

## KICKOFF RETURNS

It is during this time that the officials are the most spread out and there is action in many areas of the field necessitating strict discipline on the part of all officials.

It is of utmost importance that we stay within our own area(s) of responsibility and not be "ball watchers" when we should be "blocker watchers".

As with any other play during the game, we should have only one official observing the ball carrier with all other officials observing blockers and off the ball activity. Too many eyes on the ball carrier and not enough eyes in other areas significantly decreases our ability to properly officiate the play and leads to criticism of our abilities.

## UPFIELD OFFICIALS

The upfield officials (S,F,B and U in a seven man game) should locate their "keys"( receiving team players that they are responsible for) prior to the kick and should observe those player from the time of the kick to the time that those players make initial contact with a kicking team player. After that initial contact , they should then read the play, switching to a zone type coverage and officiate the blockers and any off the ball action as required.

In cases of a long runback, the B and U have goal line responsibility and the S and F have sideline responsibility to the goal line. Only one official at a time should assume ball carrier responsibility.

## KICK INTO END ZONE

If the kick goes into the end zone between the field numbers, the R (positioned in the end zone) has ball and clock responsibility. He should observe the catch, if any, and wind the clock ( when appropriate) if the ball is brought out of the end zone. As the ball crosses the goal line and into the field of play, the R should now assume blocker responsibility as he would on a normal running play from scrimmage as he can no longer see the ball.

The H and/or L, but not both,( originally positioned on the goal line and out of bounds but contacting the pylon) will now have ball responsibility as far as they can take it. Prior to the catch and while the ball is in the end zone, the H and L should focus on blockers and the area near the 15-20 yard line.

If the ball is caught in the end zone and outside the field numbers, the H and/or L, but not both, will assume ball and clock responsibility and will take the ball carrier up the field as far as possible with the R totally focused on blockers.

## **KICK IN FIELD OF PLAY**

**When the kick is caught in the field of play, the R has blocker responsibility throughout the play as he is always behind the ball carrier.**

**The H and L should stay at the goal line until it is positive that the goal line is not an issue, the covering official then observing possession and starting the clock if appropriate. The offside official will observe blocking action much the same as the R.**

**The H and/or L should treat the runback as a normal running play, taking the ball carrier as far as possible.**

## **FUMBLE MECHANIC**

When player possession of the ball is lost and a fumble ensues, the covering official should drop his beanbag at his feet on the yard line where possession was lost. This action is necessary for multiple reasons; the beanbag spot may be used as an enforcement spot for fouls committed while the ball is loose; it may be the spot the ball is returned to if the ball goes out of bounds in advance of that spot; or if an inadvertent whistle occurs during the loose ball.

Fumbles are a critical part of the game and may become a turning point.

It is of utmost importance that the officials communicate the results of all fumbles clearly, and in a timely manner.

When fumbles occur, the most important issue to coaches, players, fans and media is-- **WHO'S BALL IS IT??**

The method of communication for the officials is the **directional signal**.

The ruling official should utilize this signal (hand and arm extended toward the goal line) on **ALL RECOVERIES** (both offense and defense) to indicate the direction toward which the recovering team will next put the ball in play. This signal should be followed by the timeout signal when appropriate.

**NOTE-** In cases where the clock is an issue, such as the last two minutes of a half, the timeout signal should precede the directional signal.

## **HL - LJ CUSHION**

For scrimmage downs, your initial position prior to the snap should be **out of bounds** and on the line of scrimmage.

When a play starts toward you, your first movement should be **directly back** and deeper into the out of bounds area.

This movement allows you to establish a "cushion" between you and the players coming toward you and creates a wider view angle in which you can observe blockers, and when necessary, the ball carrier.

It is not recommended that movement upfield or downfield along the sideline be utilized as this severely restricts the officials view angle and positions him at the improper angle to rule on this play.

If the play becomes dead inbounds, the official should move cautiously (walking or slowly jogging) to the dead ball spot, stopping the clock if necessary, observing any dead ball action as he moves.

If the play becomes dead as a result of the ball going out of bounds, the official should establish, in his mind, the dead ball spot, stop the clock, and allow the pursuing players to clear the area. The official should then move cautiously (walking or slowly jogging) to the dead ball spot, observing any dead ball action as he moves. He should be facing the out of bounds area when he stops.

In either case, the official must not put himself in any position where he may be injured.

**Always move cautiously and be aware of player activity near you.**

Stay wide and out of bounds and you will be safer and have a better opportunity to observe the action you are responsible for.

## SOFT SPOTS

### DESCRIPTION-

A "soft-spot" is the approximate forward progress spot, as observed from across the field by the opposite side official, when the runner/receiver, in possession of the ball, is contacted and driven back to a spot where the ball becomes dead.

This spot is extremely important when the play ends near the line to gain or the goal line.

"Soft spots" are most frequently required on plays that end in the vicinity of, or slightly beyond (within 10-15 yards), the line of scrimmage. Occasionally, a "soft spot" is required deeper down the field, but only if a first down or touchdown is in question.

### PROCEDURE-

The opposite side official (HL or LJ), and the Umpire, must always be conscious of the ball carrier being driven back from his established forward progress spot. SJ, FJ and BJ should mirror this procedure on downfield plays.

Upon this recognition, the opposite side official should establish, to the best of his ability, a forward progress spot on his side of the field, that may be required by the covering official to accurately spot the ball.

Frequently, the covering official will be unable to establish an accurate forward progress spot in this situation due to the fact that he is moving downfield toward the dead ball spot as the ball carrier is being driven back. In many instances, these movements result in the covering official establishing a forward progress spot that is inaccurate (usually short), thus the need for assistance from another official.

When this occurs, the Umpire (or BJ), upon retrieving the ball after the play becomes dead, or the covering official who is holding his spot for a possible first down ruling, should look to the opposite side official for a "soft spot". The opposite side official should indicate to the Umpire or covering official, that he, the opposite side official, has a better spot than the covering official. The ball should then be spotted using the "soft spot".

This procedure should be always discussed during the pre-game conference by the entire crew.