

6. GENERAL MECHANICS

6.1 - Duties and responsibilities

General priorities (highest first):

1. Having a thorough knowledge of the duties of your own position.
2. Being aware of the duties of each of the other officials.
3. Being prepared and able to assume any one of the other positions whenever circumstances, such as injury or delayed arrival, require rearrangement of assignments.
4. Knowing the prescribed signals and when and how they should be used.
5. Being able to handle and pass the ball properly underarm up to 10 yards with a flat trajectory and nose first.

Specific duties during the game (in no particular priority):

6. Knowing the down and yardage prior to each snap.
7. Being ready to assist any official who is out of position.
8. Securing a new ball, if appropriate, after all action has ceased.
9. Being alert to happenings away from the ball when play has left your immediate area.
10. Calling time out for any player who is obviously injured.
11. Being prepared, if necessary, to call any serious foul or rule infraction that you observe, regardless of specific assignment.
12. Observing incorrect procedures or rulings by other officials and attempting to prevent and/or correct them whenever possible.
13. Communicating with colleagues, players, coaches, announcers or spectators as appropriate whenever anything unusual or out of the ordinary happens.

14. Communicating with colleagues when in doubt. [®]

6.2 - Tempo and injuries

1. Always try to keep the game flowing smoothly, but do not rush. Move quickly when required, but do not allow your desire for rapid action to interfere with your duties nor with correct determinations.
2. Jogging (slow running) into position almost always looks better than walking.
3. When moving into position for the next down, keep facing the ball. This may enable the Referee to declare the ball ready for play sooner, and thus speed up the game tempo. It will certainly prevent you being surprised by a quick snap and improve your ability to spot extracurricular activity.
4. When players are getting angry or frustrated, you may need to slow down the tempo of the game in order for them to cool off or have an opportunity to speak to you or their teammates (legally). Alternatively, a slight increase in the tempo of the game may be beneficial in forcing them to concentrate more on playing and less on talking. Use your experience to decide which is the appropriate course of action in a given circumstance.
5. Particularly in hot weather, encourage players to drink water during stoppages in play by reminding them of the opportunities. Never call a Referee's timeout solely for the purpose of allowing players or officials[◊] to take in water. Stopping the game at an arbitrary point will always benefit one team over the other in terms of momentum. Instead, use the opportunity of an injury or penalty enforcement to allow players to go towards the sideline for a quick drink.

Injuries:

6. The recognition of injured players is the concern of all game officials.
 - (a) If in doubt about a player who is on the ground, signal timeout [S3] and call the attention of the medical personnel present.
 - (b) If in doubt about a player who is still on their feet, ask them if they are OK. If they do not answer in the affirmative after asking twice, stop the clock as they are probably in no fit state to continue.
 - (c) The responsibility for stopping the clock for an injured player rests with the official who first spots that the player may be injured. This may be the nearest official, but not always, particularly when the player is out of view of the nearest official. Do not overrule an official who is in a better position than you to evaluate the state of a player, unless an egregious error has been made. [§]
 - (d) In the closing seconds of a half, take care not to grant an injury timeout that would enable Team A to run an additional play that it would not otherwise have time to do. A player's condition is unlikely to get worse in a few seconds, unless it is an immediately life-threatening condition. Allowing the period to end will not significantly delay medical attention. [◊]
 - (e) Pay particular attention to participants (players and officials) who may have suffered a concussion. Be aware of the signs of concussion and be on the lookout for them. Anyone who shows signs must leave the field for assessment and may not return to the game unless cleared to do so by a medical professional.
 - (f) Be on the lookout for participants who are bleeding or are blood-soaked. They must also leave the field for attention.
 - (g) The time of an injury is when an official sees it and declares a timeout, not when the injury occurs. It is not necessary to restore time to the game clock if there is a delay in spotting the injury, unless the delay is egregious.

(h) If an injured player is observed before the ball is spotted, even if the injury timeout is only granted *after* the ball is spotted, no timeout should be charged to their team. Crew communication is important to establish when a player was first observed as injured. If in doubt, the injury was observed before the ball was spotted. [®]

7. Good practice in dealing with injured players includes:

- Never hurry the treatment of an injured player.
- Always act in the best interests of the injured player. This usually involves summoning their team's trainer on to the field to tend to them. If a team doesn't have its own trainer, then the medical personnel provided by game management (e.g. a paramedic or stadium doctor) should be summoned.
- Other personnel (e.g. a coach or a fellow player) may want to tend to the player while the medical personnel are being summoned. Take care with this, since unless you know they are trained in first aid, there is a possibility (usually remote) that they might make the situation worse. This might particularly be the case if a broken bone or internal injuries are suspected. Nevertheless, allowing these personnel to reassure the player is normally the most appropriate thing to do.
- Before the game, ask the Head Coach of each team to identify their team's first responder(s) to players' injuries, and whether they are qualified in first aid (or better, are a paramedic, physiotherapist, sports therapist, doctor or nurse).
- In cases where the player is legally a child, everyone has a higher duty of care towards them. Allowing a parent (or other family representative) on to the field to talk to or reassure the player while they are being examined may be a good thing to do. The need for this normally increases with the severity of the injury, the length of the stoppage and the youth of the player.
- The official who recognises an injured player should note their number and ensure that the provisions of Rule 3-3-6 are observed.
- Always follow the advice or instructions of the medical personnel present regarding the removal of players from the field. Don't rush this.
- Do not resume play while a player is being treated out of bounds within the **safety zone**,[®] or deeper if there is a risk to them and/or the people attending them.

