

22. CHAIN CREW AND BALL PERSONS

22.1 - Chain crew

1. This section lists the instructions that an official (normally the **Down Judge**) gives to the chain crew before the game. Under some circumstances it may be appropriate to delay the kickoff until this is done. Under circumstances that are clearly due to the home team's mismanagement, it also may be appropriate to penalise the home team (Rule 3-4-1-b).
2. Introduce yourself to the chain crew before the game. Note or record their names and use them frequently during the game. Stress to them the importance of their job. Continually praise and thank them, particularly when they do something quickly and promptly.
3. Make the down box operator responsible for the whole crew. Normally, they should be the most experienced person on the crew.
4. Demonstrate to the chain crew the signals that you will use to indicate (i) the down number; (ii) stay!; (iii) move the chain.
5. During the game, avoid handling the chain or down box. Use verbal instructions to the operators to have them move them to the correct position.
6. **Instruct the chain crew never to move the down marker or chain, or change the down number, except at the direction of the Down Judge or Referee.** If they are told to move and they can see that a flag has been thrown, they must stay where they are and draw the official's attention to the flag. When they do move, they must move quickly and with no fuss to their new position.
7. Instruct the crew that the chain never moves on 2nd, 3rd or 4th down; only the down box does. It is also possible (e.g. after a penalty) for there to be a 1st down and for the chain *not* to move.
8. Instruct the chain crew that their expected normal pace is to jog from position to position. In a "hurry up" situation, they should try to move faster.
9. **It is crucial for the safety of players, officials and the chain crew that the sideline be kept clear. The down box and chain *must* be six feet out of bounds, except when setting the chain for a new series. This must be stressed to the down box operator and chain crew.**
10. It is crucial for visibility by officials, players, coaches and spectators that the down box is always in front of the stake (i.e. nearer the field) (**Exception:** during a measurement).[§]
11. Instruct the down box operator that between downs:
 - (a) They must not move until signalled to do so.
 - (b) They must position the down box level with the **Down Judge's** downfield heel.
 - (c) They should change the number on the down box to that indicated by the **Down Judge**.
 - (d) Ideally, they should change the number while moving the box to the new position – i.e. the box should show the old number at the old position, and the new number at the new position.
 - (e) The position of the down box must always be *six feet* out of bounds, except when setting the chain for a new series.
12. Instruct the crew that when a new series of downs is awarded:
 - (a) The down box should be moved first to the spot indicated by the **Down Judge** (the front edge of the stake level with the front of the ball).
 - (b) The chain should then be positioned, setting the rear-most stake exactly **behind**[§] where the down box is. The front stake should then be placed to extend the chain to its full length.
 - (c) The down box operator should give hold of their box to the rear stake operator in order that they may position the chain clip. (If a fourth member of the chain crew is available, they may be designated as clip operator). The clip must be positioned *precisely* on the back edge of a 5-yard line, normally the one nearest to the rear stake.
 - (d) Once the clip is set, the chain must be moved *six feet* out of bounds. The chain clip should be positioned on the chain clip reference mark (if there is one) **or the coaching box line (if the chain is within the team area).**[◇]
 - (e) **If the down box is not in position at the snap, the Down Judge will drop a bean bag at the sideline parallel with the spot of the snap. The chain crew will line up on this spot. (This should only ever occur late in the game, with the clock running, when the offensive team are trailing and attempting to drive down the field to score.)**[§]
13. If possible, the chain clip operator or down box operator (or an additional person) should be asked to record the number of the down, **the distance to the line to gain**[†] and the yard line of each succeeding spot. If this is not possible, it is permissible for the down box operator to use a marker (e.g. a golf tee or a bean bag) to indicate the position of the down box. Finally, the down box operator should be encouraged to memorise the yard line at which they are located.
14. Instruct the crew that if play develops (or seems likely to develop) in their direction they are to move quickly away from the sideline and to drop their equipment to the ground as they go. Emphasise the safety aspects of this, and explain how the chain can be reset using the clip.
15. Instruct the crew that at the end of the 1st and 3rd periods:
 - (a) The **Down Judge** will record the down number, the distance to the line to gain, the yard line and the line on which the clip is set.

