

One Good Turn...Keep Your Head on a Swivel When Ball is Dead

By Jerry Grunski (Referee Magazine - November 2007)

An official covering the play watches a runner cross the sideline, gets to the spot, kills the clock and plants his foot. Then he looks down to make sure his foot is secure on the correct place.

That is a sin. At least, it's a violation of the 10th Officiating Commandment as written by former NFL Director of Officiating Jerry Seeman. His commandment was, "Thou shalt be a great dead-ball official."

Well, perhaps calling it a sin is a little severe. Let's back off and call it a mistake. Several college officials near where I live delight in coming to meetings and scolding fellow officials who stare at the ground when establishing a spot. "The ground will never commit a foul," they say.

The point they're trying to make, however, is a valid one. Once you've determined what the dead-ball place is, if you keep staring at it, you'll be ignoring all the players in the game. Any action an official can take to keep his attention fixed on players when a bunch of them move beyond the sideline will be a sound practice. Yet many officials cannot break the eyes-on-the-ground habit.

While sitting in a press box watching a high school game with former NFL line judge Bama Glass, he said the first habit he had to break when advancing to the pros was running down the sideline and planting a foot, turning to the field and serenely killing the clock.

"That may be three, four seconds of elapsed time," Glass said. "It's unacceptable. The clock's gotta be killed the instant a play carries outside the field of play. It's one signal you use while on the run."

The NFL has established efficient and effective techniques for getting an accurate spot while watching players who are out of bounds. Covering officials hop around obstacles if necessary, all the while focusing entirely on players. It is difficult to understand why the efficient and effective techniques of the NFL are not adopted wholesale across the nation. Surely, officials see them displayed weekly, for half a year. Moreover, their basic pragmatism is easy to accept. Officials should also be watching receivers and defenders - not the ball - after an incomplete pass. Watch peripheral players after fumble recoveries too, after any kind of runback. Someone could be upset and may drive into an opponent unnecessarily.

Alertness is not exclusively a dead-ball proposition. Sensible seeing-eye behaviors during live action may be categorized under several principles, one of which can be called "dropping keys." I believe respective officials should observe what their keys do following a snap and how eyes should shift - many times in milliseconds - as a play unfolds. Here's a single for-instance. An umpire in a high school game may be watching a guard and snapper when a play starts, but if the snapper is buffeted by a noseguard and the guard next to him pulls, the umpire must redirect his focus instantly toward the tackle in the direction of the pulling guard. That is because the tackle's block will likely be the essential block on the play. Oh, other blocks will be important too, but those can be observed by other officials. Those officials should also be abandoning their initial keys once a runner moves beyond the free-blocking zone.

So here's principle number one: Know when to drop your key and observe with precision the subsequent phase of a play.

Next, let's address the "Magnetic Corollary." When the ball moves toward or along a sideline, either in possession of a runner - sweep, pass reception, interception, kick runback or loose ball after possession – all 22 players will be drawn to the ball like iron filings pulled to a magnet. Such mass action leaves many players vulnerable, with backs toward opponents, tempting them to hit from behind. In truth a secondary "subset" principle can be applied: When the ball is outside the hash, interior officials (referee, umpire and back judge) have no business watching it. They should be looking at players who do not have the ball, blockers and potential tacklers, while adopting an "inside-out" perspective.

That principle can't be an absolute, though; it's more of an "in general" attitude, because there are times when interior officials should indeed follow a ball or a runner into a side zone. A passer flushed and fleeing, a fumble propelled toward the sideline are just two occurrences.

Those are useful topics to be explored in crew conferences, to define coverage responsibilities under varying live-ball circumstances.

Another principle is, beware of "curling" propensities. Curling can take place on sideline plays. Players begin by moving upfield or downfield and then bend toward the side zone when action calls them there, as already described.

But there are two other instances of potential curling that deserve mention. One is lead blockers on a sweep.

Sometimes blockers get too far out ahead of a runner and bypass assigned blocking targets. In such cases - rare, but they do occur - blockers may be in position to hit pursuers from behind. That is where umpire and wing officials can demonstrate identical focus. An alert back judge can contribute another pair of sharp eyes in those instances too.