8. Look after your own physical and mental well-being and that of your colleagues. Drink plenty of water, especially in hot weather. **During a charged or injury timeout, other officials may need to temporarily cover the dead ball spot to allow the Umpire or Centre Judge to go towards the sideline to get a drink.** [§]

Hurry-up situations (when the game clock is still running):

- A hurry-up situation is usually late in the game or late in the first half, but may also be used tactically at other times.
 - Team A urgently desires to score before the end of the period. In the fourth quarter, this will be because they are behind in the score.
 - Team A will play with urgency: it will probably not huddle and its players will get into position for the next snap much more quickly than normal. The snap count will typically be short.
 - Team B will probably want to slow the game down to consume time, but will be forced to respond to Team A's increased tempo.
 - The pressure will often lead to mistakes, by players of both teams and (occasionally) by the officials.
- In such situations, spotting the ball for the next down must be done very efficiently.
 - The Umpire (or when a play ends in the offensive backfield, [IN 3xx FORMATION (CREW OF 6C/8)] the Centre Judge or [IN 2xx FORMATION (NO C)] the Referee)[®] must go and get the ball wherever it is inbounds, and act as both Retriever and Spotter (MOFO 6.7). Once the ball is spotted, and unless there is a matching substitution situation, leave it and move to your pre-snap position.
 - Other officials should not handle the ball unless it is handed to them.
 - Anticipate that after a play that ends inbounds, the ball carrier may toss the ball to an official (not necessarily the Umpire) or run the ball to the succeeding spot.
- Be in position for the next down as quickly as reasonably possible. Don't over-hustle though, and try to keep out of players' way. At the end of a play:
 - The Coverer (MOFO 6.7)[®] should not come into the field unless player conduct requires it or the spot is very close to the line to gain.
 - Other officials should not pinch in on the dead-ball spot as much as usual.
 - Anticipate requests for a timeout from players or the Head Coach. Know positively how many timeouts each team has remaining.
 - [DOWN JUDGE] Make sure the chain crew knows to be ready for the next play as quickly as possible.
- Anticipate plays that are more likely to score quickly, stop the clock or save time. Be prepared to adjust your response accordingly. Likely plays may include:
 - passing of any sort, particularly longer passes and/or passes to the sideline
 - spiking the ball to stop the clock
 - the ball carrier wanting to get out of bounds and the defense wanting to stop them
 - a rapid field goal attempt (the Back Judge, or in extremis the Referee (see 9.8.d.2), may have to rule on it alone)
 - if Team A do score but are still behind, anticipate an onside kick

13. Anticipate that you might have to call fouls that are more likely to occur because of the speed at which things are happening, including:
 - illegal formation, because not all Team A players line up in their correct position
 - illegal shift/false start,¹ because not all Team A players are set for one second before the snap
 - illegal substitution, particularly by Team B not getting replaced players off the field before the ball is snapped
 - holding or illegal use of hands because players are desperate to limit an opponent's movement (but don't start calling picky fouls)
 - deliberate fouls to stop the clock
14. This is not a time for doing non-essential tasks that would "waste" your time or that of players and coaches who are focused on doing things at pace. For example, it would be inappropriate to spend time warning a player or passing information to the Head Coach. Wait until the clock next stops before notifying players and coaches of the time remaining (Rule 3-3-9-b). Leave your bean bag behind if it would take time to retrieve – you or the ball person can retrieve it later.
15. You may feel a tendency to save time by skipping some normal duties. For example, it is unlikely that either team will make a substitution, so you may feel that counting the players can be skipped. Such shortcuts carry a risk, but are sometimes justified. Don't use a hurry-up situation as an excuse to become lazy and ignore important responsibilities. Don't be caught out when a team (especially Team B) *does* make a surprise substitution, because you must make sure it is done legally. If Team A makes a substitution, Team B must be given their opportunity to respond (Rule 3-5-2-e).
16. Do not stop the game unless there is a clear and serious safety issue that cannot wait until the clock next stops. In particular:
 - (a) Don't stop play just because an official is not perfectly in position. Officials should adapt and officiate as best they can as they move to the best position to cover the play.
 - (b) Don't stop play just because the down box has not yet reached its proper place or shown the correct number. If it isn't at the previous spot by the time the ball is snapped, the **Down Judge** should drop a bean bag to mark the yard line.
 - (c) Don't stop play just because the defense is not in position. It's their responsibility to get into position in time.
 - (d) Don't give too much heed to players who may appear winded because they are moving slowly. Genuinely injured players will typically be on the ground. Other players may be exaggerating in the hope that you will stop the game to their team's advantage.
 - (e) **Do stop the game if a player is obviously injured, but remember that there are rules to address unfair advantage gained by this.** Injuries that only present after the ball is spotted result in a timeout being charged (Rule 3-3-6-a-1). Injuries that are obviously feigned are unsportsmanlike conduct (Rule 9-2-1-a-1-l).[®]
17. Avoid situations where either team could blame you for consuming or conserving time. Move briskly, but don't move so quickly that you risk tripping up and making yourself look foolish. Work efficiently; work smoothly; intervene as little as possible. **If you have to relay the ball, don't let it hit the ground (BOG - ball on ground) (MOFO 6.7.5).** §

6.3 - Boxing in

1. When shifting position during the game, always try to surround the play together with the other officials. A position of "outside looking in" is essential for sideline and end line coverage while the ball is inbounds. Once a player with the ball goes out of bounds, the sideline officials must turn and keep their eyes on them while there is a threat of action against them. Keeping the play "boxed in" should ensure that each play is observed from more than one viewpoint.
2. While the ball is live, don't get too close to the play.
3. **When the ball becomes dead, if you are far away, continue moving towards the dead-ball spot. This creates the impression that you were closer to the play and helps sell any call you make. People's perception of your position is often based on where they last saw you, not where they first saw you.** §
4. Keep out of the way of the players.
5. **If you are moving, your ability to officiate a play accurately decreases. This is because when you move, your head moves, making it very difficult to focus and process visual information.** [◊] When critical action happens in your area, try to be in a position where your eyes are horizontal and stationary. This could mean coming to a stop before a pass or kick arrives in your zone. Just slowing down and steadying yourself, especially your head, will help.
6. Generally, there is no need for **you or**² any official to watch:
 - (a) The ball while it is in the air (other than a glance to ascertain its direction if it may be coming towards you).
 - (b) The ball after a pass is incomplete.
 - (c) The dead-ball spot once it is marked (MOFO 6.6.1).
 - (d) The ball at the succeeding spot until the **snapper/kicker**³ is about to touch it (**Exception:** if the wind is strong enough to move the ball).
 - (e) The spot of a foul after a flag has been thrown to it (or level with it).
 - (f) The goal line after a touchdown or safety has been scored.

