

13. DOWN JUDGE AND LINE JUDGE (CREW OF 6D/7/8)

13.1 - Free kicks

13.1.a – Priorities

Prior to the kick:

1. Being aware of whether the Referee has instructed the crew to switch to onside-kick positions, and moving position (if appropriate) if they have.
2. 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. Reminding the players to count their number if the team you are responsible for counting does not have precisely **the correct number of[‡]** players on the field.
4. 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, **that the safety zone is clear,[®]** 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 **outside the safety zone[®]** at the receiving team's end of the field. Checking that the ball persons are in position.
 - (c) Facing the field of play to signal that you are ready. Turning away, **or obviously leaving your position,[°]** if something on your sideline becomes no longer clear or you can see that a colleague is clearly not ready. Sounding your whistle, if your area becomes dangerously unclear after the ready for play.
5. Being alert always for short kicks.

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. If[×] the kick is short:
 - (a) Knowing where and by whom the ball was first touched.
 - (b) Observing illegal blocks by Team A (Rule 6-1-12).
 - (c) Marking any spot of illegal touching with a bean bag.
 - (d) Marking the dead-ball spot if you are the nearest official and there is little or no return run.
9. Giving the start the clock signal [S2] only if the ball is first legally touched in the field of play **and you are the nearest official or you have the best view of it.**
10. Ruling whether the ball becomes dead in the end zone or not.
11. 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.
12. Marking the spot with a bean bag of any backward pass, handing or fumble in your area.
13. Observing fouls/violations by all players generally in your area, but particularly:
 - (a) illegal touching of a short kick
 - (b) illegal blocks in the back and holding fouls at the point of attack
 - (c) illegal blocks below the waist
 - (d) contacting an opponent with the crown of the helmet or targeting a defenseless opponent above the shoulders
 - (e) safety-related fouls such as face mask, tripping, chop blocks, illegal wedges or illegal blind-side blocks
 - (f) late hits by any player after the ball is dead
 - (g) 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
 - (h) **illegal forward handing or illegal forward passes**

13.1.b – Initial positioning

Normal kicks:

1. **[DOWN JUDGE]** Be in position C (see 26.1) **slightly behind[°]** Team B's goal line outside the sideline opposite the press box side of the field.
2. **[LINE JUDGE]** Be in position B (see 26.1) **slightly behind[°]** Team B's goal line outside the sideline on the press box side of the field.
3. Stand where you can see in a straight line over the pylon towards where the kick will come from.

Onside-kicks:

4. [LINE JUDGE]
 - (a) [IN F6 FORMATION (CREW OF 6)] Move to position D (see 26.1) outside the press box sideline on Team B's restraining line.
 - (b) [IN F7-8 FORMATION (CREW OF 7/8)] Remain in the normal position.
5. [DOWN JUDGE]
 - (a) [IN F6-7 FORMATION (CREW OF 6/7)] Move to position E (see 26.1) outside the sideline opposite the press box on Team B's restraining line.
 - (b) [IN F8 FORMATION (CREW OF 8)] Remain in the normal position.

Free kicks after a penalty or safety:

6. 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.

13.1.c – Response to what happens (movement and signals)**Prior to the kick:**

1. 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:

2. 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.
3. 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:

4. 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.
5. If the kick threatens to go into the end zone, [step up to the goal line extended](#)[◊] (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.
6. If the live ball and at least one player go deep into the end zone, move to cover the end line.
7. If the kick clearly goes to the opposite side of the field to you, move upfield about 10 yards to get a better/different angle on lead blocks and any illegal wedges.
8. If a touchback occurs:
 - (a) Sound your whistle loudly to prevent further action.
 - (b) Move infield ahead of any receiver who has the ball. Until you get in front of them, continue to watch them in case they are fouled.
 - (c) Give the touchback signal [S7].
9. On a deep kickoff, follow the ball carrier and keep them [boxed in](#)² between you and the upfield officials.
10. 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:

11. Maintain a position where you can see the ball and the blocks by Team A players.
12. Know where and by whom the ball was first touched. Mark any spot of illegal touching with your bean bag (Rule 6-1-3).
13. If you are the nearest official when the ball becomes dead, signal timeout [S3] and mark the dead-ball spot.

13.1.d – Advanced techniques

1. You may adjust your position 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. [If the ball threatens the pylon, be in line with the kick so that you can rule whether the ball crosses the goal line or the sideline first.](#)[§]
2. [After the ball is dead and all action is ceased, if you are the nearest official to the previous spot make sure that any kicking tee has been removed from the field.](#)[◊]

13.2 - Basic scrimmage plays**13.2.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. Observing false starts in general and, in particular, by linemen and backs on your side of the formation. [This includes when Team A never sets.](#)
3. [Observing other illegal shifts \(no 1-second pause after simultaneous movement by Team A players\).](#)[◊]
4. Observing offside (and other line of scrimmage infractions) by Team B players (especially those between you and the ball).
5. Observing illegal motion by Team A players on your side of the formation.

