
Jam 10: HR your first game

Month 12

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- *Expectations for a Head Referee*
- *Managing common game procedures*
- *Other topics and concerns for before, during, and after games*
- *Concepts & philosophies spotlight: Topics for Captains and Officials meetings*

I don't expect expert skating skills from an HR (Head Referee). An individual who can do cartwheels on skates can still make a terrible derby HR. Your skill and speed at backwards-facing crossovers has little to do with whether I will staff you as HR. If you are safe skating among the other participants, are located where you need to be relative to where everyone else is during a jam, and if you're able to skate well enough to do your job WHILE doing your job, then flashy showboating beyond that is not something I personally watch for in a derby HR.

Memorizing the rules doesn't make someone a better HR than someone else. It could be useful for some people — maybe you can even quote the rules better than me. However, similar to skating skills, your ability to precisely quote a *Casebook* example of pack destruction doesn't mean you're able to recognize it in a live game and call No-Pack fairly. It's the appropriate application of the rules and *Casebook* guidance that is more important. I want you to apply the concepts illustrated in the *WFTDA Rules*. I can recite the preamble of the Constitution, but that doesn't make me qualified to be a lawyer.

HRs don't necessarily need to be the most knowledgeable official at a game. **HRs are managers.** They may have the answers; they may not. Their job is to figure out who does have the answers and then make the best decision at the time as quickly and decisively as possible.

Here's some of the skills I look for in an HR:

- Working knowledge of the safety requirements
- Impartiality
- Ability to take feedback
- Communication
- Leadership
- Delegation
- Composure under stress
- Game flow maintenance
- Humility
- Compassion

If you HR one of my games and you let ORs run for six minutes because you're allowing the JR to argue with the OPR about what they each saw on the track and what the applicable *Casebook* example is, then in an evaluation after the game I'm going to let you know that I think that you let your ORs go too long. If you in turn point fingers at others for your lack of game flow management and don't learn from your mistakes, then I'm also not going to take away a good opinion of your ability to accept and apply feedback.

When I'm personally staffing for HR for a local game, often what I'm looking for is someone to either be a mentor to others on the crew or someone who is in a position where they're a newer official ready to HR for the first time in a welcoming environment surrounded by people with more experience who are ready to mentor and support them.

As long as a game is staffed, safe, and fair, I see most games during the season as training opportunities for the officials. Playoffs and post-season games are often the only games where I choose to put everyone where they're most comfortable.

TRAINER / SKATERS

Most of us probably didn't feel ready to HR our first derby game no matter how many games we had worked before. There's too many unpredictable things that could happen, so we can't prepare ourselves for every potential thing. Here's the checklist to ask if someone is ready to HR:

- Can they skate well enough to keep everyone around them safe?
- Are they safe emotionally for themselves and all other participants?
- Do they understand the HR's duties laid out in the *WFTDA Risk Management* guide or other applicable safety requirements?
- Can they recognize egregious or dangerous actions?
- Can they help facilitate the items discussed at the Captains Meeting?
- Do they understand how and when the score can be changed?
- While skating, can they define EZ enough for safety, game structure, and points?
- Can they listen to the ORs and make a decision?
- Do they know when to ask for help from a more experienced official?

Answer these yes, and I think they have the basics required to HR a game. If someone is new to HR, they will need more support during the game than an experienced HR. That's expected. The best thing you can do for someone's first game as HR is to demonstrate patience with their mistakes. The second best thing you can do is to staff a solid FIPR and the most experienced HNSO you can find. If those aren't available locally, ask around to other leagues and see who can come help as guest officials. Giving your HR their best first time experience ensures they'll stay around long enough for a second HR experience.

Your first game as HR will not go perfectly. You will make mistakes.

If there are mentors working beside you during the game, leverage their knowledge, but keep game flow in mind. Don't go to them with every question or ask their opinion for every decision you make. You run the game. If they observe something potentially dangerous or unfair, they'll proactively bring it up. Otherwise, they'll probably let you do your job and give you occasional gentle reminders for important things they think you missed.