- (g) The ball after a field goal attempt is scored or missed.
- (h) The sideline or end line after a player has been ruled out of bounds.
- (i) A player who is out of the play and has no opponent near them.
- (j) Substitutes and coaches in the team area.

In each case, there is a need for you to concentrate on something else more important.

6.4 - Co-operation and communication

1. It is essential that the officials work together as a team and that you communicate efficiently with each other for the purposes of effective game administration. Such communication will often be verbal, but where verbal communication is impossible or inappropriate, approved visual signals should be used. [\[USING O2O/CREW RADIO\]¹](#) Radios should be used where available, but only in accordance with Chapter 25.
2. You must also communicate where appropriate with players, coaches, spectators and announcers. If a ruling is puzzling or controversial, it is better to take a moment to explain it than for everyone to continue in ignorance. Your aim is to give information before someone needs to ask for it.
3. On the sidelines, ask the Head Coach to appoint someone as the "Get-back coach", responsible for keeping their colleagues and players in the coaching box and team area. They can devote more time than you can to keeping people out of your way.
4. All officials should signal the down number before each down. If there is disagreement, toot your whistle before the snap, signal timeout [S3] and confer with your colleagues to establish the correct number. All officials are responsible for ensuring that the down box shows the correct number.
5. It is never wise to carry your whistle in your mouth. It is too easy to blow an inadvertent whistle. [If you use a finger whistle or your whistle is on a lanyard, raising it²](#) to your mouth gives you a fraction of a second extra thinking time in which to decide whether the whistle needs to be blown or not. Even when there is a pre-snap foul, there is not microsecond urgency to get a whistle blown.
6. At the end of a down, if you are the Coverer and you are sure the ball is dead, blow your whistle. It should be blown with authority, not just a peep. Other officials should echo the whistle *only* if it is necessary to end continuing action in their area of coverage. Never be the first official to blow a whistle if the ball is not in your zone of responsibility. Don't toot your whistle unless you have thrown a penalty flag or otherwise need to attract the Referee's attention.
7. If you blow an inadvertent whistle, don't think no one will notice. Continue to blow and make sure the play is killed. Admit your mistake and follow the procedure laid down by rule (Rule 4-1-2-b). [See also the specific sections on inadvertent whistle mechanics \(MOFO 6.15\) and philosophies \(MOFO 3.8.7\).](#) ³
8. Your body language says more than you think – be aware of it. If you are moving hesitantly (e.g. towards the spot where a catch was attempted), it is a sign that you are not sure of the call and need help. Be aware of such body language signals by colleagues and be prepared to assist them where you can. Never point at players or coaches in a disapproving or threatening manner.
9. Don't shout at people – it indicates your loss of control. Never swear at a player, coach or colleague.
10. The following points illustrate good and bad practice when two or more officials disagree on a call. The goal is to get the involved officials to resolve the matter between themselves, but if they cannot the Referee may have to be the final arbiter of the decision.

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Officials who disagree on a call must come together to discuss the matter with each other. Other officials who can offer information or rules knowledge should also be involved. The best place for this conference is at the dead-ball spot or the spot where the contentious matter took place. The conference should be conducted calmly, without raised voices or overt gestures (including pointing). Discussing face-to-face is best but [USING O2O/CREW RADIO] one official should press transmit on their radio so that the rest of the on-field crew and the video judge can hear the conversation. ⁴ Officials not involved in the conference should keep players away, while maintaining coverage of the dead-ball spot and any other relevant spots.
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> (b) Officials should describe what they saw, not just what they are ruling. One official may accept that another had a better view of the play. Make sure that all relevant facts (e.g. whether the ball was live or dead, whether the incident occurred before or after the change of possession) are mentioned.
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> (c) Distinguish between issues of fact (e.g. what happened?), issues of judgement (e.g. did it happen intentionally?) and issues of rule (e.g. what does the rulebook say we do in the given situation?). Note the distinction between saying "I saw X" and "I think I saw X". Try to quantify certainty/uncertainty (see section 5.8).
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> (d) Cut short the conference once all the officials concerned have given their view and opinion. There is no time for repeated remarks (unless clarification is necessary) and encourage everyone to stick to the point.
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> (e) Ideally, the officials concerned will come to their own resolution and notify the Referee.
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> (f) If the officials cannot agree on the call, it is normally best to go with the call made by the official with primary responsibility for making it. Going with the call made by an "experienced" official over that made by an "inexperienced" official should not be a factor.
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> (g) Remember the "when in doubt" principles in the Rules and in section 3.9. ⁵
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> (h) Once a final decision has been made, the Referee should signal and/or announce the outcome decisively. The need for the decision to be clearly notified to everyone becomes greater the longer the conference takes. It also helps to sell the call if all of the officials nod their heads in agreement during or at the end of a discussion.

