

Football Officiating A to C

AWARENESS

Most football fans understand how the down, distance, score and time remaining affect how teams strategize. The same information that helps the guy in the 53rd row can help officials if they use a little common sense.

For example, it's third down and 11. Team A trails by two points with 1:37 to play in the fourth quarter and has the ball on its own 44 yardline. Going without a huddle because it is out of timeouts, team A lines up in a shotgun formation with an empty backfield and three eligible receivers on the right side of the formation.

Gee, do you think a pass is coming? Do you think the receivers will run at least 11-yard routes? Is it likely the quarterback's first look will be to a receiver running a pattern near the sideline?

That is a fairly elementary example, but it illustrates how officials can process information and turn it into proper coverage of a play.

The latter stages of a game are also prime times for flea-flickers or other trick plays, onside kicks, clock-killing spikes (and fake spikes) and other tactics that are less

than routine. Your ability to anticipate them will help determine if you are in proper position to make a big call (or no-call) at the end of a game.

Good officials recognize when trouble between opponents is brewing. It doesn't always happen at the end of a one-sided game when the trailing team figures it has nothing to lose by resorting to cheap shots. Take care of those problems early and you may well prevent a full-scale brawl.

In a nutshell, successful officials not only look the part, act the part and have good judgment. The truly good ones never stop thinking and anticipating.

Communication between officials should be by word and by signal. Every official should signal the down after every play. Officials with player-counting responsibilities must confirm their count among each other. Make sure everyone on the crew knows which team was charged with a timeout and how many timeouts each team has left.

BE SURE

Two acronyms for you to remember are MIBT and GTBO. Those translate to ***Make It Be There***, and ***Get the Big One***.

There is no place in officiating for guesswork. If you only *think* you saw a foul, don't throw the flag. In this technological age, virtually every game you work will be recorded by somebody, be it one of the teams or a parent in the stands. Officials face more scrutiny than ever before. Playoff assignments have been withdrawn over missed calls that showed up on video. That's why it's important to avoid phantom calls. If the foul you thought you saw doesn't show up, you could face repercussions. Make It Be There.

Football officials can steal a page from their baseball brethren and use the pause, read and react method of making calls. When you see a potential foul, pause a moment to be sure what you're seeing truly is a foul. Read the act and determine if the foul had a material affect on the play. Ask yourself if game control or fundamental fairness would be compromised if you didn't make the call. After processing that information and answering those questions, you can react by either throwing the flag or making a no-call.

Get The Big One means giving less attention to fouls that don't matter than those that actually affect the game. We're not advocating ignoring the rules. Rather, the idea is to be sure that fouls that give one player or team an

advantage over an opponent are penalized. For instance, it's better to adopt a "when in doubt, it's a foul" attitude when dealing with a facemask foul than a uniform number that's the wrong color or style.

COMMUNICATE

For some reason, many officials do very little talking on the field, either to players and coaches or to crewmates. They're missing golden opportunities to upgrade their performances.

Wing officials, particularly the line judge, can help the referee by letting him know verbally where a play has ended in relation to the line-to-gain. Simple phrases such as, "They're short," "Take a look; that's pretty close," and "That's a first down," help improve the flow of the game by accelerating the ball-spotting and chain-setting procedures.

Confirm the down with your crewmates after every play. Remind each other of special rules situations such as the fourth-down fumble rule (NCAA) or plays that provide the snapper with protection. If the clock was stopped on the previous play, let the referee know before the ready signal whether the clock starts on the ready or the snap.

Communicate with the coaches when necessary. After a timeout, the wing officials should let the respective coaches know how many timeouts each team has left. Wings should also pass along the numbers of players called for fouls. If the line judge calls a foul on the team whose sideline is on the linesman's side, the linesman should get the number and let the coach know.

Too many officials think the only times captains are necessary are at the coin toss. Make sure you know who the captains are and try to get their names. When talking to them, refer to them as "Mister" or "Captain." Good captains help the officials by taking care of teammates whose actions or comments are bordering on fouls. "Captain Jones, I need some help with your left guard. If I have to, I'll flag him for talking to the opponents, but I'd rather you took care of it so I don't have to." There are literally dozens of other ways in which communication can make a tough job easier. Don't be afraid to speak up when necessary.

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