

9. REFEREE AND CENTRE JUDGE

9.1 – Free kicks

9.1.a – Priorities

Prior to the kick:

1. [REFEREE] Determining whether, based on the state of the game, an onside kick is likely. (An onside kick is likely if the team kicking off is behind in the score late in the game.) If it is, *instructing the crew to switch to onside-kick positions by [USING CREW RADIO] or discreetly[§]* pointing first to the official who needs to shift their position and then to the spot they should move to.
2. [REFEREE] Counting Team B players and signalling the count [one of Sup3, Sup4 or Sup24] to colleagues. Noting count signals from colleagues. Recounting if your count differs from that of colleagues.
3. [CENTRE JUDGE] Counting Team A players and signalling the count [one of Sup3, Sup4 or Sup24] to colleagues. Noting count signals from colleagues. Recounting if your count differs from that of colleagues.
4. Reminding the players to count their number if the team you are responsible for counting does not have precisely 11 players on the field.
5. Checking readiness for play:
 - (a) Checking side and end zone areas to ensure that all non-players are out of the restricted areas, that non-participants are off the field of play, and that all team personnel are within the team area.
 - (b) Ensuring that the chain crew (and the alternate down box and line-to-gain marker operators, where provided) have moved themselves and their equipment well out of the way and that the equipment has been placed on the ground outside the team areas and behind the limit lines *at the receiving team's end of the field.* [§] Checking that the ball persons are in position.
 - (c) [CENTRE JUDGE] Ensuring that all Team A players are within the nine-yard marks prior to the kick (Rule 6-1-2-c-5) and that nobody other than the kicker is more than five yards behind the ball.
 - (d) [REFEREE] Checking that the kicking team has at least 4 players on either side of the kicker.
 - (e) [REFEREE] [IN F4 FORMATION (CREW OF 4)] Monitoring the 25-second clock and penalising the kicking team if it runs out.
 - (f) *[REFEREE] Checking that all officials are ready and facing the field of play.* [§]

During the kick play:

6. Observing whether a free kick goes out of bounds nearest to you without being touched by the receiving team. Ruling whether a Team B player near the sideline touches the ball while out of bounds.
7. Watching players for a fair catch signal, and being prepared to rule on any interference with the opportunity to catch the kick.
8. Giving the start the clock signal [S2] only if the ball is first legally touched in the field of play in your area of responsibility.
9. [REFEREE] Ruling whether the ball becomes dead in the end zone or not.
10. [REFEREE] [IN F5 FORMATION (CREW OF 5)] Marking the forward progress or out of bounds spot if the ball becomes dead on your side of the field. This responsibility extends up to Team A's 2-yard line.
11. Marking the spot with a bean bag of any backward pass, handing or fumble in your area.
12. Observing *fouls/violations[§]* by all players generally in your area, but particularly:
 - (a) illegal blocks in the back and holding fouls at the point of attack
 - (b) illegal blocks below the waist[×]
 - (c) contacting an opponent with the crown of the helmet or targeting a defenseless opponent above the shoulders

- (d) safety-related fouls such as face masking, tripping, chop blocks, illegal wedges or illegal blind-side blocks
- (e) late hits by any player after the ball is dead
- (f) any player of the kicking team who enters the field of play after the kick or who voluntarily goes out of bounds during the kick [and returns inbounds](#)[§]

9.1.b – Initial positioning

Normal kicks:

1. [REFEREE]
 - (a) [IN F6-8 FORMATION (CREW OF 6/7/8)] Be in position A (see 26.1) on Team B's goal line near the centre of the field, staying clear of any players in the vicinity. If you expect the kick to go deep into the end zone, adopt a deeper initial position.
 - (b) [IN F4-5 FORMATION (CREW OF 4/5)] Be in position C (see 26.1) on Team B's goal line outside the sideline opposite the press box side of the field. [Stand where you can see in a straight line over the pylon towards where the kick will come from.](#)[†]
2. [CENTRE JUDGE]
 - (a) [IN F8 FORMATION (CREW OF 8)] Be in position G (see 26.1) on Team A's restraining line outside the sideline opposite the press box side of the field.
 - (b) [IN F6 FORMATION (CREW OF 6)] Be in position E (see 26.1) outside the sideline opposite the press box on Team B's restraining line.

Onside-kicks:

3. [REFEREE]
 - (a) [IN F4-5 FORMATION (CREW OF 4/5)] Move to position A (see 26.1) near the centre of the field on Team B's goal line or deeper than the deepest returner.
 - (b) [IN F6/F8 FORMATION (CREW OF 6/8)] Remain in the normal position.
 - (c) [IN F7 FORMATION (CREW OF 7)] Move to position C (see 26.1) on Team B's goal line outside the sideline opposite the press box side of the field.
4. [CENTRE JUDGE]
 - (a) [IN F8 FORMATION (CREW OF 8)] Remain in the normal position.
 - (b) [IN F6 FORMATION (CREW OF 6)] Move to position G (see 26.1) outside the sideline opposite the press box on Team A's restraining line.

Free kicks after a penalty or safety:

5. When a free kick is taken following a penalty or a safety, the same relative positions should be taken, moving up or down the field as appropriate.

9.1.c – Response to what happens (movement and signals)

Prior to the kick:

1. [REFEREE]
 - (a) Remind colleagues on Team B's goal line to get into position and get ready if they have not already done so.
 - (b) When all players are in position and ready for play, check that all officials on Team B's goal line are ready and that the Umpire has their arm in the air.
 - (c) Give the ready for play signal [S1] and sound your whistle for the start of play.
2. If anything happens that should prevent the kick taking place (e.g. a [non-player](#)[°] enters or approaches the field of play), toot your whistle, give the timeout signal [S3] and deal with the problem.

