




MHSAA
Officials Program

FOOTBALL

**OFFICIALS
MANUAL**

Crews of 4, 5 and 7



Football Officials Manual Crews of 4, 5 and 7

MHSAA OFFICIALS PROGRAM



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Introduction

The purpose of MHSAA-produced mechanics manuals is to emphasize and promote consistency in rules knowledge and application, theory and philosophy and mechanics and signals. This manual serves as a guide to fundamental and emerging ideas, approaches and directions from the MHSAA in these areas. The content provided in this manual establishes a base from which all officials working MHSAA contests can consistently and successfully manage a football game. This uniform approach will assure MHSAA member schools and their teams that they can rely on the same approach to officiating regardless from which part of the state they are located. The designs of each of the systems (*i.e.*, 4-, 5- and 7-person crews) were created with consideration for simplicity of field and play coverages and consistency of responsibilities during the contest and from one system to another. The content in this manual applies to the 5-person system, entirely. When applicable, deviations are included for the 4- and 7-person systems. Unless specified otherwise, the positioning, responsibilities and play coverage mechanics outlined in the 5-person system apply to the corresponding positions in the 4- and 7-person systems.

Areas highlighted in grey signify noteworthy changes in system mechanics from the last edition of this manual.

Not everything an official may encounter can be accounted for and included in the text of a manual. Throughout the season, Points of Emphasis, Rulings and Interpretations and In-Season Bulletins will be posted through the Football page of the Officials section on the MHSAA website. Please check there regularly to find updates and other resources to assist you in your officiating duties throughout the year. You can find these at www.mhsaa.com/Officials/Sport-Specific-Content/Football.

NOTE: Any reference in this manual to “he,” “him” or “his” shall be deemed a reference to “she,” “her” or “hers,” as the case may be, when the person is a female.

Section 1: General Football Officiating

I) Officiating Philosophies and Axioms (Alphabetical by Topic)

Officiating axioms relate to situations when there is question or doubt caused by positioning, timing, view or circumstance. When this occurs, officials should apply these “rules of thumb” to make the best possible ruling. There is a difference between, and these do not apply to, plays that are close calls; and they should never be used as an excuse for being out of position, not using approved mechanics or failing to focus on proper keys and coverages. Officials should continually work to be in the proper position to see the plays and rule on them correctly. Just because a play is close does not mean the official should be in doubt. When an official is certain of what occurred, he should rule on exactly what he observed.

Axioms will be identified throughout this section with the bullet point led with (**Axiom**).

A) Ball Spotting

- When the next series following a change of possession begins outside of Team B's or R's 10-yard line, or when Team A obviously reaches the line-to-gain, the ball should be placed on the back of the nearest advanced whole yard line. If inside of Team B's or R's 10-yard line, or short or close to the line-to-gain, the ball should be placed precisely where the play ended.
- On a grass field, measurements should be granted in critical situations when requested and the ball is within ½-yard on either side of the line-to-gain. This is not necessary for turf fields when the series started on a whole yard line.

B) Blocking

- If a player is illegally blocked or held into making a tackle, no foul should be called unless the action is a personal foul or there is an extended element of time between the foul and the tackle.

- If there is a potential holding by either the offensive or defensive team, but the action occurs clearly away from the point of attack and has no (or could have no) effect on the play, holding should not be called.
- Obvious and intentional takedowns create special focus and should be called.
- Rarely should you have a hold on a team block unless a clear hold takes place after the defender breaks through the combination.
- If the blocker is in a “chase mode” all the action must be from the side to be legal. It is a block in the back when the force is on the back, even if one hand is on the number and one hand is on the side. The force of the block could be slight and still a foul if the contact propels the player past the runner or prevents him from making the play. If the force is clearly from the side, it is not a foul. Blocks that start on the side and subsequently end up in the back are also not fouls as long as contact is maintained throughout the block.
- Blocks in the back that occur at the same time a runner is being tackled should not be called, unless they are in the nature of a personal foul or there is forcible contact that involves player safety.
- **(Axiom)** If there is question whether an illegal block or hold takes place in the endzone or in the field of play, it occurred in the field of play.

C) Catch/No Catch

- A completed catch occurs when a player secures a ball in flight before the ball touches the ground, first touches the ground in bounds with any part of his body and then maintains possession throughout the catch attempt.
- Secure possession is proven:
 - a. When an upright player controls the ball and holds it long enough to advance, elude a defender or hand off or pitch the ball.

- b. When a player that is going to the ground during the act of the catch controls the ball maintains possession of the ball through the process of contacting the ground and momentum of the catch ending. If the ball contacts the ground during the process, but the contact with the ground does not cause the player to bobble or lose control of the ball, the official should determine secure possession has been proven.
- If a player attempts to make a catch while going out of bounds at the sideline or end line, he must secure possession of the ball inbounds and maintain possession as he goes out of bounds. If a player is bobbling the ball while any part of his body is touching out of bounds, it cannot be a catch.
- **(Axiom)** When in question, a catch (or interception) is incomplete.

D) False Starts vs. Motion

- Sudden, irregular movements or those movements that are clearly meant to simulate the start of a play should be flagged as a false start regardless of the position of the player(s).
- Trick plays to entice encroachment by the defense should be held to the highest level of scrutiny as to their legality.
- Players in motion that turn perpendicular with the line of scrimmage and then start forward should be flagged for a false start; but players that remain relatively parallel with the line of scrimmage and just start drifting toward the line of scrimmage should be flagged for illegal motion.
- If the ball is snapped as a back is moving toward the line of scrimmage while going in motion (to be distinguished from a “sudden, irregular movement”), this should be flagged for illegal motion.
- **(Axiom)** When there is a question to whether an action is a false start or illegal motion, rule illegal motion.

E) Fumbles

- **(Axiom)** When in question, the runner fumbled the ball and was not down.
- **(Axiom)** When in question as to whether the quarterback passed or fumbled, it should be ruled an incomplete pass.
- **(Axiom)** When in question, forward progress has ended instead of the runner breaking out of the grasp or fumbling the ball.

F) Game Clock

- **(Axiom)** When in question, a charged team timeout precedes a foul that prevents the snap.
- **(Axiom)** When in question, stop the clock for potentially injured players.

G) Kicking Plays

- For onside or “pooch” kicks, the kicker’s retraining line should be officiated as a plane, and encroachment should be called anytime a K player (other than the holder or kicker) breaks the plane before the ball is kicked. This line is not officiated as strictly on normal kickoffs.
- If an illegal block in the back occurs on a kick that will not be returned, *i.e., fair catch, kick out of bounds or touchback*, and the contact was slight (not a personal contact foul) and near the end of the kick, no flag should be dropped.
- Roughing the kicker will be called for forcible contact to the plant leg, and running into the kicker is general called when the contact is on the kicking leg unless severe and/or forceful.
- **(Axiom)** When in question, Team A is not in a scrimmage kick formation and is required to meet numbering requirements.
- **(Axiom)** When there is question as to whether a kicked ball crossed the plane of the goal line, consider the ball having entered the endzone.

- **(Axiom)** When in question, a foul by the receiving team on a scrimmage kick occurs before the end of the kick.
- **(Axiom)** When there is question as to whether a Team K player interfered with a Team R player before the ball was touched, it was kick-catch interference rather than a clean play.
- **(Axiom)** When there is a question whether a kicked ball has been touched by either Team K or Team R, the ball was not touched.

H) Line of Scrimmage

- Officials should work to keep offensive linemen legal and address issues immediately. Only call formation fouls when obvious, or when a warning to a player and subsequent warning to the head coach are ignored.
- Formations during a planned trick play should be officiated with a high-level of scrutiny.
- **(Axiom)** When in question, the tight end is *not* covered up when there are already enough players on the line of scrimmage, and should be considered covered up if there are not.
- **(Axiom)** When there is a question as to whether a defensive player aligned tight on the line of scrimmage jumps into the neutral zone, call the foul.
- **(Axiom)** When in question, a quick or abrupt movement by the center or quarterback is a false start.

I) Pass Interference

- When a flag is thrown for pass interference, the calling official should be able to articulate the reason for the foul.
 - a. Offensive Pass Interference (OPI)
 - i. Blocking beyond the expanded neutral zone. If a Team A or K player blocks an opponent beyond the expanded neutral zone during a pass that crosses the line of scrimmage, it is OPI. This will not be called on an overthrown screen pass intended for a

- player behind the line of scrimmage unless the blocking prevents the player from catching the ball.
- ii. Pick plays. Intentional contact by a Team A or K player against a defender beyond the expanded neutral zone (or not immediately against a player across from him) intended to free up another player during a pass that crosses the line of scrimmage is a foul for OPI.
 - iii. Pushing off. It is OPI if a receiver attempts to create separation by shoving a defender. Hand checking or other normal or incidental contact is not enough to be considered as pushing off.
 - iv. Playing through the defender. It is OPI when, because of the location of the pass, the receiver defends against a catch by the Team B or R player that has established his position by making contact before the ball arrives that hinders his opponent from making a play on the pass.
- b. Defensive Pass Interference (DPI)
- i. Arm bar. DPI occurs when a defender extends his arm across and into the body of the receiver before the ball arrives and restricts his opportunity to catch the pass.
 - ii. Grab and restriction. When a defender grabs ahold of a receiver's arms or pins them against his body in a way that restricts his ability to catch the pass, it is DPI.
 - iii. Not playing the ball. DPI should be called when a defender making no attempt at the ball contacts the receiver before the ball arrives.
 - iv. Playing through the receiver. It is DPI when a defensive player plays through a receiver's back, regardless of whether he is attempting to play the ball or not.

- v. Hook and turn. If a defender uses his arm to hook a receiver's arm or body and restricts him by causing the receiver to turn before the ball arrives, it is DPI.
- vi. Cutoff. It is DPI when a defender cuts off the path of a receiver using contact or "rides" him away from the path of the pass.

J) Passing Situations (Miscellaneous)

- Unless the quarterback is under duress or illegally attempting to conserve time (not a spike immediately following the snap), intentional grounding should not be called.
- If the passer is contacted after he starts his passing motion, intentional grounding will likely not be called; but if he is contacted clearly before he starts his passing motion, there should be a foul for intentional grounding if there is no eligible receiver in the vicinity.
- If the passer is legally throwing the ball away and it lands incomplete near or beyond the sideline, do not penalize the offense for having ineligible players downfield.
- **(Axiom)** If an interception is near the goal line and there is a question as to whether possession is gained in the field of play or endzone, it was made in the endzone and a potential touchback.

K) Personal Fouls

- If action is deemed to be "fighting," *i.e., a strike or attempted strike with the arm, hand, leg or foot*, the player must be disqualified.
- **(Axiom)** When there is a question as to whether an act is a fight or simply unnecessary roughness, it should be deemed unnecessary roughness (not unsportsmanlike conduct).
- **(Axiom)** When in doubt, it *is* a block below the waist, a clip or a chop block.

- **(Axiom)** When there is question as to whether a player is in a defenseless position, they should be considered defenseless.
- **(Axiom)** When there is question as to whether to eject for an illegal helmet contact or targeting foul, the player should *not* be ejected.
- **(Axiom)** When there is a question on the severity of a facemask penalty, it is a 15-yard penalty rather than a 5-yard penalty. MIBT – make it be there.
- **(Axiom)** When there is question to the status of the ball when a hit near the end of, and away from, the play, it should be considered a dead-ball rather than live-ball foul.

L) Runner Down

- The ankle or wrist is considered part of the foot or hand, respectively, and does not make a runner down.

M) Scoring Plays

- **(Axiom)** When in question, it is *not* a touchdown.
- **(Axiom)** When in question, it is *not* a safety.

N) Sideline Plays

- If contact occurs on a runner before he has a foot down out of bounds, it should be considered legal unless the contact is forcible and meant to punish.
- If a runner continuing down the sideline after the whistle has blown eases up, forcible contact by an opponent is a foul unless it was part of the initial action.
- **(Axiom)** If there is a question as to whether a runner has stepped out of bounds, the runner should be considered as remaining in bounds.

II) Helpful Hints for Officiating Football

- Be mentally and physically prepared to work the game.
- Concentration is imperative. Be prepared to focus intently for 5-10 seconds, 120-150 times per game.
- Be professional, respectful and a good communicator.
- Display integrity, courage and poise. Your true character is revealed in the tough calls.
- Use preventative officiating early and often.
- Hustle and move with a purpose! Every movement should improve your angle to get a better look at the play.
- Be a great dead-ball official. Make certain all players are covered after the play and continue to officiate until both sides are back with their teammates.
- Before you blow a whistle, see the ball.
- Crisp and efficient ball relays maintain a proper pace of play.
- Call quality fouls. See everything you call, but don't call everything you see. Get the big ones (the "ooh-makers") and pass on the inconsequential contact.
- Do not reach for your flag unless you're prepared to drop it. When you see a foul, get a number and keep officiating.
- If you miss a call, don't dwell on it. Always be ready to officiate the next play. Thinking about past decisions will keep you from thinking about the next decision.

III) Officiating Character, Conduct and Ethics

An official is nothing without integrity. When others question your judgment, rules knowledge and timing, they should still be able to rely on your character and ethics. The *MHSAA Officials Guidebook* provides a number a specific ethical and conduct standards for which officials must adhere in order to maintain registration with the MHSAA. These include, but are not limited to, the **Code for MHSAA Athletic Officials, Social Media Guidelines and the Conflict of Interest Policy.**

Additionally, officials should maintain the following character traits:

- Have ambition, but also patience. Newer officials often burn out by being overly-concerned about advancement early in their careers.
- Don't be jealous, but instead supportive, of another official's good fortune and opportunities.
- Be receptive and willing to accept advice from any official. Take what you can use and disregard the things that don't apply.
- Be honest with yourself. Set and keep realistic expectations with your skills and abilities in mind.
- Be a leader through example. Adopt a philosophy to help others reach their goals.
- Having passion for officiating will make you a better official because it gives you drive to improve your skills, makes you interested in studying rules and mechanics and inspires comradery with your crewmates.
- Be courageous and have conviction. Do what is right even when it's not easy or popular.

IV) Personal Responsibilities

A) Physical Conditioning

Football officiating requires commitment both mentally and physically, and appropriate physical conditioning is necessary to maintain adequate coverage of responsibilities during a contest. It is recommended that officials have regular physical examinations and monitor health concerns.

An old adage says, "stay in shape rather than get in shape." Both the season and off-season have their challenges in this area, and our busy lives often make it difficult to take the necessary steps to maintain a healthy lifestyle. However, taking the time throughout the year to eat healthy, remain active and address physical health concerns as they arise will help the process of transition into a new season.

B) Rules and Mechanics Knowledge

For proper management of a football game and season, concrete knowledge of the rules of the game and the mechanics of the system are essential. This requires a great deal of time and study. It also is a community effort – rules and mechanics should be discussed regularly amongst other officials to allow for input as to proper understanding, interpretation and application.

Rules should be consistently and fairly enforced and without deviation from the NFHS playing rules. The intent of each rule should be kept in mind, and officials should maintain a balance between strict enforcement and chaos. There are times when a technical application of a rule is detrimental to the spirit of the rule, and officials should be able to recognize the importance of using common sense and fair play to supplement their enforcement of the rules.

Proper positioning, knowledge of keys and field coverage responsibilities are mastered through an extensive knowledge of the mechanics of the system. Each official must have a thorough understanding of his duties in the assigned position, as well as those of the officials on the crew. He should be confident in the system and his crewmates' abilities to focus on the tasks at-hand; but also, be prepared to assist a crewmate when appropriate, within the rules and mechanics and after fulfilling all of his own responsibilities for a play.

C) Play Coverage (Boxing in the Play)

Officials on a crew should always work to keep players on the field "boxed in" between other officials. Referees, Umpires and Back Judges should always maintain an inside-out perspective of the play, and line of scrimmage and deep wing officials should keep an outside-in look. Line of scrimmage and deep wing officials should not enter the field of play while the ball is live.

D) Hustle

Hustle is moving to get into position quickly, but with a purpose and proper understanding of distance and angle. Hustling is not simply running fast. It's understanding the system in which an official is working and recognizing the importance of efficient movements within the system to ensure the best positioning possible for developing plays.

Some officials that run just for the sake of appearance may actually put themselves out of position. Understanding when it's necessary to hustle is a matter of experience and instinct – the latter often developed as a result of the former. This is not an excuse, however, to be lackadaisical on the field. Keep in mind this philosophy: Never walk when you should jog, and never jog when you should run.

E) Uniform

An official's appearance in his uniform is the first impression provided to coaches and administrators. Before even one snap, officials are judged on their appearance and demeanor. Much of this impression is attributed to the cleanliness and condition of the uniforms being worn. The proper uniform and accessory requirements are found on page 11 of the *Officials Guidebook*.

Section 2: Fundamental Crew Operations

I) Fundamental Crew Mechanics

A) Pregame Responsibilities

The officials should take the field dressed in full uniform approximately 30 minutes before the start of the game to conduct their pregame administrative duties. They may wear black pregame warm-up jackets during this time, as long as everyone on the crew matches. After the crew's pregame duties are completed, they may return to the locker room before returning for the national anthem and start of the game. If officials return to the locker room, they must be back on the field at least five minutes before the scheduled start time.

Meeting with Coaches

Officials should meet with each head coach as a crew, starting with the home coach first. This will allow the crew to obtain any information about pregame or halftime ceremonies and pass them along to the visiting coach. If necessary, arrange so that the crew begins at the end of the field of the home team to avoid passing the visiting team head coach. Meetings should take place apart from players and warm-up drills on the field and should be conducted in a brief, but thorough, manner. Crew members in attendance should include the Referee, Umpire and both line of scrimmage officials. The Back Judge (Line Judge in a 4-person crew) should use this time to meet with the clock operator(s) in the press box. If a 7-person crew, the Field Judge and Side Judge should inspect the field – including ensuring field markers and other impediments are moved to their proper locations. If this is a 4- or 5-person crew, the Referee shall designate which officials will inspect the field and when they will do so.

The meeting with the coach should begin with introduction and providing the coach a rating card

completed with the crew member's names, their ID numbers and their positions. The Referee should, in order:

- Ask whether all players are legally and properly equipped.
- Ask if any casts or braces need to be checked.
NOTE: The Umpire will immediately check any players' equipment while the rest of the meeting takes place.
- Confirm the coach is aware of the MHSAA policy on sportsmanship and taunting.
- Remind the coach the crew will be looking for targeting, unnecessary roughness, blindside blocks and other points of emphases.
- Request the team captains' numbers.
- Explain you will go to the coach for any options on penalty enforcement that are not obvious.
- Ask who the coach would like to be able to call timeouts (other coaches and/or players).
- Ask whether the QB is right/left handed and K and P is right/left footed.
- Ask whether the coach intends on running any special plays or formations.
- Discuss play clock administration, including which official will count down the last five seconds.
- Ask the coach his preferences for the coin toss.
- Ask if he has any questions or concerns before the start of the game.

If ceremonies or other special events are scheduled before the start of the game or for halftime, the officials should ask the head coach whether he expects any delays or if there are any special requests of the crew. The Referee will then inform the coach what time the crew will conduct the coin toss (should be timed with the expected conclusion of the meeting with the visiting head coach). The crew will then conduct the same meeting with the visiting

head coach. It is important that the length of time spent with each head coach is approximately the same.

Meeting with Clock Operator(s)

During the pregame meeting with coaches, the Back Judge (Line Judge in a 4-person crew) should meet with the clock operator(s) in the press box to discuss expectations from/of the crew. He should ensure that his watch is synced with that of the timer, and make any adjustments necessary so that the game clock is set to end at the scheduled start time for the game. If there is an understanding between the crew, the clock operator and the athletic administrator, the pre-game clock may be set so that it expires at five minutes before the scheduled start time.

In the discussion with the clock operator(s) before the start of the game, the official should cover the following areas:

- Which official(s) and signals to look for starting and stopping the game clock and/or play clock.
- Confirmation that any automatic horn is turned off and recommend that tenths of second be removed from the game clock.
- Signals and procedures for resetting game and play clocks.
- 35 pt.- (*i.e.*, *T.I.P.S.*) and 50 pt.- differential rules.
- Halftime clock will be set at the end of the second period upon the Referee's signal in the designated endzone, and the three-minute warm-up clock will be set automatically as soon as halftime has concluded.
- Overtime intermission times and procedures.

Coin Toss

Approximately 20-25 minutes before the scheduled start, the Referee and Umpire should conduct a pregame meeting and coin toss with team captains to give them specific instructions from the crew and determine the choices of each team to start the game. A simulated coin toss may take place approximately 3-5 minutes before the start time if the school/league/conference prefers this option.

REFEREE:

Pre-Snap Positioning and Responsibilities

- a. For the coin toss, the Referee will move to the middle of the field and take a position near the 50-yard line, facing the scoreboard and opposite of the Umpire.
- b. When captains from both teams have moved to their respective sidelines, the Referee will signal the officials to escort them toward the middle of the field.
- c. The Referee will then instruct the captains to introduce themselves to their opponents and return so that their backs are parallel with their own sidelines.
- d. The Referee will introduce himself and briefly discuss the sportsmanship and responsibility expectations of the captains.
- e. After identifying which visiting captain will call the toss, the Referee will ask that individual what his call is before the toss is made. He will then repeat the call and confirm with the Umpire what was understood.
- f. The Referee will then flip the coin into the air. It is recommended that the coin be allowed to fall to the ground on short artificial turf fields, and the coin should be caught when the field is natural turf

surface. If the latter, the captains should be notified before the toss that there will be a re-toss if the coin is not caught.

- g. Once a winner of the toss is determined, the Referee will talk the winning captain through his options, using his coach's preference from the pregame conference. If the choice differs from what was indicated by his coach, the Referee should probe whether he would prefer to opt for the coach's suggestion. If, however, the captain insists on a different option, the Referee should accept his decision.
- h. The Referee will then turn to the opposing captain and ask what remaining option he chooses. If the toss-winning captain chooses to defer, the Referee should ask the opposing captain, "Would you like the ball or to choose the end of the field you'll start?" After that decision is made, he'll then turn back to the toss-winning captain and ask which remaining option he chooses.
- i. After all options have been selected, the Referee will direct the opponents to line up facing one another, each parallel to and facing their opponent's goal line.
- j. The Referee will then move to the toss-winning captain positioned nearest the press box and tap him on the shoulder while facing his opponent's captains.
 - If he elected to receive, the Referee will make a reception/catch motion.
 - If he elected to kick, the Referee will make a kicking motion.
 - If he elected an end of the field to start, the Referee will extend both arms in the direction of the goal line which they will defend. He will then

move to the opposing captain nearest the press box and signal the choice of the opponent.

- If he elected to defer, the Referee will signal “incomplete” and then move to the opposing captain nearest the press box. He’ll then signal the choice of the opponent.
- k. Then, the Referee should wish each team good luck, encourage them to shake hands and dismiss them back to their sidelines.

UMPIRE:

Pre-Snap Positioning and Responsibilities

- a. At the time set for the coin toss, the Umpire will move to the middle of the field and take a position near the 50-yard line, facing away from the scoreboard and opposite of the Referee.
- b. After the Referee has secured from the visiting team captain the coin toss decision, the Umpire will verbally repeat the Referee and note the decision on his game information card.
- c. The Umpire will note on his game information card the options selected by each of the captains and confirm them with the Referee after the captains have been dismissed.

HEAD LINESMAN and LINE JUDGE:

Pre-Snap Positioning and Responsibilities

- a. The Head Linesman and Line Judge will each take positions next to the captains for the team on their respective sidelines (*i.e., the Line Judge on the press box side and the Head Linesman on the opposite side of the press box*), standing on the same side of the 50-yard line as the Referee.
- b. The Head Linesman and Line Judge will determine which captain will speak for his team at the coin toss

and have him stand next to the official (Referee's side).

- c. When the Referee signals to the officials, they will escort the captains toward the center of the field. As they approach their respective near hash marks, they will hold their positions and allow the captains to continue to midfield.
- d. After the coin toss is completed and the captains are dismissed, the Head Linesman and Line Judge will move to their remaining pregame responsibilities.

BACK JUDGE:

Pre-Snap Positioning and Responsibilities

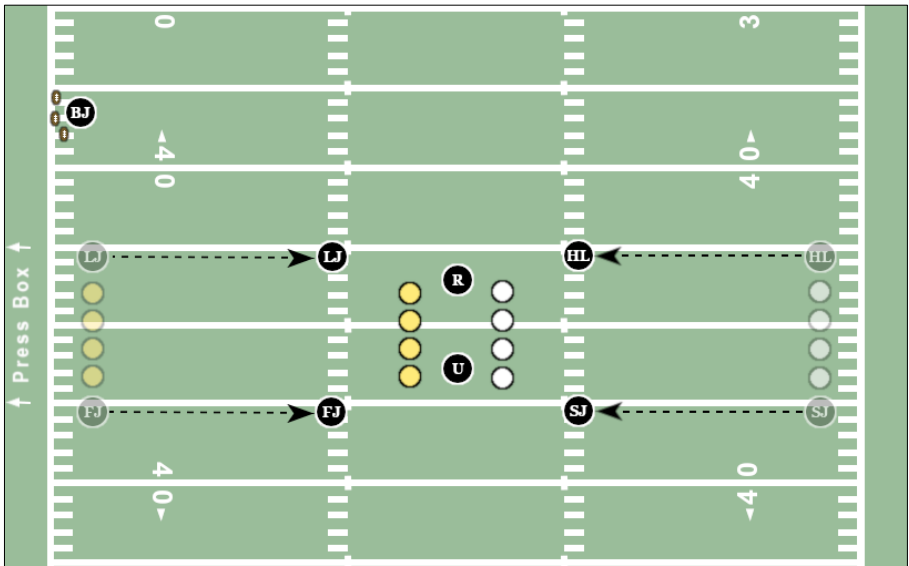
- a. During the coin toss, the Back Judge should check and mark each team's game balls. An identical marking should be made on each of the approved game balls so they can be quickly identified by any member of the crew.

FIELD JUDGE and SIDE JUDGE (7-Person Crew):

Pre-Snap Positioning and Responsibilities

- a. The Field Judge and Side Judge will each take positions next to the captains for the team on their respective sidelines (*i.e., the Field Judge on the press box side and the Side Judge on the opposite side of the press box*), standing on the same side of the 50-yard line as the Umpire.
- b. When the Referee signals to the officials, they will escort the captains toward the center of the field. As they approach their respective near hash marks, they will hold their positions and allow the captains to continue to midfield.
- c. After the coin toss is completed and the captains are dismissed, the Field Judge and Side Judge will move to their remaining pregame responsibilities.

Positioning for Coin Toss



Meeting with Line-to-Gain Crew

Prior to the start of the contest, the Head Linesman and Line Judge (just the Head Linesman in a 4-person crew) should conduct a pregame meeting with the line-to-gain crew. While it is preferred that the line-to-gain crew is made up of four members – front and back stake holders, a down box operator and a clip person – a three-person crew is also acceptable (down box operator also manages the clip). Regardless of the number of crew members, the success of the line-to-gain crew is dependent on their alertness, agility and responsiveness to directions.

Often times, these crews consist of members that have been working the chains on the sidelines for decades. Some positions on a line-to-gain crew are generational, being passed from one to the next. It can be difficult in some of these instances because the members become set in their ways and are sometimes resistant to a different way of doing things. It is important for the Head Linesman to remind the line-to-gain crew that they are an important part of the crew of officials for the game. He should explain that

not all crews do things exactly the same thing, and that the pregame meeting will make certain that everyone is on the same page.

Inspection of the Line-to-Gain Equipment

The officials will examine the down box first and check that it operates correctly. They will then move onto the chain and stakes. The stakes should have flat bottoms and should be attached together by a chain free of kinks or breaks. They should be measured for accuracy by placing the back stake on the back edge of a line (preferably at a 10-yard interval). When the front stake is stretched, it should also be located on the back edge of whole yard line, 10 yards in advance of the back stake.

NOTE: Any secondary down box used on the press box side of the field should also be checked for functionality, and its operator should be included in the pregame meeting with the line-to-gain crew.

Line-to-Gain Crew Accessories

A ribbon or piece of tape should be located at the five-yard point of the chain so that the Head Linesman can easily identify and communicate to the Referee when a penalty for a dead ball foul will result in a first down. The Head Linesman should carry a spare strip of either of these items if the chain does not already have one in place. He should also routinely carry a couple of zip ties in his hat should a link in the chain break and a quick repair is needed.

OPTIONAL: It is acceptable for the Head Linesman to carry an additional bean bag to be used in the following situations:

- If the line-to-gain crew is unable to get to the succeeding spot before next snap, the Head

Linesman may drop his bean bag at the spot where the down box operator will locate the box.

- During 1st-and-goal situations where only the down box is used, the Head Linesman may drop his bean bag at the spot marked by the down box operator in case the down box is moved from its position during the play.

Game Procedures

When meeting with the line-to-gain crew, it is important that the Head Linesman convey his expectations for them. The Head Linesman should provide the line-to-gain crew with a set of simple signals to be used during the game as instructions for whether they should stay at their position or move to the spot of the next series. He should also let them know when a new series does occur, it is most important that the down box person get to the new spot as quickly as possible. They should be instructed to look for penalty flags that might negate the results of the previous play, and communicate and confirm with the Head Linesman if he signals to move before a decision on the foul/penalty enforcement has been made.

At the start of a new series, the Head Linesman will mark the spot for the down box and rear stake with the heel of his downfield foot. The back stake will be set on the sideline and the front stake will be pulled taught downfield. The clip should then be placed on the back edge of the whole yard line at the nearest five-yard interval (e.g., 5, 10, 15, 20...), unless it is within two yards of the rear stake. If that is the case, it should be placed on the whole yard line at the next five-yard interval. Once the clip has been set, the line-to-gain crew will back up and hold their equipment on the back edge of the restricted area. This space between the crew and the sideline will allow both the line-to-gain

crew and the sideline officials to move freely into position for their duties.

(See [Measurement Procedure \(p. 49\)](#) and [Intermissions \(p. 73\)](#) for specific protocols as they relate to line-to-gain crew members for these areas.)

Conduct Expectations for Line-to-Gain Crew

As mentioned, line-to-gain crew members often have a long and closely connected history with the home team. In rare instances, this can create conflict between their game duties and the devotion as a fan to their school. For this reason, part of the Head Linesman's discussion with the line-to-gain crew should touch on the need for focus, hustle and impartiality regardless of the team on offense.

It is expected that each member of the line-to-gain crew will give total concentration to their responsibilities during the game. They should not be in idle conversation with members of the team, coaching staff or fans; and none of them should be looking at or talking on their phones. Their attention should be focused on the action on the playing field and good awareness of the instructions and other communications from the officiating crew.

Line-to-gain crew members should refrain from reactions to plays that might give the appearance of partisanship or impropriety, and may not make critical comments or gestures to or about an official or an official's decision. If a member of the line-to-gain crew violates one of these basic tenets, is incompetent in his duties or becomes a distraction during the contest, the game officials are authorized to have that host administration replace that individual with another.

With most line-to-gain crews being very experienced both in tenure and age, they are not always the most quick and nimble group on the field.

The combination of good, efficient hustling and paying close attention can make up for any deficiencies in the fleet of foot. This system also puts in place some optional safeguards for when the line-to-gain crew is not able to assume their proper position before the officials and teams are ready for play.

National Anthem

When the playing or singing of the national anthem is announced, the officials should line up shoulder-to-shoulder on the nearest yard line or sideline at their position while facing the flag at attention and remove their hats. On the first note of the anthem, each civilian official should place right hand is over his heart so that his hat over his left shoulder. His left arm and hand should remain hanging at his side. If the official is a military veteran or active service member, he may leave his hat on his head and shall give and hold a military salute.

There should be no talking, laughing, spitting or chewing gum once the anthem has begun. It is appropriate and acceptable for an official to sing along as the music is played or words are sung.

Other Participants

MHSAA game officials shall have no role in determining the appropriateness of the positions game personnel take during the singing/playing of the anthem. They may not penalize, discipline or address players or coaches for refusing to stand at attention during the anthem. When and whether this conduct is addressed is entirely the prerogative of the member schools involved.

Game Information Cards

All officials will carry with them a game information card while on the field. They can be found in reusable or disposable form, or an official may create his own using a pocket-size note pad. These cards should be used by all officials to record the following information before the game:

- Captains' numbers
- Coin toss winner
- Teams' toss choices

The additional following information should be recorded during the game:

- The details of timeouts (*i.e., who requested, time remaining and number of requests during half*).
- Unsportsmanlike conduct fouls (person or player info).
- Ejected players.
- The Referee, Umpire, Head Linesman and Line Judge should record down, distance and position of the ball at the end of the first and third quarters.
- All officials should note any unusual plays, rulings, questions or reminders for discussion at halftime or following the game.

5-Person Crew

The Back Judge will record all fouls called by himself, the Umpire and the Referee. The Head Linesman and Line Judge will record fouls for themselves.

4-Person Crew Modifications

The Line Judge will record all fouls called by himself, the Umpire and the Referee. The Head Linesman will record fouls for himself.

7-Person Crew Modifications

The Back Judge will record all fouls called by himself and the Umpire, and the Field Judge will record fouls called by himself and the Referee. The Head Linesman, Line Judge and Side Judge will record fouls for themselves.

B) Officials' Communications

Crew Communication

Communication is essential for a crew to operate efficiently and effectively during a game. Most of this communication is non-verbal, using signals and eye contact. Before the start of every play, every official on the crew must count the players assigned to his position (*e.g., offense, defense, kicking, receiving or own sideline*) and then signal to the corresponding official(s) the results of that count. There are no exceptions.

Counting Players

5-Person Crew

REFEREE:

- Kickoff or Safety Kick – Team R
- Fair Catch Kick – Team R
- Scrimmage Play or Punt – Team A/K
- Field Goal or Try – Team A/K

UMPIRE:

- Kickoff or Safety Kick – Team K
- Fair Catch Kick – Team K
- Scrimmage Play or Punt – Team A/K
- Field Goal or Try – Team A/K

HEAD LINESMAN:

- Kickoff or Safety Kick – Team R
- Fair Catch Kick – Team R
- Scrimmage Play or Punt – Own Sideline
- Field Goal or Try – Own Sideline

LINE JUDGE:

- Kickoff or Safety Kick – Team R
- Fair Catch Kick – Team R
- Scrimmage Play or Punt – Own Sideline
- Field Goal or Try – Own Sideline

BACK JUDGE:

- Kickoff or Safety Kick – Team K
- Fair Catch Kick – Team K
- Scrimmage Play or Punt – Team B/R
- Field Goal or Try – Team B/R

4-Person Crew Modifications

HEAD LINESMAN:

- Kickoff or Safety Kick – Team R
- Fair Catch Kick – Team R
- Scrimmage Play or Punt – Team B/R
- Field Goal or Try – Team B/R

LINE JUDGE:

- Kickoff or Safety Kick – Team K
- Fair Catch Kick – Team K
- Scrimmage Play or Punt – Team B/R
- Field Goal or Try – Team B/R

7-Person Crew Modifications

SIDE JUDGE and FIELD JUDGE:

- Kickoff or Safety Kick – Team K
- Fair Catch Kick – Team K
- Scrimmage Play or Punt – Team B/R
- Field Goal or Try – Team B/R

When a team has 11 players, the officials should give a “clenched fist” signal with an extended arm. With less than 11, both hands should be displayed near the official's

waistline with palms in and all fingers extended. When a team has too many players on the field, the official should make a “thumb down” signal.

Other Signals

Other signals amongst crew members include an upward-extended arm to signal to the Referee that the official is ready on a free kick, both index fingers extended and moving back and forth near the head to indicate that the spot of the snap will occur beyond the original line of scrimmage (double-sticks) and arms crossed at the wrists above the head on fourth down to indicate that the clock will be stopped regardless of the result of the play.

Crews may develop their own signals as well to communicate whether the runner came down in bounds or out of bounds on a play that reached the line-to-gain, or to give preliminary signals to the referee for fouls called downfield. Many of these signals may be substituted or supplemented by the use of crew radios.

Use of Crew Radios

Crews are increasingly utilizing official-to-official (o2o) communications on the fields to assist with crew communication, game management and pace of play. These are permitted by the MHSAA using the protocols outlined in the [Wireless Communication Guidelines](#). This provides instances when wireless communication is appropriate; however, radios should not be used as a substitute for crew conferences or individual hustle and engagement. Crews, especially those new to the o2o, tend not to communicate effectively, for instance, by giving long-winded responses. Misuse of this type of communication can actually slow down crew penalty enforcement and pace of play.

Crew Conferences and Overturning Calls

On occasion, crew members may need to conference with one another regarding a rule enforcement or a call on the field. If there is confusion regarding a rule or a head coach requests a timeout to discuss a possible rule misapplication, the entire crew should confer to ensure that the proper ruling was made.

Sometimes only the officials involved on a call may need to consult with each other to make certain that the action observed is correct. One instance may be when multiple flags are thrown in the same area of the field on potentially the same action, such as when each line of scrimmage official has a flag for action prior to the snap. In this case, they may need to come together briefly to discuss what foul occurred and by which player.

Another instance might be when a catch/no catch, in-bounds/out-of-bounds decision occurs between two officials on the same sideline. If an official has information that he is certain the pass is incomplete, he should signal that immediately. If, however, there is a possibility that the pass was complete, officials should stop the clock and confer. The information each provides should be used to determine the proper decision, followed by a signal by only one of the officials exiting the conference.

When officials come together to ask/give information regarding a call, they should only offer information they are certain occurred on the play. Because officials rarely share field coverage responsibilities, there will often be times when an official will not have pertinent information for what occurred. It is okay for an official to say, “I don’t know” or “I’m not for certain,” and, in fact, this should be done if the official is not positive they can add accurate information to help with the decision.

The overturning of calls should be a rare occurrence and only when the official is absolutely certain that his crewmate’s decision was incorrect. Crews that meet

excessively or at great length convey that the crew is unsure of the rules or applications. There is little more that hurts a crew's credibility than overturning an original call that is later shown to be correct. An official that enters a conference believing a call should be changed should have more information than he just believes the judgment was incorrect. He should offer a plausible reason why the original calling official made the incorrect decision – something caused by positioning or that his attention was focused on another aspect of the play. For instance, a line of scrimmage official may conference with a Referee to inform him that a pass was not in the vicinity of an eligible receiver – something the Referee may not have been able to see because his attention was focused on the contact being made on the quarterback.

If two officials confer on a call, and the original call is changed, the official that is changing his call will signal the change as he exits the conference. There may also be instances where officials make two separate calls, call two different fouls on the same play for the same action or cannot agree on a decision in conference with one another. In these rare instances, the Referee should listen to both official's accounts and determine which call is correct based on the information obtained. The Referee will then, alone, signal the decision.

Flag Dropped After the Play

The foul most flagged after the conclusion of the play is for intentional grounding. It is the Referee's decision to determine whether the passer threw the ball away with the intent to save a loss of yardage or to conserve time. An exception is when the quarterback immediately spikes the ball following the snap.

Because the Referee is responsible to watch all action on the quarterback, it is rare when he would see the ultimate destination the ball was thrown. Following an

incomplete pass in which the passer was under duress, the Referee should confer with the covering official to determine whether there was an eligible receiver occupying the area where the pass was thrown. A line of scrimmage official can quickly inform the Referee of this by jogging toward the Referee's position while pointing in the direction of the receiver in question.

If, after consultation with the covering official, the Referee determines that the pass was illegally thrown incomplete, he will drop his flag at the spot that the ball was released.

Picking Flags Up

While it should not be a regular occurrence, or used as a prop for weak officiating, clearly incorrect fouls should be overturned and the flags picked up. There are a number of instances when this might be the case – some of which include penalties that could not have occurred by rule. For instance, if a timeout was called prior to a flag thrown for delay of game or for a false start, this should be picked up since the timeout occurred first.

Fouls can also be overturned when another official can provide pertinent information that would negate the foul. A good example would be when pass interference is overturned because another official saw the ball tipped. The flag should be picked up after this information is relayed. Another might be when roughing the kicker or roughing the holder is waived off because another official has information that the offender was blocked into the contact.

The last category of fouls that may be overturned involve substituting one official's judgment for another. These should only be done in the rarest of instances, and only when the official overturning the call is absolutely certain that the initial call was incorrect. The primary category of fouls that this will cover is safety. If a called

blindside block is determined by another official to not be a foul because the blocker actually used extended arms, or if a called targeting foul is determined not to be targeting because another official had a better look to determine no actual contact occurred with the head or neck area, these flags can be picked up.

Communication with Coaching Staffs

All officials must be able to effectively communicate with coaches. Officials should convey a calm, relaxed demeanor and avoid being confrontational or short-tempered. Officials should be willing to listen to coaches' questions or concerns. Officials should use good eye contact and appropriate tone and volume in their voices.

Because of their position on the sidelines, line of scrimmage and deep wing officials are the primary conduit for communication with coaches. This close proximity, while it may have its challenges, can be a benefit because it allows for the quick communication and direction from officials. In order to correct issues that occur on the field with their team, coaches will often want to know the number of the player at issue. It is important that crews share accurate information with the coach regarding fouls, unusual plays and preventatively addressing concerns. If the sideline official does not have the information a coach requests, and it is not a matter of immediate importance, the official should inform the coach that he will get that information at the next available opportunity.

Sideline officials can also facilitate options that the coach may take for penalty enforcement and communicate these decisions to the Referee. They should also know the number of timeouts remaining for each team and be able to let the coach know that information upon request. That information should also be shared after each timeout.

Officials should be willing to answer reasonable questions and concerns of coaches. If asked to pay particular attention to action on the field, the official should inform the coach that he

will either look for the action described, or communicate with the official that has that responsibility at the next convenient stoppage. While an official may inform a coach that he was not responsible for watching the action of concern, it is important the way this is communicated. Instead of “That’s not my call (or area),” an official should respond with something along the lines of “Sorry, coach. I had a different responsibility on that play, but I’ll try to get that information for you if I can as soon as possible.”

Coaches have a responsibility to communicate appropriately as well. If a coach becomes abusive, demonstratively protests a decision, enters the playing field for the purpose of arguing with the officials or refuses to stop arguing after being warned, he should be penalized. Special emphasis has been put on the reduction of personal attacks from coaches and players. While some of the conduct mentioned should result in a 15-yard unsportsmanlike foul, personal attacks against an official result in an immediate ejection (in addition to the UNS).

An official should display a good presence while in discussion with a coach. He should keep an upright but relaxed posture, hands behind the back or at his sides and maintain eye contact. Officials should avoid engaging in arguments with coaches. When a coach is convinced that a call was missed or incorrect, continued discussion will rarely result in changing his mind. Arguing with a coach will only inflame the situation and distracts the official from his next responsibilities.

Explanation/Challenge to Rules Application

Coaches may request that a Referee explain a rules decision or penalty enforcement. If this occurs in a reasonable manner, the Referee (and one additional official) should oblige the coach with a brief explanation at the sideline. If the coach insists that the rule has been misapplied, he may request a timeout for further discussion.

During this time, the officials should confer with one another to determine whether the rule was enforced properly. This may also include consultation of a rule book when necessary. If the result of the conference is that the call is overturned, the timeout will be an official's timeout. If the call stands, the coach's team will be charged a timeout. If no further timeouts remain when the call stands, the team will be assessed a delay of game penalty.

C) Field Microphones

When provided by the host school, the Referee's microphone is an excellent tool for explaining penalties, unusual rulings and other important game situations. A Referee that makes quality announcements can instill confidence in the entire crew. While this is an opportunity for a Referee to display some personality while making their announcements, there are some fundamentals that should be followed to ensure that the message is conveyed clearly and accurately:

- Check the equipment. Some technological malfunctions are out of anyone's control. However, one area officials can control is the testing of the equipment beforehand. The Referee should check whether the microphone and receiver connect with one another. This should be conducted during pregame team warmups because most people that aren't expecting an announcement won't notice when it's made; but game officials and school administrators that are specifically listening for this test will be able to determine whether the clarity and volume are at the appropriate levels.
- Know where to speak. The Referee should have one focal point to which he directs his announcements. He should find an individual, a specific location in the bleachers or the press box to look at while announcing his information. If the game is televised, the official should direct the announcement toward the camera

that will focus on him when making it. This location should be predetermined before the start of the contest.

- Practice makes perfect. Referees should practice making announcements in front of a mirror or in front of a camera for review. They should work on everything from cadence, to tone, to switching on the microphone with little effort.
- Think before you speak. A Referee should not turn on his microphone unless he is absolutely certain what he will say. He should have all relevant penalty or play information, and should have the Umpire standing by with the particulars should the details slip the Referee's mind.
- Use of common terms. When describing the team, it is best to use terms such as offense, defense, kicking team or receiving team. Referees should avoid announcing the uniform color or the school name when announcing penalties. It is permissible to use the uniform color or school name when announcing a charged team timeout.
- Coordinate voice and signals. The Referee's voice should match his signals. For example, the holding signal should be made simultaneous to when he says "holding". Referees should develop a cadence and routine for how the penalty is announced. The order of the announcement isn't as important as the consistency of it. The Referee should determine for himself what sounds best: Foul type, team, number and penalty enforcement. Or, foul type, number, team and penalty enforcement.
- Get through difficulties. If the microphone malfunctions or begins going in and out, the Referee should continue to speak and signal. The signals will convey the necessary information to the press box, teams and spectators; and if televised, the audio feed may still be

connected to the network even if the PA system is not working.

If the Referee makes a mistake in his description, he should fix the issue by pausing briefly, then saying, "Correction." For instance, "Holding, on the offense, number 76...Correction, number 72..."

- Remain calm and collected. Before beginning the announcement, the Referee should come to a complete stop, take a breath and then start to speak. He should use his normal speaking voice and allow the microphone to do its work. The Referee should avoid rushing through his announcement and signals, but still keep it concise and to the point. To display poise and confidence, the Referee should complete his entire announcement before turning away from the press box or moving to his position.

Penalty Announcements

When announcing penalties, the Referee may need to indicate whether the foul occurred during a dead ball (including the dead ball signal). If it is a live ball foul, there is rarely an instance where this needs to be announced. When not specified otherwise, it is assumed that the foul took place during the live ball. When announcing the foul occurred during a dead ball, the Referee may indicate this by saying, "Prior to the play..." or "After the play..."

If there are multiple fouls (*i.e., two live ball fouls on the same team*), the Referee will announce the foul(s) that is/are declined first, and conclude with the foul for which the penalty is accepted. Double-fouls (*i.e., one or more live ball fouls by each team*) should be announced in the order in which they occurred. If a live ball foul is followed by a dead ball personal foul, they will be announced separate and in the order they occurred.

Fouls that occur during downs which include a scrimmage kick should be announced based on when

during the down the foul occurred. It is important the Referee distinguish whether the foul occurred “During the kick...,” “During the return...” or if it was “Kick-catch interference.”

Ruling Announcements

From time-to-time, the Referee may need to explain rulings or provide information. When doing so, the Referee should first reiterate what was called on the field by starting with, “The ruling on the field is...” It is also important that whenever possible, the Referee indicate the reason for the decision was “by rule”. This lends credibility to the decision, as it gives unusual or unexpected calls a foundation in the rule book.

EXAMPLE: “The ruling on the field is that the kick was caught inside the 5-yard line and his momentum carried him into the endzone, where the ball became dead. By rule, the ball is placed at the 2-yard line where the ball was caught, and it will be 1st and 10 for Central.”