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. Identifying your key player(s) (see sections 16.5 and 16.6). If the formation is new or unusual, verbally or visually confirming this with the other officials.
10. Noting eligible receivers and those players who would normally be eligible by position but who are ineligible by number. In addition, noting players (usually tight ends) who would normally be eligible by number but who are not eligible because a player is lined up outside them on the line of scrimmage.
11. Watching the tackle on your side of the formation if there is no tight end on your side.
12. 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.
13. Observing substitution infractions by both teams (especially the team on your side of the field). For example:
 - (a) replaced players not leaving the huddle within 3 seconds of an incoming substitute entering it
 - (b) replaced players not being off the field before the snap
 - (c) substitutes coming on to the field, communicating, and then leaving the field
14. Ensuring that coaches and substitutes are behind the coaching box line and that your sideline is clear of any obstructions.
15. [DOWN JUDGE] Noting whether the chains and down box are in their proper position, but only preventing play if there is a serious problem.
16. Observing the legality of the formation, in particular that there are no more than 4 players in the backfield.
17. Alerting colleagues if Team A makes a substitution while the snapper is at, near or moving towards their position at the line of scrimmage. §
18. Indicating Team A's scrimmage line (the tail of the ball) using your foot that is nearest their goal line.
19. Until the ball is snapped, § indicating, using the off-the-line signal [Sup1], when the Team A player closest to you is off the line of scrimmage.
20. Observing whether all Team A players have met the requirement for being within the nine-yard marks.
21. [DOWN JUDGE] If the distance to the line to gain is approximately 5 yards, know whether a 5-yard penalty would give a first down or not.

13.2.b – Initial positioning

1. Be where you can see the entire neutral zone, and the ball at the snap.
2. Normal scrimmage down position is in the neutral zone, at least one yard outside the sideline. †
3. [DOWN JUDGE] Be on the side of the field opposite the press box.
4. [LINE JUDGE] Be on the press box side of the field.
5. Never adopt a position that restricts the positioning or movement of players.
6. Never speak to players or coaches when the snap is imminent.

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

1. In the event of sudden movement by Team A players, come in quickly and confer with the Umpire to determine which team was responsible.
2. If one or more Team B players enter the neutral zone, watch the reaction by Team A players who may be threatened. Watch for when the Team B players get back to their own side of the neutral zone.
3. If there is a foul before the snap, blow your whistle, throw your flag and signal timeout [S3]. Come in quickly to the succeeding spot to prevent any play and to confer with the Umpire and the other wing official about the call. However, if there is no possibility of doubt about what the foul is, you may give a miniature penalty signal [e.g. S18 or S19] to the Referee without coming in all the way or [USING O2O/CREW RADIO] transmit the foul to all colleagues. @

13.2.d – Advanced techniques

Reasons for varying (or not) your initial position:

1. You get a much better view of everything from a wide position. It also prevents you being caught inside on a sweep play or out-pattern pass. ×
2. If a Team A player asks you whether they are on or off the line of scrimmage, inform them how they can use your signals to tell for themselves. Do not say anything to the player that might cause them to move immediately prior to the snap. Do not answer questions like "Am I on/off the line?" with a yes/no response, since you may have misheard the question. The fact that you are indicating the line with your foot and not using the off-the-line signal [Sup1] is sufficient to indicate to all concerned that the player nearest you is *on* the line. No separate signal is necessary or desirable.
3. If there is more than one receiver close to you off the line, you may optionally show the number by outstretching fingers at the end of your off-the-line signal [Sup1].
4. Do not attempt to give the off-the-line signal [Sup1] and a Team B player count signal [either Sup3 or Sup24] at the same time. Two outstretched arms may be misinterpreted as the matching substitutes signal [Sup36]. @

13.3 - Running plays

13.3.a – Priorities

1. Observing the ball carrier and action around them.
2. Blowing your whistle and marking the forward progress or out of bounds spot if the ball becomes dead in the middle or on your side of the field. This responsibility extends up to Team B's 2-yard line. If the ball goes to the other side of the field, backing up your colleague on the other side of the field by either estimating the dead-ball spot or mirroring their spot.
3. Observing any fumble where you are the nearest official or have the best view, and marking the spot with a bean bag.
4. Observing fouls by all players generally in your area, but particularly:
 - (a) illegal block in the back and holding fouls at the point of attack, especially those made by a wide receiver, tight end, lead back or pulling lineman
 - (b) illegal block below the waist fouls by players on your side of the formation
 - (c) safety-related fouls such as face mask, tripping, chop blocks or illegal blind-side blocks
 - (d) late hits by any player after the ball is dead
 - (e) unnecessary roughness against the quarterback after they have handed off or pitched the ball on a play away from you
5. Ruling (with help from the Referee or Centre Judge on passes from deep in the backfield) 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 Referee or Centre Judge. **Not attempting²** to make a pass/fumble ruling if the passer is contacted — leave that to the Referee **or Centre Judge.** [§]