The curl can be devastating though and can lead to what I call "negative clustering." It can happen when wing officials hurry toward the pile on every play inside the hash. A fellow official, criticizing that technique, says it results in a "bucket brigade." One official picks up the ball and hands it to another official who turns and gives it to a third for placement. What that does is to narrow the focus of officials, and it causes officials to ignore players behind them.

If a wideout and a cornerback engage in a tussle after a play, a wing official may not observe that if he's squeezing in excessively. Sometimes the referee also rushes to the dead-ball spot after a draw play. When a passer drops into a pocket, rushers are often driven around behind him. In the instance described one defender who had curled past the quarterback returned and drove a shoulder solidly into the quarterback's kidneys, propelling him face forward with a vicious hit. That's one that's got to be caught.

Clearly, clustering can be a detrimental mechanic. It opens up places on the field where no watchful officiating eye can observe and respond properly.

THE 3-RING CONCEPT



Dead Ball Officiating Tips

Spotting the ball

- 1) Hustle but don't hurry to the spot
- 2) Ball relay
- 3) Off-ball officiating

Players going out-of bounds

- 1) Continue to watch players
- 2) Use the bean bag

Digging for fumbles

- 1) Only the closest official becomes the digger
- 2) Don't be shy – tap/pull players off the pile
- 3) Verbal techniques ...

20 Keys to Being a Great Dead Ball Official

Most of a football game is during the interval between downs; therefore to be a great official, you have to be a great DEAD BALL official!

1. Know that three things ruin a football game: 1) Fights; 2) Excessive penalties; and 3) Injuries.
2. Do whatever it takes to prevent problems from occurring. Preventative officiating is the key to being a great dead ball official (hustle, presence, voice, whistle).
3. Primary responsibility is player safety (and their own). Personal fouls cause injuries and provoke other problems. All personal (player safety) fouls must be enforced (zero tolerance).
4. Do not tolerate taunting, baiting and unsportsmanlike acts. unsportsmanlike acts lead to more problems during the game...personal fouls and fights (zero tolerance).
5. Set standards early and are consistent. Active prevention starts the first play of the game.
6. Are firm, but fair. They warn -- they don't threaten.
7. Remember: No pain -- no gain -- no foul. Quality calls = advantage/disadvantage.
8. Maintain their poise at all times. Keeping their cool when all around them are losing their composure.
9. Get into a flow and maintain a tempo. They follow a routine. They move the game along.
10. Continue to officiate after they have thrown their flags.
11. Keep their eyes on the players. They do not look down at their progress spot (feet). They keep their heads up -- continuing to observe the action around the ball carrier.
12. Work as a unit. Dead ball officiating is a team effort. They box-in players. They don't let players get behind them (accordion effect). They communicate and cooperate with each other.
13. Close up out-of-bounds. They get there quickly (usually straight down the sideline and then out of bounds). They avoid getting obstructed by players in the bench area. They bring opponents out of the team area (visually, if not physically). The official making progress should also be looking out of bounds, following the action.
14. Pinch in, but don't lose their field of vision. They hustle, but don't hurry. They make their presence felt when needed. They are disciplined to follow their keys (don't ball hawk), but see the big picture (soft eyes). They officiate on-ball and off-ball/fringe areas (hot spots) and behind the play as dictated by their keys and how the play develops.
15. Continue to officiate until players separate and the potential for problems no longer exists.
16. Are never in a hurry to get to the ball.
17. Sense trouble and take the necessary steps to prevent it. They act, so they don't have to react. They are proactive. They expect the unexpected, anticipating problems before they happen. They have the courage to step up when necessary.
18. Maintain their concentration the entire game (never letting up). They are totally focused on their tasks and the game. Remember, fatigue effect concentration/effort/judgment.
19. When all else fails, step back and take numbers.
20. Take pride in being great dead ball officials.

Summary of Personal Fouls and Unsportsmanlike Conduct From Redding Study Guide

Personal Fouls

- Prohibited action includes piling on; tackling a runner who is out of bounds; continuously contacting the head of an opponent (not the runner); use of the helmet as a weapon (face tackling, butt blocking, spearing); hurdling; tackling or running into an opponent obviously out of the play; roughing the passer. Also, intentionally contacting a game official includes automatic disqualification.

- A definition for illegal helmet contact was added in an effort to place more emphasis on risk-minimization concerns. Butt blocking, face tackling and spearing are now under the heading of "Helmet Contact - Illegal."