- (i) If an official does not agree with the final decision, they must not make any statement or gesture that would give that impression.
- 11. All verbal communication between **you and other[®]** officials and with persons subject to the rules should normally be in English. If a translation into another language is necessary, this should normally be given after the English statement. In games where English is the primary language of communication, if a person addresses **you or another[®]** official in a language other than English and the response needs to be shared with others, then it should be translated into English before a response is made. (National federations or officiating organisations may substitute their local language for English for use in domestic games only.)
- 12. The following are examples of situations where **you or another official are[†]** "involved", even if **you[‡]** have not thrown a flag. Communicating **your[‡]** knowledge to the rest of the crew (especially the Referee) may well be crucial to getting the call correct.
 - (a) illegal touching of a pass or kick
 - (b) incorrect clock operation
 - (c) change of possession
 - (d) whether or not the pass or kick crossed the neutral zone
 - (e) where there are multiple flags
 - (f) whether a pass was caught or trapped
 - (g) whether a pass was catchable on a pass interference call
 - (h) whether a pass was forward or backward
- 13. When in doubt about any aspect of what you have seen or heard, communicate with your colleagues to try to confirm your suspicions or to obtain additional information that will aid your judgement. [®]

6.5 - Signals

1. Your signals should be clear, distinct and deliberate at all times.
2. If you are the Coverer, signal a timeout when the rules provide for stopping the clock or when a timeout is charged to a team or to the Referee.
3. Repeat *all* timeout signals given by *any* other officials.
4. The usual timeout signal is [S3]. However in the following circumstances, the Coverer should give the specified signal *instead* of the timeout signal:
 - (a) when a touchdown, field goal or try is scored: [S5];
 - (b) when a safety is scored: [S6];
 - (c) when a touchback is awarded: [S7];
 - (d) when a forward pass is incomplete, or a field goal attempt is wide or short of the goal, or when there is no score on a try: [S10].

These signals are sufficient to instruct the timekeeper or clock operator to stop the clock. Signal [S3] should be given *in addition* if a charged or injury timeout is awarded. However, signal [S3] should be given *alone* if the Coverer threw a flag for a foul by the scoring team.

5. The on-field timekeeper should stop the clock before giving or repeating any timeout signal. [×]
6. **During a running clock session (Rule 3-3-2), all officials should give stop and start the clock signals as normal. The on-field timekeeper should ignore a stop the clock signal unless it is for one of the reasons that does stop the clock during such a session. It does not matter if it takes a few extra seconds to establish that this is the case.** [§]
7. Signals such as timeout or incomplete pass should be repeated two or three times (or held for a few seconds) to ensure that everyone sees them. More repetitions are excessive. Do not bend at the waist when giving incomplete pass signals - **height lends authority.** [§]
8. On scrimmage plays, use the start the clock signal [S2] *only* when the ball becomes dead in bounds within 10 feet of the sideline and the line to gain has not been reached. As the Coverer, make the starting signal two or three times and no more. If the play ends beyond or close to the line to gain, give the timeout signal [S3] *only*.
9. There is no need for the on-field timekeeper to echo the start the clock signal [S2]. If visual confirmation is required they may use signal [Sup12].
10. When giving signals at the end of a play, continue to face the players in your area of responsibility until all threat of further action has passed. If you signal clearly enough (and continue the signal for long enough) your fellow crew members, the occupants of the press box and the spectators will all see the signal whatever direction it is given in.
11. It is only the Referee's signals on penalties and unusual incidents that need to be given in the direction of the press box. Don't make signals *towards* the Referee while you still have players in your area who you need to watch.
12. Unless you are absolutely certain that the Referee knows that the line to gain has been reached, that the play ended out of bounds, that there was a change of possession, or that there was a score, repeat the signal(s) you have given once you have established eye contact with the Referee, but only when there is no threat of further action in your area.
13. Don't get excited when signalling (especially touchdowns). Be tranquil and poised. Don't become emotional. Maintain your equanimity. Get into the habit of making your signals unhurriedly, smoothly and calmly (except on pivotal plays that require a bit more emotion - see section 5.7).

14. If you are the Coverer, you will need to give only one signal that the ball is dead.¹

- This will be using the dead-ball signal [S7] unless the start the clock signal [S2] (see 6.5.8 above), timeout signal [S3], touchdown/field-goal signal [S5], safety signal [S6] or incomplete pass/unsuccessful field-goal signal [S10] is appropriate instead.
- Not giving a signal, or giving the wrong signal, will likely confuse other members of your crew, and possibly players, coaches and spectators as well. How will they know whether: a pass was complete or incomplete? the play ended inbounds or out of bounds? a first down has been achieved or not? the ball was in the end zone or not? a field goal attempt was good or not?

15. Some common game scenarios and what signals need to be given relating to the game and play clocks:

Type of down	How game clock stops	How play clock starts	How game clock starts
Scrimmage down ends with a running game clock	Not applicable (clock keeps running)	Covering official signals S7 to start 40-second play clock	Not applicable (clock keeps running)
Scrimmage down ends with a stopped game clock (e.g. Team A first down or out of bounds before 2:00) and game clock will start on the Ready for Play	Covering official signals S3	40-second play clock starts on covering official's clock signal	Referee gives signal S2 when an official places the ball at the succeeding spot and is in position to officiate [®]
Scrimmage down ends with a stopped game clock (e.g. incomplete pass) and the game clock will start on the snap	Covering official signals S10	40-second play clock starts on covering official's incomplete pass signal	Starts on next snap
Down ends with a touchdown	Covering official signals S5	40-second play clock starts on covering official's touchdown signal	Not applicable (try down is normally untimed)
Free kick	Covering official signals S3	40-second play clock starts on covering official's clock signal	Starts on next snap
Clock stopped for injury/helmet off	Covering official signals S3	Play clock starts on the Referee's signal [S1]: 40 seconds if Team B responsible; 25 seconds otherwise	Referee gives signal S2

16. All scenarios above assume no foul is called. If there is a foul, once administration of the penalty has been completed, the play clock will be set to 25 seconds and the Referee will blow their whistle and give the ready-for-play signal [S1]. If the game clock should start on the ready, the Referee will then give signal S2 to start the game clock.