During any kick play:

3. If you see any player of the kicking team voluntarily go out of bounds during the kick, drop your bean bag or hat to mark their exit, and your flag if they return.
4. If the clock should start when the ball is first legally touched in the field of play, give the start the clock signal [S2] if you are the nearest official or the one with the best view.

During a kick play that goes deep:

5. After the ball is kicked, observe the players in your area of responsibility (see 26.1). After checking its initial trajectory, do not watch the flight of the ball.
6. [REFEREE]
 - (a) [IN F4-5 FORMATION (CREW OF 4/5)] If the kick threatens to go into the end zone, stay on the goal line (out of the way of all players) to rule on a touchback. If the ball threatens the pylon, be there to be able to rule on whether the ball goes out of bounds in the field of play or the end zone.
 - (b) If the [§]live ball and at least one player go deep into the end zone, move to cover the end line.
 - (c) If a touchback occurs:
 - (i) Sound your whistle loudly to prevent further action.
 - (ii) Move infield ahead of any receiver who has the ball. ^λUntil you get in front of them, continue to watch them in case they are fouled.
 - (iii) Give the touchback signal [S7].
 - (d) On a deep kickoff, follow the ball carrier and keep them bracketed between you and the upfield officials.
7. [CENTRE JUDGE]
 - (a) [IN F6 FORMATION (CREW OF 6)] Move downfield along the sideline while the kick is in the air. During the return, stay ahead of the ball carrier, keeping them bracketed between you and the downfield official. On a long run, be at Team A's goal line before the ball carrier. [†]Mark the dead-ball spot if you are the nearest official when the ball carrier is tackled or is out of bounds.
 - (b) [IN F8 FORMATION (CREW OF 8)] Angle slowly infield as you move down the field. Observe action ahead of the ball carrier. Keep all players in front of you and maintain a safe cushion between you and the return, while not being too far away to get your flag to the spot of a foul you observe. On a long run, stay ahead of the players and get to the goal line ahead of the ball carrier. You have responsibility for the end line should that be threatened (e.g. after a fumble near Team A's goal line). [°]When you are sharing responsibility for a line (or pair of lines) with other officials, adjust so that you get a complementary view of the play.
8. [IF ON A SIDELINE] If the ball goes out of bounds in your area go to and hold the spot, dropping your flag if appropriate. [×]

During a kick play where the kick is short:

9. [REFEREE] Stay deep so that you get a long view of the action. You may be the only official who observes:
 - (a) that Team A did not have at least 4 players on each side of the kicker at the kick
 - (b) a fair catch signal
 - (c) kick-catch interference
 - (d) unnecessary roughness or a late hit
10. [CENTRE JUDGE]
 - (a) Maintain a position where you can see the ball and the blocks by Team A players.
 - (b) [IF ON TEAM A'S RESTRAINING LINE] Particularly watch the blocks made by Team A players before they are eligible to touch the ball (Rule 6-1-12).
 - (c) [IF ON TEAM B'S RESTRAINING LINE] Know where and by whom the ball was first touched. Mark any spot of illegal touching with your bean bag (Rule 6-1-3).
 - (d) If you are the nearest official when the ball becomes dead, signal timeout [S3] and mark the dead-ball spot.

9.1.d – Advanced techniques

1. [REFEREE] [×]You may adjust your ^λposition according to such factors as the free kick spot, [§]the wind and the known strength of the kicker's foot. However, it is important to be on the goal line (and particularly, at the pylon) before the ball gets there in crucial situations.
2. [CENTRE JUDGE]
 - (a) [IN F6 FORMATION (CREW OF 6)] Pay particular attention to the blocks made by the two players from Team B's front line who were nearest you at the kick.

- (b) [IN F8 FORMATION (CREW OF 8)] Pay particular attention to the blocks made by the middle player(s) from Team B's front line.
- (c) If an expected outside kick is instead kicked deep, move into the field of play. You, the Umpire and the other official on Team A's restraining line each take responsibility for one third of the middle of the field (Figures 26.1.G and 26.1.J). Leave[§] sideline responsibility in your area to the Side Judge or Linesman.

9.2 – Basic scrimmage plays

9.2.a – Priorities

1. Knowing the down and distance, and signalling the down to your colleagues. Noting the down signals given by colleagues. Checking that the down box displays the correct number. Not allowing play to start if there is a dispute about the down number.
2. Counting Team A players and signalling the count [one of Sup3, Sup4 or Sup24] to your colleagues. Noting count signals from colleagues. Recounting if your count differs from that of colleagues.
3. Observing false starts in general and, in particular, by backs and the quarterback.
4. [REFEREE] Warning Team A verbally ("10 seconds" or "hurry") when there are 10 seconds left on the play clock, and [IN xx0 FORMATION (CREW OF 4)] penalising them if the play clock runs out.
5. Observing illegal shifts (Team A never set or no 1-second pause after simultaneous movement by more than one Team A player).
6. Observing the legality of the snap.
7. If there is a pre-snap foul, stopping all action by tooting on your whistle and giving the timeout signal [S3].
8. Anticipating whether the play is a run or a pass by reading the initial action of the interior linemen. If they move backwards it is likely that a pass play will develop. If they charge forwards or pull, it is likely that a running play will develop.
9. Being aware of where the line to gain is in relation to the line of scrimmage so that you don't have to look at the chain to know if the dead-ball spot is close to the line to gain. ×
10. Being aware of the boundaries of the tackle box. §
11. Observing substitution infractions by Team A, For example:
 - (a) replaced players not leaving the huddle within 3 seconds of an incoming substitute entering it
 - (b) breaking the huddle with more than 11 players
 - (c) keeping more than 11 players in the huddle/formation for more than three seconds
 - (d) substitutes coming on to the field, communicating, and then leaving the field
12. Noting any ineligible receivers in the backfield between the tackles, because of the potential for illegal touching and ineligible receiver downfield fouls.
13. Observing the legality of the formation, in particular the requirement for 5 players numbered 50-79.

