

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 - Basic philosophy

1. Each official must fully understand the rules. However, the knowledge is not sufficient without the ability to interpret and correctly apply them. These skills can only be acquired by way of considerable effort and study.
2. In addition to the necessary rules knowledge, the official needs to know where to stand, what to look for, and of course, what to do when they see it. With these skills, officials can provide impartial administration of one of the most exciting sporting competitions, allowing it to proceed smoothly so that skillful play is not spoiled by fouls or unsportsmanlike conduct.
3. It is fundamental that the correct use of mechanics leads to better officiating. Increasingly, we see that reliable mechanics is the factor that distinguishes good officials from the rest.
4. Mechanics are two things: responsibilities and positioning. Responsibilities are paramount because unless each official performs their assigned duties for every part of each play, inevitably there will be action that is not observed. Neglecting a responsibility gives players carte blanche to violate the associated rules. Positioning is almost as important, because an official always has the best chance of making a call correctly if they are in position to get the best view of the action. The positioning mechanics in this book are based on many, many years of experience and have been found by extensive experiment to be the best.
5. **This book contains over 120,000 words and nobody can remember all of them all of the time. Therefore it is important for officials, both experienced and novice, to keep returning to the book. By re-reading sections of it, new details will emerge that will improve your effectiveness as an official. By sharing your knowledge with your colleagues, you will improve their effectiveness too.**
6. We encourage you to write out a personal checklist of things you must do and look for in each position on all possible play situations. Review and update this periodically as a reminder of what you should be doing and how best to achieve it.
7. Don't forget that football is a game played by and watched by people. As a football official, you have to appreciate the wide variety of human reactions that can arise in the charged atmosphere of a sporting competition. By developing that appreciation, you can learn to gain the respect of the players and coaches, and maintain the discipline so essential in such a physically exciting game as football.
8. The foundations of officiating:
 - (a) The first foundation of officiating a game is that it is played in a safe environment. The field, its surrounds, and the players and their equipment on it, must not pose an unreasonable risk to the participants, nor make a mockery of the game. This is often taken for granted.
 - (b) The second foundation is the respect that the players and coaches must have for the decisions made by the officials. Without that respect, anything the officials do is unlikely to significantly influence the players' behaviour. The penalties in the rulebook form an effective deterrent for illegal actions only if they have an impact on players and the game.
 - (c) Without these foundations it is next to impossible for the officials to apply the rules effectively to ensure a fair contest.
9. A textbook like this cannot hope to be definitive about every possible situation that might arise in a game of football.
 - (a) That means you have to decide for yourself what is the best response to what happens. That doesn't mean that you can "freelance" and do whatever you want. You have responsibilities at all times to your colleagues to be in the expected place and to be covering your priorities. Only by working together can your crew expect to officiate a game successfully. Only by being in the right place at the right time can you play your role in that.
 - (b) This book tells you the best place to be for common situations, and how to respond to common occurrences (and a few rare ones). Everything else is up to you.

1.2 - Crew formations

1. Our mechanics cover crews of any size from 3 to 8 (**9 with a Video Judge**).[◊] While crews of 3 mechanics are covered in a specific chapter, mechanics relating to other sizes of crews are spread through most of the chapters of the book. In the past, we have distinguished the crew's formation simply by its size, but developments in officiating mean that this is no longer appropriate - for the same number of officials, we potentially have multiple crew formations. For example, traditionally a crew of 6 has two officials deep (the Field Judge and the Side Judge). However, an alternative is to have only one official deep and add a Centre Judge.
2. In the same way that people talk about soccer teams as being in a 4-3-3 or 4-4-2 formation (where the digits represent the number of defenders, midfielders and forwards), we describe the composition of a crew in terms of the number of officials in each of three groups.
3. The groups are:

| | |
|------------|---|
| Core group | Referee (R), Centre Judge (C), Umpire (U) |
| Wing group | Down Judge (D), Line Judge (L) |
| Deep group | Back Judge (B), Field Judge (F), Side Judge (S) |

