



A

AWARENESS OF GAME SITUATIONS

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.

B

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 Playoff assignments have been withdrawn over missed calls that showed up on video.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 effect 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.



DOWN & DISTANCE

Every official must know the down and distance before every play. That is as basic to football officiating as knowing the count and number of outs in baseball and softball. Understanding how the game strategy is affected by that information (see "Awareness of game situations") is only part of the need to know.

If the chains or down box should be dislodged or moved improperly, or if a complicated penalty enforcement leads to confusion, a crew that knew the down and distance before the play can straighten out the situation without guesswork.

A linesman should never have to turn away from the field to see if a play has ended beyond the line-to-gain. Only by knowing the distance before the play can the linesman know if the line-to-gain was reached. That means no turning around, which in turn leads to good dead-ball officiating.

Here's a play using NFHS rules that demands knowledge of the down. Tie game, 17 seconds on the clock. Team A has the ball, third and 10 on team B's 27-yard line. Team A decides to go for a field goal. The kick is blocked behind the line. The ball never crosses the line of scrimmage and is recovered by the kicking team. Because the kick came on third down, the clock should continue to run. Team A would need to call a timeout in order to get another chance at the field goal. If you mistakenly thought the ball was snapped on fourth down, you would likely stop the clock, giving team A an unfair advantage.



EQUIPMENT

The tools of the officiating trade include more than just your uniform and your flags, beanbags and whistle. Games go more smoothly when officials give thought to other game-related equipment.

For instance, the chains and down box should be checked for each game to be sure they're in good shape. A piece of tape wrapped around the links at the mid-point of the chain helps the linesman when a five-yard foul may or may not give team A a first down. For instance, the first play of a series is a running play that gains five and a half yards. On second down, a team B player crosses the neutral zone and contacts a team A player before the snap. The linesman can look at the chain, see that the down box is slightly beyond the tape and tell the referee that the penalty will result in a first down. That prevents a measurement while still ensuring that team A gets the first down it earned.

The linesman must instruct the chain crew before the game. Some linesmen and many chain crews will give the meeting short shrift because of the experience of the chain gangs or the official. The meeting is important because not every linesman operates in exactly the same way. The meeting should include a reminder to the chain crew regarding safety. If players approach the sideline, the chain crew should be prepared to drop the sticks and move away from the sideline.

At some higher levels of football, the chain crews consist of experienced officials. If you're lucky enough to have such a chain crew in your games, enlist their help. Consider having the person who puts the clip on the chain chart the penalties for your crew. Bring a small clipboard and a chart with spaces listing when the penalty was called, the nature of the foul, which official or officials called it and whether the penalty was accepted or declined. Some conferences or associations require that the report be turned in to a supervisor. Whether or not that is a requirement in your area, the crew can study the information. If you notice that your crew is calling an inordinate number of holding fouls, for instance, a review of the rules regarding blocking may reveal that some of the calls were unnecessary.

Game balls should be inspected before the game to ensure they are properly inflated. When state high school association rules mandate, the ball must have the NFHS authenticating mark. The goalpost pads and pylons should also be checked to be sure they are properly placed.

This section also refers to player equipment. Before the game, officials should make a casual visual inspection of the players. That can be done while the players are warming up. Issues such as knots in jerseys or tinted eye shields can be corrected or addressed before the game.

FFORMATION

In addition to down, distance and other game factors, offensive and defensive formations provide hints as to what type of play an official can expect in a given situation. Most teams using the wishbone formation, for instance, are predominantly running teams. Teams using four-receiver sets and shotgun formations pass more times than not.

Defensive formations are less revealing but still helpful. Although teams generally use one defensive alignment such as a 4-3 (four down linemen and three linebackers) or 3-4 (three down linemen and four linebackers) as their base defense, the manner in which they deploy players will depend on what scouting or past experience has determined the opposing offense is likely to do in certain situations.

