

From Whistle to Snap – Version 2

This document is intended to supplement to the 2014 edition of Mechanics Illustrated (MI) and any previous editions of From Whistle to Snap. Many of the chapters of MI include information about dead ball officiating; however, officials and RTO observers noted areas that needed clarifications and additional information. In this chapter, we are going to cover what happens after the whistle blows and the play ends until the ball is snapped (or free kicked) starting the next play. This will include the “Accordion” mechanic and other dead ball responsibilities. The other chapters in the mechanics manual cover the positioning, coverage areas, and other live ball oriented topics.

The Accordion Mechanic:

One of the basic dead ball mechanics is the accordion mechanic used at the end of most plays (The exceptions are noted in the next section). Simply put, the accordion is the motion of all officials other than the Umpire(U) toward the dead ball spot at the end of the play. This convergence of officials helps improve dead ball officiating and reminds the players that you are there. For the wing officials, it helps sell the forward progress spot and moves them away from coaches who might be reacting to the play or call.

In the normal accordion mechanic, the Referee(R) moves toward the ball, normally coming in about 5-7 yards. The Back Judge(BJ) also comes toward the ball about 10-12 yards. The wings come down the sideline to the forward progress yard line and square up their turn and come in to at least the top of the numbers. The crew should move back to their regular positions when the ball is spotted by the umpire, however this should be done without turning their back to the ball or players.

There are conditions where the accordion mechanic must be altered because our first responsibility is safety for the players. For example, no official should go past players from opposing teams. He needs to be in a position to dead ball officiate their activities. Also, you never go past the ball. If you are a wing and the ball is on your sideline, you don't accordion at all - you have a spot to hold. In this situation, the other wing should come in further to be closer to the action, maybe as far as his hash mark. If the ball ends in your side zone, you don't go past it.

In all but one case, wing officials would stop the accordion movement before they pass players of either team. We want to be in the best position to dead ball officiate. The one exception is when the dead ball spot is very close to a first down or the goal line. For those, if you are the nearest wing official with the spot, you should come all the way into the dead ball spot. The BJ and/or R should slide over towards your side as he comes in to cover any players behind you.

Application of the Accordion:

The accordion mechanic is used on most normal plays of short to modest gain. There are some situations though where we deviate from this mechanic. These include:

- If we have an incomplete pass, no accordion mechanic is needed.
- On long plays, only the wings would be using the accordion.
- When a penalty flag is thrown; you may have to cover another official's dead ball spot or report the foul to the R. In those cases, you would deviate from the accordion mechanic to take care of the more important responsibility.
- If there is a safety issue where you need to move to separate players, that automatically takes precedence over the accordion mechanics.

On short plays that result in a runner nearing or crossing the goal line, both wings should accordion in quickly ("crash in") towards the spot where the ball crossed the goal line or where it ended short of the line. The covering wing official can check with the U if there is question on whether the ball crossed the goal line or not and either signal touchdown or point down at the spot to sell the call that the runner is short.

Before the Next Play:

There are a number of tasks that officials need to accomplish before the next snap:

- Once the ball is spotted, officials should back out to their pre-snap position.
- Officials need to get their player counts. If R notices that A is short a player, he needs to continue giving the "short count" signal until the ball is snapped so that the wings are aware of the situation.
- Wing officials need to verify the validity of the formation.
- Wing officials also need to be sure their side's restricted area is clear when the snap is imminent.
- Wing officials can indicate whether to the widest receiver on their side whether he is on or off the line and give the appropriate signal and/or acknowledgement to the opposite wing.
- Umpire needs to determine if any linemen are outside of the free blocking zone and that all linemen are appropriately numbered.
- Finally, the Referee does not give the ready for play signal until all officials are ready and the down box is in position and has the correct down.

Other Dead Ball Mechanics Notes:

There are other mechanics that can come into play during the dead ball period.

- Incomplete Pass: The covering official should give the incomplete signal no more than twice (and then any optional supplementary signals). All other officials should give the stop clock signal.