It is not necessary to use the microphone to explain every ruling on the field, especially if it only involves the judgment of an official. For instance, a runner that steps out of bounds is indicated by the official giving the “stop the clock” signal and marking the progress spot. It is not likely that the Referee will need to announce that the runner went out of bounds. The same is true for most fumbles or interceptions. These types of plays are often self-explanatory by the mechanics used by the covering official. Some examples of plays where announcements might be helpful are:

- If there is question as to whether a pass or fumble occurred by the quarterback.
- Why a play was not ruled intentional grounding.
- When a runner is ruled down by forward progress prior to fumbling the ball.

- Any clock adjustment.
- When a penalty flag is picked up.

D) Pace of Play

Officials have significant impact on the pace at which a game is played. An upbeat tempo by the officiating crew sets the tone for everyone involved: coaches, players, line-to-gain crew and ball boys. Implementation of some time-saving measures can maintain a good pace of play and proper flow to the game.

Covering officials must encourage players to keep celebrations brief following a touchdown, and move them along to prepare for the try. To ensure play is ready to start immediately following an intermission, teams should be notified to wrap up conversations and move to their positions at 45 seconds of a timeout or following a try or field goal.

Officials should always be ready and in position for the Referee to signal the ready-for-play in a timely manner. The Referee must signal the ready-for-play without delay. If a play results in a first down in bounds, the Referee will signal for the game clock to restart as soon as the ball is spotted and he has made eye contact with the Umpire.

When an official calls a foul that prevents a snap, he should give a preliminary signal (or radio) to the Referee from his position. For most of these types of fouls, the penalty enforcement can be made relatively quickly. Another tip to expedite penalty enforcement is for the Head Linesman to inform the Referee whenever a 5-yard penalty for a foul prior to the snap will result in a first down.

If a team is not promptly coming from the sideline following a timeout, try or field goal, the Referee should signal ready-for-play as a means to bring them into compliance. Officials should not be expected to constantly remind teams to retake the field following these delays.

E) Reverse Mechanics

Following a change of possession after a punt, or an interception or fumble recovery by Team B, the crew must be prepared to transition to reverse mechanics to properly cover the field.

5-Person Crew

REFEREE:

- a. The Referee will assume the responsibilities normally reserved for the Back Judge on the other end of the field at the start of the play. He should remain well in front of the ball, paying particular attention to the quarterback (or kicker); and taking a position on the goal line in advance of the ball carrier, if the goal line is challenged.

UMPIRE:

- a. The Umpire will retain the same inside-out responsibilities and allow any play behind him to pass beyond his position.

HEAD LINESMAN and LINE JUDGE:

- a. The line of scrimmage officials will have mirrored responsibilities of those when the play started.

BACK JUDGE:

- a. The Back Judge should follow behind the play, looking for blindside blocks, hits on defenseless players and physical altercations between opponents.

7-Person Crew Modifications

When a 7-person crew uses reverse mechanics, the line of scrimmage officials and deep wing officials will exchange responsibilities.

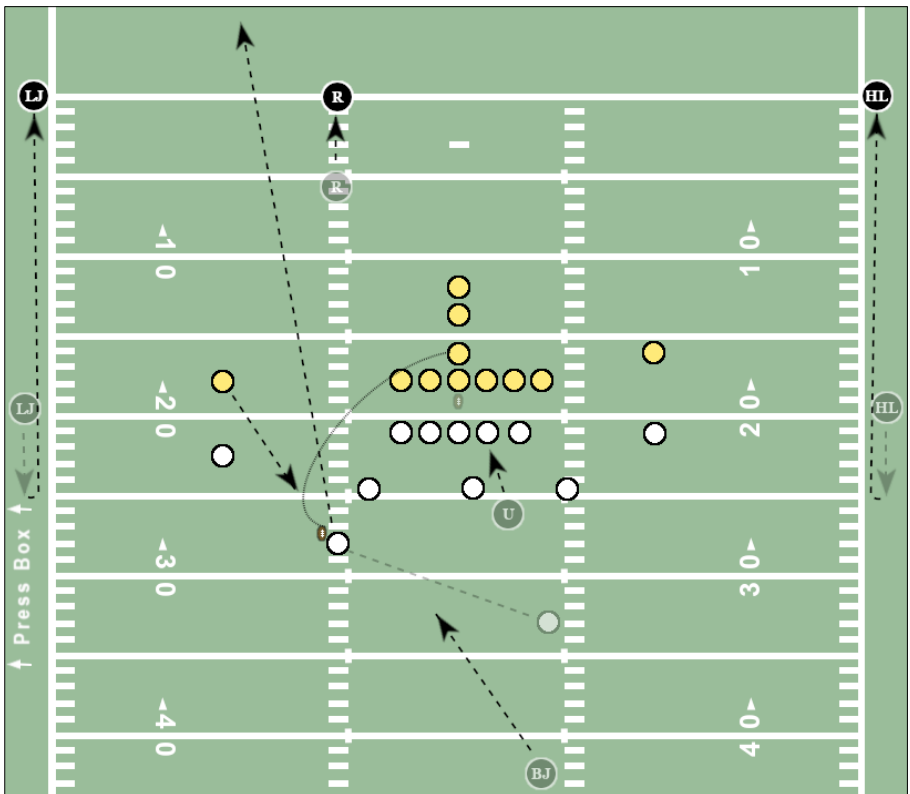
HEAD LINESMAN and LINE JUDGE:

- a. The Line Judge and Head Linesman will immediately give ground and attempt to remain approximately 20 yards in front of the play. They should maintain a wide vision and observe blocks ahead of the ball carrier. Line of scrimmage officials are responsible for the forward progress spot inside the 2-yard line.

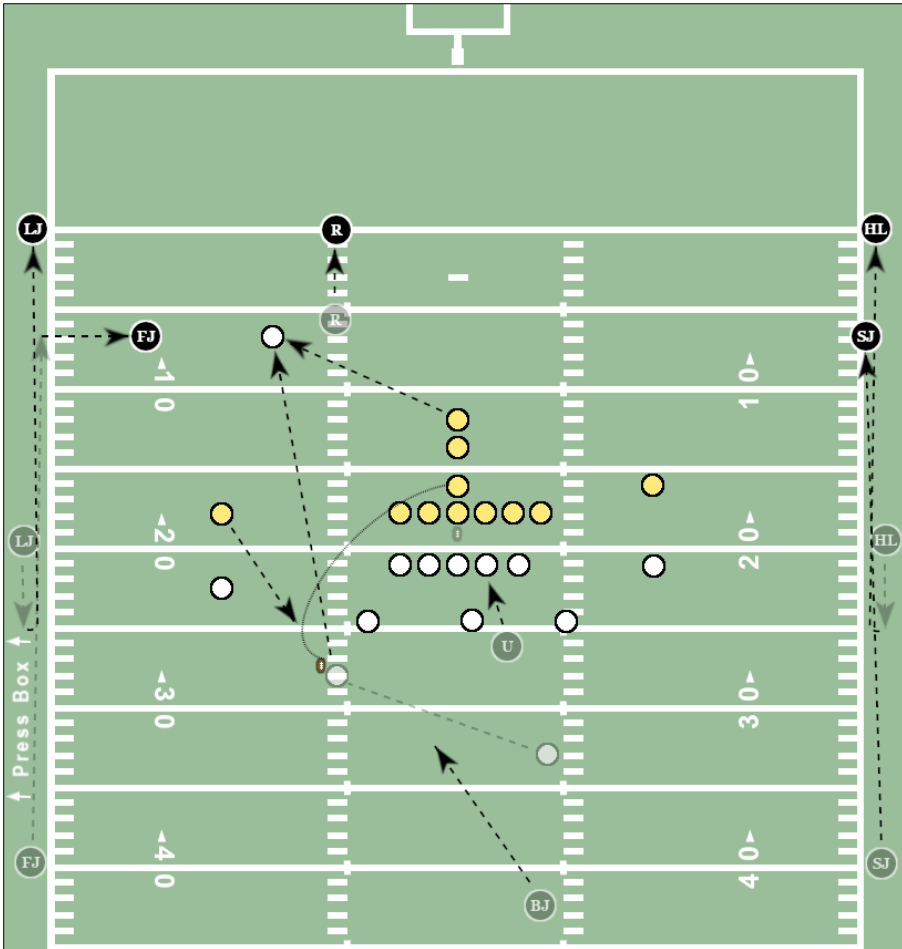
SIDE JUDGE and FIELD JUDGE:

- a. The Side Judge and Field Judge will remain behind the ball carrier (or allow the ball carrier to advance beyond their reversed position). The deep wing officials will then assume the forward progress spot up to the 2-yard line.

Reverse Mechanics – Interception – 5-Person Crew



Reverse Mechanics – Interception – 7-Person Crew



F) Forward Progress and Spotting the Ball

Throughout the game, the determination of forward progress and where the ball is spotted is hardly noticed and rarely disputed. It is generally accepted that the start of any new series should begin with the ball located on the back side of a full yard line. In some cases when the spot of the previous play ended with the point of the ball being placed on the front side of the hash line, it may be necessary to use the front side of the line to start the new series. If, however, the line-to-gain

is easily reached as the runner is downed in between yard marks, the ball should be placed on the next full yard unless it is between the 10-yard line and goal line (in which case it should be spotted precisely where it is downed). Whenever a turnover on downs occurs, the ball should be kept at the same position. This may result in the ball not starting the series on a whole yard line. For instance: When the nose of the ball is located on the backside of a whole yard line when an incomplete pass occurs on 4th down, it will be returned to the same location. This results in the new series beginning with the rear point of the ball on the front of the whole yard line.

There are times, though, where the exact spot of progress is critical to the play, and will affect whether a first down, safety, touchback or touchdown occurs. These situations demonstrate the importance for officials to understand the concept of forward progress – “the end of advancement of a runner, toward the opponent’s goal.” The runner’s advancement can end four ways: (1) he is down by rule, (2) his forward movement is stopped, (3) he steps out of bounds or (4) he fumbles the ball. Progress is determined by the forward-most point of the ball in possession of the player (or of a ball that goes out of bounds while not in possession of a player). When a runner is coming out of the endzone, the entire ball must cross the goal line in order for the play to end *outside* the endzone.

The officials primarily responsible for marking progress during the game are the Head Linesman and the Line Judge. Exceptions include:

- The crew must utilize reverse mechanics.
- The Referee marks progress in the backfield.
- The Back Judge (Line Judge in a 4-person crew) determines whether a runner scored a touchdown during the return of a kickoff.
- A deep wing official (7-person crew) takes responsibility for the progress of the ball carrier inside the 2-yard line when the play originated outside of the 5-yard line.

- A deep wing official (7-person crew) has a long pass completion that occurs immediately in front of him.
NOTE: It may be tempting for deep wings officials to take the spot during long runs and passes, but it's important that Side Judges and Field Judges continue to give way and remain well ahead of the play so that they can observe action in front of and around the ball.

Forward Progress Mechanics

When a sideline official has the responsibility for the progress spot, he will remain parallel to the sideline until he reaches the yard line where the ball was downed. If the clock will be stopped because the line-to-gain was reached or progress was stopped out of bounds, the covering official will stop the clock immediately, even if he has not yet reached forward progress spot. If progress is stopped in bounds near the sideline, he will indicate so with the “wind the clock” signal (unless he’s reached the line-to-gain – then he’ll only give the “stop the clock” signal and may subsequently indicate to the Referee that the clock should start on the ready-for-play).

When the determination of progress occurs near the sideline, officials must keep a few things in mind to determine where, if any, the spot should occur:

- When contact pushes the runner forward (who is either running forward or backward), the runner gets his forward most spot.
- When the contact pushes the runner backward when he was running forward or backward, the runner is entitled to the forward-most spot of the ball at the point of contact with his opponent.
- When the runner is airborne as he crosses a sideline, the spot is where the ball crossed the sideline – not where the ball is when the runner first touches out of bounds.

- When an airborne player in possession of the ball is carried by a defender in flight, the spot is the point of original contact.

NOTE: Unless the airborne receiver is driven in another direction than he was already moving, he must come down in bounds in order to complete a catch.

If the runner is down clearly in bounds, the covering official will move to the progress spot, then “square off” at the yard line. He will then sound his whistle and extend his arm above his head while moving onto the playing field and 5-9 yards in the direction of the ball. Unless the line-to-gain or goal line is at issue, marking progress should be rather undemonstrative. Instead, the covering official should simply place his forward-most foot slightly ahead of the other to signal to the Umpire where to set the ball. Once the ball is placed on the ground, the official will retreat backwards to the sideline (remain facing the field) and prepare for the next play.

When the progress spot is close to the line-to-gain or goal line, the covering official will continue onto the field of play. If time is of the essence, a measurement is expected or there will be a lengthy delay in locating the position of the ball, the official will stop the clock as he moves further onto the field. If the close play is at the goal line, the official will pinch in until he sees the ball. At that point he will decide whether the ball crossed the goal line or not. If it was determined to have crossed the goal line, he will signal a touchdown. If not, he will take the ball and place it at the spot of progress.

For close plays at the line-to-gain, the covering official will move in as far as players’ positions will allow (first point of resistance). Officials should not leave the spot by moving around players to get to the ball. The Umpire will then hand

the ball to the covering official and allow him to place it on the ground at his position.

Measurement Criteria

If a down ends at or around the line-to-gain on a turf field that is marked with permanent lines, the officials will have a pretty good understanding as to whether the line-to-gain was reached if the series originated on the backside of a full yard line. If the covering sideline official knows for certain whether the line-to-gain was reached or not, he should either signal the next down (if short of the line-to-gain but not turned over) or the “stop the clock” signal (if the line-to-gain was reached or if there is a turnover on downs). In either case, the official (or cross-field official) should inform the Referee that the ball is obviously a first down or obviously short.

Determining whether a first down was achieved can be more difficult when the series was either not started on a full yard line, or when played on natural fields. In these types of situations, it is advisable that when the covering sideline official is not 100% certain as to whether the line-to-gain was reached, he should request to be handed the ball so that he can place the ball on the ground to achieve the most accurate spot. The Umpire must be alert to a sideline official requesting the ball to avoid having to re-set it. The Referee will then determine whether the ball had reached or was short of the line-to-gain, or whether a measurement should be taken. Additionally, a team captain may request the officials to take a measurement. If this is a reasonable request based on the circumstances, and is requested prior to the ready-for-play, it should be granted.

Measurement Procedure

5-Person Crew

REFEREE:

- a. When the Referee determines that a measurement is appropriate, he will signal for the clock to stop and then tap his upper chest to indicate to the press box that it is an official's timeout.
- b. He will then wait with the Back Judge and the ball until the stakes are brought to his position.
- c. After the front stake and clip are set and the chain is stretched, the Referee will rule whether any part of the ball has reached any part of the front stake. He should remain on the opposite side of the chain from the press box.
- d. If it is a first down for Team A or a turnover on downs, he should signal a first down in the appropriate direction.
- e. If the ball was short of the line-to-gain, but still Team A's ball, he should indicate approximately how short the ball is with his hands or fingers, and then signal the next down.
- f. If the ball is measured short in the side zone, the Referee will grasp the link of chain that will be used to re-set the ball, and then move it to the proper location inside the hash marks.
NOTE: The ball should be left in place with the Back Judge as a reference until the chain is brought to the hash marks. If a new ball is available, it should be brought in to speed up the pace of play.
- g. After spotting the ball, the Referee will allow the chain to be re-set on the sideline. After the chain is in place and the crew is ready, he'll signal ready-for-play using the proper game clock status.

UMPIRE:

- a. The Umpire should not spot the ball; but rather, hand the ball to the covering official in close line-to-gain situations. If the ball is brought from inside the hashes to the side zone, the Umpire should mentally note where the ball ended on the play so that it can be returned to the same lateral position.
- b. After the Referee calls for a measurement, the Umpire will take the front stake from the line-to-gain crew after they approach the ball. When the Head Linesman indicates he is ready with the clip, the Umpire will pull the chain taught, ensuring that it is in a straight line with the back stake.
- c. If a first down is declared, the Umpire will return the ball (or Team B's ball if turned over on downs) to the spot where the play ended.
- d. If the ball is measured short of the line-to-gain in the side zone, the Umpire will move the front stake to the proper spot inside the hash marks so that the ball can be re-set.

HEAD LINESMAN:

- a. After the Referee calls for a measurement, the Head Linesman is responsible to instruct the line-to-gain crew when to come onto the field. He will grasp the chain (not the clip) and move the stakes and chain onto the field to the yard line indicated by the Line Judge.
- b. The Head Linesman will then place the clip on the back edge of the yard line and inform the Umpire when he is ready for the chain to be pulled taught.
- c. After the measurement has been completed, the Head Linesman will reset the chain on the sideline.
NOTE: If the ball is measured short of the line-to-gain in the side zone, the Head Linesman will move the chain from the side zone to inside the hash

marks to be re-set before resetting the chain on the sideline.

OPTIONAL: When a first down occurs, the clip may be left in place and a new, second clip should be placed on another corresponding yard line until a play is run in the new series.

LINE JUDGE:

- a. After the Referee calls for a measurement, the Line Judge will take a position on, and direct the Head Linesman to, the yard line in which the clip will be set.
- b. The Line Judge is then responsible to keep players and coaches away from the measurement and to keep everyone out of the view of the press box.

BACK JUDGE:

- a. After the Referee calls for a measurement, the Back Judge will move to the position of the covering official and assume responsibility of holding the ball with his back toward the defensive side of the field.
- b. The Back Judge will hold the ball steady and level to allow the Referee to make a ruling on whether the line-to-gain was reached.
- c. If the ball is measured short of the line-to-gain in the side zone, the Back Judge will remain with the ball until the chain and clip are moved inside the hash marks.

4-Person Crew Modifications

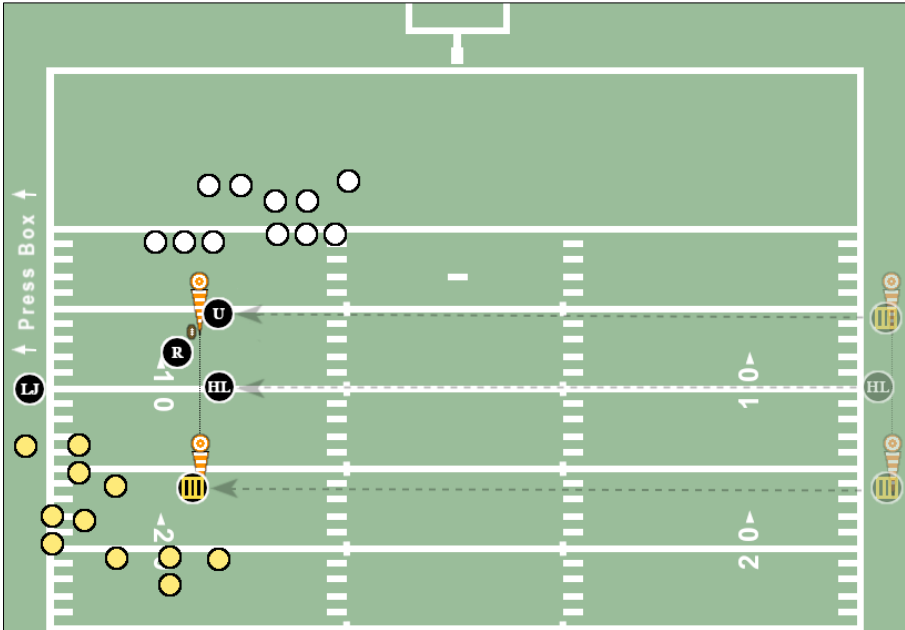
REFEREE:

- a. The Referee is responsible to hold the ball in place as the crew brings the stakes and chain onto the field for a measurement.

UMPIRE:

- a. If the ball is measured short of the line-to-gain in the side zone, the Umpire will remain with the ball until the chain and clip are moved inside the hash marks.

Measurement – 4-Person Crew



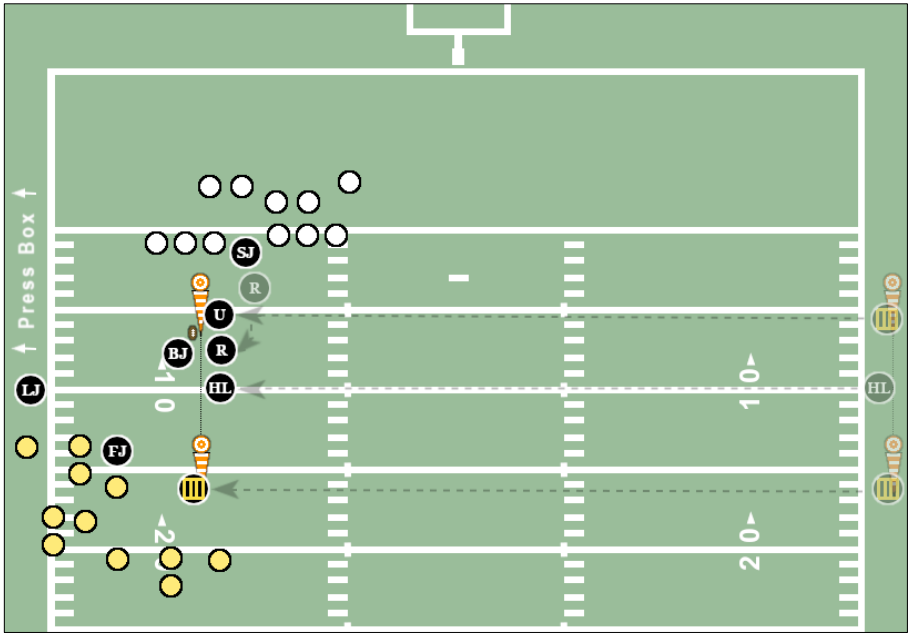
7-Person Crew Modifications

SIDE JUDGE and FIELD JUDGE:

- a. After the Referee calls for a measurement, the deep wing officials are responsible to keep players and coaches away from the measurement.

NOTE: The Field Judge or Side Judge can help maintain proper pace of play by retrieving a new ball during measurement situations. If the ball is measured short of the line-to-gain in the side zone, a new ball should be retrieved from the team that will next put the ball in play from the deep wing official assigned to that team's sideline.

Measurement – 5- and 7-Person Crew



G) Sideline Plays

Proper coverage on plays going out of bounds begins when the ball is still in play. On sweeps or quick passes to their side of the field, line of scrimmage officials will allow the ball carrier to pass their position and then trail the play by a minimum of five yards. This allows the official to maintain a wide field of vision to observe action both on and around the ball carrier.

It may be necessary for a Line Judge or Head Linesman to step into the backfield on plays near their sideline or that are stopped for a loss. Line of scrimmage officials that move downfield too soon can get too close to the action. This often creates a situation where the official must defensively avoid contact, rather than actively officiate the play.

NOTE: For passes made to the sideline between a line of scrimmage official and a deep wing official, the primary responsibility for whether the player secures the ball to make the catch is that of the line of scrimmage official. While the deep wing official can assist with any part of the catch decision, he

should pay particular attention to the feet of the player in relation to the sideline. This allows both officials to contribute to the decision whether a catch was made in bounds, and whether the requirements of the catch were completed.

If the play moves out of bounds, the officials will go to the spot that the ball carrier left the field (or the spot of forward progress in the field of play) and then make a one-quarter turn to face the players away from the field. If the ball carrier stepped out of bounds, the clock should be stopped. If progress was stopped in-play first, the “wind the clock” signal should be given, except when the line-to-gain was reached.

Extra attention may be required if players enter a team area on the sideline. The official should remain at the spot facing the action until the area is cleared of players and the participants have returned back to the field of play. Officials should not turn to provide the Umpire and Referee a progress spot at the risk of missing a foul off the field. All officials present should use verbal instructions to players to return them to the field. This might include phrases such as “We’re done” or “It’s over,” and are often more effective than continually blowing the whistle.

The presence of more than one official on sideline plays is imperative in maintain proper control of the game. The number of officials will depend on the location of player, proximity to the team area and actions of those involved. The Referee should approach from behind short plays to the sideline (less than eight yards downfield). The Back Judge (5-person crew) or the Field Judge/Side Judge (7-person crew) should approach from ahead on longer plays that go to the sideline down the field (more than eight yards downfield). In some instances, it may be necessary for officials to come from both sides of the play (and sometimes the Umpire from the middle).

If an altercation occurs that needs immediate attention and requires the official to leave his spot, he should drop his bean bag to mark progress. The cross-field official will then hold the progress spot.

H) Dead Ball Officiating

There is rarely an instance when every official on the field should be watching the ball carrier. Typically, only one official assumes primary on-ball coverage, while other crew members cover action in front and behind the play. That leaves all other officials with the responsibility to keep their heads on a swivel and view all possible action away from the play.

Officials can help maintain control of the game using the “accordion” method: Following a play in which officials have no ball-spotting responsibilities, they should move 5-10 yards into the field toward the congestion of players and keeping alert to individual matchups away from the pile. Once players have dispersed and are returning back to their huddle or side of the line of scrimmage, the officials that have squeezed in should retreat backwards toward their starting positions for the next play.

During this time, verbal commands to players such as, “Use the ground to get up,” “That’s all,” or “Walk away” helps to clear the area effectively and prevent unnecessary action by opposing players.

Fights

Fighting is defined as a strike against an opponent “with the arm, hand, leg or foot”. Contact is not required, but intent is – and the act in attempt to strike the opponent must be an act unrelated to football. A punching motion made in attempt to “rip” through a lineman may be a strike and may be intentional, but is done in the normal techniques of football. While this may be deemed an illegal personal contact foul, it would not be considered fighting and subject to an *automatic* ejection.

The best way to combat fights is to prevent them. This means regularly communicating with players and coaches when an official recognizes tensions are beginning to increase. Officials should also not hesitate to call personal

or unsportsmanlike fouls as preventative measures. While offsetting penalties may not have an impact on field position, they do send a message that the conduct in question will not be tolerated. An unsportsmanlike foul is the start to a process that will result in an ejection should the individual receive a second. This is the ultimate line in the sand for the player to correct his behavior, or risk being ejected and suspended.

If a fight does break out, the officials' primary concern should be the safety of themselves and the participants. An official should not put himself in the middle of a physical altercation at the risk of his own safety. This can easily be the case if a fight involves multiple members for both teams. Instead, it is often best for the officials to initially encircle the combatants and make notations of their numbers. Sideline officials should work to move other players off the field and encourage coaches to address their own team.

Once the officials believe that it is safe for them to enter into the fray, they may then begin to separate combatants. When doing so, the officials should remain calm. When an official's anger and intensity match that of the combatants, it often has the effect of escalating the situation. If players are closely tied together, officials should approach with verbal commands to stop. This also may require officials squeeze in between two players to force them to separate. While it may be necessary for an official to physically intervene, they should not use overly-aggressive physical actions such as forcefully shoving or pushing athletes or grabbing them by the helmet or mask.

After the altercation has subsided, the crew should conference to determine what penalties will be administered. Discussion should be had as to which players were actually engaged in fighting. While in most instances at least two players are engaged in a fight (and ejected), there are times when only one player is "fighting".

If A1 strikes B1, and then B1 shoves A1 away, A1 should be the only player ejected in this altercation. B1's action, perhaps worthy of a personal contact foul, should not be considered as participating in the fight.

I) Bean Bag and Hat Mechanics

Use of Bean Bags

Bean bags should be used by officials to mark spots on the field that may later be needed as points of reference. Bean bags should be dropped on the appropriate yard line, but not necessarily the exact spot of action that is referenced. Officials should avoid throwing bean bags in the same manner they throw penalty flags for spot fouls, and should never throw a bean bag in the direction of players. Bean bags are not intended as a substitute for hustle. Officials should move into position to mark forward progress and not throw a bag to the yard line as a shortcut.

Mandatory Use of Bean Bags

- Fumble beyond the neutral zone (or with no neutral zone).
- Backward handoff or backward pass beyond the neutral zone (or with no neutral zone).
- Spot where a scrimmage kick ends in bounds.
- Spot of possession when the momentum exception applies for a catch or recovery of a free or scrimmage kick, the interception of a forward pass or the interception or recovery of a fumble or backward pass.
- First touching on a free or scrimmage kick.

Permitted Use of Bean Bags

- Any fumble.
- To mark the spot of progress only when the official must leave the spot to break up an altercation.

- The Referee marks the spot of forward progress when a passer is sacked and when line-of-scrimmage officials are downfield.

(See [Line-to-Gain Accessories \(p. 24\)](#) for two optional uses of bean bags with line-to-gain crews.)

Fumble Mechanics and Responsibilities

While dropping the bean bag may serve as a good indicator to other crew members that a fumble has occurred (to avoid a potential inadvertent whistle), it is primarily to mark the yard line that may be used for loose ball penalty enforcement.

An official should only drop a bean bag when he sees the ball fumbled. Simply observing a ball loose, but not fumbled, is not grounds for dropping a bean bag, as the spot it is dropped may not be accurate.

Officials that drop a bean bag must continue to officiate the play. If the covering official observes a player recover a fumble while prone or otherwise down by rule, he will immediately whistle the play dead. If the team that fumbled recovers the ball, the official should signal as if spotting normal progress. If the opposing team recovers the ball, the clock should be stopped, the covering official should vocally announce his decision to surrounding crew members and then he should point in the direction the goal line of the recovering team's opponent.

If a fumble results in players from both teams forming a pile that prevents the covering official from determining possession, the ball must be found before awarding possession. The official closest to the pile (other than the Referee) should begin removing players on the top of the pile as he works his way toward the ball. The next official nearest to the pile should signal for the clock to stop and visually confirm this occurs. Other officials should continue to cover action in and around the pile, removing players and ensuring that additional players do not enter the fray. They

should be particularly alert to players using forcible contact to pull or push opponents from the pile.

When the official working through the pile sees the ball and is certain as to which player recovered it, he shall verbally relay that information to the Referee. Regardless of which team recovers the fumble in the pile, only the Referee shall signal and announce possession of the ball.

Use of Official's Hat

An official's hat may be dropped by an official at his position when he observes a player intentionally leave the playing field or fail to return immediately when blocked out of bounds. There is no foul at that time, but the dropped hat indicates that the official observed the player go out of bounds and knows how it occurred. If the player returns back to the field of play, a flag should be thrown to the yard line in which the player returns.

An official's hat should never be used as a substitute for a penalty flag. If an official observes more fouls than he has flags, he should mentally note the details of the infraction and the spot where the foul occurred. A bean bag may also be dropped to mark the spot of the foul in these rare circumstances.

J) Rotating Footballs

Wet Ball Mechanics

Inclement weather can create problems with ball-handling, and it is important that officials attempt to keep the game ball as dry as possible. The primary official responsible for this task is the Umpire. He should carry a towel for all games so that he can remove any moisture or debris from the ball. This is especially important, though, for games where rain or snow is a factor. It is advisable that a second towel be available to the Umpire in the event that the first one becomes saturated.

These towels can also be used as a cover to protect the ball from falling precipitation. When this technique is used, the Umpire should stand with his foot marking the spot where he will set the ball. He will hold the ball (laces down) under the

draped towel until the offensive team is approaching the line of scrimmage. He will then set the ball down at the spot his foot marks and immediately back out to his position behind the defensive line.

Wet conditions may also require the regular rotation of game balls. Crews may use ball-rotation mechanics that best fit their dynamics, capabilities and resources (*i.e., ball boys and number of footballs*); however, there are some basic tenets for which crews should adhere. These apply to when a ball is rotated because of wet conditions, when the ball gets away and might delay the resumption of play or when the offense is in a “hurry-up” mode.

NOTE: Officials that have confidence in the ball kids may utilize a system where footballs from both teams are kept on each sideline (*e.g., two footballs on one side and one on the opposite side*). If this system is used, officials may retrieve replacement footballs from either side as necessary.

Incomplete Passes

The covering official on the incomplete pass will retrieve the ball. If the Back Judge is the covering official, the new ball will be retrieved by the line of scrimmage official on the sideline of the offensive team. If the line of scrimmage official is the covering official on the play, it should be the Back Judge that retrieves the new ball from the sideline if more than eight yards downfield, and it should be the Referee if less than eight yards downfield. In a 7-person crew, the Field Judge or Side Judge will assume new ball retrieval responsibilities from their own sideline that are normally reserved for the Back Judge in a 5-person crew.

Completed Passes and Runs Inside the 9-Yard Marks

The Umpire will retrieve the football from the middle of the field and request a new football from the offensive team’s sideline official of the offensive team. As the sideline official retrieves the football, the Referee will take the old ball from the

Umpire. The sideline official will relay the ball into the Umpire and then receive the old ball from the Referee.

NOTE: This mechanic may be used when exchanging a wet ball for a dry one or when the offensive team request a new ball be used at the start of a new series.

Completed Passes and Runs Outside the 9-Yard Marks

The line of scrimmage official covering the play will mark forward progress. The Back Judge (more than eight yards downfield) or the Referee (less than eight yards downfield) retrieves the new ball from the sideline.

7-Person Crew Modifications

In a 7-person crew, the Field Judge or Side Judge will assume new ball retrieval responsibilities from their own sideline that are normally reserved for the Back Judge in a 5-person crew.

NOTE: These mechanics will only apply when an alternate football for the offensive team is available from the side of the field where the play ended. If no extra balls are being used to rotate footballs throughout the game, the same mechanics will apply; however, the officials will retrieve the ball from the previous play. This is called “triangulating” the ball back to the Umpire.

Section 3: Timing and Periods

I) Timing Operations

The importance of good clock management by the crew cannot be understated. Everything revolves around the clock – It is the responsibility of every crew member to know the clock status and ensure that the clock runs and stops as it is supposed to. It is primarily the Line Judge that is responsible to know the time left in the period on each play. For this reason, the Line Judge should keep a wristwatch to maintain the time if the game clock were to malfunction. The Line Judge should make a habit of checking the game clock at the conclusion of each play; and every time the clock needs to start or stop in a critical situation during the game, all officials should glance to make sure that the clock is operating as it should.

Near the end of a period (*i.e., last minute remaining*), either the Referee or the Back Judge (Umpire in a 4-person crew) – whichever official is facing the clock – is responsible to pay close attention to the time remaining and determine whether the snap of a last-second play has started before the end of the quarter.

A) Game Clock Guidelines

While any official may stop the clock for any reason, the Referee is the primary official responsible for restarting the clock when it will be started other than on the snap. If the game clock is not restarted before the snap, it must start at the snap. **In these cases, there is no need for the Referee to signal for the game clock to wind. This is an antiquated mechanic that is not necessary and no longer approved.** If there might be a question about this non-mechanic, this should be discussed with the clock operator at the pregame meeting.

No Visible Game Clock

The Line Judge may be required to keep the game clock on the field if there is no clock on the field or if the score board malfunctions. If this is the case, the Referee

will need to regularly inform each head coach of the time remaining as end of the period approaches. The Referee will be notified by the Line Judge when the game clock reaches four minutes remaining; and then again at three minutes, two minutes and one minute remaining. The Referee will then ensure each head coach is notified at these intervals. The same will be done following each play within one minute remaining.

Free Kick Timing

The game clock will not start on a free kick until the ball has been touched by Team R. Team K may not advance a free kick that it recovers. For this reason, no time should run off the clock if Team K recovers a free kick anywhere on the field before being touched by a Team R player. When this occurs during a critical clock situation, the officials should make certain that the time on the clock at the end of the play is the same as when the kick occurred. Other instances during free kicks where officials should be especially observant to the clock include kicks out of bounds, touchbacks and kicks that are first touched and possessed by a Team R player while already down.

If the free kick is touched (and not immediately downed) by Team R, the covering official should signal the clock to start with the “wind the clock” signal. Officials should use proper timing so as not to unnecessarily signal the clock to start, just to immediately signal it to stop.

Plays Near the Sideline

For plays near the sideline, including those where forward progress is stopped before the runner went out of bounds, the official will need to signal whether the play ended in bounds or out of bounds. If the play ends in bounds, the covering official should use the “wind the clock” signal. One exception to this is when the runner is downed near the sideline beyond the line-to-gain. In this case, there

is no need to use the “wind the clock” signal, just to immediately follow it with a signal to stop the clock. Rather, the covering official should only use the “stop the clock” signal. The game clock will only stop until the Referee’s ready-for-play signal. The covering official should communicate to the Referee with either crossed wrists (start on the snap) or a twirling index finger (start on the ready-for-play).

Point Differential (T.I.P.S.)

After the start of the second half, any time the score differential reaches 35 points or more, the following changes and only these changes, shall be made regarding rules determining when the clock will and will not be stopped. The clock will run continuously except for the following situations when it will be stopped for:

- T**imeouts (team charged)
- I**ntermissions (between 3rd and 4th quarters, and after a score)
- P**enalities (until the Referee’s ready-for-play)
- S**afety (injuries, etc.)

Normal timing procedures shall resume if the point differential is reduced to less than 35 points. Additionally, should the point margin increase to a 50-point differential at any time during the game, the clock will run continuously except during officials’ timeouts for injured players and the halftime intermission. The game clock will continue to run under this procedure for the remainder of the game unless the point differential drops below 50, in which case the clock will operate under the T.I.P.S. clock procedure.

Clock and Timing Exceptions

All MHSAA high school football contests will use 12-minute periods as a default. However, there are a number of period length and timing exceptions at the subvarsity level:

- For subvarsity high school contests, the clock **shall** start on the **ready-for-play** following a change of possession.
 - If the game also includes 7th and/or 8th graders, they **may** play 10-minute periods and the clock **shall** start on the **ready-for-play** following a change of possession.
- If both teams are made up entirely of 7th and/or 8th graders, they **may** play either 8- or 10-minute periods and the clock **shall** start on the **snap** following a change of possession.

Protocols for Closing Seconds of a Period

Inside of one minute remaining in a period, the Referee or the Back Judge (the Umpire in a 4-person system) is responsible to determine whether a last-second snap occurred before/after the time expired. If the official responsible to monitor the closing seconds of the game clock is also responsible for the play clock, he should only focus his attention on the clock with the fewest seconds remaining.

While it is preferred that schools not use the tenths position on the game clock, it is not prohibited by rule. Therefore, if a game clock legally stops with just tenths of one second remaining, this time should be permitted to remain on the clock. Officials should never remove tenths of seconds to take the clock to zeros unless the clock was stopped improperly. Here are some rules of thumb when it comes to determining whether a team can complete one final play before time runs out:

Clock is Running	Clock is Stopped (but will restart on RFP)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A ball snapped with at least two seconds remaining can be spiked to stop the clock and leave enough time to have one additional play. • Only one play is possible if the ball is snapped with less than two seconds remaining. Any incomplete pass attempt will run out the clock. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A ball immediately snapped at the Referee’s signal with more than two seconds can be spiked to stop the clock and leave enough time to have an additional play. • Only one play is possible if the ball is snapped with between one and two seconds remaining. Any incomplete pass will run out the clock. • No play is possible if the ball is attempted to be snapped with less than one second remaining. *

* Officials will still allow the offense to attempt a snap; however, no play shall be permitted. The Referee will signal ready-for-play and then immediately signal that the period is over.

Adjustments to the Game Clock

Proper clock management doesn’t always mean that every second that errantly ticks away, or every time there is a slight delay in starting the clock, requires a correction. Part of good game management is recognizing critical clock

situations and making the appropriate adjustments when necessary. The more critical the situation, the more exact the crew should be in ensuring that the time on the clock is absolutely accurate. Situations near the end of a half receive more scrutiny than those to start a half; and larger amounts of time added or subtracted in error may be addressed, while insignificant timing errors may be ignored.

Officials should use the “*more than 5 with more than 5*” principle when determine when and whether to correct game clock errors that include the clock being stopped too early or continuing to run too long. This means that outside of five minutes remaining in either half, there must be an error (+/-) of more than five seconds in order to adjust the game clock. Within five minutes of either half’s conclusion, all clear errors should be corrected. Additionally, any time run off when the clock is errantly started (*e.g., clock started on a snap that followed a pre-snap, dead ball foul*) should be returned to the correct time. Any adjustment to the clock for an error in timing must be recognized and corrected before the next snap following the error. After that point, no adjustments can be made.

B) Play Clock Guidelines

The use of the 40/25-second play clock creates more consistency from play to play because it is not based on the subjectivity of the Referee. The 40-second play clock can be kept in the same manner it always has, and there is no need for a school to utilize an on-field play clock. If a play clock is displayed on the field, it may be administered by an operator in the booth (or on the sideline) or on the field by the Back Judge. The MHSAA highly recommends that the play clock is kept off the field and by a separate operator other than the individual maintaining the game clock.

NOTE: An officiating crew should not be expected to carry a hand-held play clock device. This is distracting to their work and interferes with the signals and mechanics the MHSAA

expects of them. If the start/stop/reset device is cumbersome and cannot be attached to the belt (*i.e., designed for on-field use*), the play clock shall be maintained by a play clock operator.

40/25-Second Play Clock Situations

The system is rather simple: Except in cases following an administrative stoppage by the officials, the play clock will begin at 40 seconds immediately (*i.e., ≈1-2 seconds*) following the conclusion of the play. The conclusion of the play may be indicated by a number of signals used by the officiating crew. They include the:

- Incomplete pass signal.
- Stop the clock signal.
- Single arm extended upward to mark forward progress.
- Wind the clock signal to indicate a player's progress was stopped in bounds.

When the 40-second play clock is used, it is the Umpire that has the primary responsibility of determining “ready-for-play” and when the offense can snap the ball. In high school football, there is no necessity or requirement to allow the defense to match up against offensive personnel or formation. When he receives the ball, the Umpire should make certain that the officials are in position and ready. He'll then spot the ball and back away. This action is considered the ready-for-play as it relates to the ability of the offense to snap the ball and in regards to fouls and penalty enforcement. (See [Wet Ball Mechanics \(p. 59\)](#) for *alternative ready-for-play mechanics*). In addition, when the clock is stopped because a runner reached the line-to-gain and remained in bounds on the previous play, the Umpire will coordinate the ready-for-play with the Referee's “silent wind” signal to start the game clock.

The play clock will be set to 25 seconds following any administrative stoppage by the Referee. Some of these include, but are not limited to:

- Start of a new period.
- After a score by either team.
- After a time out.
- Following a measurement.
- After a legal kick in which either team starts a new series.
- Team B is awarded a first down.
- Foul administration or penalty enforcement.
- Inadvertent whistle.

EXCEPTION: When the game clock and play clock are stopped as a result of an apparent *defensive* injury or *defensive* equipment issue, the play clock will be set at 40 seconds when it resumes.

Play Clock Mechanics

In order to maintain consistency between games with on-field play clocks, and those that do not, the Back Judge should signal the final seconds of the play clock in either case. He will do so by extending his arm high above his head to indicate that the play clock has 10 seconds remaining, and then visibly count off the last five seconds with the same arm. Before throwing his flag for delay of game, the Back Judge should first wait for the play clock to hit zeros, then look to see whether the ball has been snapped. If not, this is when he should blow his whistle and drop the flag.

4-Person Crew Modifications

REFEREE:

- a. The Referee will assume the play clock responsibilities reserved for the Back Judge.

UMPIRE:

- a. The Umpire will mirror the visible countdown of the last five seconds of the play clock.

Resetting the Play Clock

There are a couple of situations in which the play clock needs to be reset. (1) If a play clock displayed on the field is started before the end of the play, or if the 25-second play clock is started when it should be the 40-second play clock, the Referee may signal to the play clock operator to reset the play clock to 40 seconds. This mechanic involves sounding the whistle twice and making an upward pumping action with both palms open over his head. (2) If the incorrect time is put on the on-field play clock, or if the 40-second play clock will fall below 25 seconds before the ball is spotted, the Referee or the Back Judge may signal the play clock operator (or the Back Judge) to reset the play clock to 25 seconds. This mechanics involves sounding the whistle twice and making an upward pumping action with one palm over his head.

C) Timeouts

When a timeout is granted, the official calling the timeout should use the “stop the clock” signal, and then extend both arms in the direction of the team (in relation to the line of scrimmage) that requested the timeout. The Referee will then signal the same to the press box. Alternatively, officials may point with one arm in the direction of the team requesting the timeout. If an official’s timeout is called, the Referee will signal to the press box by tapping his chest near the top of his shoulders after signaling for the clock to stop.

All officials should record any timeout with the team making the request, the quarter and time remaining. The calling official should also notate the player or coach that requested the timeout.

Injury Timeouts

Injury timeouts will be handled generally in the same manner as other timeouts, except:

- Whenever an official believes that a player is injured, he should stop the game at the next dead ball and have the player attended to/removed.
- Keep the teams on the field unless the injury will create a significant delay.
- Coaches may come onto the field to attend to an injured player but may not coach players inside of the 9-yard marks.

5-Person Crew

REFEREE:

- a. During the timeout, the Referee will stand with the Umpire near the ball. When the Back Judge sounds his whistle indicating 15 seconds remaining, the Referee will point to the appropriate sideline officials to indicate that the timeout is ending.
- b. After the Back Judge sounds his whistle that the timeout has expired, or if both teams return to the field before time expires, the Referee will sound his whistle and signal the ready-for-play.
- c. The Referee should inform the head coach when the team has used its last available timeout.

UMPIRE:

- a. The Umpire will stand over the ball during the timeout and remain in that position to prevent a snap until the Referee gives the ready-for-play.

HEAD LINESMAN and LINE JUDGE:

- a. During a timeout, the line of scrimmage officials are responsible to stand near the sideline on their side of the field, while avoiding getting too close to the huddle.

- b. When the Back Judge sounds his whistle that 15 seconds remain, line of scrimmage officials will inform the coach and team that the timeout is about to end and to start them back to the field.
- c. When the timeout has expired, the line of scrimmage officials should inform the team that the Referee will be signaling ready-for-play and/or the start of the play clock. They should continue to encourage the team back onto the field.
- d. After the timeout has ended and the players have started to return to the field, the corresponding line of scrimmage official should inform the head coach how many timeouts he has remaining.

BACK JUDGE:

- a. It is the Back Judge's responsibility to time timeouts. This includes sounding a preliminary whistle to indicate that 15 seconds remain, and then sounding a second whistle (if both teams have not returned to the field) to indicate the expiration of the timeout.

4-Person Crew Modifications

LINE JUDGE:

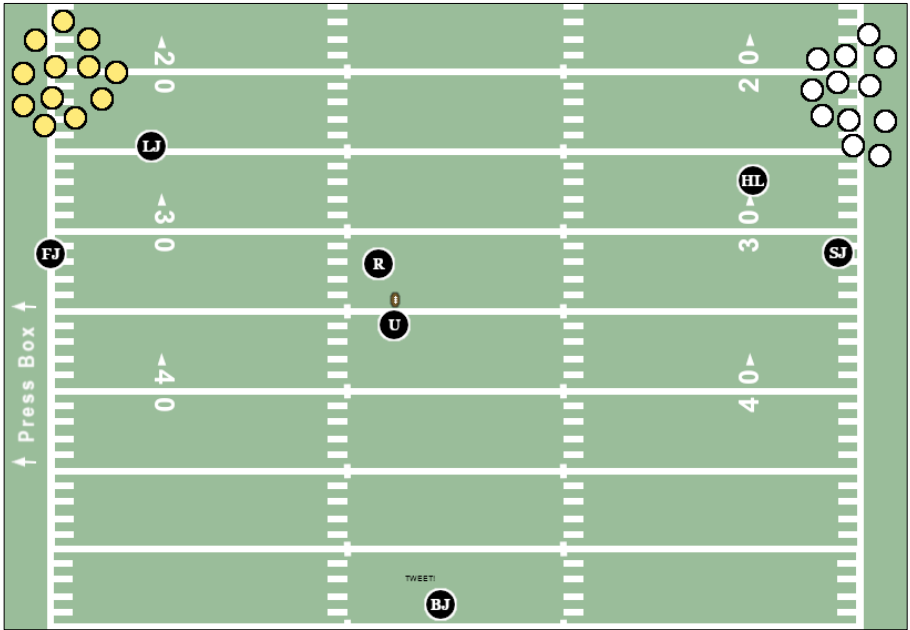
- a. The Line Judge will assume all timing responsibilities reserved for the Back Judge in a 5-person crew.