However, observing the safeties and cornerbacks can provide keys. When a defensive back approaches the line of scrimmage as the quarterback is calling signals, he is "showing blitz." Although teams sometimes fake a blitz, officials can use that key to prepare their coverage for the play. Expect a back to eschew going out for a pass in favor of staying behind the line to help protect the passer. Those blocks can sometimes be double-teams (raising the possibility of a chop block), a cut block (which may be illegal depending on the location of the ball or the players involved when the block occurs) or holds (because not all backs are skilled blockers).

GGOALLINE

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

When the snap is at or inside team B's five yardline, the wings move immediately to the goalline and work back toward the ball if the runner is downed short of the goalline. 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 goalline 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 goalline. 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 break the plane of the goalline. 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.

H 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.

I 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 result 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.

J 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.

K 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.

L 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.

M MOTION

When a team A player goes in motion, every official on the field should take notice. Before the snap, the official away from whom the player is moving has to make sure the man in motion doesn't cut upfield before the snap. The referee has to make sure team A doesn't have two men in motion. The back judge has to know if the motion has change the strength of the formation because that will change his key (see "Keys"). Officials should also notice how team B responds to the motion. Perhaps defensive backs that had been close to the line of scrimmage and ready to blitz will drop off.

Once the ball is snapped, the player in motion still bears attention. Motion men are often used as lead blockers on sweeps. Make sure someone watches that block to make sure it's legal. See the entire block so you don't penalize team A for contact that starts above the waist and ends below the waist or starts in the front and ends in the back only because the team B player turned.

N NOTES

"Cheat sheets" were discouraged during your school days, but they come in handy on the football field. Most officials pull out their information card before the game, jot down the captains' numbers, record which team won the toss and put the card back into their pocket. They don't look at it again until the second half unless a team takes a timeout before halftime. That's an incredible waste of a potentially valuable resource.

Record the captains' names (first and last) and numbers. Players will be more responsive when called by their name rather than number. If you need a captain's help in dealing with an exuberant teammate, the captain will be more receptive if called by his name. If the coach doesn't offer the captains' names in the pregame meeting, ask for them.

Jot down the results of the coin toss. You might also consider recording which captain served as his team's spokesman. If the coach wanted his captain to defer the choice but the player chose to receive, the coach will want to speak to the captain who disobeyed his orders. Write down both team's choices. If you're confused about which compass direction the teams are facing, use S for scoreboard end and N for non-scoreboard end, if applicable.

Log the number of the player who asked for a timeout and the time on the clock when the timeout was granted. Record the name or number of any ejected player or coach or anyone flagged for unsportsmanlike conduct.

Every official should note the down, distance and position of the ball (i.e. left hash, slightly right of center) at the end of the first and third quarters. That information will help you reset the ball properly to start the next quarter. The card also provides a means of jotting down reminders for discussion at halftime or after the game. If you are unsure you properly applied a rule, when time allows make a note to yourself to check on it. If you think of a way your crew can better cover a certain type of play, you can write it down.

Umpires may wish to record the uniform numbers of players they inspected before the game. It will help an umpire remember which players had equipment that was judged illegal should the player participate wearing the illegal gear.

If you find all of this information won't fit on a standard information card, create your own or use a blank index card. Another tip: When working a game in rain or snow, take along a plastic bag with a reusable seal such as a sandwich bag. Keeping the card in the sealed bag will limit the amount of time it is exposed to the elements.

O OUT OF BOUNDS

One of the toughest things to teach newer officials is the need to turn away from the field of play when a play ends out of bounds. Some less-experienced officials seem to think that no one will see them give the stop-the-clock signal unless they are facing the field. Others worry about what's going on behind them, not realizing that other officials are (or should be) observing players still on the field.

You may see 99 plays ending out of bounds with no problems. But that 100th play could be the one in which someone delivers a blow after the whistle. If you don't see it and the act goes unpenalized, you may soon find yourself breaking up a brawl.

At no time while players are out of bounds should officials turn their backs on the play. Players who have crossed the sideline return to the field must be accompanied by an official. Holding the spot with your foot, blowing your whistle, signaling the clock to stop and watching the players may seem like a lot to do at one time, but it comes naturally with practice.

