

To Bag or Not to Bag- Proper Use of the Bean Bag

That may not be the question that goes through our minds at the time of a loose ball because for the most part a lot of us tend to bag everything. While this practice won't get you into any trouble with the sidelines it does lead to some unnecessary "bagging" of spots. Do we need to beanbag all fumbles, change of possessions or muffs? Obviously not or we would not have this discussion. It is the "why" that leads us to what we need to beanbag. We need the spot, where the run ends (where fumble occurs), as an enforcement spot for fouls that occurred during that particular running play. When the fumbled ball is recovered or intercepted, without becoming dead by rule, it begins a new running play and with it being a new enforcement spot for fouls that occur during this second running play. (Or third or fourth) That enforcement spot will be where that run ends by rule. The obvious question is can you have more than one running play during a down? Yes, and for the task of enforcing penalties during these multiple running plays we need a bean bag (or hat) at every spot where the ball becomes loose by fumble and where nearly every backwards pass originates. So you can see why bean-bagging fumbles is so crucial.

So let us start with fumbles. We know that all fumbles should be bagged. We always bean bag fumbles by B after a change of possession. For that matter a fumble by any team after there has been a change of possession. A run that advances beyond the line of scrimmage is obvious to us because that is where that particular running play ends and a loose ball (not to be mistaken for a "loose ball play") begins. A fumble that occurs behind the line of scrimmage need to be bagged not because we need that spot, but to show us that the run ended behind and not beyond the line of scrimmage. In the definition of a loose ball play we know that everything that occurs behind the line of scrimmage, prior to the ball becoming loose, by a legal forward pass or backwards pass, by a legal kick or by a fumble is all part of a loose ball play. This particular play changes our enforcement spot to previous spot because, again, everything that happens behind the line of scrimmage before the ball advances beyond is part of the loose ball play.

What about illegal forward passes? These are treated as nothing more than fumbles however they are illegal and should be marked with a flag, whether behind or beyond the line of scrimmage.

This discussion of loose ball plays and everything that precedes it behind the line of scrimmage brings us to backward passes. The backwards pass is the least bean-bagged spot on the field. When the quarterback pitches the ball backwards (or forwards for that matter) he is creating a loose ball. So when the option play comes down the line and the backwards pass hits the running back in the chest and bounces to the ground where do you throw the beanbag? Where the pitch originated from or where the muff occurred? You should bag where the backwards pass originated from. This is where the run ended and a loose ball, however short, began.

As with fumbles, we need this reference point for enforcement, whether behind or beyond the neutral zone.

Now I did say nearly every backwards pass. The ones I'm talking about that do not need to be bean bagged are snaps. The bad snap on a scrimmage kick play or when the offense is in shotgun or the hand-to-hand snap. These are all backwards passes (loose balls) and thus the beginning of a "loose ball play" because it occurs behind the line of scrimmage. However, we already have the spot of enforcement conveniently marked, the previous spot, with the down box. So we do not need to bag these spots. These will always be loose balls and therefore, parts of a loose ball play that may turn into a running play, but we already know where this loose ball originated. The muffed snap is the most unnecessarily bean bagged spot on the field.

What else do we bag? The first touching of a scrimmage kick beyond the line of scrimmage or free kick by A in the 10 yard neutral zone. These are violations because the kicking team cannot legally possess the kick by rule. These are bagged because the spot of this violation (first touching) playing into B's options of where to possibly snap the ball next, we need to bag all these violations no matter how many of them may occur during a kick.

We are all in agreement that we need to bag anything under the momentum rule. A kick caught and passes intercepted by B going into their end zone inside the 5-yard line and the less obvious momentum beanbag is the intercepted or grounded fumble by either team inside their own 5-yard line. This is to protect the possessing team against safeties or giving them touchbacks when they do not deserve them. This spot may serve as the spot where we snap the ball next.

The only thing left to bag, if you have any bags left, is the post scrimmage kick spot. Do you bag a muffed kick by R? NO! Drop the beanbag at the yard line where the kick ends by definition. When it is possessed by anyone, A or B, in the field of play, becomes dead in the field of play with no one in possession, or goes out of bounds.

As I mentioned at the very beginning, bean-bagging spots that we do not need will not get you into trouble with sidelines. In fact some beanbags may even sell some plays. The only problem with excessive bean bagging is you may not have a beanbag when you really need one. You may have to throw your hat later in the play, but no coach can say that you are not aware of what is taking place.

Bean Bag These Plays

- Fumbles
- Backwards Passes
- First touching of a scrimmage kick by K
- First touching of a free kick by K; before it has advanced 10 yards or has been touched by R in the 10 yard zone
- Anything that falls under the momentum rule
- Spot where a scrimmage kick ends

Do NOT Bag These Types of Plays

1. Muffed hand to hand snaps
2. Muffed long or shot gun snaps
3. Spot where R muffs a scrimmage kick
4. Spot of an illegal pass---flag
5. Spot of an illegal kick or illegally kicking of a loose ball--- flag
6. Spot of an intercepted pass or any change or possession (unless it falls under the momentum rule)

Types of Plays

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|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Can a loose ball be part of a loose ball play? | Yes, if it became loose behind the line |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Can a loose ball be part of a running play? | Absolutely |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Can a running play be part of a loose ball play? | Never |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Can a loose ball play be part of a running play? | Never |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Can a running play follow a loose ball play? | Yes, when the ball crosses the line |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Can a loose ball play follow a running play? | Never |