

First Horn – Now What?

After the first warning horn it's time for the crew to get back to work. Know your responsibilities in a two and three-person crew.

The following is a recommended best practice for handling resumption of play after a time-out or intermission — after the first warning horn is sounded.

- **Start in the right spot.** In a two-person (NFHS) crew — the person situated at the division line will be the official to handle the teams returning on the court. In a three-person crew, the officials that are either positioned at the top of the 3-point arc (30 second time out) or the opposite side neutral lane space mark, commonly called “the block” for a 60 second time out will be responsible for handling the huddles.
- **Move toward the huddles.** After the timer sounds the 1st warning horn which designates there is only 15 seconds left in the time out or intermission to be “ready and play” — you should “physically move toward” the huddles. Don't walk ... a slight jog looks better. In a three-person crew it's easy. You have one official for each huddle. With a two-person crew the official at the division line needs to handle both.

“Never turn your back or run away from the huddle until you are confident of the team's return to the floor.”

- **Get Verbal and Visual.** Be close enough and say loud enough for everyone in the huddle(s) to hear: “First horn ... No Substitutions.” It's simple. Four words every time while holding up your index finger with the arm toward the huddle. If the team is still talking after the first warning horn — keep moving closer until you next to the huddle. I personally continue to hold up my index finger so they can see a visual warning.
- **Stay until Huddle Breaks.** In my pre-games we discuss this technique. If the “huddle handling” official is still standing out of position dealing with the teams — then we are NOT ready to resume play. Once the huddle starts to break you will start to back-out to your position.
- **Stubborn Huddlers.** If they don't break and the 2nd horn is sounded. Get verbal again. “That's the 2nd horn ... we are about ready to play ball” ... or something like that. A bit of final encouragement (and official final warning) before we get ready to resume play. If after the 2nd horn the handling official is still near the huddle and not in position, we will NOT put the ball in play. However, if that official has given the final warning and decides the team is not complying then they should move away from the huddle into their next position. This alerts the inbound official that we've given enough warnings and you can follow the resumption of play procedures — in NFHS by putting the ball on the floor and initiating a count.
- **Count and count again.** Each official (or the table official in a crew of two) is responsible for two things.
 - 1) Not allowing any substitutes after the 1st warning horn. (remember, you already warned them)
 - 2) Counting the players as they return to the floor. This is CRITICAL and a key responsibility of the “huddle handler.” If you are alone (crew of two) then count both teams. Otherwise count the team members from the huddle you were responsible for. Obviously do not signal ready to play (to your partner) if teams have excessive players on the court. Allow time to remedy that situation before starting. (a.k.a. preventative officiating)

“It's the entire crews responsibility to make sure the right number of players return to the floor.”

- **Resumption of Play.** If all goes well the teams will break the huddle on time and you can resume play normally. If not, the resumption of play procedure (NFHS 7-5) should be used. That's a topic for another day.

Once the first horn sounds it's time for YOU (and the crew) to get back to work. Focus on clear communications with the huddles, prompting the players to be on-time ready to play, and make sure to prevent rule violations such as late substitutions and too many players.