Wing officials should start each play no closer than toes on the back edge of the sideline. They should not hesitate to move beyond the sideline when necessary, such as when a sweep or sideline pass brings several players toward the sideline. That's why it's important for wing officials to keep a "clean sideline," one in which players and coaches stand only where allowed by rule.

Linesmen and line judges can improve their chances of clean sidelines by having each head coach designate a "get-back coach." The get-back coach is usually an assistant coach who urges substitutes, trainers and other sideline personnel to stay in the team boxes.

The wing official should introduce himself to the get-back coach shortly before the game begins. If, in the excitement of the game, the get-back coach forgets his duties, a gentle reminder from the wing official usually does the trick. Players will usually respond to a coach's order to get back.

Don't hesitate to issue a sideline warning if warranted. The first warning has no yardage walkoff, and is often all that's needed to get compliance.

P POSTGAME

Another longtime Referee emphasis has been the importance of a pregame meeting. Less discussed but equally important is the postgame meeting.

Once the game is over and you've reached the locker room, a crew should honestly assess its performance. If an unusual play occurred, discuss how it was handled and if the reaction was correct. Even if it was a routine game, the crew can discuss what it did well and what it could have done better.

Be technical and be critical. Don't let the conversation deteriorate into a testosterone festival, filled with comments like, "Did you hear what I told that coach? Man, I shut him up in a hurry!" Instead, examine what caused the blowup. "The coach said I missed a clip on that kickoff return for a touchdown. Did any of you see it? I saw the block and thought it was legal. Should I have told the coach I saw it and passed on it?"

One of the more pleasant aspects of officiating is going out for food and beverages after a game. You can discuss elements of the game over dinner, but be careful. Other restaurant patrons may have attended the game. You don't want to start a debate with fans or air your dirty laundry in a potentially hostile area. What's said in the locker room should stay there.

Q QUIET WORD

Just as a picture says a thousand words, a look or brief comment can work wonders on the football field. The quiet word is part of preventive officiating. If you see an offensive lineman hold an opponent on a play on which the run goes to the other side of the field, let the lineman know you saw it. "Hey, number 76. Understand that if you hold like that at the point of attack, I'll have to throw a flag." If a player is acting up but has not yet earned a

flag, talk to him. “Come on now, 55. You’re a better player than that. Play football, OK?” Use a conversational tone, not an aggressive tone.

You say that sounds like you’re coaching? Au contraire. You’re passing along information. Officials are not merely enforcers; part of their job is to improve or at least maintain the flow of the game. The quiet word doesn’t have to be punitive. If a runner hands you the ball instead of making you bend for it, say thank you. If a player helps an opponent to his feet, compliment him for that act of good sportsmanship.

There will be times when you’ll need to raise your voice in order to make a point. But that should happen as little as possible. There will also be times when you should not speak at all. Sometimes merely making eye contact with a player or coach is all that is necessary to convey the message you choose to send.

R RULEBOOK

Believe it or not, the rulebook is more of a friend than an enemy. The vast majority of the questions you have about situations can be answered simply by checking in the rulebook. The trick is knowing where to look. It comes easily only by reading and re-reading the book.

When you get your new rulebook, speed-read the entire book. Read it as if you’re cruising through a novel. You will not remember everything you read, but don’t worry about that now. Familiarize yourself with different sections so you don’t need to rely on the index.

Categorize the rules. Some rules have more game-to-game impact than others. For example, the “Game, Field Players and Equipment” rules, often near the front of the book, are not necessarily the ones you should read first. While important, that section is not the most important for someone who is trying to learn the rules. What’s more important, a legal blocking technique or the width of the stripes on the ball? Perhaps the most important section of the book is the one dedicated to definitions. Mastering the definitions not only helps you on the field, it helps you study the rest of the book.

Read in short increments of time. After the initial reading of the entire rulebook, study in increments of 15-20 minutes per sitting. Digest the material in bite-sized pieces. Read some part of the rulebook each day, including during the offseason. Make it as much a part of your daily routine as brushing your teeth.

Study just before falling asleep. Studies have shown that memory retention is enhanced by studying right before sleeping. Instead of watching TV as you begin to fall asleep, read the rulebook.