9.2.b – Initial positioning

1. Be where you can see the ball at the snap.
2. Normal scrimmage down position is 5-7 yards behind the deepest offensive back (or 13-15 yards behind the line of scrimmage), normally at least as wide as the tackle.

Side of the formation:

3. [REFEREE] Be on the throwing arm side of the quarterback so that you are more likely to be able to see their arm when they start their passing motion.
4. [CENTRE JUDGE] Be on the side of the quarterback opposite to the Referee.
5. However if there is a surprise change of quarterback (e.g. in a wildcat formation), the Referee and the Centre Judge should remain in their existing positions, normally until the end of the current possession series.

9.2.c – Response to what happens (movement and signals)

1. If Team A players adjust their position, ensure you can still see the ball at the snap.
2. Keep out of the way of players shifting or in motion.

9.2.d – Advanced techniques**Reasons for varying (or not) your initial position:**

1. Generally, the higher the standard of play and the faster the players, the deeper and wider you need to stand. (Compare with the position adopted by NFL referees.)
2. Be deeper and wider if your mobility is hindered either by your condition or ground conditions (e.g. mud or uneven surface).
3. There is no need to coordinate your position to the position of the Umpire.

Signalling the player count:

4. The latest time to make the player count signal is when the offensive team breaks its huddle (but it can and should be done earlier if possible). [IN 3xx FORMATION (CREW OF 6C/8)] [CENTRE JUDGE] You do not need to count and signal if you don't have time to do so because you have spotted the ball.

9.3 – Running plays**9.3.a – Priorities**

1. Observing the ball carrier and action around them until the ball crosses the neutral zone.
2. Observing any fumble where you are the nearest official or have the best view, and marking the spot with a bean bag.
3. Being prepared to help with, or make, a ruling on whether a pass is backward or forward, and signalling a backward pass [Sup5] immediately if the pass is clearly backward. Normally leave the direction of a quick pass to the wing officials. Noting any backward pass signal from the wing officials.
4. [IN xx0/xx1 FORMATION (CREW OF 4/5/6C)] Marking the dead-ball spot (with the possible assistance of the wing officials) if the quarterback is tackled or goes out of bounds behind the neutral zone.
5. Observing fouls by all players generally in your area, but particularly:
 - (a) illegal block in the back and holding fouls around and slightly in front of the point of attack, especially those made by a back, or the tackle or guard on the same side of the formation as you
 - (b) safety-related fouls such as face masking, tripping, [illegal blocks below the waist](#),[®] chop blocks or illegal blind-side blocks
 - (c) late hits by any player after the ball is dead
 - (d) unnecessary roughness against the quarterback after they have handed off the ball

9.3.b – Response to what happens (movement and signals)

1. If the action comes towards you, backpedal to keep clear, but keep the players in view at all times. Don't turn your back on the play.
2. If the play goes up the middle, follow safely behind while observing players making lead blocks and those behind the play who may be in danger.
3. If the play goes to one side or the other, move laterally to be able to observe critical blocks for legality. [IN 3xx FORMATION (CREW OF 6C/8)] If the play comes to your side, watch lead blocks. If the play goes to the other side, watch action behind and inside the play.
4. Normally, at the end of the play, close in on the action to deter dead-ball fouls. This is particularly the case on short runs into a side zone or out of bounds where you may be the second nearest official. However, on long runs, hang back so as to observe players who have been left behind by the play for unnecessary roughness.

9.3.c – Advanced techniques

1. Don't blow your whistle when the ball carrier's back is toward you or you are obscured by other players (or officials) – they may have fumbled the ball without you seeing it. See leather! Be certain that the ball is dead.
2. If a pile-up of players forms, give the timeout signal [S3], converge on the pile, determine who has possession (Mechanic 5.11) and encourage players to unpile safely.
3. If you're not the nearest official to the dead-ball spot, observe for late hits and other illegal acts. It is particularly your responsibility to observe action close to the wing officials as they are concentrating on the forward progress spot.

Particular types of running play:

4. Quick handoffs that result in short yardage gains will be the responsibility of the Umpire or wing officials while you concentrate on action behind the ball.
5. On plays into the line, if the ball carrier is driven back after their forward progress is stopped, retrieve the ball from the ball carrier and relay it to the Spotter.
6. On pitchout option plays:
 - (a) If the quarterback keeps the ball, there is no need for you to cover them beyond the neutral zone. When they turn up field, switch to observing threats of fouls against the trailing back.
 - (b) If the quarterback pitches the ball, continue to observe them while there is a threat that they may be fouled.

9.4 – Pass plays

9.4.a – Priorities

1. Ruling whether the passer has passed or fumbled the ball. If it is a fumble, marking the spot with a bean bag. [IN 3xx FORMATION (CREW OF 6C/8)] Taking your time to ensure that you and your colleague do not make contradictory calls.
2. Ruling (with help on a quick pass from the wing officials) whether a pass is backward or forward, and signalling a backward pass [Sup5] immediately if the pass is clearly backward. Noting any backward pass signal from the wing officials. [IN 3xx FORMATION (CREW OF 6C/8)] Taking your time to ensure that you and your colleague do not make contradictory calls.
3. Observing fouls by all players generally in your area, but particularly:
 - (a) intentional grounding or any other illegal pass by the passer
 - (b) roughing the passer
 - (c) illegal block in the back and holding fouls by linemen and backs protecting the passer, especially the tackle or guard on the same side of the formation as you
 - (d) safety-related fouls such as face masking, tripping, illegal blocks below the waist,[®] chop blocks or illegal blind-side blocks
 - (e) late hits by any player after the ball is dead