- Interceptions: Wings would accordion in as normal. If the interception is in your primary coverage area, and the runner is downed, stop the clock and signal the new direction of play, otherwise treat it as a running play.
- Fumbles: Only one or two “diggers” in the pile. All other officials stay away and dead ball officiate.
- PAT kicks: Once the ball is kicked, wings should crash in down the line of scrimmage and R should move in towards the center of the action. Passions are high right after a score and the players just ran into each other for the kick. Tempers may be short, so be in position to preventative officiate.
- Field goals: Same as for PAT kicks, except only move in once the ball is clearly across the goal line. Remember, if it does not cross the goal line, it is a scrimmage kick and you need to officiate it accordingly.
- After a scoring kick play or try and the signals are given, all but R should square out to their sideline and then go down the sideline off the field. R should go directly to the goal line, then go down the goal line to his pre-kick position. No official should be running down the middle of the field. Record your scoring notes once in the proper position for the ensuing free kick.
- Normal Downs: The LJ is responsible for communicating the next down to the R as soon as the play ends. The R echoes this signal and the HL then instructs the box holder to change the down. The others on the crew echo the down signal.
- Stopping the clock: Any official can stop the clock by giving the stop clock signal no more than twice unless the clock fails to stop. The remainder of the crew should echo this signal. If the clock does not stop, this may need to be repeated.
- Spotting the ball: On long plays where the wings are not yet downfield and the BJ has the spot on the field and has the ball, he can spot it and just let the U know it is spotted. There is no requirement for the U to re-spot the ball. Likewise, in situations where the U goes downfield to get the ball from a crew member, the R can come to the spot and take the relay from U and spot the ball. When spotting the ball, the umpire should square to and face the wing from whom he is marking the spot.
- When a free kick results in a touchback, R should blow the whistle loudly and move to a position to get players attention while giving the touchback signal.
- When there is a dead ball penalty on a free kick and the decision is made to re-kick with a distance mark off, the BJ shall go to the previous spot, march off the penalty, either hand the ball to a player or place it on the ground, and then give the proper penalty signal.
- Close to the line to gain: On plays that are close to being a first down, the covering wing official does not stop at the hash mark, but comes all the way to the dead ball spot. The ball is then given to him and he spots it where he saw the play end. Never relay the ball away from the dead ball spot and have a wing spot it at a different location.

- Ball boys: Ball boys should be near the wing as he moves up and down the field. This way they have the shortest distance to run when they bring in a new ball.
- Ready for Play: The RFP whistle and signal should not be given until all crew members but the U, are in their pre-snap positions. When the signal is given, the U can leave the ball and move to his pre-snap position. In some game situations (little time left, hurry up offense, etc.), the R can “point off” the U so that he can move to his pre-snap position before the RFP is given.
- On touchdowns, only the covering official gives the touchdown signal and does not take his eyes from players when doing so. When the R has verified that there are no penalties cancelling the score, he turns to the press box to give the official touchdown (confirmation) signal.
- On a pass to the back corner of the end zone when the back judge is on the end line and the side official has the goal line, both officials may signal the touchdown.
- It is good practice for the crew members to remind the referee that the clock starts on the snap or on the ready for play. This can be done verbally or by hand signals (snapping fingers or small winding motion). The snapping of fingers is not a signal that the referee should be giving for the clock operator.
- When the line to gain and the line of scrimmage are both inside the 5-yard line, the wing officials should break to the goal line at the snap and officiate backwards to the line to gain. While the goal line is most important in these short yardage situations, the line for achieving a first down can be very important also and the wings need to be aware of it.
- The snapper protected signal is given by the referee to the umpire to remind him that the snapper is protected when a scrimmage kick formation is used. The umpire may also give the signal to the referee as an acknowledgement that he is aware of the snapper having protection. This is not a required signal if the Umpire has already verbalized to the players that the snapper has protection.
- Timeouts: HL and LJ should be alert and do not allow coaches/attendants to enter the field before the R has granted the timeout. If the coach wants an Outside the Nine Yard Mark Conference “steer” the coach and teams to a legal position nearer the sideline than the top of the numbers and between the 25 yard lines. Monitor the team huddle from a triangular position near the huddle, on the offensive of the huddle, facing the huddle, close enough monitor, but with the R also in view.
- Injury timeouts: Coaches may not come onto the field to conference with their players during injury timeouts (3-5-8 & casebook situation B). Any conference during an injury timeout must be held outside the nine yard marks and away from any injured player. If there are any conferences, officials should take the same positions they would normally take during team timeouts.
- Team Timeouts: If the head coach (or designee) calls a team timeout from the sideline, the wing official should stop the clock. If he is not holding the dead ball spot, he can move towards the referee. He should give a subtle signal to the

