

Announcing Penalties

By Brian Feener, USA Football

Announcing penalties can be a nerve-wracking experience for a new official. Here are some easy, step-by-step directions on how to call penalties effectively.



VIENNA, VIRGINIA - - As a football referee, you are the crew chief. You wear the white hat that differentiates you from the others.

The referee, as opposed to the umpire or back judge, is front and center during all fouls and will have to explain those calls to a biased audience of coaches, players, parents, and fans.

Correctly announcing penalties is an easy way to show authority as a referee and maintain control of a game. Conversely, incorrectly announcing penalties will show the players, parents, and coaches that you are under-prepared.

As the referee, when announcing penalties always follow this two-part procedure:

Part 1: The Initial Signal (live-ball penalties only)

1. Signal the penalty.
2. Indicate the offense/defense (or kicking/receiving team).
3. If necessary, discuss the enforcement options with the team not being penalized. Use simple terms and keep the conversation limited to down and distance. When obvious, omit this step.

Part 2: The Full Announcement

1. Use the preliminary signal (if necessary).
2. Signal the penalty.
3. Indicate offense/defense.
4. Player Number (*Note: If a referee is 'miked up' during a high school game, only the offending team is announced – not the offending player number -ed*).
5. Yards penalized.
6. The down.

The announcement during a live-ball penalty should sound like:

"Holding. Offense. . Ten-yard penalty. Repeat third down."

or:

"After the play. Personal foul. Defense. Fifteen yard penalty. Result of the play is first down."

The announcement during a dead-ball penalty should sound like:

"Before the snap. False start. Offense. Five-yard penalty. Repeat first down."

Each piece of the announcement should be clear, concise, and said with confidence.

Notice, I am using periods between the steps and not commas. Each piece of the call is its own sentence. *How* you deliver the call is as important as *what* you deliver in the call.

In any game, there may be a call from your linesman that you disagree with. Perhaps you had a different angle on the holding penalty and you believe that there is an opportunity to pick up the flag; however, your partner is 100% certain that there was a hold, and there is no convincing him otherwise. In this case, you must still make the announcement with 100% confidence in your call.

Extra phrases in your calls are bad habits and nothing more. Your "personal style" does not belong in your penalty announcements.

Some phrases to always avoid and why:

"I got..." *You* don't have anything.

"We got," *We* don't have anything.

"Blue team," It is the offense, defense, kicking, or receiving (or return) team.

"There's a...", Avoid extra words.

"That's a...", Avoid extra words.

"On the..." Avoid extra words.

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