ANECDOTE

I actively seek opportunities to mentor newer HR in games. If possible, I'd rather be HNSO in a position like JT or PT if there's a new HR. I absolutely don't want to overshadow the HR, I want them to be seen as that ultimate decision maker running the game. Being staffed as a HNSO helps me let the benches build confidence with the HR's abilities.

Here's a secret: a solid crew of experienced NSOs can potentially help a relatively mediocre HR look like the best HR the teams have ever worked with. As HNSO, I am naturally attending the pre-game meetings and ORs, so it's easy to make sure the game is facilitated safely and fairly without me stepping on anyone's toes. As JT, I can help keep game flow and offer suggestions. As PT, I'm in a good position to be helpful for game procedure reminders like foul outs or ejections.

It's common for a newer or even not-so-newer HR to administer something impactful to the game and make that hard decision, but then they forget some of the follow up procedures necessary as a result of that decision. This is where experienced NSOs come in.

Here's a scenario: An OTO is coming to an end, and I'm the PT with the paperwork, and the HR comes over and says to me "We're expelling Red five-six for an egregious back block." They signal to the JT to make the swoopy whistle to start the next Jam.

Awesome! They did so many things correctly. They saw something happen on the track. They called the OTO. They got the info and different perspectives from the crew. They made a decision. They told the PT to write it down. They're killin' it!

Me: "Got it. Did you tell the teams? Do we need a sub?"

HR, startled and then grateful: "Oh, right!" Then they give the OTO whistle again to finish up communicating and facilitating the expulsion.

There's a lot that an HR does during a game. I've kept the duties and suggestions mostly in bullet form. I want you to be able to refer to these bullet points quickly to remind yourself of the topics.

If you're a new HR, these are the kinds of things I personally do. Some are mandated by the rules, some are the procedures that are common conventions in my region or among the crews I typically work with, and some are simply my personal preference. If you've worked or skated in other games, you've seen HRs do these things. Learn from those HRs. Consider what I include

here in my lists. Implement the things that make sense to you, or adapt them to the needs of your games and crews.

CONCEPTS & PHILOSOPHIES SPOTLIGHT

Pre-game Captains and Officials Meetings

Captains Meeting

The times for this meeting is typically determined by the host league. The meeting may not be in person, and it could instead be held virtually before game day or via email communication. Arrive promptly. If you are closely acquainted with any of the attendees remember that you have an expected role on this day that is separate from any personal relationship you have with them. Maintain an appropriate level of professional distance. If you shake hands or hug one person, then shake everyone's hand or hug everyone. These meetings are one of the best places to establish trust with the teams and make a good first impression.

Another thing to keep in mind is the HNSO is not subservient to you. You may even choose to have the HNSO lead the meeting. Then you can follow up with topics they didn't cover.

- Introductions
- Venue-specific issues (*tell officials, too*)
 - Opening ceremonies
 - Skater introductions
 - Demo jam
 - Halftime entertainment
- Check whether jersey colors have high contrast
- Confirm which color names to use (*tell officials, too*)
- Ensure helmet covers match uniform colors and have high contrast
- Ask for the colored wrist bands or other JR signifiers that match their jersey color (*give to JRs, HNSO, or SKs*)
- Ask what individuals are A and C, and verify the letter is visible (*tell officials, too*)
- Number concerns (*tell officials, too*)
- Benches / swap at half?

