

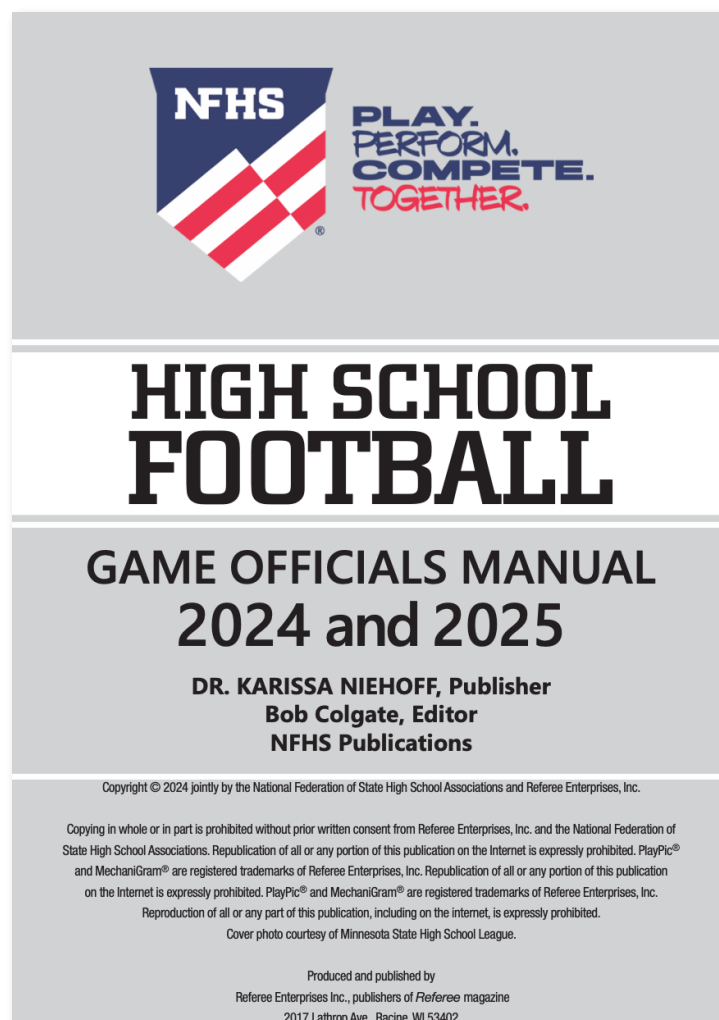


2025 NFHS / MSHSAA Mechanics Checklist

The information contained within is based on the High School Football Game Officials Manual 2024-2025 edition as well as MSHSAA approved additions/clarifications. This document is intended to be used as a reference guide. Refer to the Game Officials Manual for additional details.

Mike Hoffman

6/15/25



www.Referee.com

PreGame Duties

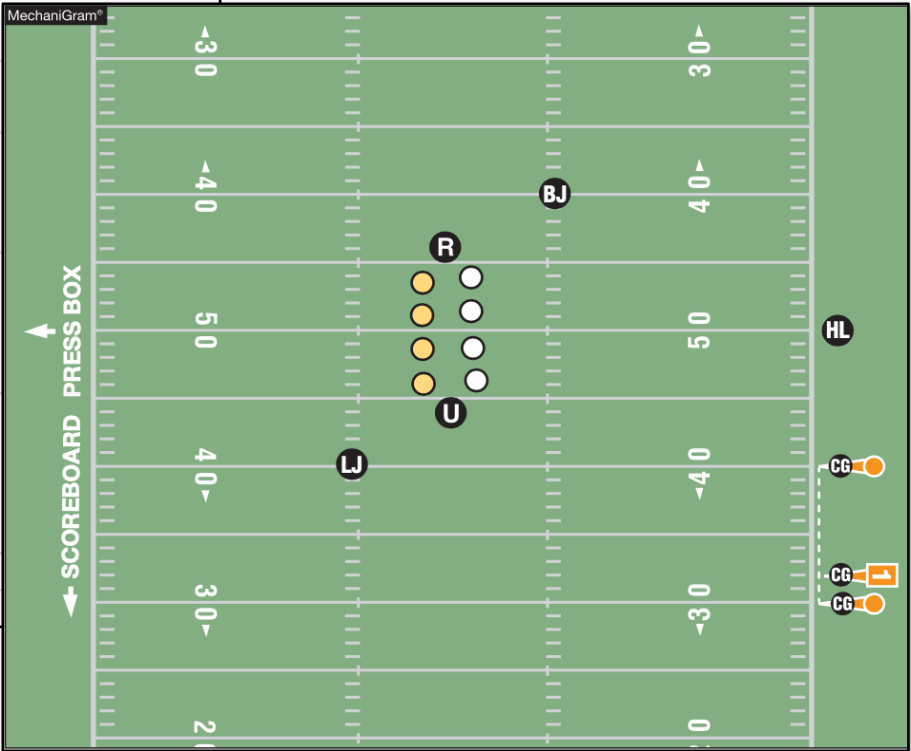


Referee	Umpire	Head Linesman	Line Judge	Backjudge
Officiating crew should enter the field together 60 minutes before game time.				
Referee and another official meet with the home team head coach and then the visiting team head coach.				
Provide coach(s) card with list of crew members				
Inspect the entire field per the NFHS Manual		Check the chain crew equipment		Inspect the entire field per the NFHS Manual
		Meet with ball personnel		
Observe players, uniforms, equipment, etc., while they are warming up				
Crew meet to discuss information from head coaches meeting				
Meet with Game Clock Operator 30 minutes prior to Kickoff				Meet with Play Clock Operator 30 minutes prior to Kickoff
After duties are performed, if ONE team leaves the field, the crew may leave the field and return to locker room or designated area				
At the time the coach stated, or no later than 5 minutes prior to kick-off, the crew MUST arrive back at the field				
Proceed to sideline opposite LTG equipment	Proceed to sideline with LTG equipment	Meet with Chain Crew	Escort team from your side of field from their access entry point to their sideline	Escort team from your side of field from their access entry point to their sideline

