (a) out-of-bounds at the A-18; (b) in-bounds at the A-18 with no eligible Team A receiver in the area; or (c) in-bounds at the A-18 with RB A36 in the area. **RULING:** Intentional grounding in (a) and (b) because the ball has not crossed the neutral zone. In (c), the play is legal because, under Rule 7-5-2(d), the passer may throw the ball into an area occupied by an eligible receiver even if the ball does not cross the neutral zone.
3. A – 1/10 @ A-20. QB A9 receives a direct snap and drops straight back seven yards. Under a rush, he rolls to his right outside the pocket and throws a forward pass that

crosses the sideline at the A-17 and lands on the ground out-of-bounds in the stands at the extension of the A-23 yard line. **RULING:** Legal play. For purposes of this rule, the neutral zone extends indefinitely beyond the sideline.

4. A – 1/10 @ A-20. QB A9 receives a direct snap and drops straight back seven yards. Under a rush, he rolls to his right outside the pocket and throws the ball forward. When QB A9 released the ball, A56 and A79 were five yards downfield. The pass lands at the A-25 (a) out-of-bounds; (b) in-bounds within two yards of the sideline; or (c) in-bounds at the numbers / nine-yard marks. **RULING:** No foul for intentional grounding in (a), (b), or (c). No foul for ineligible receiver downfield in (a) and (b) because the pass landed near or beyond the sideline. In (c), foul for ineligible receiver downfield because the pass did not land near the sideline.
5. A – 2/3 @ A-45. QB A9 in shotgun receives a snap and drops straight back 10 yards. Under a rush, he rolls to his right outside the pocket and throws the ball forward toward the sideline from the A-35. The ball (a) strikes the back stake, which is at the A-42 and falls to the ground at that spot; or (b) is caught by an assistant coach standing in the team box at the A-42. The ball would have landed beyond the neutral zone but for hitting the stake or being caught by the coach. **RULING:** Legal play. The only reason the ball did not cross the neutral zone is because of an obstruction.
6. A – 2/5 @ A-25. QB A9 in shotgun receives a snap and drops straight back seven yards. Under a rush, he rolls to his right outside the pocket and throws the ball forward downfield. At the A-22, B56 jumps in the air and knocks the forward pass to the ground. The ball lands at the A-20. Had B56 not blocked the pass, the ball would have crossed the neutral zone **RULING:** Legal play. The only reason the pass did not cross the line is because B-56 blocked it. The intent of the rule is to allow the passer to legally throw the ball away. Because the passer complied with his obligations under the rule, the blocking of the pass by B-56 does not convert the passer's action into a foul.
7. A – 3/10 @ A-25. Both offensive guards line up five yards wide on their respective sides of the snapper. Both tackles line up outside of the guards, so that the outside edges of the tackles are seven yards away from the position of the ball at the snap. QB A9 receives a shotgun snap and drops straight back seven yards. Under a rush, he rolls to his right outside and throws the ball forward out-of-bounds and beyond the neutral zone. When A9 passed the ball, he was standing behind the original position of the right guard. **RULING:** Legal play. To legally throw the ball away, the passer needs to leave the area bounded by the outside edges of the normal position of the tackle, which is approximate to the lateral edges of the free-blocking zone—four yards laterally on each side of the spot of the snap. The widening or narrowing by the tackle does not change the tackle's normal traditional position.
8. A – 3/10 @ A-20. QB A9 muffs the snap, and the ball rolls on the ground at the A15. (a) QB A9; or (b) RT A79 picks up the ball, rolls to his right outside the pocket, and throws a forward pass that lands out-of-bounds beyond the neutral zone. **RULING:**

Legal play in (a) and (b). In each situation, the player that initially possessed the snap (or the loose ball following snap) maintained possession of the ball, left the pocket, and threw the ball away beyond the neutral zone. The ability to throw the ball away applies to any Team A player that complies with the rule.

9. A – 3/10 @ A-20. QB A9 muffs the snap, and the ball rolls on the ground at the A15, where he picks it up. Under a rush, he rolls to his right outside the pocket. In pursuit, B32 knocks the ball loose from QB A9's hand. A9 is able to recover the ball after it hits the ground, and, while outside of the pocket, he throws the ball out-of-bounds and beyond the neutral zone. **RULING:** Legal play. Although A9 fumbled, no other player possessed the ball before A9 recovered it and threw the pass away.
10. A – 1/10 @ A-20. QB A9 receives the snap and hands the ball to RB A36 behind the line. A36, while still in the backfield, is forced to his right by the defense. When A36 gets to the numbers, he throws the ball out-of-bounds and beyond the neutral zone to avoid being tackled in the backfield. **RULING:** Intentional grounding. Only the player that initially controls the snap or loose ball following the snap is afforded the opportunity to legally throw the ball away. Once A9 handed the ball to A36, no Team A player could legally throw the ball away.
11. A – 3/5 @ B-15. The score is A-7, B-13. There are :10 seconds left in the 4th quarter. Team A has no timeouts. QB A9 in shotgun formation receives the snap. Seeing no open receivers, A9 runs to his right into the side zone in an attempt to reach the line to gain. B27 grabs A9 near the 9-yard marks (outside the pocket) at the B-20. As he is being tackled but before his knee touches the ground, A9 throws a forward pass that lands at the B-13 (a) out-of-bounds just beyond the sideline; or (b) inbounds near the numbers. There were no Team A players in the area of the pass. The game clock shows :02 seconds at the end of the play. **RULING:** In (a) and (b), legal play. Although A9 was likely trying to conserve time, he was also avoiding a loss of yardage and complied with the rule by throwing the ball beyond the neutral zone from outside the pocket.