# CLOCK ADMINISTRATION

The clock operator at any football game is a position that needs to be performed with a great level of care. Football has always been called a game of inches and seconds. One extra inch on the field or one extra second on the scoreboard clock can create an unfair advantage for one of the teams. The clock operator must know proper “game timing” and work closely with the on-field officials to correctly and fairly operate the game clock.

## **FIELD OFFICIAL AND CLOCK OPERATOR GUIDELINES**

The clock operator should meet with the game assigned Line Judge the “timing table” at least 30 minutes before game time (as early as possible for Youth games) for the following purposes:

1. To synchronize the Field Official’s watch with the scoreboard clock with the correct time. If the official start time of the game is within 30 minutes, the scoreboard clock should start the countdown.
2. Verify functionality of the scoreboard clock and proper operation by clock operator.
3. To advise game officials whether the clock operator will be in the press box or on the sideline. Determine procedure for communication with timer and check this procedure prior to the game.
4. To discuss coordination of starting, stopping and adjusting the clock in accordance with the playing rules.

The field clock is normally started 30 minutes before all high school games.

All pre-game and halftime activities will be synchronized with the official game clock. To ensure the game begins on time, the Clock Operator, Home School Administrators, and Head Coaches should be reminded that team captains will be called for the coin toss 5:00 minutes before the game start time. All pre-game activities should be completed (exception: National Anthem) before the coin toss.

The halftime intermission will start on the referee’s signal when the players and game officials leave the field. (Note: This is the time when the halftime intermission length should be confirmed with the clock operator, normally 15 minutes plus 3-minute warm-up, 20 minutes for homecoming). The mandatory three-minute warm-up period will be put on the clock after the intermission time has elapsed and immediately start.

The LINE JUDGE will instruct the clock operator of the procedures that will be followed in the event of a field clock failure. In the event of a field clock failure, the on-field game official responsible for game timing (LINE JUDGE) will then be responsible for all game timing. If the field clock becomes inoperative and is subsequently repaired, it will not be used again until the next period or when the referee determines it is reliably operational.

If available, the public-address announcer should indicate the field clock will not be official until the malfunction is corrected and a subsequent announcement is made on the public-address system.

### **FIELD OFFICIAL INSTRUCTIONS TO CLOCK OPERATOR - PROVIDE THESE INSTRUCTIONS EVERY TIME!**

1. You, as the Clock Operator, are a game official. Impartial at all times and trusted with the integrity of the game. You are an integral member of the field officiating crew and our responsibility of game administration.
2. Unfair advantages occur when the game clock is not started or stopped correctly by the rule. Great care must be exercised to see that no time lag occurs in starting or stopping the clock. I will work with you from the field, using hand signals and communicate verbally when necessary.
3. On all free kicks, the nearest game official(s) will signal the legal touching of the ball by indicating that the clock should start. Do NOT start the clock on the kick!
4. Any game official may signal a time-out and stop the clock. Keep an eye on ALL field officials.
5. There are several actions that will stop the clock;
   1. Incomplete pass
   2. End of any kick
   3. Any scoring play
   4. Touchback
   5. A dead-ball out of bounds
   6. Change of possession
   7. A team timeout
   8. An official time out
   9. A first down (Note: Clock may start of Ready for Play)
6. After the clock has been stopped, the referee will start it again on the REFEREE’s start-the-clock signal (demonstrate signal). Inform the operator that after a first down, the referee may give the start-the-clock signal without any whistle.

In all cases, field officials will signal to stop the clock or signal the score (demonstrate the 5 signals)

1. After the clock has been stopped, the referee will start it again on the referee’s start-the-clock signal (demonstrate signal). If no such signal is given, start the clock on the snap without the signal from the referee.
2. The referee may start the clock again in certain instances before the ready-for-play signal.
3. The PAT is not a timed down. Do NOT start the clock.
4. There are instances when a period shall be extended by an untimed down. During these extensions, leave the clock at 0:00.
5. Do not reset the clock for the next period until the referee declares the period over by facing the press box and holding the ball overhead.
6. If we have a “running clock” game condition, I will instruct you from the field to “run the clock”. The clock will only stop for time-outs and scores and should not be stopped regardless of the signals given by field officials.

