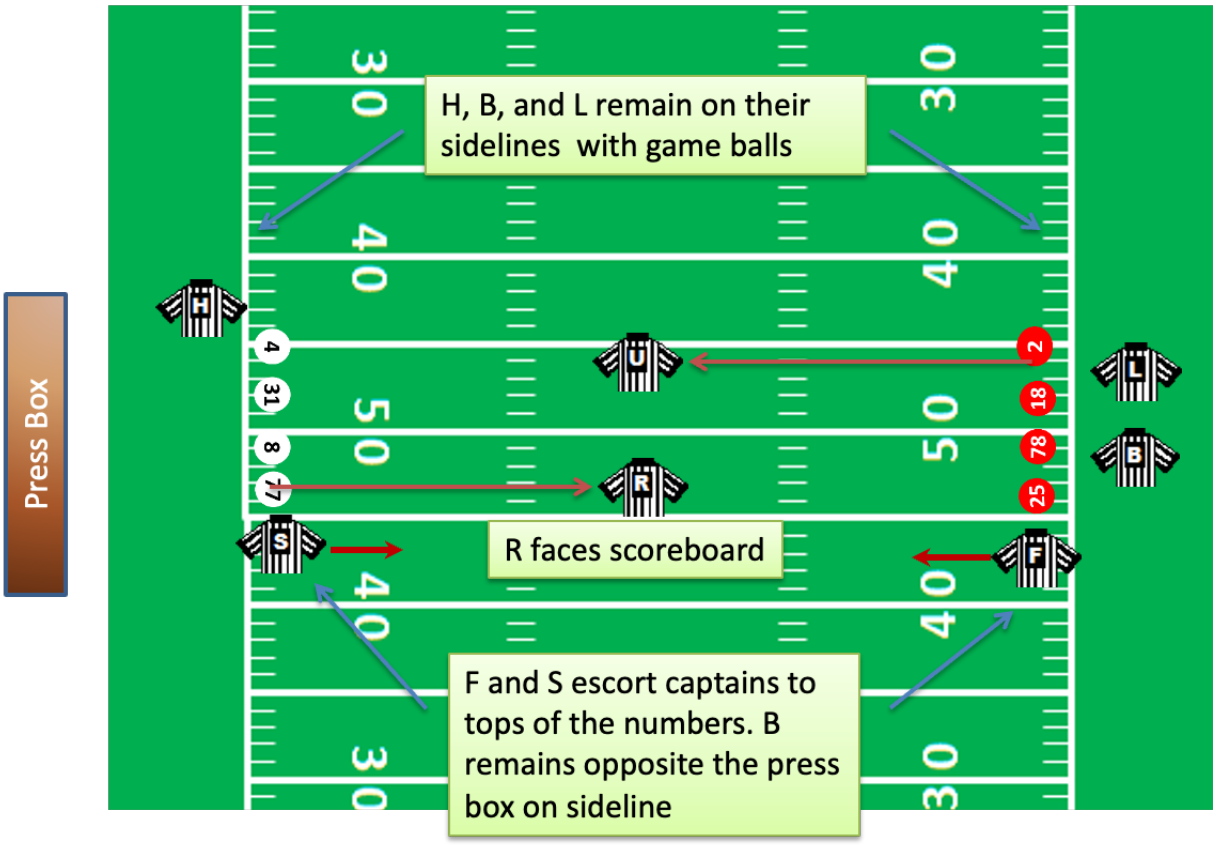
New Jersey Football Officials Association

