

NFHS Rule Differences: 8-Player vs. 11-Player Football

(For Utah High School Officials - UHSAA)

Field & Equipment

- Standard Utah Setup: Games are typically played on a 100-yard field (53 1/3 yards wide, but may be narrower) with goalposts and standard 10-yard end zones.
- Goal Posts: Used for PATs and field goals unless otherwise noted.
- Field Variations: If an 80-yard field (often 40 yards wide) is used, or if no goalposts are present, teams may:

Smaller Field:

- Reduce field width, affecting hash mark positioning.
- Adjust kickoffs (placed at the 30-yard line instead of the 40).
- Touchbacks and safeties result in the ball being placed at the 15-yard line (instead of the 20).

No Goal Posts:

- Only use 2-point conversion Try's after touchdowns (no kicks possible).

Team Composition

- Number of Players: 8 players per team on the field.
- Scrimmage Formation: No more than 3 offensive players may be backs (instead of 4 in 11-player).
- Numbering: No jersey-number restrictions for players on the line (no 50-79 rule for interior linemen).

Eligible Receivers

- The ends and all players in the backfield are eligible (typically 3-4 players per side, depending on formation). Positioning solely determines eligibility. Numbers don't matter.
- No requirement for any ineligible numbers at any time.

Free Blocking Zone

- Defined as a square area extending 3 yards laterally on either side of the snap and 3 yards behind each line of scrimmage (smaller than in 11-player).

Kicking & Free Kicks

- Kickoffs, punts, and field goals are handled as in 11-player unless goalposts are absent.
- Free-Kick Formation: In 8-player, only 3 players are required on each side of the kicker (11-player requires 4 on each side).

Offensive & Defensive Formations

- Backfield Limit: Maximum of 3 players in the backfield.
- Defensive Fronts: Typically fewer linemen; no rule differences, but alignments differ due to fewer players.

Timing & Scoring

- No timing or scoring differences (quarters, play clock, and points remain the same as 11-player).
- If the field has no goalposts, teams must attempt a 2-point try after touchdowns.

Penalty Enforcement

- No changes, use all 11-player principles and distances.

Key Officiating Points

- Wider spacing: Officials should adjust positioning due to fewer players and larger open field.
- Eligibility checks: Especially important on passes, as any back or end can be an eligible receiver.
- Kicking alignment: Watch for 3/3 split on free kicks.
- Smaller free-blocking zone: Pay close attention to blocks below the waist.
- Field variations: Confirm with game management if the field is shorter and/or narrower, or lacks goalposts to ensure proper spotting of Kicks, Touchbacks, or Safeties.