Coin Toss



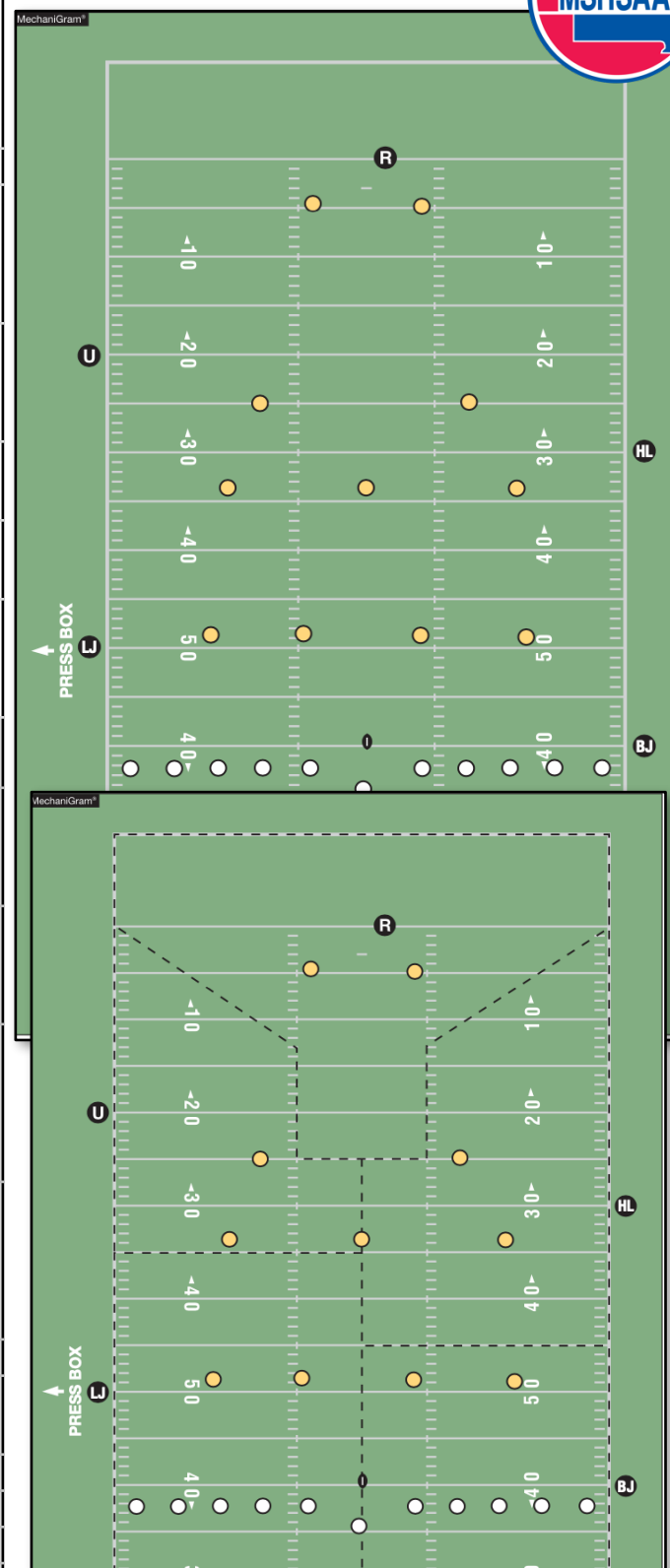
Referee	Umpire	Head Linesman	Line Judge	Backjudge
Position: Sideline opposite LTG equipment	Position: Sideline with LTG equipment	Position: Sideline with LTG equipment	Position: Sideline opposite LTG equipment, opposite R	Position: Sideline with LTG equipment, across from R
			Obtain Kicking ball	Obtain Kicking ball
Speaking captains should be positioned so they are closest to the referee when the group meets in the center of the field.				
Escort captains to center of field at 3 minute mark	Escort captains to center of field at 3 minute mark		Escort captains at 3 minute mark; stop at hash mark	Escort captains at 3 minute mark; stop at hash mark
Face Scoreboard or Back to Scoreboard	Face Referee		Observe team members not involved in toss	Observe team members not involved in toss
Visiting team has choice of Heads or Tails	Repeat Visiting Teams Choice of Heads or Tails			
Toss Coin, catch coin in air or let it hit the ground				
Offer Kick or Receive, Defend a Goal, or Defer Choice				
Captain chooses to defer: face press box, tap shoulder of deferring captain & signal the declination				
Ask captains to put their backs to goal line their team will defend, provide appropriate signal				
All officials join the referee and umpire in the center of the field and record the results of the toss.				
All game officials simultaneously move to their kickoff positions.				



FREE KICK



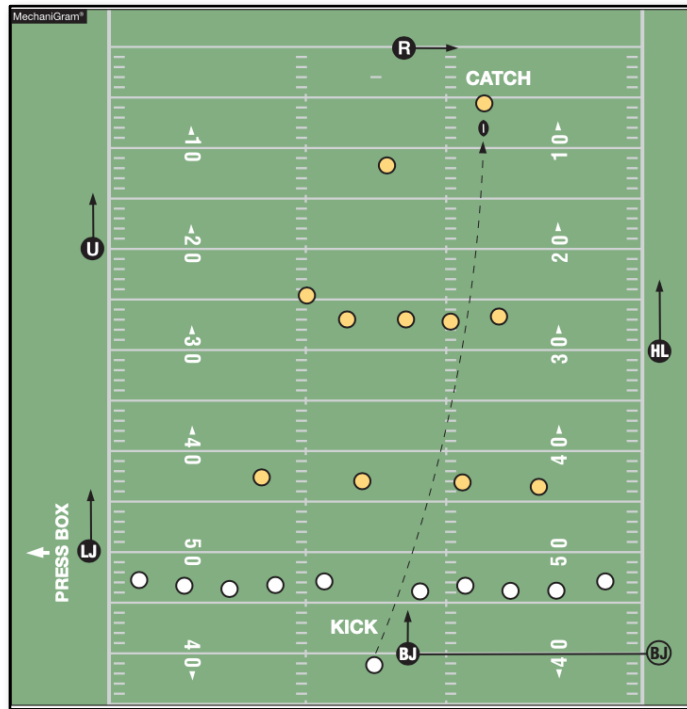
Referee	Umpire	Head Linesman	Line Judge	Backjudge
Hustle to kickoff position (GL on HL side, halfway between center of field and hash mark)	Hustle to kickoff position while clearing sideline	Hustle to kickoff position while clearing sideline	Hustle to kickoff position while clearing sideline	Hustle to kickoff position while clearing sideline
Count R	Count R	Count R	Count K	Count K
		Move to the numbers on your side of the field once the players are on the field	Move to the numbers on your side of the field once the players are on the field	Kicking Ball; 60 sec interval/ 15 sec signal
		Identify R's free-kick line, remind R that all blocks must be above the waist	Identify R's free-kick line, remind R that all blocks must be above the waist	Give ball to K when K has 11 players on field
				Place ball on ground if K is not ready
				Remind K not to kick the ball until RFP
Whistle and provide Ready For Play Signal				Verify no K player, other than kicker, is more than 5 yds from K's free-kick line
Verify at least 4 players on each side of Kicker			Responsible for R's Free Kick line	Responsible for K's Free Kick line
	Officiate players coming towards you in your AOR	Officiate players coming towards you in your AOR	Pop-Up Kick (Secondary), 1st Touching, Kick Crossing R's Free Kick Line	Primary for Pop-Up Kick, 1st Touching (Secondary)
Start clock when <u>kick is legally touched in behind H or U</u>	Start clock <u>when kick is legally touched even or upfield from you</u>	Start clock <u>when kick is legally touched even or upfield from you</u>	Start clock <u>when kick is legally touched even or upfield from you</u>	
Responsible for Goal Line; Touchback; Momentum; Muffed Kick; Legal/Illegal Kick	Officiate Goal Line / sideline / pylon if threatened behind you.	Move quickly downfield after ball is kicked	Drift (slowly) downfield after ball is kicked	After ball is kicked, move toward center of the field no more than 10-15 yds toward R's goal line
Kick down middle of the field, R stays with the runner to about R-25	If return is to U's side and as wide as the hash mark, pick up coverage & stay with the runner to R-45	If kick is on HL's side between hash mark and sideline, stay with the runner to about R-35	Return to your side of field, pick up coverage of runner from R-45 to GL	Pick up coverage of runner on returns to HL side of field after runner reaches R-35
Watch for Illegal Blocks	Watch for Illegal Blocks	Watch for Illegal Blocks	Watch for Illegal Blocks	Watch for Illegal Blocks
				Responsible for K's Goal Line
Kick OOBs	Kick OOBs	Kick OOBs	Kick OOBs	Kick OOBs
Dead Ball Awareness	Dead Ball Awareness	Dead Ball Awareness	Dead Ball Awareness	Dead Ball Awareness
Clock Status	Clock Status	Clock Status	Clock Status	Clock Status