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

1. If the run comes to your side of the field:
 - (a) Retreat at an angle out of bounds and towards Team A's end line if necessary.
 - (b) Pick up coverage of the ball carrier as they approach the neutral zone in your area.
 - (c) Let the ball carrier get ahead of you, then follow them downfield until the ball becomes dead, keeping out of the way of all players.
 - (d) Once the ball becomes dead, blow your whistle and move to a point level with the forward progress spot.
 - (e) If the ball becomes dead inbounds and near the sideline, be prepared to take forward progress from your wing colleague using cross-field mechanics if the ball carrier is driven back towards you.
2. If the run goes up the middle:
 - (a) Stay wide but approximately level with the ball carrier's progress.
 - (b) Come in when the play is dead to rule on forward progress. Come in until you meet resistance (do not leap over players). **Exception:** Don't come in if Team A is in a hurry-up offense (or should be) and the clock is still running.
 - (c) Only blow the whistle if you can clearly see the ball and the player in possession.
3. If the run goes to the opposite side of the field:
 - (a) Stay wide but approximately level with the ball carrier's progress.
 - (b) Keep your eyes open for cheap shots behind the play.
 - (c) Stay focused – be alert for reverses.
 - (d) When the ball becomes dead, move level with the dead-ball spot. Do not blow your whistle.
 - (e) If your colleague on the opposite side of the field is unable to get to the dead-ball spot quickly (e.g. because the ball becomes dead close to the sideline or the ball carrier is driven back):
 - (i) Assist them by staying in position level with your best judgement of the forward progress spot (cross-field mechanics), but do not be obtrusive about this.
 - (ii) Hold this position long enough to allow them an opportunity to mirror your spot if they are unable to judge it themselves, but give it up when the Coverer obviously indicates a forward progress spot of their own.
 - (iii) If the Coverer marks a very inaccurate spot, unobtrusively attract their attention to your spot. **[USING O2O/CREW RADIO] is one way of doing this, particularly if they are looking away from you (MOFO 25.5.1).** [§]
4. On a long run:
 - (a) Follow the play, maintaining as good a view as possible of the ball carrier and the players near them. Be prepared to close in when the ball becomes dead and mark the forward progress spot.
 - (b) Occasionally, the deep wing official may be in a better position than you to cover the ball carrier, in which case they may be the one to declare the ball dead and mark the forward progress. However, this should not be normal practice **unless the play ends inside Team B's 2-yard line[§]** — keep up with the play!
5. If the run ends behind the line of scrimmage:
 - (a) Assist the Referee (or Centre Judge) in determining forward progress.
6. Remain out of bounds until you are certain the ball is becoming dead. Never turn your back on the ball.

Covering the dead-ball spot:

7. When marking forward progress, converge to the dead-ball spot when play in your area permits. Square off, i.e. move parallel to the sideline then in, rather than diagonally. This is particularly important on pivotal plays that end around the line to gain or goal line, where *selling* the spot may be crucial (MOFO 5.7).
8. Be alert to cover the forward progress spot when the ball carrier has been driven back, but watch the ball carrier (and action against them), not the spot. Do not leap over or pass players to reach the forward progress spot: keep them in front of you. Drop your bean bag *only* if you are forced to leave your spot.
9. If the ball goes out of bounds on your side of the field, signal timeout [S3]. Normally, you have forward progress all the way up to Team B's 2-yard line. Unless the deep wing official is much closer than you, move to the dead-ball spot once players have cleared the immediate area. Stop on the sideline and watch any continuing action in the out-of-bounds area.
10. If absolutely necessary, mark the dead-ball spot with your bean bag and go out-of-bounds to prevent/stop continuing action.
11. Once all action has ceased, help (if needed) to retrieve/relay another ball to the Spotter (MOFO 6.7).
12. If the ball becomes dead within approximately 10 feet of the sideline and the clock should not stop for any other reason, give the wind the clock signal [S2].
13. If the ball carrier goes out of bounds in the deep wing official's area, go into the team area as far as the ball carrier and observe any actions against them.

13.3.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](#)⁴ – 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 (MOFO 6.10) 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.

Particular types of run play:

4. On a pitchout option play to your side of the field:
 - (a) Move into the backfield to observe action against the trailing back (any offensive player in a position to receive a backward pass), until the ball is pitched or the quarterback turns upfield.
 - (b) If the ball is pitched, you are responsible for the loose ball and for action by and against the trailing back.
 - (c) If the ball is not pitched, once the quarterback turns upfield they are your responsibility as on any other running play, and the Referee (or Centre Judge) will take over responsibility for the trailing back.

General tips:

5. It is better to pick up the ball carrier too soon than not soon enough. You may be forgiven for missing a hold, but you will never be forgiven for missing a fumble.
6. Even though the ball may be on the other side of the field, you may have a better view of the end of the run than the nearest official. If the ball carrier is facing you, or has the ball in the hand nearest you, or is spun round towards you in the tackle, you may need to help out your colleague.
7. If you are the Coverer and the run ends near to the line to gain, you must come in all the way and place a ball at the *exact* dead-ball spot.

13.4 - Pass plays**13.4.a – Priorities**

1. Ruling whether the pass is complete or incomplete. While primarily this will be for passes to your side of the field, in practice you may need to rule on any pass where the receiver is facing or at right angles to you, regardless of their position. Similarly, if the receiver has their back to you, you may need to defer to another official with a better view than you.
2. Observing the initial contact by and against your key player(s).
3. Observing fouls by all players generally in your area, but particularly:
 - (a) defensive and offensive pass interference
 - (b) defensive holding and illegal use of hands against eligible receivers
 - (c) illegal block below the waist fouls by players on your side of the formation
 - (d) illegal touching of a forward pass by a player who went out of bounds voluntarily
 - (e) ineligible receivers downfield
 - (f) [illegal passes](#)
 - (g) contacting an opponent with the crown of the helmet or targeting a defenseless opponent above the shoulders
 - (h) safety-related fouls such as face mask, tripping, chop blocks or illegal blind-side blocks
 - (i) late hits by any player after the ball is dead
4. Ruling whether a forward pass was thrown from behind or beyond the neutral zone. Also, being prepared to assist in determining whether the ball crossed the neutral zone prior to a forward pass.
5. Ruling whether a forward pass crossed the neutral zone or not.

6. Ruling whether a *quick* quarterback pass went forward or backward. Use the backward pass signal [Sup5] immediately if the pass is backward. Do not attempt to make a pass/fumble ruling if the passer is contacted – leave that to the Referee or Centre Judge. §
 7. Marking the forward progress or out of bounds spot (on your side of the field) if the ball becomes dead behind the neutral zone.
 8. Advising the Referee if the pass was thrown into an area not occupied by an eligible receiver, or the pass clearly did not reach the neutral zone.
 9. Watching for players who go out of bounds across the sideline or end line.
- Once the pass is complete, apply the same priorities as on a running play (above).

