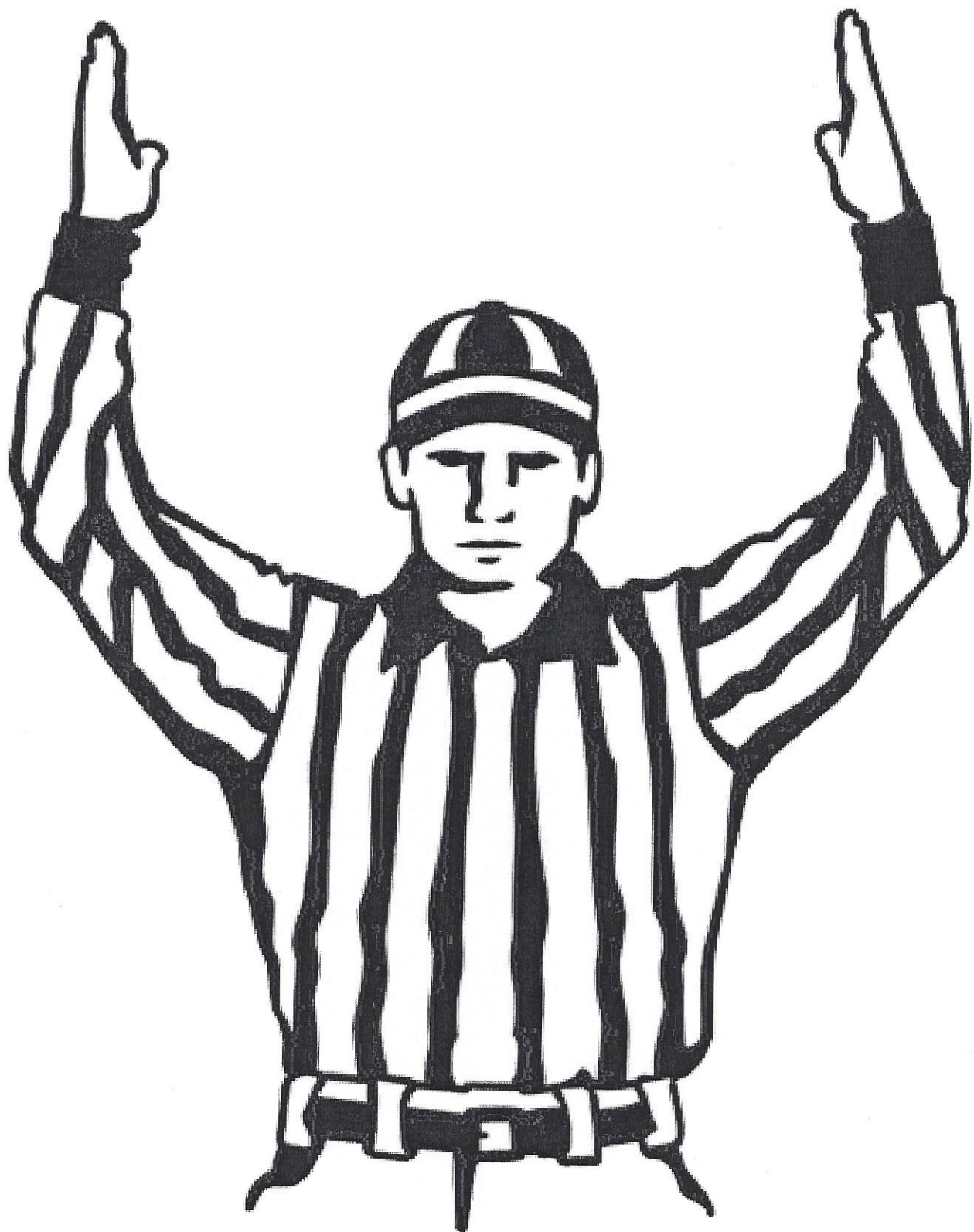


REFEREE RESPONSIBILITIES



Referee

The **referee** (R) is responsible for the general supervision of the game and has the final authority on all rulings. In the NFL, he also has final authority on the score and the down number in case of any disagreement. Although all officials on the crew may be responsible for any decision involving the application or interpretation of the rules, the referee has the final decision. Thus, this position is sometimes referred to as **head referee** and is considered to be the **crew chief**. He can be identified by his white cap, while the other officials wear black caps during each play from scrimmage, the referee positions himself behind the offensive team, favoring the right side (if the quarterback is a right-handed passer). He also counts offensive players.

On passing plays, he primarily focuses on the quarterback and defenders approaching him. The referee determines any fouls for roughing the passer and, if the quarterback loses the ball, determines whether the ball was fumbled or if an incomplete pass had been thrown.

On running plays, the referee observes the quarterback during and after the time he hands off the ball to a running back, holding his attention on him until the action has cleared in case the play becomes a play action pass or some other trick passing play. After it has been established that the running back will keep the ball, the referee then checks the running back and the contact behind him. During punts and field goals, the referee observes the kicker (and holder) and any contact made by defenders approaching them. On a punt out of bounds, he uses his vantage point behind the punter to direct the nearest sideline official to the spot where the ball went out of bounds.