17. In a running clock session, unless there is a penalty or other game administration situation, the game clock will not stop. After game administration, the play clock will be set to 25 seconds and the Referee will blow their whistle and give the ready-for-play signal [S1] and then give signal S2 to start the game clock.

18. Do not use any signal or action that is prohibited for persons subject to the rules, for example those specifically prohibited in Rule 9-2-1-a. ²

6.6 - Marking spots

- There are only three ways to mark a dead-ball spot. These are:
 - with a ball (placed so its axis is parallel to the sideline);
 - with your foot;
 - with a bean bag.
- Place a ball at the spot if you have one and don't need to relay it, or mark the front tip of the ball with your downfield foot. **The Coverer must never move away from the spot except in the most exceptional of circumstances.** Then use a bean bag as a last resort.
- Only use a ball to mark the *actual* dead-ball spot. Never place a ball on the ground at any other spot level with the dead-ball spot (except at the inbounds spot). Don't place a ball at the inbounds spot if the enforcement of a penalty has not been completed.
- When marking forward progress with your foot do it inconspicuously. The best way is to stand with your feet level, with the instep of your downfield and upfield feet marking the front and back ends of the ball respectively. (In this context downfield means nearest the defensive team and upfield means nearest the offensive team.) If you want to extend your downfield foot slightly this is permissible, but don't draw undue attention to the position: there is nothing worse than two officials obviously indicating *different* spots.

5. In normal play, forward progress usually only needs to be marked to a tolerance of one foot. Since the ball is just less than one foot long, this means there are only three positions that a ball can be in between any pair of yard lines:
 - (a) with the nose (most forward point) of the ball on **back edge of**[®] the forward yard line;
 - (b) with the middle of the ball midway between the two yard lines;
 - (c) with the tail (rearmost point) of the ball on **front edge of**[®] the back yard line.
 Note that in this system the ball is never positioned spanning a line.
6. Officials need only mark forward progress to the nearest one of these points, except:
 - (a) where the line to gain or goal line is concerned, in which case more accuracy is necessary;
 - (b) after a change of possession (start of new series), in which case the dead-ball spot should always be marked with the nose of the ball on the nearest yard line.
7. If you have difficulty judging the dead-ball spot when a ball carrier has begun a feet-first slide (Rule 4-1-3-r), subtract 2 yards from the spot where their body first touches the ground.
8. Officials may direct the spotting of the ball at the hash marks by giving the Spotter appropriate verbal instructions or signals, i.e.: "nose on" [Sup32], "middle" [Sup33] or "tail on" [Sup34].
9. If a series of downs started "middle", then the line to gain will be reached if the ball is at "middle" 10 yards on. Similarly for "nose on" and "tail on".
10. The lateral position of the ball is denoted by the following numbering system:

1	hash on press box side
2	goal post on press box side
3	centre of field
4	goal post opposite press box
5	hash on side opposite press box

When using an elastic band or similar, one way to denote the position is to place the band on the 1st finger for left hash, 2nd finger for left goal post, 2nd & 3rd fingers if the ball is in the centre, 3rd finger for right goal post, and 4th finger for right hash. For finer resolution, other combinations of fingers can be used.

11. When marking a spot, continue to officiate. Don't stare at the ground – the spot won't move!

6.7 - Ball relay

1. After any play, the following roles need to be performed by the officials. In many cases, on a given play, one official will perform more than one role **and, in most normal situations,**[†] it is highly unlikely that all members of the crew will be involved.
 - (a) **Coverer:** an official who is covering the dead-ball spot.
 - (b) **Retriever:** an official who procures a ball from a ball person, player or, occasionally, where it is lying on the ground.
 - (c) **Spotter:** an official who places the ball at the succeeding spot.
 - (d) **Relayer:** an official who acts as intermediary in getting the ball from the Coverer or Retriever to the Spotter.
 - (e) **Clearer:** an official who clears the old ball off the field
2. If you are the Coverer you should not normally handle a ball unless the ball becomes dead at your feet or you can easily procure a ball from a player without moving from your position, in which case you become the Retriever and you should relay it to the Spotter or a Relayer.
3. **By Rule 1-3-2-f, a replacement ball shall be obtained whenever the ball becomes dead outside the 9-yard marks. Aim to achieve this, but do not do so obsessively. If the ball person is slow or a colleague is out of position, and it is quicker to relay the previous ball to the succeeding spot, do so.**[§]
4. The Relayer should also be the Spotter if they can carry the ball to the succeeding spot before anyone else can get there.
5. Never be in a hurry to relay the ball. Accuracy is more important than speed. If you are not so good at throwing the ball accurately, you will need to make up for it by taking a few more steps to get closer to your target. **One of the worst things that can happen is to have the relayed ball on the ground (BOG), due to an inaccurate pass or poor catching. This looks bad and may significantly delay play.**[◊]
6. If you have a ball in your hand, move it into the field *towards* the succeeding spot rather than away from it (e.g. to the dead-ball spot).
 - (a) The exception to this is if there is a flag on the play, in which case the priority is to get the ball to the dead-ball spot.
 - (b) The exception to the exception is if there has been an incomplete pass - the ball still needs to go infield to the Spotter **at the previous spot.**[◊]
7. When a scrimmage play ends between or near the hash marks:
 - (a) The Umpire will **most frequently**[‡] be the Retriever and Spotter.
 - (b) On a long play, the Back Judge may act as the Retriever **unless they are the Coverer.** In either case, if **nobody else is nearer to the succeeding spot, they will also be the Spotter.**[§] Similarly, if there is a loss on the play the Referee or Centre Judge may act as the Coverer, Retriever and Spotter.[§]
 - (c) If a pass is incomplete deep down the middle of the field (**between the hash marks,**[◊] or the play ends in Team B's end zone, the Field Judge or Line Judge should act as Relayer and send their ball person to

retrieve the old ball. The Umpire will take the ball from the Relayer. The Relayer must ensure that *their* ball person is the one who retrieves the old ball.