7-Person Crew Modifications

SIDE JUDGE and FIELD JUDGE:

- a. When a timeout is called, deep wing officials will observe the team on their side of the field and assist the line of scrimmage official in monitoring the huddle and returning the team back to the field of play.

Positioning and Responsibilities for Timeouts



D) Intermissions

When time expires at the end of a period, the Referee must make certain that there are no penalties that might carry over to the next period or that will extend the current period with an untimed down.

Halftime

If between halves, the Referee will raise the ball over his head to indicate to the press box that the period has ended. He will then have the intermission time added to the game clock and start it to begin halftime. The Back Judge (or Line Judge in a 4-person system) will sync his watch with the halftime clock to ensure the crew is back on the field at least three minutes before the second-half kickoff. Line of scrimmage officials are responsible to get their coach's choice for the kickoff before the start of the third period.

End of the First and Third Periods

5-Person Crew

REFEREE:

- a. At the end of either the first or third period, the Referee will meet with the Umpire and record on his game information card the yard line on which the ball is spotted, the down and distance to the line-to-gain.
- b. The Referee will then instruct the Head Linesman when to move the stakes and chain to the corresponding, opposite position.

UMPIRE:

- a. After he spots the ball following the last play of either the first or third period, the Umpire will meet with the Referee and record on his game information card the yard line on which the ball is spotted, the down and distance to the line-to-gain.
- b. Upon the Referee's instruction to the Head Linesman to move the stakes and chain, the Umpire will move the ball to its new position on the corresponding, opposite yard line. The lateral position of the ball remains the same (*e.g., if the ball is spotted on the right hash to end the period, it will be spotted on the diagonal right hash when it is re-spotted for the start of the next period*).

HEAD LINESMAN:

- a. Upon the conclusion of either the first or third period, the Head Linesman will notate on his game information card the yard line on which the ball is spotted, the down and distance to the line-to-gain.
- b. The Head Linesman will ensure the stakes are rotated and confirm the clip is secure and in its proper place.

OPTIONAL: If at the end of the period, less than ten yards are needed to reach the line-to-gain, the Head Linesman may use a second clip at the point where the down box is located before rotating the stakes.

- c. When the Referee has instructed the Head Linesman to do so, he will move with chain to the new position. He will set the clip on the corresponding yard line while the stakes are set in their new positions and then inform the Referee when the stakes have been properly set.

LINE JUDGE:

- a. Following the conclusion of either the first or third periods, the Line Judge will mentally note the yard line and lateral position of the ball.
- b. He will then immediately move to the new, opposite yard line, and confirm when the Umpire and Head Linesman have secured proper placement of the ball.

BACK JUDGE:

- a. The Back Judge is responsible to time the interval between periods. If he sees that the ball has been repositioned and is ready for play, he will sound a preliminary whistle to indicate that 15 seconds remain, and then sound a second whistle (if both teams have not returned to the field) to indicate the expiration of the intermission.

4-Person Crew Modifications

LINE JUDGE:

- a. The Line Judge will assume all timing responsibilities reserved for the Back Judge in a 5-person crew.

7-Person Crew Modifications

FIELD JUDGE and SIDE JUDGE:

- a. The Field Judge and Side Judge are responsible to encourage the teams on their sideline to move to their positions on either side of the new line of scrimmage following the conclusion of the intermission.

E) Overtime Responsibilities

When the fourth period concludes and the score between teams is tied, the game will continue in overtime periods until a winner can be determined. Overtime periods are played using MHSAA procedures approved by the National Federation. When regulation time is over, the officials will direct both teams to their respective sidelines. The Referee will set the game clock to three minutes and immediately start it to time the first overtime intermission. For all additional overtime periods, the intermission will be two minutes in length.

During the OT intermission, a coin toss will be conducted in the same manner as to start the game. Officials will gather team captains from the sidelines and escort them to the middle of the field, where the Referee and Umpire await. One official from each team's sideline will secure a football in preparation of the results of the toss, and have it available to quickly be put in place for the first series.

In the same manner as the opening coin toss, the Referee will allow the visiting team to call the toss before the coin is flipped. The winner of the toss is provided the choice to start on offense or defense, or choose an end of the field to start the series. The remaining option is given to the captain of the opposing team.

Once all decisions are determined, the Referee will arrange the teams so that the team starting on offense is facing the goal they will be advancing toward and the team starting on defense opposite and facing them. He will then signal first down toward the goal on the end of the field that the series will begin.

Officials should move to their next positions immediately and in advance of the conclusion of the intermission. Sideline officials should encourage teams to be ready to start the overtime series when the intermission has concluded.

There is no game clock for overtime periods – only a play clock. The ball will be placed on the 10-yard line with the series starting 1st-and-goal. Should a penalty cause the overtime series to begin behind the 10-yard line, it will remain a 1st-and-goal scenario. A team may only achieve a first down when the defensive team commits a foul that includes an automatic first down penalty (*i.e., roughing the passer, roughing the kicker, roughing the snapper or roughing the holder*) or when a scrimmage kick is touched by Team R beyond the expanded neutral zone and recovered by Team K.

Each possession of overtime is ended if the offensive team scores, the ball is turned over or the defensive team scores. If a team scores a touchdown on the first series of an overtime period, they may attempt a try for either one or two points. If the offensive team scores during the first possession, there will be a one-minute intermission before the possession of their opponent. The 25-second play clock will begin when the Referee signals ready-for-play.

After the conclusion of the first possession of an overtime period, the offensive team becomes the defensive team and vice versa (unless the defensive team scores, in which case the game is over). They will start, first and goal, on the same end of the field as the first possession. If a team is leading after the conclusion of the second series of an overtime period, the game is over. If the offensive team from the second series scores a touchdown to take the lead (and win the game), the try will not be attempted.

If the teams remain tied after the first overtime period, an additional overtime period will begin after an intermission (*i.e., two minutes*). There are no additional coin tosses if additional overtime periods are needed. The team that lost the toss for the first overtime will have the choice to start on offense or

defense, or choose an end of the field to start the series – followed by the remaining choice from the opposing team. This will alternate every additional overtime period.

The Head Linesman and Line Judge should obtain the choice of the head coach on their sideline during the intermission of each additional overtime and report this information to the Referee to ensure that the next overtime period is started without delay.

Section 4: Fouls and Penalty Enforcement

Proper penalty enforcement is critical for a game to be fairly managed and played, and it is the responsibility of all members of the crew to contribute to ensuring that correct options are given, ball placement and down and distance are accurate and proper procedure is followed. While there is often some latitude given to officials regarding philosophy or judgment in calling fouls, there is no gray area in the enforcement of rules such as the administration of penalties. If any crew member recognizes that a penalty will not be enforced properly, it is his responsibility to make sure that the crew comes together to get it right. The following section will provide MHSAA officials with the tools necessary to make sure that proper procedure and enforcement are followed.

I) Keys to Penalty Enforcement

Before the details of penalty enforcement are explained, there are a number of key points to keep in mind:

- Live ball fouls do not cause the ball to become dead (and officials should not sound their whistles to signify when a live ball foul occurs). It is most often illegal motion and illegal shift penalties that are errantly blown dead. These are sometimes confused with, but should be distinguished from, false start fouls – which are dead ball fouls. (See [Crew Conferences and Overturning Calls \(p. 32\)](#) for when a foul is called in error by rule.)
- No penalty causes the ball to be turned over. While it is possible for the ball to be turned over on a foul that results in a loss of down, it would be because the offensive team failed to reach the line to gain as in any other 4th down situation.
- Enforcement of a penalty may never take the ball more than half the distance to the offending team's goal line. (See [Free Kick Out of Bounds \(p. 97\)](#) for a situation where this rule has been errantly applied.)

- There is no loss of yardage when there is a double foul, equal number of dead ball personal, nonplayer or unsportsmanlike fouls or if all penalties are declined.
 - If a play includes a double foul, a replay of the previous down will occur from the previous spot.
 - If a play includes a foul or fouls where all penalties are declined, or an equal number of dead ball personal, nonplayer or unsportsmanlike fouls offset, play will continue from the succeeding spot.
- An offended team may decline the distance portion of the penalty, while accepting any other portion of the penalty. The circumstances when a team may choose this option are few and far between. One situation may be where a receiving team that is awarded a fair catch following kick-catch interference may refuse the yardage penalty, but would still be permitted to attempt a fair-catch free kick. Perhaps the most plausible instance might be the kicking team declining the distance penalty following a defensive penalty on a missed try. While the team would accept the penalty to replay the down, the kicker may feel more comfortable kicking from the original position of the kick rather than half the distance to the goal.
- The decision to accept or decline a penalty must be made before any charged timeout, and the choice for the enforcement of a penalty cannot be revoked once decided.
- When a team commits a live ball foul and one or more dead ball personal fouls, the penalties for all fouls may be enforced. The combination of live ball and dead ball personal fouls by the same team **ARE NOT** considered a multiple foul.

- When a live ball foul is followed by a dead ball personal foul (or includes a nonplayer or unsportsmanlike foul), or by multiple dead ball person fouls, to either team, they are enforced in the order they occurred. Live ball fouls from one team and dead ball personal fouls from another **DO NOT** offset.
 - If a play includes a double foul, those would offset. Then the dead ball personal, nonplayer or unsportsmanlike fouls would be enforced in the order they occurred.
 - If a play includes an equal number of dead ball personal, nonplayer or unsportsmanlike fouls by each team, those would offset. Then any remaining nonplayer, unsportsmanlike or dead ball personal fouls would be enforced in the order they occurred.

II) Types of Fouls

Knowledge of what type of foul(s) is/are being penalized is essential to determining proper enforcement. It is possible for the same action or conduct (“what” foul) to be categorized differently depending on “who” committed it, “when” it takes place and “where” it occurs. It is also possible that a single action might fall within two category types at the same time. Knowledge of all these components will lead officials to the correct ruling. The rule book identifies nine different types of fouls. They are:

A) Dead Ball: A foul which occurs in the time interval after a down has ended and before the ball is next snapped or free kicked. Examples include both fouls that occur just before the ball is snapped (*e.g., delay of game, false start or encroachment*), and those which occur just after the ball becomes dead (*e.g., a personal foul for a late hit or taunting after a score*).

B) Live Ball: A foul which occurs during a down (*i.e., between the snap or free kick and the moment the ball becomes dead at the end of the down*).

- C) Simultaneous with the Snap:** An act which is not illegal, per se; but which becomes a foul when the ball is snapped or free kicked (*e.g., illegal formations and offensive movements such as illegal shifts or illegal motions*). Fouls that occur simultaneous with the snap are live ball fouls.
- D) Player:** A foul (other than a nonplayer or any unsportsmanlike) by a player in the game. These may include both live and dead ball fouls (*e.g., holding, blocks in the back, pass interference, roughing the passer, etc.*)
- E) Nonplayer or Unsportsmanlike:** Are noncontact fouls that occur while the ball is dead (*e.g., improper language by a coach or player*) or that occur during a down while the ball is live, but do not affect or influence the play in progress (*e.g., taunting by a ball carrier before crossing the goal line*) – and are treated like a dead ball foul regardless of when they occur. **NOTE:** It is also a nonplayer foul when unintentional contact occurs with an official in the restricted area by a coach, player or member of sideline personnel while the ball is live. This is a personal contact foul and not an unsportsmanlike foul.

Guidelines for Unsportsmanlike (UNS) Fouls

It is important to first distinguish unsportsmanlike fouls from conduct that's unsportsmanlike. While shoving or pushing may be unsportsmanlike acts, they are, by definition, not unsportsmanlike fouls because they involve contact between players. If these acts are flagged, it should be as a personal contact foul. This is an important distinction, especially since an individual that accumulates two unsportsmanlike fouls is disqualified. This is not to say that players cannot, or shouldn't, be disqualified for flagrant actions such as fighting or spitting; they just wouldn't be categorized as "UNS".

Used wisely, the enforcement of penalties for unsportsmanlike fouls can serve to prevent situations from

escalating or as a purely punitive measure to discipline improper or abusive language or conduct directed toward an opponent or an official. Officials must use good judgment in both recognizing unsportsmanlike acts and determining whether they should be penalized. It can sometimes be difficult to balance permitting certain acts of spontaneous emotion, while penalizing clearly prolonged, self-congratulatory acts that make a mockery of the game. Keep in mind that football is a game of high intensity and emotion, and officials should avoid being overly technical in applying the rule. There is some conduct, though, that is plainly intended to taunt or demean an opponent and should be flagged for UNS immediately. Some of these actions include:

- Making a slashing motion across the throat.
- Violent demonstrations such as mimicking the shooting of a gun in the direction of opponents.
- Removal of the helmet to celebrate or protest.
- Giving the “Heisman” pose.
- Gestures with sexual connotations.
- Dancing or a coordinated skit amongst teammates.
- Somersaulting or flipping.
- Spiking or spinning the ball on the ground or dunking the ball over the crossbar.

Sideline Infractions

Sideline infractions may be confusing for some officials because they can involve a combination of (1) unintentional contact with an official in the restricted area and (2) nonplayers outside of the team box. It is important that each of the first two infractions are enforced independent of one another and that the third category (UNS) is only applied as the rules provide.

Unintentional contact on an official in the restricted area is a nonplayer personal contact foul – not an unsportsmanlike foul. Even though the yardage penalty is

15-yards for each occurrence and the head coach (or any replacement head coach) is disqualified for the second (and any subsequent) foul for contact in the restricted area by anyone, it is not because the foul is for unsportsmanlike conduct.

The sideline infraction foul for nonplayers outside of the team box has a progressive enforcement – warning (1st offense), 5-yards (2nd offense) and 15-yards (3rd and subsequent offenses). The third and any subsequent offense are unsportsmanlike fouls, but they are assigned to the person in violation – not always the head coach. While this type of unsportsmanlike foul can be combined with any other unsportsmanlike fouls (remember: not contact fouls like addressed in (1)) to cause for that person’s ejection. Here are a few situations that may provide more insight:

Situation 1: Assistant coach bumps the official inside of restricted area, and then the same coach is later observed out of team box when the ball is live.

Ruling: The first results in a 15-yard penalty and the second results in a sideline warning. In neither case is an unsportsmanlike foul issued.

Situation 2: The crew calls three sideline infractions on a team for being out of the team box while the ball is live. Then, the head coach screams an obscenity and receives an UNS foul.

Ruling: The first three result in a warning, 5-yard penalty and 15-yard penalty, respectively. The 15-yard penalty is an UNS foul on the head coach. When he receives a second UNS later in the game, he is ejected.

Situation 3: The crew calls two sideline infractions on a team for being out of the team box while the ball is live. Then, an assistant coach bumps into the official in the restricted area. The same assistant coach then

receives an UNS foul for arguing that call. Later, the team receives a third sideline infraction for being outside of the team box while the ball is live.

Ruling: The first two result in a warning and 5-yard penalty. When contact is made with the official, the result is a 15-yard penalty. Then the assistant is given an UNS 15-yard penalty. When the team receives the third sideline infraction, a 15-yard penalty is assessed and this is an UNS on the head coach. There is no automatic ejection under this combination of fouls. The head coach is now at risk of being ejected if any of the following occur during the remainder of the game: (1) Contact with an official inside the restricted area by anyone (2) Another sideline infraction on any member of the team for being out of the team box while the ball is live (*i.e.*, UNS). (3) If HE receives any other UNS foul.

F) Flagrant: A foul so severe or extreme that it places an opponent in danger of serious injury, and/or involves violations that are extremely or persistently vulgar or abusive conduct. Flagrant fouls may be either live or dead ball personal fouls, and may also be player, nonplayer or unsportsmanlike fouls. Flagrant fouls result in an immediate disqualification in addition to the distance penalty for the foul. The disqualification remains in effect for flagrant fouls, even if the offended team declines the rest of the provisions of the penalty. The MHSAA has determined that personal attacks by a coach, player or member of sideline personnel is a flagrant unsportsmanlike foul and should result in the offender's immediate ejection.

G) Double: One or more live ball fouls (not including nonplayer or unsportsmanlike fouls) which are committed by each team during the same down. When a double foul occurs, the penalties offset, there is no yardage penalty assessed to either team and the down is replayed. It is, essentially, a "do-over".
EXCEPTION: When live ball fouls are committed by each team

during a play in which the ball is turned over, it is not always considered a double foul. (See [Fouls by Both Teams with a Change of Possession \(p. 89\)](#) for when this occurs.) **NOTE:** When an equal number of dead ball personal, nonplayer or unsportsmanlike fouls are committed by opposing teams, the penalties for the fouls offset similar to that of a double foul; but this is not a double foul because the down is not replayed.

- H) Multiple:** Two or more live ball fouls (not including nonplayer or unsportsmanlike fouls) which are committed by the same team during the same down. When a multiple foul occurs, the offended team is permitted to accept the enforcement of the penalty from any one of the fouls committed.

- I) Post-Scrimmage Kick (PSK):** A foul committed by the receiving team during a down in which a legal scrimmage kick occurs (not including fouls for illegal substitution or illegal participation) and which a number of other criteria are met. (See [Post-Scrimmage Kick \(p. 99\)](#) for further explanation on PSK enforcement.)

III) Types of Plays

There are two types of plays to consider in penalty enforcement for live ball player fouls: A loose ball play and a running play. A single down will consist of one or a combination of plays. It may include a loose ball play alone, a loose ball play followed by one or more running plays or just one or a series of running plays. If there is both a loose ball play and a running play in the same down, the loose ball play will always precede the running play(s). A down may only ever include a single loose ball play, and no loose ball play may ever occur following a change of possession.

These terms to describe the status of the ball should not be confused with the actual position of the ball at the time of the foul, or the designed offensive play in which they occur. There may be times a ball is “loose,” but the play is a running play for the purpose of penalty enforcement. There are also times where the foul occurs

while a player is running with the ball, but the play is actually loose ball play because of subsequent action.

Loose Ball Plays

A loose ball play is defined as action that occurs during:

1. Any snap, fumble, backward pass or illegal kick in or behind the neutral zone (before team possession is changed).
2. A legal forward pass.
3. A free kick or scrimmage kick until the kick ends.
4. Any run that precedes any of the action listed in 1-3.

NOTE: If no action outlined in 1-3 actually occurs subsequent to the run, any foul that occurs during the run will be considered to have occurred during a running play.

Running Plays

A running play is defined as any other type of play not included in the definition of a loose ball play. The same action considered a “loose ball” when it occurs behind the neutral zone would be considered part of a running play if it occurs beyond the neutral zone. For instance, if a runner were to fumble the ball or make a backward or forward pass from beyond the neutral zone, any foul that occurs during this time would still be considered as part of the previous running play. Once the ball is recovered or caught, a new running play may begin.

If a down consists of more than one running play, each are considered a separate running play for the purpose of penalty enforcement. Fouls that occur during these plays are referenced as connected to the “related run”. To determine when a new related run begins, you must know when the previous related run ended. A related run ends when:

- The ball becomes dead in a runner’s possession. This occurs where the player steps out of bounds, where he is tackled, where his forward progress is stopped or

when he scores a touchdown or try. **NOTE:** The end of the run is considered the goal line when a running play ends on a touchdown or try.

- A runner loses possession. This occurs where any fumble or backward or forward pass beyond the neutral zone takes place. **EXCEPTION:** When the ball is handed off to another player, both players' possessions are considered as part of the same related run.
- The momentum rule is in effect. This occurs where the spot of the catch or recovery takes place.

IV) Next Down After Penalty

In most instances when the penalty for a live ball foul is accepted, the previous down is replayed. There are a few exceptions: They involve fouls during scrimmage kicks, fouls that include an automatic first down penalty, fouls that include a loss of down penalty and cases where the opponent of a scoring team commits a foul during a touchdown, field goal or successful try. (See [Special Enforcements \(p. 97\)](#) for these and others exceptions.)

V) Clean Hands Principle

The principle of clean hands is, essentially, that (1) a team should never be advantaged by committing a foul and (2) they should never be forced to give up a ball they legally acquired on a change of possession if they gained possession of the ball before they committed a foul. When these two philosophies are followed, it ensures that a foul committed by a team didn't have a role in gaining possession. They will still retain possession of the ball even though they may still be penalized yardage as a result of the foul(s) committed after gaining possession.

Foul by Both Teams with a Change of Possession

When live ball fouls (not including nonplayer or unsportsmanlike fouls) are committed by both teams during the same down, in most instances this results in a double foul with

offsetting penalties and a replay of the down. Some situations following a change of possession, though, allow the team in final possession to keep the ball under the Clean Hands Principle.

The penalty enforcement process when both teams commit live ball fouls (not including nonplayer or unsportsmanlike fouls) during the same down is:

1. Determine whether the team in final possession fouled before or after final possession was gained.
2. If the team in final possession fouled before they gained final possession, it is a double foul – replay the down.
3. If the team in final possession fouled only after gaining final possession, give them the option to decline all of the penalties for their opponent's fouls. **NOTE:** An example situation in which it would be more advantageous to accept the penalty would be: Team A is called for an offensive holding on a play in which they throw an interception in the endzone. Team B commits a block below the waist in the endzone following the interception, before running the ball out to the 25-yard line. If Team B declines the hold and Team A accepts the block below the waist, the result would be a safety. In this case, Team B may rather have a double foul, give the ball back to Team A and replay the down.
4. Then, enforce the live ball penalty against the team in final possession.
5. Enforce any nonplayer, unsportsmanlike or dead ball personal fouls for either team in the order they occurred (including offsetting equal number of said penalties).

The same enforcement principles apply if the change of possession occurs on a scrimmage or free kick, even if the foul of the receiving team technically occurs prior to possession being secured under the Post Scrimmage Kick enforcement. The idea is that by kicking the ball to the opposing team, the kicking team is indicating they intend on giving the ball to their

opponent. (See [Post-Scrimmage Kick \(p. 99\)](#) for further details about this special enforcement.)

VI) Basic Spot

The basic spot is the reference point for determining from where a penalty will be enforced. The basic spot is the:

- Previous Spot (the spot where the ball was last snapped or free-kicked) for:
 - Any foul which occurs simultaneous with the snap or free kick (See [Fouls Simultaneous with the Snap \(p. 83\)](#) for examples.).
 - Any foul which occurs during a loose ball play (See *Special Enforcement for exceptions to this enforcement* – [Roughing the Passer \(p. 110\)](#), [Tack-On Rules \(p. 101\)](#), [Kick-Catch Interference \(p. 98\)](#) and [Post Scrimmage Kick \(p. 87\)](#)).
 - Any foul which a legal kick occurs and an inadvertent whistle ends the down before possession is gained by either team.
- End of the Related Run (See [Running Plays \(p. 88\)](#)).
- Succeeding Spot (the spot where the ball would have been snapped or free-kicked had there been no foul) for:
 - Any unsportsmanlike or nonplayer foul whether it occurs during a live or dead ball. **NOTE:** This means that if a nonplayer or unsportsmanlike foul occurs during a play in which the offense scores, the score will count and the penalty will be assessed from the succeeding spot.
 - Any dead ball foul. **NOTE:** When a dead ball foul occurs during a down in which a new series is awarded because the line to gain has been reached (during the play or following a preceding dead ball foul), the new line to gain will not be established until the penalty has been enforced if the dead ball foul occurred before the ready-for-play. If the dead ball foul occurred after the

ready-for-play, the line to gain remains the same as at the time of the ready-for-play.

- When the end of the run occurs in the endzone and the result of the running play would be a touchback.

VII) All-but-One Principle

The All-but-One Principle is a set of rules that determines from where a penalty will be enforced based on whether the team was in possession of the ball at the time of the foul and where the foul occurs in relation to the basic spot. As the name implies, except in one instance, penalties are enforced from the basic spot. The one instance in which this is not the case is when *the team in possession of the ball commits a foul at a point behind the basic spot*. **NOTE:** It's important to know to what exactly the terms "behind" and "beyond" refer. In reference to the basic spot, "behind" means the side of the basic spot that the team with the ball is coming from, and "beyond" means the side of the basic spot that the team is advancing.

If referencing behind or beyond the neutral zone (or line of scrimmage), "behind" means the offensive (including kicking) team side and "beyond" means the defensive (including receiving) team side.

VIII) Enforcement Spot

One of the most common errors in penalty enforcement is the lateral placement of the ball on the field. Officials will often enforce penalties from the position of the ball wherever the play ends. While this may sometimes result in the correct lateral placement, it can also result in placing the ball in a position completely opposite from where it should be located.

So, how do you determine where the ball should be placed laterally on the field? The short answer is that the ball should be placed on a corresponding lateral position from the spot where the penalty will be enforced. This may be the previous spot, the succeeding spot, the spot of the end of the related run or the spot of the foul. (See [Basic Spot \(p. 91\)](#) and [All-but-One Principle](#)

(p. 92) for descriptions.) If any of these enforcements would cause the ball to be laterally placed on a yard line outside of the hash marks, the ball will be placed inside the nearest hash mark on the same yard line. **NOTE:** Many officials utilize an elastic down indicator on their wrists to remind them of what down is next if a penalty requires the down be replayed from the previous spot. Another use of elastic down indicators is to specify the previous lateral location of the ball for the same reason.



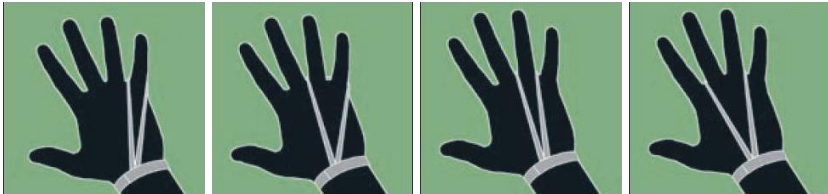
1st Down

2nd Down

3rd Down

4th Down

Lateral Position Indicator

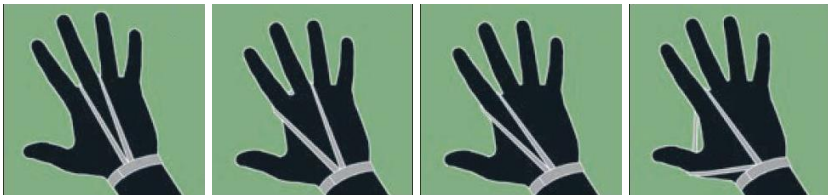


Right Hash

Between Right Hash & Upright

Right Upright

Between Right Upright & Middle



Middle

Between Left Upright & Middle

Left Upright

Between Left Hash and Upright



Left Hash

IX) Clock Status Following Enforced Penalty

Another potential point of confusion is the status of the game clock following the enforcement of a penalty for a live ball foul during a play. In almost all instances, the status of the clock will be the same when it resumes as it was at the conclusion of the play in which the foul occurred. If the action that ends the down results in the stoppage of the clock (*e.g., incomplete pass, runner goes out of bounds, a touchback, a score, etc.*), the clock will restart on the snap just as if no foul had occurred.

EXCEPTION: When a down that includes a live ball foul is ended due to an official's inadvertent whistle, the clock will resume on the ready-for-play unless it is Team B or R in possession during a running play when the inadvertent whistle occurs (and they accept the results of the play).

Inadvertent Whistle

While there are not many saving graces when an official has an inadvertent whistle, a live ball foul committed during a play when one occurs can be one. This is because enforcement of the penalty supersedes the inadvertent whistle, including the option for the team in final possession to replay the down. If a foul occurs, an accepted penalty is enforced as if the inadvertent whistle never happened.

That's not to say this makes all situations easy to enforce, though. Take the following play:

Situation: 4th and 2 on Team B's 35-yard line. A12 takes the snap and attempts to bootleg to the right. During the play, A89 pulls down B55 and is called for holding at the line of scrimmage. B65 is able to reach the quarterback at B's 40-yard line, where the ball is knocked loose backwards. The official errantly tweets his whistle as A12 is brought to the ground, while the ball is bouncing in play at the 50-yard line.

Ruling: This is an inadvertent whistle, but Team B has the option to accept or decline the penalty for the holding foul. If they accept the penalty, it will be 4th and 12 for Team A at Team B's 45-yard line. However, if they decline the penalty the ball is not immediately turned over on downs. Rather, Team A (since they were last in possession), is given the opportunity to (1) accept the play where it was last in a player's possession. This would turn the ball over to Team B and it would be 1st and 10 on Team B's 40-yard line. Or, (2) they may choose to replay the down. It would then remain 4th and 2 on Team B's 35-yard line. Since Team A would obviously want to keep the ball, it is in Team B's best interest to accept the penalty initially.

NOTE: If a team requests and is granted a timeout to be taken during the dead ball time frame following the enforcement of a penalty, the clock will restart on the snap following the timeout regardless of what the status of the clock was at the end of the down.

Dead Ball Fouls

Similar clock procedure principles apply for dead ball fouls. If the clock was stopped when the dead ball foul occurs, it will remain stopped until the next snap (unless the clock was stopped only to enforce the penalty for a live ball foul). If the clock was running when a dead ball foul occurs, it shall restart on the ready-for-play. **EXCEPTION:** If the clock is stopped due to an accepted penalty for a delay of game foul, the clock *shall* restart on the snap. (See [*Illegally Conserving or Consuming Time \(below\)*](#) for when the Referee may adjust the clock when this exception is being abused.)

Illegally Conserving or Consuming Time

The Referee is given a lot of latitude to control when the clock will restart when he believes that either team is attempting to stop the clock or run it out by committing

penalties. He does not have the authority, though, to restart a clock that was stopped because of action simultaneous to the end of the down; nor does he have authority to run time off the clock as in other rulesets.

However, if a penalty is accepted which would cause the game clock to be started on the snap (*e.g., delay of game foul*), the Referee may choose to start the clock on the ready-for-play if he believes that the foul was committed for the purpose of conserving time. The same authority also applies if the Referee believes a team is committing fouls for the purpose of consuming time – he may choose to have the clock restart on the snap if it would normally start on the ready-for-play.

Additionally, when a penalty is accepted within the last two minutes of either half, the offended team has the option to choose start the clock on the snap if it would normally start on the ready-for-play. **NOTE:** This rule does not go the other way. If the clock is legally stopped simultaneous with the end of the down, and would be restarted with the snap by rule, there is no option for the offended team to, instead, have the clock started on the ready-for-play.

The option to start the game clock on the snap should be treated the same as any other penalty enforcement option. If the Referee believes that there is an obvious choice, he may make the determination as to what is in the offended team's interest. If the offended coach prefers the other option, he may inform his line of scrimmage official of his decision.

Extension of Periods

If the penalty for a live ball foul that occurs during a down in which time for the period expires is accepted by either team, the period *must* be extended with an untimed down until a down ends the period without a foul that must be enforced. An extension of the period does not apply to penalties for fouls:

- That include a loss of down, even if the ball would be turned over on downs; or

- Where the resulting enforcement spot will be a free kick or during overtime.

NOTE: Dead ball personal fouls that occur after time expires, or nonplayer or unsportsmanlike fouls that occur during or after the play in which time expires, are not considered a foul in which the acceptance of the penalty would extend the period.

X) Special Enforcements

There are some situations where following regular penalty enforcement would be inequitable, or even put the offended team at a disadvantage. In these situations, the rules provide for special enforcements based on the principles of fairness. Since these special enforcements cover the circumstances of the particular play, there is not a general process that can be followed to get to the correct enforcement. Rather, officials just need to remember the rule that applies in each of these cases:

A) Free Kick Out of Bounds

It is a foul on Team K when a kick goes out of bounds untouched by Team R. The penalty provides four enforcement options from which Team R may choose:

- 5-yard penalty from the previous spot and re-kick.
- Accept the ball 25 yards in advance of the previous spot.

NOTE: Since this is not an award of penalty yardage – it is a designation of a succeeding spot – it is not subject to the limitation of half the distance restriction. The only yardage limitation is if the ball is kicked from inside Team R’s 25-yard line, in which case the option is not offered.

- Accept the ball 5 yards in advance of the succeeding spot.
- Decline the penalty and take the results of the play where the ball went out of bounds.

NOTE: A foul for a free kick out of bounds is not eligible for the tack-on penalty provision because it does not occur during the kick (the foul occurs simultaneous with the end of the kick).

B) Kick-Catch Interference

It is a foul for a Team K player to interfere with a Team R player's opportunity or to catch the ball. **NOTE:** When a kicked ball that has been grounded first touches a Team K player, it is not a foul. If it occurs on a free kick within the neutral zone, or on a scrimmage kick beyond the expanded neutral zone, it is first touching. If it occurs on a free kick beyond the neutral zone, Team K is eligible to recover the ball and secure possession.

NOTE: *First Touching* – First touching permits Team R to accept possession of the ball at the point of first touching, even if subsequently possessed by Team R. It, essentially, gives Team R a free opportunity to scoop up the ball and attempt to advance as far as possible. If the ball carrier is tackled, runs out of bounds or has his progress stopped behind the point of first touching, Team R would take possession at the point of first touching. If the ball is turned over to Team K, the turnover would be nullified and Team R would take possession at the point of first touching. First touching is ignored, however, if there is any accepted penalty. Take the following situations:

Situation 1: K12 attempts an onside free kick from the K-40, blocks before the ball goes 10 yards at the K-50 and first touches the grounded ball at the K-48. R81 then scoops up the ball and (a) the runner is tackled at the R-45. (b) the runner fumbles the ball which is recovered and downed by K65 on the K-45.

Ruling: In (a), the penalty for the foul will be accepted. This will be a tack-on penalty (See [Tack-On Fouls \(p. 101\)](#)) and Team R will have the ball 1st and 10 on the K-45. In (b), Team R may decline the penalty and take the ball at the K-

48, or they may accept the penalty and have Team K re-kick from the K-30.

Situation 2: K18 punts the ball from the K-35. As the ball is coming to rest at the R-35, K40 touches the ball and begins to walk away. Immediately after, R25 picks the ball up and begins running. (a) The runner runs out of bounds at the R-45. (b) The runner fumbles the ball which is recovered and downed by K65 at the R-45. (c) R55 commits an illegal block foul at the R-25 and then the runner fumbles the ball which is recovered and downed by K65 at the K-45.

Ruling: In (a), it will be 1st and 10 for Team R at the R-45. In (b), it will be 1st and 10 for Team R at the R-35. In (c), if the penalty is declined, it will be 1st and 10 for Team R at the R-35. If the penalty is accepted, it will be 1st and 10 for Team R at the R-15. In neither case can Team K retain possession of the ball.

C) Post-Scrimmage Kick (PSK)

Fouls that occur during a scrimmage kick, between the snap and the end of the kick are, by definition, committed during a loose ball play. Under regular enforcement, fouls that occur during this time would be enforced from the previous spot. Penalizing Team R from the previous spot in these situations would often lead to Team K receiving a “cheap” new set of downs. This could be excessively punitive in many cases – especially since Team K was intending to give the ball to the opposing team. As a result, these situations will be enforced under the Post Scrimmage Kick enforcement. Under this enforcement, the basic spot becomes the spot where the kick ends. This occurs when:

- A Team R player gains possession of the ball.
- The kick goes out of bounds.
- The ball comes to rest in bounds and is no player is attempting to secure possession.

- The ball enters Team R's endzone.
NOTE: The basic spot is the 20-yard line for a ball that enters Team R's endzone (touchback).

NOTE: Because the end of the kick in PSK enforcement sets the basic spot, it is important that the covering official drops his bean bag on the yard line where the kick ends. (See [Use of Bean Bags \(p. 56\)](#))

In order for Post Scrimmage Kick enforcement to be applied, *all* of the following criteria must be met:

- ✓ The foul is committed on a down in which a scrimmage kick (not including any try attempt or a successful field goal) occurs and goes beyond the neutral zone, and the foul occurs between the snap and the end of the kick.
NOTE: It is not necessary for the ball to remain beyond the neutral zone – just that a scrimmage kick crossed beyond neutral zone during the down.
- ✓ The foul is committed by Team R beyond the expanded neutral zone.
- ✓ Team K will not be the next to put the ball in play.

If all of the criteria are met, Team R will retain the ball, and the penalty for the foul will be enforced using the All-but-One Principle. If any of the criteria are not met, the penalty will be enforced under regular enforcement for a loose ball play (*i.e., previous spot*). **NOTE:** When all the criteria are met, Team K does not have an option to apply regular enforcement – any accepted penalty must be enforced under PSK enforcement.

NOTE: Post Scrimmage Kick enforcement cannot be applied during overtime (or from regulation to overtime), so any foul committed by Team R during a loose ball in overtime will be enforced from the previous spot.

D) Tack-On Fouls

Tack-on fouls, using the same logic as other penalty enforcements for fouls committed during kicks, seek to prevent the frequency of re-kicks. Tack-on penalty provisions only apply to fouls by Team K before the end of a free or scrimmage kick. If the foul occurs after the end of the kick, it would be penalized using regular enforcement.

When Team K commits a foul during a free kick or during a down in which a legal scrimmage kick occurs, before the kick has ended, Team R may accept the yardage for the penalty from the succeeding spot. **NOTE:** If the down ends in Team K's possession, or Team R also commits a foul during the down, regular enforcement of the penalty or penalties will be in effect. Take the following situations:

Situation 1: K18 punts the ball from the K-35. During the kick, K88 is flagged for holding at the K-40. R25 muffs the kick at the R-35. (a) The ball is recovered by R25 and he is tackled at the R-40. (b) The ball is recovered by K80 and he is tackled at the R-30. (c) The ball is recovered by K80. He then fumbles the ball and it is recovered and downed by R50 at the R-30.

Ruling: In (a), Team R may choose to accept the penalty and have Team K re-kick from the K-25, or they may accept the yardage from the succeeding spot – 1st and 10 for Team R at the 50-yard line. In (b), the penalty will be enforced from the previous spot and the down will be replayed from the K-25. In (c), Team R may choose to accept the penalty and have Team K re-kick from the K-25, or they may accept the yardage from the succeeding spot – 1st and 10 for Team R at the R-40.

Situation 2: K12 kicks off from the K-40, which is fielded by R25 at the R-15. During the kick, K88 is flagged for an illegal block at the R-45. (a) During the kick, R50 is also flagged for an illegal block at the R-40. (b) During the return

by R25, R50 is flagged for an illegal block at the R-30. In both situations, R25 is tackled at the R-35.

Ruling: In (a), this is double foul where the penalties will offset. Team K will re-kick from the K-40. In (b), this may be a double foul if Team R accepts the penalty for K88's foul. The penalties will offset and Team K will re-kick from the K-40. Team R may keep the ball if they decline the penalty for K88's foul. The penalty would be enforced using regular enforcement. It will be Team R's ball – 1st and 10 – from the R-15.

There are some additional considerations regarding the succeeding spot when determining whether/where the special tack-on enforcement is applied. For instance:

Multiple Offensive Plays During the Same Down

It doesn't matter whether a legal scrimmage kick crosses the expanded neutral zone, or whether there are multiple legal kicks during the same down. As long as the foul by Team K occurs between the snap and the end of the kick, the tack-on provision may apply. **NOTE:** It is possible for a legal kick to occur and to be followed by another offensive play in the same down. Whether the tack-on provision applies depends entirely whether the foul occurred during the kick (including action between the snap and the kick) or whether it occurred during action subsequent to the end of the kick.

Situation 1: 4th and 8 on the K-12. After the snap, K89 is flagged for holding on the end. The punt is blocked and then recovered and downed by (a) R99 at the K-8. (b) K18 at the K-10.

Ruling: In (a), Team R may accept the penalty and have Team K re-kick from the K-6, or they may accept the yardage from the succeeding spot – 1st and 10 for Team R at the K-4. In (b), Team R may accept the

penalty and have Team K re-kick from the K-6, or they may decline the penalty and accept the ball at the K-10.

Situation 2: 4th and 8 on the K-12. After the snap, K89 is flagged for holding on the end. K18 muffs the snap and just gets off a kick that goes high into the air and comes down at the K-18. The ball takes a sharp bounce and returns behind the neutral zone where it is retrieved by K18 at the K-9. (a) He immediately punts the ball a second time, and the ball is downed at the K-45. (b) He completes a legal pass to K81, who is tackled at the K-17. (c) He completes a legal pass to K81, who is tackled at the K-25. (d) He advances with the ball, during which K80 is flagged at the K-10 for an illegal block below the waist and is then tackled at the K-19.

Ruling: In (a), Team R may accept the penalty and have Team K re-kick from the K-6, or they may accept the yardage from the succeeding spot – 1st and 10 for Team R at the K-35. In (b), Team R may accept the penalty and have Team K re-kick from the K-6, or they may accept the yardage from the succeeding spot – 1st and 10 for Team R at the K-8 ½. In (c), since Team K would be next to put the ball in play, Team R may only have the penalty enforced under regular enforcement – 4th and 14 for Team K on the K-6. In (d), Team R may accept the penalty and have Team K re-kick from the K-6, they may accept the yardage from the succeeding spot – 1st and 10 for Team R at the K-9 ½ or they may accept regular enforcement on the penalty for the illegal block foul – 4th and 15 for Team K at the K-5.

Touchdown Scored by Team R

When the play following a foul committed by Team K during the kick results in a touchdown by Team R, the succeeding spot will be the spot of the Try. If accepted, the penalty will be half the distance to the goal (*i.e.*, 1 ½-yard

line). **NOTE:** This is a tack-on penalty coming from a foul committed by Team K before the end of the kick, and it is not eligible to be “bridged” to the succeeding kickoff. This would only be permitted if the foul by Team K occurred between when the kick ends and the touchdown. (See [Fouls Involving Scoring Plays \(p. 105\)](#) for further explanation when it is appropriate to bridge penalties.)

Team K Fouls on Play Resulting in Safety by Team R

It would be a very rare circumstance, however, there may be an instance where the foul by Team K during the kick occurs on play where Team R takes a safety. For instance:

Situation 1: K18 punts the ball from the 50-yard line. During the kick, K88 is flagged for holding. R25 allows the ball to fall behind him. While players from both teams are surrounding the bounding ball at the R6-yard line, R30 quickly picks up the ball and attempts to avoid Team K players by retreating into the endzone where he is tackled.

Ruling: It is likely that Team R will want to accept the penalty and have Team K replay the down from the K-40. However, Team R may rather take the safety and have the penalty enforced on the succeeding spot (*i.e., free kick from the R-30*). This meets all of the requirements of the tack-on provision and will be permitted.

Team K Fouls Going into Second Half or Involving OT

The exception that provides for the tack-on penalty states it is applicable “...when K will *not* be next to put the ball in play.” Since K *may* be the next to put the ball in play depending on the options selected to start the second half and each new overtime, this tack-on penalty may not carry over in those instances. And, in order to provide both teams equitable penalty enforcement in the same situation (*i.e., on a scrimmage kick to end their opponent’s overtime*

possession), the tack-on penalty exception will not apply to situations involving any part of overtime (*i.e., from regulation to overtime, between possessions of an overtime or between multiple overtimes*).

E) Fouls Involving Scoring Plays

If the non-scoring team accepts a penalty for a live ball foul (not including a nonplayer or unsportsmanlike foul) during a down in which the opponent scores a touchdown, field goal or successful try, the score is nullified as part of the enforcement. There are instances, however, where using the same regular enforcement for a foul by the non-scoring team during a touchdown, field goal or successful try would require the scoring team to decline the penalty and accept the results of the play if they wish to keep the score. To reduce the likelihood of “free shots” taken during scoring plays, these situations will use the following special enforcements:

Fouls During Touchdowns

A team that scores a touchdown during a down in which their opponent commits a foul has two options for enforcement of the penalty: (1) It may be enforced from the succeeding spot – the spot of the try – or (2) they may attempt the try as normal and bridge the penalty by carrying it over to the ensuing kickoff. **NOTE:** If the touchdown occurs during a down in which the ball is turned over to the scoring team, the penalty may only be enforced on the try or kickoff if the foul occurred following the final change of possession. If the foul was committed prior to the change of possession, the scoring team must decline all penalties to keep the touchdown.

NOTE: A “bridged” penalty always bypasses a try and carries over to the ensuing kickoff, so it is not possible to bridge a penalty from regulation to overtime or within overtime since no kickoffs are possible. However, a penalty

may be bridged to the second half kickoff if a team scores a touchdown as time expires in the second quarter.

Fouls During Successful Tries

If Team B/R fouls during a down in which Team A/K successfully converts a try by either kick or otherwise, Team A/K has two options for enforcement: (1) They may enforce the penalty and replay the down or (2) they may keep the point(s) scored and enforce the penalty from the succeeding spot. This may be either an ensuing kickoff in regulation or to/during overtime.

Fouls During Successful Field Goals

If Team R fouls during a down in which Team K successfully converts a field goal, Team K has two options for enforcement: (1) They may enforce the penalty and replay the down or (2) they may keep the point(s) scored and enforce the penalty from the succeeding spot. This may be either an ensuing kickoff in regulation or to/during overtime.

Dead Ball Personal, Nonplayer or Unsportsmanlike Fouls

When either team commits a dead ball personal foul between the touchdown and the ready-for-play for the try, or for any nonplayer or unsportsmanlike foul during the play in which the touchdown is scored, the offended team has two options for enforcement: (1) It may be enforced from the succeeding spot – the spot of the try – or (2) they may attempt the try as normal and bridge the penalty by carrying it over to the ensuing kickoff. Since overtime periods do not include a kickoff, it is not possible to bridge a penalty from regulation to overtime or within overtime. **NOTE:** If a dead ball foul occurs after the ready-for-play and before the snap, the penalty will be enforced using regular enforcement and applied to the try.

NOTE: When a penalty is either bridged or carried over to a second half kickoff or to/during an overtime period, it is important to notify the team with the option to kick to start the second half, or for an overtime selection, so that they can make an informed decision.

NOTE: Any combination of penalties eligible for carrying over to the succeeding spot or bridging to the ensuing kickoff may be applied to the applicable spot or spots at the offended team's choice. Take the following situations:

Situation 1: 3rd and goal from the B-2 with Team A down by 8 and 1:00 left in the game. Team A runs an end-around play and scores a touchdown. During the run, B80 is flagged for a block below the waist. After the touchdown (a) B80 is then flagged for a personal foul. (b) A88 is then flagged for a personal foul.

Ruling: Since both teams' penalties for these fouls may be applied to either the try or the kickoff, in (a), Team B may choose to apply one penalty to each enforcement spot or both penalties to one enforcement spot. In (b), Team B will first decide from where the penalty will be enforced, followed by Team A's decision as to where the penalty for the foul against them will be enforced. These are not offsetting penalties even though if each were enforced on the ensuing kickoff they would have the same effect as offsetting, and the ball would be kicked off from the normal kickoff spot (no need to walk them off). However, if they are both enforced on the succeeding try, it will certainly have more of an impact against Team A/K. The results would be Team A/K would be attempting the try from the 16 ½-yard line.

Situation 2: 3rd and goal from the B-40 with :02 remaining in the first half. During the down in which a "Hail Mary" pass is completed in the endzone for a touchdown as time

expires, B80 is flagged for holding. The sideline official also ran into a Team B assistant coach inside of the restricted area while moving downfield to cover the play. Following the touchdown, B80 begins arguing with the official about the call and is flagged for unsportsmanlike conduct. Team A decides to have those penalties applied on the second half kickoff. Things calm down briefly for the try attempt. During the succeeding successful try, B55 is flagged for roughing the snapper. This penalty will also be enforced on the ensuing kickoff. As the teams leave the field for the intermission, Team B's head coach begins to berate the officials and is flagged for unsportsmanlike conduct.