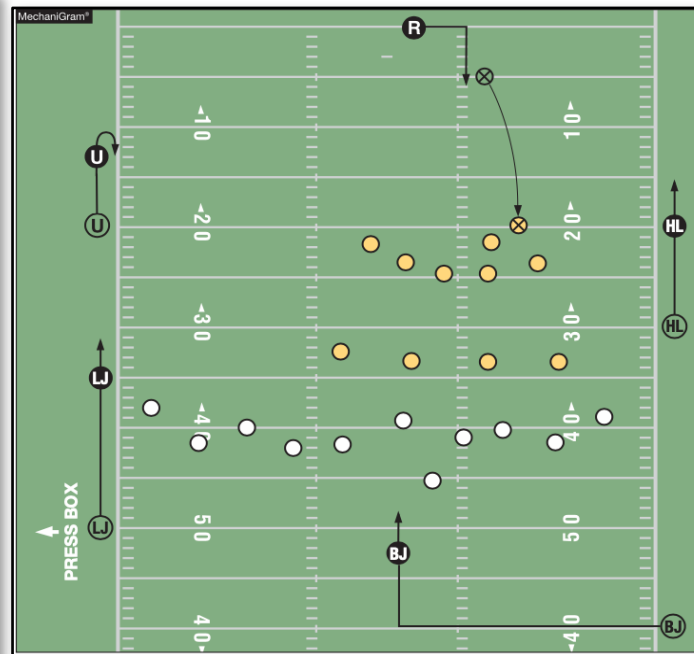
Free Kick



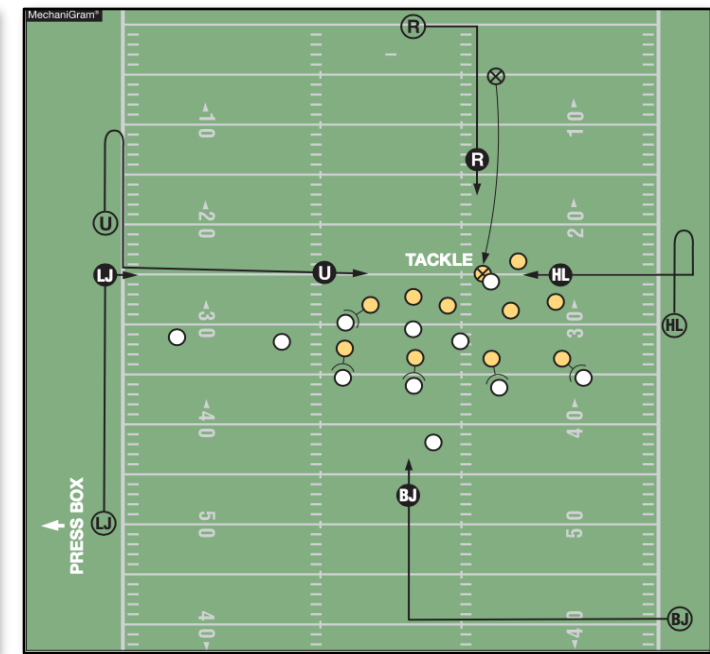
Free Kick to Side Zone Part 1



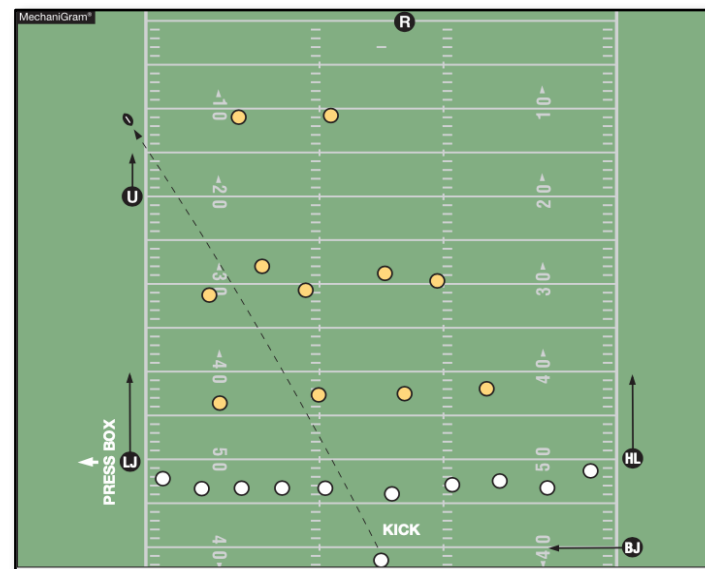
Free Kick to Side Zone Part 2



Free Kick to Side Zone Part 3



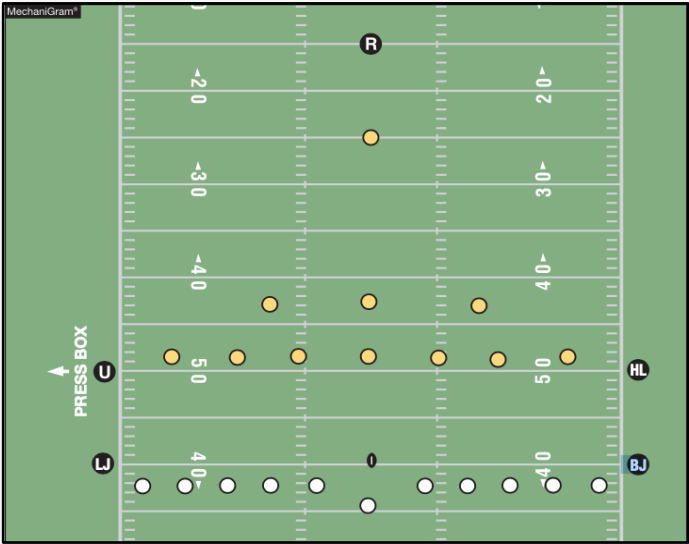
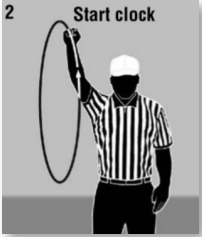
Free Kick OOBs



On-Side Kick



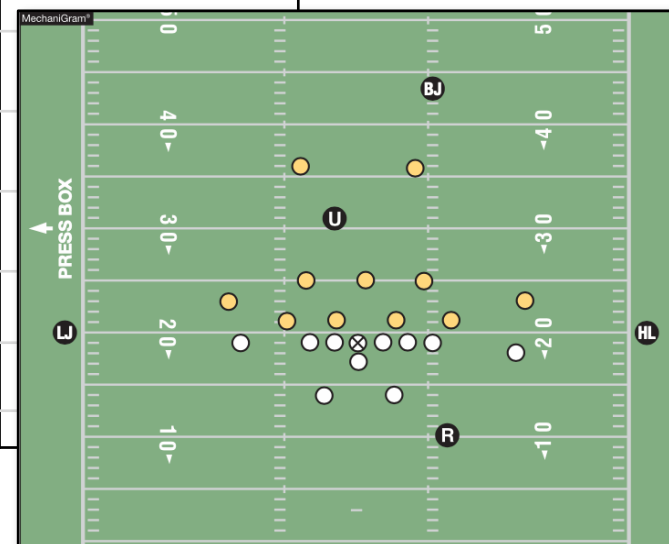
Referee	Umpire	Head Linesman	Line Judge	Backjudge
Position: Middle of field behind deepest receiver	Position: R's Free Kick line	Position: R's Free Kick line	Position: K's Free Kick line	Position: K's Free Kick line
Count R	Count R	Count R	Count K	Count K
Verify at least 4 players on each side of Kicker				Responsible for K's Free Kick line
				No K players (other than Kicker) more than 5 yds behind K's Free Kick Line
		Ball Kicked into ground	Responsible for K's Free Kick line - Officiate as a plane	Responsible for K's Free Kick line - Officiate as a plane
	1st Touching by K (bean bag spot)	1st Touching by K (bean bag spot)	<u>Primary:</u> Blocking by both teams	<u>Primary:</u> Blocking by both teams
			<u>Secondary:</u> 1st Touching by K (bean bag spot)	<u>Secondary:</u> 1st Touching by K (bean bag spot)
	Start clock when kick is legally touched	Start clock when kick is legally touched	Start clock when kick is legally touched	Start clock when kick is legally touched
Kick OOBs	Kick OOBs	Kick OOBs	Kick OOBs	Kick OOBs
Clock Status	Clock Status	Clock Status	Clock Status	Clock Status