- Confirm the total number of bench staff
- Accommodations
 - Communicate any accommodations for an official that you're aware of (electronic whistles, adaptations to official verbal or hand signals, etc.)
 - Ask what accommodations their team needs
 - If hard of hearing individuals are noted, ask what accommodations are needed. Typically they request reasonable requests like shoulder taps in the box
 - If they ask for accommodations on the track itself, often they're asking for extra time to understand they've received a penalty. Consider explaining to the team that you and the officials will always do your best, but you all may occasionally forget requests that aren't standard practice. Add that if an official does forget a special accommodation – especially if a penalty for Skating Out of Bounds or Misconduct is issued – that the team should please wait for lineups and then remind yourself or the HNSO about the accommodations discussed in this meeting. Add that if it happens, you'll remove the penalty. No OR should be needed to correct this.
- Communicate your preference for how teams communicate with officials between jams (*tell all officials*)
- Communicate how you'll solicit their feedback between halves and after the game
- Communicate any preferences you have for communicating time out signals
- Explain your preferences for the facilitation of Official Reviews (*tell officials*)
- Offer to answer questions regarding any penalties you've found commonly officiated differently (*tell officials*). Examples might include:
 - Metric for leaving the track for a penalty
 - Expected timeframe for situations like false start cedes or pack reformations that you expect
 - Metric for avoidable contact to officials
- Any remaining questions they may have
 - Sometimes a team may have a rules question about a strategy they are implementing and they do not want the other team to hear
- Remember the HNSO may have additional questions

Facilitate the Officials Meeting

All the officials have specific jobs and expectations, that includes you. You have certain rules-mandated responsibilities and game management expectations, but no one is subservient to anyone else. Everyone is a co-participant in game safety and the fair administration of the rules and procedures. Most of them will have important game information you will eventually need to complete your duties.

Don't patronize people or assume anyone's experience or abilities based on their appearance. Some of the people in this meeting might have worked 1000+ games. Some people in this meeting might never have officiated anything other than their home scrimmages. All of our interactions should assume everyone is doing their best and is qualified for their role.

- Introductions
- Tell the other officials the information you and the HNSO learned at the Captains meeting
- Communicate anything special you like others to do – below are the items I like the cover
 - All officials:
 - Communicate relevant information from Captains meeting
 - Explain your preferences for how to handle ORs
 - Describe expected behavior for SOs during TTOs and OTOs
 - Pass along any other procedural delegation duties you and the HNSO determine are required
 - Ensure everyone knows where the medics are located and describe expected behavior during injury TOs
 - For JT (it's ok for this conversation to be 1-on-1 before or after the All-Officials meeting):
 - Instruct them continually monitor medics, and call the jam if there's no medic watching the game action
 - Pass along your preferences you discussed with the Captains regarding TO requests

- Request that they watch you at the end of OTOs and ORs to see if you're giving a hand signal to indicate the swoop whistle should be given to end the TO, even if it still looks like you're talking with a coach or skater
- Talk about lineups and TO situations where they might be unsure whether they should or should not announce the 5s warning
- Remind them that they have a whistle and other NSOs don't, so it's ok if they call an OTO if they're sure they see an NSO signaling an OTO is needed
- For SOs:
 - Inform SOs when and where you'd like them to gather before the first jam
 - For all SOs but especially JRs, remind them that they have a whistle. If they hear the 5s announcement and they still require more time to facilitate a penalty or other game information, remind them to call the OTO if they need it.
- For JRs:
 - Distribute the colored wristbands you obtained from the teams
 - Confirm they've picked what team they're each starting with
 - Suggest that after every jam they compare displayed points with the points they awarded
 - Instruct them to confer with SKs at halves to ensure communication procedures are adequate and that points and other jammer stats are correct
 - Remind them of the importance of ensuring points are DISPLAYED correctly before the next jam is allowed to start – communicating a correction to the points does not mean they actually go up on the display in time to be part of the official score