9.4.b – Response to what happens (movement and signals)

1. When a potential passer drops back, backpedal to remain wider and deeper than them. [REFEREE] [IN 2xx FORMATION (NO C)] If they roll out to either side, go the same way, staying wherever possible on their throwing arm side. Remain behind the line of scrimmage to observe the legality of the throw, the pass protection blocking and any action against the passer, particularly after they have thrown the ball and until there is no threat of a foul.
2. [REFEREE] Verbally alert defenders when the passer has released the ball (e.g. "ball's gone").
3. Maintain a position to observe offensive and defensive action behind the line after the ball has gone downfield.
4. On a sack or tackle behind the line of scrimmage, sound your whistle to stop play. Keep watching the ball carrier until any threat of a continuing action foul against them has passed. [IN xx0/xx1 FORMATION (CREW OF 4/5/6C)] Get to a position level with the ball carrier to mark forward progress. Use your bean bag to mark the spot if you have to go with the ball carrier as they are driven back.

9.4.c – Advanced techniques

1. If you believe the passer intentionally grounded the pass, move to the spot of the pass and consult with other officials about the position of eligible receivers and/or whether the pass crossed the neutral zone in flight. It is permissible to throw your flag to the spot of the pass if you cannot immediately get to it. An official may inform you that an eligible receiver was in the area of the pass, or that the pass (from outside the tackle box) crossed the neutral zone. It is appropriate to wave a flag off if this happens, but ensure that players and Head Coaches (and spectators, if possible) are informed of the reason.
2. If you observe the pass being tipped, give the ball touched signal [S11]. The signal should normally be used on passes tipped in the offensive backfield, but inconspicuous (to the spectators) touching downfield could be signified in this way too. It is not necessary to give it when the pass is obviously touched (e.g. when a defensive lineman bats it into the ground).
3. *When the potential passer is about to be hit, focus on the ball and the defenders, not the passer. This will make it easier for you to rule pass/fumble or roughing the passer.*
4. [REFEREE] [IN xx0/xx1 FORMATION (CREW OF 4/5/6C) OR IN GOAL LINE SITUATIONS] If there is a possibility that the pass was thrown from beyond the neutral zone, move to the spot of the pass and drop a bean bag there. Keep officiating until the play is over, then come back and check the position of your bean bag in relation to the neutral zone. Consult with colleagues who may also have had a view of the location of the pass. If the pass was illegal, throw a flag at the position of the bean bag. If you are confident the pass was illegal, it is permissible to drop the flag rather than the bean bag. [IN xx2/xx3 FORMATION (CREW OF 6D/7/8)] This responsibility is primarily the Line Judge's (except if they have moved to cover the goal line).
5. Do not watch the ball after the pass is thrown. Concentrate on the passer until there is no threat of further action against them.
 - (a) [IN 3xx FORMATION (CREW OF 6C/8)] It is permissible for *either* the Referee or the Centre Judge to switch their attention away from the passer once the ball is thrown and any immediate threat to them has gone. The official *away* from the side of the field to which the pass is thrown needs to stay with the passer. If the pass is thrown down the middle of the field, both officials should stay with the passer. §

9.5 – Goal line plays

9.5.a – Priorities

Same priorities as on other scrimmage plays.

9.5.b – Initial positioning

1. [SNAP FROM OUTSIDE TEAM A'S 10-YARD LINE] If your normal position would be *near* Team A's goal line, take up position *on* the goal line, moving wider than normal if necessary. You also have responsibility to cover Team A's end line.
2. [SNAP FROM BETWEEN TEAM A'S 5 AND 10-YARD LINES] Take up a position wider than normal and be prepared to move to the goal line to rule on a possible safety. You also have responsibility to cover Team A's end line.
3. [SNAP FROM ON OR INSIDE TEAM A'S 5-YARD LINE]◊ Take up a position on the end line (the wing officials have responsibility for the goal line.)
4. [OTHERWISE] Adopt the same position and coverage as for any other scrimmage play.

9.5.c – Response to what happens (movement and signals)

1. Respond to the play as you would normally do for a run or pass.
2. *Do not give a score signal if you have thrown a penalty flag for a foul by the scoring team. Do not blow your whistle or give any signal if you are not sure about the outcome of the play.*
3. [REFEREE] When an official gives the touchdown [S5] or safety [S6] signal, check that no penalties have occurred, step clear of the players, and signal the score to the press box. *Hold the signal for approximately 5 seconds. ^λ There is no need to whistle. §*

9.5.d – Advanced techniques

1. [REFEREE] When there is a score:
 - (a) Should any doubt exist about the score, consult all the officials concerned before signalling your decision. [×]
 - (b) Only be the first official to signal a touchdown or safety if you are the primary Coverer on the goal line. Give a preliminary signal while continuing to monitor players in your area of responsibility, then drop the signal while you check for flags. Once you are certain that the score is valid, give a second, final signal to the press box and hold it for approximately 5 seconds.

9.6 – Returns

9.6.a – Priorities

1. Observing the ball carrier and action around them while you are the nearest official.
2. Observing any fumble where you are the nearest official or have the best view, and marking the spot with a bean bag. [×]
3. Observing blocks by players in your area of responsibility ahead of and around the ball carrier, particularly:
 - (a) illegal block in the back and holding fouls at the point of attack
 - (b) illegal block below the waist fouls anywhere
 - (c) safety-related fouls such as face masking, tripping, chop blocks or illegal blind-side blocks
 - (d) assisting the runner[§]
 - (e) contacting an opponent with the crown of the helmet or targeting a defenseless opponent above the shoulders
 - (f) late hits by any player after the ball is dead
4. Observing any hand-off or pass where you are the nearest official or have the best view, and marking the spot with a bean bag.
5. Observing any *illegal* forward pass or forward handing, especially if you have a view that is level or nearly level with the ball carrier. [◇]
6. [REFEREE] Observing any foul on the passer or kicker.