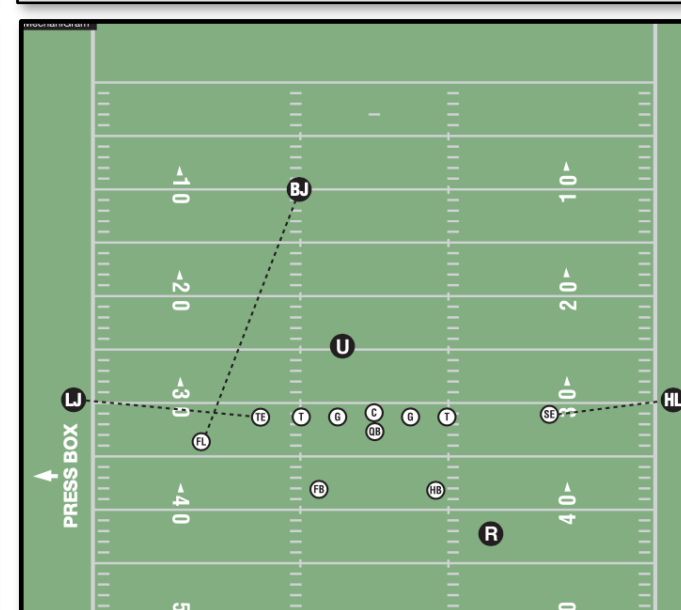
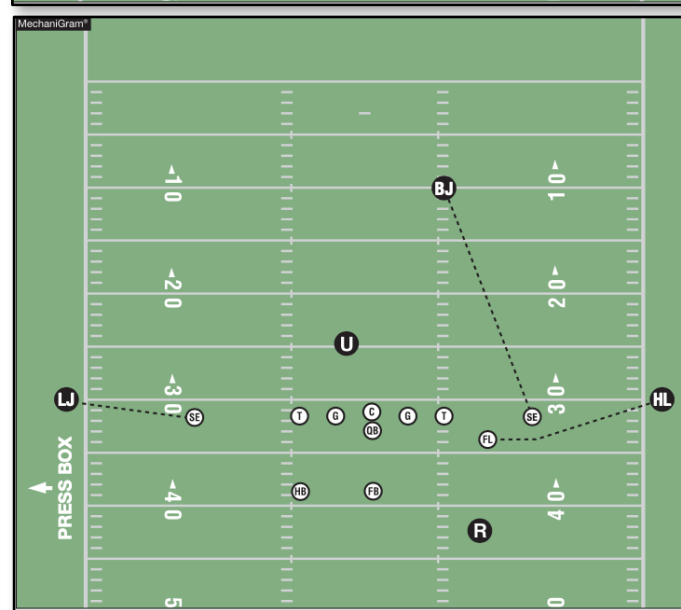
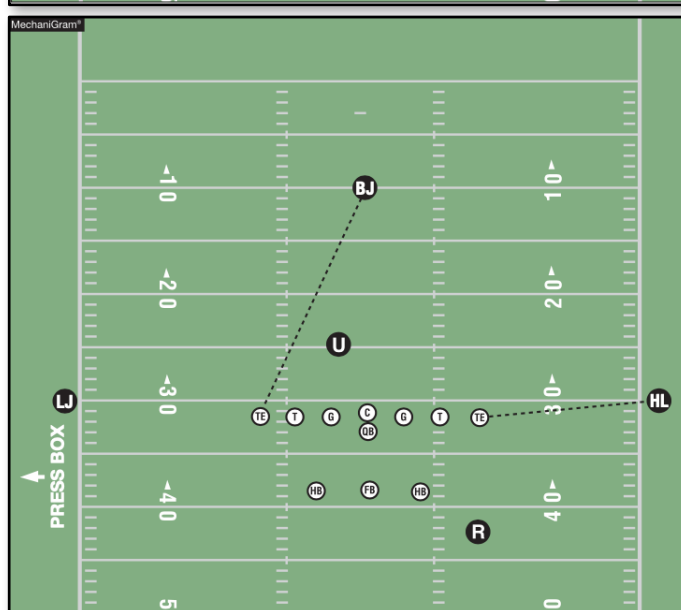
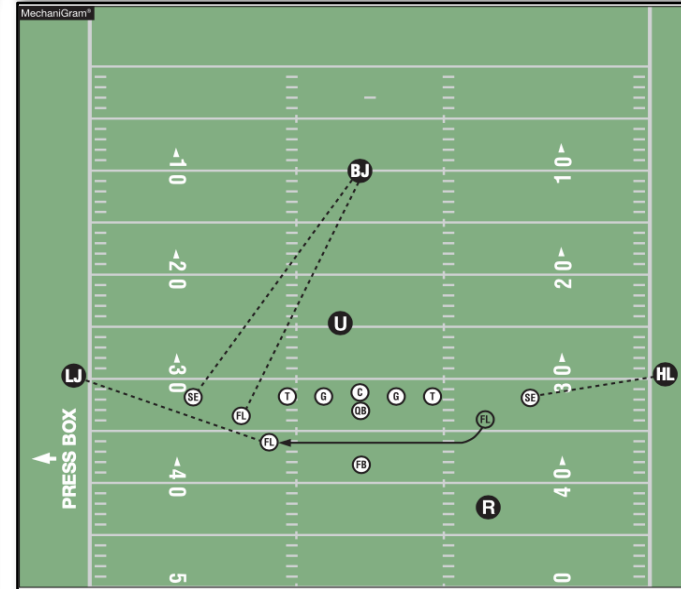
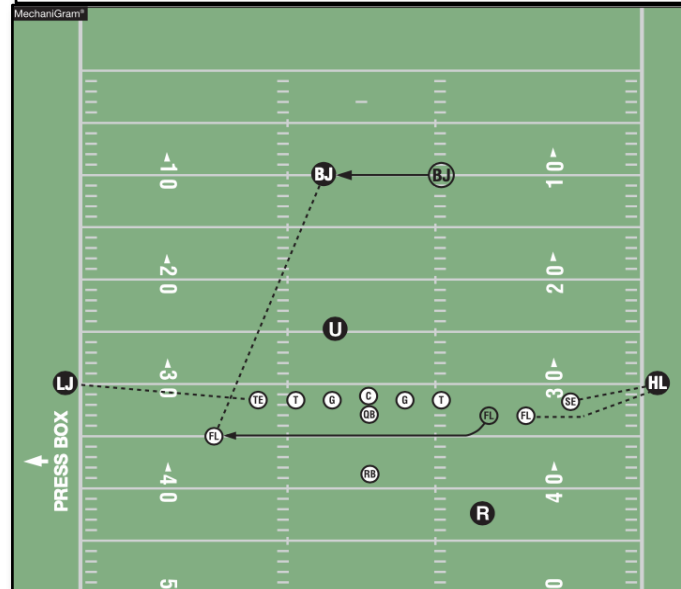
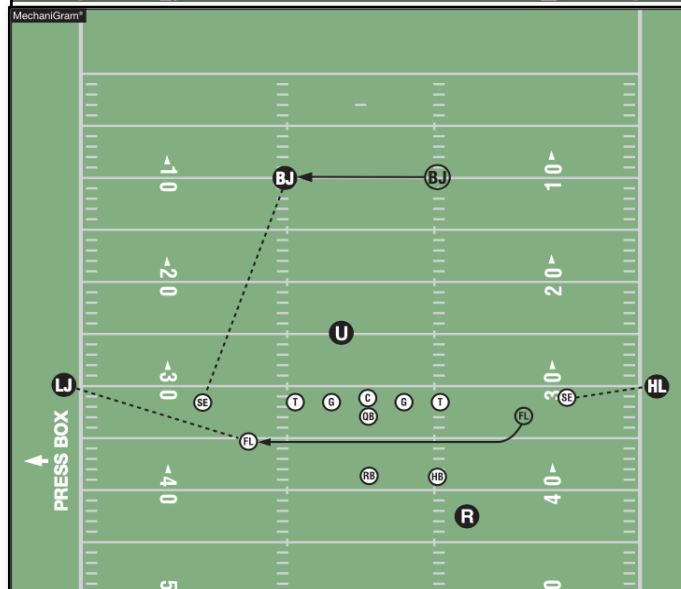
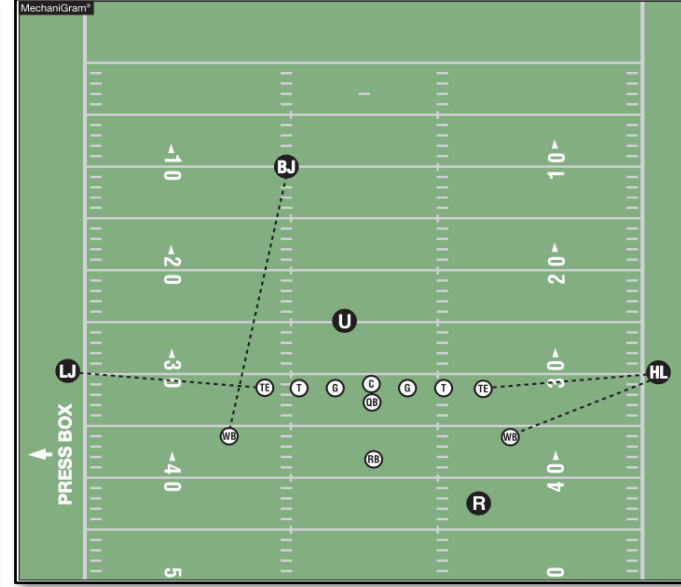
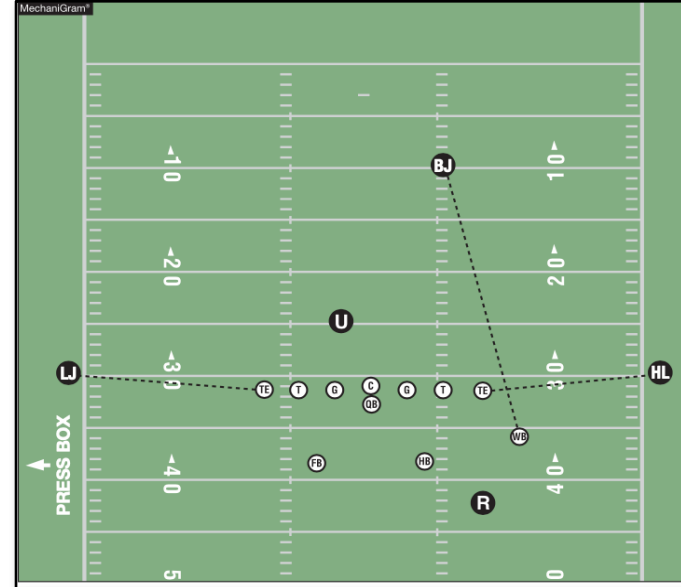
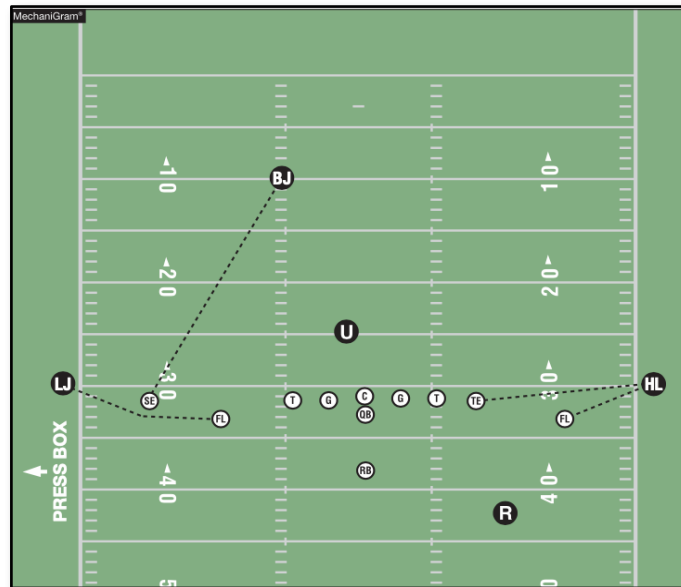
PreSnap