Ruling: All of these fouls are eligible for carrying over or bridging to the second half. If the offending team will kick off for the second half, it will be from the K-1 7/8. If the offending team will receive for the second half, the kickoff will be from R-5.

F) Fouls During Running Plays that End in the Offensive Team's Own Endzone

The result of a running play that ends in the offensive team's own endzone is one of two possibilities: A safety or a touchback. If the offensive team is the team that put the ball in their own endzone, the result would be a safety; but if it was the opposing team that put the ball in the endzone, the result would be a touchback.

Safety

If a foul occurs during a down that includes a safety caused by the related run ending in the endzone, the basic spot for this foul is the goal line. **NOTE:** The basic spot is set at the goal line because the related run ended inside the endzone, and not because the result was a safety. The basic spot may be outside of the endzone if the related run ends outside of the endzone (*i.e., end of the related run*) or if the foul occurs during a loose ball play (*i.e.,*

previous spot) and where the enforcement of an offensive foul in the endzone results in a safety.

Touchback

If a foul occurs during a down that includes a touchback caused by the related run ending the endzone, the basic spot for this foul is the 20-yard line. **NOTE:** Remember that the opponent of the offensive team may have started the down as the offensive team (*i.e., by fumbling or throwing an interception into the endzone*).

NOTE: In either case, it is vitally important to know whether the foul occurred during a loose ball play or a running play. For instance: If Team B commits a foul during a down in which Team A puts the ball in their own endzone, and then fumbles the ball out of bounds, the basic spot would be the previous spot because a fumble behind the neutral zone is considered a loose ball play. If Team A was tackled in the endzone, the basic spot would be the goal line.

G) Loss of Down Penalties

Under regular enforcement the down is replayed when a penalty is accepted for a live ball foul. There are a number of fouls, though, where the penalty does not include a replay of the down. This is often referred to as a penalty with a “loss of down”. When the penalty includes a loss of down in addition to the yardage penalty, the down will be advanced if the line to gain was not reached after the administration of the live ball foul.

NOTE:

- If the line to gain was not reached following the administration of a loss of down penalty for a live ball foul that occurred on fourth down, possession will be turned over after enforcement of the yardage penalty.

- If a loss of down penalty is enforced on a foul that occurs following a change of possession, the loss of down portion of the penalty is ignored.

There are four fouls that include a loss of down in addition to the yardage penalty. They are:

- Illegal Forward Pass
- Illegal Touching
- Illegal Handing
- Intentional Grounding

NOTE: Under NFHS rules, intentional grounding is a form of an illegal forward pass. This means that when intentional grounding occurs, it marks the end of the related run; thus, the basic spot. For this reason, a foul for intentional grounding in the endzone will result in a safety whether the penalty is accepted or declined. Take the following:

Situation 1: 4th and 5 from the A-3. A12 takes the snap and rolls out into the endzone. As B55 charges after him, A12 throws the ball away from inside the endzone and is flagged for intentional grounding.

Ruling: The basic spot is where the pass was thrown from (*i.e., end of the run*). If Team B accepts the penalty, the enforcement will be from inside the endzone and a safety. If Team B declines the penalty, the end of the run is in the endzone, and since Team A is the team that had the force that put the ball in the endzone, this would also be a safety.

H) Automatic First Down Penalties

There are three fouls that include an awarded new series of downs (*i.e., automatic first down*) in addition to the yardage penalty, regardless of whether the enforcement of the yardage provision causes the ball to reach the line to gain. They are:

- Roughing the Snapper
- Roughing the Kicker or Holder

- Roughing the Passer

NOTE: Penalties for roughing the snapper, kicker or holder are enforced from the previous spot whether the down results in a loose ball play or not. Roughing the passer is enforced from the succeeding spot if the succeeding spot is beyond neutral zone, when there is no change of possession during the down and the foul is not for an incidental facemask – otherwise, the penalty is enforced from the previous spot.

I) Intentional Pass Interference

Likely the least flagged foul in high school football (and for good reason), intentional pass interference is a single foul that carries two penalties – 15-yards from the previous spot and an additional 15-yards from the succeeding spot. This enforcement applies to both the offensive and defensive teams. The second penalty is not an unsportsmanlike foul, and no one will be assessed an unsportsmanlike penalty accumulating toward disqualification. **NOTE:** The succeeding spot penalty cannot be enforced unless the previous spot penalty is accepted and enforced first.

NOTE: The above paragraph is the least amount of words we could put to paper on the topic, while still covering it in full. In fact, this rule is primarily discussed only ever in theory. In practice, no one expects this call to ever be made, and most coaches don't even know the rule exists. That is the extent that can be said without flatly saying not to call this particular foul.

J) Unfair Acts

The term “unfair acts” is an incredible understatement of the fouls that this rule seeks to address. This gives the officials, and the Referee in particular, extensive latitude in handling situations that are deemed so blatant and so egregious that they warrant the enforcement of a penalty not explicitly

prescribed, but required to maintain order and equity under the concept of common sense and fair play.

Some of the penalties that might fall under this category include:

- Returning time to the game clock if a defensive team coordinates a strategy for everyone to commit intentional fouls at the snap to prevent the offense from even the ability to attempt a play.
- Awarding a score when a player is prevented from advancing by a non-participant when he would have obviously scored during the down.
- Forfeiting a game because of consistent and patently dangerous conduct.
- Other acts that would be considered a deliberate and persistent travesty to the game.

Most fouls in a game – even really bad ones – can be handled through enforcement of the written rules. Penalizing a foul as an unfair act should only be reserved for the most serious offenses and those which do not already have a penalty spelled out in the rules.

XI) Mechanics of Penalty Enforcement

Just as important as knowing the proper enforcement of penalties, is using signals and mechanics that clearly convey the foul called, and doing so in an efficient manner so as not to unnecessarily delay the game.

A) Flag Techniques

When a foul occurs where the enforcement spot may be the spot of the foul, *i.e., live ball fouls other than those simultaneous with the snap*, the flag should be thrown/dropped as close to the spot as possible. This is because the ball is enforced from the specific spot (not just the yard line) where the foul occurred, if enforced from the spot of the foul.

After throwing the flag, the calling official should mentally note the player's number and the yard line where the foul occurred. It may be necessary to adjust the location of the flag for more specificity. If so, this should be done as soon as the play has ended. The calling official should ensure that another official is covering the spot of his flag before reporting the foul to the Referee.

For dead ball fouls, or live ball fouls simultaneous with the snap, the flag should be tossed above the official's head and in front of him. Since the enforcement spot for this foul is predetermined, the calling official may immediately report the foul to the Referee.

B) Preliminary Signals

For dead ball fouls, the calling official should, immediately after throwing his flag, use the "stop the clock" signal (even if the clock is not running) and sound his whistle. This is especially important to prevent further play if the ball is snapped after the foul. If multiple flags are thrown on the play, the officials should briefly come together to determine if they are for the same action, and that they have the same judgment. Otherwise, the calling official will give the preliminary signal to the Referee while moving in his direction.

Following a play in which a live ball foul is flagged, the calling official will sound his whistle and give the "stop the clock" signal. This may require several loud blasts on the whistle to get the attention of the players and crew. If there are multiple flags thrown during the play, no preliminary signal should be given. Instead, a brief conference should take place to determine whether the fouls were for the same action. If only one foul is called on the play, the calling official should give a preliminary signal for the foul while moving in the direction of the Referee.

C) Penalty Enforcement Responsibilities

CALLING OFFICIAL:

- a. The calling official should be prepared to provide the Referee all the pertinent information related to the play, including:
 - The foul that occurred. (See [Pass Interference \(p. 8\)](#) for specific action that may need to be relayed.)
 - The team and player that committed the foul.
NOTE: If an official doesn't have a specific number for the player committing the foul, he should not take time to subsequently identify the player; nor should he make up a number.
 - Important spots related to enforcement (*i.e., spot of the foul or end of the run*).
 - When the foul occurred in relation to related runs.
 - The results of the play.
 - The status of the clock for when play resumes.
 - Whether an ejection is recommended for the play.
NOTE: While the opinion of the calling official may ultimately result in the ejection of a player, that decision should be made by the crew.

REFEREE:

- a. After receiving the preliminary signal and/or explanation from the calling official(s), the Referee should decide if the enforcement seems obvious, or whether an option should be given to the offended team. If the decision seems obvious, the Referee will immediately announce the foul and penalty enforcement.
- b. If an option is required, the Referee will give a preliminary signal and then get the choice of the offended team's head coach. If there is confusion as to the enforcement or options, the Referee may confer with the Umpire and the calling official. He will then announce the foul and penalty enforcement. (See [Penalty Announcements \(p. 39\)](#) for further information.)

UMPIRE:

- a. When the Umpire notes the preliminary signal by the calling official, he may immediately begin walking off the penalty yardage while the announcement is being made if the enforcement is obvious.
- b. If an option is required, the Umpire will wait for the Referee to receive the choice, and then begin walking off the penalty yardage while the announcement is being made.
- c. After reaching the new spot of the ball, and before placing it on the ground, the Umpire will look to the Head Linesman to ensure that the ball is placed on the correct spot.

HEAD LINESMAN:

- a. The Head Linesman should be prepared to get the enforcement decision of the head coach on his sideline and relay that to the Referee when applicable.
- b. When the Head Linesman recognizes what the enforcement for the foul will be, he will walk off the penalty yardage on his sideline. He will also be responsible for directing the line-to-gain crew to their proper positions.
- c. After reaching the yard line for the new spot of the ball, the Head Linesman will indicate to the Umpire with his forward foot to ensure the ball is placed on the correct spot.

LINE JUDGE:

- a. The Line Judge should be prepared to get the enforcement decision of the head coach on his sideline and relay that to the Referee when applicable.
- b. During the enforcement of a penalty, the Line Judge will hold his position at the enforcement spot of the penalty. He will remain in this position until the chain has been reset and the ball is set on the ground.
- c. He will then walk off the penalty yardage on his sideline to ensure the ball is placed at the correct spot.

ALL OTHER OFFICIALS:

- a. All other officials have the responsibility to observe the penalty enforcement and ensure it is accurate. They should provide input if the final enforcement is not correct. No official should permit the next play to occur if the penalty has not been enforced properly.

Section 5: Free Kicks

Since the play clock for a free kick does not start until the Referee's ready-for-play signal and whistle, a kick should never be permitted without the proper number of players on the field for both teams.

I) Kickoff

A) 5-Person Crew

REFEREE:

Pre-Snap Positioning and Responsibilities

- a. The Referee will take a position in the middle of the field on Team R's goal line and should adjust his position between the hash marks depending on the position of the deepest receiver(s).
- b. Once all crew members are in position and have signaled they are ready, the Referee will sound his whistle and signal ready-for-play.

Play Coverage

- a. The Referee will ensure that Team K has at least four players on either side of the kicker at the time of the kick – if not, he will flag the play and shut it down immediately.
- b. Once the ball is kicked, the Referee may move up into a position using proper angle to see in front of the receiver (while remaining behind him) based on where the ball is kicked.
- c. If the kick will threaten the goal line, he should hold his position to make decisions on whether a touchback has occurred or whether the momentum exception should be applied on a caught or recovered ball.
- c. If the ball is touched by a Team R player in his primary coverage area, the Referee will wind the game clock.
- d. If the receiver advances with the ball, the Referee will continue upfield while observing blocks in front of the ball carrier and in the middle of the field until the ball reaches the R-30. As the ball carrier reaches the R-30, the Referee

should move his focus to players trailing the play and continue upfield behind the deepest combination of Team R and Team K players.

- e. When the play ends, the Referee may assist with retrieving the proper ball to be put in play for the new series or try.

UMPIRE:

Pre-Snap Positioning and Responsibilities

- a. The Umpire will take his position off the field on the sideline opposite the press box, straddling the extended Team R restraining line (usually the 50-yard line) while holding his bean bag.
- b. The Umpire will ensure that all players and coaching personnel are clear of the restricted area. Once the correct number of players have been counted, he will raise his hand to indicate to the Referee that he is ready.
- c. The Umpire has the responsibility of Team R's restraining line, including whether the ball has reached the line before it is touched by a Team K player. He has the shared responsibility to determine whether the kicker made a pop-up kick and must also be aware if players from either team block before the ball has reached Team R's restraining line.

Play Coverage

- a. After the kick occurs without foul, the Umpire will direct his attention on the initial blocks made by/on the second-inside blocker nearest Team R's restraining line on his side of the field.
- b. Once the Team K players pass his position, the Umpire will move into the field of play, approximately 8-10 yards downfield and at the near-side hash marks.
- c. As the ball is being returned, the Umpire will observe action in the middle of the field in front of the runner. He should be especially alert to Team R players moving back toward their own goal line.

- d. The Umpire will allow the play come to his position and continue to officiate the play using an inside-out technique, particularly looking for fouls away from the ball as he moves upfield behind the play.
- e. When the play ends, the Umpire will move to the ball and replace it with the proper ball for the next series or try.

HEAD LINESMAN:

Pre-Snap Positioning and Responsibilities

- a. The Head Linesman's starting position is off the field on the sideline opposite the press box, at approximately the same yard line as the deepest Team R receiver(s).
- b. The Head Linesman will ensure that all players and coaching personnel are clear of the restricted area. Once the correct number of players have been counted, he will raise his hand to indicate to the Referee that he is ready.

Play Coverage

- a. After the kick, the Head Linesman will direct his attention on the blocks made by/on the farthest outside blocker nearest Team R's restraining line on his side of the field.
- b. If the ball is kicked behind him on his half of the field or threatens the pylon in his primary coverage area, the Head Linesman will retreat to cover the ball.
- c. If the ball is touched by a Team R player in his primary coverage area, the Head Linesman will wind the game clock.
- d. For returns on his half of the field, the Head Linesman is responsible for the spot for kicks out of bounds, blocks at the point of attack and forward progress all the way to the goal line.
- e. For returns on the opposite side of the field, the Head Linesman is responsible for blocks in the middle of the field away from the ball.
- f. When the play ends, the Head Linesman will mark forward progress on his side of the field. He will mirror the progress

spot and clean up around the runner if the ball is on the opposite side of the field.

LINE JUDGE:

Pre-Snap Positioning and Responsibilities

- a. The Line Judge's starting position is off the field on the press box sideline, at approximately the same yard line as the deepest Team R receiver(s).
- b. The Line Judge will ensure that all players and coaching personnel are clear of the restricted area. Once the correct number of players have been counted, he will raise his hand to indicate to the Referee that he is ready.

Play Coverage

- a. After the kick, the Line Judge will direct his attention on the blocks made by/on the farthest outside blocker nearest Team R's restraining line on his side of the field.
- b. If the ball is kicked behind him on his half of the field or threatens the pylon in his primary coverage area, the Line Judge will retreat to cover the ball.
- c. If the ball is touched by a Team R player in his primary coverage area, the Line Judge will wind the game clock.
- d. For returns on his half of the field, the Line Judge is responsible for the spot for kicks out of bounds, blocks at the point of attack and forward progress all the way to the goal line.
- e. For returns on the opposite side of the field, the Line Judge is responsible for blocks in the middle of the field away from the ball.
- f. When the play ends, the Line Judge will mark forward progress on his side of the field. He will mirror the progress spot and clean up around the runner if the ball is on the opposite side of the field.

BACK JUDGE:

Pre-Snap Positioning and Responsibilities

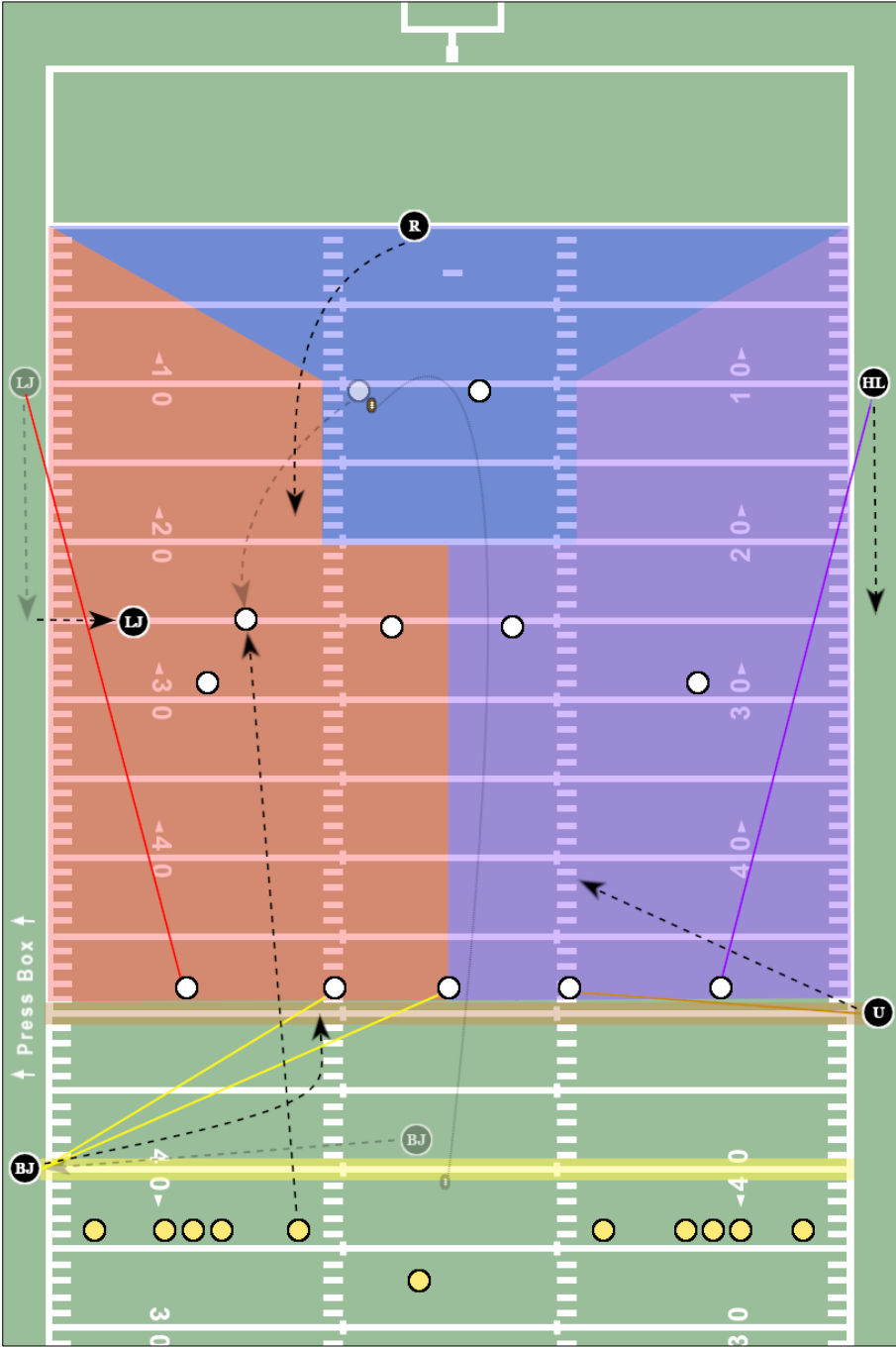
- a. The Back Judge will start in the middle of the field with the kicker. He'll then hand the ball to the kicker and give him instructions to raise his hand when he's ready and look to the Referee for the ready-for-play whistle and signal.
- b. From his position in the middle of the field, the Back Judge will count the Team K players and then move to his position off the field **on the press box sideline** straddling the extended Team K restraining line (usually the 40-yard line) while holding his bean bag. After reaching his position, the Back Judge will raise his hand to indicate to the Referee that he is ready.
- c. The Back Judge has the responsibility of Team K's restraining line, including whether any Team K player has encroached the line before the ball has been kicked. He has the shared responsibility to determine whether the kicker made a pop-up kick and must be aware if players from either team block before the ball has reached Team R's restraining line. He should also be alert as to whether the kicker is blocked before he advances five yards downfield.

Play Coverage

- a. After the kick occurs without foul, the Back Judge will direct his attention on the initial blocks made by/on the second- and third-inside blockers nearest Team R's restraining line on his side of the field.
- b. Once the Team K players have moved downfield, the Back Judge will move into the field of play, approximately 8-10 yards downfield and at the near-side hash marks.
- c. As the ball is being returned, the Back Judge will observe action in the middle of the field in front of the runner. He should be especially alert to Team R players moving back toward their own goal line.

- d. The Back Judge should remain at least 20 yards in advance of the ball carrier as the play advances. He has the primary responsibility for coverage at the goal line and should be straddling the goal line in advance of the runner crossing it.
- e. If the play ends at the goal line, the Back Judge will rule on forward progress.
- f. When the play ends prior to reaching the goal line, the Back Judge may assist with retrieving the proper ball to be put in play for the new series or try.

Kickoff – 5-Person Crew



B) 4-Person Crew Modifications

REFEREE:

Pre-Snap Positioning and Responsibilities

- a. The Referee will take a position on Team R's goal line between the numbers on the press box side of the field and the near hash marks. He should adjust his position depending on the position of the deepest receivers.

Play Coverage

- a. For returns on his half of the field, the Referee is responsible for the spot for kicks out of bounds, blocks at the point of attack and forward progress all the way to the goal line.
- b. For returns on the opposite side of the field, the Referee is responsible for blocks in the middle of the field away from the ball.
- c. When the play ends, the Referee will mark forward progress on his side of the field. He will mirror the progress spot and clean up around the runner if the ball is on the opposite side of the field.

LINE JUDGE:

Pre-Snap Positioning and Responsibilities

- a. The Line Judge will assume the position and all of the responsibilities reserved for the Back Judge in a 5-person crew, including the responsibility to count players from Team K.

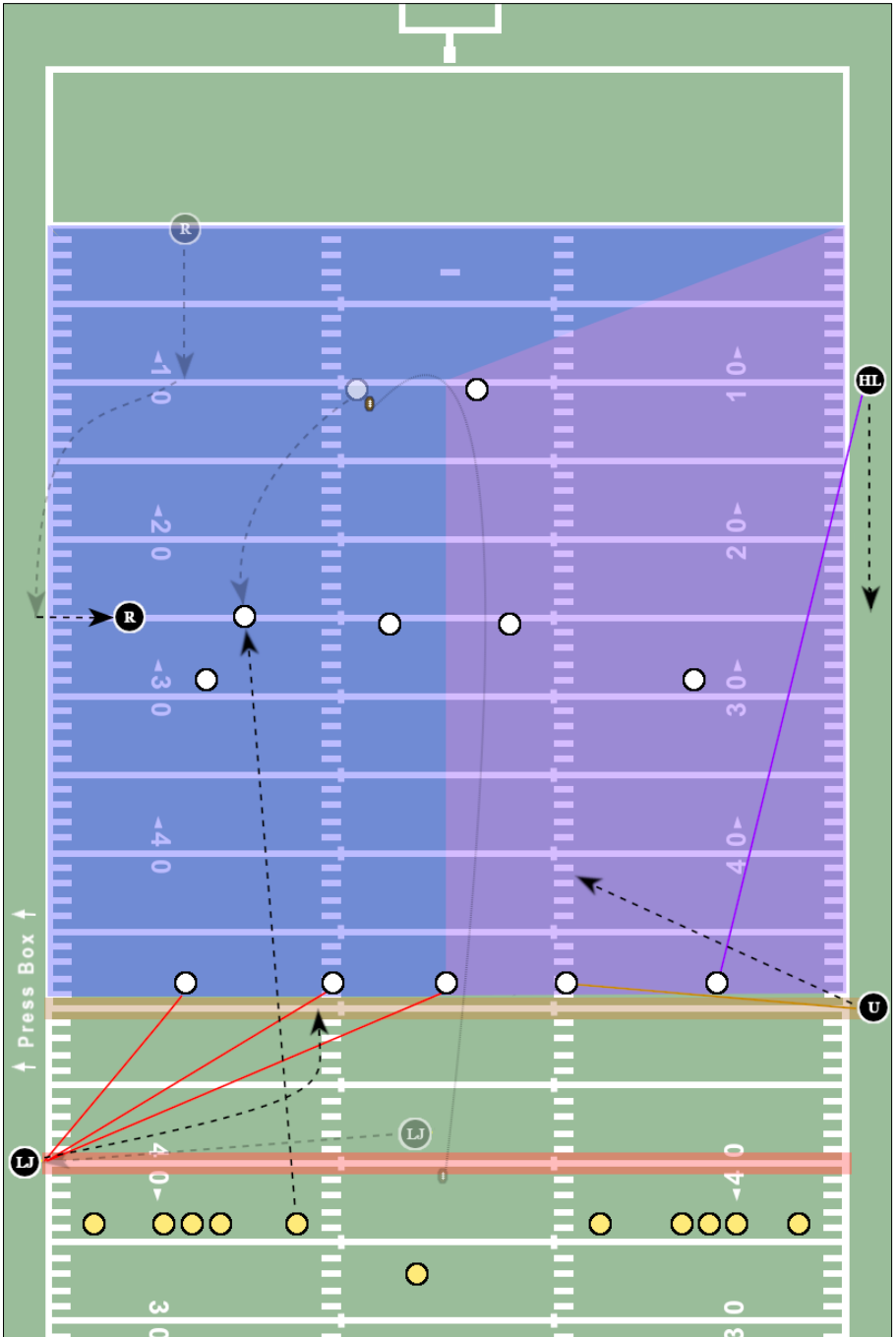
Play Coverage

- a. After the kick occurs without foul, the Line Judge will direct his attention on the initial blocks made by/on all blockers nearest Team R's restraining line on his side of the field.
- b. Once the Team K players have moved downfield, the Line Judge will move into the field of play, approximately 8-10 yards downfield and at the near-side hash marks.

- c. As the ball is being returned, the Line Judge will observe action in the middle of the field in front of the runner. He should be especially alert to Team R players moving back toward their own goal line.
- d. The Line Judge should remain at least 20 yards in advance of the ball carrier as the play advances. He has the primary responsibility for coverage at the goal line and should be straddling the goal line in advance of the runner crossing it.
- e. If the play ends at the goal line, the Line Judge will rule on forward progress.
- f. When the play ends prior to reaching the goal line, the Line Judge may assist with retrieving the proper ball to be put in play for the new series or try.

EXCEPTION: Under normal kickoff mechanics (*i.e., not an obvious onside kick*) for both 4- and 5-person systems, if the kicker indicates he will kick off from near either hash mark, the officials located on the restraining lines shall adjust their positions (if needed) so that the official located on the sideline nearest the location of the kick shall take a position on Team K's restraining line. The other official will then take his position on Team R's restraining line. This is referred to as "Rubber Band Mechanics" and will put the officials in the best positions if Team K were to attempt an unexpected onside kick. If making this adjustment, it is important for the officials to make eye contact to ensure both are in the correct positions.

Kickoff – 4-Person Crew



C) 7-Person Crew Modifications

HEAD LINESMAN:

Play Coverage

- a. After the kick, the Head Linesman will observe the initial block on/by the first Team K player downfield on his half of the field, and then focus his attention on the receiver if the ball is kicked in his primary coverage area.
- b. The Head Linesman is responsible for forward progress on his half of the field up to the K-2.

LINE JUDGE:

Play Coverage

- a. After the kick, the Line Judge will observe the initial block on/by the first Team K player downfield on his half of the field, and then focus his attention on the receiver if the ball is kicked in his primary coverage area.
- b. The Head Linesman is responsible for forward progress on his half of the field up to the K-2.

SIDE JUDGE:

Pre-Snap Positioning and Responsibilities

- a. The Side Judge will take his position off the field on the sideline opposite the press box, straddling the extended Team K restraining line (usually the 40-yard line) while holding his bean bag.
- b. The Side Judge will ensure that all players and coaching personnel are clear of the restricted area. Once the correct number of players have been counted, he will raise his hand to indicate to the Referee that he is ready.
- c. The Side Judge has the responsibility of Team K's restraining line, including whether any Team K player has encroached the line before the ball has been kicked. He has the shared responsibility to determine whether the kicker made a pop-up kick and must be aware if players from either team block before the ball has reached Team R's restraining line. He should also be alert as to whether

the kicker is blocked before he advances five yards downfield.

Play Coverage

- a. After the kick, the Side Judge will direct his attention on the blocks made by/on the farthest two outside blockers nearest Team R's restraining line on his side of the field.
- b. Once Team K has moved downfield, the Side Judge will move approximately 15-20 yards downfield while remaining off the field on his sideline.
- c. As the ball is being returned, the Side Judge will retreat upfield while maintaining approximately 20 yards in advance of the ball carrier and looking for blocks in front of the play.
- d. The Side Judge is responsible for forward progress on his half of the field inside of the K-2, including goal line coverage.
- e. If the Side Judge does not have forward progress responsibilities at the end of the play, he may assist with retrieving the proper ball to be put in play for the new series or try.

FIELD JUDGE:

Pre-Snap Positioning and Responsibilities

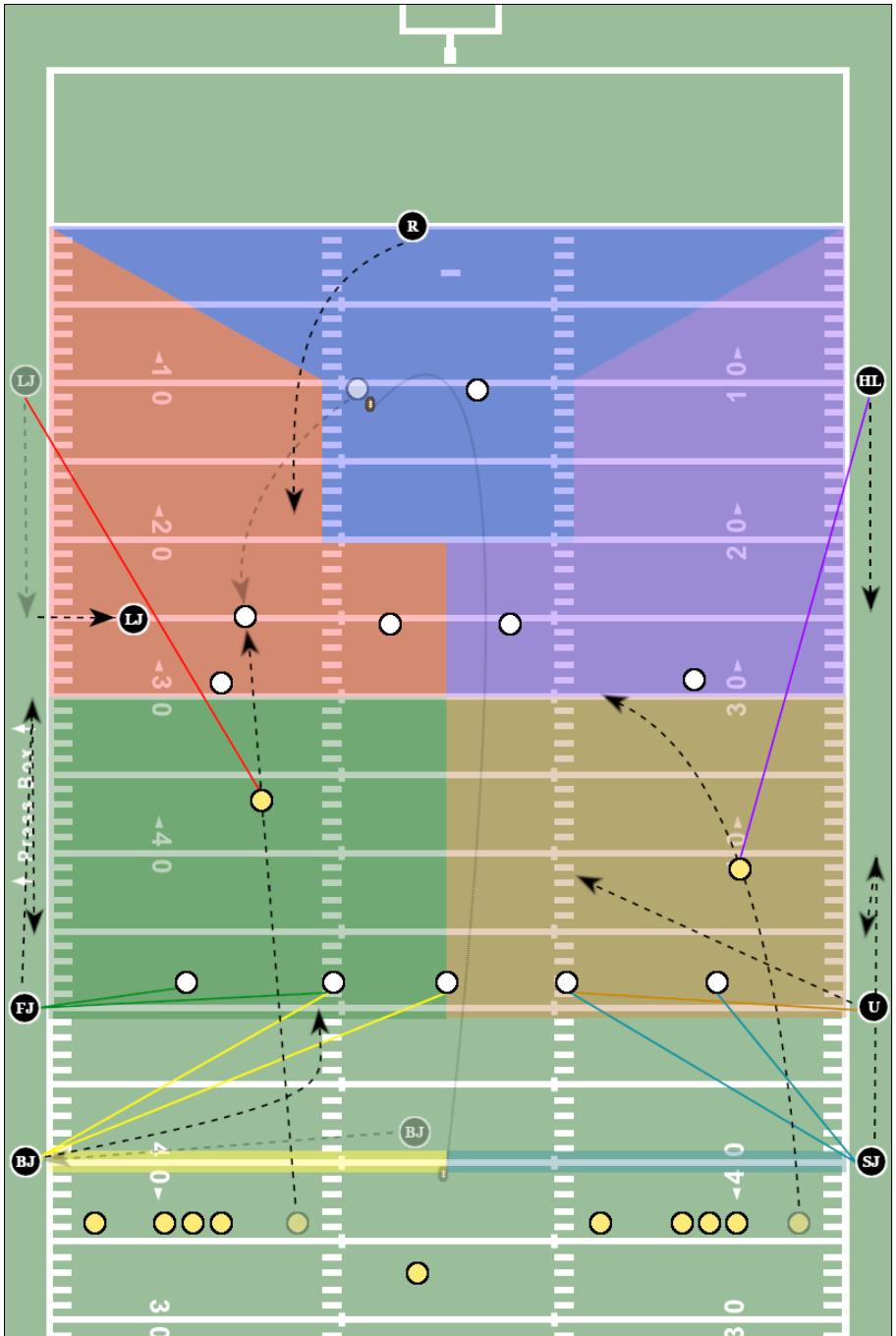
- a. The Field Judge will take his position off the field on the press box sideline, straddling the extended Team R restraining line (usually the 50-yard line) while holding his bean bag.
- b. The Field Judge will ensure that all players and coaching personnel are clear of the restricted area. Once the correct number of players have been counted, he will raise his hand to indicate to the Referee that he is ready.
- c. The Field Judge has the responsibility of Team R's restraining line, including whether the ball has reached the line before it is touched by a Team K player. He has the shared responsibility to determine whether the kicker made

a pop-up kick and must also be aware if players from either team block before the ball has reached Team R's restraining line.

Play Coverage

- a. After the kick, the Field Judge will direct his attention on the blocks made by/on the farthest two outside blockers nearest Team R's restraining line on his side of the field.
- b. Once the Team K players have moved downfield, the Field Judge will move approximately 15-20 yards downfield while remaining off the field on his sideline.
- c. As the ball is being returned, the Field Judge will retreat upfield while maintaining approximately 20 yards in advance of the ball carrier and looking for blocks in front of the play.
- d. The Field Judge is responsible for forward progress on his half of the field inside of the K-2, including goal line coverage.
- e. If the Field Judge does not have forward progress responsibilities at the end of the play, he may assist with retrieving the proper ball to be put in play for the new series or try.

Kickoff – 7-Person Crew



II) Obvious Onside Kickoff

NOTE: “Rubber Band Mechanics” DO NOT apply to onside kicks.

A) 5-Person Crew

REFEREE:

Pre-Snap Positioning and Responsibilities

- a. The Referee will take a position in the middle of the field, five yards deeper than the deepest Team R player and approximately five yards to either side of the receiver. If possible, the Referee should shade near the hash mark on the side of the field from which the kick will be made.
- b. Once all crew members are in position and have signaled they are ready, the Referee will sound his whistle and signal ready-for-play.
- c. The Referee must take a position that will allow him to easily return to the goal line in advance of a kick that is unexpectedly deep or that gets by the deepest receiver.

Play Coverage

- a. If the kick is onside as expected, the Referee may assist with retrieving the proper ball to be put in play for the new series or try when the play ends.
- b. If the kick is not onside, the Referee will have forward progress of the runner for the entire field until the Line Judge and Head Linesman can assume those responsibilities.

UMPIRE:

Pre-Snap Positioning and Responsibilities

- a. The Umpire will assume the same position and responsibilities as for a regular kickoff.

Play Coverage

- a. If the kick is onside as expected, the Umpire will hold his position on the Team R restraining line. If the kick is toward his side of the field, the Umpire should focus especially on whether first touching occurs by Team K in the neutral zone and who recovers the ball. If the kick is toward the opposite side of the field, he will focus on where the ball was first touched and which team touched it.
- b. If the kick is not onside, the Umpire will move into the field as he would on a regular kickoff.

HEAD LINESMAN:

Pre-Snap Positioning and Responsibilities

- a. The Head Linesman's position for obvious onside kick attempts will be off the field on the sideline opposite the press box, straddling the extended Team K restraining line (usually the 40-yard line) while holding his bean bag.
- b. He should be especially attuned to whether any Team K players encroach before the ball is kicked.

Play Coverage

- a. If the kick is onside as expected, the Head Linesman will turn and focus on the area surrounding the ball, watching especially for which team initiates blocks inside the neutral zone. He will also wind the clock if/when it is first touched by a Team R player.
- b. If the kick is not onside, the Head Linesman will move approximately 15-20 yards downfield while remaining off the field on his sideline and will assume forward progress responsibilities if/when the ball carrier reaches his position – all the way to the goal line.

LINE JUDGE:

Pre-Snap Positioning and Responsibilities

- a. The Line Judge's position for obvious onside kick attempts will be off the field on the press box sideline, straddling the

extended Team R restraining line (usually the 50-yard line) while holding his bean bag.

Play Coverage

- a. If the kick is onside as expected, the Line Judge will hold his position on the Team R restraining line. If the kick is toward his side of the field, the Line Judge should focus especially on whether first touching occurs by Team K in the neutral zone and who recovers the ball. If the kick is toward the opposite side of the field, he will focus on where the ball was first touched and which team touched it.
- b. If the kick is not onside, the Line Judge will move approximately 15-20 yards downfield while remaining off the field on his sideline and will assume forward progress responsibilities if/when the ball carrier reaches his position – all the way to the goal line.

BACK JUDGE:

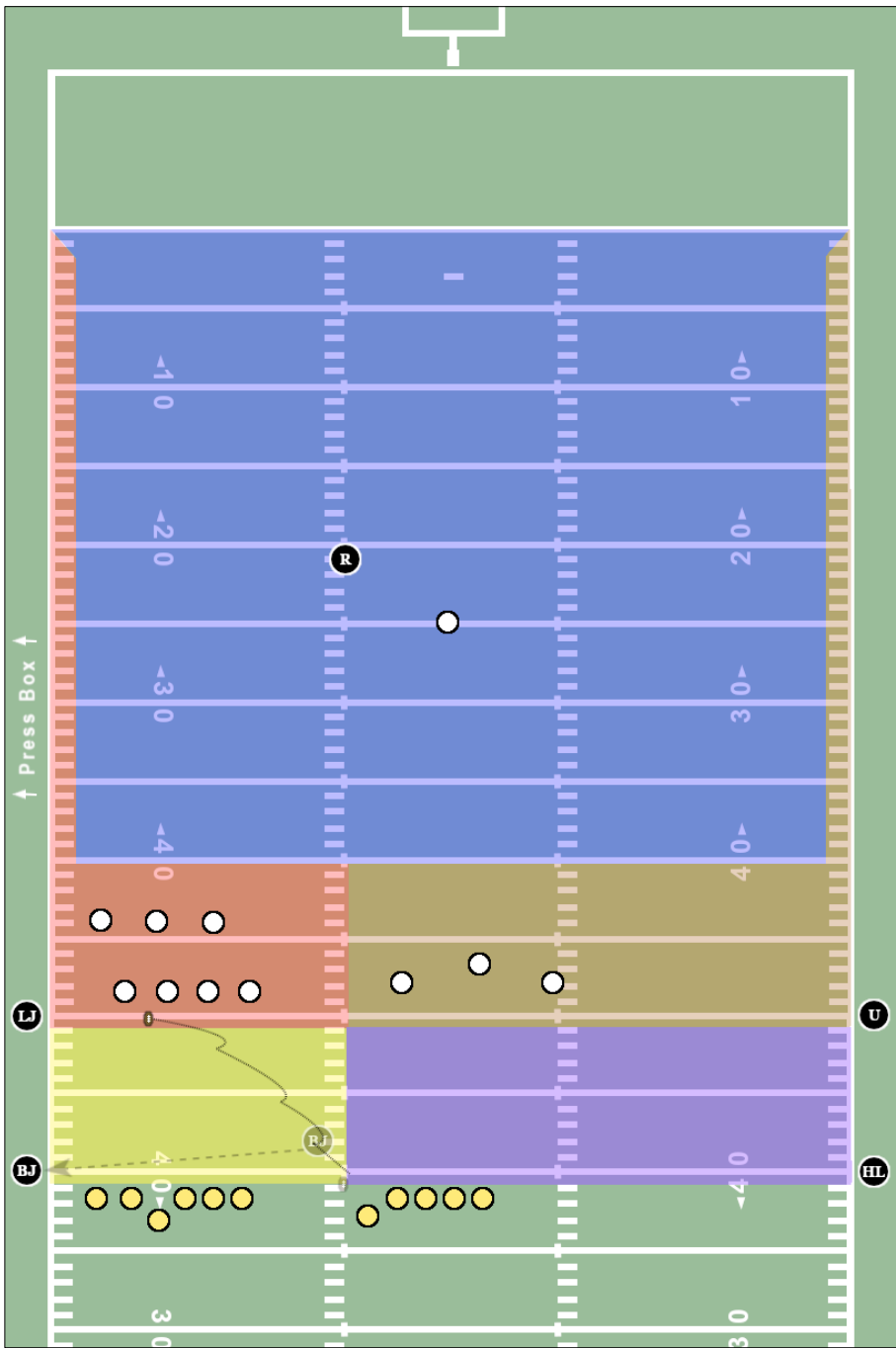
Pre-Snap Positioning and Responsibilities

- a. The Back Judge will assume the same position and responsibilities as for a regular kickoff.
- b. He should be especially attentive to whether the kicker drives the ball into the ground for a pop-up kick and whether any Team K players encroach before the ball is kicked.

Play Coverage

- a. If the kick is onside as expected, the Back Judge will turn and focus on the area surrounding the ball, watching especially for which team initiates blocks inside the neutral zone. He should also wind the clock if/when it is first touched by a Team R player.
- b. If the kick is not onside, the Back Judge will move into the field as he would on a regular kickoff.

Obvious Onside Kickoff – 5-Person Crew



B) 4-Person Crew Modifications

REFEREE:

Play Coverage

- a. For returns on his half of the field, the Referee is responsible for the spot for kicks out of bounds, blocks at the point of attack and forward progress all the way to the goal line.
- b. For returns on the opposite side of the field, the Referee is responsible for blocks in the middle of the field away from the ball.
- c. When the play ends, the Referee will mark forward progress on his side of the field. He will mirror the progress spot and clean up around the runner if the ball is on the opposite side of the field.

LINE JUDGE:

Pre-Snap Positioning and Responsibilities

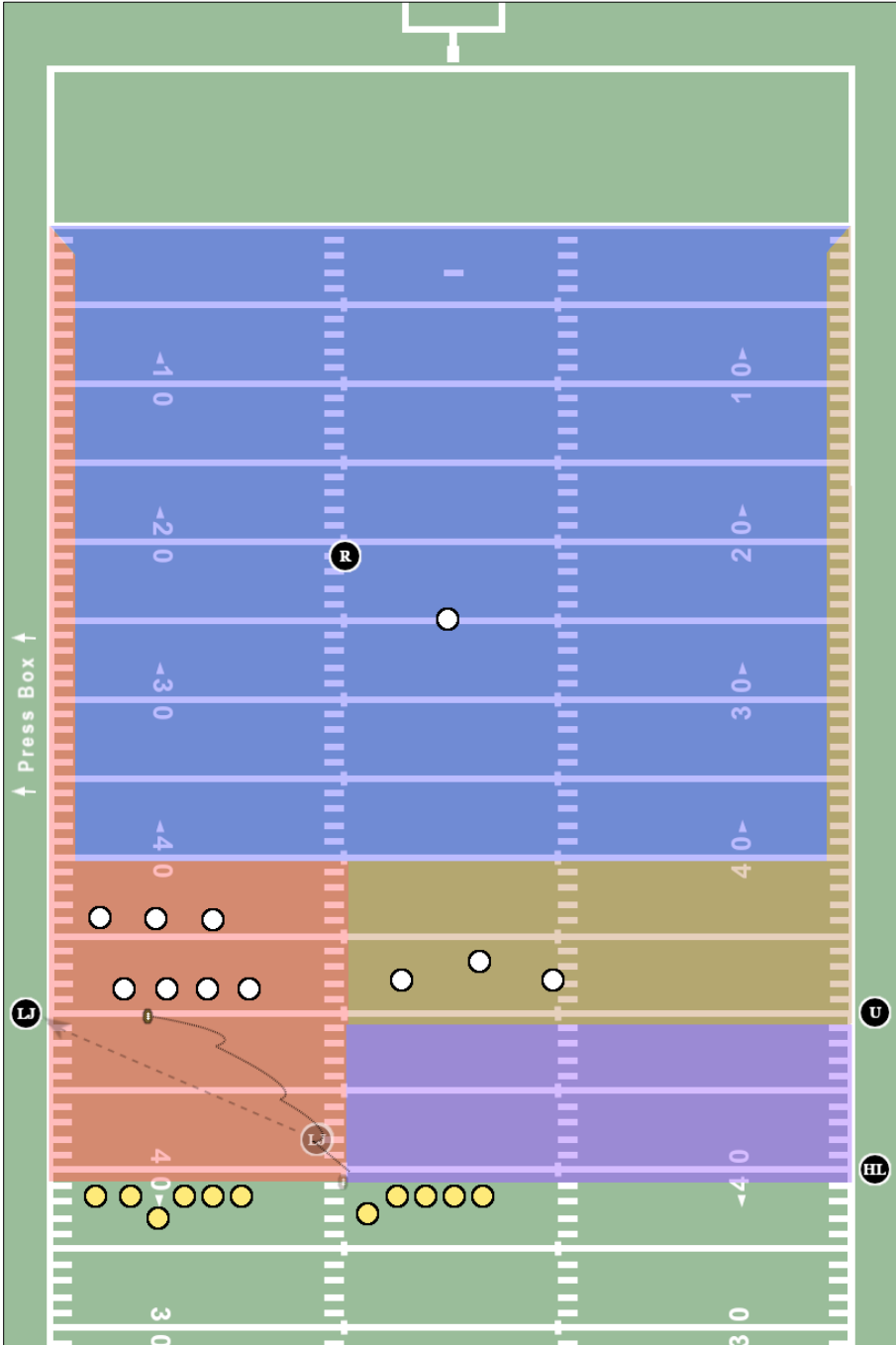
- a. The Line Judge will start in the middle of the field with the kicker. He'll then hand the ball to the kicker and give him instructions to raise his hand when he's ready and then look to the Referee for the ready-for-play whistle and signal.
- b. From his position in the middle of the field, the Line Judge will move to his position off the field on the press box sideline straddling the extended Team R restraining line (usually the 50-yard line) while holding his bean bag. After reaching his position, the Line Judge will raise his hand to indicate to the Referee that he is ready.

Play Coverage

- a. If the kick is onside as expected, the Line Judge will hold his position on the Team R restraining line. If the kick is toward his side of the field, the Line Judge will focus especially on whether first touching occurs by Team K in the neutral zone and who recovers the ball. If the kick is toward the opposite side of the field, he will focus on where the ball was first touched and which team touched it.

- b. If the kick is not onside, the Line Judge will direct his attention on the initial blocks made by/on the second- and third-inside blockers nearest Team R's restraining line on his side of the field.
- c. Once the Team K players have moved downfield, the Line Judge will move into the field of play, approximately 8-10 yards downfield and at the near-side hash marks.
- d. As the ball is being returned, the Line Judge should observe action in the middle of the field in front of the runner. He should be especially alert to Team R players moving back toward their own goal line.
- e. The Line Judge should remain at least 20 yards in advance of the ball carrier as the play advances. He has the primary responsibility for coverage at the goal line and should be straddling the goal line in advance of the runner crossing it.

Obvious Onside Kickoff – 4-Person Crew



C) 7-Person Crew Modifications

HEAD LINESMAN:

Pre-Snap Positioning and Responsibilities

- a. The Head Linesman's position for obvious onside kick attempts will be off the field on the sideline opposite the press box, straddling the extended yard line halfway between Team K's and Team R's restraining lines (usually the 45-yard line) while holding his bean bag.

Play Coverage

- a. If the kick is onside as expected, the Head Linesman will hold his position between the restraining lines. He will focus on the action within the neutral zone – blocks, first touching and if the kick is recovered and by whom.
- b. If the kick is not onside, the Head Linesman will move approximately 15-20 yards downfield while remaining off the field on his sideline and will assume forward progress responsibilities if/when the ball carrier reaches his position – up to the K-2.