Don’t forget to check related casebook plays or approved rulings. Once you’ve grasped a rule, read related caseplays and manuals before moving to the next rule. Case plays enhance knowledge by taking rules and placing them into game situations. However, the case plays cannot replace the rulebook. Also, take quizzes and tests, which reinforce what you already know or emphasize what you don’t know.

Keep your rulebook near your TV. If a foul occurs, ask yourself how the penalty would be enforced at the level you work. Check the rulebook to make sure you’re correct.

S SIGNALS

Clear, sharp signals not only help public address announcers, teams and spectators understand what call has been made, they enhance the impression an official makes in the eyes of others.

The hand signals used by football referees to signify penalties can be traced to the late 1920s. In a game between Syracuse and Cornell, radio announcer Ted Husing asked referee Ellwood Geiges if Geiges could do something to keep the press booth informed of the action. Some of the signals Geiges created on the spot (such as offside and holding) are still used in their original form. Albie Booth, a well-known official of that era, is also credited with originating many of the signals.

Ideally, you want to appear poised and relaxed when giving signals. You do not want to create the impression you are lethargic or lazy. The other extreme, appearing overly excited, should also be avoided. Avoid nervous mannerisms such as tugging on your lanyard, repeatedly snapping your down indicator, etc. Have the same body language late in the game as you had at the beginning and, above all, avoid getting caught up in the emotion of the game.

Neither your signals nor your facial expression should indicate emotion. If you've just flagged a coach for unsportsmanlike conduct or ejected a player, over-enthusiastic thrusts of the arms can enflame an already contentious situation.

Add some emphasis to your signals when you're trying to sell a close call. But save that emphasis for occasions when it is needed. In all other instances, maintain a slow, even tempo.

Some associations allow supplemental signals. Check with your association before using such non-authorized signals.

Your signals must be firm, but not flashy. Don't give signals that infer a "gotcha" attitude to the offending player.

T TIMERS

Few things make an official's life more miserable than a bad clock operator. If the clock stops or starts incorrectly despite the officials' best efforts and signals, the officials will bear the brunt of coaches' wrath, not the timer.

In extreme cases, officials can take over the timing of a game. But that should be an absolute last resort, one undertaken only if the timer is clearly trying to influence the outcome of the game (which is difficult if not impossible to prove).

Before going to the press box to meet the timer in the pregame, the appropriate official must confirm with the game manager the starting time of the game and the length of halftime. That information should also be confirmed with the timer.

On free kicks, remind the timer to wait for the proper signal. From scrimmage, the clock will start either with the referee's ready or on the snap.

Remind the timer that five signals should cause him to stop the clock: stop the clock, incomplete pass, touchdown, touchback and safety.

The timer must observe the covering official on plays that end at the sideline. Remind the timer to look for the stop-the-clock signal when the ball goes near a sideline, there is a change of possession or there is a first down, and that tries are always untimed.

Instruct the timer to wait for the referee's signal before starting the countdown for halftime. That signal is contingent upon both teams clearing the field. For NFHS games, there is an additional three-minute warmup that immediately follows the intermission. That time should also start on the referee's signal so he can ensure both teams are on the field ready to loosen up.

Another item for prep games: If the regulation game ends in a tie and overtime is played, the timer will need to put three minutes on the clock (NFHS rules mandate a three-minute break between the end of regulation play and the first overtime period) and again wait for the referee's signal. After that, the clock is not needed unless there is a second overtime (a two-minute break occurs in that case).

The timer should be asked how the referee will be able to communicate with the timer if the clock needs to be corrected. In some cases, assistant coaches in the pressbox communicate through headphones to coaches on the sideline. Using the coaches is one method of relaying information. Another is to have the referee signal the correct time with his fingers, like a basketball official reporting a foul to the scorer. The official meeting with the timer should find out if the clock is programmable (can be set to a specific time) or if it has to run through a one-minute cycle in order to be reset.

