

Football Officiating G to I

GOAL LINE

When the ball is being snapped from or inside the 10 yard line, be sure you've communicated the information to any official who may have a call involving the goal line. That applies whether the line in question is team A's goal line or team B's goal line.

When the snap is at or inside team B's five yard line, the wings move immediately to the goal line and work back toward the ball if the runner is downed short of the goal line. Don't hesitate to politely tell photographers, ballboys and other non-team personnel to back up to give you the room you need.

The umpire's role on goal line situations is a subject of great debate. Here's our take on it: Because the umpire is parallel rather than perpendicular to the play, the umpire's position makes it next to impossible to determine the spot or rule whether a touchdown has been scored. (For the same reason, *Referee* believes the umpire should never get forward progress spots elsewhere on the field.) The umpire should get the spot from the covering wing official. That means the umpire will almost never signal a

touchdown. Abiding by that mantra means you won't get different signals from the umpire and the wing officials.

Another tip for umpires: Don't position yourself on the goal line. You'll block the view of the wing official. Moving a step or two deeper into the end zone is acceptable in that instance.

The touchdown signal is given only by an official who actually sees the ball in possession of a runner breaking the plane of the goal line. Mirroring the signal is dangerous; if the covering official is incorrect, the crew will find it difficult to overcome two officials making a mistake. If the covering official is correct, there is no need for a second signal.

The referee must be especially aware of attempts by team A to gain an advantage. Such acts as a rolling start (in which the quarterback walks up behind the snapper and, without stopping, puts his hands under center and immediately receives the snap) and helping the runner must be penalized.

HISTORY

Most officials see teams more than once a season or perhaps once every year. The more times you see a team, the more information you can gather and use. Whether it's

the type of offense a team runs (such as the wishbone, wing-T, etc.) or a trick play such as a reverse on a kickoff, a little foreknowledge goes a long way. Every game is a history lesson for the gridiron.

Teams have tendencies — strategies, formations and plays they employ in certain situations. For instance, some teams are “right-handed;” they run behind the right tackle on running plays or short-yardage downs. While it would be risky to focus all of your attention on the tackle on such a play, casting your initial glance in that direction gives you an advantage in officiating the play. In the days leading up to a game involving a team that passes the vast majority of the time, a back judge in particular and all officials in general should review the mechanics and rules revolving around pass plays.

History also refers to previous games between the two teams. Perhaps there was an altercation between opponents the last time the teams played. One team may have revenge on its mind after it was blown out or knocked out of the playoffs the previous year. You must still officiate the game with a “clean slate” attitude, but such information should help you recognize potential problems before they arise.

That sort of information should be exchanged during local association meetings. “Our crew has the Tech-Central game this week. Has anyone had either of the teams this year?” “If anyone has the East-West game this week, I can tell you why the papers are full of ‘revenge’ stories. We had that game last year.” Don’t embellish the stories or offer an alibi as to why your crew may not have handled a situation as well as you’d have liked.

INELIGIBLE & ELIGIBLE RECEIVERS

There are few absolutes in football or in life, but here’s one: If a team A player whose number is 50 through 79 inclusive catches a legal forward pass before it’s touched by an opponent, you should have a flag on the ground. The enforcement will vary depending on which code you’re working, where the foul takes place, etc., but it’s definitely a foul.

If only everything else involving eligible and ineligible receivers was that easy. The point here is that there are 17 potential eligible receivers on every play that begins with a snap (11 on team B, six on team A). Knowing which players fit which category is crucial. On most plays, that’s

easy (as noted above). Complications arise when team A uses an unusual formation or the pass is tipped.

Say you're a wing official and you see team A line up with a wide receiver positioned on the line and a tight end also on the line. That means the tight end is "covered," and is an ineligible pass receiver. That should raise a red flag in your mind — a red flag that should be followed by your gold flag if the tight end is beyond the line of the scrimmage when a legal forward pass crosses the line of scrimmage.

On scoring kick plays in a crew of five, the back judge and line judge should let each other know the numbers of the eligible receivers on the ends of the line. That way, if a bad snap or a fake results in players moving downfield, the deep officials know who's an eligible receiver. The umpire should take special note of players taking advantage of the numbering exception on scrimmage kick plays. It's OK for number 18 to snap the ball, but he's an ineligible receiver nonetheless.

Here's one that happens at least once a season, usually in high school freshman games: A player wearing an ineligible number approaches the referee and says, "I'm eligible." You should respond, of course, by clicking on

your mic and announcing that tidbit to the world. At least, that's how the NFL guys do it. Unfortunately, only NFL rules allow an ineligible to report as an eligible.

How you respond before the ball is snapped depends on your philosophy. One school of thought says have the referee tell the appropriate wing official, who should try to offer the coach a quick explanation of the rule. Another theory is to let the chips fall where they may; the coach should know the rule. Pick your poison, but remember the rules regarding eligibility.

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