LINE JUDGE:

Pre-Snap Positioning and Responsibilities

- a. The Line Judge's position for obvious onside kick attempts will be off the field on the press box sideline, straddling the extended yard line halfway between Team K's and Team R's restraining lines (usually the 45-yard line) while holding his bean bag.

Play Coverage

- a. If the kick is onside as expected, the Line Judge will hold his position between the restraining lines. He will focus on the action within the neutral zone – blocks, first touching and if the kick is recovered and by whom.
- b. If the kick is not onside, the Line Judge will remain close to his original position and allow the play to come to him.

- c. As the ball is being returned, the Line Judge will retreat up field while maintaining approximately 20 yards in advance of the ball carrier and looking for blocks in front of the play.
- d. The Line Judge is responsible for forward progress on his half of the field inside of the K-2, including goal line coverage.
- e. If the Line Judge does not have forward progress responsibilities at the end of the play, he may assist with retrieving the proper ball to be put in play for the new series or try.

SIDE JUDGE:

Pre-Snap Positioning and Responsibilities

- a. The Side Judge's position for obvious onside kick attempts will be off the field on the sideline opposite the press box, straddling the extended Team K restraining line (usually the 40-yard line) while holding his bean bag.

Play Coverage

- a. If the kick is onside as expected, the Side Judge will turn and focus on the area surrounding the ball, watching especially for which team initiates blocks inside the neutral zone. He will wind the clock if/when it is first touched by a Team R player.
- b. If the kick is not onside, the Side Judge will remain close to his original position and allow the play to come to him.
- c. As the ball is being returned, the Side Judge will retreat up field while maintaining approximately 20 yards in advance of the ball carrier and looking for blocks in front of the play.
- d. The Side Judge is responsible for forward progress on his half of the field inside of the K-2, including goal line coverage.
- e. If the Side Judge does not have forward progress responsibilities at the end of the play, he may assist with retrieving the proper ball to be put in play for the new series or try.

FIELD JUDGE:

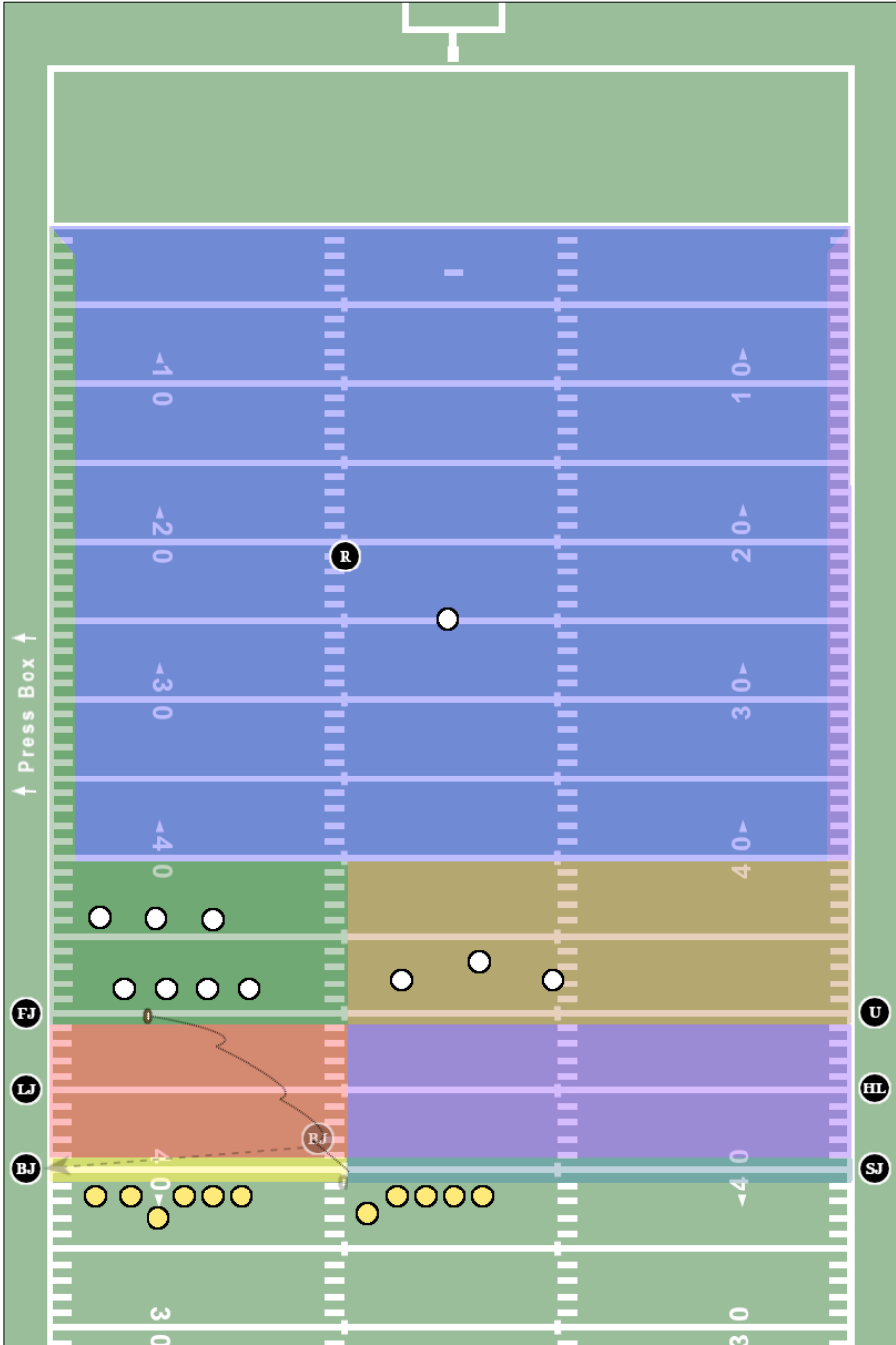
Pre-Snap Positioning and Responsibilities

- a. The Field Judge's position for obvious onside kick attempts will be off the field on the press box sideline, straddling the extended Team R restraining line (usually the 50-yard line) while holding his bean bag.

Play Coverage

- a. If the kick is onside as expected, the Field Judge will turn and focus on the area surrounding the ball, watching especially for which team initiates blocks inside the neutral zone. He will also wind the clock if/when it is first touched by a Team R player.
- b. If the kick is not onside, the Field Judge will move approximately 15-20 yards downfield while remaining off the field on his sideline and will assume forward progress responsibilities if/when the ball carrier reaches his position – up to the K-2.

Obvious Onside Kickoff – 7-Person Crew



III) Safety Free Kick

Positioning, responsibilities and play coverage for free kicks following a safety are the same as with kickoffs for 4-, 5- and 7-person crews, except for the yard line from where they are usually kicked (*i.e., usually the 20-yard line*). (See [Kickoffs \(pp. 118-131\)](#) for proper mechanics for safety free kicks.)

IV) Fair-Catch Kick

A fair catch kick that does not score is treated like a kickoff. Once it reaches Team R's restraining line, it may be recovered by either team. If recovered by Team K, it may not be advanced.

A) 5-Person Crew

REFEREE:

Pre-Snap Positioning and Responsibilities

- a. The Referee will take a position on Team R's end line, just behind the upright located opposite the press box.
- b. Once all crew members are in position and have signaled they are ready, the Referee will sound his whistle and signal ready-for-play.

Play Coverage

- a. The Referee will ensure that Team K has at least four players on either side of the kicker at the time of the kick – if not, he should flag the play and shut it down immediately.
- b. Once the ball is kicked, the Referee is responsible to determine whether the ball passes completely inside his upright. He should only signal if the ball is adjudged narrowly within his upright, or when it's clearly good or clearly wide. The Referee should not signal at all if it is a close decision near the Line Judge's upright.
- c. If the kick is short of the goal line, the Referee will move into the field of play and cover it as he would a kickoff.
- d. If the ball is touched by a Team R player in his primary coverage area, the Referee will wind the game clock.

- e. If the receiver advances with the ball, he will continue upfield while observing blocks in front of the ball carrier and in the middle of the field until the ball reaches the R-30. As the ball carrier reaches the R-30, the Referee will adjust his focus to players trailing the play and continue upfield behind the deepest combination of Team R and Team K players.
- f. When the play ends, the Referee may assist with retrieving the proper ball to be put in play for the new series or try.

UMPIRE:

Pre-Snap Positioning and Responsibilities

- a. The Umpire will take his position off the field on the sideline opposite the press box, straddling the extended Team R restraining line while holding his bean bag.
- b. The Umpire will ensure that all players and coaching personnel are clear of the restricted area. Once the correct number of players have been counted, he will raise his hand to indicate to the Referee that he is ready.
- c. The Umpire has the responsibility of Team R's restraining line, including whether the ball has reached the line before it is touched by a Team K player. He has the shared responsibility to determine whether the kicker made a pop-up kick and must also be aware if players from either team block before the ball has reached Team R's restraining line.

Play Coverage

- a. After the kick occurs without foul, the Umpire will direct his attention on the initial blocks made by/on the second- and third-inside blockers nearest Team R's restraining line on his side of the field.
- b. Once Team K passes his position, the Umpire will move into the field of play, approximately 8-10 yards downfield and at the near-side hash marks.
- c. If the ball is short of the goal line and is returned by Team R, the Umpire will observe action in the middle of the field

in front of the runner. He should be especially alert to Team R players moving back toward their own goal line.

- d. The Umpire will allow the play come to his position and continue to officiate the play using an inside-out technique, particularly looking for fouls away from the ball as he moves up field behind the play.
- e. When the play ends, the Umpire will move to the ball and replace it with the proper ball for the next series or try.

HEAD LINESMAN:

Pre-Snap Positioning and Responsibilities

- a. The Head Linesman's starting position is off the field on the sideline opposite the press box, straddling the extended Team R goal line.
- b. Once the correct number of players have been counted, the Head Linesman will raise his hand to indicate to the Referee that he is ready.
- c. The Head Linesman's primary responsibility is whether a kick that does not score crosses the goal line. He is also responsible for the spot of a kick out of bounds on his sideline.

Play Coverage

- a. After the kick, the Head Linesman will direct his attention on the blocks made by/on the farthest outside blocker nearest Team R's restraining line on his side of the field.
- b. The Head Linesman makes determinations whether the ball broke the plane of the goal line if a kick that doesn't score threatens the goal line.
- c. If the ball is touched by a Team R player in his primary coverage area, the Head Linesman will wind the game clock.
- d. For returns on his half of the field, the Head Linesman is responsible for the spot for kicks out of bounds, blocks at the point of attack and forward progress all the way to the goal line.

- e. For returns on the opposite side of the field, the Head Linesman is responsible for blocks in the middle of the field away from the ball.
- f. When the play ends, the Head Linesman will mark forward progress on his side of the field. He will mirror the progress spot and clean up around the runner if the ball is on the opposite side of the field.

LINE JUDGE:

Pre-Snap Positioning and Responsibilities

- a. The Line Judge will take a position on Team R's end line, just behind the upright located on the press box side of the field.
- b. Once the correct number of players have been counted, the Line Judge will raise his hand to indicate to the Referee that he is ready.

Play Coverage

- a. Once the ball is kicked, the Line Judge is responsible to determine whether the ball passes completely inside his upright and over the crossbar. He should only signal if the ball is adjudged narrowly within his upright, or when it's clearly good or clearly wide. The Line Judge should not signal at all if it is a close decision near the Referee's upright.
- b. If the kick is short of the goal line, the Line Judge will move into the field of play and to the press box sideline.
- c. If the ball is touched by a Team R player in his primary coverage area, the Line Judge will wind the game clock.
- d. For returns on his half of the field, the Line Judge is responsible for the spot for kicks out of bounds, blocks at the point of attack and forward progress all the way to the goal line.
- e. For returns on the opposite side of the field, the Line Judge is responsible for blocks in the middle of the field away from the ball.

- f. When the play ends, the Line Judge will mark forward progress on his side of the field. He will mirror the progress spot and clean up around the runner if the ball is on the opposite side of the field.

BACK JUDGE:

Pre-Snap Positioning and Responsibilities

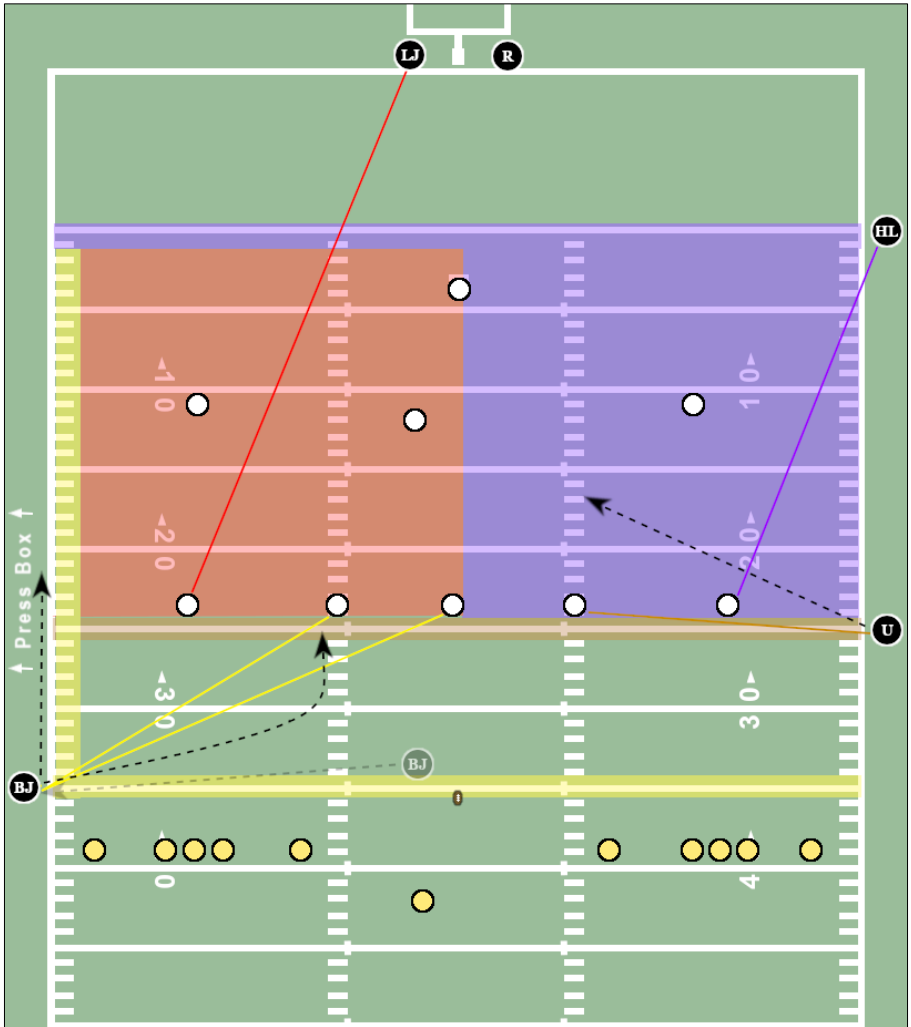
- a. The Back Judge will start in the middle of the field with the kicker. He'll then hand the ball to the kicker and give him instructions to raise his hand when he's ready and then look to the Referee for the ready-for-play whistle and signal.
- b. From his position in the middle of the field, the Back Judge will count the Team K players and then move to his position off the field on the press box sideline, straddling the extended Team K restraining line while holding his bean bag. After reaching his position, the Back Judge will raise his hand to indicate to the Referee that he is ready.
- c. The Back Judge has the responsibility of Team K's restraining line, including whether any Team K player has encroached the line before the ball has been kicked. He has the shared responsibility to determine whether the kicker made a pop-up kick and must be aware if players from either team block before the ball has reached Team R's restraining line. He should also be alert as to whether the kicker is blocked before he advances five yards downfield.

Play Coverage

- a. After the kick occurs without foul, the Back Judge will direct his attention on the initial blocks made by/on the second- and third-inside blockers nearest Team R's restraining line on his side of the field.
- b. Once Team K has moved downfield, the Back Judge will move into the field of play, approximately 8-10 yards downfield and at the near-side hash marks.

- c. If the ball is short of the goal line and is returned by Team R, the Back Judge will observe action in the middle of the field in front of the runner. He should be especially alert to Team R players moving back toward their own goal line.
- d. The Back Judge should remain at least 20 yards in advance of the ball carrier as the play advances. He has the primary responsibility for coverage at the goal line and should be straddling the goal line in advance of the runner crossing it.
- e. When the play ends at the goal line, the Back Judge will rule on whether the runner scored or was short.
- f. When the play ends prior to reaching the goal line, the Back Judge may assist with retrieving the proper ball to be put in play for the new series or try.

Fair-Catch Kick – 5-Person Crew



B) 4-Person Crew Modifications

REFEREE:

Pre-Snap Positioning and Responsibilities

- a. The Referee will take a position on Team R's end line, in the middle of, and just behind, the uprights.
- b. He will retain the same responsibilities as he would in a 5-person crew.

Play Coverage

- a. The Referee will ensure that Team K has at least four players on either side of the kicker at the time of the kick – if not, he should flag the play and shut it down immediately.
- b. Once the ball is kicked, the Referee is responsible to determine whether the ball passes within the uprights and over the crossbar. He will move behind/under an upright if it is threatened to rule on the kick.
- c. If the kick is short of the goal line, the Referee will move into the field of play and near the sideline on the press box side of the field. If the ball is touched by a Team R player in his primary coverage area, the Referee will wind the game clock.
- d. For returns on his half of the field, the Referee is responsible for the spot for kicks out of bounds, blocks at the point of attack and forward progress all the way to the goal line.
- e. For returns on the opposite side of the field, the Referee is responsible for blocks in the middle of the field away from the ball.
- f. When the play ends, the Referee will mark forward progress on his side of the field. He will mirror the progress spot and clean up around the runner if the ball is on the opposite side of the field.

LINE JUDGE:

Pre-Snap Positioning and Responsibilities

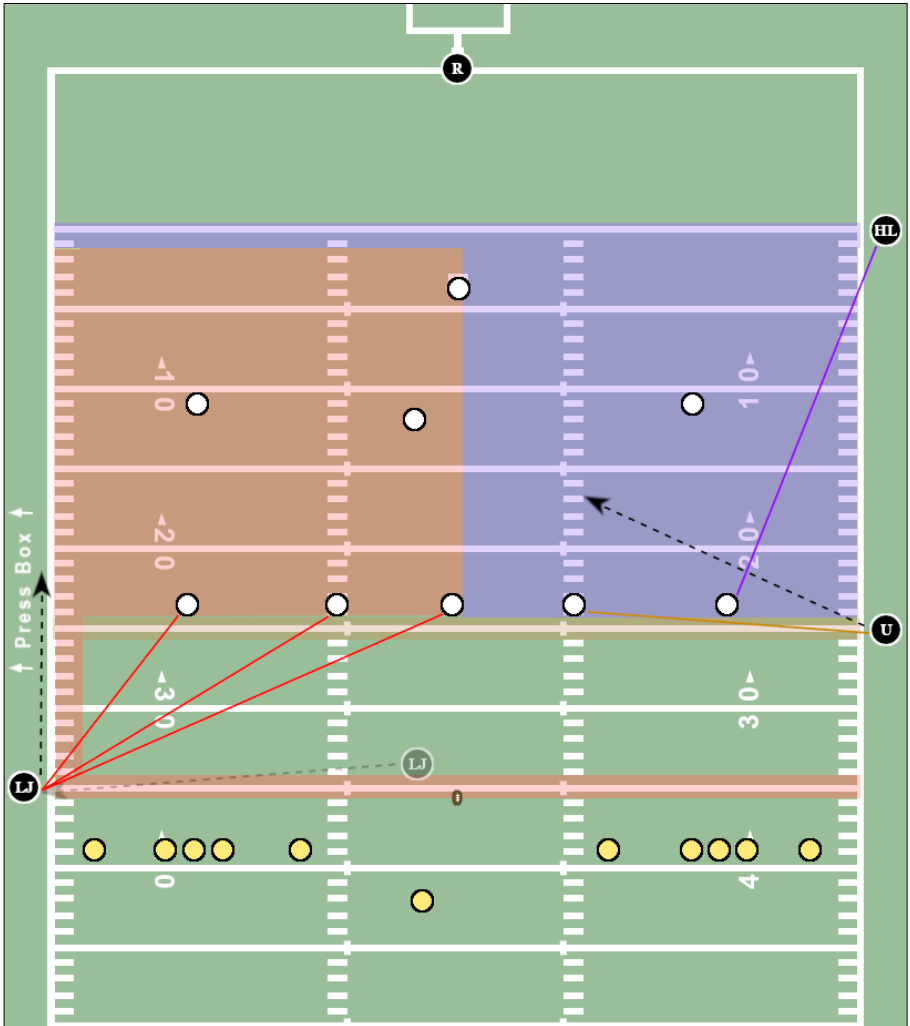
- a. The Line Judge will assume the position and all of the responsibilities reserved for the Back Judge in a 5-person crew, including players from Team K.

Play Coverage

- a. If the kick has potential to go out of bounds untouched on his sideline, the Line Judge will move down the sideline to cover the out-of-bounds spot.

- b. At whatever time the Line Judge recognizes that the ball will not go out of bounds on his sideline, he will enter the middle of the field and utilize the same mechanics and play coverage responsibilities as the Back Judge in a 5-person crew.

Fair-Catch Kick – 4-Person Crew



C) 7-Person Crew Modifications

SIDE JUDGE:

Pre-Snap Positioning and Responsibilities

- a. The Side Judge will take his position off the field on the sideline opposite the press box, straddling the extended Team K restraining line while holding his bean bag.
- b. The Side Judge will ensure that all players and coaching personnel are clear of the restricted area. Once the correct number of players have been counted, he will raise his hand to indicate to the Referee that he is ready.
- c. The Side Judge has the responsibility of Team K's restraining line, including whether any Team K player has encroached the line before the ball has been kicked. He has the shared responsibility to determine whether the kicker made a pop-up kick and must be aware if players from either team block before the ball has reached Team R's restraining line. He should also be alert as to whether the kicker is blocked before he advances five yards downfield.

Play Coverage

- a. After the kick, the Side Judge will direct his attention on the blocks made by/on the farthest two outside blockers nearest Team R's restraining line on his side of the field.
- b. Once Team K has moved downfield, the Side Judge will move approximately 15-20 yards downfield while remaining off the field on his sideline.
- c. If the ball is being returned, the Side Judge will retreat upfield while maintaining approximately 20 yards in advance of the ball carrier and looking for blocks in front of the play.
- d. The Side Judge is responsible for forward progress on his half of the field inside of the K-2, including goal line coverage.
- e. If the Side Judge does not have forward progress responsibilities at the end of the play, he may assist with

retrieving the proper ball to be put in play for the new series or try.

FIELD JUDGE:

Pre-Snap Positioning and Responsibilities

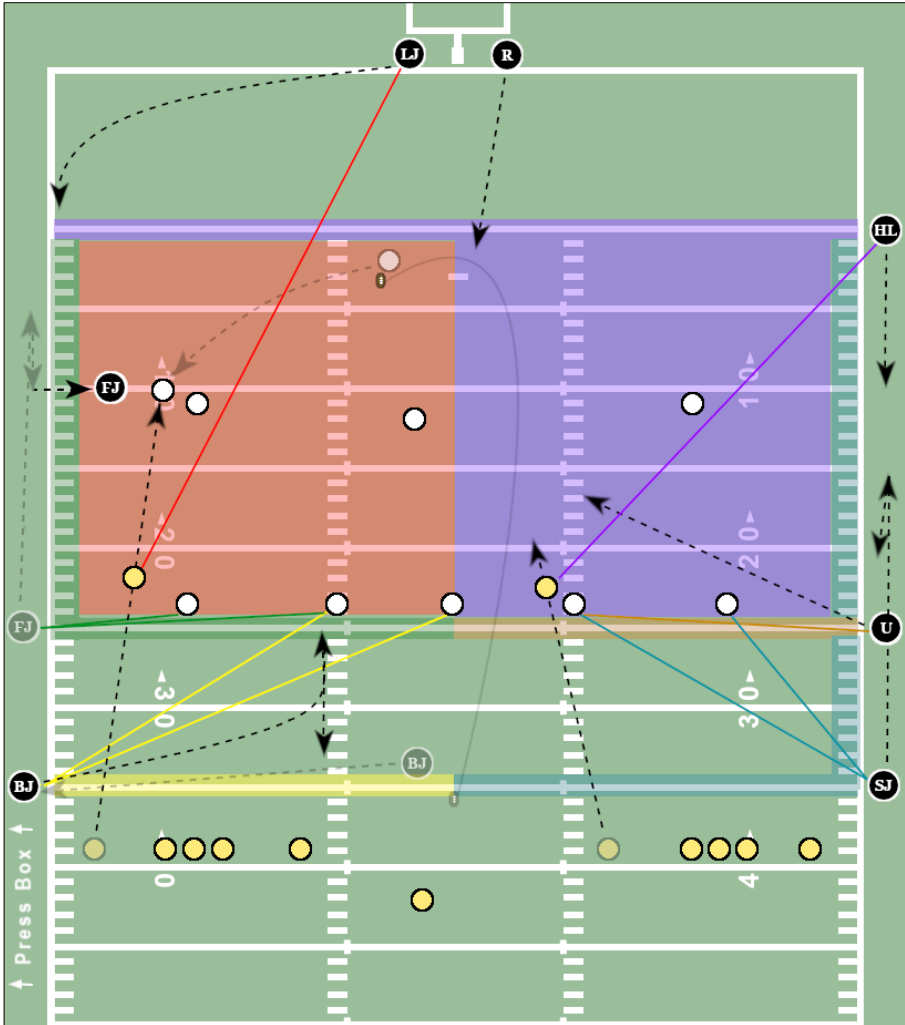
- a. The Field Judge will take his position off the field on the press box sideline, straddling the extended Team R restraining line while holding his bean bag.
- b. The Field Judge will ensure that all players and coaching personnel are clear of the restricted area. Once the correct number of players have been counted, he will raise his hand to indicate to the Referee that he is ready.
- c. The Field Judge has the responsibility of Team R's restraining line, including whether the ball has reached the line before it is touched by a Team K player. He has the shared responsibility to determine whether the kicker made a pop-up kick and must also be aware if players from either team block before the ball has reached Team R's restraining line.

Play Coverage

- a. After the kick, the Field Judge will direct his attention on the blocks made by/on the farthest two outside blockers nearest Team R's restraining line on his side of the field.
- b. Once Team K has moved downfield, the Field Judge will move approximately 15-20 yards downfield while remaining off the field on his sideline.
- c. If the kick has potential to go out of bounds untouched on his sideline, the Field Judge will continue to move down the sideline to cover the out-of-bounds spot.
- d. If the ball is being returned, the Field Judge will retreat up field while maintaining approximately 20 yards in advance of the ball carrier and looking for blocks in front of the play.
- e. The Field Judge is responsible for forward progress on his half of the field inside of the K-2, including goal line coverage.

- f. If the Field Judge does not have forward progress responsibilities at the end of the play, he may assist with retrieving the proper ball to be put in play for the new series or try.

Fair-Catch Kick – 7-Person Crew



Section 6: Scrimmage Formation Keys

A “key” is the initial focal point (*i.e., offensive player*) by an official at the snap. The purpose of reading keys is to identify the type of play, the direction of the play and possible illegal action on/by a key. Keys are determined by the position of players at the snap. In some instances, an official may be responsible for multiple keys, and there will also be times where two officials will share responsibility of a single key.

Keys are just the initial responsibility following the start of a play, and the play may dictate that officials leave their keys for other responsibilities. Officials should transition through a developing play using the concept of “man, zone, ball”. This requires that officials maintain focus on their keys at the snap and initial progression of the play, where officials will then transition to a focus on their zones of coverage. The length of time spent focusing on keys is determined by the number of officials on the field, the type of play and the speed at which the play develops.

Officials in crews of seven will likely be able to remain focused on their keys longer than officials in crews of four or five since more eyes are spread out over the field on individual players. Generally, the transition to from “man” to “zone” occurs when the play begins to develop beyond the expanded neutral zone. This may be as receivers run routes downfield into another official’s zone of coverage, or when a ball carrier passes the line of scrimmage on a run play. Most importantly, the speed of the play will dictate whether officials leave their keys to zone coverage – faster-developing plays result in a quicker transition, while officials can remain with their keys longer for slower-developing plays. If a forward pass is made, all officials other than the Referee will turn their focus to the action surrounding the ball.

Keys apply anytime the offense is in a scrimmage formation (*i.e., scrimmage play or scrimmage kick*). Officials need to know which players are eligible and whose responsibility they are on apparent punts, field goals and tries as well. Specific keys are outlined below:

5-Person Crew

REFEREE:

- a. The Referee will ensure the snap was legal and then focus his attention on the offensive tackle opposite his position. **EXCEPTION:** If trips (or greater) are located on his side of the field, the Referee should focus his attention on the offensive tackle on the same side as the formation's strong side so that the line of scrimmage official can remain focused on his keys.

UMPIRE:

- a. The Umpire will ensure that no snap infraction has occurred, then turn his attention to the offensive lineman – from the tackle on the Referee's side of the field to the guard opposite of the Referee. During the play, he should cycle his focus on pairs of adjacent linemen (*e.g., tackle/guard or guard/center*), being especially alert to illegal combination blocks.

The keys for all other positions are based on the strength of the formation and the location of eligible receivers within the formation. To simplify the process, only players positioned outside of the tackles will be counted for determining the strength of a formation. If a formation is balanced based on the number of eligible receivers outside of the tackles, the strong side of the formation will be on the Line Judge's side of the field.

Line of scrimmage officials will always be responsible for any backfield player lined up within the tackles *if they come out of the backfield in their direction*. A player in motion may change the strength of a formation, and thus, change officials' keys. However, if they are positioned between the tackles at the time of the snap, they are treated like any other back (*i.e., they are the key of the*

line of scrimmage official they are running toward). **NOTE:** This should not be confused with which official is responsible for fouls at the snap by the player in motion. The backside line of scrimmage official, *i.e., the official from which the player is motioning away*, will be responsible for determining whether the player was moving toward the line of scrimmage at the time of the snap.

Eligible receivers lined up front to back in a “stacked” formation – lined up directly behind one another – are considered as positioned inside to outside.

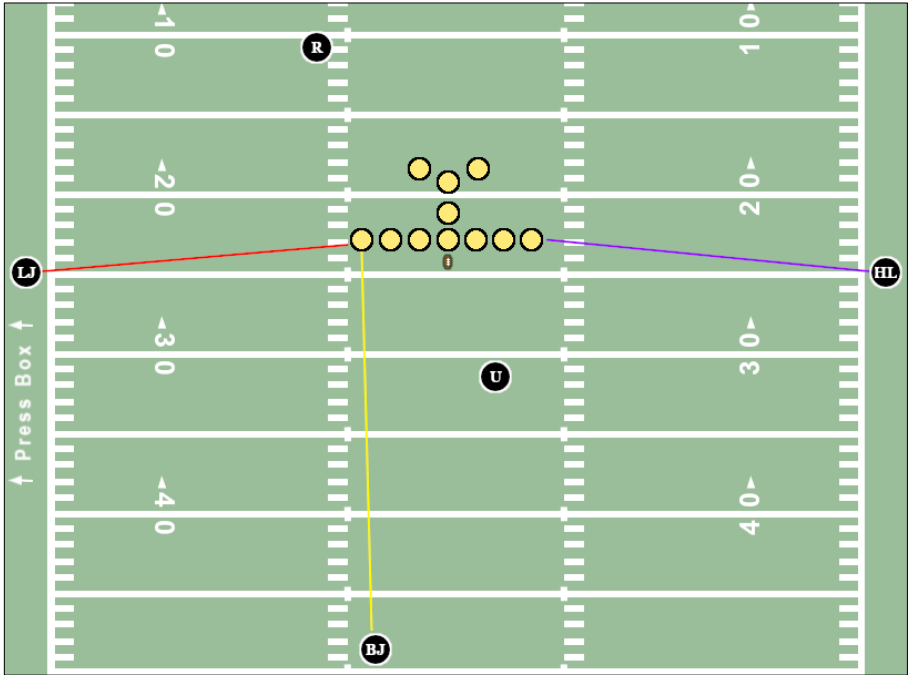
HEAD LINESMAN and LINE JUDGE:

- a. The line of scrimmage officials have key responsibilities for the widest eligible receiver on their side of the formation.
- b. If their position is located on the weak side of the formation, they have key responsibilities for *all* receivers on their side of the formation.

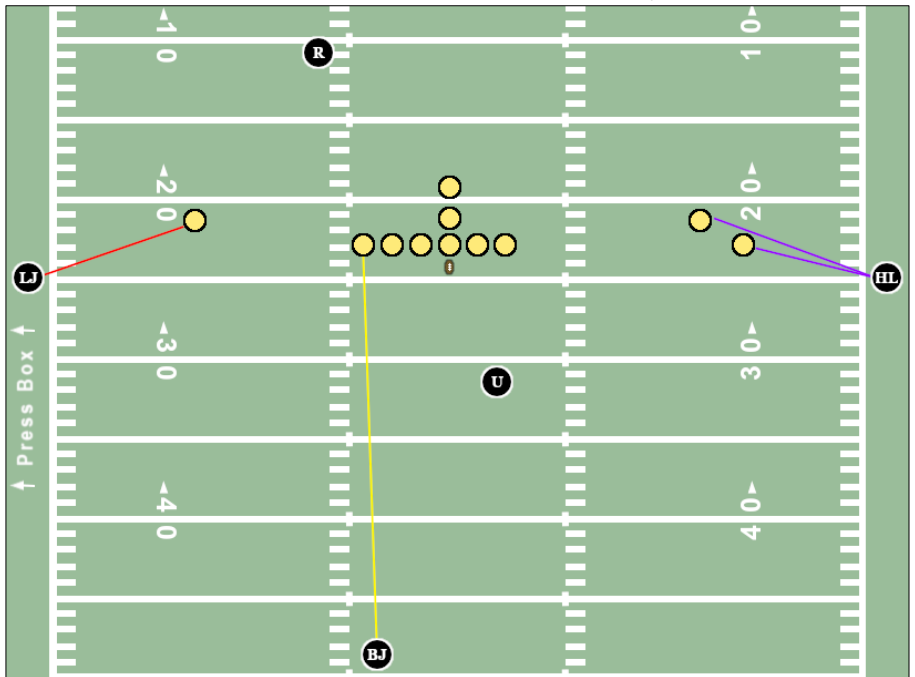
BACK JUDGE:

- a. The Back Judge has key responsibilities for the inside-most eligible receiver(s) on the strong side of the formation.

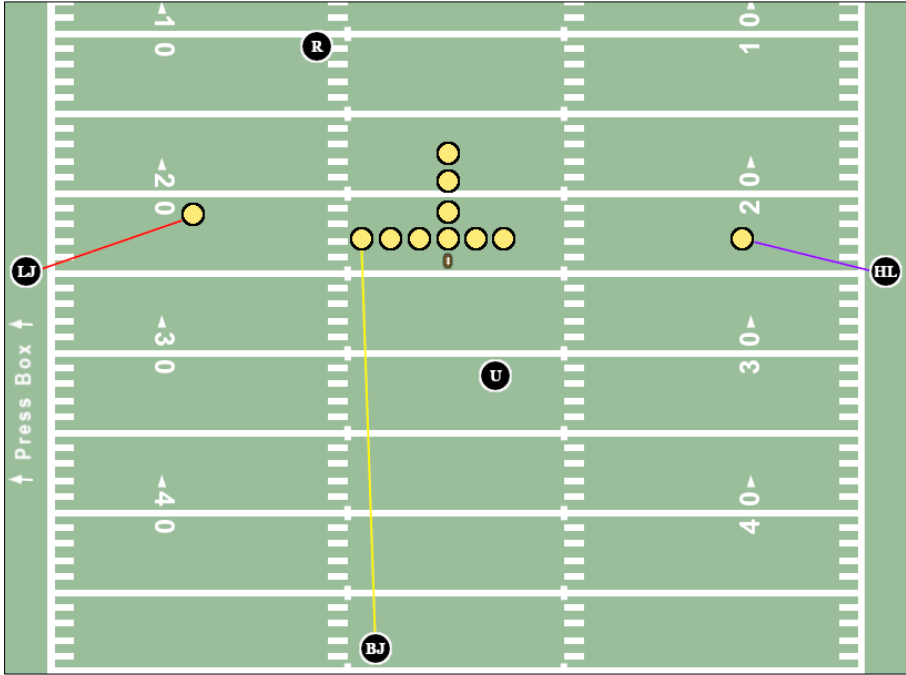
Balanced – Double Tight – 5-Person Crew Keys



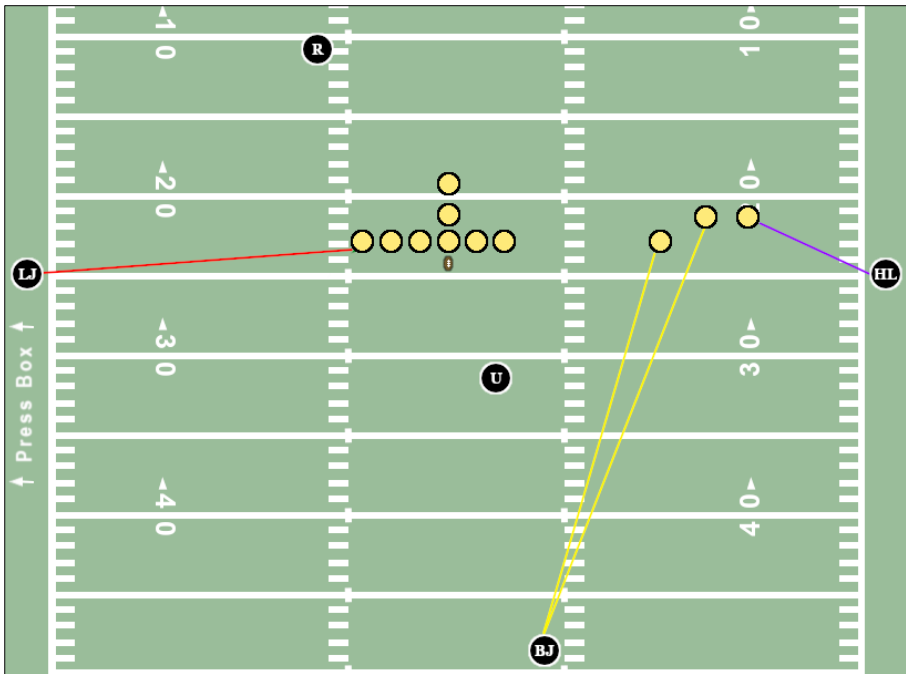
Balanced – Twins – 5-Person Crew Keys



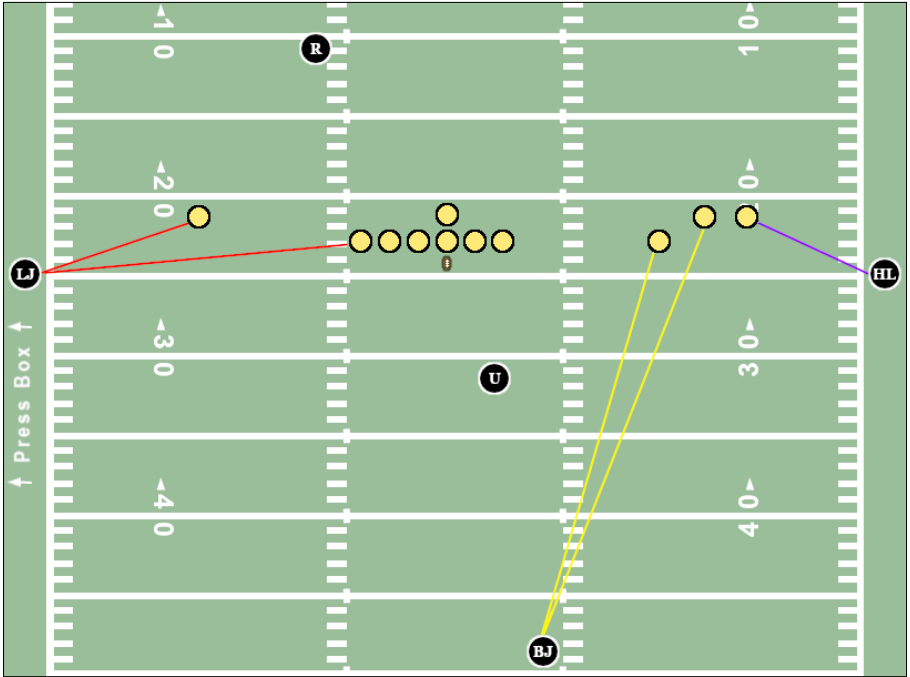
Strong Right – Twins – 5-Person Crew Keys



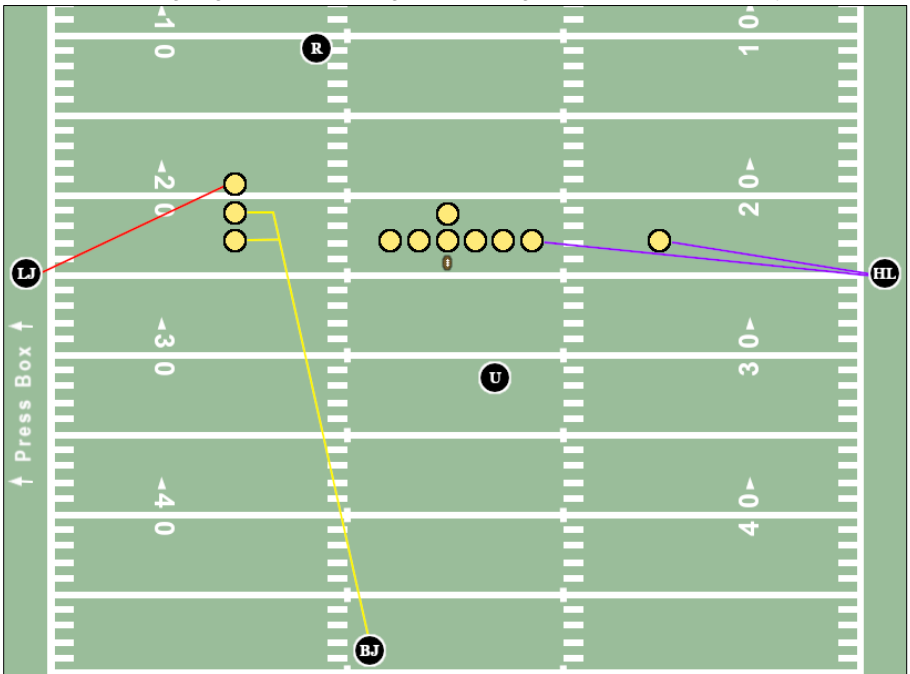
Strong Left – Trips Left, Tight Right – 5-Person Crew Keys



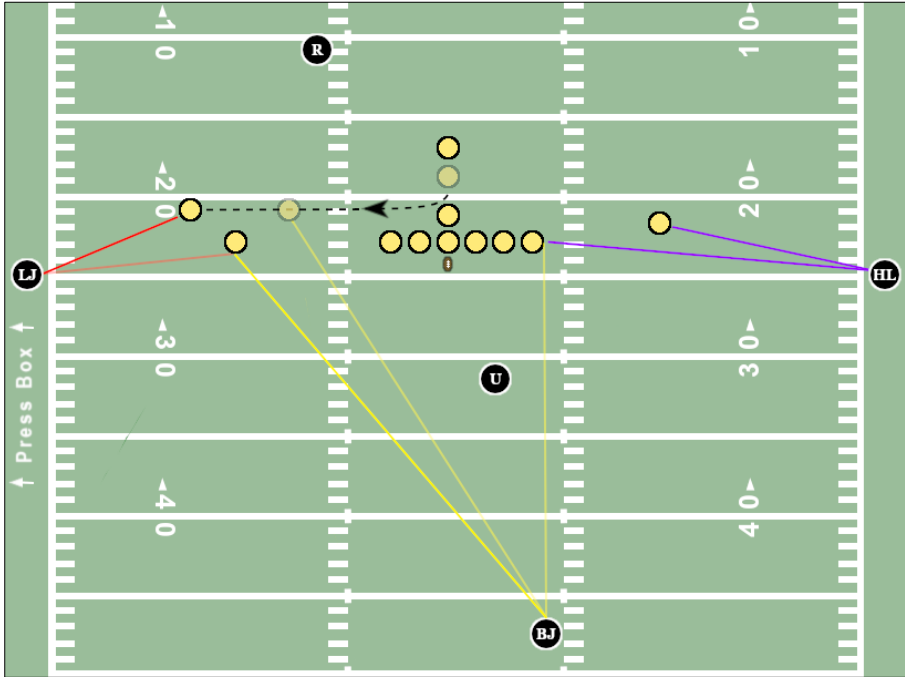
Strong Left – Trips Left, Wide Right – 5-Person Crew Keys



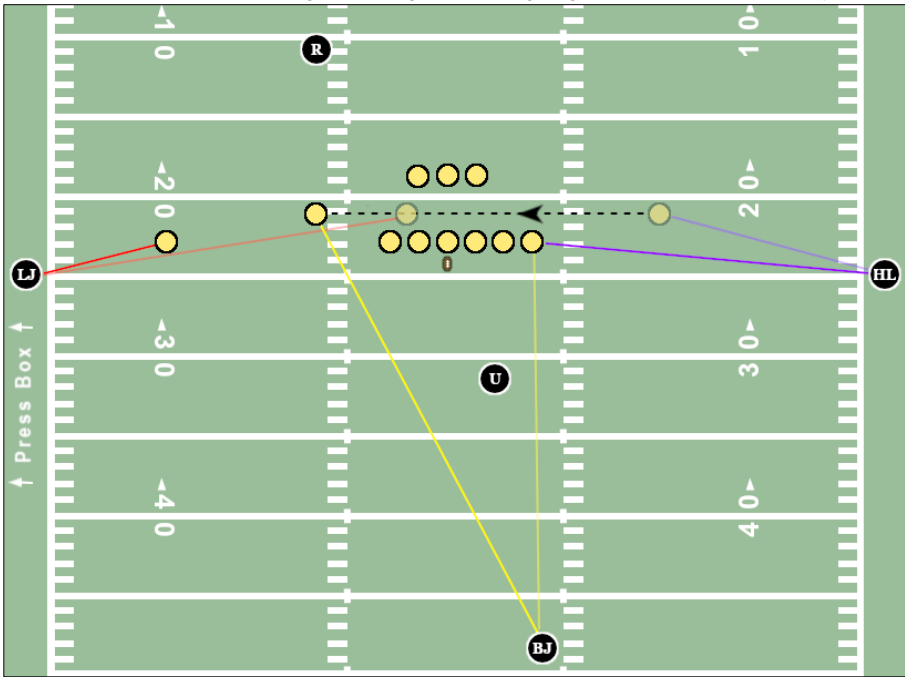
Strong Right – Stacked Right, Wide Right – 5-Person Crew Keys



Backfield Motion Changes Strength – Balanced – 5-Person Crew Keys



Receiver Motion Changes Strength – Strong Right – 5-Person Crew Keys



4-Person Crew Modifications

HEAD LINESMAN and LINE JUDGE:

- a. The line of scrimmage officials have key responsibilities for *all* eligible receivers on their side of the formation.

7-Person Crew Modifications

BACK JUDGE:

- a. The Back Judge has key responsibilities for the inside-most eligible receiver on the strong side of the formation.