8. When a scrimmage play ends well outside the hash marks:
 - (a) [IN xx0 FORMATION (CREW OF 4)] The wing official will almost always be the Coverer. The Referee and Umpire share the roles of Retriever and Spotter with whichever is nearer to the ball being the Retriever, and the other going to the inbounds spot to be the Spotter.
 - (b) [IN 2x1 FORMATION (CREW OF 5)]¹ Responsibilities will be similar to a crew of 4 except that on long gains the Back Judge may also be the Retriever or Spotter. The Referee, ^x Umpire and Back Judge need to divide up their roles as follows: whoever is nearest the dead-ball spot is the Retriever; the next nearest is the Relayer or Spotter, and the furthest away may be the Spotter if they can get into position.
 - (c) [IN xx2/2x3 FORMATION (CREW OF 6D/7)] The Coverer will be either the wing official or the deep wing official on that side of the field. The Retriever will normally be the other sideline official on the same side. [IN 2x3 FORMATION (CREW OF 7)]² The Back Judge, plus either the Umpire or Referee (whichever is nearer) will act as Relayer(s). The Umpire or Referee should go to the inbounds spot to be the Spotter.
 - (d) [IN 3xx FORMATION (CREW OF 6C/8)] Responsibilities will be similar to a crew of 5/7 except that the Umpire and Centre Judge will combine to perform the roles of Retriever and Spotter. The Referee should aim to not be involved in ball relay (except when a player hands a ball directly to them). Normally, if the Umpire is the Retriever or Relayer, the Centre Judge should move to the succeeding spot and act as the Spotter. Conversely, if the Centre Judge is the Retriever or Relayer, the Umpire should move to the succeeding spot and act as the Spotter.[†] Efficiency is the key.
9. When the ball becomes dead in the end zone on a free kick, the Coverer will obtain a ball from either the returner or a ball person and either take it or relay it to the touchback spot.
10. In hurry-up situations (when the clock is still running), the Umpire (or Centre Judge, if there is one and especially if there is a loss on the play) *must* go and get the ball wherever it is inbounds, and act as both Retriever and Spotter. Other officials should not handle the ball, and must ensure that they are quickly in position for the next down (MOFO 6.2.10).

6.8 - Out of bounds coverage

1. When handling out-of-bounds plays, it is important that each official assumes a separate responsibility in order that duplication does not result in extra-curricular activity going unobserved.
2. If you are the first official (the Coverer):
 - (a) You should first of all signal timeout [S3] and, for your own safety, move to the out-of-bounds spot only after players have run through that area.
 - (b) You should signal timeout as soon as the ball becomes dead – don't wait until you reach the dead-ball spot. You may give the timeout signal while on the move.
 - (c) Remain on (or near) the sideline at the out-of-bounds spot to watch continuing action in or near the team area. It is essential to observe continuing action. If absolutely necessary, you can drop a bean bag and go further out to prevent/stop any continuing action.
 - (d) Once there is no further risk of fouls occurring, you may obtain a ball from either the ball carrier or a ball person and use it to mark the spot.
3. If you are the second official (the next official to reach the area: [IN xx2/xx3 FORMATION (CREW OF 6D/7/8)] this will be the other official on the same side of the field as the first official; [IN xx1 FORMATION (CREW OF 5/6C)] this will be the Back Judge, Referee or Centre Judge):
 - (a) You should go out of bounds with the ball carrier (going out as far as the ball carrier does) to specifically watch for and prevent fouls on them.
 - (b) If the ball carrier (or another player) goes into the opposition's team area, stay close to them and escort them back on to the field before you even start to think about ball relay.
 - (c) As Retriever, you should normally be the one to retrieve the old ball from the ball carrier or a new ball from the ball person and convey it to the Relayer for relay to the inbounds spot.
 - (d) If necessary you should loop around the Coverer (going further out of bounds in the process) in order to cover a ball carrier who carries on running beyond the Coverer.
4. If you are the third official (this will be [IN xx2 FORMATION (CREW OF 6D)] the Referee; [IN 3xx FORMATION (CREW OF 6C/8)] the Referee, Centre Judge or Back Judge; [IN 2x1/2x3 FORMATION (CREW OF 5/7)] the Referee or Back Judge) you should cover the action in the field of play behind the first two officials and act as Relayer.
5. If you are the fourth official (this will be [IN xx1/xx2 FORMATION (CREW OF 5/6)] the Umpire or Centre Judge; [IN 2x3 FORMATION (CREW OF 7)] the Umpire, Referee or Back Judge; [IN 3x3 FORMATION (CREW OF 8)] the Umpire, Centre Judge, Referee or Back Judge) you should observe continuing action between your position and the sideline and also move towards the sideline to assist as a potential Relayer.
6. [IN xx0 FORMATION (CREW OF 4)] The Referee and Umpire must co-ordinate as necessary to do the jobs of the second and third officials (Retriever and Relayer) described above. In particular, the Umpire must be prepared to move towards the sideline (or even out of bounds if necessary) to be in position to deter or observe continuing action. Either the Referee or the Umpire should act as Spotter, as appropriate.