## 25/40-SECOND PLAY CLOCK

The play clock is used to ensure that each team is given a consistent interval between plays and from game to game. A visible play clock is not authorized for use in California.

Both a 40-second and a 25-second play clock are used. Unless the game is stopped for administrative reasons (e.g., change of possession, penalty, injury, clock error, etc.), the offensive team has 40 seconds to snap the ball after the previous play ends. After administrative stoppages, a 25-second play clock is used. With a 40-second play clock, the ball is ready for play when an official spots the ball and steps away to his position. The 40-second play clock has significantly standardized the time the offense has to put the ball into play in both NCAA and NFL play.

Here are some examples beginning with a common scenario. Table 1 shows more scenarios.

EXAMPLE 1: A32 runs for a one-yard gain and is tackled inbounds (a) short of, or (b) beyond the line-to-gain. RULING: In either case, a 40-second play clock is started immediately when the ball is declared dead. In (a), the game clock continues to run. The referee does not give a ready signal or any other clock signal. In (b), the game clock stops. The referee signals “first down,” the ball is spotted and the referee then signals to start the game clock with a silent wind. The referee does not wait for the chains to be set before starting the clock.

On a fourth-down play that results in a change of possession, the clock is stopped to award Team B a first down, the game clock will stop, and the referee will blow his whistle and signal ready-for-play for a 25-second play clock.

EXAMPLE 2: A11 throws an incomplete pass. RULING: A 40-second play clock is started immediately when the ball is declared dead and the game clock stops. The game clock will start on the snap and there is no overt referee signal.

EXAMPLE 3: A24 runs out of bounds (a) short of, or (b) beyond the line-to-gain. RULING: In both cases, a 40-second play clock is started immediately when the ball is declared dead and the game clock stops. The game clock will start on the snap and there is no overt referee signal. In (b), the referee signals a first down.

As illustrated in the preceding three examples, if a play ends beyond the line-to-gain without a foul, a 40-second play clock is used. The game clock is still stopped for the ball to be spotted, but that is not considered an administrative stoppage.

The following is a prime example of an administrative stoppage.

EXAMPLE 4: A11 throws an incomplete pass. A79 is flagged for holding. RULING: The clock stops for the incomplete pass. After the penalty is administered, the ready-for-play is blown, and a 25-second play clock is started. The game clock starts on the snap.

Administrative issues are situations such as the chains getting tangled up or broken, a dry ball not brought in time, etc. This stoppage is not intended to allow for additional time needed to break up scraps between players. Statements like “Play clock is running” can be used as an aide to assist in getting players back to the huddle.

If there is an appreciable delay in spotting the ball and the play clock is down to 20 seconds, the play clock should be rest to 25 seconds. When there is no visible play clock, the referee should approximate this interval and use his best judgment. When in doubt, reset the play clock. The referee will do this by stopping the game clock and signaling (both palms open in an over-the-head pumping motion) that the play clock should be re-set at 25 seconds. The game clock will start by rule either on the ready-for-play signal or the snap.

When the 40-second play clock is running, the effective ready-for-play is the spotting of the ball. The impacted rules are: 2-25-1 (establishment of the line of scrimmage), 2-28-1 (establishment of the neutral zone), 2-26-5 (establishment of the line-to-gain), 2-8 and 7-1-5 (encroachment), 5-3-1 (designation of a new series), 7-1-3 (snapper restrictions), 7-1-7 (false start), and 7-2-1 (nine-yard mark compliance).