Seven-Official Mechanics Addendum

2026

Coin Toss

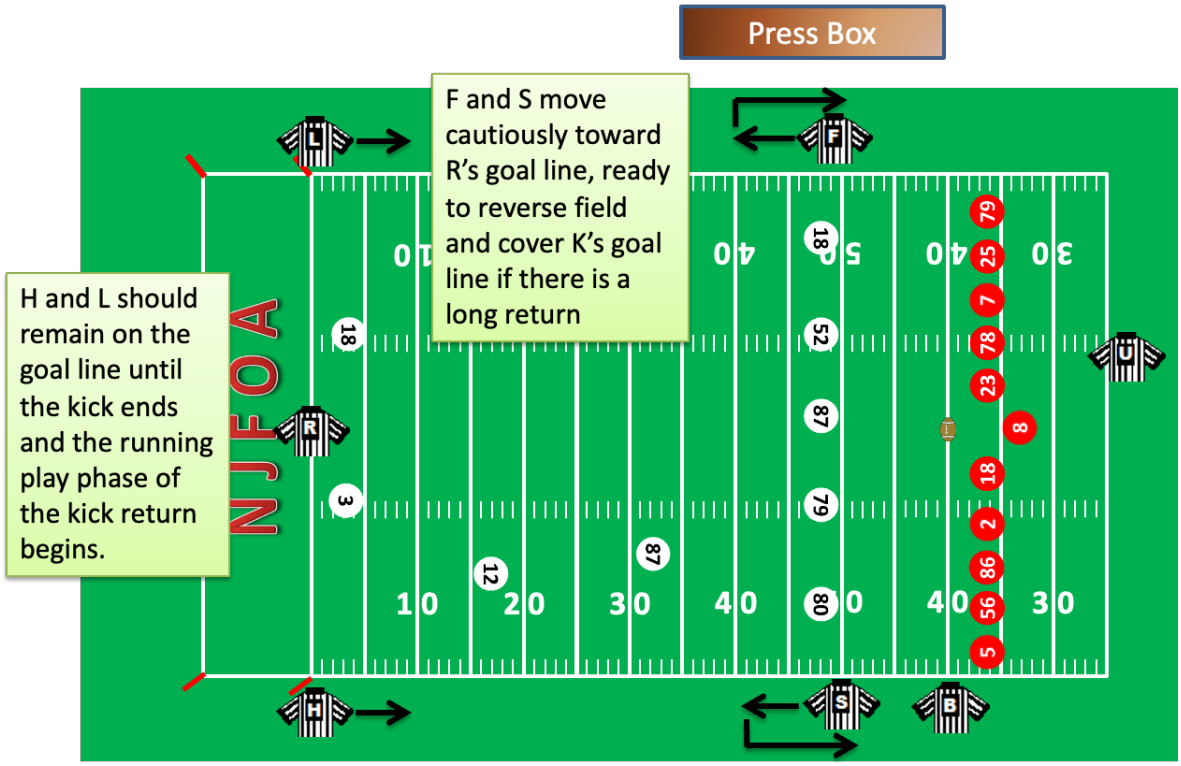
The proper officiating positions for the coin toss are illustrated in the following diagram:



Once it has been determined which team will kick off, the Head Line-Judge should take the appropriate game ball to the center of the field and hand it to the ***Umpire****. The officials make a written record of the results of the toss and move to their kickoff positions simultaneously.*

