

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 – Crew formations

- Our mechanics cover crews of any size from 3 to 8. While [crew of 3](#) mechanics are covered in a specific chapter, mechanics relating to other sizes of crew are spread through most of the chapters of the book. In the past, we have distinguished the crew's formation simply by its size, but developments in officiating mean that this is no longer appropriate - for the same number of officials, we potentially have multiple crew formations. For example, traditionally a [crew of 6](#) has two officials deep (the Field Judge and the Side Judge). However, an alternative is to have only one official deep and add a Centre Judge.
- In the same way that people talk about soccer teams as being in a 4-3-3 or 4-4-2 formation (where the digits represent the number of defenders, midfielders and forwards), we describe the composition of a crew in terms of the number of officials in each of three groups.
- The groups are:

Core group	Referee (R), Centre Judge (C), Umpire (U)
Wing group	Linesman (H), Line Judge (L)
Deep group	Back Judge (B), Field Judge (F), Side Judge (S)
- We represent the crew [scrimmage](#)[◇] formation in a 3-digit notation where:
 - the first digit represents the number of officials in the core group
 - the second digit represents the number of officials in the wing group
 - the third digit represents the number of officials in the deep group

5. The exception to this is on free kicks, where the formation used is based entirely on the size of the crew. In free kick situations, we refer to crew formations as F4, ..., F8 where the digit denotes the size of the crew.[§]

- These notations reflect[‡] that future developments in football officiating may add an additional official to any group. For example, the NFL is considering adding a third official to the wing group.
- In this notation, we use 2xx to mean a crew that has two officials in the core group, regardless of the number in the others. Similarly, xx3 indicates a crew that has three officials in the deep group.
- The following are the valid crew formations we recognise:

Formation	Crew size/label	Core group	Wing group	Deep group	FK formation
120	3	R	H, L		F3
220	4	R, U	H, L		F4
221	5	R, U	H, L	B	F5
222	6D	R, U	H, L	F, S	F6
321	6C	R, U, C	H, L	B	F6
223	7	R, U	H, L	B, F, S	F7
323	8	R, U, C	H, L	B, F, S	F8

- A [crew of 6](#) needs to decide before a game which [scrimmage](#)[◇] formation to use. It should use a 222 formation (6D) when it expects a lot of passes, kicks or other down-field action. The crew should use a 321 formation (6C) when it expects a lot of action around the line of scrimmage. A crew should normally not change [scrimmage](#)[◇] formation during a game, but may do so if absolutely necessary and only during a game stoppage. Obviously, before making such a decision, the crew should take regard of its members' experience in the changed positions.
- CFO mechanics require opposite officiating positions (H/S, L/F) to swap sidelines at half-time. IAFOA mechanics require officiating positions to stay on the same sideline for the entire game. If, for some reason, it is necessary to swap personnel, then the person who was H in the first half becomes L in the second half, and vice versa. Similarly, F and S would switch roles.

1.3 – Points of emphasis

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

1. **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, Umpire and Centre Judge 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.5.a). **[USING RADIO] Transmit the details of the foul so that everyone is aware (Mechanic 19.1.b.4).** [@]

- (c) The Umpire should ensure that he knows as soon as possible the reason for a flag being thrown (Mechanic 19.2.a.6).

- (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 (Mechanic 19.2.a.3).

(e) If your flag is for targeting, you must have direct, verbal communication with at least one other official prior to reporting the foul to the Referee (Mechanic 19.1.b.8). [@]

2. **Whistle:** It is never wise to carry your whistle in your mouth. It is too easy to blow an inadvertent whistle[§] (Mechanic 5.5.5).

3. **Concussion:** Pay particular attention to participants (players and officials) who may have suffered a concussion (Mechanic 5.3.6.c). [§]

4. **Game clock at the end of a half:**

- (a) Be particularly aware of the time remaining and the status of the clock during the last few minutes of a half, especially the second half when the game is close.

- (b) By rule (Rule 3-3-8-c), everyone is entitled to know the time remaining every occasion that the clock stops during the last two minutes of each half. The crew must be proactive in sharing this information unless there is a visual game clock. This responsibility starts with the timekeeper and includes the officials nearest the Team A and Team B huddles, and the officials nearest the Head Coach of each team (Mechanic 20.3.1). **[USING RADIO]** Using radios to share clock information is now mandatory (Mechanic 25.3.1).

- (c) Anticipate when the Head Coach of a team might want to call a timeout after a play ends. Be prepared to look towards the Coach if you can do so without taking your eyes off important action in front of you.

5. **Clock when a ball carrier goes out of bounds:** If the ball carrier is pushed backwards or sideways out of bounds, the clock continues to run, because his *forward* progress was stopped inbounds (Rule 4-1-3-a).

Previous points of emphasis are also still relevant:

6. **Before ready on free kicks:** [IN xx1/xx2/xx3 FORMATION (CREW OF 5/6/7/8)] The Umpire should remain between the kicker and the ball until the Referee declares the ball ready for play (Mechanic 10.1.a) and (Mechanic 10.1.b). Other officials should **face the field**[§] until the ready for play, unless something happens that means they are no longer ready.

7. **Signalling timeout:** All officials should always echo all the timeout [S3] signals given by all other officials (Mechanic 5.6.3).

8. **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.

- (c) **Particularly remind players of the play clock after a touchdown or kickoff.** [@]

9. **Umpire and Centre Judge mechanics around ready for play:**
- (a) The Umpire and Centre Judge should be in their position (not standing over the ball) prior to the snap (Mechanics 9.9.c.3.d and 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 B has not yet finished its response to Team A's substitution
 - (b) The Umpire or Centre Judge 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 (Mechanics 9.9.c.3.h and 10.9.c.14).
 - (c) Whichever official spots the ball, there is no reason for anyone to stand over it unless something delays play.
10. **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 or Centre Judge should handle the ball while the clock is running (Mechanics 9.9.c.3.c and § 10.9.c.9). [IN 2xx FORMATION (NO C)] 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).
11. **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.d).
 - (b) For holding to be worth calling, there must be demonstrable restriction. It may be slight, but it should be demonstrable.
12. **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 sideline 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 sideline 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 sideline official.
 - (d) At the two-minute warning, the nearest sideline 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 sideline 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).
13. **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).
14. **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).