Prior to game day

- Pregame communication with host league

- If you're in the US, ask what insurance covers the league and the venue. If they have insurance you're not familiar with, I recommend doing your own research to understand whether you and other participants' insurances are covered. Folks in other locations should refer to their local regulations.
- Coordinate with the host league regarding staffing the game — they might expect you to do this
- Ask any facility or logistic questions
 - Parking
 - Game schedule
 - How early can officials arrive
 - Check in details
 - Location of officials locker room
 - Warm up times for officials on skates
 - Will there be introductions or other “bout production” items before the game. If common at sporting events in your region, ask whether there's an anthem or other pregame ceremonies
- Pregame communication with other officials on the crew
 - HNSO – Introduce yourself in an email, etc., and include anything specific you'd prefer at the Captains meeting or during the game
 - Staffing – Whether or not you're the person staffing the game, make sure the crew knows ahead of time what they're doing during the game. The HR is also typically staffed as one of the IPRs.
 - Call times – Let people know when you'd like to see their faces at the venue
 - Contact information – Make sure the crew knows how to get ahold of you, in case they're running late
 - Other crew requirements – For instance, JRDA registration, background check, accommodations required for officials
- Re-read the *WFTDA Rules* and *Casebook*
- Re-read the *WFTDA Risk Management* guidelines
- Review the overtime jam procedures
- If the game is not using WFTDA sanctioning rules, familiarize yourself with the differences. JRDA is the most common example, though USARS or MADE are additional examples.

Before the game

- Ensure the game area and track meets safety requirements
- Locate the Medics
- Don't forget to warm up and do your pre-game rituals
- Facilitate game day meetings. I've discussed these in the Concept Spotlight box **in Chapter XX.**

During the game

- Safety is your number one job
 - Continual awareness of medics
 - Continual awareness of the condition of the track and game area
 - Continual awareness for potentially injured individuals
 - Continual awareness for potential Code of Conduct violations or other requirements of the Risk Management guidance
- Maintain professional interactions with the teams at all times
 - They might yell at you
 - This is typically ok as long as it's not abusive to anyone or detracting from the integrity of the game or the performance of the officials
 - Remember they're having an emotional response to the game events, not a logical response. This is discussed more in **Chapter XX**
 - If the crew made a mistake, be quick to own that and be transparent with teams
 - Use polite words like please and thank you
 - You are not an authority figure over them; you are a collaborator with them for safety and fairness
 - Look for opportunities to build trust with the skaters, coaches, and other bench staff
- Gameflow and keeping the game moving appropriately during timeouts is your responsibility as the game manager
 - Do not let ORs go too long
 - End all OTOs as soon as possible while still retaining the fairness and integrity of the game
- Facilitate penalty call administration
 - Ensure the NSOs have all info they need

- Ensure there's only one penalty assigned per skater per illegal action
- If two calls are made on one skater's single action, consider the hierarchy of which is most appropriate
- I recommend to include relevant NSOs when discussing overturning calls, especially the HNSO and PBM if they might have information regarding the call or no-call
- Captain penalties
 - Captain-specific penalties are served as non-pivot blocker
 - If they're already in the queue or in the box as a non-pivot blocker, that's fine. Just add the second penalty to their service.
 - If they're already in the queue or box as the jammer or pivot, then you wait until the next available jam, so they can serve as a non-pivot blocker. Then they must serve as one of the four blockers in the next available jam, even if that means they start in the queue.
 - If you're a new HR, it might be smart to trust the experienced HNSO or PBM to advise you on these procedures, if possible
- Captain foul outs and expulsions
 - There are rules-mandated responsibilities and abilities reserved for team Captains. If the Captain retires from the game, fouls out, is expelled, or PERMANENTLY leaves the game for any other reason like injury or safety equipment issues, the team may designate a new skating Captain. (If the A is a rostered skater, they don't automatically become the new C, but can be named as the new C.) The new Captain must display a C, per the rules. They have all the abilities of the original Captain including calling time outs and official reviews.
 - Teams are not necessarily required by the rules to immediately designate a new C. However, if a Captain-specific penalty is issued, the team must then designate a new C to serve the penalty. If they refuse, then the officials will choose. I suggest the first skater at the top of their paperwork roster or choose randomly.
 - This transfer of the C is ONLY allowed when the original C has permanently left the game due to events like foul outs, injuries, or expulsions