Referee	Umpire	Head Linesman	Line Judge	Backjudge
Position: Passing-arm side of the QB, ~ 15 yards deep and at least as wide as the TE.	Position: 5-10 yards beyond LOS between B's defensive tackles	Position: Straddle LOS 1 yard behind the sideline	Position: Straddle LOS 1 yard behind the sideline	Position: ~ 20-25 yards beyond LOS, no wider than hash mark. Ball snapped between B-10 & B-15: starting position may be in EZ. Ball snapped between B-10 and GL: Start on end line
Verify down marker is correct, provide RFP, & sound whistle (when appropriate)	Remain over ball until RFP or released by R; Note position of ball between hash marks			Responsible for Team B's GL until ball is snapped at or inside B-10.
Note ball position on field (right hash, right goal post, middle of field, left goal post, left hash)	Note ball position on field (right hash, right goal post, middle of field, left goal post, left hash)			25/40 sec play clock
Count A	Count A	Count B	Count B	Count B
Down/Distance/LTG	Down/Distance	Down/Distance/LTG	Down/Distance/LTG	Down/Distance/LTG
	5 players 50-79	Illegal Substitutions	Illegal Substitutions	
	Snap infractions, FST, III Shift / Motion	Identify Eligible Receivers	Identify Eligible Receivers	
		Verify no more than 4 in backfield	Verify no more than 4 in backfield	
Key on opposite tackle	Guard / Center / Guard	Keys, Extend arm towards backfield to indicate closest Team A player(s) is off LOS		
Be alert for False Start, Illegal Shift / Motion		FST, III Shift / Motion	FST, III Shift / Motion	
		Player in Motion away from you until snap	Player in Motion away from you until snap	
		Snap, Tackle, Back	Snap, Tackle, Back	



KEYS



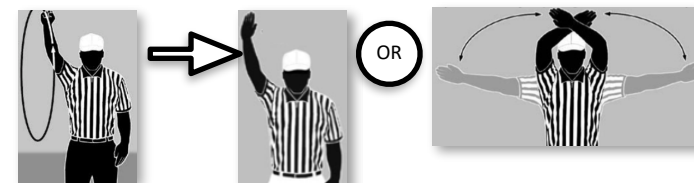
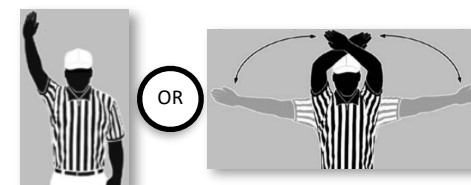
Running Plays