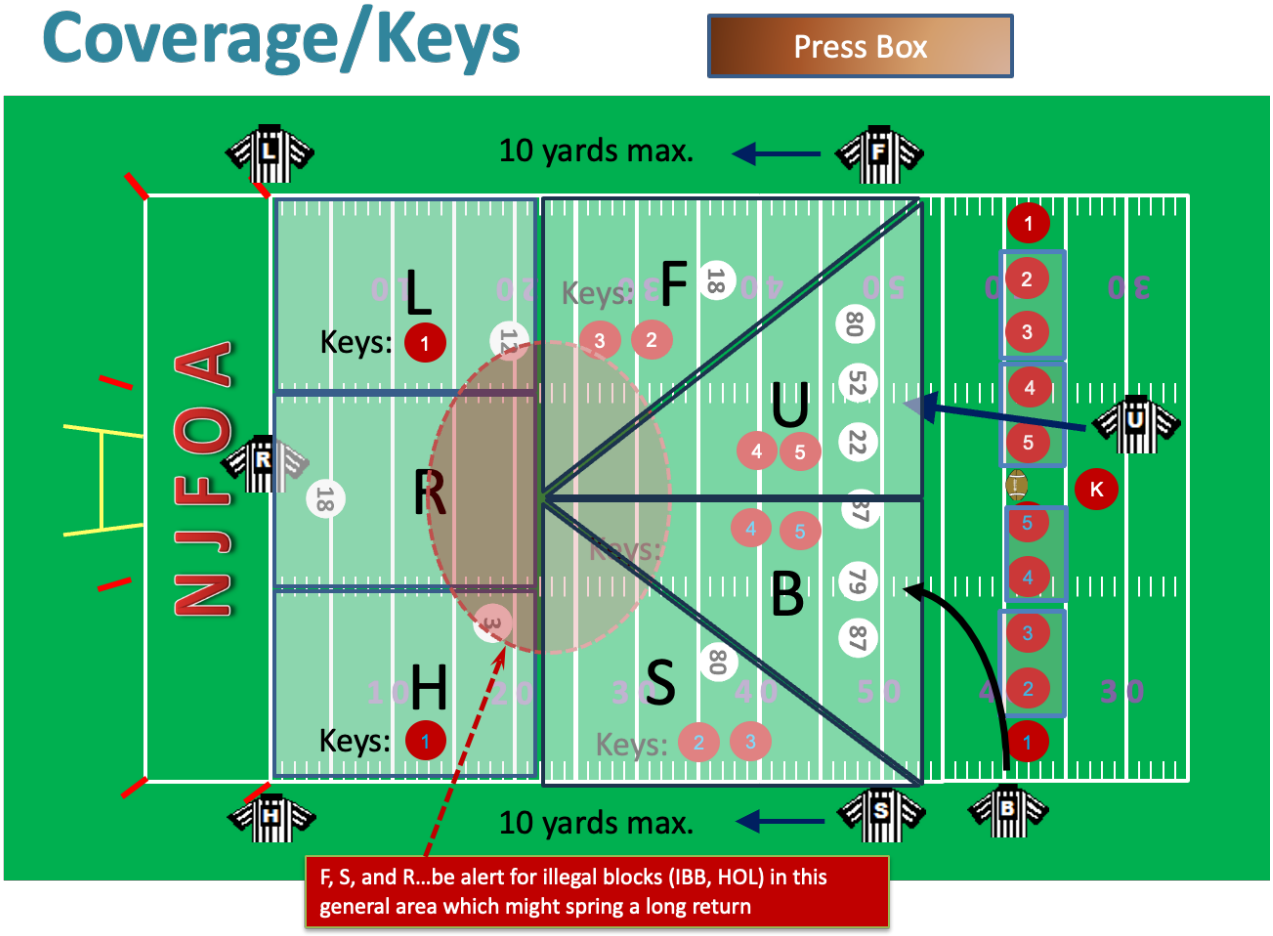
Free Kick

The *normal* free kick positions are illustrated in the following diagram:



Note: ***This picture represents a free kick taking place in the second half****. Even though the short and deep wings change sidelines at the half, the back judge is always positioned on K's free kick line opposite the press box. He does not change sidelines.*