The timer should also be asked if the clock is in working order to the best of his knowledge. If there were mechanical malfunctions in previous weeks, were the problems solved? Either way, Referee recommends having an official on the field (usually the back judge in a crew of five or the line judge in a crew of four) time the game as a backup. If the clock malfunctions during the game, the timer should be instructed to wait for a timeout or other break in the action before resetting the clock. The timer should communicate with the referee to obtain the correct time, then reset the clock.

In areas using a game-shortening procedure (such as a 35-point rule), it's a good idea to provide the timer with a list of exceptions to clock rules.

U UNIFORM

The editors at Referee have harped on wearing the correct uniform and using the proper accessories for so long, it seems redundant to bring it up again here. Yet year after year there are reports of officials wearing dirty, ill-fitting, old or improper uniforms, unpolished shoes, adjustable caps and committing other fashion faux pas. One crew showed up for a state playoff football game wearing V-neck basketball shirts. Another group featured four members in long-sleeved shirts and one wearing short sleeves.

Apparently, the message has not gotten through to everybody, so here goes again.

The standard black and white shirt with a Byron collar and one-inch vertical stripes are worn. Leave the wide-stripe shirts for the guys who've made it to the next levels. Officials should own shirts with short and long sleeves. All crew members should wear the same length sleeves. Do not wear a long-sleeved garment underneath a short-sleeved shirt. T-shirts and turtlenecks (for cold weather) should be black. The undershirt should not have any letters or pictures that could be seen through your striped shirt. Shirts should always be tucked in. Association patches are allowed if it's accepted in the area.

In most places, black pants have replaced the iconic white knickers. A black belt 1-1/4 to 2 inches wide with a plain buckle is required. Shirts should remain tucked in at all times.

Entirely black shoes are most acceptable; however, some state associations and college conferences allow black with minimal white markings (like shoe logos). Black laces are always worn.

A black cap with white piping should be worn by all but the referee. The referee's white hat must be clean. All caps should be fitted and made of either wool or nylon. Adjustable caps and those made of mesh appear unprofessional.

Do not go to the game dressed in any part of your uniform. It just looks unprofessional. Make a good first impression on game management by wearing clean, pressed clothes to and from the game. Jeans, shorts, T-shirts, baseball caps, sneakers, sandals, sweatsuits and jogging attire are inappropriate. Wedding rings may be worn on the field, but other rings, necklaces, bracelets and earrings may not. As a backup in case a watch malfunctions during the game, at least one official who doesn't have timing responsibilities should wear a watch.

Carry your uniform in a garment bag or gym bag. The bag should be neat (no frayed edges, etc.) and entirely black. Some associations have their group's logo or the official's name embroidered on the bag. That's acceptable if that's what officials in the area are doing. If no one else in the area is doing it, don't do it just to stand out.

Many officials at the high school and college levels use all black, wheeled, airline-type luggage. They keep your clothes clean and pressed and, because of the wheels, are easy to transport.

V VIDEO

Whenever possible, watch tape of the games you work. Most athletic directors and coaches will gladly send a copy of the game if the crew provides a self-addressed, postage-paid video mailer. The crew should chip in and share the expenses since everyone on the crew will benefit.

Internet-based options are also available. That gives you the ability to watch the game you worked as well as get a sneak peek at teams you'll have in the future.

Any time you watch a video, watch it with a critical eye, preferably as a crew. Questions you should be asking include: Are you lining up where you should be? After the ball is snapped, are you moving to be in position to make the necessary calls? Are you looking off the ball or are you being a ball watcher? How are your forward-progress spots?

Check to make sure penalties were properly enforced, the crew correctly signaled the clock to stop and start, flags and beanbags were dropped at the appropriate places and that the fouls you called actually show up on film.

W WHISTLE

Your whistle is like your voice. It can convey messages, in a “whisper” or a “holler.” When you blow your whistle, make sure you’re saying what you want to say.

The ready-for-play signal should be a firm, one- or two-second tone. A request for a timeout or some other clock stoppage merits a firmer if not longer blast. When an official has thrown or sees a penalty flag on a play, a series of short toots help inform the referee of the situation.

Now about the whistle itself. If a whistle on a lanyard is used, both must be black. Carry a spare in your pants pocket. If a finger whistle is used, it should also be black plastic. Use a finger whistle only if you’ve trained yourself not to make one-armed signals.