Referee	Umpire	Head Linesman	Line Judge	Backjudge
Focus on the ball, runner and blocking around the runner.	Blocks & Holding at Point of Attack	Stay on LOS until ball carrier crosses LOS	Stay on LOS until ball carrier crosses LOS	Cover play while staying within hash marks
Play to opposite side, move toward or parallel to the LOS		Back Side Coverage	Back Side Coverage	Fumble
Play to R's side, responsible for the runner until runner crosses the NZ or turns upfield.		Fumble (Bean Bag Spot of fumble)	Fumble (Bean Bag Spot of fumble)	
Ball exchange / Shovel Pass	<u>Do not sound whistle</u> unless covering official is not in position	Forward Progress beyond/behind LOS*	Forward Progress beyond/behind LOS*	
Fumble behind LOS (OK to Bean Bag)		* Pick up Forward Progress from offside wing official if necessary		Assist with ball relay
Maintain focus on QB if threatened after handoff/pitch		See ball before blowing whistle	See ball before blowing whistle	
Blocks & Holding at Point of Attack				

Dead Ball

		Provide either the Dead Ball or Time-Out signal.		
Follow play to sideline		If play ends near sideline: Wind Clock then provide either the Dead ball or Time-Out signal.		
		Out of Bounds Procedures	Out of Bounds Procedures	Out of Bounds Procedures
Dead Ball Officiate	Dead Ball Officiate	Dead Ball Officiate	Dead Ball Officiate	Dead Ball Officiate
	Spot ball for next down			Clock Status
Clock Status	Clock Status	Clock Status	Clock Status	Dead Ball Awareness
Dead Ball Awareness	Dead Ball Awareness	Dead Ball Awareness	Dead Ball Awareness	
Signal number of next down		Indicate # of next down on chest	Indicate # of next down on chest	
Responsible for Goal Line on change of possession		After R signals next down, signal down with extended arm & verbally confirm down with box indicator	After R signals next down, signal down with extended arm & check down indicator	



Wings only pinch in as far as necessary. The wider that you are able to work the better. When possible and as action/play allows, remain on the sideline. Guidelines below represent the maximum amount a wing official should pinch in when necessary when the ball is dead.

Ball to your side: come no further than 9 yard marks, stop if meeting resistance of player(s)

Ball in center of field: come no further than 9 yard marks, stop if meeting resistance of player(s)

Ball away from you: come no further than your hash, stop if meeting resistance of player(s)

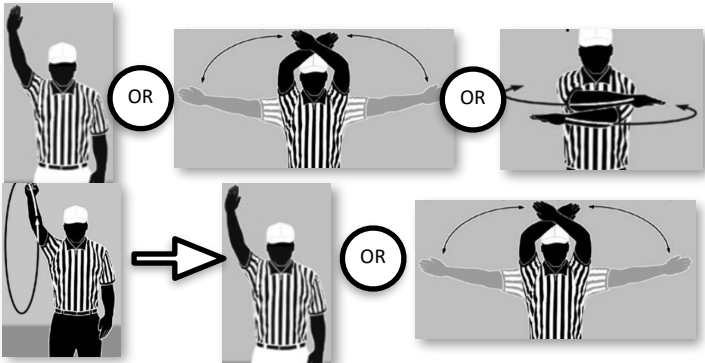
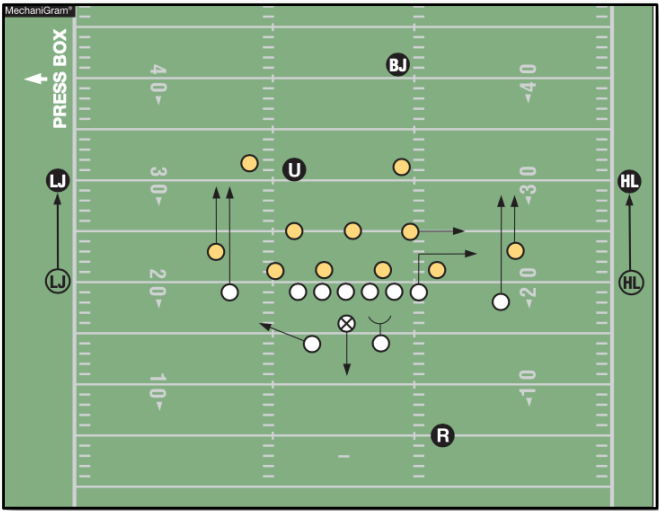
Close to first down/TD:

- Your Side/Center: pinch in until meeting resistance of player(s) on the yard line of the spot

- Away from you: pinch no further than your hash

Passing Plays

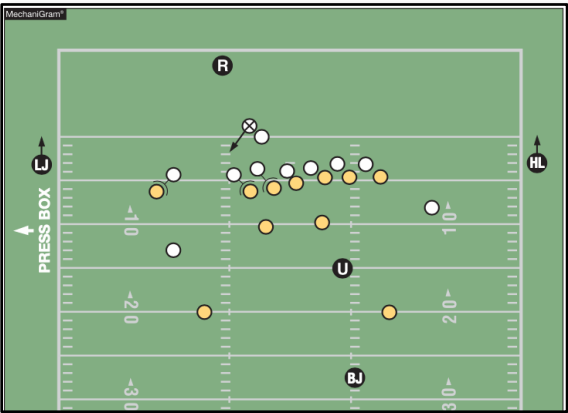
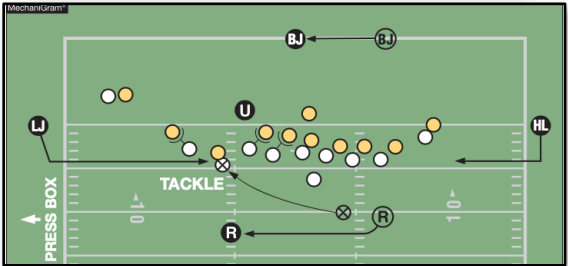
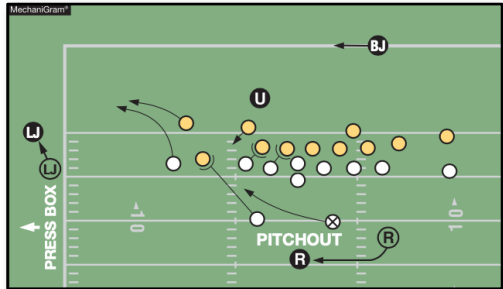
Referee	Umpire	Head Linesman	Line Judge	Backjudge
Special attention to passer (move with QB, keeping at least a 10 yd buffer)	Step towards NZ	<i>Stay on LOS as long as possible.</i> May release downfield after receiver has gone 12-15 yds downfield, or the QB has released the ball.	<i>Stay on LOS as long as possible.</i> May release downfield after receiver has gone 12-15 yds downfield, or the QB has released the ball.	Cover play while staying within hash marks
Ball exchange / Shovel Pass	Blocks & Holding at Point of Attack	Back Side Coverage	Back Side Coverage	Action takes you to ball
Blocks & Holding at Point of Attack	Ineligibles downfield	Ineligibles downfield	Ineligibles downfield	Deep Coverage - Keep all players in front of you
Forward/Backward Pass	Signal if pass is tipped	Punch Pass backwards on passes thrown to your side of field	Punch Pass backwards on passes thrown to your side of field	Goal Line and End Line Responsibility
If flight of pass is altered because passer's arm is hit by a defender, resultant loose ball is a forward pass.	Illegal Forward Pass beyond NZ	<i>Pass Touched Behind / Beyond LOS</i>	<i>Pass Touched Behind / Beyond LOS</i>	Don't get beat to Goal Line
If the play results in a fumble, R may beanbag spot where possession was lost	Pivot when pass is thrown and follow flight of ball. Catch/trap responsibility if the receiver is facing the U.	Forward Progress beyond/behind LOS	Forward Progress beyond/behind LOS	Momentum (bean bag)
		Fumble	Fumble	Fumble
Intentional Grounding	Assist with Intentional Grounding	Assist with Intentional Grounding	Assist with Intentional Grounding	
Pass thrown to stop clock				
If QB is sacked, determine progress spot		OPI-DPI	OPI-DPI	OPI-DPI
Follow play to sideline / OOBs	<u>Do not sound whistle</u> unless covering official is not in position	FEET – BALL – FEET	FEET – BALL – FEET	
Illegal Forward Pass beyond NZ	Spot ball for next down	See ball before blowing whistle	See ball before blowing whistle	See ball before blowing whistle
Dead Ball				
		Provide either the Dead Ball , Time-Out or Incomplete Pass signal.		
		If pass completed & play ends near sideline: Wind Clock then provide either the Dead Ball or Time-Out signal.		
		Out of Bounds Procedures	Out of Bounds Procedures	Out of Bounds Procedures
		Indicate # of next down on chest	Indicate # of next down on chest	Assist with ball relay
Signal number of next down		After R signals next down, signal down with extended arm & verbally confirm down with box indicator	After R signals next down, signal down with extended arm & check down indicator	
Dead Ball Awareness	Dead Ball Awareness	Dead Ball Awareness	Dead Ball Awareness	Dead Ball Awareness
Clock Status	Clock Status	Clock Status	Clock Status	Clock Status