6.9 - Dealing with fights

1. If by putting yourself between two players you can prevent a fight, then do so, but never do so at risk to your own safety (your number one concern). Never grasp a player's face mask to prevent or break up a fight.
2. If a fight breaks out on the field and you are the nearest official to a team area, you should regard it as your primary duty to keep substitutes and coaches from joining the argument. This will normally be the case if you are the wing or deep wing official on that side of the field, but on occasion you may be another official (e.g. the Referee or Back Judge) if, for example, the fight breaks out in an end zone.
3. If substitutes, coaches or other personnel come on to the field they should be immediately ordered off it. If they persist and cannot be recalled, record or note their numbers (or identities if not substitutes) so that they or their coaches may be cautioned once order has been restored (MOFO 3.5.7).
4. If you are nearest the fight, make a note of the numbers of the players involved, taking care to distinguish participants from those players trying to break up the fight. Those players definitely observed to have participated in the fight must be disqualified once order has been restored.

6.10 - Fumbles

1. Unless there has obviously been no change in team possession, if you cover a fumble recovery that is not advanced, signal to show which team has recovered the ball. If Team B has recovered the ball (or Team A has recovered after a multiple change of possession), signal timeout [S3] to stop the clock, then signal a first down [S8] in the appropriate direction. If Team A has recovered the ball, signal the number of the next down.
2. If no official has seen a player recover a fumble before a "scrum" forms on top of the ball, the ball should be awarded to the player in control of the ball once the scrum is unpiled. If players from both teams have equal control of the ball, the ball should be awarded to the team last in possession (Rule 7-2-2-b). Touching the ball does not necessarily mean that a player is in control of the ball.
3. If it is necessary to "dig it out", and you are the nearest official, dig for the ball. If you are the next official, signal timeout [S3] to stop the clock, and this should be echoed by the rest of the crew. As the digging official, when you determine **it, verbally relay the jersey colour of the player in possession[†]** to the nearest standing official, normally the Referee, who will then signal the proper direction. Only the Referee, if they are not the signalling official, may echo the direction signal. (See also section 21 for bean bag mechanics on fumbles.)
4. A technique to encourage players to get off the pile is to shout out "they've got it", making it clear to players not in possession that they are too late to make a difference to possession.
5. Ensure that players from neither team contravene Rule 9-2-1-a-1-k by pushing or pulling opponents off the pile after the ball is dead.
6. Don't rush any decision. Before signalling a direction, take a moment to check that you have the direction right. That is why calling out a colour is a better practice **than giving a team name or saying "offense" or "defense".** [§]

6.11 - Written records

1. All officials should record, in writing:
 - result of the toss
 - scores
 - charged team timeouts
 - sideline warnings
 - all fouls that you call
 - all disqualified players
 - all players penalised for unsportsmanlike conduct
2. [IN xx0/xx1 FORMATION (CREW OF 4/5/6C)] [LINE JUDGE]
 [IN xx2/xx3 FORMATION (CREW OF 6D/7/8)] [FIELD JUDGE] must record all fouls **called by all members of the crew.**
3. **The record of a foul should include: quarter, time, team, player, foul code, calling official(s) and whether the penalty is accepted, declined, offset, cancelled or waved off.** [®]
4. At the end of the first and third periods, and before moving to the other end of the field, all officials should record the yard line of the ball and the down and distance. The Referee, Umpire and [IN 2xx FORMATION (NO C)] Line Judge or [IN 3xx FORMATION (CREW OF 6C/8)] Centre Judge should in addition record the lateral position of the ball. The **Down Judge** and Side Judge should also record the position of the chain clip.

6.12 - Timing responsibilities

1. Depending on the number of officials on the crew, the following officials are responsible for timings:

Responsibility	3	4	5	6C	6D	7	8
Game clock (on-field timekeeper)	L	L	L	L	L/F	L/F	L/F
Play clock	R	R	B	B	S	B	B
Duration of charged timeouts	R	U	U	U	U	U	U
Duration of interval between quarters	R	U	U	U	U	U	U
Duration of interval after score	R	U	U	U	U	U	U
Duration of interval between halves	L	L	L	L	L/F	L/F	L/F
Duration of game	L	L	L	L	L/F	L/F	L/F

2. Game clock operating options:
 - (a) [IN xx2/xx3 FORMATION (CREW OF 6D/7/8)] The crew shall decide whether the Line Judge or the Field Judge will be responsible for the game clock and associated duties. **As a rule of thumb, the Field Judge could be responsible if the clock is being operated off the field and the Line Judge if it is being operated on. Responsibility may also depend on the relative experience of the officials.** [◊]
 - (b) If the control device for a stadium clock is portable and can be used on/near the field of play, it is permitted for the on-field timekeeper to supervise an assistant to operate it from near the sideline. If the control device is watch-like, it is also permissible for the on-field timekeeper to operate the stadium clock as the official game clock. **In the latter case, there may be an increased risk of time not being kept accurately. This can be mitigated by having a second official keep backup time (e.g. if the Line Judge is the timekeeper, the Field Judge also keeps a clock as backup).** [§]
 - (c) [USING O2O/CREW RADIO] It is permitted for an assistant off the field to keep the game clock (Rule 3-2-4-a). This is an option that may improve accuracy of clock operation, but should only be taken when an additional official (experienced in timekeeping) is available and there is a vantage point where they have good visibility of the field. In the absence of a stadium clock, the assistant shall relay the time remaining to the crew by radio when required by rule, upon request, or at periodic intervals.
 - (d) The Video Judge must not be used as the clock operator/assistant due to their need to concentrate on other duties.
 - (e) If there is a visible game clock, it must be regarded as the official game clock. If not, it must be switched off. Don't split hairs about time on the clock. If the stadium clock says that a period has ended, don't overrule it unless you have good and strong grounds (MOFO 20.1).
3. The duration of the game is defined to be the time from the opening kickoff to the final whistle, including the half-time interval and time for any stoppages or suspensions.
4. [ON-FIELD TIMEKEEPER] Your primary responsibility is to the accuracy of the time by rule, and you may ignore incorrect clock stop/start signals given by the Referee or other officials if you have positive knowledge of the correct situation (**Exception:** the Referee has the final word on unfair clock tactics situations). [§]