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| **Event \*** | **Play Clock Starts at** | **Game Clock Starts on** | **Covering Official’s Signal** |  | **Referee’s Signal** |
| Dead ball inbounds | 40 | Running | S7 |  | None |
| Dead ball out of bounds | 40 | Snap | S3 | | None |
| Incomplete pass | 40 | Snap | S10 |  | None |
| Team A awarded 1st down (inbounds) | 40 | Signal | S3 |  | Wind |
| Team A awarded 1st down (out-of-bounds) | 40 | Signal | S3 |  | None |
| Penalty administration | 25 | Ready | S3 |  | Wind |
| Charged team timeout | 25 | Snap | S3 |  | Chop |
| Injury/Helmet off | 25 | Ready | S3 |  | Wind |
| Measurement | 25 | Ready | S3 |  | Wind |
| Double Change of possession- Team A snaps | 40 | Ready | S3 |  | Wind |
| Change of possession- Team B snaps | 25 | Snap | S3 |  | Chop |
| Touchdown | 25 | N/A | S5 |  | Chop |
| Try, FG, Safety | 25 | Varies\*\* | Varies\*\* |  | Chop |
| Start of each period | 25 | Snap | N/A |  | Chop |
| Legal kick | 25 | Snap | S3 |  | Chop |
| Start of an overtime period | 25 | N/A | N/A |  | Chop |
| Other administrative stoppage \*\*\* | 25 | Ready | S3 |  | Wind |

\* If event does not occur in conjunction with any other event that stops the clock.

\*\* The game clock will start on the free kick by rule.

\*\*\* Includes inadvertent whistle and period extension.

S3 is stop the clock, S7 is “dead ball - start play clock,” S10 is incomplete pass.

### PLAY CLOCK MECHANICS

**Responsibilities.** The 40-second play clock is maintained by the BACK JUDGE in a 5-official crew and by the REFEREE in a 4-official or 3-official crew. The play clock starts as soon as the play ends, and the ball is dead.

**Starting the play clock.** The covering official’s signal will designate when to start the play clock. When the ball is declared dead, the play clock starts when the following signals are given (only one signal is used):

1. The dead ball signal (S7) indicates the play has ended inbounds. The covering official will raise his arm straight up for two-to-three seconds
2. The start-the-clock signal (S2) indicates the play has ended inbounds near the sideline
3. The stop-the-clock signal (S3) indicates the play has ended out of bounds
4. The incomplete pass signal (S10)

**Re-set.** If the play clock is interrupted, it will always be reset to 25 seconds. The signal is one arm with an open palm pumped into the air – “push the sky”. If the ball is not spotted with approximately 20 seconds remaining on the play clock, the referee will re-set the play clock by whistling the ready-for-play.

**Countdown**. The following signaling technique will be used for the benefit of coaches and players for both a 40-second and 25-second play clock. In a 5-official crew, the signaling official will be the Back Judge, and for a 4-official crew, it will be the Referee.

The arm will be raised with 5 seconds remaining, followed immediately by a lateral swing of the arm to indicate each second in the final 5-second countdown. In a 4-official or 3-official crew, the Referee will provide the countdown signals.

**Chain Crew.** When the 40-second count applies, the ball can be snapped as soon as it is spotted. That requires the “box man” to hustle to the next spot after instructed by the Head Linesman. If the box is not in place when the snap is imminent, the Head Linesman will drop a bean bag to indicate the placement of the box. Under no circumstances will the play clock be re-set to 25-seconds because of a slow chain crew.

**First down inbounds.** When a first down is gained, and the play ends inbounds, the clock stops to award the new series, but the 40-second play clock starts when the ball becomes dead (it is not an administrative stoppage). Although the ball normally can be snapped as soon as it is spotted, in this special case, it cannot be snapped until the game clock is re-started. Thus the Umpire will stand over the ball to prevent a snap until the Referee signals the game clock to start with a silent wind (no whistle) and the Umpire confirms it has started.

If the clock operator does not respond, the Referee may blow his whistle to get the clock operator’s attention. Such a whistle does not re-set the play clock. If the clock operator still doesn’t respond, the Referee will signal timeout and re-set the play clock to 25 seconds.

## TIME OUTS

It is important for all officials to remain focused during all game Timeouts. We must continue to observe players, team, and coaches’ actions. Each official has specific responsibilities during all charged time-outs.

REFEREE observes Team A huddle

UMPIRE covers ball and spot

HEAD LINESMAN with the chain crew

LINE JUDGE covers the team on sideline opposite chains and times the time out (4-official)

BACK JUDGE covers the team on chains side and times the time out

All officials record the number of times outs remaining for each team, verifies with the crew, and counts the players for both teams.