

UHSAA FOOTBALL MERCY RULE

Quick Reference for Game Officials and Clock Operators | Revised August 25, 2026

1. WHEN THE MERCY RULE BEGINS:

Football format	Mercy Rule begins
11-player football	After halftime , as soon as either team leads by 35 points or more.
8-player football	At any time , as soon as either team leads by 35 points or more.
ONCE THE MERCY RULE BEGINS, IT REMAINS IN EFFECT FOR THE REST OF THE GAME — even if the lead later drops below 35 points.	

2. BASIC CLOCK INSTRUCTION:

KEEP THE GAME CLOCK RUNNING unless the **Referee (white hat only)** signals for the clock to stop, as explained below.

3. WHEN TO STOP AND RESTART THE CLOCK

Situation	STOP the clock	RESTART the clock
Charged team time-out	On the Referee's time-out signal	On the next snap
Official's time-out	On the Referee's time-out signal	On the Referee's wind-the-clock signal
Change of team possession	When the down ends	On the Referee's wind-the-clock signal

Referee's time-out signal: The Referee taps both hands on the chest.

4. SITUATIONS THAT DO NOT AUTOMATICALLY STOP THE CLOCK

Incomplete pass	Runner out of bounds	First down	Touchdown	Penalty administration
KEEP RUNNING	KEEP RUNNING	KEEP RUNNING	KEEP RUNNING	KEEP RUNNING

If the Referee taps both hands on the chest during any of these situations, stop the clock on that signal.

5. TOUCHDOWN AND TRY PROCEDURE

Following a touchdown: Keep the clock running through the Try. After the Try is completed, stop the clock when the Referee signals the official's time-out for the intermission. Restart on the Referee's wind-the-clock signal.

6. GAME-ENDING PROVISION

THE GAME ENDS IMMEDIATELY when one team leads by 45 points or more:

- At the end of the third quarter, or
- At any time during the fourth quarter.

7. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

25/40 Play Clock: Remains in use throughout the game. **Scope:** All classifications & levels; non-region, region and postseason games.

Clock operator reminder: KEEP IT RUNNING unless the Referee signals you to stop.