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

1. Your progression on a pass play is: (phase A) your key player; (phase B) your zone; (phase C) the destination of the pass. See also Chapter 16.
2. Remain on the line of scrimmage (or take one step into the offensive backfield) to be able to rule on whether a pass was thrown from behind or beyond the neutral zone, and whether or not the pass crossed the neutral zone. Remain there until you are confident a pass is *going to be*[°] thrown that will definitely cross the neutral zone, then move downfield (typically sidestepping for a short pass; if necessary turning to sprint for a long pass) to get into position to observe the likely destination of the pass, but *(importantly)*² without getting ahead of the intended receiver.
3. Only watch your key player during the initial action after the snap when there is a threat of illegal contact between receiver and defender. Switch to zone coverage as soon as that threat no longer exists.
4. If a potential Team A receiver voluntarily goes out of bounds in your area, drop your bean bag or hat to indicate this, and observe them to see whether they touch a forward pass while still ineligible.
5. Once you are aware that the pass has been thrown, move into position to best be able to rule on whether the pass is complete or incomplete, and whether there is interference. While the ball is in flight, watch opposing players who are contesting for the ball, not the ball itself. Be alert to both offensive and defensive pass interference.
6. If the player who attempts to catch the ball has their back to you, before making the call, look for help from any official in a better position than you.
7. If the receiver is driven back, be prepared to give them their forward progress. This is especially the case when the receiver is near a sideline, and you may need to use cross-field mechanics. If the receiver is on your side of the field, the other wing official may have the best forward progress. Take your spot from them. If the receiver is on the other side of the field, you may have the best spot. Offer a spot to your colleague. [USING O2O/CREW RADIO] is one way of doing this, particularly if they are looking away from you (MOFO 25.5.1). §
8. If you are not the nearest official, don't just watch the receiver, but particularly watch for defenders slightly away from the ball who come in and target the receiver with the crown of their helmet or above the shoulders. This is often missed by the nearest official.
9. If the pass is overthrown, bounces off a player or is otherwise uncatchable, continue to watch the player(s) for personal fouls (hitting a defenseless receiver). Do not ball-watch.
10. Blow your whistle if you see the ball become dead in your area.
11. If the pass is thrown to the opposite side of the field from you, your first responsibility is to clean up action on your side of the field and in the middle of the field. However if you are 100% sure of what you see over there, you may assist with rulings on complete/incomplete, pass interference, illegal helmet contact and forward progress.
12. When ruling on pass receptions involving the sideline, give only one signal *after the ball is dead*.[°] Give the incomplete pass signal [S10] if *you or another official rules the pass*² incomplete. Give the timeout signal [S3] if the pass is ruled complete and the ball carrier goes out of bounds thereafter (MOFO 6.8) or the ball is dead at or beyond the line to gain. Give the start the clock signal [S2] if the pass is complete and *you declare the ball carrier down inbounds*² short of the line to gain *within approximately 10 feet of the sideline*.[§] Whichever signal is used, *give it*² two or three times to maximise the chances of other officials seeing it. Remember to look at the other official on your sideline before giving any signal that indicates a completed pass. Nod your head "yes" to them to indicate a completed pass. Give the incomplete pass signal [S10] if you have it incomplete.
13. When contact that would have been pass interference occurs on a pass that is uncatchable, give the uncatchable pass signal [S17].
14. If there is an issue as to whether the pass or passer crossed the neutral zone or not, give the side of the zone signal [Sup42] towards the appropriate side. Maintain/repeat the signal until relevant other members of the crew have seen it.
15. After an incompleteness, obtain a ball from the ball person and form a relay to return the ball to the Spotter (MOFO 6.7).
16. If there is a run after the catch, respond as you would on a running play (above).
17. Maintain a position where you can see player activity in fringe areas, particularly on wide-open plays.

13.4.c – Advanced techniques

1. When an airborne player attempts to catch a pass near the sideline or end line, watch their feet first to see whether they come down in bounds. If they do, then look to their hands to see whether they have control of the ball. If you look at their hands first, you may miss the instant when their foot touches the ground (MOFO 5.4.8). Establish eye contact with any colleague at the end of the play before giving any signal.
2. Always be prepared to come back to rule on play near the neutral zone in addition to sideline action. If the potential passer decides to run with the ball, you must cover them once they are beyond the neutral zone.
3. If the pass is incomplete in your area:
 - (a) If there is no eligible receiver in the area, and/or the pass clearly does not reach the neutral zone, move quickly towards the Referee to inform them of this. If the ball crossed the neutral zone, give signal [Sup42] by pointing to the ground beyond the neutral zone. If the ball did not cross the neutral zone, move towards the Referee while pointing to the ground behind the neutral zone.
 - (b) If there *is* a receiver in the area, and you believe the Referee may not be aware of that fact, move towards the Referee while pointing towards the eligible receiver. Calling out "Number 34 was in the area of the pass" (for example) is also permissible.
 - (c) [USING O2O/CREW RADIO] Transmitting this information is also an option.
4. 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).
5. If the play ends near to the line to gain, you must come in all the way and place a ball at the *exact* dead-ball spot.

13.5 - Goal line plays

13.5.a – Priorities

Same priorities as on other scrimmage plays, plus:

1. [AT TEAM B'S GOAL LINE] Ruling whether a touchdown is scored or not.
2. [AT TEAM A'S GOAL LINE] Ruling whether a safety is scored or not.
3. Observing players' celebrations after a score.