HEAD LINESMAN and LINE JUDGE:

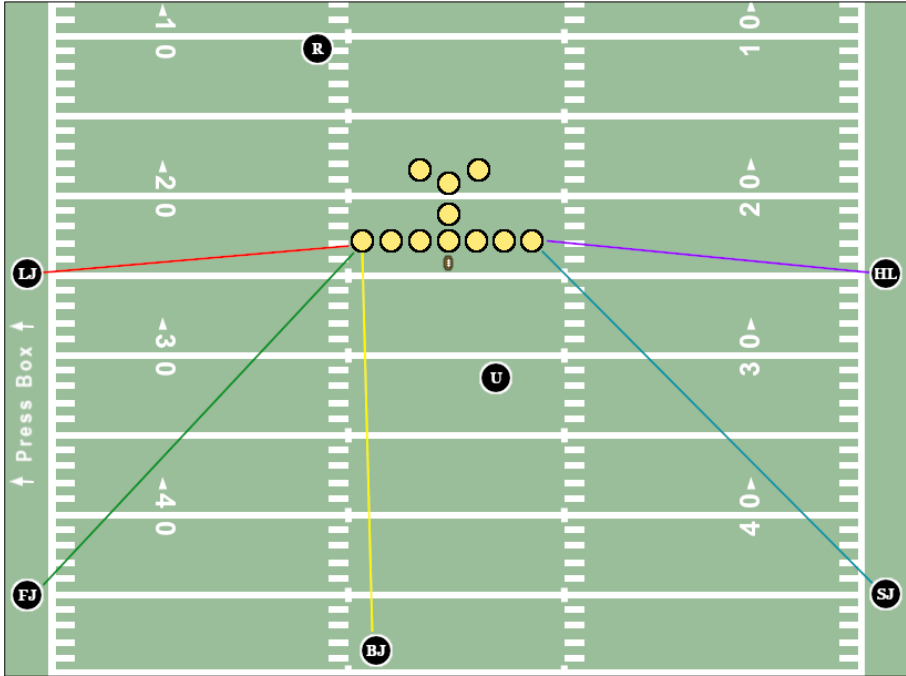
- a. The line of scrimmage officials have key responsibilities for *only* the widest eligible receiver on their side of the formation, regardless whether they are positioned on the strong or weak side of the formation.

SIDE JUDGE and FIELD JUDGE:

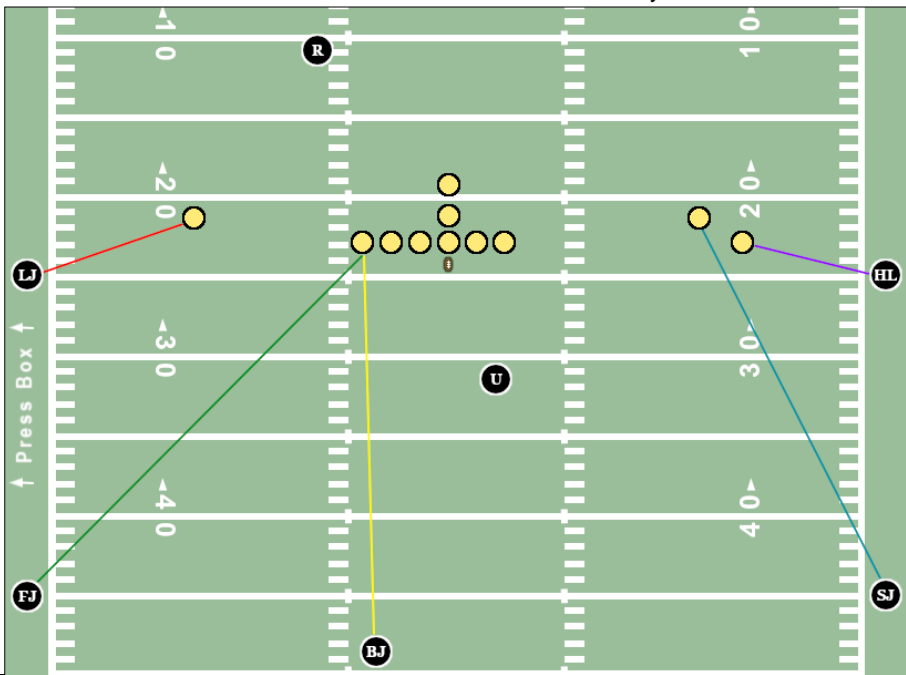
- a. If their position is located on the weak side of the formation, or the formation is balanced, the deep wing officials have key responsibilities for the inside-most eligible receiver on their side of the formation.
- b. If their position is located on the strong side of the formation, the deep wing officials have key responsibilities for the second-widest eligible receiver on their side of the formation.

NOTE: When the strong side of the formation contains four eligible receivers, the deep wing official will have the key responsibilities for the second- *and* third-inside receivers on that side.

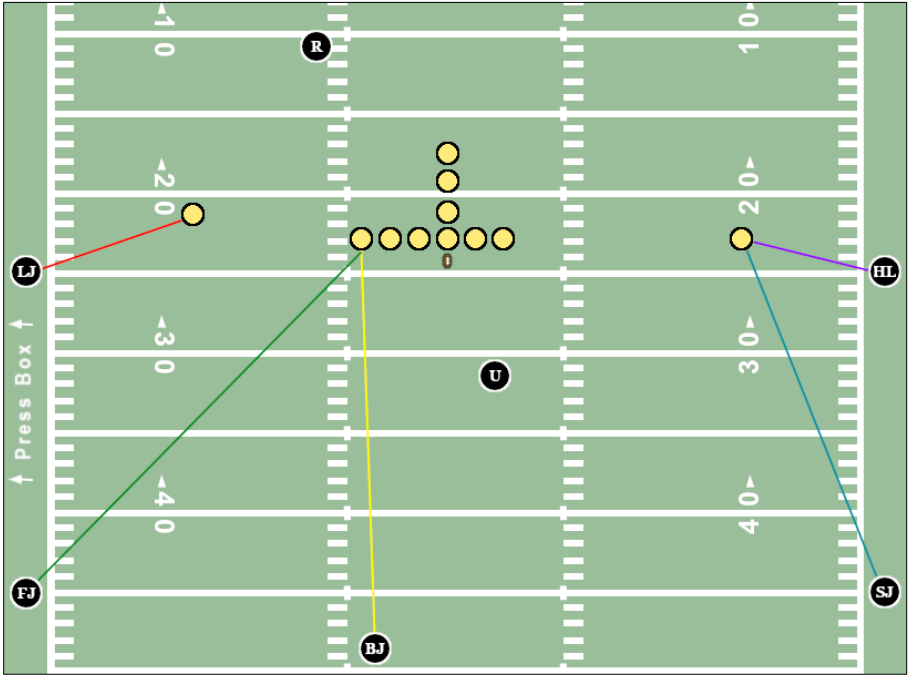
Balanced – Double Tight – 7-Person Crew Keys



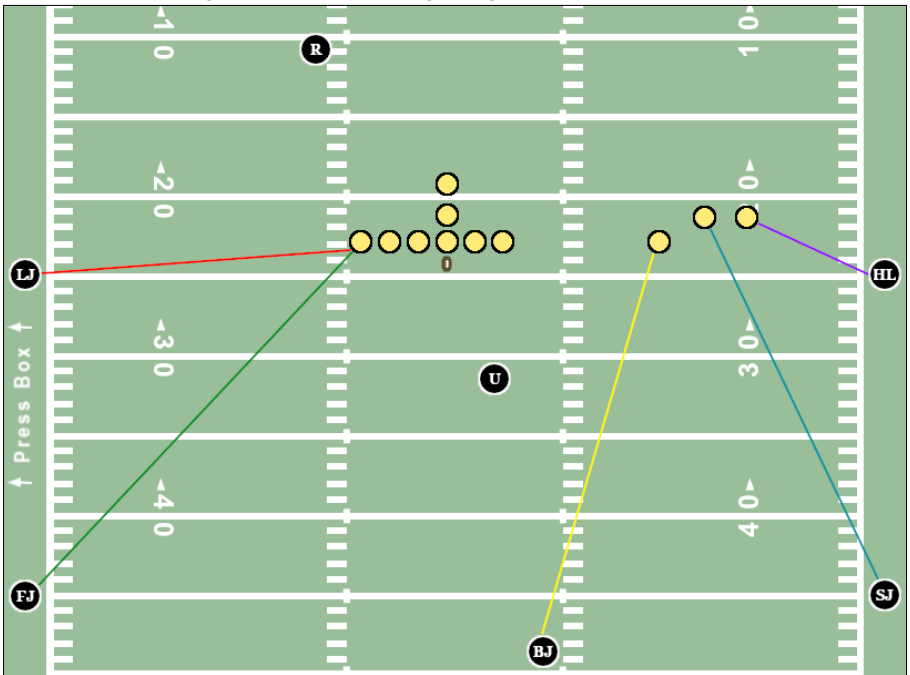
Balanced – Twins – 7-Person Crew Keys



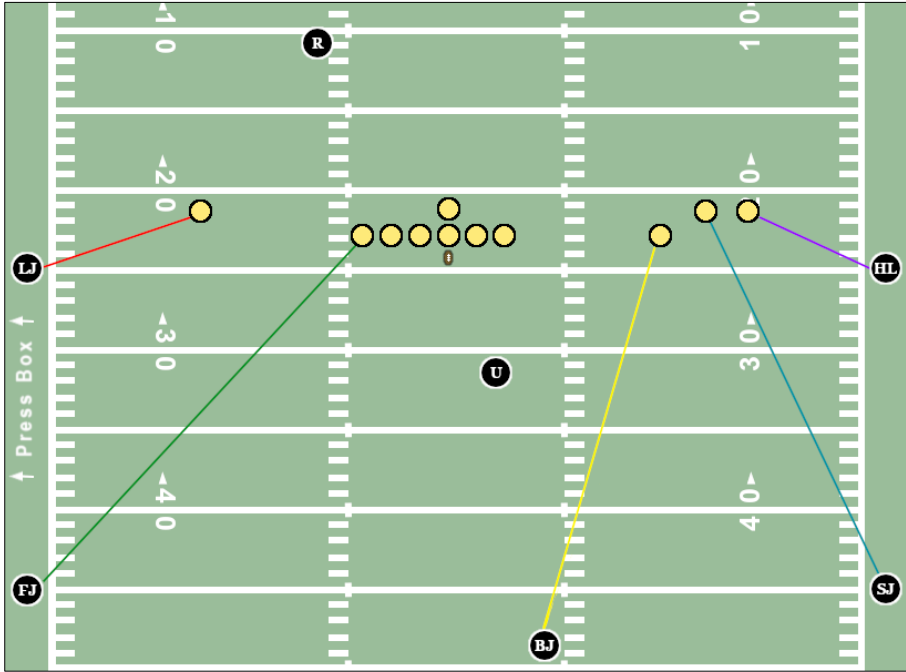
Strong Right – Twins – 7-Person Crew Keys



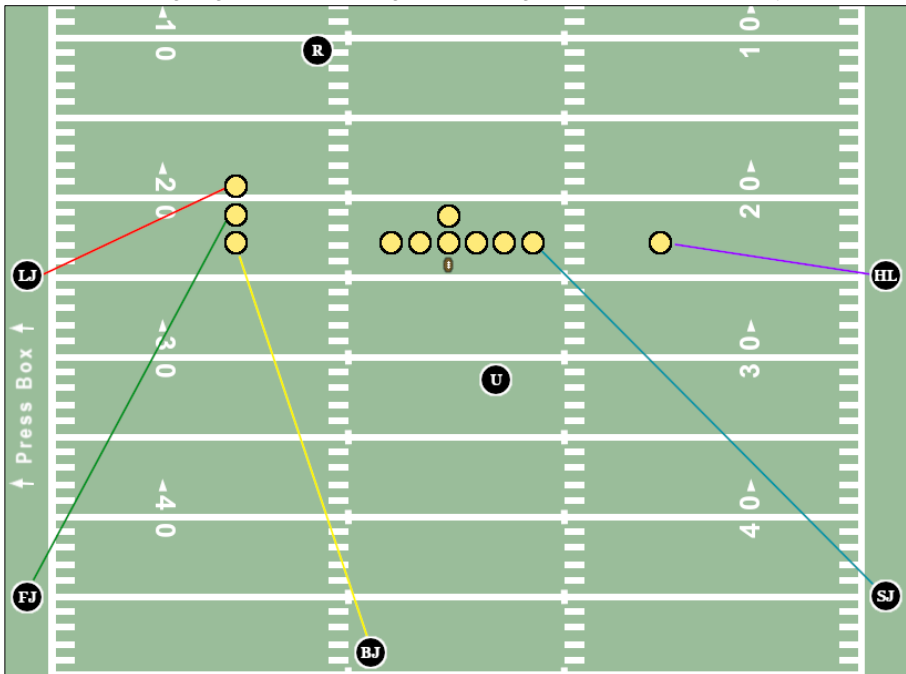
Strong Left – Trips Left, Tight Right – 7-Person Crew Keys



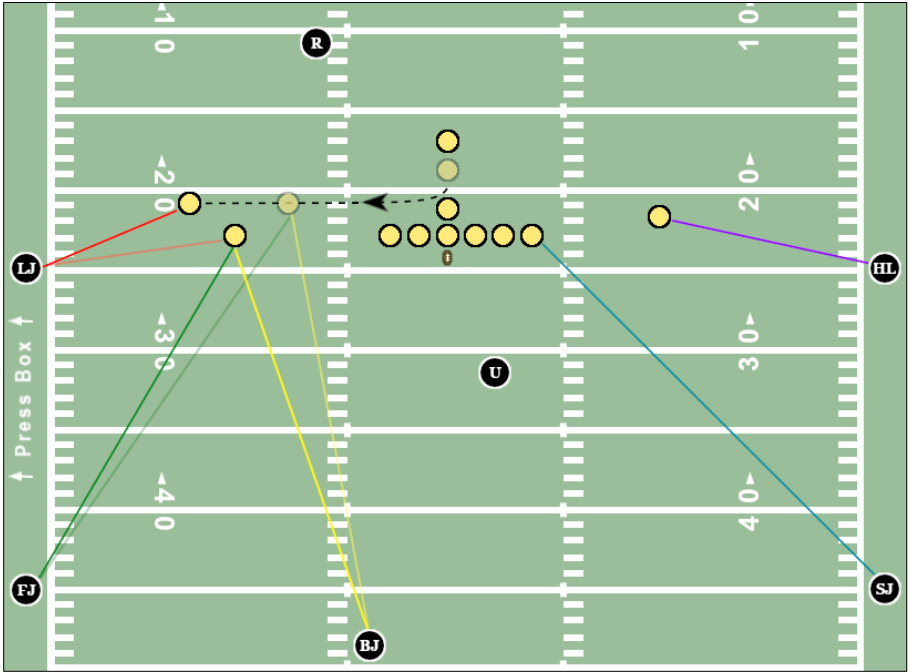
Strong Left – Trips Left, Wide Right – 7-Person Crew Keys



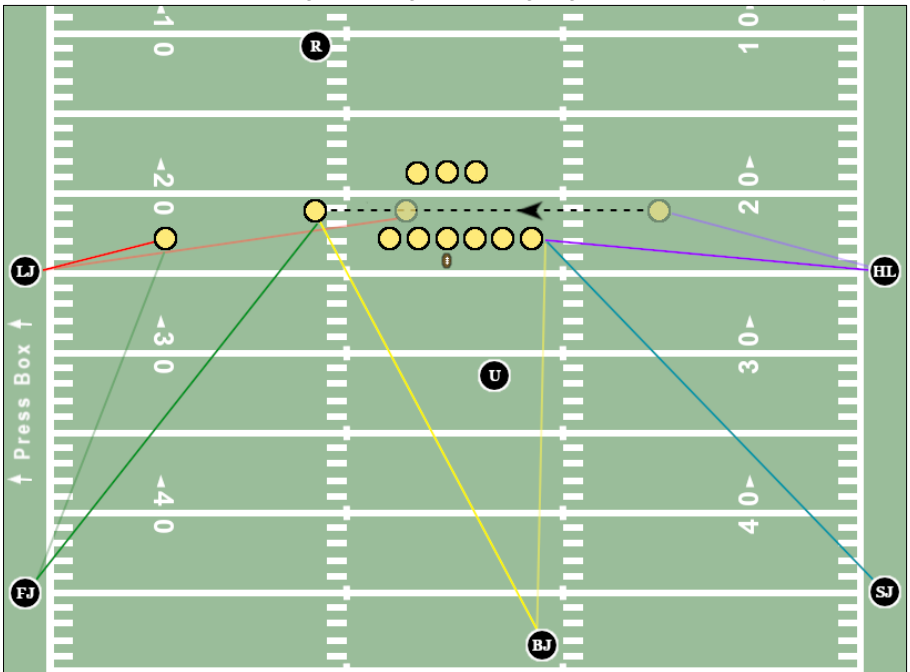
Strong Right – Stacked Right, Wide Right – 5-Person Crew Keys



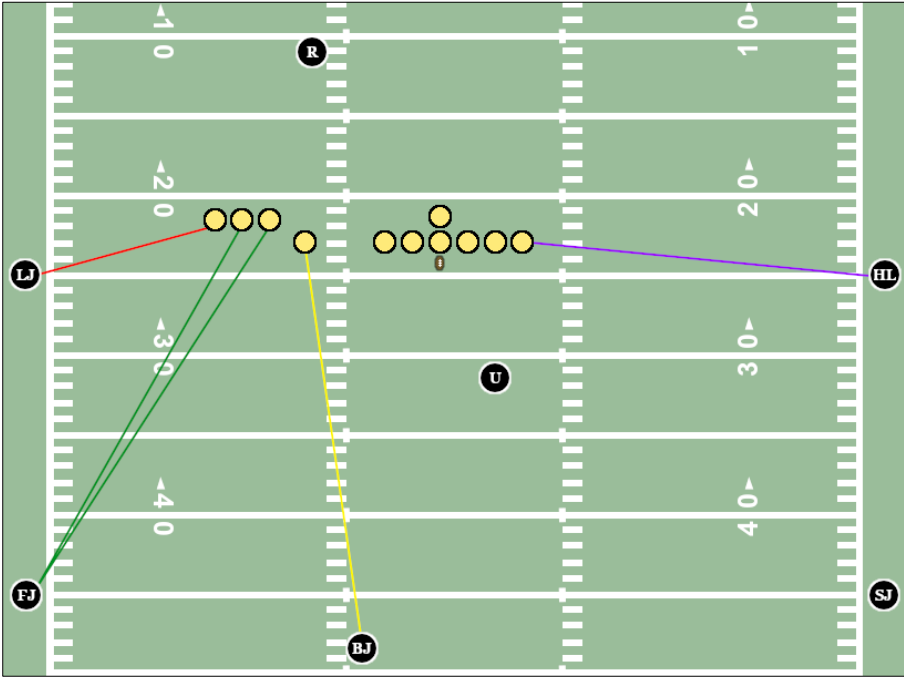
Backfield Motion Changes Strength – Balanced – 7-Person Crew Keys



Receiver Motion Changes Strength – Strong Right – 7-Person Crew Keys



Strong Right – Quads Right, Tight Left – 7-Person Crew Keys



Section 7: Scrimmage Plays

I) Pre-Snap Positioning and Responsibilities

“Scrimmage plays” are a reference to plays from scrimmage where the team is expected to run or pass, and are distinguished from other plays from scrimmage in which the offensive team assumes a scrimmage kick formation.

Officials will take the same positions and have the same pre-snap responsibilities for all scrimmage play formations outside of Team B’s 20-yardline. **EXCEPTION:** (See [Victory Formation \(p. 192\)](#) for when a team tries to run out the clock in the waning seconds of the game.)

A) 5-Person Crew

REFEREE:

- a. The Referee will take a position 12-15 yards behind the offensive line of scrimmage and just outside the tight end (or tackle if no tight end) on the throwing arm side of the quarterback.
- b. The Referee will give any preliminary signals to the crew, including the number of the upcoming down, “double sticks” to indicate more than 10 yards is needed for a first down or “crossed wrists” on fourth down to indicate that the game clock will be stopped regardless of the results of the next play.
- c. After counting players, the Referee will give the proper signal to corresponding officials.
- d. Following an administrative stoppage, the Referee will signal the ready-for-play (either a chop or a wind) for the 25-second play clock.

UMPIRE:

- a. While standing over the ball, the Umpire will give any preliminary signals to the crew, including the number of the upcoming down, “double sticks” to indicate more than 10 yards is needed for a first down or “crossed wrists” on fourth

- down to indicate that the game clock will be stopped regardless of the results of the next play.
- b. After counting players, the Umpire will give the proper signal to corresponding officials.
 - c. When the officials are in their proper positions, the Umpire will back away from the ball (but never turn his back) to move into proper position. If the 40-second play clock was started following the conclusion of the previous play, this will also be the signal for ready-for-play.
 - d. The Umpire will take a position 5-8 yards behind the defensive line of scrimmage and between the offensive guards, being careful to avoid the position taken by defensive players. In most instances, he will be positioned diagonally across from the position of the Referee.
 - e. The Umpire will ensure that there are at least five offensive players on the line of scrimmage, numbered 50-79.

HEAD LINESMAN:

- a. The Head Linesman will take a position off the field on the sideline opposite the press box, straddling the extended line of scrimmage and ensure that unauthorized personnel are clear of the restricted area.
- b. The Head Linesman will give any preliminary signals to the crew, including whether “five gets one”, whether the clock will start on the ready or the snap, the number of the upcoming down, “double sticks” to indicate more than 10 yards is needed for a first down or “crossed wrists” on fourth down to indicate that the game clock will be stopped regardless of the results of the next play. **NOTE:** The Head Linesman should note the line to gain in his head so he doesn’t have to look back to determine whether a first down occurs.
- c. After counting players, the Head Linesman will give the proper signal to corresponding officials.
- d. The Head Linesman may assist wide receivers in getting in their proper positions by extending his foot and vocalizing

- where the line of scrimmage is located. **NOTE:** The Head Linesman should never instruct players to move up or back.
- e. The Head Linesman will communicate with the Line Judge using signals (hold signals until just before the snap) to provide information regarding the formation: (1) Extended arm with a closed fist toward the backfield if widest player is off the line of scrimmage and with two fingers extended if the widest two players are off the line of scrimmage. (2) Hand on cheek if there is an unbalanced line on his side of the formation. (3) Touching the bill of his cap if he confirms the formation with the Line Judge.

LINE JUDGE:

- a. The Line Judge will take a position off the field on the press box sideline, straddling the extended line of scrimmage and ensure that unauthorized personnel are clear of the restricted area.
- b. The Line Judge will give any preliminary signals to the crew, including the number of the upcoming down, “double sticks” to indicate more than 10 yards is needed for a first down or “crossed wrists” on fourth down to indicate that the game clock will be stopped regardless of the results of the next play.
- c. After counting players, the Line Judge will give the proper signal to corresponding officials.
- d. The Line Judge may assist wide receivers in getting in their proper positions by extending his foot and vocalizing where the line of scrimmage is located. **NOTE:** The Line Judge should never instruct players to move up or back.
- e. The Line Judge will communicate with the Head Linesman using signals (hold signals until just before the snap) to provide information regarding the formation: (1) Extended arm with a closed fist toward the backfield if widest player is off the line of scrimmage and with two fingers extended if the widest two players are off the line of scrimmage. (2) Hand on cheek if there is an unbalanced line on his side of

the formation. (3) Touching the bill of his cap if he confirms the formation with the Head Linesman.

BACK JUDGE:

- a. The Back Judge will take a position between the hash marks, approximately 20-25 yards behind the defensive line of scrimmage. His location between the hash marks is determined by the formation: If a balanced formation, the Back Judge should be positioned toward the wide side of the field. If one side of the formation is stronger than the other, the Back Judge should be positioned toward the strong side of the field.
- b. The Back Judge will give any preliminary signals to the crew, including the number of the upcoming down, “double sticks” to indicate more than 10 yards is needed for a first down or “crossed wrists” on fourth down to indicate that the game clock will be stopped regardless of the results of the next play.
- c. After counting players, the Back Judge will give the proper signal to corresponding officials.

B) 4-Person Crew Modifications

UMPIRE:

- a. The Umpire may take a position up to 10 yards behind the defensive line of scrimmage for easier downfield coverage.

C) 7-Person Crew Modifications

SIDE JUDGE:

- a. The Side Judge will take a position off the field on the sideline opposite the press box, approximately 20 yards downfield from the line of scrimmage.
- b. After counting players, the Side Judge will give the proper signal to corresponding officials.

FIELD JUDGE:

- a. The Field Judge will take a position off the field on the press box sideline, approximately 20 yards downfield from the line of scrimmage.
- b. After counting players, the Field Judge will give the proper signal to corresponding officials.

II) Runs (*Play Coverage*)

NOTE: (See [Goal Line Coverage \(pp. 195-206\)](#) for plays that start inside the Team B 20-yard line.)

A) 5-Person Crew

REFEREE:

- a. If the Referee recognizes “run” at the snap based on his keys, he will turn his focus to the initial action by the quarterback.
- b. The Referee should not rule on head-to-head blocks for runs between the tackles, but should be prepared to rule on blocks at the point of attack or by pulling linemen.
- c. If the run moves toward the sideline, the Referee will follow behind the runner (approximately 5-8 yards) and continue to observe action on/by the runner, ruling on clips, blocks below the waist and late hits out of bounds.
- d. If the run ends outside of the 9-yard marks, the Referee may be able to assist retrieving the ball and “triangulating” it to the Umpire.

UMPIRE:

- a. The Umpire will focus on the initial blocks by the guards and center at the snap, such as chop blocks or illegal blocks below the waist.
- b. After the initial blocks, the Umpire will rotate with the runner to the point of attack, working “inside-out”.
- c. If the run ends inside the 9-yard marks, the Umpire will move to retrieve the ball while continuing to observe dead ball action around the runner.

- d. If the run ends outside of the 9-yards marks, the Umpire will move to the hash mark on that side of the field and will await the ball being returned to him by another official.

NOTE: The Umpire should be alert to when the runner is down near the line-to-gain, and where the covering official may request to spot the ball himself. In these close instances (usually in critical situations during the game), the Umpire will not spot the ball until he is absolutely certain that the covering official does not wish to do so himself.

- e. After spotting the ball, the Umpire will ensure that the other officials are in their proper positions, signal the number of the next down and then back away. This action indicates ready-for-play and the offense may snap the ball.

NOTE: The Umpire may hold his position over the ball until the Referee signals ready for play in the following situations:

- After a penalty
- After a measurement
- After a timeout
- After a first down on a run that ended out of bounds (Referee will give the “silent wind” signal)

- f. If the play ends near the goal line, the Umpire should never signal touchdown. Rather, if the covering official has not signaled touchdown or forward progress, the Umpire will find the ball and hold it on the ground at that position to allow the covering official rule on the forward progress.

HEAD LINESMAN and LINE JUDGE:

- a. At the snap, the line of scrimmage officials will focus on the initial blocks by their keys, especially for illegal blocks below the waist, chop blocks and holds. They may also be able to assist with the same responsibilities for the tackle on their side of the field if there is only one, or no, eligible receivers for which they have responsibility.

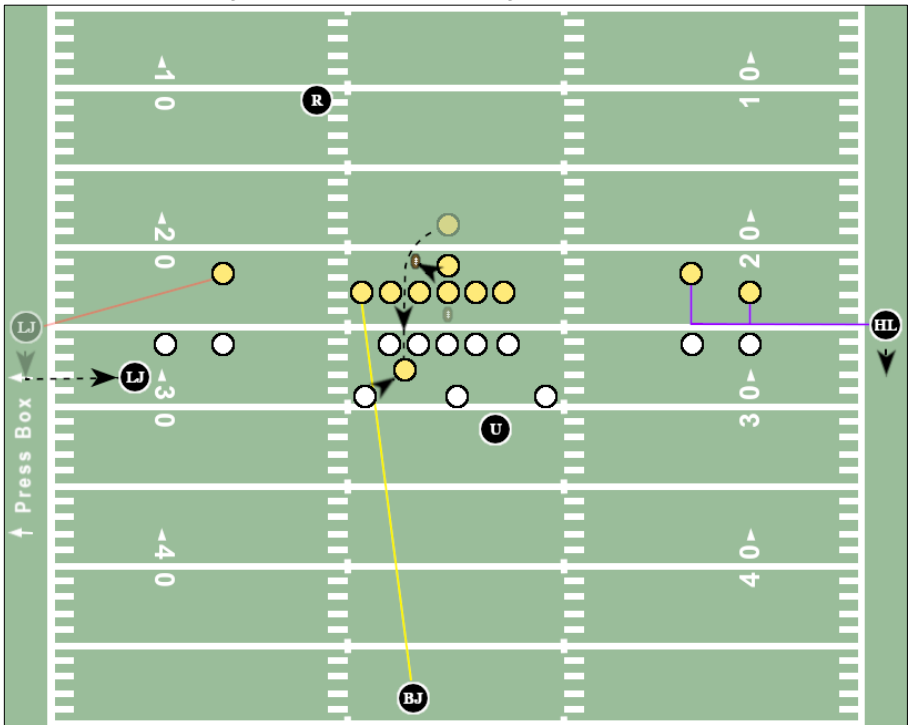
- b. If the run is headed toward his sideline, the official may need to step back into the backfield to allow the runner to pass in front of him. This should be done sooner rather than later to ensure the official is out of the way of the play. Until the runner turns upfield, the official will observe blocks in front of the runner. This may include pulling linemen or lead blocking backs.
- c. Forward progress belongs to the official on the side of the field where the run ends. If a run following a handoff is stretched across the backfield toward the opposite side of the field from the official, he should be alert to possible hits on the quarterback behind the play. On runs to the opposite side of the field, the official will observe action between his sideline and the Umpire – particularly personal fouls away from the play. He should be prepared to assist with forward progress on the opposite side of the field if the covering official is not able to see the ball down.
NOTE: Only one official should have the forward progress spot to avoid conflicting spots in critical situations. The opposite official should mirror the position (not the signal) of his cross-field partner.
- d. If the Back Judge will rule on forward progress at the goal line near the sideline, the line of scrimmage officials should be prepared to offer confirmation that the runner remained in bounds.

BACK JUDGE:

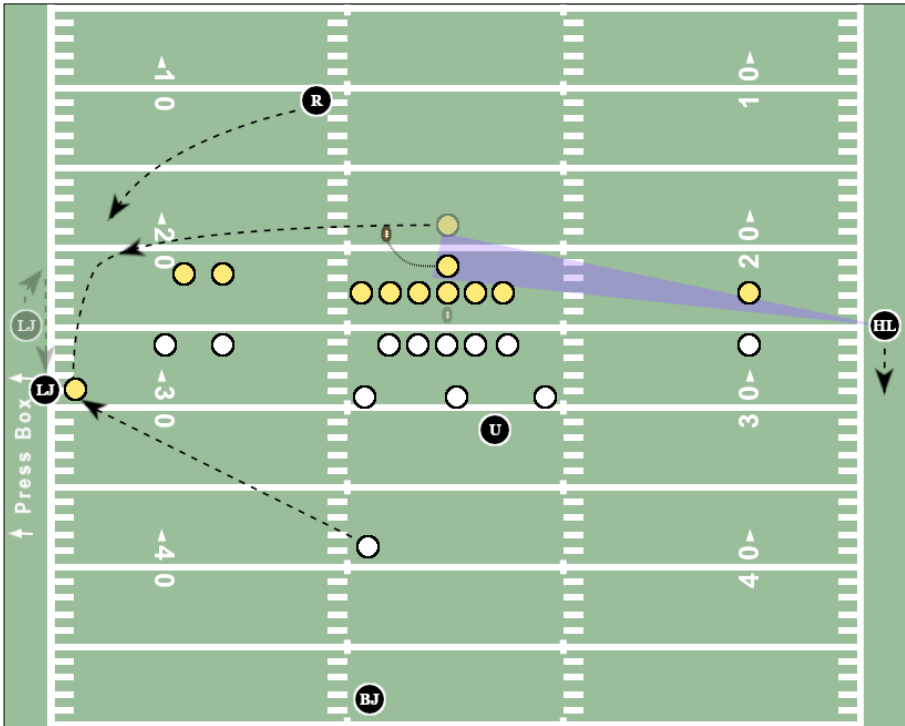
- a. At the snap, the Back Judge will pick up the action of his key(s), being especially alert to holds and illegal blocks.
- b. The Back Judge should never move forward from his position during the play, attempt to remain at least 20 yards in front of the ball carrier and should be in position at the goal line before the runner reaches it.

- c. While staying inside the hash marks, the Back Judge will rotate to the opposite side of the field from the play, and he is responsible for blocking action in front of the ball carrier.
- d. On long runs that end near the goal line or in the end zone, the Back Judge may rule touchdown or forward progress. If a runner crosses the goal line near the pylon, the Back Judge should first confirm with the appropriate sideline official that the runner remained in bounds.
- e. On run plays where the Back Judge has no forward progress responsibilities, he should be alert to dead ball fouls that occur away from the play.
- f. If the run ends outside of the 9-yard marks and more than eight yards downfield from the line of scrimmage, the Back Judge will assist with retrieving the ball and getting it to the Umpire.

Positioning, Responsibilities Coverage – Run – 5-Person Crew

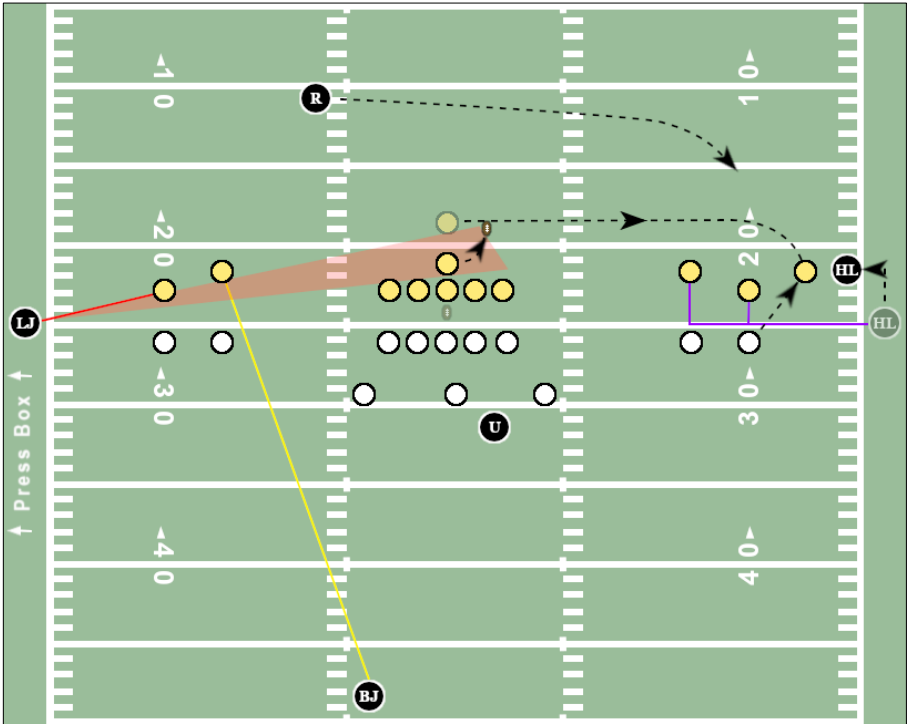


Positioning, Responsibilities Coverage – Outside Run Right – 5-Person Crew



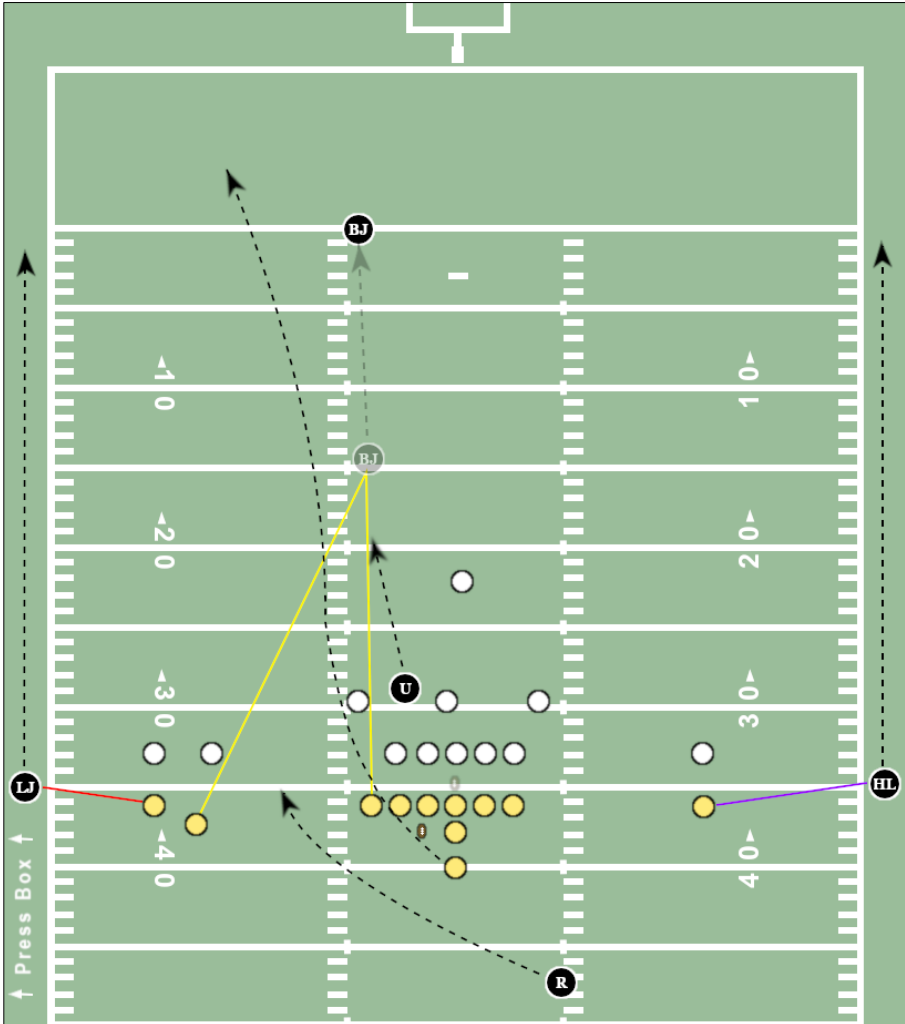
NOTE: The Line Judge steps back into the backfield to allow the runner to pass his position. Because the Referee will be trailing the play to assist at the sideline, the Head Linesman should be watching the backside of the play, looking for any cheap shots on the quarterback.

Positioning, Responsibilities Coverage – Outside Run Left – 5-Person Crew



NOTE: Because the Referee will be trailing the play to assist at the sideline, the Line Judge should be watching the backside of the play, looking for any cheap shots on the quarterback.

Positioning, Responsibilities Coverage – Long Run Left – 5-Person Crew



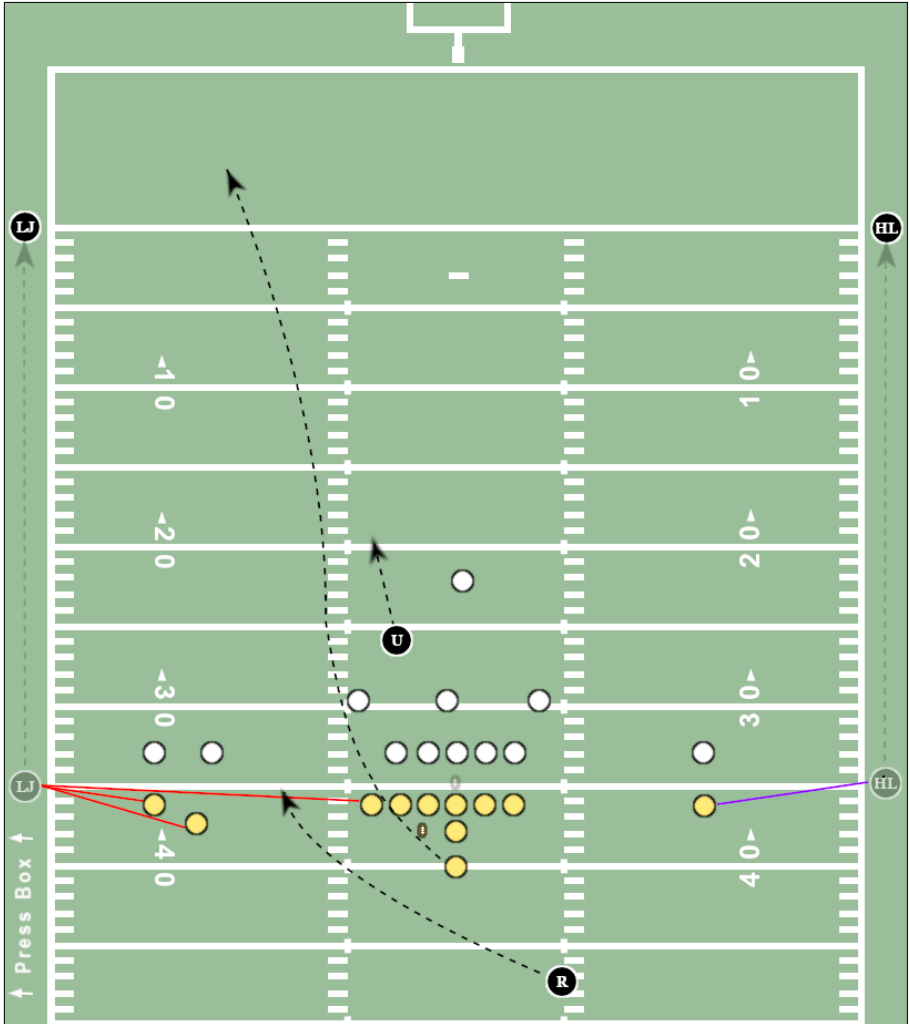
NOTE: The Back Judge is responsible to remain ahead of the play and in position to make a ruling at the goal line.

B) 4-Person Crew Modifications

HEAD LINESMAN and LINE JUDGE:

- a. The line of scrimmage officials have the responsibility for all forward progress, including on long runs near the goal line.

Positioning, Responsibilities Coverage – Long Run Left – 4-Person Crew



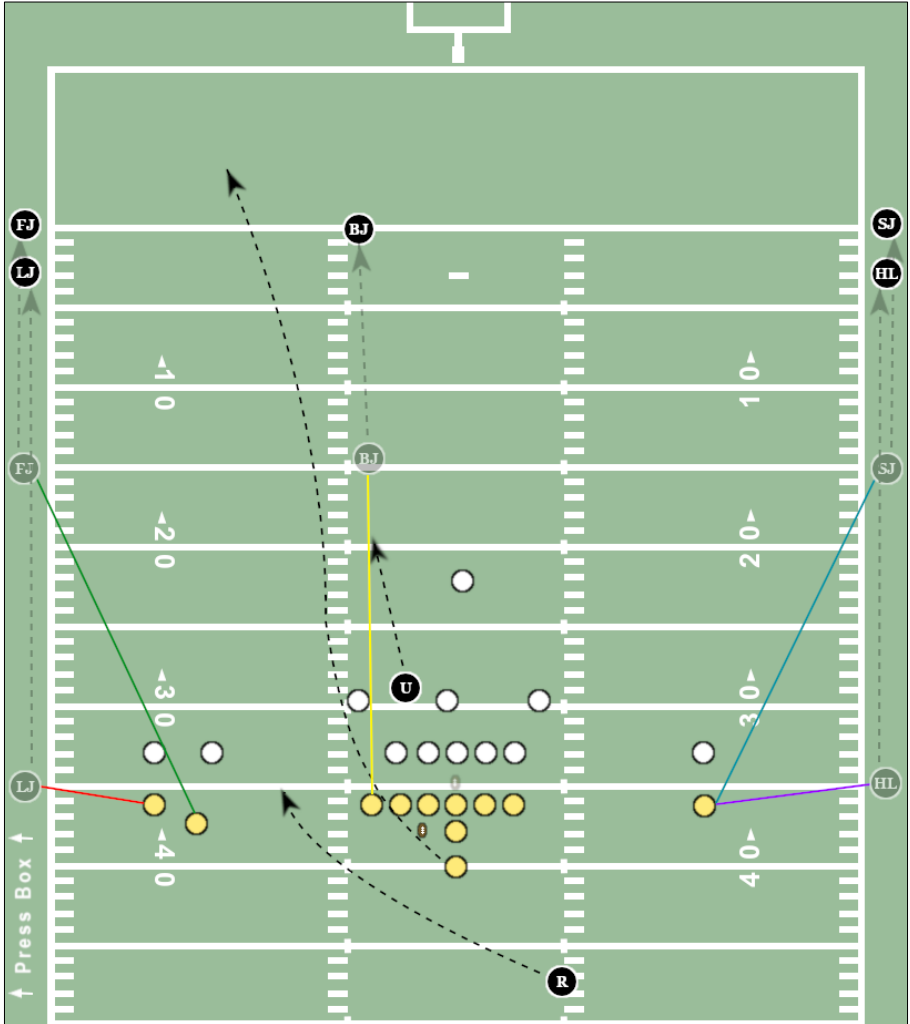
NOTE: The line of scrimmage officials are responsible to rule on all forward progress, including decisiona at the goal line.

C) 7-Person Crew Modifications

SIDE JUDGE and FIELD JUDGE:

- a. At the snap, the deep wing officials will pick up the action of their keys, being especially alert to holds and illegal blocks.
- b. The deep wing officials are responsible for blocking action in front of the ball carrier on their half of the field. They should never move forward from their positions during the play, attempt to remain at least 20 yards in front of the ball carrier and should be in position at the goal line before the runner reaches it.
- c. The deep wing officials have the responsibility for forward progress inside the Team B 2-yard line.

Positioning, Responsibilities Coverage – Long Run Left – 7-Person Crew



NOTE: The Back Judge and both deep wing officials are responsible to remain ahead of the play and in position to make a ruling at the goal line. The Side Judge and Field Judge have forward progress responsibilities inside the 2-yard line.

III) Forward Passes (*Play Coverage*)

NOTE: (See [Goal Line Coverage \(pp. 195-206\)](#) for plays that start inside the Team B 20-yard line.)

A) 5-Person Crew

REFEREE:

- a. If the Referee recognizes “pass” at the snap based on his keys, he will continue to observe blocking of the offensive tackle, especially looking for illegal blocks below the waist, chop blocks or holds on defensive ends.
- b. As the quarterback is threatened, the Referee will concentrate on the players approaching him, being especially alert to holding and hands to the face.
- c. If the quarterback rolls out or scrambles away from the pocket, the Referee will attempt to stay on his throwing arm-side by looping behind the running quarterback.
- d. As the quarterback is preparing to pass, the Referee will completely focus his attention on him. The Referee will have the responsibility to rule on pass vs. fumble and late hits on the quarterback.
- e. If the pass is thrown, the Referee should verbalize to rushing defensive players preventative language such as “The ball is gone!” or “Pass is away” to avoid late contact. He should warn players that are close to fouling, and praise players that successfully avoid late contact.
- f. On an immediate pass toward the sideline, the Referee should look to the backside line of scrimmage official for a signal as to whether the pass was backward.
- g. The Referee is solely responsible for action by players on the line of scrimmage once a pass is thrown downfield. The Referee should not follow the pass; but rather, remain focused on the action in front of him.
- h. After the play has ended, the Referee may be able to assist in retrieving a ball at the sideline area inside of eight yards from the line of scrimmage.

