

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 – Basic philosophy

1. Each official must fully understand the rules. However, the knowledge is not sufficient without the ability to interpret and correctly apply them. These skills can only be acquired by way of considerable effort and study.
2. In addition to the necessary rules knowledge, the official needs to know where to stand, what to look for, and of course, what to do when he sees it. With these skills, officials can provide impartial administration of one of the most exciting sporting competitions and allow it to proceed smoothly so that skillful play is not spoiled by fouls or unsportsmanlike conduct. It is fundamental that the correct use of mechanics leads to better officiating.
3. Mechanics are two things: responsibilities and positioning. Responsibilities are paramount because without each official performing his assigned duties for a particular part of each play inevitably there will be action that is not observed. To neglect a responsibility is to give players carte blanche to violate the rules with which it is associated. Positioning is almost as important, because it is fundamental that an official has the best chance of making a call correctly if he is in position to get the best view of the action. The positioning mechanics in this book are based on those of various US officiating associations, particularly the CFO. They are thus based on many, many years of experience and have been found by extensive experiment to be the best.
4. All officials are encouraged to write a personal checklist of things they must do and look for in each position on all possible play situations. This should be reviewed and updated periodically as a reminder of what they should be doing and how best to achieve it.
5. It must not be forgotten that football is a game played by and watched by people. Football officials must develop an appreciation of the wide variety of human reactions that can arise in the charged atmosphere of a sporting competition. It is only through the development of such an appreciation that officials can learn to gain the respect of the players and coaches, and maintain the discipline so essential in such a physically exciting game as football.
6. The foundations of officiating:
 - (a) The first foundation of officiating a game is that it is played in a safe environment. The field, its surrounds, and the players and their equipment on it, must not pose an unreasonable risk to the participants, nor make a mockery of the game. This is often taken for granted.
 - (b) The second foundation is the respect that the players and coaches must have for the decisions made by the officials. Without that respect, anything the officials do is unlikely to significantly influence the players' behaviour. The penalties in the rule-book form an effective deterrent for illegal actions only if they have an impact on players and the game.
 - (c) Without these foundations it is next to impossible for the officials to apply the rules effectively to ensure a fair contest.
7. A textbook like this cannot hope to be definitive about every possible situation that might arise in a game of football. It therefore means that the officials have to decide for themselves what is the best response to what happens. That doesn't mean that officials can "freelance" and do whatever they want. They have responsibilities at all times to their colleagues to be in the expected place and to be covering their priorities. Only by working together can a crew expect to officiate a game successfully. Only by being in the right place at the right time can an individual official play his role in that. This book tells you the best place to be for common situations, and how to respond to common occurrences (and a few rare ones). Everything else is up to you.

1.2 – Points of emphasis

For this edition, we wish officials to take particular note of the following points.

1. **Signalling timeout:** All officials should always echo all the timeout (S3) signals given by all other officials (Mechanic 5.6.3).
2. **Referee mechanics around ready for play:**
 - (a) Whether you are using a 40-second play clock or a 25-second one, it is important to declare the ball ready for play consistently.
 - (b) Where there is no 40-second clock, we attempt to simulate it.
3. **Umpire mechanics around ready for play:**
 - (a) Umpires should be in their position (not standing over the ball) prior to the snap (Mechanic 10.9.c.13) unless:
 - (i) one or more of the Referee, Linesman or Line Judge is not in position and facing the ball
 - (ii) one or more of the deep officials is a considerable distance away from their position
 - (iii) the down box is nowhere near the line of scrimmage or is showing the wrong down number
 - (iv) Team A is making a last second substitution
 - (b) Umpires should immediately get over the ball if a whistle is blown for any reason (e.g. a foul occurs, a timeout is granted, the ball blows away) or if Team A makes a last second substitution (Mechanic 10.9.c.14).
 - (c) If the Referee or another official spots the ball, there is no reason for the Umpire to ever stand over it unless something delays play.
4. **Penalty administration:**
 - (a) If you have thrown your flag, make sure you give a long, clear timeout signal at the end of the play (Mechanic 19.1.b.2). Other officials will echo this. Make sure the Referee and Umpire are aware of your signal.
 - (b) Unless you are holding the dead-ball spot, once continuing action has ended, go to the Referee to report your foul (Mechanic 19.1.b.4).
 - (c) The Umpire should ensure that he knows as soon as possible the reason for a flag being thrown.
 - (d) If you have information to contribute to penalty administration (e.g. you thought the pass was uncatchable on DPI; you know there was a change of possession and are not sure the Referee does), pass it on.
5. **Hurry up plays:** Don't slow down the game. In particular, when Team A is attempting a hurry-up offense:
 - (a) A wing official marking the dead-ball spot should not come into the field unless player conduct requires it or the spot is very close to the line to gain.
 - (b) Only the Umpire should handle the ball while the clock is running (Mechanic 10.9.c.9). The one exception to this is if the Referee is nearer to spot the ball when there has been a loss of yardage.
 - (c) All officials (and the chain crew) have a duty to get to their position, face the ball and be ready for the next play as quickly as possible.
 - (d) Do not consume time talking to players, coaches or other officials while the clock is running.
 - (e) Do not grant a measurement if it is possible to avoid it (Mechanic 18.4).
6. **Rules application:**
 - (a) It is a foul to block an opponent in the back; it is not a foul to touch an opponent in the back (Mechanic 3.3.5.c).
 - (b) For holding to be worth calling, there must be demonstrable restriction. It may be slight, but it should be demonstrable.

7. **Sideline communication:** The following items of communication between the officials and the Head Coach of a team are essential:
 - (a) For each foul against his team, the nearest wing official must inform the Head Coach of the number or position of the offending player and what the player did that was illegal (Mechanic 19.3.10). If the enforcement involves loss of down, the Coach must be informed of this also.
 - (b) For each unusual enforcement or judgement, an official must inform both Head Coaches, whether or not it is against his team (Mechanic 19.3.10). This may be the nearest wing official or the Referee, depending on the nature of the call.
 - (c) "If a visual game clock is not the official timing device during the last two minutes of each half, the Referee or his representative shall notify each captain and head coach of the time remaining each time the clock is stopped by rule" (Rule 3-3-8-c). This will normally be relayed to the Head Coach via the nearest wing official.
 - (d) At the two-minute warning, the nearest wing official must inform the Head Coach of the precise time remaining and how many timeouts each team has remaining.
 - (e) When a team has used its final timeout of a half, the Referee must inform the Head Coach of this fact, as well as the precise time remaining. The Referee should not delegate this job to another official.
 - (f) When a player is disqualified, the Referee accompanied by the official who called the foul (or the nearest wing official if it was the Referee) must inform the Head Coach of the number of the player disqualified and the nature of the foul (Mechanic 19.1.b.11).
8. **Measurements:** When a measurement takes place, it must take place at the precise dead-ball spot. The Coverer must place the ball on the ground at that spot. Measurements must not be made at some spot level with the dead-ball spot and, in particular, the ball must not be moved from a side zone to between the hash marks before the measurement takes place (Mechanic 18.5).
9. **Out of bounds coverage:** When the ball carrier goes out bounds, the covering official must turn and keep their eyes on him while there is a threat of action against him (Mechanic 5.4.1).