referee indicating that his team has called a team timeout. This signal should be agreed upon as a part of the pregame conference.

- Catch Signal: It is OK for officials to give the good catch signal when there is some question as to whether the ball was caught.
- Prolonged injury timeouts: If the injury is serious, send both teams to their sidelines. Officials should write down the game situation (down, distance, time, and number of the injured player). Once team personnel are on the field, the crew should move away from the injured player. Do not offer medical advice. If the delay is longer than 15 minutes or if the referee deems it appropriate, the referee should advise the coaches that prior to play resuming, there will be a three-minute warmup timed on the field.
- On free kicks that go out of bounds, the covering official should throw his flag up in the air towards the spot where the ball went out of bounds. He can then move to the exact spot where the ball crossed the sideline and remain there until it is obvious that the spot is no longer needed.
- Prior to beginning the march-off of the distance on a penalty enforcement, the umpire must ensure that the line judge is holding the enforcement yard line. Line Judge should hold this spot until the umpire has placed the ball on the ground and the Line Judge verifies that the spot is correct. Flags for spot fouls should be left on the ground until enforcement is complete. It is OK to swap the flag on the ground with yours if you are holding that spot. After swapping the flag, hand it to the official, do not throw it.
- Back Judge should read his key before moving after the snap. Then if he reads run, he should not move backwards but rather towards the point of attack to help box in the play.
- When A sets or shifts into a legal punt formation with no receiver dropping deep, Back Judge should line up on the hash mark on the Head Linesman's side 40 yards off the line of scrimmage. If this position is in the end zone, he should be on the goal line.
- When a penalty occurs during a play, the most critical spot is the end of the run. The covering official should hold this spot until relieved or signaled by the referee that the spot is no longer needed. If available, another official should cover the flag. The referee should jog to the official who threw the flag to get the penalty information whenever possible.
- As a part of their pre-snap routine, wing officials must ensure that anyone outside of the team box (reporters, statisticians, photographers, etc.) must be at least 5 yards off the sideline.
- Relay: When relaying the ball to another official, use short under-hand tosses.
- Halftime: When both teams have left the field, the referee should give the wind the clock signal to the timer who should then start the halftime clock. When the teams return to the field after the halftime, the referee should again give the wind the clock signal to start the three-minute warmup period.
- When both teams are going to exit through the same gate at halftime, crew members other than the referee should stop the team furthest from the gate until

the other team has cleared the gate. The referee will remain on the field to start the half-time clock once all team members have left the field.

- On Free Kicks, when the BJ returns to his sideline, he will move to the yard line 5 yards from the restraining line and verify that no player other than the kicker has any body part behind that line. Then he will return to the restraining line and then signal that he is ready for the free kick.
- Counting: For Five-man crews, on free kicks, Line Judge and Back Judge count kickers. Referee and Umpire count Receivers. Head Linesman may count receivers. On scrimmage plays, Referee and Umpire count offense, Back Judge and Line Judge count defense. Head Linesman may optionally count defense.
- if the Back Judge is on the goal line and a potential pass receiver enters the end zone the Back Judge must go with him and move to the end line to make sure that the end line is not violated. As soon as the Back Judge leaves the goal line the wing officials must assume goal line coverage. If the touchdown is scored by a player carrying the ball across the goal line, then the signal is given by the official with goal line coverage at the time the ball crosses the goal line. If the touchdown is scored by completing a pass in the end zone the signal is given by the official with coverage of the completion. In the case of a pass in the corner this could/should be both the wing official and the Back Judge after checking with each other to make sure they agree.
- Wind clock signal: It is ok for a wing official to give the “wind the clock” signal on plays ending inbounds near the sideline if in his judgement, it is appropriate.
- After a long play that results in a first down, the Referee should signal to the linesman that we have a first down and quickly jog to within 15 yards of the new line of scrimmage and then signal the first down.
- On scoring kicks, both officials under the goalposts should signal whether the kick is good or no good. Optionally, if the kick is wide, the official under that goal post may give the “kick is wide” signal. If the kick lands in the end zone on a field goal attempt, only the back judge gives the touchback signal and neither official gives the “no good” signal.