Finger whistles are a boon for several reasons. One is safety. With the whistle out of your mouth, you are less likely to have teeth knocked out or damaged if a player’s stray elbow hits you in the mouth. Another reason is preventing inadvertent whistles. The time it takes you to bring your whistle to your mouth is all the time it may take to realize you shouldn’t be blowing the whistle at all.

X XEROPHILOUS

You probably wondered how we were going to solve the “X” problem. Now you’re probably wondering what the heck xerophilous is and how it relates to officiating.

Our friends at Webster’s tell us that xerophilous means “Capable of thriving in a hot, dry climate.” Some plants and animals are so equipped, but most humans are not. To make a long story short, this is a reminder to drink plenty of fluids when you officiate in hot or humid weather.

Dehydration is arguably the most dangerous side effect of officiating in hot conditions for prolonged periods of time. Dehydration can not only dramatically affect performance, but can lead to heat stroke, a potentially life-threatening condition.

When exercise is performed in high humidity, sweat doesn’t evaporate as efficiently to produce cooling. The increase in body temperature causes more ineffective sweating, increases dehydration and hastens the increase in core body temperature. The combination of increased body temperature and rapid dehydration leads to decreased performance.

A drop in physical ability is not the only consequence of even slight dehydration. Several scientific studies have shown dehydration also leads to decreased mental ability.

Sports officials are faced with complex tasks requiring judgment, memory and concentration. Considering the loss of mental ability and physical performance, a dehydrated official will not only be unable to run to the action, he won’t know what to do when he gets there.

Avoiding dehydration is difficult because athletes and officials will typically take a drink only when thirsty. Quenching your thirst does not sufficiently replenish fluid levels. Avoiding dehydration requires drinking more fluid than needed to satisfy thirst.

A number of sports drinks are available, and all contain reasonable amounts of both carbohydrates (sugars) and electrolytes (salts). Avoid soda-type drinks since most contain too much sugar and not enough salts. Sodas also contain caffeine, which increases urine production and counteracts your body’s effort to conserve water.

Ideally, you should consume four to six ounces of fluid for every 10 to 15 minutes of activity to effectively avoid dehydration. That avoids filling the stomach with large quantities of fluid at one time. Most officials cannot stop activity every few minutes to take a drink. A more practical technique is to drink three to four cups (24 to 32 ounces) of fluid about once an hour. Use that method in your preseason workouts in order to get your body accustomed to performing activities with fluid in your stomach.

According to Dr. Emilio Vazquez, M.D., who practices family medicine and officiates in Madisonville, Ky., drinking about two or three cups of fluid 10 to 15 minutes before a game is also recommended. Over-hydration will not only decrease the chance of dehydration, but will also help your stomach start emptying and force your body to absorb the fluid. If it’s a very hot or humid day, increase fluid intake to as much as one to two quarts an hour.

Replenishing lost fluids after a contest is important when an official has an assignment the following day. Even under ideal circumstances, it's difficult to end a long day sufficiently hydrated. If you start the next day a little "dried out," you'll have a hard time catching up with your body's needs.

Y **YESTERDAY**

As the old saying goes, you're only as good as your last game. Many officials work more than one game each week. The last game you worked — yesterday's game, if you will — is gone. If you experienced problems in that previous game, you can't carry the problems over to your next game. The same with your last call. If you kick one, forget about it for the moment. If you let it eat at you, you won't be thinking about the next call and you'll kick that one, too.

The time to dwell on your mistakes and examine your performance is after the game. Solicit advice from crewmates, mentors or veteran officials whose opinions you trust. Fix the problem, then get on with your life.

Z **ZEBRA**

There may be places where "zebra" is still used as a derogatory term to describe officials. But in most areas officials use it to describe themselves. It's a badge of honor. Some officials have personal stationary emblazoned with zebras. They've chosen to turn a negative image into a positive one.

Officials should take pride in their avocation. That means being a professional at all times, not just when you're in uniform. Unacceptable behavior brings disrepute to the entire officiating community. Officials should be role models.