4. We represent the crew scrimmage formation in a 3-digit notation where:
 - (a) the first digit represents the number of officials in the core group
 - (b) the second digit represents the number of officials in the wing group
 - (c) the third digit represents the number of officials in the deep group
5. The exception to this is on free kicks, where the formation used is based entirely on the size of the crew. In free kick situations, we refer to crew formations as F4, ..., F8 where the digit denotes the size of the crew.
6. These notations reflect that future developments in football officiating may add an additional official to any group. [×]
7. In this notation, we use 2xx to mean a crew that has two officials in the core group, regardless of the number in the others. Similarly, xx3 indicates a crew that has three officials in the deep group.
8. The following are the valid crew formations we recognise:

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

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

1.3 - Points of emphasis

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

1. **Keeping the safety zone clear:** A new rule (Rule 1-2-3-d) has defined a safety zone around the field. This is intended to increase safety for players, officials and anyone else near the field of play and end zones. We still see examples of officials who allow the play to start with personnel illegally too close to the action. Why would anyone want to put themselves at risk when the rules allow the situation to be made safer? This is a critical safety responsibility and needs to be addressed. 999 times out of a 1000, someone will step back if asked by an official. The other 1 time, game management can be asked to intervene.
2. **Recognising pivotal plays:** A crew will often be remembered for a game's "pivotal plays" (MOFO 5.7). These are the moments we need to recognise and respond to in order to officiate the game effectively. The mechanics set out specific responses set out in the mechanics (MOFO 5.7.6). If these are not applied, it likely means the play was not recognised as pivotal, resulting in sub-optimal coverage. Officials must clearly communicate the outcome of the play to colleagues and, where appropriate, to nearby players and coaches. [◊]
3. **Communication when in doubt:** In this edition, we put a focus on the additional communication that is necessary between members of the crew whenever there is doubt about what happened (MOFO 5.8) (MOFO 5.10.32). Uncertainty should trigger an attempt to gain more information. This will not always work – inevitably, some plays we never know exactly what happened – but normally communication will increase both the knowledge and confidence that the crew has in its collective "call". Also, just because you are sure what happened on a play, that doesn't mean all members of the crew will be (especially the Referee). Like with pivotal plays, ensure you communicate effectively – this could be an additional or repeated signal or verbally (face to face or radio). [◊]
4. **Signalling at the end of a play:** One of the biggest giveaways that an official does not know what is happening or what they are doing is when they do not give the correct signal at the end of a play. Giving a dead-ball signal [S7], a timeout signal [S3] or an incomplete pass signal [S10] is so much a normal part of officiating that failing to do so when required is a clear sign of inexperience or poor competence. [◊]
 - (a) Officials need to focus on the basic signals (MOFO 6.5). This will make them both look more authoritative to players, coaches and spectators and more effective members of the crew.
 - (b) All officials should always echo all the timeout [S3] signals given by any other officials (MOFO 6.5.3).
 - (c) When covering plays out of bounds or incomplete passes, always keep your eyes on the players (MOFO 6.5.10).
 - (d) Don't be afraid to repeat a signal if you think a colleague (particularly the Referee) did not see it at your first attempt (MOFO 6.5.12).

5. **Stay at the dead-ball spot:** If you are the official covering the dead-ball spot, NEVER lose it. Stay at the spot if at all possible. If you need to move (e.g. for safety reasons), move towards/away from the sideline, not up/down the field, so that you stay on the yard line. If you absolutely need to leave the yard line, drop your bean bag before you go. Ingrain this into your way of working. If another official comes and takes over the spot from you (e.g. so that you can go speak to another official), that is OK, but they then inherit this responsibility. [◊]

6. **Relaying the ball effectively:** If you have a ball in your hand, use it effectively. If you are at the succeeding spot, put it down (unless there is a penalty to enforce). If you are a Retriever or Relayer (MOFO 6.7.1), move the ball towards the succeeding spot (normally), the dead-ball spot (if there is a flag on the play) or the previous spot (if there was an incomplete pass) (MOFO 6.7.6). [◊]

7. **Ball on ground during penalty enforcement:** The mechanics during penalty enforcement mean that, at any one time, only one ball should be on the ground (as opposed to in an official's hands). This speeds up the process and makes clear when penalty enforcement is in progress and when it has been completed. [◊]