Corrections to the Mechanics Illustrated, 2014 edition:

Page 20: Entirely black shoes or black shoes with a white manufacturer's logo or stripe shall be worn. The shoe may have a white or black sole. Only black laces shall be worn with either style of shoe.

Page 71: The Back Judge and Line Judge do not need to bring footballs to the coin toss. But either both bring them or neither brings them.

Page 75: During the timeout, the Referee and Back Judge remain in their positions in the offensive and defensive backfield respectively, the umpire stands over the ball and the Linesman and Line Judge should take positions ***on the offensive side of their huddle, facing so that they can both monitor their huddle and have the Referee in sight.***

Page 83: **Linesman:** The Linesman will count the R players and signal his count to the referee.

Page 83: **Line Judge:** The Line Judge will count the K players before moving back to the sideline and verify his count with the Back Judge.

Page 84: **Back Judge:** The Back judge will not move to the sideline until he has verified his count of K players with the Line Judge.

Page 96: The Linesman observes the initial line charge and remains on the line until the kick crosses the neutral zone while the Line Judge releases downfield when the ball is snapped. On short scrimmage kick, the Line Judge watches action involving short receiver(s) until the Back Judge can release from the deep receiver(s).

Page 196-197: 3-Man - The kickoff mechanic is changed. The HL lines up on K's restraining line and takes the ball out to the kicker. The LJ lines up on R's restraining line.

Page 202: When a play ends inbounds near a sideline and a first down has been achieved, the covering official should first give the "wind-the-clock" signal followed by the stop-the-clock signal.

Page 206-208- Replace all from Pregame Duties section with the following:

PREGAME DUTIES

Taking the Field

The officiating crew should take the field a minimum of 30 minutes prior to the scheduled kickoff time. The crew should take the field together if at all possible and should be in complete uniform and ready to start the contest. Preferably do your stretching before coming on the field, or in the end zone after all other pregame tasks are completed.

Meeting with Coaches

As soon as is practical after taking the field the officiating crew should meet with the head coach of each team. If the circumstances require the coach meetings to occur prior to the officiating crew taking the field, then the Referee and one additional official as a minimum will conduct each meeting. Meet with the home team coach first if possible. The meeting should begin with the Referee, or wing official for that sideline, introducing himself and giving the coach a card listing the names of the officiating crew members, at his discretion the referee may delegate the crew card presentation to the side official responsible that the coach's sideline. The referee should then continue the meeting with his request that the coach certify that his players are legally and properly equipped followed by the WIAA required question regarding the presence of a health care provider certified in concussion management. Suggested additional subjects for the meeting include:

- Equipment issues needing the Umpire's attention
- Unusual formations or plays the team may employ
- Numbers (and names) of the team captains
- Throwing hand of passers and kicking foot of kickers
- Rule "Points of Emphasis"
- Remind coaches that they cannot come on the field between plays unless a timeout is called.
- Sideline management instructions
- Foul reporting
- Time Out calling
- Halftime duration
- Time for coin toss
- Reminder that the playing field is an extension of the classroom and appropriate behavior by all participants is expected

Additional subjects for home team head coach:

- Chain crew

- Any field issues (goal post pads, close obstacles that need to be moved)

The Referee would be well advised to involve his entire crew in the head coach meetings, which crew member asks which questions is an excellent topic for the crew pregame meeting.