9.6.b – Response to what happens (movement and signals)

1. Keep out of the players' way.
2. Backpedal towards Team A's goal line ahead of the play. If it is no longer possible to backpedal, turn and watch the play over your shoulder. [REFEREE] Keep the passer or kicker in your field of view.
3. If the play advances far enough to threaten Team A's goal line, be there before the ball carrier. [IN 3xx FORMATION (CREW OF 6C/8)] The Centre Judge should prioritise getting to Team A's goal line while the Referee prioritises watching the passer or kicker.
4. If you are watching a block develop, stay with it before switching to the ball carrier or another block. Even if you expect another official to take responsibility for it, stay with the block until you are confident it is legal.
5. If the ball becomes dead in your area of responsibility, blow your whistle, give the time-out signal [S3], and then signal first down [S8] to show which team is in possession.
6. If you are not the nearest official to the dead-ball spot, nevertheless move towards it and observe the continuing action after the ball becomes dead. On plays when the ball carrier goes near the sideline or out of bounds, move laterally to cover the area around them for extra-curricular activity. If you are the second official to the area, go out of bounds after the ball carrier and watch for and prevent fouls on them (Mechanic 5.9).

9.6.c – Advanced techniques

1. Do not get too close to the play – move away from it if necessary to maintain a safe position, especially on the goal line.

9.7 – Punts

9.7.a – Priorities

Before and during the kick, applying the same priorities as on basic scrimmage plays (above), plus:

1. If the punter is in their end zone, observing whether they step out of bounds prior to the snap or between the snap and the kick.
2. Observing fouls by all players generally in your area, but particularly:
 - (a) any action against the kicker that might be roughing or running into
 - (b) illegal blocks below the waist, especially by backs
 - (c) before the kick, illegal block in the back and holding fouls by linemen and backs protecting the kicker, especially the **tight end and/or wing back on the same side as you[†]**
 - (d) safety-related fouls such as face masking, tripping, chop blocks or illegal blind-side blocks
 - (e) unnecessary roughness fouls away from the ball
 - (f) late hits by any player after the ball is dead
 - (g) illegal formation
 - (h) Team A players going out of bounds during the down
3. Responding to bad snaps or blocked kicks by first observing the ball or the kicker (whichever is deeper) and action around them, and then adopting run, pass or return priorities as appropriate. [×]

During a punt return, applying the same priorities as on returns (above).

9.7.b – Initial positioning

1. Take a position at least 2 yards deeper than the kicker and at least as wide as the tight end position. [IN 3xx FORMATION (CREW OF 6C/8)] Agree which side of the formation you will take, but normally stay on the same side you were for the previous plays.
2. [IN xx0 FORMATION (CREW OF 4)] Favour the Line Judge's side of the field, and be alert for illegal movement of interior linemen on the Line Judge's side. [OTHERWISE] Favour the side of the field of the kicker's kicking foot.
3. Be in a position to see the ball from snap to kick, and to be able to see the blockers and the kicker at the same time.

9.7.c – Response to what happens (movement and signals)

1. [REFEREE] Verbally alert defenders when the kicker has kicked the ball (e.g. "ball's gone").
2. Only if the kicker is not threatened, and the trajectory of the kick is towards a sideline, move quickly behind the kicker into line with the flight and be prepared to direct the official covering the sideline to the out of bounds spot using signals [Sup17, Sup18 & Sup19]. [IN 3xx FORMATION (CREW OF 6C/8)] Only the official on the side that the ball is kicked *away* from should do this, and should not need to move much to do so.
3. After the kick:
 - (a) [IN xx0 FORMATION (CREW OF 4)] Move out to cover play in the side area vacated by the Line Judge.
 - (b) [OTHERWISE] Move to the middle of the field (between the hashes) so as to best observe a return to either side of the field. Stay back after the players move down-field.
 - (c) In either case, be the deepest official covering the return run.
 - (d) [REFEREE] Keep the kicker in sight in case they are targeted by an opponent.
4. During the punt return, respond as for any other return play.
5. If the play turns into a run or pass, respond as you would do normally for that type of play.

9.7.d – Advanced techniques

1. Particularly check for the correct number of players on Team A. Teams get mixed up more often on punt plays than any other.
2. [REFEREE] Warn the kicker if they are near, on or outside the endline prior to the snap.
3. Ideally, when the ball is kicked, you are at a 45-degree angle to the kicker and able to observe them, the ball and players trying to block the kick.
4. [REFEREE] Watch the snap into the punter's hands, then look at the onrushing Team B players and focus on the ones who are most threatening to contact the punter.
5. If there is a bad snap or the kick is blocked, move away from the ball and players trying to recover it. Move to a position to cover any or all of the Team A goal line, the Team A end line, and [IN xx0 FORMATION (CREW OF 4)] the Line Judge's side line.
6. Be alert for blocked kicks and their recovery and advance. On fake kicks switch to normal run or pass coverage.
 - (a) While a kick is loose in the backfield:
 - (i) [IN 2xx FORMATION (NO C)] Continue to watch the ball and players trying to recover it – other officials will watch the kicker.
 - (ii) [IN 3xx FORMATION (CREW OF 6C/8)] The official nearest to the ball should continue to watch the ball and players trying to recover it. The other official should watch the kicker and players threatening them.
 - (b) If the ball is blocked and the kicker is roughed/run into, the Umpire may be able to help you determine whether it was the player who blocked the kick who contacted the kicker.
 - (c) If the ball is snapped over the punter's head, be particularly observant for players illegally kicking a loose ball, and for holding by players of either team trying to prevent opponents recovering the ball.