6.13 - Counting responsibilities

1. Depending on the number of officials on the crew, the following officials are jointly responsible for counting players:

Responsibility	3	4	5	6C	6D	7	8
Team A on scrimmage downs	R,L	R,U	R,U	R,U/C	R,U	R,U	R,U/C
Team B on scrimmage downs	D,L	L,D	B,L,D	B,L,D	S,F	B,F,S	B,F,S
Team A on free kick downs	L,D	U,D	U,B,D	U,B,C	U,F,S	U,F,S,B	U,F,S,B,C
Team B on free kick downs	R,D	R,L	R,L	L,R,D	L,R,D	L,R,D	L,R,D
2. It is especially important to count players on field goals, punts, tries and after every change of possession.
3. Having **too many**[‡] players on the field and not noticing it is one of the worst errors a crew can make.
4. The officials who have responsibility for counting the players on each team also have the responsibility for enforcing the restriction on the number of players allowed in the huddle.

6.14 - Alternate officials

1. Where alternate officials are assigned to a game, they may be used EITHER to perform specific mechanics OR to simply assist on the sidelines.
2. Pre-game duties of the alternate officials:
 - (a) Attend the pre-game conference.
 - (b) Pre-game on the field, assist with checking the chains, checking the balls, briefing the chain crew, briefing the ball boys, briefing the stadium clock operator(s), checking player equipment and any other task requested by the game crew.
 - (c) Introduce yourself to the Head Coach on the side of the field you will operate during the game. If there is no alternate official on the other side of the field, ask a sideline official on the other side to inform their Head Coach that there is an alternate official and your location.
3. Where specific mechanics are needed:
 - (a) As a ninth official, stand level with the line of scrimmage on the press box side of the field and discreetly assist the crew with rulings concerning balls and ball carriers crossing the neutral zone.
 - (b) As a tenth official, stay with the chain crew and note the down number, distance and yard line before each play.
4. Where no specific mechanic coverages are required, or in addition to the above, stand near the team area (at least one alternate official on each side of the field) and:
 - (a) assist the game officials in communicating with the Head Coach (and vice versa)
 - (b) observe any potential transgressions of the restricted area between the sideline and the coaching box, and work with the "Get-back coach" to encourage substitutes, coaches and others to remain in their proper areas
 - (c) observe potential transgressions of the mandatory and illegal equipment rules, and warn coaches where breaches may occur

- (d) observe the conduct of all persons in the team area and inform the game officials of any abuse or taunting emanating from there
- (e) observe whether injured players leave the game and remain out of the game for at least one play
- (f) confirm whether requests for timeouts come from the Head Coach
- (g) liaise with television personnel where necessary
- (h) be aware of the time to kickoff, and the progress of the half time interval
- (i) observe play and assist the game officials in correcting any egregious errors, in particular:
 - (i) penalty enforcement spots and distances
 - (ii) timing errors
 - (iii) number of timeouts left for each team
- (j) carry spare equipment (e.g. whistles, pens/pencils, flags, bean bags, **radios**)[◊] in case a member of the game crew loses theirs
- (k) **look out for your own safety at all times**[‡]

5. **As an alternate official, wear full uniform, but cover your shirt with a non-strip jacket or tabard to distinguish you[‡] from the members of the main crew.**

6. The officials should decide in the pre-game conference which positions the alternates will slot into in the event that one, two or more of the crew is incapacitated. If the Referee is incapacitated, it is best that another member of the crew moves to Referee and the alternate replaces that official, unless the alternate official is an experienced Referee at the level of the game.

6.15 - Inadvertent whistles

1. If you do blow an inadvertent whistle, make sure that play stops. Blow your whistle repeatedly until all action ceases. Don't try to hide or cover-up the inadvertent whistle - we all make occasional mistakes and learn from them.
2. If you clearly hear a whistle blown on the field when the ball is or should be still alive, blow your own whistle to stop any further play. If in doubt, allow the play to continue. Don't respond to whistles from spectator areas or from nearby fields.
3. If you suspect that an inadvertent whistle was blown on the previous play, [USING O2O/CREW RADIO] ask who blew the whistle. Ascertain the facts of what actually happened. Decide whether inadvertent whistle provisions need to be applied. If so, apply inadvertent whistle provisions (Rule 4-1-2-b) and the philosophy laid down in (MOFO 3.8.7). If not, continue the game. A referee's timeout will probably need to be taken while this is all determined.
4. **[REFEREE][®]**
 - (a) If there has been an inadvertent whistle, give the inadvertent whistle signal [S12] and announce, "There was an inadvertent whistle during the play".
 - (b) If the down is to be repeated, announce, "By rule, the down will be repeated".
 - (c) If the ball has been awarded in continuing action, announce, "The ball has been awarded to [name of team]" and what down it is.
 - (d) If the team in possession chooses to take the ball at the dead-ball spot, announce, "[Name of team] has chosen to take the ball at the dead-ball spot".
 - (e) If a penalty is accepted, announce, "By rule, the penalty will be enforced as if there was no inadvertent whistle". If a violation privilege is chosen, announce, "[Name of team] has chosen to take the ball [at the spot of illegal touching]", if appropriate.
 - (f) Continuing action recoveries do not normally require an announcement that there has been an inadvertent whistle, unless it was particularly obvious.