Goal Line Play



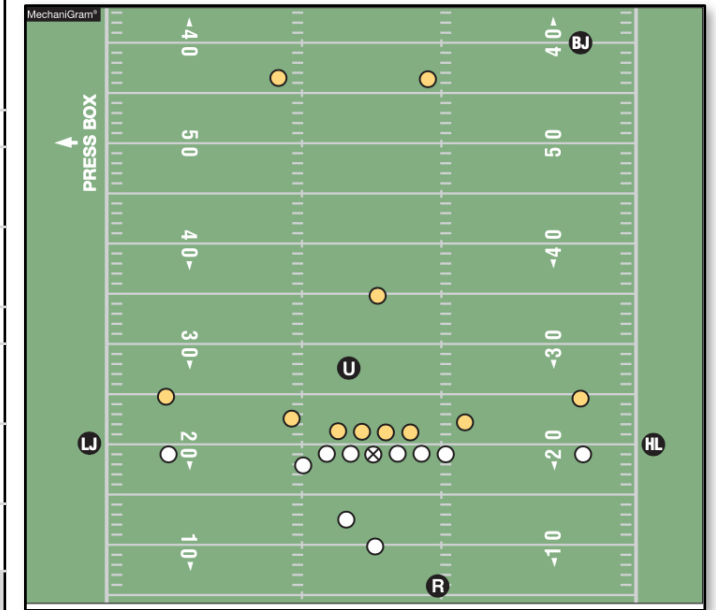
Referee	Umpire	Head Linesman	Line Judge	Backjudge
Position and Coverage same as Running/Passing play(s)				Ball snapped between B-10 and GL: Start on end line
Do not give TD from behind runner	Do not give TD signal at any time	Remove LTG indicator from sideline when goalline is LTG		Responsible for End Line
	Be sure ball is not moved forward after ball is dead	Provide bean bag to down-operator when LTG has been removed		
		Offense Going In; 5 yds and in		
		Immediately release diagonally to the GL extended at the snap		
		Offense Going In; 10 yds and in		
		Slowly release at the snap towards GL staying ahead of runner.		
	Do not block GL for Wing Officials	Result of Play: Short of GL		
		Officiate back towards the ball. Wind clock if run ends near SL. Provide Dead Ball Signal.		
		Result of Play: TD		
After verifying with crew, give TD signal facing press box		Signal TD when you see ball in possession of runner break plane of GL		
The TD signal is given only by a game official who actually sees the ball in possession of a runner break the plane of the goal line. Mirroring the signal can cause problems; if the covering game official is incorrect, the crew will find it difficult to overcome two game officials making a mistake. If the covering game official is correct, there is no need for a second signal.				
		Offense Going Out; Ball snapped from A-5 and In		
		Reverse GL Mechanics: Immediately release to GL at the snap.		
Dead Ball Awareness	Dead Ball Awareness	Dead Ball Awareness	Dead Ball Awareness	Dead Ball Awareness
Clock Status	Clock Status	Clock Status	Clock Status	Clock Status



Scrimmage Kicks



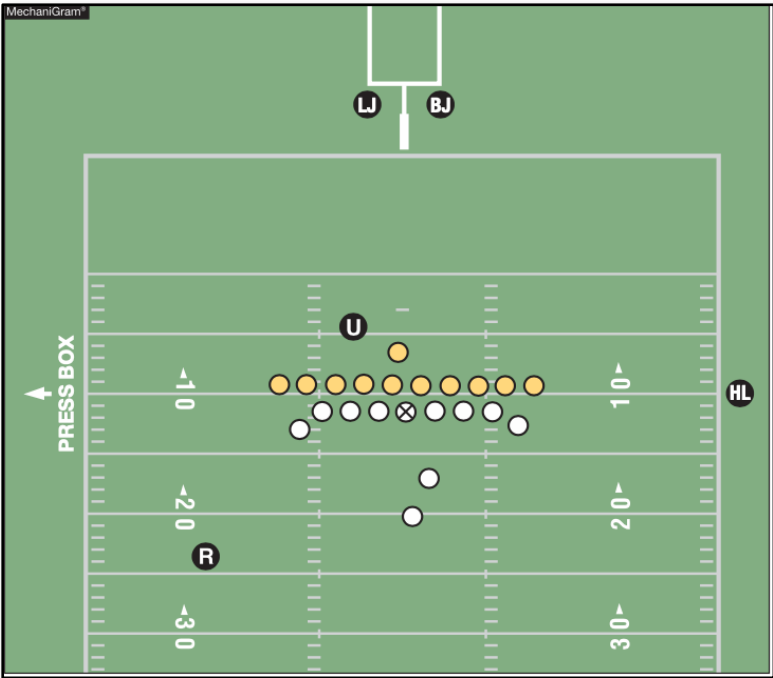
Referee	Umpire	Head Linesman	Line Judge	Backjudge
	Remain over ball until RFP or released by R			
Position: 3-5 yards outside TE & 2-3 yards behind Kicker on Kicking leg side	Position: 5-10 yards beyond LOS favoring LJ's side line	Position: Straddle LOS 1 yard behind the sideline	Position: Straddle LOS 1 yard behind the sideline	Position: 10-12 yards wider than & 2-3 yards deeper than Rec
Count K	Count K	Count R / Team Colors	Count R / Team Colors	Count R / Team Colors
Signal SK formation to U	Echo R's SK formation signal	Illegal Substitutions	Illegal Substitutions	
Be alert for False Start, Illegal Shift / Motion	Remind R players that snapper is protected	Identify Eligible Receivers	Identify Eligible Receivers	
	Numbering Exceptions	FST, Ill Shift / Motion	FST, Ill Shift / Motion	
	Snap infractions, FST, Ill Shift / Motion	Verify no more than 4 in backfield	Verify no more than 4 in backfield	
	Guard / Center / Guard	Player in Motion away from you until snap	Player in Motion away from you until snap	
		Snap, Tackle, Back	Snap, Tackle, Back	
Be alert for blocked kick	Step toward NZ after snap	Release downfield after ball crosses NZ	Release slowly downfield after snap. Stay on LOS if errant snap.	Bean Bag End of Kick
Rule on Kicker / Shield	Roughing Snapper	Watch blocks in front of Kick returner	Watch blocks in front of Kick returner	Fair Catch
Runner / GL coverage on long returns	Blocks by Offensive guards and backs behind NZ		Observe action of signaler when no fair catch is made	First Touching / Muff
	Aid LJ in determining if Kick crosses NZ	Forward Progress / Goal Line Responsibility	Forward Progress / Goal Line Responsibility	Goal Line / Touchback / Momentum
	Be alert for Ineligibles downfield on fakes or if play breaks down	Be alert for Ineligibles downfield on fakes or if play breaks down	Be alert for Ineligibles downfield on fakes or if play breaks down	Slowly follow runner
	After kick, pivot to LJ side of field	Fumble	Fumble	Fumble
	Help relay ball	See ball before whistling	See ball before whistling	See ball before whistling
	Spot ball for next down	OOB Procedures	OOB Procedures	OOB Procedures
		Assist R in covering short or blocked kicks	Assist R in covering short or blocked kicks	Assist with ball relay
Line up covering official on Kicks OOBs		Kicks OOBs	Kicks OOBs	Cover deep Kicks OOBs on HL's side of field
Dead Ball Awareness	Dead Ball Awareness	Dead Ball Awareness	Dead Ball Awareness	Dead Ball Awareness
Clock Status	Clock Status	Clock Status	Clock Status	Clock Status