UMPIRE:

- a. If the Umpire recognizes “pass” based on his read of the center and guards, he will immediately move up to the line of scrimmage with the responsibility for illegal forward passes near the line of scrimmage, ineligible receivers downfield and whether a pass is behind or beyond the line of scrimmage.
- b. If the pass is beyond his position, the Umpire will rotate with the ball to assist with catch/no catch decisions coming toward this middle of the field and within 15 yards of the line of scrimmage.

NOTE: Because it is impossible for the Umpire to see the entirety of the play, he should not rule on holding of the receiver or pass interference.

- c. If the play continues following the completion of the pass, the Umpire will follow behind the play looking for any fouls that occur away from the ball.
- d. Following the play, the Umpire will move in the direction of the ball (no closer than the 9-yards marks) to retrieve it and take it to the succeeding or previous spot.

HEAD LINESMAN and LINE JUDGE:

- a. Line of scrimmage officials will utilize the “Hold-Read-React” technique.
- b. Both officials will **Hold** at the snap and be prepared for a quick pass. If the pass is backward, the backside official will indicate this by extending his arm into the backfield. The official to who the pass is coming toward should delay in making a ruling on an incomplete pass if it is a close call between forward and backward until he looks across the field to the ruling official.
- c. The officials will then **Read** their keys and then move to zone coverage.
- d. If either line of scrimmage official recognizes the quarterback moving away from the official’s position, he will

React by moving downfield along the sideline while remaining under control – going no farther than 10 yards until the ball is released.

NOTE: The ideal position to rule on a pass is between five and 10 yards away in order to be able to see the arms and both feet of the receiver.

- e. If the quarterback is rolling out toward his position, the near sideline official should remain close to the line of scrimmage for ruling on possible illegal forward passes or to cover forward progress if the quarterback attempts to run with the ball.
- f. If the quarterback remains in the pocket, the Head Linesman may drift up to five yards downfield before the pass. The Line Judge will hold his position and is responsible for calls involving the line of scrimmage.
- g. Line of scrimmage officials will rule on any passes in their primary coverage areas. If the pass is complete and the play continues, the officials will continue down the sideline while trailing the ball carrier.

NOTE: Officials may need to give additional information when there is question as to why a pass was ruled the way it was. It is often better to answer these questions before they're asked. For instance:

- When a pass is bobbled near the sideline, but secured before the player went out of bounds, it is permissible for the official to give a “completed catch” signal before marking the progress spot.
- When a pass is incomplete because the player was out of bounds when the catch was made (including the player bobbling the ball while going out of bounds), the official may signal the pass incomplete, followed by a “two-hand swipe” or make a “bobbling the ball” signal, as the case may be.

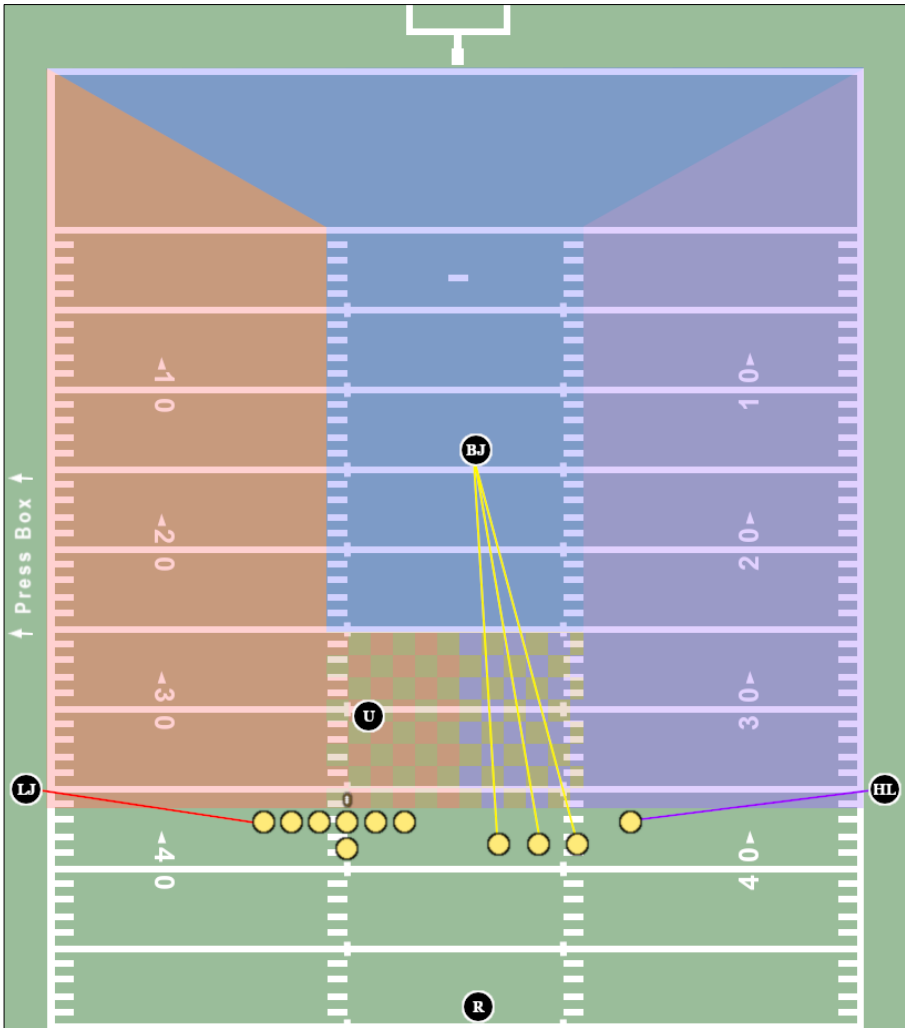
- h. The covering official will mark the progress spot, while the cross-field official will mirror the spot and observe action between his sideline and the middle of the field.

BACK JUDGE:

- a. At the snap, the Back Judge will immediately observe his key(s), looking especially for holds at the line of scrimmage or designed pick plays by the receivers – then move into zone coverage.
- b. The Back Judge will remain stationary until a receiver moves downfield. At that point, he will backpedal to always remain ahead of the deepest receiver.
- c. When the pass is thrown, the Back Judge will identify the intended receiver and move into a position to best observe the play. The ideal position is inside the hash marks with the intended receiver between his position and the line of scrimmage official covering the play.
- d. Once the ball is in the air, the Back Judge will focus his attention to the action on/by the receiver and the primary defender. He should be especially alert to contact on the backside of the play that causes interference. For passes made outside of his primary coverage area, the Back Judge should look for action by a second or third defender and any illegal contact on a defenseless receiver.
- e. If the pass is complete and the play continues, the Back Judge will continue in advance of the play. He is responsible for ruling touchdown or forward progress at the goal line. If the player crosses the goal line near the pylon, the Back Judge should first confirm with the appropriate sideline official that the runner remained in bounds.
- f. If the pass is completed and the runner ends up down outside of the 9-yard marks and more than eight yards downfield from the line of scrimmage, the Back Judge should assist with retrieving the ball and getting it to the Umpire.

- g. On plays where the Back Judge has no forward progress responsibilities, he should be alert to dead ball fouls that occur away from the play.
- h. If a deep incomplete pass remains on the field, the Back Judge should ask a player to retrieve it. As a last resort, if the ball is in his immediate vicinity, he may retrieve the ball himself.

Keys and Approximate Pass Coverage Zones – 5-Person Crew



B) 4-Person Crew Modifications

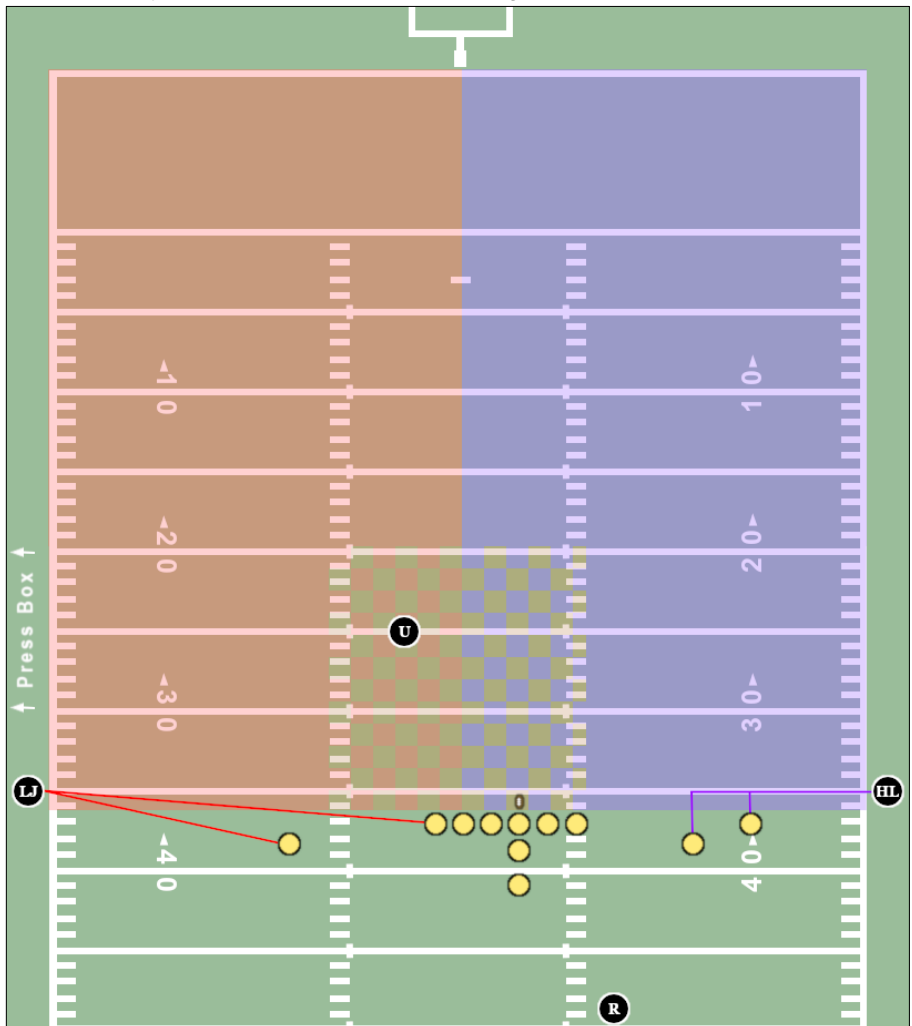
REFEREE:

- a. The Referee has the primary responsibility for ruling on whether a quick pass is forward or backward.

HEAD LINESMAN and LINE JUDGE:

- a. For passes with the quarterback moving away from their positions, the line of scrimmage official may move up to 15 yards downfield before the pass is thrown.

Keys and Approximate Pass Coverage Zones – 4-Person Crew



C) 7-Person Crew Modifications

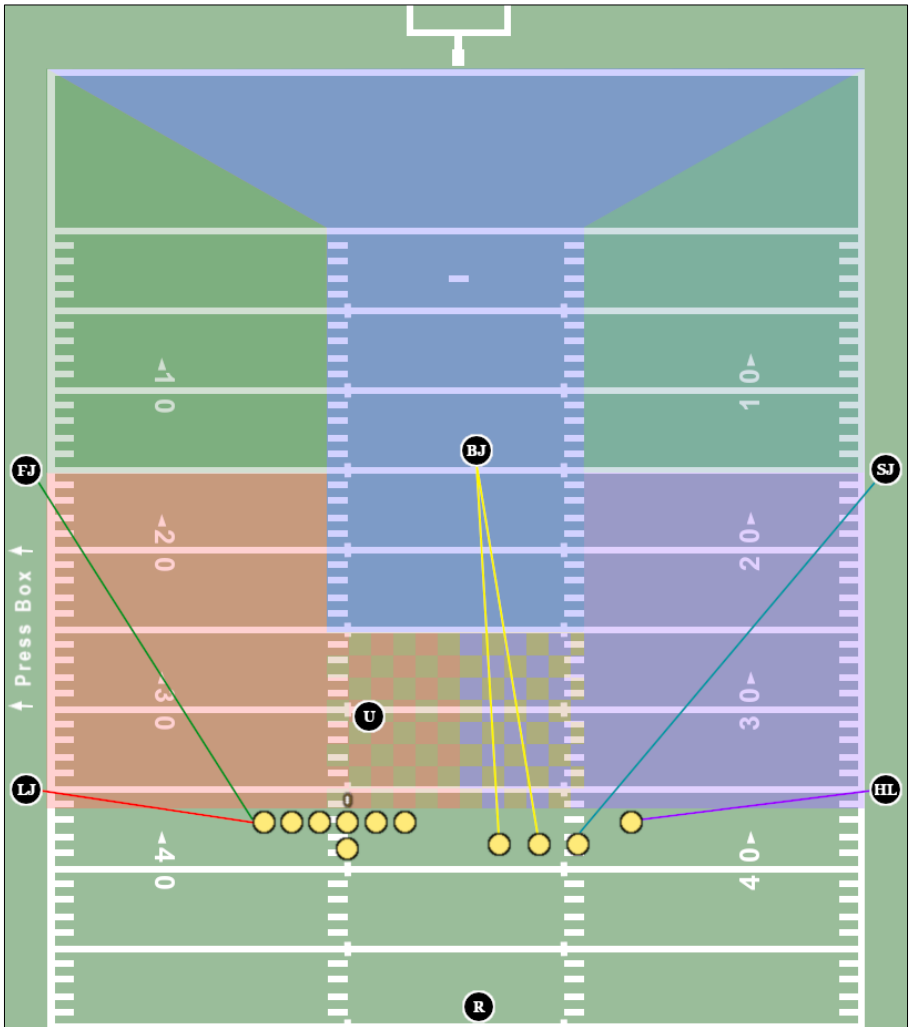
SIDE JUDGE and FIELD JUDGE:

- a. At the snap, the deep wing officials will immediately observe their keys, looking especially for holds at the line of scrimmage or designed pick plays by the receivers – then move into zone coverage.
- b. They will remain stationary until a receiver moves downfield. At that point, they will remain ahead of the deepest receiver downfield.
- c. When the pass is thrown inside a deep wing official's primary coverage area, he will focus his attention to the action on/by the receiver and the primary defender. He should be especially alert to contact on the backside of the play that causes interference. For passes made outside of his primary coverage area, he should look for action by a second or third defender and any illegal contact on a defenseless receiver.
- d. If the pass is complete and the play continues, the deep wing officials will continue in advance of the play. They have the responsibility for forward progress inside the Team B 2-yard line.

NOTE: A deep wing official may assist with a spot of forward progress outside of the 2-yard line in rare circumstances when the receiver is downed immediately at his position on the field.

- e. If a deep incomplete pass remains on the field on his side of the field, the deep wing official should ask a player to retrieve it. As a last resort, of if the ball is in his immediate vicinity, he may retrieve the ball himself.

Keys and Approximate Pass Coverage Zones – 7-Person Crew



IV) Victory Formation

It is often the case when a team has the lead and possession of the ball at the end of a game, it will have its quarterback “take a knee” immediately after receiving the snap in attempt to run out the clock and reducing the risk of a turnover. This is also a tactic used by a team that seeks to end the game graciously without “running up the score” on their opponent.

While this is an almost-universally accepted way to end the game, there is sometimes confusion surrounding unwritten permitted/prohibited actions by the defensive team during this time. Since officials don’t enforce “unwritten” rules, it is important that they provide each team good guidance, modify their positions to be close to the action and remain vigilant to the problems that might occur.

A) 5-Person Crew

REFEREE:

- a. The Referee will receive confirmation from the quarterback that they intend to take a knee.
- b. The Referee will instruct the quarterback that he should not take more than one step backward before kneeling immediately, and remind him that attempting a designed trick play in this situation may warrant a penalty as an unfair act.
- c. The Referee will take a position much closer to the quarterback, but still located behind the deepest back.
- d. Once he has recognized that the snap was received cleanly by the quarterback and that he has secure possession, *only* the Referee should immediately sound his whistle.
- e. If the snap is mishandled or the ball is fumbled, the play should be officiated as any other play from scrimmage.

UMPIRE:

- a. The Umpire will stand over the ball and provide the following instructions to both the offensive and defensive

linemen: “They’re taking a knee. Be smart, don’t do anything illegal and protect yourself.”

- b. The Umpire will then move to a position immediately behind the defensive line, while still providing access to linebackers if the snap is mishandled.
- c. Following a clean snap, the Umpire will move into the neutral zone to ensure good conduct between the teams. The Umpire will not sound his whistle on the play.
- d. If the snap is muffed, the play should be officiated as any other play from scrimmage.

HEAD LINESMAN and LINE JUDGE:

- a. The line of scrimmage officials will each take a position straddling the line of scrimmage on the field, near the widest player on their side of the formation.
- b. Each official will remind the players near their position that the offense will be taking a knee and that there is no need for blocking, but they may react to a muffed snap or fumble.
- c. Following a clean snap, the line of scrimmage officials will ensure there are no issues with the players nearest them, and then will continue in toward the interior linemen to maintain a peaceful end to the game. Neither line of scrimmage official will sound their whistles on the play.
- d. If the snap is muffed, the play should be officiated as any other play from scrimmage.

BACK JUDGE:

- a. The Back Judge will take a position in the middle of the field, immediately next to the deepest defender, but no closer than ten yards to the line of scrimmage.
- b. Following a clean snap, the Back Judge will move up toward the line of scrimmage to assist with a peaceful end to the game. The Back Judge will not sound his whistle on the play.
- c. If the snap is muffed, the play should be officiated as any other play from scrimmage.

B) 4-Person Crew Modifications

HEAD LINESMAN and LINE JUDGE:

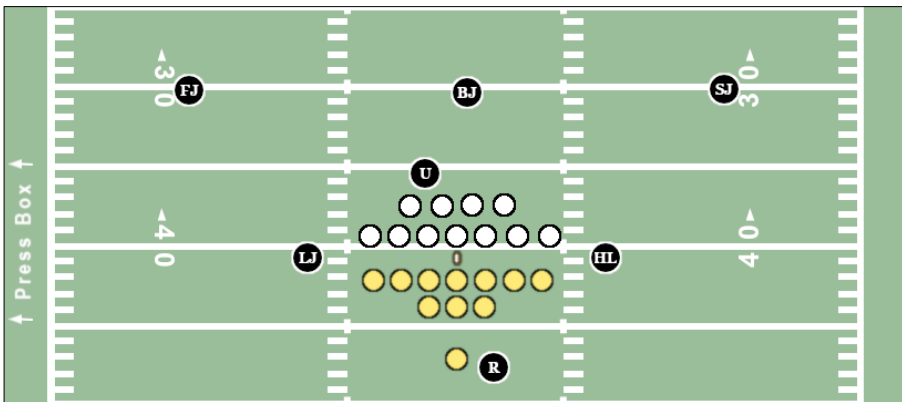
- a. Same pre-snap positioning, responsibilities and play coverage as in a 5-person crew.

C) 7-Person Crew Modifications

SIDE JUDGE and FIELD JUDGE:

- a. The deep wing officials will take a position on the field near their respective 9-yard marks and approximately the same depth as the deepest defender, but no closer than ten yards to the line of scrimmage.
- b. Following a clean snap, the deep wing officials will pinch in toward the middle of the field and be prepared to assist with a peaceful end to the game. The deep wing officials should not sound their whistles on the play.
- c. If the snap is muffed, the play should be officiated as any other play from scrimmage.

Victory Formation Positioning



Section 8: Goal Line Coverage

Goal line coverage mechanics apply to scrimmage plays whenever the offensive team will snap the ball within (and including) *the opposing team's 20-yard line*, and reverse goal line mechanics apply when the offensive team will snap the ball inside (and including) *their own 5-yard line*. The officials' initial positioning and subsequent mechanics will be determined by where the ball will be snapped.

I) **B-20 to B-15**

A) **5-Person Crew**

REFEREE, UMPIRE, HEAD LINESMAN and LINE JUDGE:

There is no difference in pre-snap positioning, responsibilities or play coverage from any other scrimmage play.

BACK JUDGE:

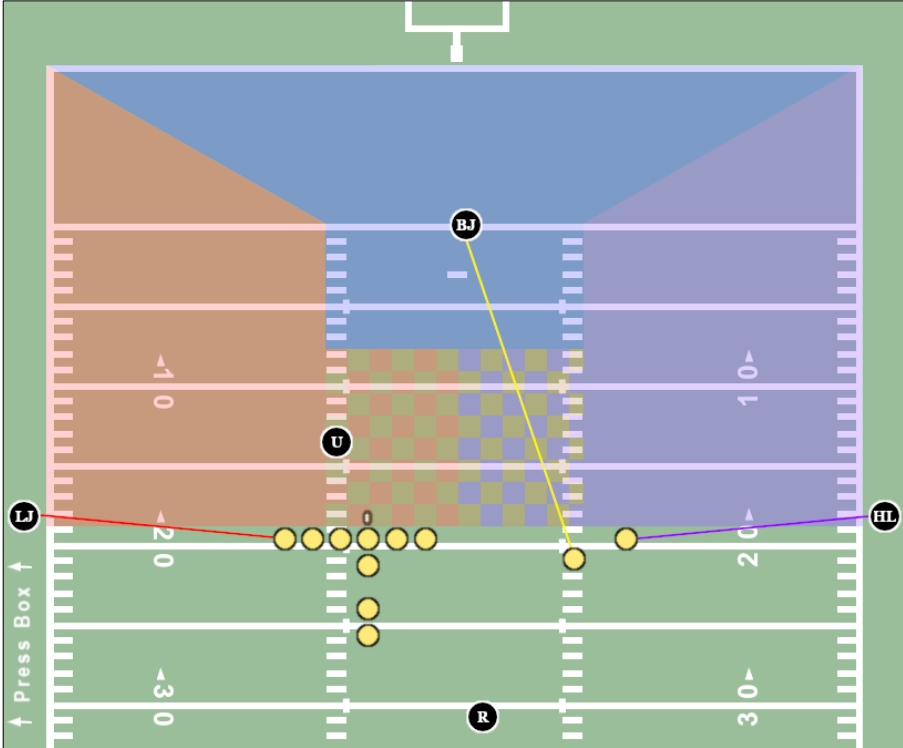
Pre-Snap Positioning and Responsibilities

- a. The Back Judge will take a position on the goal line between the hash marks, or deeper than the deepest defender if he is positioned in the end zone. His location between the hash marks is determined by the formation: If a balanced formation, the Back Judge will be positioned toward the wide side of the field. If one side of the formation is stronger than the other, the Back Judge will be positioned toward the strong side of the field.

Play Coverage

- a. The Back Judge has all of the same play coverages as any other scrimmage play. If a receiver runs a route into the endzone, the Back Judge will remain deeper than the deepest receiver and be prepared to rule on passes at the end line. Otherwise, he will hold his position to rule on progress at the goal line.

Goal Line Coverage – From the B-20 to the B-15 – 5-Person Crew



B) 4-Person Crew Modifications

Same pre-snap positioning and responsibilities and play coverage as in a 5-person crew.

C) 7-Person Crew Modifications

BACK JUDGE:

Pre-Snap Positioning and Responsibilities

- a. The Back Judge will take a position on the end line between the hash marks. His location between the hash marks is determined by the formation: If a balanced formation, the Back Judge will be positioned toward the wide side of the field. If one side of the formation is stronger than the other, the Back Judge will be positioned toward the strong side of the field.

Play Coverage

- a. The Back Judge has all of the same play coverages as any other scrimmage play, and is responsible to rule on all catches near the end line.

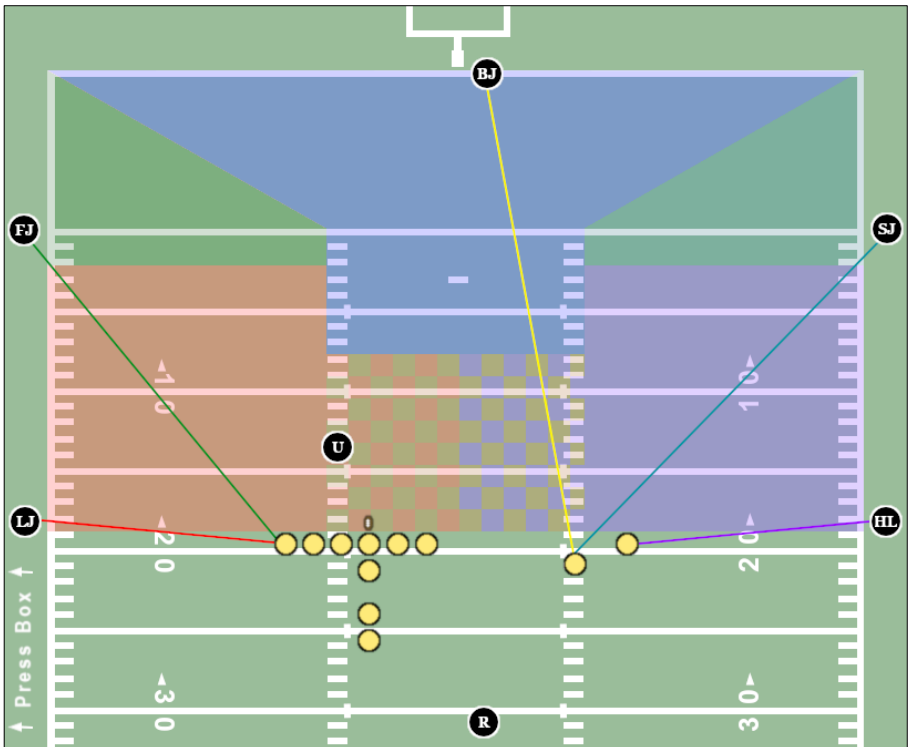
SIDE JUDGE and FIELD JUDGE:**Pre-Snap Positioning and Responsibilities**

- a. The deep wing officials will take their positions on their respective sidelines at the extended goal line.

Play Coverage

- a. The deep wing officials have all of the same play coverages as any other scrimmage play. They will hold their positions and rule on progress inside the 2-yard line or rule on any catch attempt at the endzone sideline.

Goal Line Coverage – From the B-20 to the B-15 – 7-Person Crew



II) **B-15 to B-5**

A) **5-Person Crew**

REFEREE:

There is no difference in pre-snap positioning, responsibilities or play coverage from any other scrimmage play.

UMPIRE:

Pre-Snap Positioning and Responsibilities

- a. The Umpire may take a position slightly deeper than normal to be able to quickly get to a play downed near the goal line.

Play Coverage

- a. The Umpire has all of the same play coverages as any other scrimmage play, except that it is not advisable for the Umpire to move up to the line of scrimmage on a pass unless the quarterback is rolling out toward the sideline.
- b. On a play that ends near the goal line, the Umpire should move quickly to secure the ball's position until a ruling can be made by the covering official(s).
- c. While the Umpire may indicate using a "punch" signal when he is certain that the ball crossed the goal line, he will never give a signal for forward progress or touchdown.

HEAD LINESMAN and LINE JUDGE:

Play Coverage

- a. The line of scrimmage officials have all the same play coverages for passes as any other scrimmage play.
- b. If there is a run in the middle of the field, both line of scrimmage officials should attempt to remain *slightly ahead* of the ball carrier in order to ensure the goal line is covered if it is threatened.
- c. For runs to the outside of the formation, the sideline official which the ball carrier is running toward should maintain his normal positioning by allowing the runner to pass his position; but the line of scrimmage official on the opposite

side of the field should attempt to remain slightly ahead of the ball carrier.

BACK JUDGE:

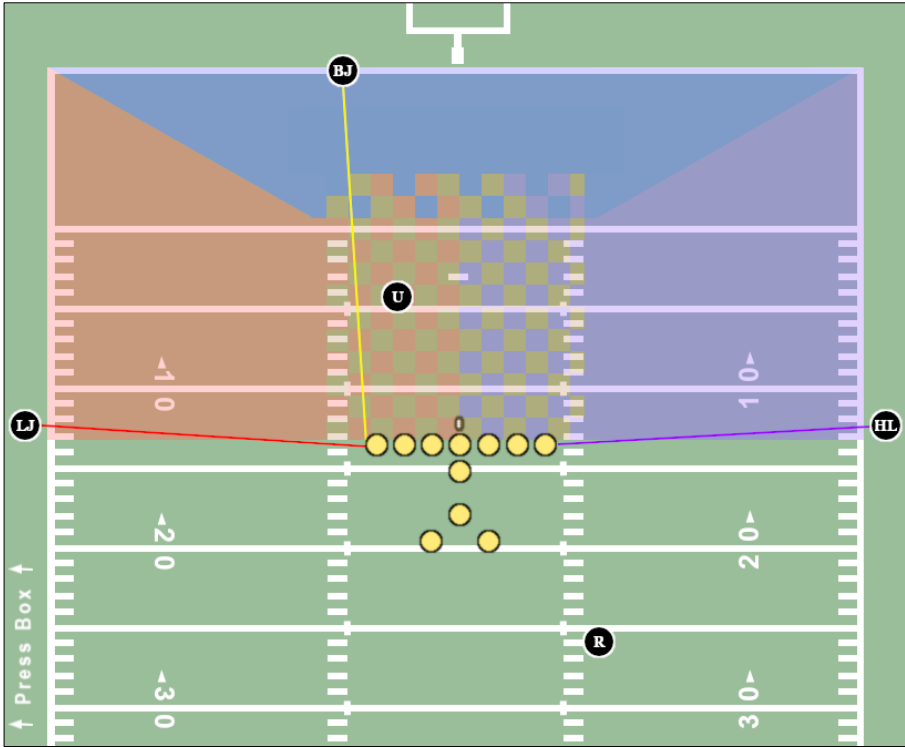
Pre-Snap Positioning and Responsibilities

- a. The Back Judge will take a position on the end line between the hash marks. His location between the hash marks is determined by the formation: If a balanced formation, the Back Judge will be positioned toward the wide side of the field. If one side of the formation is stronger than the other, the Back Judge will be positioned toward the strong side of the field.

Play Coverage

- a. The Back Judge has all of the same play coverages as any other scrimmage play, and is responsible to rule on all catches near the end line.
- b. In necessary on a pass short of the goal line or a clear run play, the Back Judge will attempt to move up to the goal line in the middle of the field to *assist* with progress at the goal line.

Goal Line Coverage – From the B-15 to the B-5 – 5-Person Crew



B) 4-Person Crew Modifications

Same pre-snap positioning, responsibilities and play coverage as in a 5-person crew.

C) 7-Person Crew Modifications

BACK JUDGE:

Play Coverage

- a. The Back Judge will hold his position and rule on catches near the end line.

SIDE JUDGE and FIELD JUDGE:

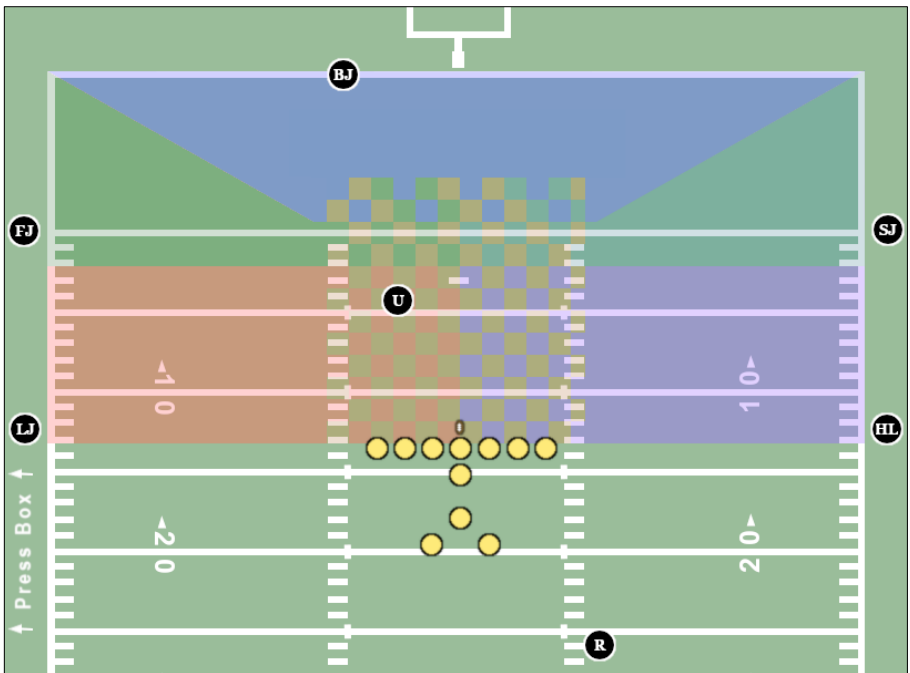
Pre-Snap Positioning and Responsibilities

- a. The deep wing officials will take their positions on their respective sidelines at the extended goal line.

Play Coverage

- a. The deep wing officials have all of the same play coverages as any other scrimmage play. They will hold their positions and rule on progress inside the 2-yard line or rule on any catch attempt at the endzone sideline.

Goal Line Coverage – From the B-15 to the B-5 – 7-Person Crew



III) B-5 and In

A) 5-Person Crew

REFEREE and UMPIRE:

There is no difference in pre-snap positioning, responsibilities or play coverage from any other scrimmage play.

HEAD LINESMAN and LINE JUDGE:

Play Coverage

- a. The line of scrimmage officials have all the same play coverages for passes as any other scrimmage play.
- b. At the snap, both line of scrimmage officials will immediately move to the extended goal line in preparation to rule on progress and a possible touchdown.

BACK JUDGE:

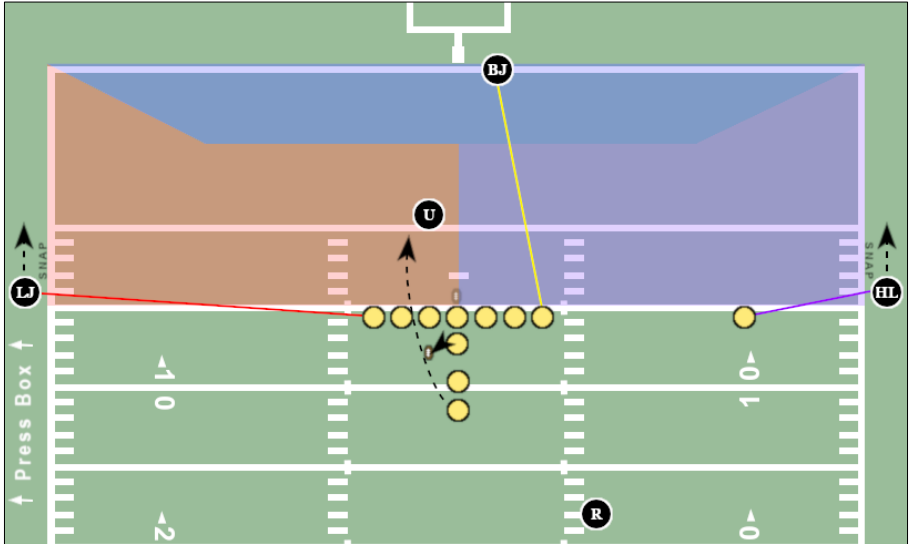
Pre-Snap Positioning and Responsibilities

- a. The Back Judge will take a position on the end line between the hash marks. His location between the hash marks is determined by the formation: If a balanced formation, the Back Judge will be positioned toward the wide side of the field. If one side of the formation is stronger than the other, the Back Judge will be positioned toward the strong side of the field.

Play Coverage

- a. The Back Judge will hold his position and rule on catches near the end line.

Goal Line Coverage – From the B-5 and In – 5-Person Crew



B) 4-Person Crew Modifications

Same pre-snap positioning, responsibilities and play coverage as in a 5-person crew.

C) 7-Person Crew Modifications

SIDE JUDGE and FIELD JUDGE:

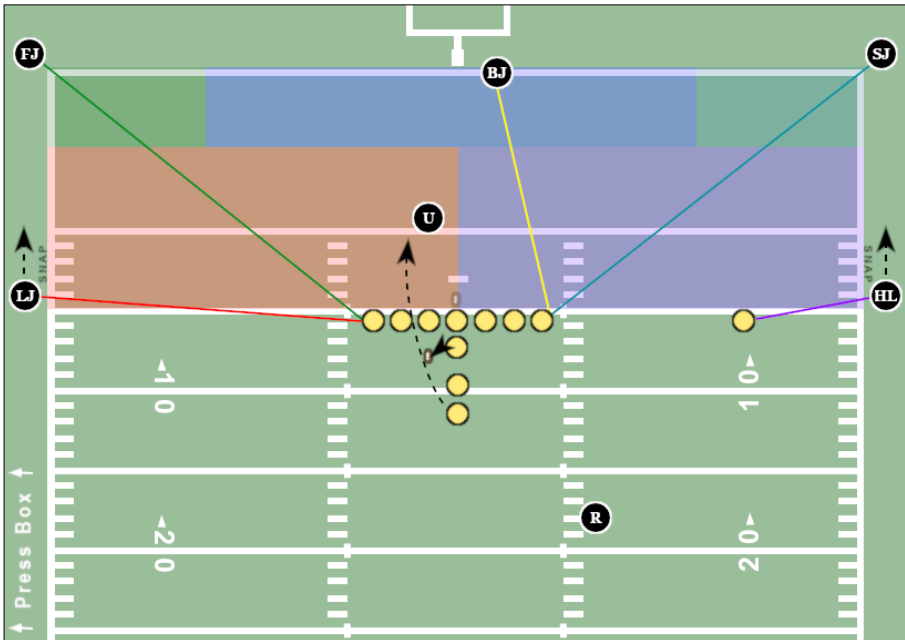
Pre-Snap Positioning and Responsibilities

- a. The deep wing officials will take their positions on their respective sidelines, diagonally outside the end line pylon to be able to easily rule on catch attempts near either the end line or endzone sideline.

Play Coverage

- a. The deep wing officials have all of the same play coverages as any other scrimmage play. If a pass threatens the end line or their endzone sideline, they will pivot to rule on the catch attempt.

Goal Line Coverage – From the B-5 and In – 7-Person Crew



IV) Goal Line to A-5 (Reverse Goal Line Mechanics)

A) 5-Person Crew

REFEREE, UMPIRE and BACK JUDGE:

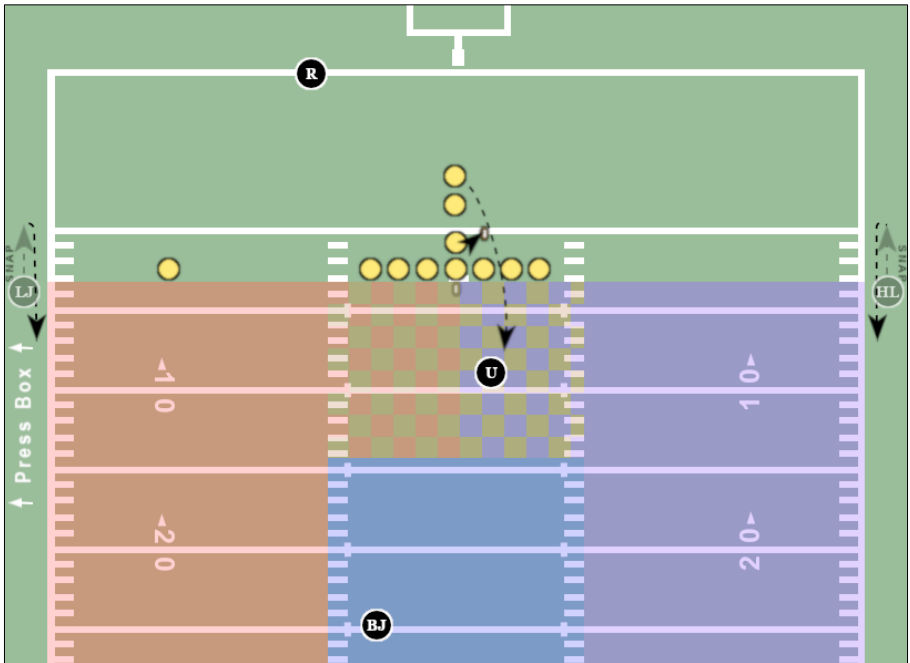
There is no difference in pre-snap positioning, responsibilities or play coverage from any other scrimmage play.

HEAD LINESMAN and LINE JUDGE:

Play Coverage

- a. The line of scrimmage officials have all the same play coverages for passes as any other scrimmage play.
- b. At the snap, both line of scrimmage officials will immediately move *back* to the extended goal line in preparation to rule on progress and a possible safety.

Goal Line Coverage – Reverse Goal Line Mechanics – 7-Person Crew



B) 4-Person Crew Modifications

Same pre-snap positioning, responsibilities and play coverage as in a 5-person crew.

C) 7-Person Crew Modifications

Same pre-snap positioning, responsibilities and play coverage as in a 5-person crew using traditional scrimmage play mechanics.

Section 9: Scrimmage Kicks

I) Punt

A) 5-Person Crew

REFEREE:

Pre-Snap Positioning and Responsibilities

- a. The Referee will take a position approximately five yards to the kicking foot side of the punter and on the yard line of, or just behind, the punter's initial position.
- b. The Referee will count Team K players and then give the appropriate signal. It is also important for the him to note in his mind all eligible receivers if Team K utilizes the numbering exception.

Play Coverage

- a. The Referee will ensure that the ball is handled cleanly on the snap.
- b. He will focus his attention on the blocks in front of the punter. When the first defender gets into the backfield, the Referee will turn his focus on the punter.
- c. If contact is made on the punter by a defender that did not first touch the ball, the Referee must determine whether the contact is Running into the Kicker or Roughing the Kicker. It should be called Running into the Kicker unless one of the following apply, in which case it should be Roughing:
 - Serious contact that could cause potential injury.
 - Contact with the plant leg.
 - Contact that clearly knocks the punter down.

NOTE: When a punter runs with the ball (*i.e., more than a step or two forward or to the side*), he loses his protection unless he clearly stops and reestablishes himself as a kicker.

- d. If the ball has been cleanly kicked away, the Referee should announce something such as, "The ball is away!" He should be able to see both the kicker and the trajectory

of the ball when it's kicked. If the ball appears to be headed out of bounds in flight, the Referee will move to the point where the ball was kicked. If the ball goes out of bounds beyond the sideline restricted area in flight, he will raise his arm. When the corresponding sideline official reaches the yard line that intersects the point of the kick and the point of the end of the kick, the Referee will "chop" his arm to instruct his crewmate where to stop.

- e. If the kick is blocked, the Referee must be prepared for all possibilities, including a run by either team or a pass or another kick by Team K (he must make sure this is legal by definition).
- f. Regardless of the results of the kick, the Referee has the primary responsibility for Team K's goal line and must be in position before the ball reaches it. He should be alert to blocks in front of the ball carrier on a return.
- g. Following the conclusion of the play, the Referee will move to the succeeding spot and organize the crew and teams for the next down.

UMPIRE:

Pre-Snap Positioning and Responsibilities

- a. The Umpire will take a position in the middle of the field behind the defensive linemen, approximately three to four yards off of the line of scrimmage. In most cases, the Umpire will be positioned diagonally opposite of the Referee.
- b. The Umpire will count Team K players and then give the appropriate signal. The Umpire should note in his mind the uniform numbers of the five interior Team K linemen, and he should alert the line of scrimmage officials if a numbering exception applies.
- c. He should remind defensive rushers not to run into or block the snapper until he is clearly in a position to defend himself.

Play Coverage

- a. At the snap, the Umpire will direct his attention on the interior lineman, with particular focus on whether the snapper is provided the opportunity to raise his head and protect himself.
- b. The Umpire should be prepared to adjust if the play is broken, including moving to the line of scrimmage to assist with an illegal forward pass or an ineligible player downfield.
- c. If the kick is made downfield, the Umpire will rotate with the ball and begin observing blocks in front of the returning ball carrier. As the ball approaches his position, he will rotate and continue to follow the play while observing action behind the ball.
- d. If the kick is blocked, the Umpire will be prepared to assist with the determination whether the kick crosses and ends beyond the line of scrimmage.
- e. Following the conclusion of the play, the Umpire will move under control toward the ball. He should be alert to a new ball being rotated in if a change of possession occurs.

HEAD LINESMAN and LINE JUDGE:

Pre-Snap Positioning and Responsibilities

- a. The line of scrimmage officials will take their positions off the field on the sideline (Head Linesman opposite the press box and the Line Judge on the press box side), straddling the extended line of scrimmage.
- b. Each of the line of scrimmage officials will count the players of the team from their own sideline and give the appropriate signal. Each will note the eligible receivers on their side of the field in case of a planned fake or broken play.

Play Coverage

- a. The line of scrimmage official on the same side of the field as the position of the Referee will release downfield as soon as the snap is secured by the punter. He'll then move

downfield approximately 15-20 yards while observing the initial flow of Team K players.

- b. The line of scrimmage official on the opposite side of the field from the Referee will hold his position until the kick crosses the line of scrimmage. He'll then move downfield approximately 15-20 yards while observing action by/against the secondary flow of Team K players.
- c. Each line of scrimmage official responsible to know whether a Team K player that goes out of bounds on his sideline was forced out or went out on his own.
- d. If the ball is kicked out of bounds in flight, but lands within the restricted area, the line of scrimmage official should mark the spot of the ball on his own. If the ball lands beyond the restricted area, the line of scrimmage official will move to the corresponding yard line where the ball lands out of bounds. He'll then turn around and raise his arm to alert the Referee of his position. The official will then walk back toward the line of scrimmage until the Referee signals for him to stop.
- e. If the kick is returned, line of scrimmage officials should be attentive to blocks in front of the ball carrier, and are responsible for forward progress on their side of the field.
- f. The cross-field official will mirror the spot of the covering official and is responsible for clean up in the middle of the field.

BACK JUDGE:

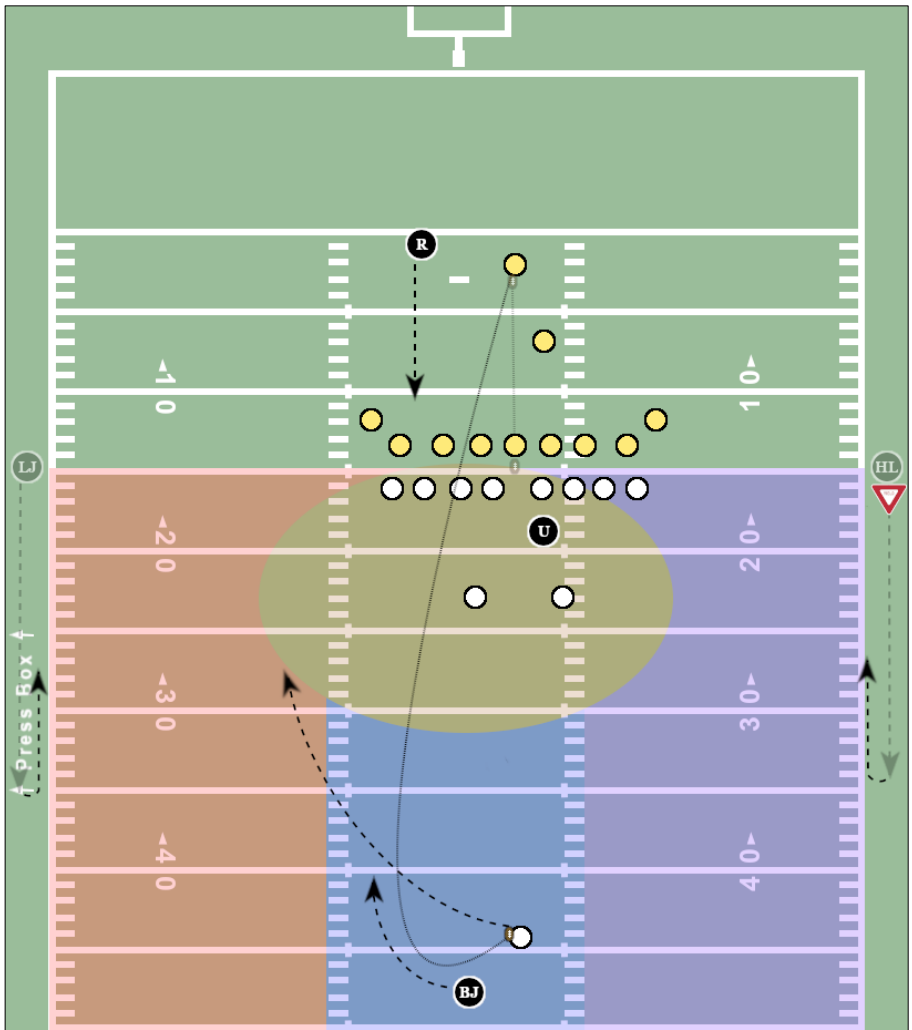
Pre-Snap Positioning and Responsibilities

- a. The Back Judge will take a position in the middle of the field, five yards deeper than the deepest Team R player and approximately five yards to the side of the receiver opposite of the Referee while holding his bean bag. If there are two receivers, he should position himself between them.
- b. The Back Judge will count Team R players and give the appropriate signal.