Remaining time prior to coin toss

Crew

- During team warmups, the officiating crew should be sensitive to the interaction between the teams. If tensions exist between the teams, the crew should immediately request that the coaches intervene.
- Move about the field with purpose, avoid gathering in groups of 3 or more without a specific purpose/reason. Do not engage in unnecessary conversation with players or coaches of either team.
- Maintain the appearance of impartiality by avoiding any activity that could be seen by a team as showing a rapport with the opposing team.

Referee

- Inspect and approve game balls, this responsibility is specifically assigned by rule to the Referee. He can be accompanied by the Umpire who can use the opportunity to instruct the ball boys as to how he would like them to work with him.
- Verify the presence of required field safety devices and the absence of any potential hazards (soccer goals, track and field equipment, etc.)
- Make himself available should the clock operator have any questions as to his job.
- Spot check player equipment for legality, instruct the player/coach to correct any issues found with uniform or equipment. Refer any items in question to the Umpire for decision on legality.
- Observe pregame warmups by each team, take special note of passers, kickers and offensive backfield players.
- (Optional) Meet chain crew members and thank them for their assistance.

Umpire

- Instruct ball boys as to how he would like them to work, usually done while accompanying the Referee during approval of the game balls.
- Spot check player equipment for legality, instruct the player/coach to correct any issues found with uniform or equipment. Decide on the legality of any uniform/equipment issues referred by other officiating crew members

Linesman

- Inspect the down box and chains. Make sure the chain is securely attached to the poles and is free of kinks. If there is no tape at the midway point of the chain (to facilitate the determination of whether a five-yard defensive penalty will result in a first down), ask a trainer for tape and mark the chain. The ends of the box and chain poles must be properly covered. If they are not, ask game management to remedy the situation.
- Meet with the chain crew, instruct them on safety procedures, proper setting of the chains and the down box, proper installation of the clip, measurement and quarter change procedures.
- Walk the Linesman's sideline, look for any safety issues such as yard line markers too close to the field, team benches or training tables too close to the field.
- Spot check player equipment for legality, instruct the player/coach to correct any issues found with uniform or equipment. Refer any items in question to the Umpire for decision on legality.
- Observe team warmups. Make note of formations used, pass routes run, passer and punter abilities along with anything else that may help in officiating the game.
- (4-man crew) Ensure that the team captains that you will escort onto the field for the coin toss are in place at the designated time.

Line Judge

- Inspect the field (with Back Judge). The Line Judge should walk down both sidelines and along each end line at a brisk but unhurried pace. You don't need to inspect every blade of grass, but if you discover potholes, broken glass or other hazards, ask game management to have the problem taken care of immediately. If the field is marked for another sport (many football fields are also used for soccer), make sure the crew knows which lines are being used for football. Make sure the goalposts are straight and free of decoration and that the goalpost pads are securely fastened. Check the pylons to ensure they are properly placed.
- Spot check player equipment for legality, instruct the player/coach to correct any issues found with uniform or equipment. Refer any items in question to the Umpire for decision on legality.
- Observe team warmups. Make note of formations used, pass routes run, passer and punter abilities along with anything else that may help in officiating the game.
- (4-man crew) Meet with clock operator if possible, answer any questions he/she might have about clock operation.
- (When applicable) Meet with auxiliary down box and line to gain operators who will be working on your sideline.
- Ensure that the team captains that you will escort onto the field for the coin toss are in place at the designated time.

Back Judge

- Inspect the field (with Line Judge). The Back Judge should walk down both sidelines and along each end line at a brisk but unhurried pace. You don't need to inspect every blade of grass, but if you discover potholes, broken glass or other hazards, ask game management to have the problem taken care of immediately. If the field is marked for another sport (many football fields are also used for soccer), make sure the crew knows which lines are being used for football. Make sure the goalposts are straight and free of decoration and that the goalpost pads are securely fastened. Check the pylons to ensure they are properly placed.
- Spot check player equipment for legality, instruct the player/coach to correct any issues found with uniform or equipment. Refer any items in question to the Umpire for decision on legality.
- Observe team warmups. Make note of formations used, pass routes run, passer and punter abilities along with anything else that may help in officiating the game.
- Meet with clock operator if possible, answer any questions he/she might have about clock operation. Ensure that the team captains that you will escort onto the field for the coin toss are in place at the designated time.