13.5.b – Initial positioning

1. Take normal scrimmage down position **2 yards out of bounds or wider[†]** so that you will not be trapped by a quick wide play. [×]
2. You have primary responsibility for Team B's goal line if the ball is snapped from on or inside Team B's 7-yard line.
3. You have primary responsibility for Team A's goal line if the ball is snapped from on or inside Team A's 5-yard line.

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

1. If you have responsibility for either team's goal line, *immediately* after the snap, move directly towards it to rule on the score or an accurate forward progress.
- [AT TEAM B'S GOAL LINE]
2. On a running play, you must be at the goal line before the ball carrier to rule on whether the ball penetrates the plane. Do *not* move towards Team A's backfield to let players pass you.
 3. If you see the ball carrier is stopped short of the goal line, blow your whistle, come in and sell the dead-ball spot. If appropriate, call out "short" to tell your colleagues that.
 4. On a pass play, move immediately to the goal line then respond to the play. If the pass is thrown short of the goal line, remain on the line to rule on penetration of the plane. If the pass is thrown into the end zone, move to the best position to rule on the end of the pass.
 5. Indicate a score by blowing your whistle and giving the touchdown signal [S5] only when you clearly see the ball break the plane of the goal line in player possession or if you see a pass completed in the end zone.
- [AT TEAM A'S GOAL LINE]
6. [SNAP FROM ON OR INSIDE TEAM A'S FIVE-YARD LINE] Be prepared to move back to the goal line to rule on a possible safety. **Assist the Referee (and/or Centre Judge) if Team A's goal line pylon is threatened on your side of the field.** [§]
 7. Indicate a safety by blowing your whistle and giving the safety signal [S6] only when you clearly see the ball carrier down or out of bounds behind the goal line.
- [AT EITHER GOAL LINE]
8. If a pile-up forms at the goal line, come into the field of play until you can see the ball. If you are the nearest official, you may need to dig for it. Check with other officials that they did not see the ball carrier down (or fumble the ball) before **the ball[‡]** reached the goal line.
 9. If you have goal line responsibility and it is necessary to move out of the players' way as they come towards you, move wider without leaving the goal line.

10. 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.
11. If you have goal line responsibility, straddle the goal line – don't run after the player into the end zone unless there is a threat of trouble by or against them, but do turn to keep your eyes on them to observe late hits or unsportsmanlike conduct.
12. If another official has sideline responsibility, do not signal touchdown until you have confirmed with them that the ball carrier was not out of bounds.
13. Maintain the touchdown or safety signal until you know the Referee has seen it, but keep your eyes on the players – don't look to the Referee until all action has ceased. Don't run and signal at the same time. You should not echo the signals of other officials unless the Referee cannot see their signal.
14. It is especially important on goal line plays that all covering officials indicate the same point of forward progress. Communicate if in doubt. Signal only if sure.

13.5.d – Advanced techniques

1. [LINE JUDGE] Inform the deep officials of the number of the yard line that is the line of scrimmage. Communicate (preferably verbally) as to who has the responsibility for the goal line. In noisy situations, point at the line you have responsibility for.
2. On a running play towards the goal line pylon, give priority to ruling on the goal line over ruling on the sideline. The deep wing official on your side can help with the sideline – only you can rule on the goal line.
3. In 3rd and 4th down short yardage situations, treat the line to gain as you would the goal line. *On 3rd down, be prepared to move directly to the line to gain if it is less than 3 yards from the previous spot. Unless a kick is likely, on 4th down, be prepared to move directly to the line to gain if it is less than 4 yards from the previous spot.* [†]
4. If the line to gain is near the goal line, your first priority is the goal line. If necessary come back from the goal line to the line to gain once it is clear that the ball carrier is unlikely to score. Usually, if the ball carrier only looks like getting as far as the line to gain, then that is the place to be. If the ball carrier is running free and looking able to get near the goal line, that is the place to be.
5. [SNAP FROM OUTSIDE TEAM A'S 5-YARD LINE] Decide whether to go back to Team A's goal line or not based on whether the play is to your side of the field and how likely it is that the ball becomes dead near the goal line. (There is little point in going back if there is a low risk of a Team A player being tackled for a safety.)
6. Do not remain on the line of scrimmage as you would for a pass play elsewhere in the field. The Umpire should assist with passes crossing the neutral zone in goal line situations.
7. *In "hail mary" situations (i.e. a few seconds to go in either half and Team A will likely throw the ball to the end zone), use goal line mechanics regardless of where on the field the ball is snapped.* [§]

13.6 - Returns

13.6.a – Priorities

1. Observing the ball carrier and action around them while you are the nearest official.
2. Marking the forward progress or out of bounds spot if:
 - (a) the ball becomes dead on your side of the field between Team A's 2-yard line and the goal line; or
 - (b) the ball carrier is between you and Team A's goal line; or
 - (c) you are closer to the spot than the deep wing official.

Normally the deep wing official will have an easier route to the spot than you because they are following the play while you have still to avoid players running towards you.
3. Observing any fumble where you are the nearest official or have the best view, and marking the spot with a bean bag.
4. 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 mask, 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
5. Observing any *legal*[®] hand-off or pass where you are the nearest official or have the best view, and marking the spot with a bean bag.
6. Observing any *illegal* forward pass or forward handing, especially if you have a view that is level or nearly level with the ball carrier.