In college football, the NFL and other professional leagues, and in some high school games, the referee announces penalties and the numbers of the players committing them (college and professional), and clarifies complex and/or unusual rulings over a wireless microphone to both fans and the media.

In addition to the general equipment listed above, the referee also carries a coin to conduct the pregame (and if necessary, overtime) coin toss.

Umpire

The **umpire** (U) stands behind the defensive line and linebackers (except as described below for the NFL), observing the blocks by the offensive line and defenders trying to ward off those blocks, looking for holding or illegal blocks. Prior to the snap, he counts all offensive players.

During passing plays, he moves forward towards the line of scrimmage as the play develops to (1) penalize any offensive linemen who move illegally downfield before the pass is thrown or (2) penalize the quarterback for throwing the ball when beyond the original line of scrimmage. He also assists in ruling incomplete passes when the ball is thrown short.

As the umpire is situated where much of the play's initial action occurs, he is considered to hold the most physically dangerous officiating position. For this reason, the NFL carried out experiments in the 2001 preseason with the umpire placed in the offensive backfield adjacent to the referee. In March 2010, the NFL announced that this repositioning would be permanent, after five major injuries were suffered by umpires in 2009 (two concussions and three knee or shoulder surgeries). From 2010-15, the umpire returned to the defensive side of the line of scrimmage during the last five minutes of the second half. In 2016, this provision was deleted, and the umpire now stands in the offensive backfield on all plays at all times of the game.

In addition to his on-field duties, the umpire is responsible for the legality of all of the players' equipment.

Head linesman/down judge

The **head linesman** (H), or **down judge** (DJ) in the NFL, stands at one end of the line of scrimmage (usually the side opposite the press box, always with the chain crew), looking for possible off sides, encroachment and other fouls before the snap. As the play develops, he is responsible for judging the action near his sideline, including whether a player is out of bounds. During the start of passing plays, he is responsible for watching the receivers near his sideline to a point five to seven yards beyond the line of scrimmage.

He marks the forward progress of the ball and is in charge of the chain crew with regard to its duties. In addition to the general equipment listed above, the head linesman also carries a chain clip that is used by the chain crew to properly place the chains and ensure an accurate spot when measuring for a first down.

Line judge

The **line judge** (L or LJ) assists the head linesman or down judge at the other end of the line of scrimmage, looking for possible off sides, encroachment and other fouls before the snap. As the play develops, he is responsible for the action near his sideline, including whether a player is out of bounds. He is also responsible for counting offensive players.

During the start of passing plays, he is responsible for watching the receivers near his sideline to a point five to seven yards beyond the line of scrimmage. Afterwards, he moves back towards the line of scrimmage, ruling if a pass is forward, a lateral, or if it is illegally thrown beyond the line of scrimmage.

On punts and field goal attempts, the line judge also determines whether the kick is made from behind the line of scrimmage.

In high school and minor leagues, the line judge is the official timekeeper of the game. In the NFL, college, and other levels of football, the official time is instead kept on the stadium scoreboard clock, and the line judge becomes the backup timekeeper.

Field judge

The **field judge** (F or FJ) works downfield behind the defensive secondary on the same sideline as the line judge. He makes decisions near the sideline on his side of the field, judging the action of nearby running backs, receivers and defenders. He rules on pass interference, illegal blocks downfield, and incomplete passes. He is also responsible for counting defensive players. He has sometimes been the official timekeeper, and in a number of leagues will run the game clock on a six-man crew. With the back judge, he rules whether field goal attempts are successful.

Side judge

The **side judge** (S or SJ) works downfield behind the defensive secondary on the same sideline as the head linesman or down judge. Like the field judge, he makes decisions near the sideline on his side of field, judging the action of nearby running backs, receivers and defenders. He rules on pass interference, illegal blocks downfield, and incomplete passes. He also counts defensive players. During field goal attempts he serves as a second umpire, except in the NFL, where he is the lone official positioned behind the defensive line, as the umpire remains in the offensive backfield.

Back judge

The **back judge** (B or BJ) stands deep behind the defensive secondary in the middle of the field, judging the action of nearby running backs, receivers (primarily the tight ends) and nearby defenders. Like the Side Judge and the Field Judge, he rules on pass interference, illegal blocks downfield, and incomplete passes. He covers the area in the middle of the field between himself and the umpire. He has the final say regarding the legality of kicks not made from scrimmage (kickoffs). The back judge is also responsible for ruling a "delay of game" infraction if the play clock expires.

With the field judge, he rules whether field goal attempts are successful.

Transitioning during turnovers, punts, and other returns

During turnovers, punts, and other returns by the defense, and play transitions from one direction to the other, the officials must also adjust. The field judge, side judge, and back judge become the trail/back positions, and the referee, head linesman/down judge, and line judge then become the lead/front positions. The umpire, in his traditional position in the middle of the field, usually stays stationary until the returner and the other players pass him.

Other officiating systems

- **A six-official system uses the seven-official system, without the back judge. I.**