- It is a foul for any player to grasp an opponent's face mask or any helmet opening. The rules distinguish between "incidental grasping," which carries a five-yard penalty, and "twisting, turning, or pulling," a 15-yard penalty.

New 2009: Another risk-minimization change in Rule 9-4-3 will make it illegal to grasp an opponent's chin strap, in addition to the opponent's face mask or edge of a helmet opening.

- When Team A is in a scrimmage kick formation, no defensive player may charge directly into the snapper until he is able to protect himself, blocks or otherwise moves to participate in the play.

- When it is obvious a scrimmage kick will be made, the defense may not rough the kicker or place-kick holder. If the contact is caused by a Team A block, there is no foul by the defense. It is not a foul if the kicker or holder is contacted by the defense when they have touched the kick and contact was unavoidable.

- The passer is protected from roughing. This foul carries a 15 yard penalty that is tacked on to the end of the last run when the run ends beyond the neutral zone and there is no change of team possession during the down. Otherwise, it is enforced from the previous spot. The penalty includes an automatic first down.

- Except as noted, these fouls all carry a 15-yard penalty, enforced under the "all-but-one principle." The only Team B personal fouls which include an automatic first down are roughing the passer, kicker, holder, or snapper.

New 2009: The horse-collar tackle has been added to the list of illegal personal contact fouls in high school football. This addition to Rule 9-4-3 states it will be illegal to grab the inside back or side collar of the runner's shoulder pads or jersey and subsequently pull the runner to the ground. The penalty will be 15 yards from the succeeding spot.

Fighting

- "Fighting" is defined as "any attempt by a player or non-player to strike or engage an opponent in a combative manner unrelated to football. Such acts include but are not limited to attempts to strike an opponent(s) with the arm(s), hand(s), leg(s) or foot (feet), whether or not there is contact."

- Fouls which occur during the course of a typical game and are related to football (such as routine late hits, standard unnecessary roughness and various other personal fouls) are not considered fighting. Also, verbal or physically demonstrative taunting is not considered fighting.

- Any player or non-player guilty of fighting is penalized 15 yards and is disqualified.

Unsportsmanlike Conduct

- Unsportsmanlike conduct fouls that occur while the ball is live are treated as dead-ball fouls.
- These include such infractions as:
 - abusive or insulting language, taunting, inciting the spectators, or other conduct that generates ill will.
 - coaches or other sideline personnel entering the field without permission of an official.
 - a player spiking, kicking, or throwing the ball high into the air, or otherwise failing to return it to an official at the end of a down.
 - any delayed, excessive, or prolonged act by which a player attempts to focus attention upon himself.
- Penalties for unsportsmanlike conduct fouls do not include an automatic first down.
- A player or coach is ejected from the game if he commits two unsportsmanlike conduct fouls.
- Any coach who is ejected must leave the stadium area for the remainder of the game and may have no direct or indirect contact with his team.

New 2009: A change in Rule 9-8-1g clarifies that the mandatory three-minute warm-up period begins immediately following the conclusion of the halftime intermission. An unsportsmanlike conduct penalty will be assessed to the head coach if the team is not back on the field prior to the start of the warm-up period.

New 2009: A significant change in Rule 9-8-3 was made in an effort to reduce the risk of injury along the sidelines. A maximum of three coaches may be in the restricted area to communicate with players during dead-ball situations. Before the ball becomes live, however, the coaches must retreat into the **team box**. This rule change results in a 2-yard belt that is clear of team personnel and helps eliminate sideline congestion while helping to minimize the risk for participating players, coaches and officials during live-ball situations.