Play Coverage

- a. Following a clean kick, the Back Judge will adjust his position inside the hash marks to see in front of the receiver to whom the ball is kicked.
- b. When the ball is in the air, the Back Judge will determine the direction of the kick and then concentrate on the receiver(s). He should be alert for a legal or illegal fair catch signal.
- c. As the kick begins to descend, the Back Judge will move his focus to the action immediately in front of the receiver – paying particular attention for blocks in the back, first touching and interference with the opportunity to make the catch.
- d. The Back Judge should use good timing before blowing the play dead on a fair catch. He should always anticipate the ball will be muffed, and must make sure the ball is caught before sounding his whistle.
- e. If the Back Judge recognizes that the kick will land behind the receiver, he will retreat backwards to keep the ball in front of him. He must be at the goal line if the kick threatens it.
- f. The Back Judge will mark the end of the kick with his bean bag. He may also be required to rule on forward progress if the ball is downed before the line of scrimmage officials are in position downfield.
- g. If the kick is returned, the Back Judge will follow behind the ball carrier, keeping the ball between himself and the covering line of scrimmage official. He is responsible for blocks in front of the ball carrier between the hash marks.
- h. Following the conclusion of the play, the Back Judge will help clean up behind the end of the play, and will assist with getting a new ball spotted if a change of possession occurs.

Punt Responsibilities and Approximate Coverage Area – 5-Person Crew



B) 4-Person Crew Modifications

HEAD LINESMAN:

Pre-Snap Positioning and Responsibilities

- a. Same pre-snap positioning and responsibilities as in a 5-person crew.

Play Coverage

- a. The Head Linesman will always be the “hold” official. He will maintain the same play coverage as in a 5-person crew.

LINE JUDGE:

Pre-Snap Positioning and Responsibilities

- a. The Line Judge will take a position on the press box side of the field between the 9-yard marks and near hash marks, five yards deeper than the deepest Team R player while holding his bean bag.

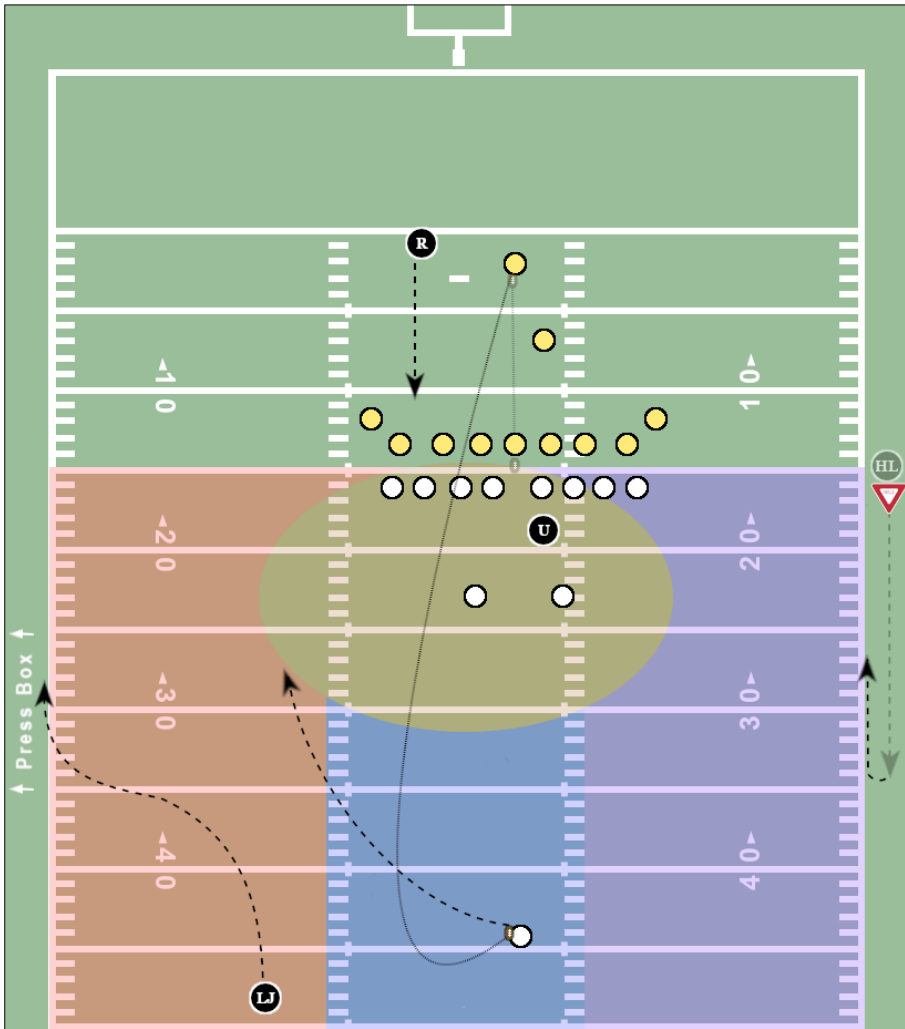
Play Coverage

- a. Following a clean kick, the Line Judge will adjust his position to see in front of the receiver to whom the ball is kicked.
- b. When the ball is in the air, the Line Judge will determine the direction of the kick and then concentrate on the receiver(s). He should be alert for a legal or illegal fair catch signal.
- c. As the kick begins to descend, the Line Judge will move his focus to the action immediately in front of the receiver – paying particular attention for blocks in the back, first touching and interference with the opportunity to make the catch.
- d. The Line Judge should use good timing before blowing the play dead on a fair catch. He should always anticipate the ball will be muffed, and must make sure the ball is caught before sounding his whistle.
- e. If the Line Judge recognizes that the kick will land behind the receiver, he will retreat backwards to keep the ball in

front of him. He must be at the goal line if the kick threatens it.

- f. The Line Judge will mark the end of the kick with his bean bag.
- g. If the ball is kicked out of bounds on the press box side of the field, the Line Judge will immediately move to the intersecting yard line located on the sideline where the ball first landed. He'll then turn around and raise his arm to alert the Referee of his position. The official will then walk back toward the line of scrimmage until the Referee signals for him to stop.
- h. If the kick is returned, the Line Judge will observe blocks in front of the ball carrier while following behind the play and gradually moving toward the press box sideline. He must be positioned on the sideline if the return threatens it.
- i. The Line Judge is responsible for marking forward progress if the ball is downed immediately and for any returns to the press box side of the field. If the return is to the opposite side of the field, the Line Judge will focus on blocks in front of the ball carrier.

Punt Responsibilities and Approximate Coverage Area – 4-Person Crew



C) 7-Person Crew Modifications

HEAD LINESMAN and LINE JUDGE:

Pre-Snap Positioning and Responsibilities

- a. The line of scrimmage officials will take the same positions as in the 5-person system.

Play Coverage

- a. Both line of scrimmage official will hold their positions until the kick crosses the line of scrimmage. They'll then move downfield approximately 15-20 yards while observing action by/against the secondary flow of Team K players from the middle of the field to their respective sidelines.
- b. If the ball is returned, the line of scrimmage officials will give ground and attempt to remain approximately 20 yards in front of the play. They should maintain a wide vision and observe blocks ahead of the ball carrier. Line of scrimmage officials are responsible for the forward progress spot inside the Team K 2-yard line.
- c. Following the conclusion of the play when they don't have forward progress responsibilities, the line of scrimmage officials will clean up around the play and will assist with exchanging footballs.

SIDE JUDGE and FIELD JUDGE:

Pre-Snap Positioning and Responsibilities

- a. The deep wing officials will take their positions off the field (Side Judge opposite the press box and the Field Judge on the press box side), approximately even with the deepest receiver.

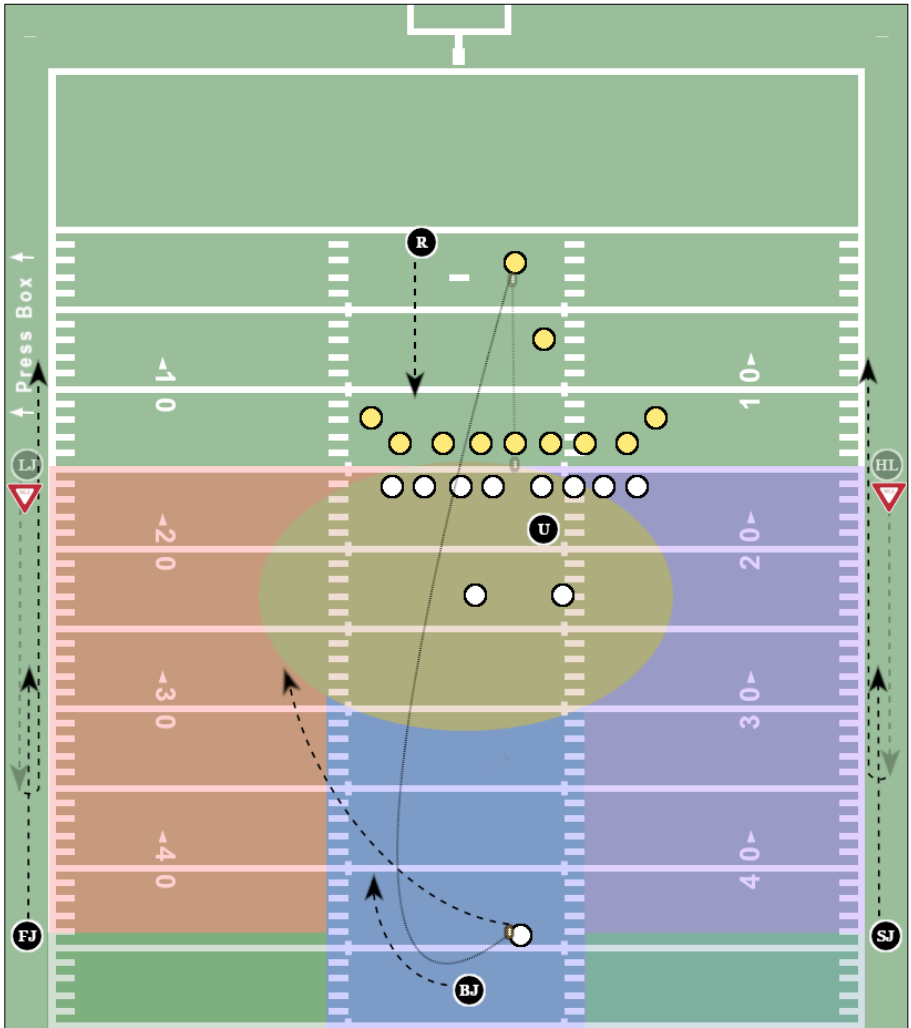
NOTE: The deep wing officials will take an initial position on the extended goal line when the snap for a punt will take place on or inside the Team R 40-yardline.

- b. The deep wing officials will count Team R players and give the appropriate signal.

Play Coverage

- a. At the snap, the deep wing officials will focus on the blocks by/against the first flow of Team K players, being especially alert to the outside “flyers” from their respective sides of the field.
- b. As the kick begins to descend, the deep wing officials will move their focus to the action immediately in front of the receiver – paying particular attention for blocks in the back and first touching.
- c. The deep wing officials must anticipate that the kick may be muffed, and should be prepared to assist the Back Judge in determining whether the receiver makes a legal or illegal fair catch signal or downs the ball immediately.
- d. If the deep wing officials recognize that the kick will land behind the receiver, they will retreat backwards to remain behind the ball. They must be at the goal line if the kick threatens it.
- e. If the kick is returned, the deep wing officials should be attentive to blocks in front of the ball carrier, and they are responsible for forward progress on their side of the field up to the Team K 2-yard line.
- f. The cross-field official will mirror the spot of the covering official and is responsible for clean up in the middle of the field.

Punt Responsibilities and Approximate Coverage Area – 7-Person Crew



II) Field Goal and Try

A) 5-Person Crew

REFEREE:

Pre-Snap Positioning and Responsibilities

- a. The Referee will take a position approximately 8-10 yards away and facing the holder. To open up his field of vision, the Referee may be positioned up to five yards deeper than the holder. He should be angled so that he is able to see the kicker, holder and any other players located in the backfield.
- b. The Referee will count Team A/K players and give the appropriate signal.
- c. For tries, he will signal “untimed down” and then the ready-for-play.

Play Coverage (Field Goals and Tries)

- a. At the snap, the Referee will focus his attention on the action by/against the blocking backs, particularly looking for holds and illegal blocks.
- b. When the first Team B/R player gets past a blocker and penetrates the backfield, the Referee should focus his attention on the action against the holder and kicker. He should be alert to defenders contacting the holder or kicker.
NOTE: A place kicker may continue to remain vulnerable even after returning his kicking foot to the ground, and he should be provided extended protection.
- c. Following a clean kick beyond the line of scrimmage, the Referee will remain focused on the action in the backfield. He'll then look to the officials under the uprights for a ruling on the kick, and then give the final ruling to the press box.
- d. If a fake kick or broken play occurs, the Referee will officiate the play the same as any regular scrimmage play.

Play Coverage (Field Goal Only)

- a. If the kick is blocked or is short of the goal line, he will officiate the play the same as a punt. The Referee must be prepared for all possibilities, including a run by either team or a pass or another kick by Team A/K (he must make sure this is legal by definition).
- b. If the live ball is recovered and returned by Team B/R, the Referee is responsible to cover Team K's goal line using reverse mechanics.

Play Coverage (Try Only)

- a. Because there is nothing possible other than the try being good or no good, the Referee will sound his whistle after the ball has been kicked.
- b. If the kick is blocked or is short of the goal line, the Referee will signal that the try was no good.

UMPIRE:

Pre-Snap Positioning and Responsibilities

- a. Prior to moving to his position, the Umpire will instruct Team B/R players to avoid hitting the snapper until he has the ability to protect himself.
- b. The Umpire will take a position on Team B/R's end line, just behind the upright located opposite the press box.

Play Coverage (Field Goals and Tries)

- a. At the snap, the Umpire will focus his attention on the action between (and including) the offensive guards, particularly looking for roughing the snapper, hurdling, holding and defensive players using teammates to gain height through leverage.
- b. If the ball is kicked cleanly, the Umpire has the responsibility to rule whether the ball passes entirely within the upright on his side. He should only signal if the ball is adjudged narrowly within his upright, or when it's clearly

good or clearly wide. The Umpire should not signal at all if it is a close decision near the Back Judge's upright.

- c. After judging the kick, the Umpire will hold his signal long enough to allow the Referee to complete his responsibilities before looking to him for a ruling.
- d. When the play ends, the Umpire will ensure all action between opposing linemen has ended.
- e. If a field goal attempt is successful, or following a try, the Umpire should begin clearing the sideline for the kickoff.

Play Coverage (Field Goal Only)

- a. If a fake kick or broken play occurs, or the kick is blocked or short of the goal line, the Umpire will immediately move to the goal line to rule whether a kick reaches the goal line (*i.e., touchback*) or to assist the line of scrimmage officials for forward progress on a run or pass play.
- b. The Umpire is responsible for sounding his whistle when a kick reaches the goal line, whether it scores or not. In all other situations, he should officiate the play from the inside-out.
- c. If the kick is returned, the Umpire will follow behind the play, looking for blocks away from the ball carrier.

Play Coverage (Try Only)

- a. If a fake kick or broken play occurs, the Umpire will immediately move to the goal line to assist the line of scrimmage officials for forward progress on a run or pass.

HEAD LINESMAN and LINE JUDGE:

Pre-Snap Positioning and Responsibilities

- a. The line of scrimmage officials will take their positions off the field on the sideline (Head Linesman opposite the press box and the Line Judge on the press box side), straddling the extended line of scrimmage.
- b. Each of the line of scrimmage officials will count the players of the team from their own sideline and give the appropriate

signal. Each will note the eligible receivers on their side of the field in case of a planned fake or broken play.

Play Coverage (Field Goals and Tries)

- a. At the snap, the line of scrimmage officials will take a quick glance into the backfield to determine whether Team A/K is attempting a fake. If not, they will focus their attention on the action at the line of scrimmage – being especially alert to holds on rushers coming around the ends.
- b. If they recognize a fake or broken play, the line of scrimmage officials will officiate as they would on any regular scrimmage play. If their starting positions are inside the 5-yard line, they will move to the goal line.

Play Coverage (Field Goal Only)

- a. If the ball is kicked cleanly, the line of scrimmage officials should move downfield and officiate as they would following a punt. They are responsible for forward progress on any return by Team R.
- b. If the kick is blocked, the line of scrimmage officials will officiate as they would for any regular scrimmage play, except that they must be prepared for the possibility of another kick by Team K.

Play Coverage (Try Only)

- a. If the ball is kicked, the line of scrimmage officials will immediately move in toward the middle of the field to help clean up all dead ball action on their sides of the field.

BACK JUDGE:

Pre-Snap Positioning and Responsibilities

- a. The Back Judge will take a position on Team R's end line, just behind the upright located on the press box side of the field.
- b. The Back Judge will count the members of the defensive team and give the appropriate signal.

Play Coverage (Field Goals and Tries)

- a. At the snap, the Back Judge will focus his attention on the action from offensive guard-to-guard, particularly looking for roughing the snapper, hurdling, defensive players using teammates to gain height through leverage and holding.
- b. If the ball is kicked cleanly, the Back Judge has the responsibility to rule whether the ball passes entirely within the upright on his side, and also whether it clears the crossbar. He should only signal if the ball is adjudged narrowly within his upright, or when it's clearly good or clearly wide. The Back Judge should not signal at all if it is a close decision near the Umpire's upright.
- c. After judging the kick, the Back Judge will hold his signal long enough to allow the Referee to complete his responsibilities before looking to the him for a ruling.
- d. When the play ends, the Back Judge will ensure all action between opposing linemen has ended.
- e. If a field goal attempt is successful, or following a try, the Back Judge will retrieve the ball that will be used for the succeeding kickoff.

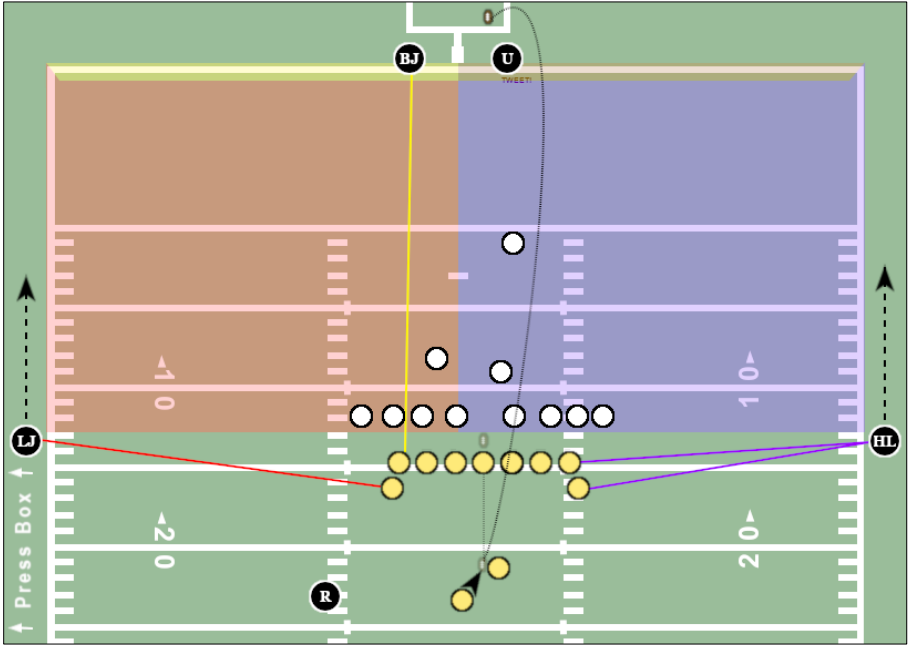
Play Coverage (Field Goal Only)

- a. If a fake kick or broken play occurs, or the kick is blocked or short of the goal line, the Back Judge will hold his position on the end line and will officiate the play as normal. He should be prepared, as the only official at the goalpost, to rule on whether a kick scores during a subsequent play.
- b. If the kick is returned, the Back Judge will follow behind the play, looking for blocks away from the ball carrier.

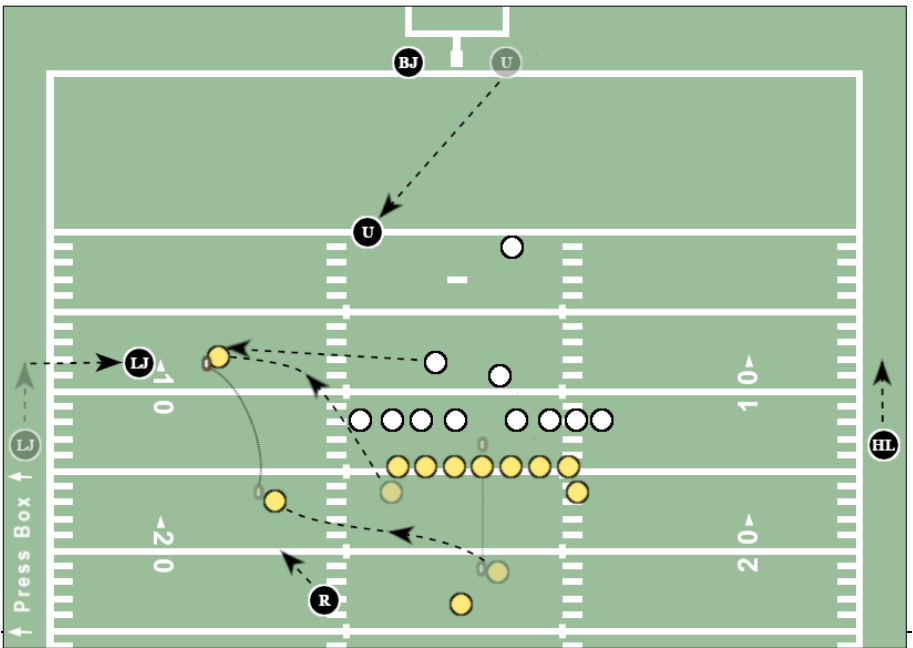
Play Coverage (Try Only)

- a. If a fake kick or broken play occurs, the Back Judge will hold his position on the end line and will officiate the play as normal.

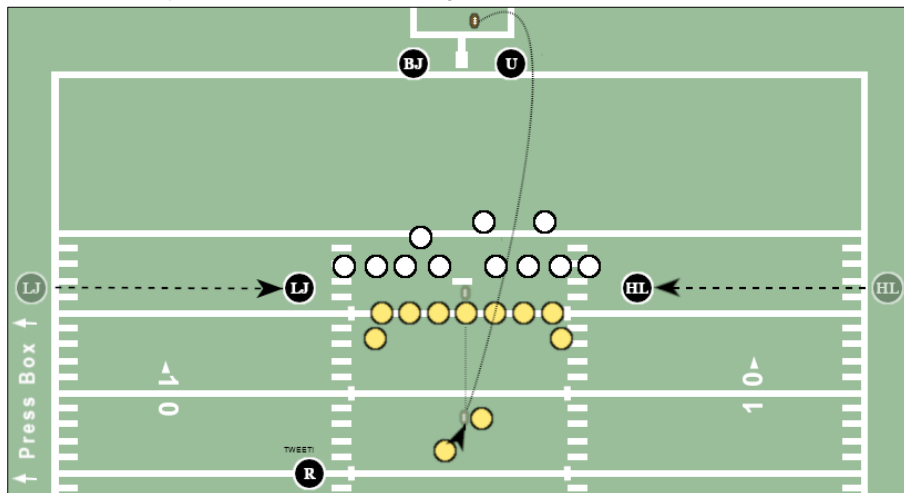
Field Goal Responsibilities, Coverage and Mechanics – 5-Person Crew



Fake Field Goal Responsibilities, Coverage and Mechanics – 5-Person Crew



Kick Try Responsibilities, Coverage and Mechanics – 5-Person Crew



B) 4-Person Crew Modifications

REFEREE:

Pre-Snap Positioning and Responsibilities

- a. The Referee will take a position approximately five yards away, five yards behind and facing the holder.

NOTE: The ideal position for the Referee is in line with the upright located opposite the holder. He may adjust his position nearer or farther away from the holder to better achieve this position, while maintaining a distance from the holder of 5-10 yards.
- b. The Referee will count Team A/K players and give the appropriate signal.
- c. For tries, he will signal “untimed down” and then the ready-for-play.

Play Coverage (Field Goals and Tries)

- a. At the snap, the Referee will focus his attention on the action by/against the blocking backs, particularly looking for holds and illegal blocks.

- b. When the first Team B/R player gets past a blocker and penetrates the backfield, the Referee turn his focus to the action against the holder and kicker. He should be alert to defenders contacting the holder or kicker.
- c. Following a clean kick beyond the line of scrimmage, the Referee will turn with the ball and line up his position with the upright on his side of the field. He has the responsibility to rule whether the ball passes entirely within the upright on his side.
- d. If it is a close decision near the crossbar or the Umpire's upright, the Referee should wait for the Umpire to signal before signaling the final ruling to the press box.
- e. If a fake kick or broken play occurs, the Referee will officiate the play the same as any regular scrimmage play.

Play Coverage (Field Goal Only)

- a. If the kick is blocked or is short of the goal line, he will officiate the play the same as a punt. The Referee must be prepared for all possibilities, including a run by either team or a pass or another kick by Team A/K (he must make sure this is legal by definition).
- b. If the ball is kicked in a second attempt to score a field goal, the Referee will be primarily responsible for ruling whether the kick scored (including the crossbar and both uprights).
- c. If the live ball is recovered and returned by Team B/R, the Referee is responsible to cover Team K's goal line using reverse mechanics.

UMPIRE:

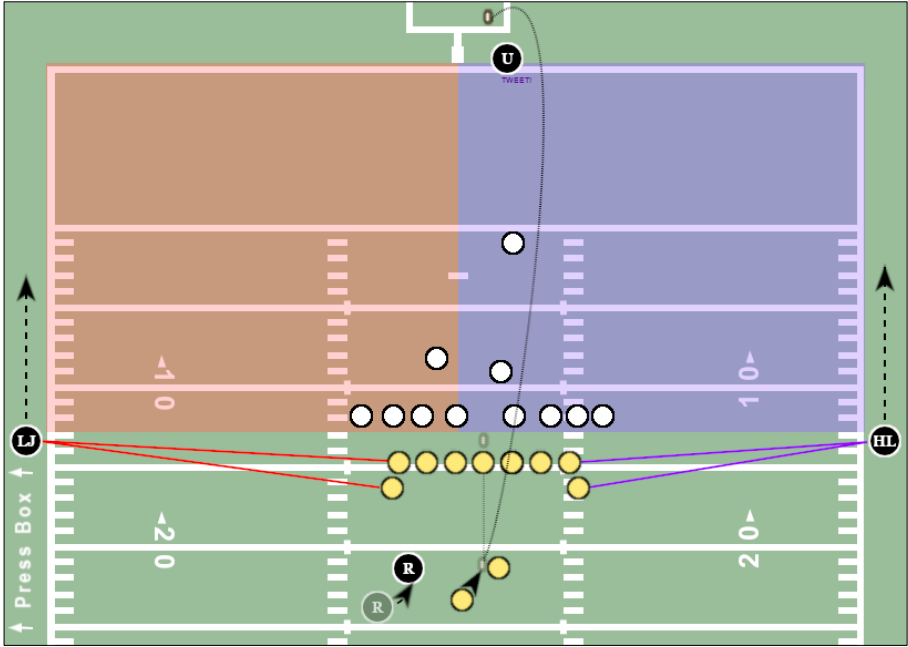
Pre-Snap Positioning and Responsibilities

- a. The Umpire will take a position on Team R's end line, just behind the upright located opposite the position of the Referee.

Play Coverage (Field Goals and Tries)

- a. At the snap, the Umpire will focus his attention on the action between (and including) the offensive guards, particularly looking for roughing the snapper, hurdling, defensive players using teammates to gain height through leverage and holding.
- b. If the ball is kicked cleanly, the Umpire has the responsibility to rule whether the ball passes entirely within the upright on his side, and also whether it clears the crossbar. He should only signal if the ball is adjudged narrowly within his upright, or when it's clearly good or clearly wide. The Umpire should not signal at all if it is a close decision near the Referee's upright.
- c. After judging the kick, the Umpire will hold his signal long enough to allow the Referee to complete his responsibilities before looking to him for a ruling.
- d. When the play ends, the Umpire will ensure all action between opposing linemen has ended.
- e. If a field goal attempt is successful, or following a try, the Umpire should begin clearing the sideline for the kickoff.

Field Goal Responsibilities, Coverage and Mechanics – 4-Person Crew



C) 7-Person Crew Modifications

UMPIRE:

Pre-Snap Positioning and Responsibilities

- The Umpire will take a position 5-8 yards behind the defensive line of scrimmage and just outside of the offensive guard on the side of the field opposite the press box (mirrored position of the Back Judge).

Play Coverage (Field Goals and Tries)

- At the snap, the Umpire will focus his attention on the action between (and including) the offensive guards, particularly looking for roughing the snapper and holding.
- When the play ends, the Umpire will ensure all action between opposing linemen has ended.
- If a field goal attempt is successful, or following a try, the Umpire should begin clearing the sideline for the kickoff.

Play Coverage (Field Goal Only)

- a. If a fake kick or broken play occurs, or the kick is blocked or short of the goal line, the Umpire will immediately move to the line of scrimmage with the responsibility for illegal forward passes near the line of scrimmage, ineligible downfield and whether a pass is behind or beyond the line of scrimmage.
- b. He will then officiate the play the same as with any regular scrimmage play, observing action from the inside out.
- c. If the kick is returned, the Umpire will open with the ball and follow behind the play, looking for blocks away from the ball carrier.

BACK JUDGE:

Pre-Snap Positioning and Responsibilities

- a. The Back Judge will take a position 5-8 yards behind the defensive line of scrimmage and just outside of the offensive guard on the press box side of the field (mirrored position of the Umpire).

Play Coverage (Field Goals and Tries)

- a. At the snap, the Back Judge will focus his attention on the action between (and including) the offensive guards, particularly looking hurdling and defensive players using teammates to gain height through leverage.
- b. When the play ends, the Back Judge will ensure all action between opposing linemen has ended.
- c. If a field goal attempt is successful, or following a try, the Back Judge will retrieve the ball that will be used for the succeeding kickoff.

Play Coverage (Field Goal Only)

- a. If a fake kick or broken play occurs, or the kick is blocked or short of the goal line, the Back Judge will hold his position.
- b. He will then officiate the play by observing action from the inside out, being especially alert for ineligible downfield.

- c. If the kick is returned, the Back Judge will open with the ball and follow behind the play, looking for blocks away from the ball carrier.

Play Coverage (Try Only)

- a. If a fake kick or broken play occurs, the Back Judge will hold his position and officiate from the inside out.

SIDE JUDGE:

Pre-Snap Positioning and Responsibilities

- a. The Side Judge will take a position on Team R's end line, just behind the upright located opposite the press box.
- b. The Side Judge will count Team B/R players and give the appropriate signal.

Play Coverage (Field Goals and Tries)

- a. If the ball is kicked cleanly, the Side Judge has the responsibility to rule whether the ball passes entirely within the upright on his side. He should only signal if the ball is adjudged narrowly within his upright, or when it's clearly good or clearly wide. The Side Judge should not signal at all if it is a close decision near the Field Judge's upright.
- b. After judging the kick, the Side Judge will hold his signal long enough to allow the Referee to complete his responsibilities before looking to him for a ruling.
- c. If a field goal attempt is successful, or following a try, the Side Judge should begin clearing his sideline for the kickoff.

Play Coverage (Field Goal Only)

- a. If a fake kick or broken play occurs, or the kick is blocked or short of the goal line, the Side Judge will immediately move to the goal line to rule whether a kick reaches the goal line (touchback) or to assist the line of scrimmage officials for forward progress on a run or pass play.
- b. The Side Judge is responsible for sounding his whistle when a kick reaches the goal line, whether it scores or not.

- c. If the kick is returned, the Side Judge will follow behind the play and gradually move toward the sideline opposite the press box – though he will not have forward progress responsibilities for returns by Team R.

Play Coverage (Try Only)

- a. If a fake kick or broken play occurs, the Side Judge will hold his position on the end line and be responsible to rule on a pass play at the end line, from the goal post to the pylon on his side of the field.

FIELD JUDGE:

Pre-Snap Positioning and Responsibilities

- a. The Field Judge will take a position on Team R's end line, just behind the upright located on the press box side of the field.
- b. The Field Judge will count Team B/R players and give the appropriate signal.

Play Coverage (Field Goals and Tries)

- a. If the ball is kicked cleanly, the Field Judge has the responsibility to rule whether the ball passes entirely within the upright on his side, and also whether it clears the crossbar. He should only signal if the ball is adjudged narrowly within his upright, or when it's clearly good or clearly wide. The Field Judge should not signal at all if it is a close decision near the Side Judge's upright.
- b. After judging the kick, the Field Judge will hold his signal long enough to allow the Referee to complete his responsibilities before looking to the him for a ruling.
- c. If a field goal attempt is successful, or following a try, the Field Judge should begin clearing his sideline for the kickoff.

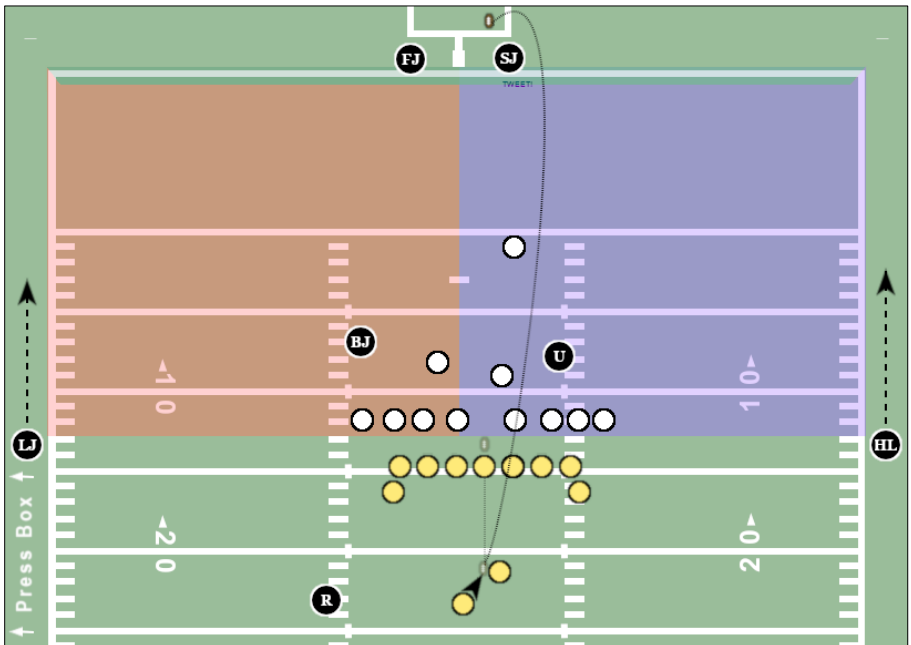
Play Coverage (Field Goal Only)

- a. If a fake kick or broken play occurs, or the kick is blocked or short of the goal line, the Field Judge will hold his position on the end line and will be responsible to rule on any pass play for the entire end line. He should be prepared, as the only official at the goalpost, to rule on whether a kick scores during a subsequent play.
- b. If the kick is returned, the Field Judge will follow behind the play and gradually move toward the press box sideline – though he will not have forward progress responsibilities for returns by Team R.

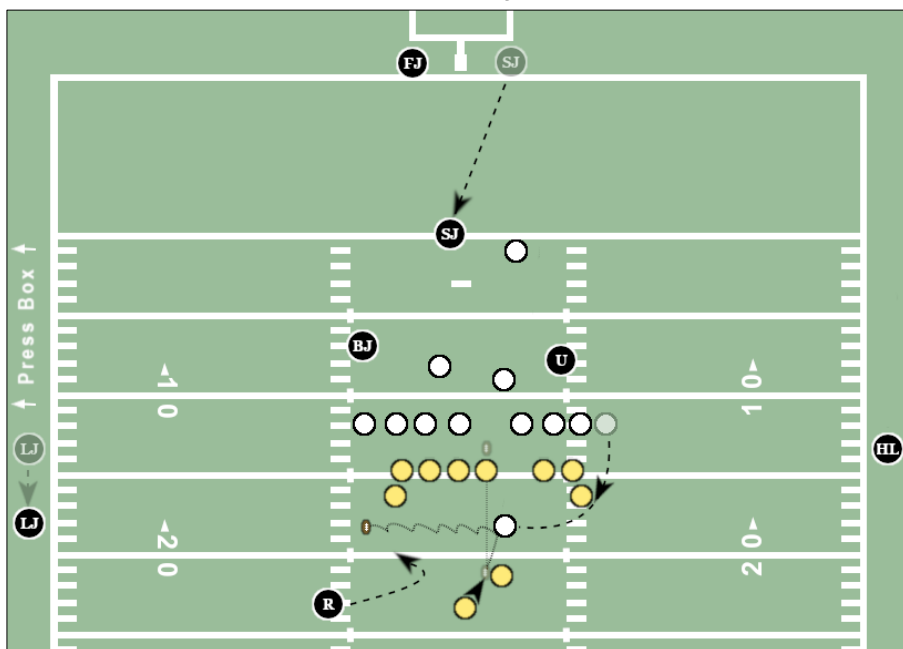
Play Coverage (Try Only)

- a. If a fake kick or broken play occurs, the Field Judge will hold his position on the end line and be responsible to rule on a pass play at the end line, from the goal post to the pylon on his side of the field.

Field Goal Responsibilities, Coverage and Mechanics – 7-Person Crew



Blocked Field Goal Responsibilities, Coverage and Mechanics – 5-Person Crew



III) Swinging Gate Coverage

Variations of these types of formations are primarily used for tries but may occur at any time. The same principles apply for anytime the offense assumes a formation that spreads the traditional lineman horizontally across the field and staggers eligible and ineligible players (by number) on the line of scrimmage. This becomes especially important if the numbering exception is being used, as eligible players (by number) may be ineligible for the entire down based on their initial position on the line of scrimmage.

The formation is designed to spread the defense across the field. If the offense notices a vulnerability in the defensive formation, they may snap from this position and attempt to advance with a pass or run. Some plays that are commonly run out of this formation include:

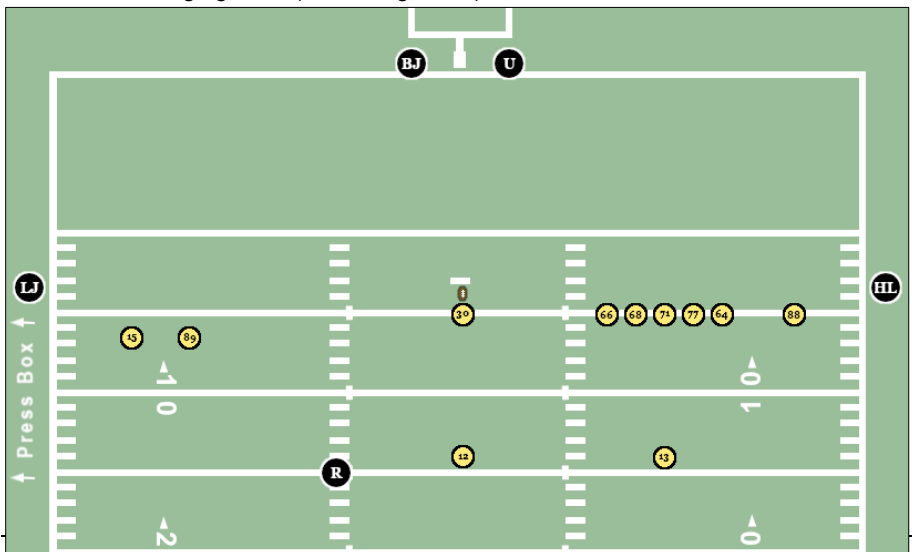
- A direct snap (not between the snapper’s legs) to a back positioned behind lineman on a far side of the formation.

- The holder receives the snap and makes a pass to an eligible receiver (including, in some instances, the snapper).
- The ball is snapped to the holder, who then pitches to the kicker that attempts to advance with a run or pass.

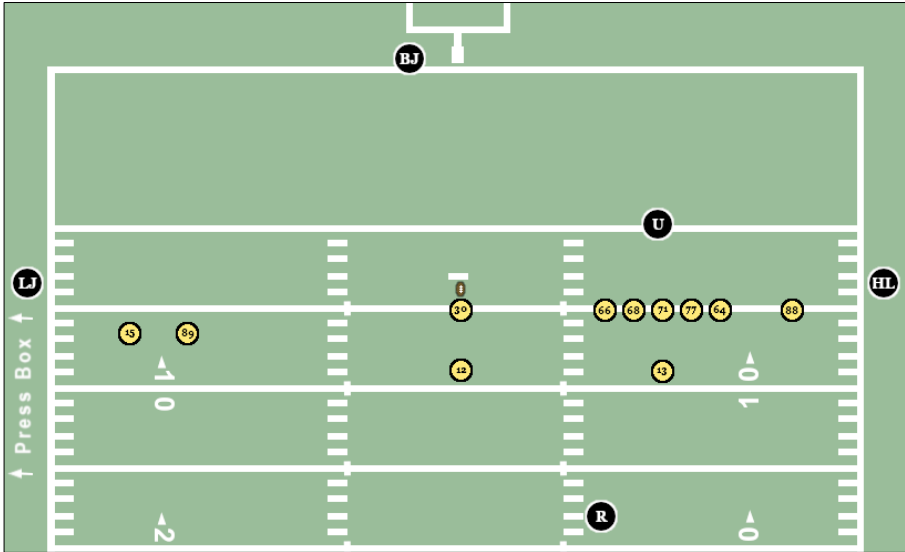
If the defense appears to have good coverage of those options, the offense will often then shift back into a traditional scrimmage kick formation. Remember that the reason for the one-second required “absolute stop” following a shift is to allow the defense and the officials to determine which players are eligible receivers. Since this formation is clearly designed to confuse the defense, err on the side of flagging for an illegal shift when it is a close call as to whether players come stopped for one second following a shift.

As long as the offense is in a scrimmage kick formation, *i.e.*, **no player in position for a hand-to-hand snap and at least one player 10 yards behind the neutral zone or a potential holder and kicker at least seven yards behind the neutral zone**, the crew should remain in position for a kick. If the ball is not kicked (or blocked on a field goal attempt), officials should adjust their positions to cover the run or pass play accordingly.

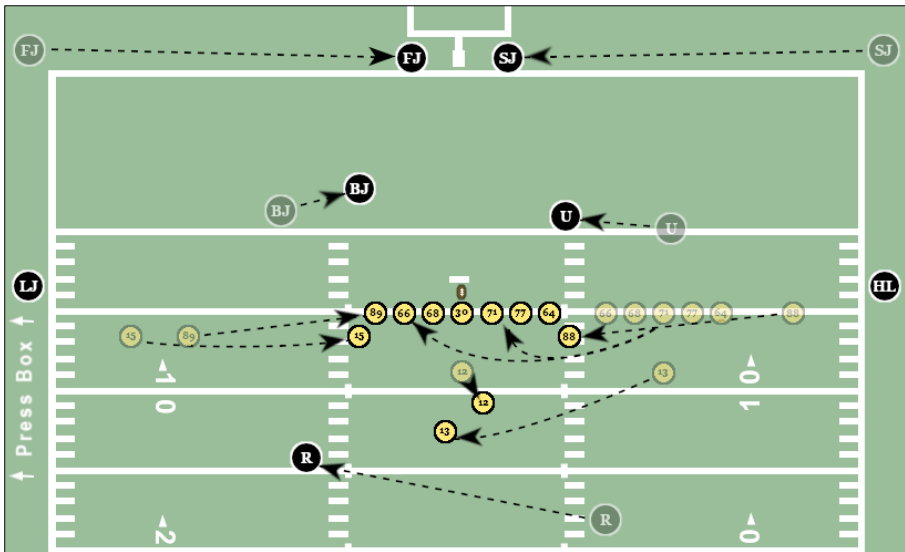
Swinging Gate (Scrimmage Kick) Formation – 5-Person Crew



Swing Gate (Scrimmage Play) Formation – 5-Person Crew



Swinging Gate Formation – Shift into Kick Formation – 7-Person Crew



NOTE: When the offense lines up in a formation that does not include a kicker (at least 10 yards) or a holder and kicker (at least 7 yards), the crew will take their positions as with any other scrimmage play. When the offense shifts into the kick formation, the officials will also shift into position for the expected kick.

Often the biggest challenge for these types of formations is determining which players are eligible receivers during the down. The first thing the crew must know is whether the offense is utilizing the numbering exception, which is only permitted in scrimmage kick formations. If they are not using the numbering exception, eligible receiver will be determined by number and position.

However, if they lineup in a scrimmage kick formation with at least seven players on the line of scrimmage, but less than five numbered 50-79, they are utilizing the numbering exception. Under these conditions, the snapper and any other players under the exception must be positioned between the ends and are ineligible for the down.

Section 10: Approved MHSAA Signals

The signals outlined in this manual are designed to provide a clear and consistent explanation of action that occurs throughout the course of the game. They are an essential part of officiating and provide information to players, coaches and spectators. For this reason, only approved signals should be utilized when working MHSAA contests.

If you have suggestions for signals that should/should not be utilized (or acceptable alternatives), please do not hesitate to share those suggestions with the MHSAA office for consideration and addition to this manual.

Ready for Play

Untimed Down

Wind the Game Clock

Stop the Clock

Media Timeout

Touchdown/Kick is Good

Safety

Dead Ball

Touchback

First Down

Loss of Down

Incomplete Pass

Tipped Ball

Inadvertent Whistle

Disregard Flag

End of Period

Sideline Warning

First Touching/Illegal Touching

Encroachment

False Start/Illegal Formation

Illegal Motion

Illegal Shift

Delay of Game

Substitution Infraction

Disconcerting Act

Illegal Helmet Contact/Targeting

Illegal Horse-Collar Tackle

Blindside Block

Unsportsmanlike Foul

Illegal Participation

Sideline Interference

Roughing/Running into the Kicker

Illegal Batting/Illegal Kicking

Invalid Fair-Catch Signal

Pass Interference

Roughing the Passer

Illegal Forward Pass/Handing

Intentional Grounding

Ineligible Player Downfield

Personal Foul

Clipping

Block Below the Waist

Chop Block

Holding

Illegal Block in the Back

Helping the Runner/Interlocked Blocking

Face Mask

Tripping

Disqualification/Ejection