



COLLEGE FOOTBALL OFFICIATING, LLC

Extending the Period: The Philosophy Behind the Rule

Recently the extension of a period (Rule 3-2-3) has been a topic of active discussion across the football landscape. My purpose here is to give the philosophy and purpose of the rule.

One can get a hint of the philosophy by looking for the common element in those circumstances where the period is extended. The thing they have in common is this: in every case the down just played is repeated. Offsetting fouls, accepted penalties (not including loss of down), and inadvertent whistle—all of these have the down repeated. In the case of the inadvertent whistle, there are some other elements that come into play, but repeating the down is an outcome of several possibilities.

When the down is going to be repeated, that really means that it has not yet been resolved. Put another way, there is some unfinished business to take care of before the period is over. And the “do-over” of that last play is what is required to wrap up that period, to bring it to a close. So we say that we extend the period—and we do that to take care of that unfinished business: the down that needs to be repeated.

Given that philosophy, it should be easy to see why the period is *not* extended when there is an offensive foul whose penalty calls for loss of down. Remember that “loss of down” is shorthand for “loss of the right to repeat the down.” So with regard to extending the period, since there will be no repeat of the down, then the business of the period has been taken care of; hence there is no reason to extend the period—it is truly over, there is no unfinished business, and we move on to the next period. Of course, if this takes place in the second or fourth period, the half is over.

There is one little wrinkle that needs clarifying. Suppose the clock runs out during a down in which there is a personal foul by Team B. The penalty will be tacked on at the basic spot and the period will be extended for Team A to run a play on first down. At first blush it looks like the down is not being repeated. But it really is, since it is unfinished business that needs to be taken care of, even though the number of the down is not what it would have been. The same thing is true for a foul that doesn't include an automatic first down but does leave the ball beyond the line to gain. The repeated down is first down, because of other rules that determine the number of the down.

Finally, consider the situation that has generated so much discussion: the clock runs out during a fourth-down play during which Team A commits a foul whose penalty includes loss of down. The ball goes over on downs. If this happens in the first or third period, Team B next puts the ball in play *after the change of period*, to either second or fourth.

Many people push back against not extending the second or fourth period in this case, claiming that it “deprives Team B the right to snap the ball.” But you can see that no such right exists, given the spirit and intent of the rule for extending. That is, extending the period is not about running *another* play; instead, it is about finishing up the business of the period by extending it so that the previous down can be repeated, and hence resolved.

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