9.8 – Field goal & try attempts**9.8.a – Priorities**

Before and during the kick, applying the same priorities as on basic scrimmage plays (above), plus:

1. Observing fouls by all players generally in your area, but particularly:
 - (a) any action against the kicker or holder that might be roughing or running into
 - (b) illegal block in the back and holding fouls by linemen and backs protecting the kicker and holder, especially the **tight end and/or wing back on the same side as you[†]**
 - (c) contacting an opponent with the crown of the helmet or targeting a defenseless opponent above the shoulders
 - (d) safety-related fouls such as face masking, tripping, chop blocks or illegal blind-side blocks
 - (e) late hits by any player after the ball is dead
 - (f) illegal formation
 - (g) [IN 2x0/2x1 FORMATION (CREW OF 4/5)][†] false starts by interior linemen, ends and backs on the Line Judge's side of the formation
2. [CENTRE JUDGE] [IN 3x1 FORMATION (CREW OF 6C)] **Ruling the success or failure of the field goal attempt. You share this responsibility with the Back Judge. [†]**
3. Responding to bad snaps or blocked kicks by first observing the ball or the kicker, whichever is deeper, and action around them, and then adopting run, pass or return priorities, as appropriate.

During a field goal return, applying the same priorities as on returns (above).

9.8.b – Initial positioning

1. [REFEREE] Be 5-10 yards wider and 3-7 yards deeper than the kicker and holder.
 - (a) [IN xx0 FORMATION (CREW OF 4) IF THE LINE JUDGE IS BEHIND THE POSTS] Be on the Line Judge's side of the field.

- (b) [IN 2xx FORMATION (NO C)] OR [IN 3x1 FORMATION (CREW OF 6C)][†] Normally be on the side of the field opposite the kicker's kicking foot.
- (c) [IN 3x3 FORMATION (CREW OF 8)][†] Normally stay on the same side of the field you were for the previous plays.

2. [CENTRE JUDGE]

- (a) [IN 3x1 FORMATION (CREW OF 6C)] Be in position about one yard behind the goal post nearest the press box. You are responsible for ruling whether the ball passes inside your upright. The Back Judge has responsibility for the other upright and crossbar. [†]
- (b) [IN 3x3 FORMATION (CREW OF 8)] Be in position opposite the Referee, 5-10 yards wider and 3-7 yards deeper than the kicker and holder. [†] Agree with the Referee which side of the formation you will take, but normally stay on the same side you were for the previous plays.

- 3. [×] Ensure that you are facing towards the kicker and holder, and that you are able to observe both the snap and the holder.

9.8.c – Response to what happens (movement and signals)

- 1. Maintain a position where you can see the kicker, holder and players threatening them.
- 2. [REFEREE] You have primary responsibility for the kicker and holder. [CENTRE JUDGE] [IN 3x3 FORMATION (CREW OF 8)][†] Observe action on the wing back and tight end on your side and help on blocks that are deep in front of the kicker and holder.
- 3. [REFEREE] Wait until the ball is dead and there is no threat to players in your area before looking to the official(s) at the goal posts to find out the result of the kick.
- 4. [REFEREE] Once all the players are completely separated, step away from players and signal the result of the play to the press box. If the kick is good, hold the signal [S5] for approximately 5 seconds.

5. [CENTRE JUDGE] [IN 3x1 FORMATION (CREW OF 6C)]

- (a) Observe the ball from kick to when it becomes obvious whether the attempt will be successful or not.
- (b) If you consider the kick to be successful, communicate ("good", nod) with your colleague behind the posts and together come out between the uprights (approximately one yard into the end zone) giving the score signal [S5] as you come to a stop.
- (c) If you consider the kick to have failed, give the no score signal [S10]. If the kick is wide to your side, you may also give the kick wide signal [Sup15]. Do *not* signal a touchback.
- (d) Hold either signal for at least five seconds and until you know the Referee has seen it.
- (e) If the kick is short or blocked and the ball is possessed by Team B, move into position to officiate the kick play as a punt.

9.8.d – Advanced techniques

- 1. Be alert for blocked kicks and their recovery and advance. On fake kicks switch to normal run or pass coverage.
 - (a) If there is a bad snap or the kick is blocked, move away from the ball and players trying to recover it. If there is a substantial return, move to a position to cover any or all of the Team A goal line and end line, and [IN xx0 FORMATION (CREW OF 4)] the Line Judge's side line.
 - (b) While a kick is loose in the backfield:
 - (i) [IN 2xx FORMATION (NO C)] Continue to watch the ball and players trying to recover it – other officials will watch the kicker.
 - (ii) [IN 3x3 FORMATION (CREW OF 8)] The official nearest to the ball should continue to watch the ball and players trying to recover it. The other official should watch the kicker and players threatening them.
 - (c) [IN xx0 FORMATION (CREW OF 4)] On a play that develops into a run to the Line Judge's side of the field, attempt to get to the goal line ahead of the ball carrier if you can.

2. [REFEREE] If Team A attempts a surprise drop goal (i.e. there is no official behind the goal), your priority is to rule on the success/failure of the kick rather than stay with the kicker (roughing the kicker cannot by rule occur if it is not obvious a kick will be made). Run after the ball towards the goal and get the best view you can of whether the kick is successful or not. Consult with other officials (e.g. the Back Judge) who may have been in position to assist before signalling the outcome.
3. [IN 3x1 FORMATION (CREW OF 6C)] On long field goal attempts (i.e. if the ball is snapped from outside Team B's 20-yard line), it is permissible for only the Back Judge to go behind the goal posts and for the Centre Judge to initially be in their normal position in the offensive backfield. This is known as the "One Judge" mechanic. The Centre Judge must clearly communicate to all other members of the crew their intention in this situation.