	INFRACTION	DIST	PENALTY			REFERENCES	
			TYPE	ENF	SP	RULE- SEC- ART	OFF SIGNAL
1	Unsportsmanlike conduct. Auxiliary equipment not sanctioned as being soft, nonabrasive or of non-hardening material.	15	L	SS	--	1-5-2	27
2	Unsportsmanlike conduct. Player participating with illegal equipment.	15	L	SS	--	1-5-3	27
3	Unsportsmanlike conduct. Player participating without required equipment, or fails to remove illegal equipment prior to participating.	15	L	SS	--	1-5-5	27
4	Unsportsmanlike conduct. Failure to properly wear required equipment during or just prior to a down.	5	L	SS	--	1-5-6	27-23
5	Unsportsmanlike conduct. Use of prohibited electronic communications during the game or between periods.	15	D	SS	--	1-6-1	27
6	Unsportsmanlike conduct. Use of phones or headsets by players.	15	D	SS	--	1-6-2	27
92	Unsportsmanlike conduct. Bait or taunt through acts, words, or insignia which engenders ill will.	15	L/D	BS/SS	--	9-5-1a	27
93	Unsportsmanlike conduct. Use of profanity or vulgar language or gestures.	15	L/D	BS/SS	--	9-5-1b	27
94	Unsportsmanlike conduct. Any delayed, excessive or prolonged act attempting to bring attention to oneself.	15	L/D	BS/SS	--	9-5-1c	27
95	Unsportsmanlike conduct. Use of disconcerting acts or words prior to the snap to interfere with offensive team's signals or movements	15	L/D	BS/SS	--	9-5-1d	27
96	Unsportsmanlike conduct. Intentionally kicking at the ball other than during a legal kick.	15	L/D	BS/SS	--	9-5-1e	27
97	Unsportsmanlike conduct. Leaving the field between downs to gain an advantage unless replaced.	15	L/D	BS/SS	--	9-5-1f	27
98	Unsportsmanlike conduct. Refusing to comply with an official's request.	15	L/D	BS/SS	--	9-5-1g	27
99	Unsportsmanlike conduct. Use of tobacco or smokeless tobacco.	15	L/D	BS/SS	--	9-5-1h	27
100	Unsportsmanlike conduct. Player who intentionally kicks the ball after the ball is dead.	15	D	SS	--	9-5-2a	27
101	Unsportsmanlike conduct. Spiking the ball.	15	L/D	BS/SS	--	9-5-2b	27
102	Unsportsmanlike conduct. Throwing the ball high into the air or from the field of play.	15	L/D	BS/SS	--	9-5-2c	27
103	Unsportsmanlike conduct. Intentionally failing to place the ball on the ground or return it to a nearby official.	15	D	SS	--	9-5-2d	27
117	Unsportsmanlike conduct. Using profanity, insulting or vulgar language or gestures.	15	L/D	BS/SS	--	9-8-1a	27
118	Unsportsmanlike conduct. Attempts to influence an official's decision.	15	L/D	BS/SS	--	9-8-1b	27
119	Unsportsmanlike conduct. Disrespectfully addressing an official.	15	L/D	BS/SS	--	9-8-1c	27
120	Unsportsmanlike conduct. Indicating objections to an official's decision.	15	L/D	BS/SS	--	9-8-1d	27
121	Unsportsmanlike conduct. Using illegal communications equipment.	15	D	SS	--	9-8-1e	7-27
122	Unsportsmanlike conduct. Holding an unauthorized conference.	15	D	SS	--	9-8-1f	7-27
123	Unsportsmanlike conduct. Failure of a team to be ready to start either half.	15	D	SS	--	9-8-1g	7-27
124	Unsportsmanlike conduct. Failure of the head coach to have his players wear legal equipment after verification.	15	L/D	BS/SS	--	9-8-1h	27
125	Unsportsmanlike conduct. Being on the field except as a substitute or replaced player.	15	L/D	BS/SS	--	9-8-1i	27
126	Unsportsmanlike conduct. Using tobacco or smokeless tobacco.	15	L/D	BS/SS	--	9-8-1j	27
127	Sideline Interference. Being outside the team box, but not on the field.	--	L	SS	W	9-8-1k	15
	First offense	5	L	SS	--	9-8-1k	7, 29
	Second offense	15	L	SS	--	9-8-1k	27
	Third and subsequent offense- Unsportsmanlike Conduct						