Field Goal / Try



Referee	Umpire	HL / LJ Facing Referee	HL / LJ Not Facing Referee	Backjudge
Position: 2-3 yds behind & 3-5 yds* to side of Kicker facing holder. <i>* Consider 7-10 yds wider</i>	Position: 4 - 7 yds beyond LOS	Position: Straddle LOS 1 yard behind the sideline	Position: Behind end line and Goal Post	Position: Behind end line and Goal Post opposite L or LJ
Signal SK formation to U	Echo R's SK formation signal	Illegal Substitutions		Play clock
Count K	Count K	Count R	Count R	Count R
Communicate status of ball after kick (Live / Dead)	Communicate status of ball after kick (Live / Dead)	Communicate status of ball after kick (Live / Dead)	Communicate status of ball after kick (Live / Dead)	Communicate status of ball after kick (Live / Dead)
Kicker / Holder / Tackle on R's side of LOS	Numbering Exceptions	FST, Ill Shift / Motion	Identify Eligible Receivers	Identify Eligible Receivers
Be alert for FST, Illegal Shift / Motion	Remind R players that snapper is protected	Verify no more than 4 in backfield	Upright	Crossbar / Upright / Whistle
Rule on Kicker and/or Holder	Snap infractions, FST, Ill Shift / Motion	Snap, Tackle, Back	Yes-Yes / No-No	Yes-Yes / No-No
Fumble / muff by Holder	Guard / Center / Guard	Goal Line Coverage	Signal Score / No Score (1 yd into EZ) with L or LJ at same time	Signal Score / No Score (1 yd into EZ) with L or LJ at same time
Be alert for blocked kick	Step toward NZ after snap	Help rule whether or not a blocked kick crossed the neutral zone	If the kick is blocked, is obviously short or the play turns out not to be a kick (fake or busted play), move along the end line and toward the nearest sideline.	
Tip Signal	Roughing Snapper	Ineligibles downfield		
Runner / GL coverage on long returns	Blocks & Holding at Point of Attack		Dead Ball Awareness	Dead Ball Awareness
In cases of a fake or a broken play, assist on sideline coverage on open side of the field.	Tip Signal	Dead Ball Awareness	Clock Status	Clock Status
If <u>Try</u> is Blocked - Ball is Dead	Help rule whether or not a blocked kick crossed the neutral zone	Clock Status		Start one min timer after R signals score/no score
	After players go past your position, pivot to R side of field	Swinging gate formation: - L and LJ: line up using traditional scrimmage mechanics with goal line and pylon responsibilities - BJ: adjust position to three or four yards behind the end line in the middle of the “goal/ uprights” with responsibility for both uprights. - U: Remain over the ball until the RFP signal, and move to a position that is ½ way between the center and next lineman. - R: Traditional scrimmage mechanics position. If the swinging gate formation then shifts to a traditional Field Goal / Try formation, shift to Field Goal / Try mechanics		
Dead Ball Awareness	Dead Ball Awareness			
Clock Status	Clock Status			



Penalty Admin



Dead Ball Foul:

- (1) Toss Flag / Whistle / Stop Clock / Come in hard to prevent snap
- (2) Verify Clock Status
- (3) Report Foul / Player # to Ref/Crew via O2O

Live Ball Foul:

- (1) Obtain Player #, Toss Flag, Continue to Officiate until the conclusion of the dead ball action
- (2) At conclusion of play: Whistle (Tweek, Tweet, Tweet) / Stop Clock
- (3) Verify Clock Status
- (4) Report to Ref/Crew via O2O:
 - (a) Result of Play
 - (b) Status of the ball when the foul occurred (During the Run, During the Kick, During the Return, etc)
 - (c) Foul, Player #, Offense/Defense, Passing/Intercepting Team, Kicking/Receiving Team



Referee	Umpire	Head Linesman	Line Judge	Backjudge
	Secure ball	Discuss Penalty Options with offended Head Coach		Obtain ball, Assist in holding spot of foul or recovering penalty flag
Announce/Signal Penalty (<u>Give Preliminary Signal, only if necessary</u>)	Enforce Penalty	Proceed to succeeding spot	Hold Enforcement Spot	
	If enforcement spot if outside hash marks, step of penalty in side zone			
	Avoid stepping off distance between yard lines, except to the first and final yard			
When penalty is enforced on kickoff, Provide Foul signal, Point to offending team, Indicate scoring signal, Point to succeeding spot				Give signal for foul enforced on kickoff

Measurements

Referee	Umpire	Head Linesman	Line Judge	Backjudge
Chain Crew Instruction Relating to Clip				
The head linesman's clip is a safety valve. If the chains are moved either in error or for safety reasons, the clip provides the exact chain location. The clip operator should be told to place the clip on the back edge of the line. The clip also provides a reference point when the chains are taken out for a measurement. <i>The clip goes on the back edge of the 5-yard line nearer the trail pole.</i>				
Preparation / Measurement				
		Instruct down indicator operator to move to forward stake and keep same down number	Closest official to Team A's sideline: Obtain additional game ball	
		Place clip between fingers, Walk chains out	Align Linesman with line and ball	<i>Hold ball facing Team A goal line</i>
	After Linesman is ready, pull chain			
Determine if ball across line-to-gain. If game is televised, allow camera to see the measurement				
Signal 1st down or signal distance to LTG				
Short of LTG in side zone				
Grasp chain at link in front of ball, walk to nearest hash mark	Relocate chains to nearest hash mark	Relocate chains to nearest hash mark	Deliver new Team A game ball to Referee	Remain with game ball at original position of ball
Obtain new Team A game ball from LJ and place ball behind link		Relocate chains to side line		