9.9 – After each down

9.9.a – Priorities

1. Observing dead-ball action by players of both teams.
2. Encouraging the players to unpile safely, and either return the ball to an official or leave it near the dead-ball spot, as appropriate.
3. Checking whether the line to gain has been reached or is close, and signalling appropriately.
4. Checking whether any penalty flags have been thrown, and, if so:
 - (a) Giving the timeout signal [S3].
 - (b) [REFEREE] Finding out what fouls have been called and administering them according to the procedures in chapter 19.
 - (c) [REFEREE] Keeping the Umpire informed.
 - (d) [CENTRE JUDGE] Reporting any fouls you have called to the Referee.
 - (e) Ensuring that all penalties are enforced correctly.
 - (f) [CENTRE JUDGE] Keeping the wing officials informed of the penalty and its enforcement.
5. [REFEREE] Determining whether a new series is to be awarded, based either on a colleague's signal that the ball definitely has reached the line to gain, your own visual inspection of the ball in relation to the line to gain, or after a measurement you have ordered.
6. Checking for injured players or other occurrences that may delay play.
7. [ON-FIELD PLAY CLOCK OPERATOR] Starting the play clock when necessary, giving a 10-second warning, and throwing a delay of game flag if the clock reaches 0 before the ball is put in play.
8. Allowing legitimate requests for timeouts. Checking that a request coming from the coaching box or team area was made by the Head Coach.
9. Echoing all timeout signals [S3] of your colleagues.
10. Assisting in relaying the dead ball or a new ball to the succeeding spot.
11. Spotting the ball at the succeeding spot if you are nearer to it than the Umpire.
12. Ensuring all officials are in (or near) position for the next down before allowing the ball to become ready for play.
13. [CENTRE JUDGE]
 - (a) Noting the lateral placement of the ball using elastic bands or some other device. The system for denoting lateral position is described in paragraph 5.7.10.
 - (b) Standing over the ball if [any of the conditions of Mechanic 10.9.c.14 apply](#).[◇]

9.9.b – Initial positioning

1. Shortly after the end of the previous down, you should be in a position in the vicinity of the succeeding spot. The precise position will depend on what happened on the previous play.

9.9.c – Response to what happens (movement and signals)

1. × If you are the Coverer, signal that the ball is dead. This will be using the dead-ball signal [S7] unless the timeout signal [S3], touchdown/field-goal signal [S5], safety signal [S6], wind the clock signal [S2] or incomplete pass/unsuccessful field-goal signal [S10] is appropriate instead. Give only *one* signal.
2. If a penalty flag has been thrown, follow the procedure in chapter 19. If a team or injury timeout has been called, follow the procedure in chapter 17. If a period has ended, follow the procedure in chapter 20.
3. [CENTRE JUDGE] At the end of a play, observe dead-ball action while moving towards the dead-ball spot, or the inbounds spot if the ball is outside the hash marks.
4. [ON-FIELD PLAY CLOCK OPERATOR] If a 40-second clock should start by rule:
 - (a) If there is a stadium play clock, check that it started shortly after the end of the play.
 - (b) If there is no stadium play clock, start a 40-second count shortly after the end of the play.

Spotting the ball for the next down:

5. Assist in relaying a ball to the Umpire or Centre Judge or spot the ball that someone else has relayed to you (Mechanic 5.8). [REFEREE] [IN 3xx FORMATION (CREW OF 6C/8)] Generally, you should not handle the ball unless it becomes dead very close to you. Normally, leave spotting the ball responsibilities to the Umpire or Centre Judge. ♦
6. If you are spotting the ball:
 - (a) Face the Coverer, not the goal line, when spotting the ball. Take the forward progress from the Coverer and place the ball at the succeeding spot. Following an incomplete forward pass, penalty, etc., verify with the Umpire that the lateral placement of the ball is correct. ♦
 - (b) Place the ball laces down if there is any risk of it rolling away from its position. ♦
7. [CENTRE JUDGE]
 - (a) In hurry-up situations, when the clock is running, go get the ball wherever it is (unless the Referee or Umpire is clearly nearer) (Mechanic 5.3.10).
 - (b) Don't worry about who spots the ball; the most convenient official to the succeeding spot should do it; other officials should assist in relaying a ball to them if necessary. (See also Mechanic 5.3.10.) However, in a hurry-up offense, it is best to leave the Referee to monitor substitutions by Team A and for the Centre Judge (and Umpire) to deal with the ball.
 - (c) If the 40-second play clock is already running, step away from the ball to make it ready for play. If the 40-second play clock is not running, wait over the ball until the Referee indicates that the ball is ready for play, then step away from it. ♦
 - (d) After spotting the ball, look to the Referee to determine if you must remain near the ball to prevent the snap or if you may assume your normal position.
 - (e) If you spotted the ball, move to a position behind and to the side of the snapper to prevent the snap. This position allows you to stay clear of the linemen's feet as they get set and to avoid having to step over or through the gap between the snapper and the guard. This also places you in front of or to the side of the quarterback so that they also can clearly see that the snap is being prevented.
 - (f) When stepping away from the ball, back into position facing the Referee and quarterback.
 - (g) If there is a late substitution and the Referee extends their arms [Sup36] indicating that the snap should not occur, go to/remains next to the snapper and warn them not to snap the ball.
 - (h) Whether you or the Umpire spotted the ball, if someone needs to return to stand over it to prevent play, normally this would be you. §

Getting ready for the next down:

8. [REFEREE]
 - (a) If you are certain the line to gain has been reached, give the first down signal [S8] and ensure that the Linesman has seen it and that the chain crew are responding to it.

