**DEAD-BALL OFFICIATING, GAME TEMPO, GAME MANAGEMENT AND SITUATIONAL AWARENESS**

Dead Ball is the term used to indicate the interval between downs. Most of a football game is during the dead ball, therefore to be a great official, you have to be a great DEAD BALL official!

Game Tempo is the term used to indicate the collective intervals between downs and the overall pace of play. When the crew hustles and works as a team the dead ball periods are brief and the pace of play is maximized.

Game Management and Situational Awareness are terms used to describe a crew’s or an individual’s ability to modify the game tempo according to the needs of that particular game. When a game is flowing well, then the crew works hard to maintain that tempo. When a game is getting into the final minutes of the half or the game, then the crew may be just a bit more deliberate to minimize the potential for error. And finally, when the game is one-sided and “needing to end” the crew will increase the tempo and make adjustments that will help the game and players end in a sportsmanlike manner.

There are times in most games when we need to be sharp. When everyone else begins to relax, we can't. We need to be crisp. Whether it’s measuring a first down, relaying the ball back into play, administering a penalty, following players OOB, making a presence at the pile, digging a fumble – we need to be alert!

When the ball becomes dead, and there is a stoppage in play, officials must continue with a dead ball routine that provides coverage for all action that may take place immediately after the play or efficiently complete all administrative duties in preparation for the next down or the ball being put into play.

Any interval between downs is considered dead-ball officiating. The most common dead-ball interval is the period right after live ball action when the ball becomes dead and ends the down. The following are tasks that must be accomplished at the completion of each down.

* Holding any progress spot until the umpire acknowledges the spot or spots the ball.
* Use cross-field mechanics to determine or confirm the accuracy of the progress spot.
* Signal the result of the play if necessary– Be Big, Strong, and Slow in your signaling.
* View all players after the ball is dead to determine if late contact is legal or illegal.
* If you an official a little further away from the play, take several steps in (“accordion in”) to be in better proximity to the action if something should need your physical presence.
* Make sure we are always “bracketing in” the players and dead ball action. No players should be behind us or unobserved.
* If you are the opposite flank official and the ball ends up in the opposite side zone, you must close to the hash marks for proximity purposes.
* If the ball ends up in the bench area, or a group of players or the QB end up out of bounds, the referee and back judge must move quickly to the out-of-bounds area and escort the opponent out of harm’s way. If the referee gets there first, the back judge stops a little short of the out-of-bound players to get a slightly wider view of the action (vice versa for the referee if the back judge is the first to arrive).
* Be a preventative force by using your proximity, your voice, and your relationships with leaders on the field.
* Continue to view all players as they separate and return to their huddle or their side of the new line of scrimmage. Closely observe until “the colors separate.”
* Check the clock's status to confirm it is correctly running or stopped as signaled by the officials.
* Help retrieve or relay the ball to the umpire on incomplete passes or change of possession.
* *BACK JUDGE* removes the “old ball” on change of possession.
* Confirm the next down with the *REFEREE*, direct the box to move, and advance the down when the referee indicates the *HEAD LINESMAN*.
* Observe all substitutions as the referee marks the ball ready for play, and the back judge starts the play clock, thus beginning our Pre-Snap Routine.

Every game has the potential to have a 'special' dead-ball period we refer to as “The Dig” which is the act of properly officiating and determining the recovering team following a fumble that results in a pile of players with the ball buried in the pile . Discussing in our pre-game meeting is the best way to prepare for “the dig”. The crew must work together in this situation to avoid a lack of field/player coverage.

When the ball is fumbled or muffed during live-ball action and becomes lost or hidden by players, we must slow our processing and final judgment of possession. An inadvertent whistle is far too common in this situation. Slowing down, finding the ball, keeping our awareness of our zones are critical, and, when necessary, DIG!

The official closest to the 'action' should be the official 'digging the pile'; in most cases, this will be the *UMPIRE* on runs but could be the BJ on scrimmage kicks or deep passes. The 'digging' official should use his voice and physical presence to stop all player action and quickly move into position to see/confirm player possession. Once determined, the 'digger' will verbalize to the second official the team's color or name in possession.

The second covering official is responsible for 'clearing the pile'. Using their voice and physical presence, they keep additional players off the pile and remove any player not clearly in immediate contact with the ball. The second official also has the responsibility to 'point' direction once team possession has been communicated to him/her by the ‘digging’ official.

The third covering official is responsible for observing action near and around the 'pile'. They need to be close enough to the action to use their presence to prevent additional player involvement but with enough distance that they can see potential illegal action of players on or near the pile. They have primary responsibility for fouls on or immediately around the pile.

The 4/5 officials keep a wide few of the action and have primary responsibility for the clock's status. They also have responsibility for any action that occurs 'off pile' and should be aware of the possibility of the loose ball 'slipping out' of the pile.

Whenever there is a dead ball interval beyond the 25-second play clock, all officials must increase their awareness of the situation and complete all administrative duties in a brisk and time-sensitive manner. The game's tempo is at stake, and officials must “increase” their efforts to keep the game moving and the game tempo “high.”

Examples of these dead ball intervals, many of which are timed by the back judge and should not extend beyond the time prescribed by rule for that dead-ball period, are:

* Pregame duties and kicking off on time
* Dead ball between PATs and free kicks
* Penalty enforcements
* Time outs
* Measurements
* Injured player
* Dead ball after change of possession
* Dead ball after free kick
* Change of quarters
* Beginning and end of halftime

Game Tempo is a crew responsibility but the referee ultimately governs that tempo. For example, when the clock is stopped to award a first down, and the chains need to be reset, the referee may wait only until the box is near the new spot and the umpire is placing the ball on the ground when he winds. This tempo is predicated on the crew conducing all of their dead ball responsibilities without any hesitation. The head linesman and the chain crew are accurate and hustling. The crew relays the ball quickly to the umpire or the umpire hustles to obtain the ball and hustles to the new spot. Any lag in the completion of these acts will cause the referee to delay the tempo but ideally the clock will be stopped for only a few seconds before the tasks are complete, and the crew is ready for the next down.

When the crew and referee are “pushing the tempo” the offense must respond and call their plays in an efficient manner. When the back judge observes the offense lagging in their efficiency and the play clock is being threatened, he must alert the referee to the problem and the referee must inform the coach calling the plays to up his/her tempo or risk being penalized. If the crew were to slow down to compensate for the lag in efficiency, the game tempo suffers dramatically so Do Not Slow the Tempo!

There is a time when the game tempo must be managed so that it does not go too fast. The most common example occurs at the end of the half or the game when a team is in “hurry up offense”. In this situation the offense is wanting to “hurry up” so the referee and umpire must hold them up until the ball is on the ground, the crew is in position, and the umpire is ready to “escape” to his position. Being a bit more deliberate in these situations maximizes accuracy and actually maintains a fast but manageable tempo.

Then there is there are times when game tempo must be exaggerated slightly due to extreme circumstances. When two teams are in overtime, the game tempo might be slowed by the referee as the game is hinging on the result of just a few plays which must be officiated with extreme accuracy. Coaches and teams must be given maximum time to prepare for each play by being just a bit more deliberate with the game tempo.

On the other hand, a game that “needs to end” because the outcome of the score is no longer in doubt, might require the crew to make close judgments in favor of the clock continuing to run. A player at the sideline who may be down in-or-out of bounds, should be ruled inbounds and the clock continues to run. The ready for play wind may be a bit quicker and the back judge may be more permissive with the play clock. The referee must be alert to “what this game needs” from the crew, and is responsible for making the decision for the crew to adjust in this manner. Crew members must not make this judgment on their own.