- From the end of the play until completion of penalty enforcement, the only ball on the ground should normally be at the *dead-ball spot*. The Coverer or someone who has replaced the Coverer will stand by it (MOFO 19.2.a.4). However, no ball should be placed on the ground if a forward pass was incomplete or the play ended in or through the defense's end zone.
- At the end of penalty enforcement, the only ball on the ground should be at the *succeeding spot*, placed there by the Umpire or Centre Judge, normally (MOFO 19.3.3.h.iv).
- At about the same time as the Umpire or Centre Judge places a ball at the succeeding spot, the ball at the dead-ball spot should be retrieved and returned to a ball person (MOFO 19.2.a.4).
- Of course, if the penalty is declined, the succeeding spot may well be:
 - the same as the dead-ball spot (in which case the ball will not need to be moved), or
 - at the inbounds spot level with the dead-ball spot (unless the dead-ball spot is less than 2 yards from the inbounds spot, two different balls should be used).
- During penalty enforcement, the Umpire or Centre Judge should *hold* a ball, and *not* place one on the ground at the inbounds spot level with the dead-ball spot, as they would otherwise if the foul had not occurred (MOFO 19.3.3.d). This communicates to everyone that penalty enforcement is still in progress.

8. **Zones of coverage:** The diagrams in Chapter 26 generally show the areas of each official's responsibility at the *start* of a play. It is important for officials to remember that these change as the play develops, usually so that the nearest official is concentrating on the ball carrier and the other officials on the action around that point. Zones grow and shrink and they move up and down the field. Don't remain fixed to a static zone. [◊]

9. **Pass coverage by wing officials:** [IN xx0 FORMATION (CREW OF 4)] There has been some criticism of the change we made in the 19th edition for wing officials to remain on the line of scrimmage until a pass is thrown. The following may help explain our thinking.

- A crew of 4 is inevitably a compromise (well so is 5, 6 and 7!). We took into account that most games with a crew of 4 will be lower division ones with (usually) lesser-skilled players. At that level, when you read pass, a number of things might happen:
 - no pass is actually thrown – in this case the best place for the wing official is on the LoS to mark forward progress, whether it is a loss (sack) or a running gain;
 - the pass is obviously incomplete – that usually can be officiated from anywhere;
 - the pass is obviously complete but short – no problem;
 - the pass is obviously complete deeper and there is no further run – the wing official can usually get to the dead ball spot sufficiently quickly – the longer the pass, the more time it will spend in the air and thus the more time for the official to move downfield;
 - the pass is obviously complete and there is a run after the catch – in most cases the run will end in clear view and, while it may take some time for the wing official to get there, the dead ball spot will normally not be contentious because it will usually be an obvious first down.

Those are the most common cases.

- There are also some more difficult cases to officiate, including:
 - when an official would be best placed to see whether the pass was caught or incomplete if they were near the end of the pass – however that can happen on a swing pass as easily as a deep pass, so there is no particular reason to be downfield for that;
 - the pass is caught and the run ends very close to the goal line – even "drifting cautiously downfield" doesn't automatically mean that an official would get to the goal line before the runner.

Fortunately these are rare. Generally we focus our mechanics on what is best in the majority of situations and then rely on the officials to do their best in the rarer ones.

- However, the main argument for keeping wing officials on the line of scrimmage was a safety one. The sooner the official is behind the play, the less likely it is that they will be run into or the ball thrown at them. Staying on the LOS gives a wing official the best chance of having a wide field of view that includes both the QB (out of the corner of one eye) and all the receivers (either in the middle of vision, or in the corner of the other eye).

We hope that clarifies things.

Previous points of emphasis are also still relevant:

- Process at end of first and third quarters:** Do not be in a hurry to change ends. Wait until everyone has properly recorded the information they need before moving to the other end of the field (MOFO 20.4.2). [◊]

