

Football Officiating J to L

JOG

A phrase to remember: Don't walk when you can jog and don't jog when you should run. Wing officials who come into the middle of the field to provide a spot or report a penalty should jog back to the sideline. Officials should jog to their positions for a free kick or after a timeout. Don't sprint in those situations, which is often construed as false hustle. Save sprinting for covering a play.

Wing officials who are not responsible for the forward progress spot (such as on a sweep to the other side) have to observe the players not directly involved in the play. That's called "cleaning up after the play." As the players move downfield, move down with them, not ahead of them. That usually requires only a jog as well.

KEYS

Another fundamental of officiating is knowing and observing your keys. By observing keys, officials can discern the type of play, which ensures that players involved in the play will be observed.

Keys are predetermined by the position you are working in the game and can be discerned when team A

lines up in its formation. For instance, in an NFHS crew of five, the back judge's main key is the widest eligible receiver outside the tackle on the strong side of the formation (that will usually be a split end). At the snap, the back judge observes the actions of his key player. If that player moves into another official's coverage area, the back judge gives him up and shifts his attention to players who have entered his coverage area.

In order to determine keys, the officials must recognize the strength of the formation (strong side vs. weak side). Strength has nothing to do with the number (or size) of the offensive linemen on each side of the center. The strong side is the side on which there are more eligible receivers outside of the tackle. The vast majority of the time, that will be the side on which the tight end lines up.

In regard to determining keys, it doesn't matter if a player is on or off the line of scrimmage. For instance, the player closest to the tackle is the back judge's key whether the player is a tight end (directly next to the tackle) or a wide out (split outside the tackle). If players are stacked, the player nearest the line of scrimmage is considered to be the widest. For example, if a wingback is stacked

directly behind the tight end, the tight end is considered the widest and is the wing official's key.

The back judge has priority in determining keys, followed by the wing men. Wing officials should not key the same player as the back judge.

The umpire and referee rely on linemen for their keys. Pulling linemen indicate a sweep or a trap block. Retreating linemen indicate a pass. Charging linemen indicate a running play. When offensive linemen provide only passive resistance, allowing defensive linemen to penetrate the neutral zone, a screen pass often follows.

The referee observes the running backs and quarterback prior to the snap. Once the ball is snapped, he looks through the quarterback to the opposite side tackle. For instance, if the quarterback is right-handed and the referee is properly stationed to the quarterback's right, the key is the left tackle.

The umpire observes the snapper and the guards prior to the snap, then shifts his look to the opposite tackle after the snap. If the keys indicate a run, the umpire must determine the point of attack. A double team or a trap block often occur at the point of attack. Likewise, pulling guards often provide the interference for a sweep or reverse.

Use your keys and you'll go a long way to proper coverage of every play.

LIGHTEN UP

Officiating is a serious business, but that doesn't mean it can't have lighter moments. When you meet the captains, greet them with a smile and a handshake. Use your body language to give the impression that you're approachable.

If a coach or a player cracks a joke during a dead-ball period, respond with a smile or a chuckle. We're not advocating that you respond with a belly laugh or a stand-up comedy routine. But don't feel that you have to be the great stoneface every minute you're on the field.

There are times when levity is not appropriate. Those situations include but are not limited to injury timeouts (you don't want anyone to think you're making light of an injury), a discussion with a coach (smiling during an argument sends the message that you're not taking the coach's comments seriously) and a blowout game (don't make it appear as if you're making fun of the losing team).

If the halftime or postgame conversation among the officials involves a call that may have been missed, don't be afraid to admit a mistake. Accepting responsibility for

errors is one step on the road to learning and ensuring that the mistake isn't repeated. Stand your ground if you think you're right. But if evidence suggests that you were wrong, don't be so stubborn or prideful that you compound the error.

REFEREE.COM
YOUR SOURCE FOR EVERYTHING OFFICIATING

VISIT DAILY FOR UPDATED CONTENT