- If that new C subsequently leaves the game, a third C can be selected, and so on
 - Similar to Captain penalties, if you're a new HR, the HNSO, PBM, or other experienced officials likely have relevant experience with facilitating these procedures
- Facilitate anything the NSOs need from the SOs
 - Maintain awareness of NSOs who need an OTO whistle called
 - Repeat missed calls or hand signals, so they can see/hear them
 - Help track down missing penalty information during lineups, since you're on wheels and you can get around faster. It might be easiest at the end of the jam to call out loudly "Skating officials to the middle" to get everyone in one spot as soon as possible during the lineup period
 - Clock adjustments and displayed information accuracy are the responsibility of the NSOs. You can help them by offering to skate over to the SBO to communicate their information directly on their behalf
- ORs
 - Check to see if the team has an OR available
 - Invite both teams' Captains and Alternates to listen
 - Only the team using their OR states the event to review
 - Repeat the request to the team, and confirm you understand exactly what they're asking for "What I'm hearing is White bench is asking for the white jammer cut penalty to be overturned, correct?"
 - If the event requested in the review happened prior to the most recent jam, inform the team it cannot be reviewed. (*The following is my opinion for what to do if the event cannot be reviewed.*)
 - If the event cannot be reviewed and the team has a TTO available, consider asking them if they'd like to turn the OR into a TTO. If yes, and the TO has already exceeded 1:00 in length, tell the JT to end the TO. Inform the NSOs that the OR is instead a TTO, as if they never used the OR
 - If the team does not wish to use an available TTO or has no TTO available, then they lose their OR

- Ask the other team if they understand the issue under review, help answer their related clarifications, if necessary. It is not required to gather any feedback or information from the other team.
- Gather all of the relevant officials (likely all of the SOs and the HNSO) in a safe location out of the earshot of the benches and skaters
- When talking with the officials, don't telegraph the nature of the discussion with hand gestures or head nods large or small. Don't re-enact any skater actions during the OR
- An OR is not a conversation with the officials, it is an adjudication of the request from the team
 - Give all officials a chance to communicate what they saw of the action in question
 - Ask any follow up questions you require
 - Ask if anyone saw anything different
 - Do not allow others to bicker the rules or speak only because they like the sound of their own voice
 - If you notice that an official seems to be using words that are related to safety or are similar to the kinds of words we use for expulsions, make sure they're comfortable speaking up about what they saw
 - If you feel the need for a majority vote, poll the officials for a verbal yea or nay (no hand gestures or head nods!)
 - Using the information you've gathered, QUICKLY make a decision that is your best implementation of the rules and procedures as you know them
 - What's most fair or most similar to how you've been calling other discretion calls during the game?
 - What's safest?
 - What is best for this game?
- Regather all Cs and As
 - Empathetically report the decision and a brief summary of the rationale. Sometimes that rationale might be simply "we didn't see it."
 - Remember that the decision is not a conversation, the HR's decision is final. The teams may have a follow up question, but they cannot get another action reviewed or reword the OR in an attempt to change the nature of the original request.

- If it was determined there was an error and the OR is retained, the team can call a second OR, per the *WFTDA Rules*
 - If no, ask the opposing team if they would now like to use their own OR (if they have one available)
 - Once you've communicated the OR decision and you're sure no one is asking at that point for another OR, indicate to the JT to blow the end of TO swoop whistle
 - After the swoop, as with any 0:30 lineup period before a jam, the teams now can bring you questions or concerns including any concerns regarding the just-completed OR. However, they cannot be allowed to unfairly extend the OR. They have the normal 30s to complete their communication to you, or they must call a new TTO or OR (if available).
- Provide succinct in-game feedback to others if needed for safety, game flow, impartiality, or paperwork and NSO procedure needs. Consider saving other feedback for halftime or after the game.
- If there are skaters serving penalties at the end of the first period, work with the HNSO and PBM to ensure they're in the box at the start of the second period and that they're serving in the same position as they were in the previous jam
- Facilitate expulsions
 - Any official can recommend an expulsion
 - Gather all relevant officials and briefly conference with the official recommending the expulsion. Then let every official have an opportunity to give their input and what, if anything, they observed. Do not forget to ask any NSO who may have had eyes on the action – especially the HNSO and PBM
 - After listening to all the information the officials have, you are ultimately the person who makes the final decision
 - If you decide to issue an expulsion
 - Tell the skater and the team's A and C. Stay calm; no official is angry. State the facts succinctly using language from the *WFTDA Rules* book. For instance "Red five-six, you are being expelled for an egregious Backblock to the white jammer. Please leave the game area and degear."
 - Request a substitution skater if required in the box
 - Tell the other team, and tell the HNSO, PBM, and announcers, as necessary