11. **Speeding up free kicks:** There should not be any significant delay in kicking off after a score. All officials should jog to their free kick positions. The Umpire should hand the ball to the kicker or leave it near the kickoff spot. Once all officials are in position, the Umpire can signal to the Referee and the Referee should promptly declare the ball ready for play. It should never be an issue of waiting for the kicking team to be ready. They have 25 seconds to get ready and kick the ball after the ready for play.
12. **Penalty administration:**
 - (a) If you have thrown your flag, make sure you give a long, clear timeout signal at the end of the play (MOFO 19.1.b.2). Other officials will echo this. Make sure the Referee, Umpire and Centre Judge are aware of your signal.
 - (b) Unless you are holding the dead-ball spot, once continuing action has ended, go to the Referee to report your foul (MOFO 19.1.b.5.a). [USING O2O/CREW RADIO] Transmit the details of the foul so that everyone is aware (MOFO 19.3.3.h.ii).
 - (c) [UMPIRE OR CENTRE JUDGE] Ensure you know as soon as possible the reason for a flag being thrown (MOFO 19.2.a.6).
 - (d) If you have information to contribute to penalty administration (e.g. you thought the pass was uncatchable on DPI; you know there was a change of possession and are not sure the Referee does), pass it on (MOFO 19.2.a.3).
 - (e) If your flag is for targeting, you must have direct, verbal communication with at least one other official prior to reporting the foul to the Referee (MOFO 19.1.b.8).
13. **Whistle:** It is never wise to carry your whistle in your mouth. It is too easy to blow an inadvertent whistle (MOFO 6.4.5).
14. **Concussion:** Pay particular attention to participants (players and officials) who may have suffered a concussion (MOFO 6.2.6.e).
15. **Game clock at the end of a half:**
 - (a) Be particularly aware of the time remaining and the status of the clock during the last few minutes of a half, especially the second half when the game is close.
 - (b) By rule (Rule 3-3-9-b), everyone is entitled to know the time remaining every occasion that the clock stops during the last two minutes of each half. The crew must be proactive in sharing this information unless there is a visual game clock. This responsibility starts with the timekeeper and includes the officials nearest the Team A and Team B huddles, and the officials nearest the Head Coach of each team (MOFO 20.3.2). [USING O2O/CREW RADIO] Using radios to share clock information is mandatory (MOFO 25.3.1).
 - (c) Anticipate when the Head Coach of a team might want to call a timeout after a play ends. Be prepared to look towards the Coach if you can do so without taking your eyes off important action in front of you.
16. **Clock when a ball carrier goes out of bounds:** If the ball carrier is pushed backwards or sideways out of bounds, the clock continues to run, because their *forward* progress was stopped inbounds (Rule 4-1-3-a).
17. **Umpire and Centre Judge mechanics around ready for play:**
 - (a) The Umpire and Centre Judge should be in their position (not standing over the ball) prior to the snap unless any of the conditions of 10.9.c.14 apply.
 - (b) The Umpire or Centre Judge should immediately get over the ball if a whistle is blown for any reason (e.g. a foul occurs, a timeout is granted, the ball blows away), or if Team A makes a last second substitution (MOFO 9.9.c.7.g and 10.9.c.16).
 - (c) Whichever official spots the ball, there is no reason for anyone to stand over it unless something delays play.
18. **Sideline communication:** The following items of communication between the officials and the Head Coach of a team are essential:
 - (a) For each foul against their team, the nearest sideline official must inform the Head Coach of the number or position of the offending player and what the player did that was illegal (MOFO 19.3.10). If the enforcement involves loss of down, the Coach must be informed of this also.
 - (b) For each unusual enforcement or judgement, an official must inform both Head Coaches, whether or not it is against their team (MOFO 19.3.10). This may be the nearest sideline official or the Referee, depending on the nature of the call.
 - (c) "If a visual game clock is not the official timing device during the last two minutes of each half, the Referee or their representative shall notify each captain and Head Coach of the time remaining each time the clock is stopped by rule" (Rule 3-3-9-b). This will normally be relayed to the Head Coach via the nearest sideline official.
 - (d) At the two-minute warning, the nearest sideline official must inform the Head Coach of the *precise* time remaining and how many timeouts each team has remaining.
 - (e) When a team has used its *final* timeout of a half, the Referee must inform the Head Coach of this fact, as well as the precise time remaining. The Referee should *not* delegate this job to another official.
 - (f) When a player is disqualified, the Referee accompanied by the official who called the foul (or the nearest sideline official if it was the Referee) must inform the Head Coach of the number of the player disqualified and the nature of the foul (MOFO 19.1.b.11). ^x
19. **Out of bounds coverage:** When the ball carrier goes out bounds, the covering official *must* turn and keep their eyes on them while there is a threat of action against them (MOFO 6.3.1).