	INFRACTION	DIST	PENALTY			REFERENCES	
			TYPE	ENF	SP	RULE- SEC-ART	OFF SIG
70	<u>Chop block</u> . Contact at the knees or below of an opponent who is already in contact with a teammate in the free blocking zone.	15	L	BS	--	9-3-6	41
71	<u>Tripping</u> . Tripping an opponent who is not the runner.	15	L	BS	--	9-3-7	46
72	<u>Fighting</u> . Fighting by a player or non-player.	15	L/D	BS/SS	DQ	9-4-1	38-47
73	<u>Personal foul</u> . Swinging foot, shin or knee into an opponent.	15	L	BS	--	9-4-3a	38
74	<u>Contacting an official</u> . Intentionally contacting an official.	15	L/D	BS/SS	DQ	9-4-2	38-47
75	<u>Personal foul</u> . Charging into an opponent obviously out of the play.	15	L/D	BS/SS	--	9-4-3b	38
76	<u>Personal foul</u> . Piling on any player who is lying on the ground.	15	L/D	BS/SS	--	9-4-3c	38
77	<u>Hurdling</u> . Hurdling an opponent.	15	L	BS	--	9-4-3d	38
78	<u>Personal foul</u> . Position on teammate or opponent to gain advantage.	15	L/D	BS/SS	--	9-4-3e	38
79	<u>Personal foul</u> . Throwing helmet to trip opponent.	15	L	BS	--	9-4-3f	38
80	<u>Personal foul</u> . Any contact with an opponent deemed unnecessary or which incites roughness.	15	L/D	BS/SS	--	9-4-3g	38
81	<u>Facemask</u> . Grasping facemask or helmet opening.	5	L/D	BS/SS	--	9-4-3h	45
82	<u>Facemask</u> . Twisting or turning the facemask or helmet opening.	15	L	BS	--	9-4-3h	38, 45
83	<u>Illegal helmet contact</u> . Butt block, face tackle or spear.	15	L	BS	--	9-4-3i	24
84	<u>Illegal helmet contact</u> . Intentionally using helmet to butt or ram.	15	L	BS	--	9-4-3j	24
85	<u>Personal foul</u> . Hiding the ball under a jersey.	15	L	BS	--	9-4-3k	38
86	<u>Striking or kneeing</u> . Striking, kicking, kneeing.	15	L/D	BS/SS	DQ	9-4-3L	38, 47
87	<u>Roughing the passer</u> . (Two options). Charging into a passer who is standing still or fading back.	15	L	SS	FD	9-4-4	34
		15	L	PS	FD	9-4-4	34
88	<u>Running into the kicker or holder</u>	5	L	PS	--	9-4-5	30
89	<u>Roughing the kicker or holder</u> .	15	L	PS	FD	9-4-5	38, 30
90	<u>Roughing the snapper</u> . Charging directly into snapper in a scrimmage kick formation.	15	L	BS	FD	9-4-6	38
91	<u>Slap to the head</u> . Defensive player slaps blocker's head.	15	L	BS	--	9-4-7	38

GUIDELINES

To Making the Unsportsmanlike Conduct (UC) Call

Key words: player shall not act in a way that is DELAYED, EXCESSIVE OR PROLONGED in an attempt to **FOCUS ATTENTION UPON HIMSELF**.

Remember to record the number of the offending player on your game card and inform the HEAD coach that if this player receives a second UC, he will be disqualified from the remainder of the game. The Commissioner and head of the Better Officiating Committee must be informed of all ejections as soon as possible.

Note: this chart is NOT all-inclusive and should be used as a guide to consistently making this call. Review how your crew will manage these types of situations in the pre-game conference.

ALWAYS	*USUALLY	NOT
1 or more back or forward flips		
Dunking or attempting to dunk the football over the cross bar	Making hand gestures that indicate throat slashing, pounding one's own chest, pointing a finger like a gun etc..	Players on the same team chest bumping away from opponents
Jump shooting a football		
Standing over the player just tackled and pointing or trying to intimidate him	Breaking stride into the endzone when no opponents are near	Spontaneous celebration shared with teammates
Leaving the endzone to interact with spectators		Celebrations done in the team box area
Spiking the ball (unless done legally to conserve time)	Immediately not returning the dead ball to an official	
Derogatory remarks directed at the officials	Standing after a t.d. with a quick pose (cross arms on chest)	
Teammates engaging in a choreographed display of celebration (MULTIPLE UC'S take all #'s but only 1 foul assessed)	Substitutes and/or coaches leaving the team box area to celebrate on the field	A coach asking about a call without being abusive or demeaning
Diving into the endzone with no opponents in the area		

*USUALLY: time left in the game, the score, tone of the game etc...