- Once the NSOs tell you everything regarding any paperwork or substitutions is taken care of, indicated to the JT to begin lineups
 - Also ask the JT to watch and confirm the skater leaves the track area before they start the next jam
 - Ask the PBM to watch for whether or not the expelled skater re-enters the game area
- Halftime
 - Confirm length of halftime and whether there will be halftime entertainment
 - Seek feedback from teams
 - Seek feedback from HNSO
 - Meet with the SOs
 - Be supportive, kind, and calm
 - Give them the positive feedback you have – both from yourself and the other participants
 - Give them anything you'd like them to do different based on the above feedback
 - Consider saving back
 - negative feedback that doesn't affect safety, game flow, impartiality, paperwork and NSO procedure needs, or bench relations
 - negative feedback that you doubt can be implemented during the current game
 - Also consider reserving harsh but necessary feedback for a 1-on-1 discussion after the group meeting
 - Do not allow this feedback session to turn into an opportunity for anyone to single out or bully anyone else
 - Insulting each other, even if it's meant light-hearted, is not a substitute for building crew cohesion and camaraderie
 - Visit restroom, refill water bottle, or have a light snack, if needed
- Coming back from halftime
 - Ensure skaters who need to report to the box are in the box
 - Ensure any skaters in queue are on the track
 - Make sure all officials are in place before indicating to the JT to end halftime with the swoop whistle

- If an overtime jam occurs, confirm with HNSO, JRs, and SKs that the score is indeed a tie. Then take the time to ensure everyone understands the procedures for the jam
- Sign IGRF after Captains have signed it
- Suspension meeting and paperwork with HNSO
- Give any final game feedback to officials

After a game

- Thank the host
- Thank all the other officials, including the NSOs
- Write down what went right
- Write down what you'd do different next time
- Follow up a couple days later with the crew to ask if they have parting thoughts for you regarding what you could do to improve
- Write evals if they were requested

ANECDOTE

Early in our SO careers, a fellow LEO and I went to a triple header at a nearby non-WFTDA league. I reffed in only the first two games, and she reffed all three. Her frustration during the first period of the last game as FIPR was obvious on her face. I didn't know if she was just tired or maybe distracted by something else. At halftime, I asked her if I could help make things easier. I was an inside NSO in that game, but if there was something I could do to help, I would.

She expressed frustration with the BIPR, who was also the HR. She felt that the pack def was lax to non-existent. We were both JRs earlier in the day for the two previous games, so neither of us had paid close attention to the pack def. Now that she was FIPR, the lack of pack control was more obvious to her. This tripleheader was hosted by a casual rec league, so she hated to interfere with their league culture.

"Have you asked the HR about it?"

"I asked twice. He says everything's fine."

However, we both knew that as the tensions got more intense in the second half that safety would become a factor if the game structure continued to be so sloppy. Everyone's first job is safety. As the second half starts, it's clear she still feels the same way. At an early time out, I spoke discreetly with her. She repeats that she's worried about the BIPR not doing his job.

"You're an IPR, too."

The next jam started. The first No-Pack from the HR seemed late, again. I looked at her face, and I saw the anger. Then the anger melted into wonder and then instantly turned to determination and confidence. When the pack reformed, she immediately gave the "Pack is HERE" verbal cue and signal. Then issued a Failure to Reform. A split second later announced another No-Pack when the pack broke again due to the penalized skater no longer being a bridge.

Even though my friend was not staffed as BIPR, in that moment, I saw her become a HR.