

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>CENTRAL VIRGINIA FOOTBALL OFFICIALS ASSOCIATION</b> <b>Study Manual</b></p>
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## **WHY ARE THERE OFFICIALS?**

by Andy Keel

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There are game officials for sporting events such as football for three very good reasons- control, safety, and fair play. Throughout your sports officiating experience, you will be gauged by those three criteria and the consistency of your efforts.

Sounds simple and easy doesn't it? Well, it is far from easy. Every game you officiate will be different. The players and coaches will be different, their skills will be different, their attitudes and emotions will be different, and their knowledge of the game will be different. And you will be different- your knowledge will increase, your physical ability will vary, your attitude and emotions will vary, but the games will be played. This is the reason that we stress the importance of JUDGMENT in an official. The good official will use his knowledge of the rules blended with his sense of the game to successfully administer the contest despite all of the variables that must be dealt with.

Let's look at each of the three criteria:

### **CONTROL**

Control does not mean a militaristic or dictatorial grip on the contest by the officials. You certainly have the authority to control in this manner, but that is not the spirit of the contest or the intent of the rules that give you your authority. First, you are providing a service to the schools who have invited you to administer their contest. Therefore the administration of the game is a team effort- you as the game crew must work with the coaches, athletic directors, support staff (chain crew, PA announcers), radio and TV coverage, and the bands and other participates in the program. Our success starts when we have established good communications with all of these groups and we are all striving to provide the best environment for the contest possible. Second, we must never forget that this is a game intended to develop our youth into more prepared and capable adults AND AS SUCH IT IS AN EXTENSION OF THE CLASSROOM- teaching teamwork, commitment, control of their emotions, the value of goals, and much more. In fact it may be the opportunity to help in this teaching and developmental process that has drawn you to officiating. To succeed, the officials must establish a sense of respect and professionalism that will set the tone and the spirit of the contest. They must demonstrate at all times an unbiased sense of fair play which is reflected in a contest where the rules are enforced fairly and equitably for all.

Since this is a highly competitive sport, we know that emotions will rise and fall with one play or call. To control the contest, the officials must have the game sense to anticipate these emotional roller coasters and insure that the players and coaches focus on their roles, retain the sportsmanship we require, and do not let their emotions impact the game in an undesired manner. This is accomplished by being involved in the game. Some officials will tell

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you that we do more work between the downs than during the play. This means the officials are talking with the players reminding them to "stop at the end of play", "return to their side of the ball", "think". All of this is not to coach, but to let the players know where we are and what we expect. By always addressing them with respect and expecting the same from them we set and maintain an environment that settles and calms situations, as opposed to inciting negative reactions. It means we are keeping the coaches informed and getting them the information they have requested and we need for them to know to help us better administer the game. We can not ignore any elements that can influence the manner in which the contest is played or the direction in which the contest will flow, and we can not over react to any one event. Above all, the officiating crew is expected to remain in control throughout the contest and to be successful we can not loose control of our emotions, or the situation.

### **SAFETY**

The safety of the players and the other contest participants must always be paramount in your mind. You have a moral and legal responsibility to make ever effort to provide a contest in which acts or conditions that could lead to injury are properly and swiftly dealt with. From field conditions and weather conditions, to individual equipment and actions during each play, the officiating crew must be diligent in their observations and quick to notify, correct or penalize. *There is no responsibility more important than safety.*

Probably one of the most important aspects of safety takes place during the pregame duties. As the field is inspected, the coaches are queried about player equipment, and the players are observed for proper equipment and pregame warmups, the officiating crew establishes their standard for safety. The crew must know the rules regarding legal and illegal equipment, bandages, and medical certifications and enforce them consistently. This is the time to determine the onsite availability of medical services- team trainers, medical doctors, and an ambulance and trained medical crew. It is a good practice to review the injury and the bleeding wound procedures at this time. This is also the time to locate onsite police staff and coordinate game activities with them. For your own safety, it is also a good practice to coordinate your return to the dressing room with the school staff to insure a readily accessible room is available and that there is an appropriate escort available.

During the game, you must be consistent in your enforcement of rules regarding the proper wearing of equipment, and like wise its repair when necessary. The rules regarding equipment from knee pads to oral protectors have evolved to reduce injury. In the excitement of the game, the player will not notice whether he has his oral protector for instance- but the officials must and they must insist that all equipment be properly worn and in proper repair.

During the game, the officials must consistently and swiftly enforce the rules regarding actions that can lead to injury both at the point of attack and anywhere on the field. As an example, the late hit or the illegal use of the helmet when tackling or blocking can never be condoned and must always be penalized from the first play of the game until the final play of the game.

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The officials must also be vigilante for acts by players that can lead to unnecessarily rough or potentially injurious play and stop the activity before it escalates to that level- *preventive officiating is the best officiating possible.*

Injured or suspected injured players should be attended to as soon as the play allows. As the game official, you must observe the ability of the player to continue and take appropriate action if there is any doubt about his condition. Follow the rules, stopping the clock as necessary and insuring that proper attention is provided. Do not rush the player or attendants, the responsibility shifts to these skilled staff and you must support their efforts by providing them the time to assist the player properly.

As all officials know, the risks of open and bleeding wounds require our immediate attention. Follow the rules and guidelines of your Association in your response to this situation and take appropriate action as soon as the play allows.

Football is a high contact sport with players of varying strength and abilities contacting each other on every play. The officials can not prevent injury, but they can influence the style of play by enforcing the rules- that is your responsibility.

### **FAIR PLAY**

The third criteria is perhaps the most difficult of the three because it fully invokes the official's knowledge of the rules and their instantaneous interpretation as each play develops. In a word this is JUDGMENT. This is compounded by the possibility that several officials will see the same play and must make a call. The goal is that the crew will have a common agreement of their understanding and interpretation of the rules and will apply that understanding consistently throughout the contest. This will result in the game being called the same from goal to goal and side to side.

For each play to be called consistently throughout the contest, it must be seen clearly by the covering official(s). This requires the officials to be in the right place to make the right call. When more than one official observes a play, it may require the officials to meet and sort out what they saw when there is a difference of opinion.

The key to consistency is teamwork. A crew that meets on time and has a good pregame meeting in which all members participate is on their way to a successful game. A pregame conference provides the opportunity to review mechanics and rules interpretations so that all members of the crew enter the field thinking football the same way. The final key to teamwork is communications throughout the game between the crew and also with the players and coaches. With these elements of Teamwork in place, the crew will be in the right place with the proper interpretation to make the right call and will have fair play from goal to goal and side to side.