- (b) The **Down Judge** will grasp the chain at the point where the clip is set and instruct the stake operator *furthest* from the midfield line to lead the way to the corresponding line in the other half of the field, reversing the chain in the process.
 - (c) The **Down Judge** will position the clip on the correct yard line, then instruct the crew to extend the chain. The chain must then be moved to its position on the chain clip reference points six feet out of bounds.
 - (d) The down box will be moved to its new position as the ball is moved.
16. Instruct the crew that when a free kick takes place they are to remove themselves and their equipment outside the **safety zone**.[®] The chain and down marker should be placed on the ground. They may be told to stand near the receiving team's 20-yard line in order to be near the likely position of the ensuing first down.
 17. Instruct the crew that when a measurement for a first down takes place:
 - (a) The down box is to be positioned where the front stake is located, unless there is a flag down. (This is to provide a backup for the location of the chain.) The number shown on the down box shall be that of the previous down. (If there is a flag down, [IN xx2/xx3 FORMATION (CREW OF 6D/7/8)] the Side Judge or [IN xx0/xx1 FORMATION (CREW OF 4/5/6C)] the **Down Judge** should drop a bean bag at the location of the front stake.)
 - (b) The **Down Judge** will grasp the chain at the point where the clip is set.
 - (c) The **Down Judge** and stake operators will rapidly carry the chain onto the field of play. The front stake operator will hand their stake to the appropriate official (normally the Umpire) **at a point a few yards from the ball.** [§]
 - (d) If a first down is awarded, the stake operators must carry the chain quickly back to the sideline and set up for the new series of downs.
 - (e) If a first down is not awarded and the ball is dead outside the hash marks, the chain will be moved under the direction of the Referee to a position where the ball can be spotted. The Referee will grasp the chain at the point level with the nose of the ball.
 - (f) If a first down is not awarded, the **Down Judge** and the stake operators will quickly return the chain to the sideline. The **Down Judge** will ensure that the clip is accurately repositioned **at the chain clip reference point (if available) or at the sideline and then moved six feet out of bounds (if not).** [§]
 - (g) Once the decision has been signalled by the Referee, the down box will then be positioned level with the front of the ball and the number shown on the down box will be adjusted to the next down, **ensuring the down box is visible in front of any nearby stake.** [§]
 18. When the goal line is the line to gain, or on try downs, only the down box will be used. The chain should be laid on the ground outside the **safety zone**[®] at around the 20-yard line and the stake operators should stand well back for their own safety and so as not to distract the down box operator.
 19. When the chain crew have been instructed in the above procedures, they should be put through a number of trial/dummy runs to ensure that they have understood their instructions. Use whatever time is available before the kickoff to practice these procedures with the chain crew.
 20. Remind the chain crew that, for the purposes of the game, they are officials and must remain impartial. They must not make any remarks to players or express any opinions on official rulings.
 21. If a member of a chain crew fails to perform to an acceptable standard, inform game management that a replacement must be provided.

22.2 - Alternate operators

1. This section lists the instructions that an official (normally the Line Judge or **Field Judge**)[‡] gives to the alternate down box and line-to-gain operators (where available) before the game. Under some circumstances it may be appropriate to delay the kickoff until this is done. Under circumstances that are clearly due to the home team's mismanagement, it also may be appropriate to penalise the home team (Rule 3-4-1-b).
2. Introduce yourself to the operators before the game. Note or record their names. Stress to them the importance of their job. Continually praise and thank them, particularly when they do something quickly and promptly.
3. Instruct the alternate down box operator that they must work approximately six feet off the sideline and that they must mirror the position of the down box on the opposite side of the field. **The auxiliary down box should be moved from its previous spot only when the main down box has been finally positioned level with the succeeding spot. This provides a backup reference point for the last previous spot.** [§]
4. Instruct the alternate line-to-gain operator that they must mirror the position of the stake denoting the line to gain. They too must keep six feet from the sideline. **The auxiliary line-to-gain stake should be moved from its previous position only when the main chains have been finally moved to their new position. This provides a backup reference point for the last line-to-gain.** [§]
5. Remind the alternate operators that, for the purposes of the game, they are officials and must remain impartial. They must not make any remarks to players or express any opinions on official rulings.
6. If an alternate operator fails to perform to an acceptable standard, inform game management that a replacement must be provided or that the alternate operators shall be dispensed with.

22.3 - Ball persons

1. This section lists the instructions that an official (normally the Field Judge or Line Judge) gives to the ball persons before the game. Under some circumstances it may be appropriate to delay the kickoff until this is done. Under circumstances that are clearly due to the home team's mismanagement, it also may be appropriate to penalise the home team (Rule 3-4-1-b).
2. Introduce yourself to the ball persons before the game. Note or record their names. Stress to them the importance of their job. Continually praise and thank them, particularly when they do something quickly and promptly.
3. Appoint one ball person to be responsible for each sideline. In addition each ball person should be made responsible for the end line to their left (when facing the field) in field goal and try situations.
4. Instruct the ball persons that if the ball becomes dead out of bounds, or in bounds outside the nine-yard marks, they are to give a ball as quickly as possible to the nearest requesting official. Normally, on an incomplete pass this will be the wing official and on other plays the deep wing official. If the dead ball goes out of bounds, or is dead because of an incomplete pass, the ball person should then retrieve it. If the dead ball is in bounds the ball person should wait with the Coverer until it is no longer required and then take it off the field.
5. Instruct the ball persons that they must keep up with the play at all times, normally staying near the position of the wing official on their side of the field. On each play, they should start just to the Team A side of the wing official or one-third of the way between the wing official and deep wing official. Instruct the ball person at all times to stay further out of bounds than the nearest official.
6. Instruct the ball persons that on field goal and try attempts, the one responsible for that end line should place their ball at the foot of a goal post and take position well behind the posts in order to recover the ball after the kick.
7. Instruct the ball persons that in inclement weather or field conditions they must ensure that their ball is kept dry and clean. It is the responsibility of game management to supply towels for this purpose.
8. Inform the ball persons that they may be asked to retrieve an official's bean bag if it has been dropped some distance from the end of the play. Instruct them that they must never touch a bean bag without being asked to do so.
9. If you have more than one ball person on your sideline, one should be made responsible for holding the spare ball and feeding it to the officials, and the other made responsible for retrieving the ball last in play [and relaying it to the ball holder ready for next use.](#) §
10. Remind the ball persons that, for the purposes of the game, they are officials and must remain impartial. They must not make any remarks to players or express any opinions on official rulings.
11. Instruct the ball persons not to give balls to players. Players may not practice with nor interfere with the game balls.
12. If a ball person fails to perform to an acceptable standard, inform game management that a replacement must be provided.