



COLLEGE FOOTBALL OFFICIATING, LLC

UNSPORTSMANLIKE CONDUCT: DEAD OR ALIVE

For as long as any of us can remember unsportsmanlike conduct has belonged to a special class of fouls: “live-ball fouls treated as dead-ball fouls.” This means just what it says: we have enforced the penalty for an unsportsmanlike conduct foul by pretending that the foul occurs after the ball becomes dead and hence applying the rules for dead-ball fouls. This has had no impact on the outcome of the play itself; the resulting penalty only affects the next play. The classic example is the ball carrier racing for the end zone, well ahead of his opponents, and before crossing the goal line he makes an obscene gesture toward the other team or the crowd. He scores the touchdown, and the penalty for his bad behavior is enforced on the try or the succeeding kickoff.

In trying to have a strong impact on such player behavior the committee in 2010 made an important change that will take effect in 2011. Beginning this season, unsportsmanlike conduct fouls by players **will be treated as common fouls**, in the sense that the penalty will be enforced the same as if the foul were holding or a block in the back or any other common foul. If the ball is alive when the player makes the taunting gesture, then the penalty is enforced at the spot of the foul—and the key outcome: **no touchdown**. One way to think about this is that starting in 2011 such a player will have a choice: he can score the touchdown, or he can taunt the opponent—but no longer can he have it both ways.

Another important change is that the penalty for unsportsmanlike conduct by a player of Team B **includes an automatic first down**.

Here are several things to notice in applying this change. We will look at a few play situations to illustrate some of the possibilities.

1. **The new penalty enforcement applies only to fouls by players participating in the game.** Fouls by coaches, squad members on the sideline, and others subject to the rules will still be treated as dead-ball fouls.
2. **All the rules for common live-ball fouls apply to these fouls also.** For example, a live-ball unsportsmanlike conduct foul by one team is offset by an opponent’s live-ball foul. And if the same team commits two live-ball fouls, one being an

unsportsmanlike act, the opponent may accept the penalty for only one. Also, penalty enforcement is governed by the three-and-one principle.

3. **The rule applies equally to all players participating in the down.** In the example given earlier the ball carrier commits the foul, but it might be a teammate.
4. **When in question it is a dead-ball foul.** We don't want to "fly-speck" this rule. If the ball is clearly still alive when the foul occurs, it is to be treated as a live-ball foul. If it is clearly dead it is to be treated as a dead-ball foul. If it is so close that you have to think for more than a couple of seconds, then treat it as a dead-ball foul.
5. **If the defense commits a live-ball unsportsmanlike conduct foul during a down that ends in a touchdown, the penalty carries over to the try or the kickoff—** just like a personal foul.

PLAY SITUATIONS

1. Third and 15 at the B-20. Eligible A88 catches a pass at the B-18 and heads for the goal line. At the B-10 he goes into a "goose step" and continues this action as he crosses the goal line. **RULING:** Live-ball foul for unsportsmanlike conduct. Fifteen-yard penalty enforced at the spot of the foul, which is the B-10, and repeat third down. Third and 20 at the B-25.

2. Second and 5 at the B-40. Back A22 takes a backward pass from the quarterback, circles right end, and heads for the goal line. Guard A66, who had pulled out to lead the play, legally blocks B90 to the ground and then stands over him at the B-30 taunting and screaming obscenities. This draws a flag from the head linesman, when A22 is at the B-10 before continuing into the end zone. **RULING:** Live-ball foul for unsportsmanlike conduct. Fifteen-yard penalty enforced at the spot of the foul, which is the B-30, and repeat second down. Second and 10 at the B-45.

3. Third and 15 at the B-20. Eligible A88 catches a pass at the B-18 and heads for the goal line. Very close to the goal line he dives into the end zone, with no Team B player closer than about 10 yards. The field judge is uncertain of the exact spot where A88 started his diving action. **RULING:** Foul for unsportsmanlike conduct. Administer as a dead-ball foul: The touchdown counts and the penalty is enforced on the try or the succeeding kickoff.

4. Second and seven at the B-30. Nose guard B55 is lined up in the neutral zone at the snap. Back A22 takes the ball on a quick play up the middle, bursts into the open, and at the B-10 he turns around prances backward into the end zone. The head linesman and the line judge both have flags for the offside foul, and the back judge drops his flag for the action by A22. **RULING:** Offsetting fouls, repeat the down. Second and seven at the B-30.

5. First and 10 at the 50. The quarterback pitches out to running back A44 who circles right end and races toward the goal line. The line judge trailing the play flags linebacker

B57 for screaming obscenities at him, complaining that he was held by the tight end. A44 scores a touchdown. **RULING:** Live-ball unsportsmanlike conduct against B57. The penalty carries over to either the try or the kickoff, at the option of Team A.

6. Third and 15 at the A-45. A12 drops back to pass and is sacked by tackle B77 for a 10-yard loss. B77 leaps to his feet, beats his chest, stands over A12 and taunts him, and showboats to the crowd, drawing flags from the referee and the line judge. **RULING:** Dead-ball unsportsmanlike conduct by B77. Fifteen-yard penalty at the dead-ball spot plus automatic first down. First and 10 for Team A at the 50.

7. Safety B33 intercepts a pass at the B-10 and returns for a touchdown. As he is coming down the sideline covering the play the line judge drops his flag after he runs into the Team B head coach who is just on the field of play near the B-40. **RULING:** Although this is a foul that takes place while the ball is alive, it is treated as a dead-ball foul because it is committed by a non-player. The touchdown counts and the 15-yard penalty is enforced on the try or the succeeding kickoff.