Pregame Official's Conference

The official's pregame conference is a critical factor in ensuring that the upcoming game is officiated in a manner that optimizes the safety of all participants, enables the athletes to perform at their highest ability and ensures an enjoyable contest for players, coaches, fans and officials. The conference is required for all games regardless of level; varsity game conferences should start no less than 90 minutes prior to the scheduled kickoff and sub-varsity game conferences should start as soon as the crew can muster together at the field.

Note that even highly experienced crews benefit from a well-planned pregame meeting. The discussion brings the entire officiating team together and gets them focused on the game, it's a time to put aside every day concerns and other items and focus on the task at hand. A quick run through mechanics, even for highly experienced crews, never is time wasted and if the crew has less experienced members it is time for them to learn from the more experienced crew members.

Every game is different, anyone who has done officiating will acknowledge this. After mechanics have been gone over by an experienced crew it is time to talk about today's specific game. Who knows what about each team? Share your knowledge and voice your concerns. If you know something about the coach's demeanor then share that with the side guys so they have some help in their sideline management duty.

If the crew completely runs out of items to talk over then cover some situations, tell of challenging calls you have had and discuss how they were/should have been handled by the crew.

A suggested outline is below for the official's conference. It deals with game management and mechanics items. Time required for each subject will vary with crew experience, but the entire crew should leave the pregame conference comfortable with their part in each of them.

General comments about upcoming game, share any information that may be pertinent regarding either of the teams, type of offense, possible issues, previous meetings, etc.

General game management items:

- Event timeline for 30 mins prior to kickoff (from game management)
- New rule changes/clarifications
- New mechanics changes/clarifications
- Official's succession (who assumes which duties if an official cannot continue in the game)
- Sideline management during game
- Clock management, both game clock and play clock
- Quarter change mechanics
- Time-out mechanics

When we take the field:

- Meeting with head coaches
- Field check
- Equipment check, includes balls, player equipment, etc.
- Chain crew
- Pregame demeanor, find something to do other than talk as a group or (especially) with coaches and players

Coin toss:

- Positions
- Are BJ and LJ going to bring a ball or not?
- Officials come together at completion of coin toss to record results

Free kicks:

- Starting positions
- Dead ball fouls
- Illegal blocking by K
- Coverage for normal kickoff
- Coverage for onside kickoff

- KO out of bounds, touchback, momentum play

Scrimmage plays:

- Presnap routine, partner signals
- Presnap dead ball fouls
- Short run play coverage
- Short pass play coverage.
- Long run play coverage.
- Long pass play coverage
- Fouls unique to pass plays, grounding, OPI, DPI, etc
- Backwards pass, broken play coverage
- Goal Line (inside the 20yd line and inside the 5yd line) coverage

Scrimmage Kicks-Punts:

- Starting positions
- Coverage for “normal” punt
- Coverage for a short punt
- Coverage for a broken play or blocked kick in K backfield
- Spot for punt that lands OOB.
- Special considerations for fouls on punts
- Touchback and momentum

Scrimmage Kicks-Scoring plays

- Starting positions, field position and/or “swinging gate” dependent
- Ball status after kick (i.e. Field Goal vs Try)
- On FG, coverage of possible return, touchback, momentum play
- Coverage for broken play or blocked kick in K backfield

Penalty enforcement:

- Crew notification of foul call
- End of Run and Spot of Foul responsibilities
- Reporting fouls to R
- Enforcement mechanics
- Reporting fouls to head coach

Measurements:

- Mechanics are quite specific; everyone has a job to do
- Measurement requests from Head Coach or Captain