



**International  
American Football  
Officials Association**

Integrity - Professionalism - Development

# **MANUAL OF FOOTBALL OFFICIATING**

Jim Briggs

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Based on the BAFRA Manual of Football Officiating

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## Foreword

It's been nearly twelve years since I was introduced to the "international" game of American football, but it seems like yesterday when I accepted the invitation to officiate the IFAF World Championship in Japan. It was an opportunity to get a jump on the upcoming fall NCAA season. Not knowing what to expect, I assumed the competition and the officiating would be equal to NCAA Division II or III. What a pleasant surprise I and the other American officials were in for. The caliber of football was well beyond what we expected and the best part was what we came away with in our relationships with the fifteen other international officials.

"Our game" was now their game. We can become pretty complacent thinking that the Americans were the only ones who knew anything about football. I remember one of our outstanding mentors, Jim Keogh, telling us that we're like a piece of fruit. "When we're green we grow and when we're ripe we rot." That was Jim's message and emphasis to every official he ever came in contact with. The two weeks together with the international officials was the opportunity of a lifetime to realize we all had room to "blossom and grow".

Through that first international experience I quickly realized that as good as we think we know the rules of the game, the Japanese officials to a man knew the rulebook better than most of us. As a whole they were like former Big Ten referee Tom Quinn who could quote you chapter and verse of every rule and "AR" in the book. The Japanese officials are truly students of the game. That motivated me to spend even more time in rules study. I needed to be better than I thought I was.

Over the next few years I had the opportunity to work games and do clinics around the world. That's where my next motivation came and it involved our officiating mechanics. Again, thinking like we do, I thought I/we had a pretty good handle on mechanics and the rationale for why we do certain things on the field. Let me tell you, just like the wakeup call on rules with the Japanese officials, I got another dose of "you're not as smart as you thought you were" from British and other European IFAF officials. No one has put together a more comprehensive, black and white mechanics manual than the IAFOA manual. The Manual of Football Officiating covers everything from three to eight person crews in an in-depth manner that is more comprehensive than any NFHS or NCAA manual. This manual is an encyclopedia of the "best practices" of football officiating. The pages are devoted to individual positions, a pre-game, general principles and axioms, measurements, working with your chain crew, etc. It's as comprehensive an officiating resource as any you will read. Combine this manual with your NFHS and NCAA/CFO manuals and you and your crew will be on the road to raising your game.

Kudos to Professor Jim Briggs, the main author and chair of the IAFOA Mechanics Committee, for his leadership and work on this officiating mechanics manual. Jim exemplifies the body of officials who officiate internationally. He and his committee members have spent countless hours discussing, debating and editing the mechanics. So the next time you think of American Football as "our game", remember "our" now means the world. The international players and coaches are pretty darn good and the officiating is even better.

So whether you're a BAFRA official, an IFAF official, or an official in the United States, Japan or Brazil, the "Manual of Football Officiating" is a must read book for you. The decision is yours... "If you're green you grow. If you're ripe you rot". Which official are you? If you know everything about the game then this manual's not for you. But remember, knowledge is power and this manual will give you power through its insights and strategies for improving your individual and crew performance. The officials in Japan made me a better rules official. BAFRA and IFAF continue to motivate me to better know and understand the mechanics of officiating football.

Bill LeMonnier, Big-10 (retired), IFAF Coordinator of Officials, ESPN Rules Analyst

### Editor's foreword

The Manual of Football Officiating (MOFO) embodies the best practice of football officiating as exemplified by top officials in the USA. The members of the International Advisory Group continue to monitor good practice in the National Football League, major college conferences and high school football, and adapt it to the particular needs of our football.

Originally developed for BAFRA members in Great Britain, this book has now been adopted as the official mechanics manual for international competitions, and is used for domestic football in many other countries, including [Australia](#), [Austria](#), [Belgium](#), [Chile](#), [Czechia](#), [Denmark](#), [Finland](#), [France](#), [Hungary](#), [Ireland](#), [Italy](#), [Kuwait](#), [Netherlands](#), [New Zealand](#), [Norway](#), [Poland](#), [Serbia](#), [Sweden](#) and [Turkey](#) (some in translation).

A previous edition of this book published by *Referee* magazine in the USA sold 1000 copies. We are proud of the book's success and would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who have contributed to it over the years.

In this manual:

- The verb "to observe" is used in relation to a specific foul to mean that the official(s) should watch players who are at risk of committing that foul, and flag it (or take appropriate preventative action) if it happens (or comes close to happening).
- The verb "to record" implies a *written* record while the verb "to note" implies a *mental* note.
- The verb "to transmit" implies [\[USING CREW RADIO\]](#) to communicate with fellow officials.
- The verb "to announce" implies communicating with players, coaches, stadium announcers, spectators and/or broadcast viewers. Often this will be [\[USING PUBLIC RADIO\]](#), but not always.
- Unless otherwise specified by context, the term "wing official" means either or both the Linesman and Line Judge, the term "deep wing official" means either or both the Field Judge and the Side Judge, and the term "sideline official" means either the Linesman, Line Judge, Field Judge or Side Judge, or another official who is located on the sideline at the time.
- The following abbreviations are used to denote officiating positions:
 

B	Back Judge
C	Centre Judge
F	Field Judge
H	(Head) Linesman
L	Line Judge
R	Referee
S	Side Judge
U	Umpire
V	Video Judge
- The section entitled "Returns" in each of the positional chapters refers to fumble, backward pass, interception, punt, field goal and other returns *except* for kickoff returns, which are covered in their relevant sections.
- Rules references are to the [2023](#) edition of the *IFAF Football Rules and Interpretations* and national rulebooks derived from it, but are normally applicable to NCAA rules also. ✕

We always encourage officials or local associations to write to us with comments on this manual and, in particular, suggestions of improvements to the mechanics which could be incorporated in future editions. Please contact me at the following email address.

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