13.6.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.
3. If the play advances far enough to threaten Team A's goal line, be there before the ball carrier.
4. Observe the ball carrier while they remain in your area of responsibility. If the change of possession occurs deeper downfield than you are, backpedal down the sideline, always keeping the ball carrier in front of you. Try and keep them boxed in between you and the deep wing official. Take over responsibility for the ball carrier if they overtake you (unless the deep wing official is forced to as well). Stay wide enough to be able to retreat outside the sideline ahead of the players. Never turn your back on the ball.
5. Assist the Referee on Team A's goal line and (if necessary) end line. You have sideline responsibility from your position to the goal line and end line.
6. 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.
7. If the ball becomes dead in your area of responsibility, blow your whistle, give the timeout signal [S3], and then signal first down [S8] to show which team is in possession. You may need to cover dead ball spots between you and the deep wing official if you are considerably closer than they or if their progress to the dead ball spot is delayed. Hold the signal until you know the Referee has seen it.

13.7 - Punts**13.7.a – Priorities**

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

1. Ruling whether the kick crosses the neutral zone by knowing if it touches the ground, a player or official beyond the neutral zone.
2. If the kick is short:
 - (a) Marking the end of the kick (if inbounds) with a bean bag.
 - (b) Marking the dead-ball spot for any kick that goes out of bounds in your area.
 - (c) Ruling whether players touched the ball or not.
 - (d) Observing any fair catch signals by players in your area.
 - (e) Observing kick-catch interference against a player in position to catch the kick, if the kick comes down in your area.
 - (f) If the kick does not come down in your area, observing players who have *not* committed kick-catch interference because they were blocked by an opponent into the returner.
 - (g) Marking all spots of illegal touching with a bean bag.
3. Observing fouls by all players generally in your area, but particularly:
 - (a) illegal blocks below the waist, especially by players on your side of the field and [DOWN JUDGE] the up back
 - (b) before the kick, illegal block in the back and holding fouls by linemen and backs protecting the kicker, especially the tackle or wing back on your side
 - (c) during the kick, illegal block in the back and holding fouls against Team A players trying to get down the field
 - (d) a Team A player returning inbounds after voluntarily going out of bounds during the down (dropping⁴ your bean bag or hat to mark their exit, and your flag if they return)
 - (e) kick catch interference when the kicked ball will land in your area
 - (f) illegal blocks made by players who have signalled for a fair catch
 - (g) contacting an opponent with the crown of the helmet or targeting a defenseless opponent above the shoulders
 - (h) safety-related fouls such as face mask, tripping, chop blocks or illegal blind-side blocks
 - (i) unnecessary roughness fouls away from the ball
 - (j) late hits by any player after the ball is dead
4. Noting the numbers of players in eligible receiver positions on your side of the formation, and observing whether anyone else is the first to touch the ball or is ineligible downfield if the play develops into a pass play.
5. Responding to bad snaps or blocked kicks by adopting run, pass or return priorities, as appropriate.

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

13.7.b – Initial positioning

1. Take normal scrimmage down position.
2. [IN xx3 FORMATION (CREW OF 7/8)] The Back Judge will have responsibility for the end of the kick, unless it ends very close to a sideline or the Back Judge is well out of position,[§] in which case it is the responsibility of the nearest sideline official.
3. [IN xx2 FORMATION (CREW OF 6D)] The Field Judge is responsible for the deepest returner and kicks that end near them, and the Side Judge is responsible for all shallower returners except those near the Line Judge. If there are two deep returners, the Field Judge and Side Judge each take responsibility for their

nearest returner and kicks that end near them. If there are more than two, the Field Judge will normally take responsibility for the two nearest them. The Field Judge and Side Judge always work from the outside in.

4. The deep wing officials will normally be responsible for the returners, but the [short wing officials](#) must assist on their respective sides of the field with coverage of the shallowest returners and short kicks out of bounds.

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

1. When the ball is kicked, observe its initial trajectory, but do not watch the flight of the ball. Observe players in your area of responsibility (defined by the diagrams in section 26.4) – their eyes will tell you where the ball is going. However, if the returner moves as a decoy, do not follow them - observe the area where the ball will come down.
2. Stay on the line of scrimmage until the ball crosses the line, then move downfield after the players until you are approximately 15-20 yards ahead of the return. Backpedal to stay ahead of the returner as they approach your position.
3. When it appears obvious that the kicked ball will *not* land in your area:
 - (a) Maintain a position where you can cover action in front of and around the returner. If you are the nearest official *other than* the official covering the punt returner, move to where you can observe players blocking in the vicinity of any returner who is in position to catch the kick. In particular, observe those *blocked by an opponent* into interfering and therefore immune to penalty (Rule 6-4-1-d).
 - (b) If a player in your area signals for a fair catch, watch that they do not block before they touch the ball (Rule 6-5-4).
 - (c) Do not hesitate to call a foul if you clearly see one occur in the area where you are the cleanup official even though you may be a considerable distance away from the action. Communicate with your colleagues to find out their view of the action.
4. When it appears obvious that the kicked ball *will* land in your area:
 - (a) If the kick is first muffed (but not possessed) by a member of Team B beyond the neutral zone, you may give the ball touched signal [S11] to signify that Team A is now eligible to touch it.
 - (b) Use bean bags to mark any spots of illegal touching and/or the spot where the kick ends. Only one official, the Coverer in each case, should mark each spot and give each signal. If you have more spots than bean bags, prioritise the spot most advantageous to Team B.
 - (c) If the ball becomes dead because it is caught or recovered by Team B after a fair catch signal, or caught or recovered by Team A after being touched by Team B, blow your whistle and give the timeout signal [S3]. Give the first down signal [S8] in the appropriate direction.
 - (d) If the kick is recovered by Team A without it being touched by Team B, blow your whistle, signal timeout [S3] and give the illegal touching signal [S16] and the first down signal [S8]. Momentary touching of the ball by a player of the kicking team should not be interpreted as control of the ball.
 - (e) If the kick goes out of bounds in your area, blow your whistle and signal timeout [S3] immediately.
 - (i) If the ball touches anything (e.g. the ground or a player) in bounds and then goes out of bounds, move directly to the spot where you judge the ball crossed the sideline.
 - (ii) If the ball goes out of bounds in flight, the Referee or Centre Judge *may* be able to assist by directing you to the spot. Look back to the Referee or Centre Judge to see if either can help. If either can, signal [Sup16] and respond to the instructions they give you using signals [Sup17, Sup18 & Sup19] to direct you to the crossing point. If they can't, move directly to the spot where your best judgement tells you the ball crossed the sideline.
 - (iii) Hold the spot, but do not place a ball at it unless a spare is at hand. Other officials will retrieve/relay a ball to the Spotter.
 - (f) If the ball rolls to a stop in your area, ensure no player is attempting to recover it before blowing your whistle and signalling timeout [S3].