- (b) If you are unsure whether the line to gain has been reached, move to the dead-ball spot and either make a decision based on your view of the ball in relation to the line to gain, or order a measurement by repeating the timeout signal [S3] and tapping your chest. Ensure that all your colleagues are aware of your decision.
 - (c) Check the number of the next down with the Linesman. Indicate and announce the new down and (if unusual or unexpected) the approximate distance to the line to gain. It is sufficient to use one of the following terms (in increasing order): "inches", "short", "long", "ten", "two stakes".
 - (d) Give the untimed down signal [S1*] for each down when a period is extended (other than a try if a touchdown is scored during an untimed down). Do not give the untimed down signal on a try.
 - (e) Check that all other officials (particularly the Umpire) are in or near their position for the next down and are ready to officiate.
 - (f) If necessary, check the status of the clock with the on-field timekeeper.
9. [CENTRE JUDGE] You and the Umpire must between you perform the duties specified in paragraphs 10.9.c.13 to 10.9.c.22.
10. Move into position for the next down. Backpedal if necessary to keep your eyes on the ball. Do not take your eyes off it in case the play starts while you are not looking.
11. Make sure that you are in a position to see the ball, the Umpire and both wing officials.

Ready for play:

12. [REFEREE]
- (a) If the 40-second play clock is already running:
 - (i) If the ball is not ready for play 20 seconds into the play count (Rule 3-2-4-b-3):
 - (1) Signal that the play clock be reset to 25 seconds [Sup29].
 - (2) If that happens immediately, then proceed as normal, otherwise:
 - (a) Declare a timeout [S3].
 - (b) Signal again that the play clock be reset to 25 seconds [Sup29] and continue to signal until the clock responds.
 - (c) When the ball is ready, continue as below.
 - (ii) If the game clock should start on the "Ready", give the start the clock signal [S2]. Only blow your whistle if needed to attract the attention of the clock operator. Without a whistle, this is a so-called "silent wind".
 - (iii) Otherwise, there is no need to give a ready-for-play signal.
 - (b) If the 40-second play clock is not running:
 - (i) If the game clock was stopped for a player injury, give a signal [either Sup29 or Sup30] to indicate whether the play clock should be set to 25 or 40 seconds.
 - (ii) **Blow the whistle and give the ready for play signal [S1].** [®] If the game clock should start on the "Ready", **follow that with** [°] the start the clock signal [S2].
 - (iii) [IN xx0 FORMATION (CREW OF 4)] Unless there is a stadium play clock, start your 25-second clock when you declare the ball ready.
 - (iv) In 10-second **runoff**² or unfair clock tactics situations, make sure that the timekeeper (or stadium clock operator) knows that the game clock is not starting normally.
 - (c) If there are stadium game and/or play clocks, check to see that they have started correctly.

Play clock administration:

13. [REFEREE]
- (a) [IN xx1/xx2/xx3 FORMATION (CREW OF 5/6/7/8)] When you see the Back Judge or the Side Judge raise their hand, give a verbal warning to Team A ("10 seconds" or "hurry" if you are not sure how many of the 10 seconds have expired).
 - (b) [IN xx0 FORMATION (CREW OF 4)] When approximately 10 seconds remain on the play clock, give a verbal warning to Team A ("10 seconds" or "hurry" if you are not sure how many of the 10 seconds have expired).
 - (c) [IN xx0 FORMATION (CREW OF 4)] When the play clock reaches 0, look at the snapper. If the ball is already moving, there is no foul. Otherwise, blow your whistle and throw your flag for delay of game. [§]

9.9.d – Advanced techniques

1. The priority at the end of a play is to get into position ready for the next one. Only if a serious incident occurs (such as a foul or misconduct, an injury, or a breakage of the chain) should your routine be interrupted.
2. If Team A makes substitutions **while the snapper is at, near or moving towards** their position at the line of scrimmage:
 - (a) Any official should be prepared to step in and shut down a play that violates the substitution rule. §
 - (b) [REFEREE]
 - (i) Give the matching substitutes signal [Sup36] to [IN 3xx FORMATION (CREW OF 6C/8)] the Centre Judge [IN 2xx FORMATION (NO C)] the Umpire to get over the ball and prevent the snap. Drop the signal if Team B do not begin substitutions within 3 seconds.
 - (ii) Hold the signal until Team B has completed its substitutions.
 - (iii) If the officials are unable to stop Team A from snapping the ball before Team B has completed its substitutions, stop play and warn Team A that further attempts will be penalised with an unsportsmanlike conduct foul.
 - (c) [CENTRE JUDGE]
 - (i) Take a position over the ball to prevent Team A from snapping it until Team B has had an opportunity to place its substitutes into position and its replaced players have left the field of play.
 - (ii) While standing over the ball, plan the route you will take to get away from the players before the ball is snapped.
 - (iii) When Team B has completed its substitutions (or does not make any), inform the snapper/QB not to snap the ball until they receive verbal approval from you. If they snap the ball before they are given verbal approval, Team A will be assessed a Delay of Game foul after a warning for the first offence (Mechanic 3.4.1.f).
3. [REFEREE] If Team A is attempting to make a quick start to the play, inform both teams that the ball must not be snapped until the whistle is sounded. Move quickly to your position, indicate to the Umpire (or Centre Judge) § that they may move to their position, check that all other officials are ready, and then blow your whistle.
4. If Team A are running a hurry-up offense, do not stop them just because you or another official is not perfectly in position (Mechanic 5.3.16.a). Adapt and officiate as best you can as you move to a position to cover the play. §
5. If you want to speak to a player on the field (e.g. to warn them that they are close to fouling), it often saves time to relay the message via the Umpire or Back Judge (for a Team B player). Don't delay the game unnecessarily by entering either team's huddle, unless a timeout is still in progress. Never attempt to speak to a player during a hurry-up or no-huddle offense. §
6. Maintain your concentration, and think about the next play.