During the punt return, respond as in the section "Returns" (above).

13.7.d – Advanced techniques

1. Be alert for cases where the kick is blocked or where there is a bad snap. This also applies if Team A switches to a run or pass formation.
 - (a) If the play turns into a run or pass, respond as you would do normally for that type of play.
 - (b) Cover the goal line and end line as appropriate ([see the section in this chapter on "Goal line plays"](#)).[‡]
 - (c) Be aware of the jersey numbers of the eligible receivers.
 - (d) If the kick is blocked or the snap is loose in the backfield, hold your position on the line of scrimmage until you can read the play. If the play is to your side of the field, move into Team A's backfield to assist the Referee and to reach a place for your own safety. If the play is [to the other side or middle](#)[‡] of the field, stay on the line of scrimmage at least until it becomes extremely unlikely that a kick will cross it.
 - (e) [\[IN 2xx FORMATION \(NO C\)\] Assist](#) the Referee by observing actions against the kicker, especially when the ball is on the opposite side of the field. [The Referee will have switched their responsibilities to watching the ball.](#)[°]

13.8 - Field goal & try attempts

13.8.a – Priorities

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

1. Ruling whether the kick crossed the neutral zone, by knowing if it touches the ground, a player or official beyond the neutral zone.
2. Observing fouls by all players generally in your area, but particularly:
 - (a) illegal block in the back and holding fouls by linemen and backs protecting the kicker and holder, especially the end and/or wing back on your side
 - (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 mask, 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
3. Noting the numbers of players in eligible receiver positions on your side of the formation, and observing whether anyone else is the first to touch the ball or is ineligible downfield if the play develops into a pass play.
4. Responding to bad snaps or blocked kicks by adopting run, pass or return priorities, as appropriate.

If the kick is returned, applying the same priorities as on returns (above).

13.8.b – Initial positioning

1. Be in normal scrimmage down position.
2. **[DOWN JUDGE]** On a try down, set the down box on the three-yard line showing down 1, and instruct the chain crew to lay the chain on the ground outside the **safety zone**[®] at around the 20-yard line, and to stand well back.

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

1. After the kick, jog in towards the pile of players in the middle of the field. This will force you to keep your eyes on the players and discourage you from looking to see if the kick is good or not. If trouble occurs, you will be in a better position to assist the Umpire in dealing with it.

13.8.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 the play turns into a run or pass, respond as you would do normally for that type of play, bearing in mind that other officials may not respond as quickly as you. If the Field Judge and Side Judge are not in a position to do so, you may need to get to your goal line pylon as quickly as possible.
 - (b) **Note the numbers of the (normally) two eligible receivers on your side of the offensive formation so that, if a pass develops, you can rule on ineligibles touching a pass or being illegally downfield.**
 - (c) If the kick is blocked or the ball is loose in the backfield, hold your position on the line of scrimmage until you can read the play. If the play is to your side of the field, move into Team A's backfield to assist the Referee and to reach a place for your own safety. If the play is **to the other side or middle**⁴ of the field, stay on the line of scrimmage at least until it becomes extremely unlikely that a kick will cross it.
 - (d) **[IN 2xx FORMATION (NO C)] Assist the Referee by observing actions against the kicker and holder, especially when the ball is on the other side of the field.** The Referee will have switched their responsibilities to watching the ball.
2. **[LINE JUDGE]** On a try down, instruct the alternate line-to-gain marker operator (if you have them) to lay their equipment on the ground and to stand well back.

13.9 - After each down

13.9.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) Reporting any fouls you have called to the Referee and Umpire.
 - (c) Covering penalty flags (and bean bags, if appropriate) thrown by colleagues.
 - (d) Ensuring that all penalties are enforced correctly.
 - (e) Keeping the Head Coach on your sideline informed of penalties, particularly against their team.
5. Checking for injured players or other occurrences that may delay play.

Change codes: [†] better coverage; [§] fill gap; [°] clarification; [®] better communication; [×] deleted; [®] rule change ⁴ editorial

6. [ON-FIELD TIMEKEEPER] Stopping and starting the clock when necessary.
7. Allowing legitimate requests for timeouts. Checking that a request coming from the coaching box or team area was made by the Head Coach.
8. Echoing all timeout signals [S3] of your colleagues.
9. Knowing whether the play ended inbounds, and informing the Referee that the clock (if stopped) should start on the ready by giving them the clock running signal [Sup12].
10. Assisting in relaying the dead ball or a new ball to the succeeding spot.

13.9.b – Initial positioning

1. Shortly after the end of the previous down, you should be in a position level with the succeeding spot.

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

1. If you are the Coverer, check whether the line to gain has been reached. [LINE JUDGE] You should normally be in a particularly good position to rule on this. If you do this consistently, the [Down Judge](#) will not need to turn to look at the chains to know whether the line to gain has been reached.
 - (a) If it has, give the timeout signal [S3]. After all action has ceased, signal first down [S8 or Sup35]. Hold the signal until you know the Referee is aware of it.
 - (b) If you are not sure whether the line to gain has been reached or not, signal timeout [S3] and yell "close". Encourage the Referee to come and look for himself.
 - (c) Only place a ball on the ground at the *actual* dead-ball spot – never at a spot level with it.
 - (d) If the play ended inbounds, inform the Referee that the clock should start on the ready by giving them the clock running signal [Sup12].
2. If you are the Coverer, [give only one signal that the ball is dead](#). See paragraph 6.5.14. ⁴
3. If a penalty flag has been thrown follow the procedure in Chapter 19. [If an inadvertent whistle has been blown, follow the procedure in Section 6.15.](#) [§] 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.

Moving the down box and chains:

4. [\[DOWN JUDGE\]](#)
 - (a) When certain that there has been no foul on the previous play (and that there is no other reason to wait), instruct the down marker to be moved to the new position, and check that the correct down number is displayed.
 - (b) When a first down is achieved, and a new line to gain is to be established, first instruct the down marker to be moved to the new position on the sideline. The chain crew should then be instructed to move quickly to their new positions.
 - (c) Anticipate any call for a measurement and be ready to bring in the chains when signalled by Referee.
5. [\[LINE JUDGE\]](#)
 - (a) Anticipate any call for a measurement and be ready to come in to mark the spot for the clip when signalled by the Referee.

Relaying the ball:

6. If you have the ball, but another official has the dead-ball spot and it is close to the line to gain, hand the ball to that official and allow them to spot it at the precise location (yard line *and* lateral position) where the ball became dead.
7. Unless you are the Coverer, assist in relaying a ball to the official who will place it at the succeeding spot (MOFO 6.7).
8. If a ball has been placed at the dead-ball spot in a side zone, and another ball is being relayed in to the succeeding spot, do not move the ball at the dead-ball spot until the replacement ball has been positioned at the correct location [at the inbounds spot](#). ⁴

Getting ready for the next down:

9. Check that there is nothing untoward going on outside your sideline or in your team area, but don't allow this duty to detract from your primary responsibilities within the field of play.
10. Verbally or visually (using signals [Sup11] or [Sup12]) inform the Referee of the correct down and clock status (if you are the Coverer), and check that the Referee indicates it correctly. Inform them immediately if an incorrect signal is given. Be aware of the new distance to the line to gain.
11. [\[ON-FIELD TIMEKEEPER\]](#) Remind the Referee of the clock status and, if stopped, remind them whether it should start on the snap or on the ready.
 - (a) If the clock has stopped for a foul, injury or helmet coming off and there is less than [two minutes](#)[®] in the half, make sure the Referee knows that there is a possible 10-second runoff.
 - (b) Be prepared for a ruling by the Referee on when the clock should start in unfair clock tactics situations.
 - (c) Start the clock when the Referee gives (or should give) the start the clock signal [S2], unless you are sure that by rule the clock should start on the snap, or the ball is obviously not ready for play (e.g. because ball, chains, down box or officials are not in position). Do *not* echo the Referee's signal, but use the clock-on-ready signal [Sup12] if necessary to confirm that the clock has started.
 - (d) If the game clock should start on the snap, start it when you see the ball legally snapped. There is no need to give a signal to confirm this.

- (e) Your primary responsibility is to get the time accurate by rule, not to follow erroneous Referee's signals about time (**Exception:** unfair clock tactics situations), but work together to get things right (MOFO 6.12.4). §
- 12. If there are stadium game clocks, check to see that they have stopped and started correctly.
- 13. If substitutions are made from your side of the field, check that Team A players fulfil the nine-yard mark requirements (Rule 7-1-3-b).
- 14. Move into position for the next down. If the ball is ready for play (or will be imminently), backpedal to keep your eyes on the ball. Do not take your eyes off it for long in case the play starts while you are not looking.

13.9.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) Give the matching substitutes signal [Sup36] to the Referee and shout "subs on".
 - (c) Drop the signal when the Referee has taken control of the process.
3. Procedures intended to allow the defense to match up must not be used for a substitution for a last-second field goal. In that situation, Team A is making a normal and expected personnel change and Team B should be prepared to respond appropriately. In no case should an official be standing over the ball to prevent the snap as the clock runs out. §
4. 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 Referee or Centre Judge (for a Team A player) or 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.
5. Maintain your concentration, and think about the next play.
6. [LINE JUDGE WHEN THERE IS AN ALTERNATE CREW]
 - (a) When the ball is declared ready for play for the next down, instruct the alternate down box operator to move their box to the new position.
 - (b) When a new line to gain is established and the chain is set, instruct the alternate line-to-gain marker operator to move it to the new position.
7. [DOWN JUDGE] Don't spend so much time interacting with the chain crew that you disregard your other duties watching players and communicating with colleagues.