Return Coverage/Keys

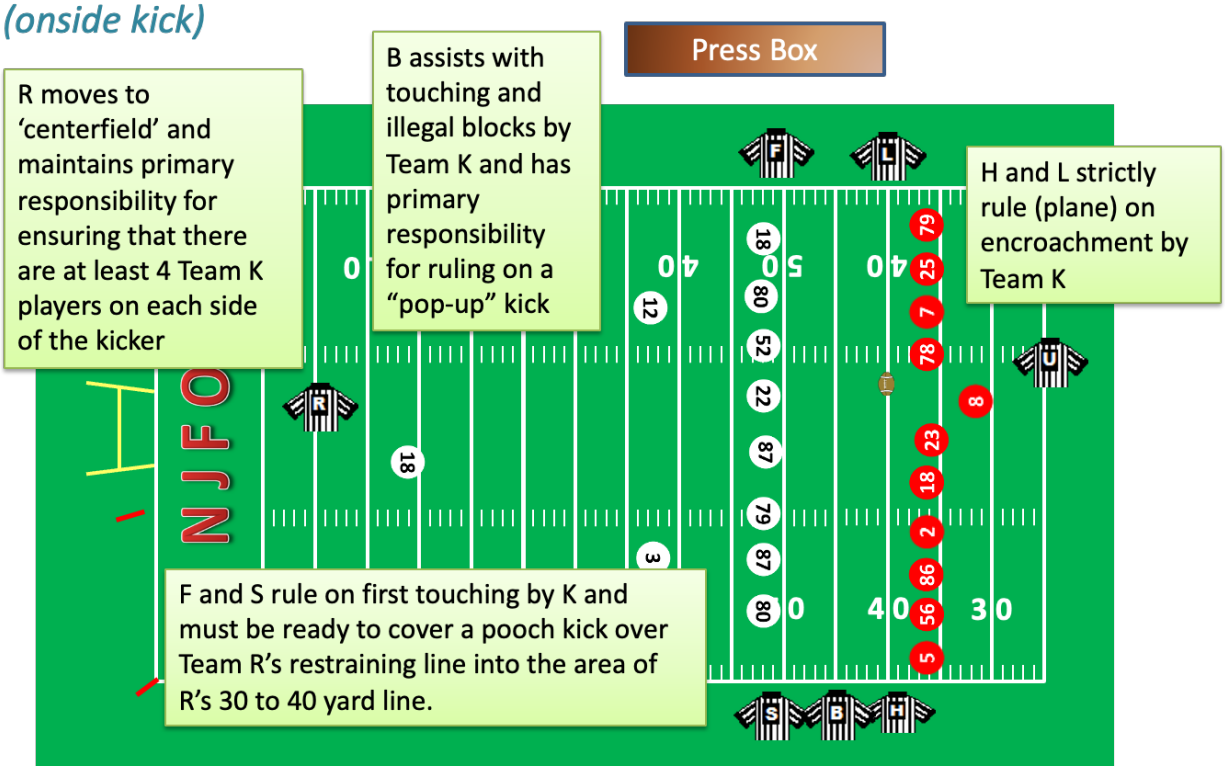


The diagram shows the <u>approximate</u> coverage areas for each official during the return of a reasonably deep kickoff toward the middle of the field. These coverage areas will change in size and shape depending on the depth and direction of the kick

Free Kick

(onside kick)

The proper officiating positions for an *anticipated on-sides kick* are illustrated in the following diagram:

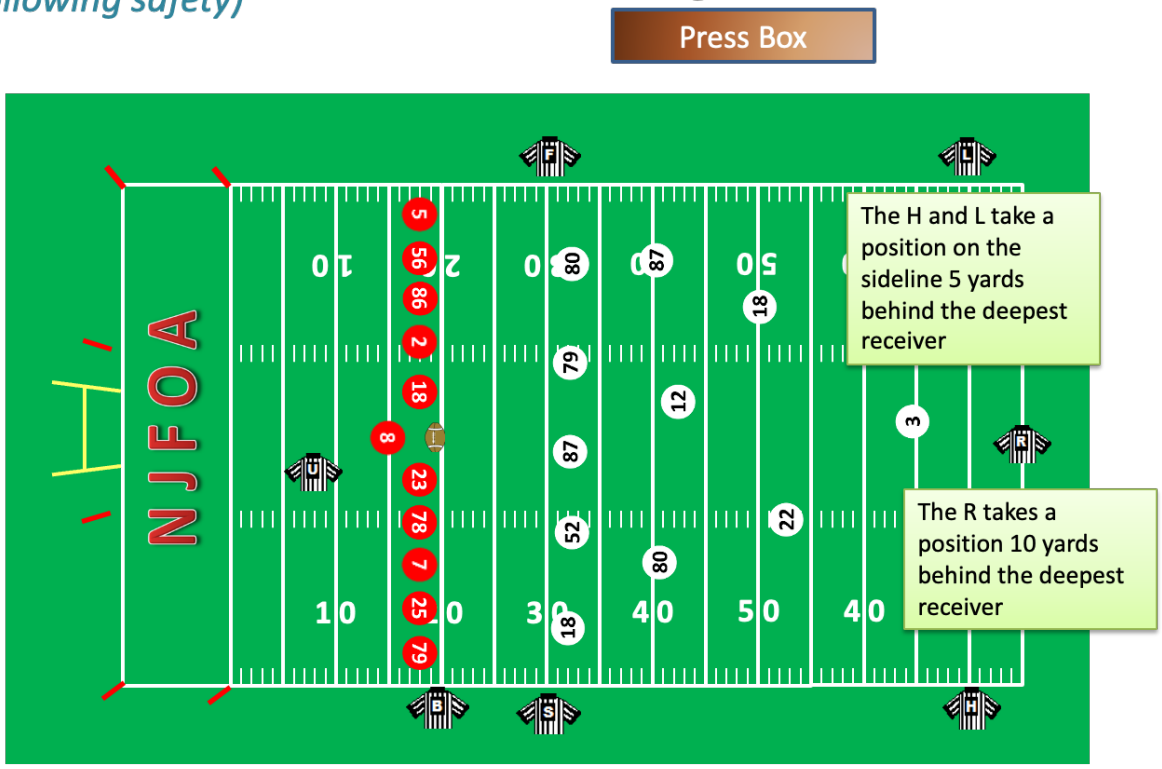


The six officials forming the box should have a bean bag in hand. Drop it on the yard line of any first touching by Team K

Free Kick

(following safety)

The proper officiating positions for free kicks following a safety are illustrated in the following diagram:

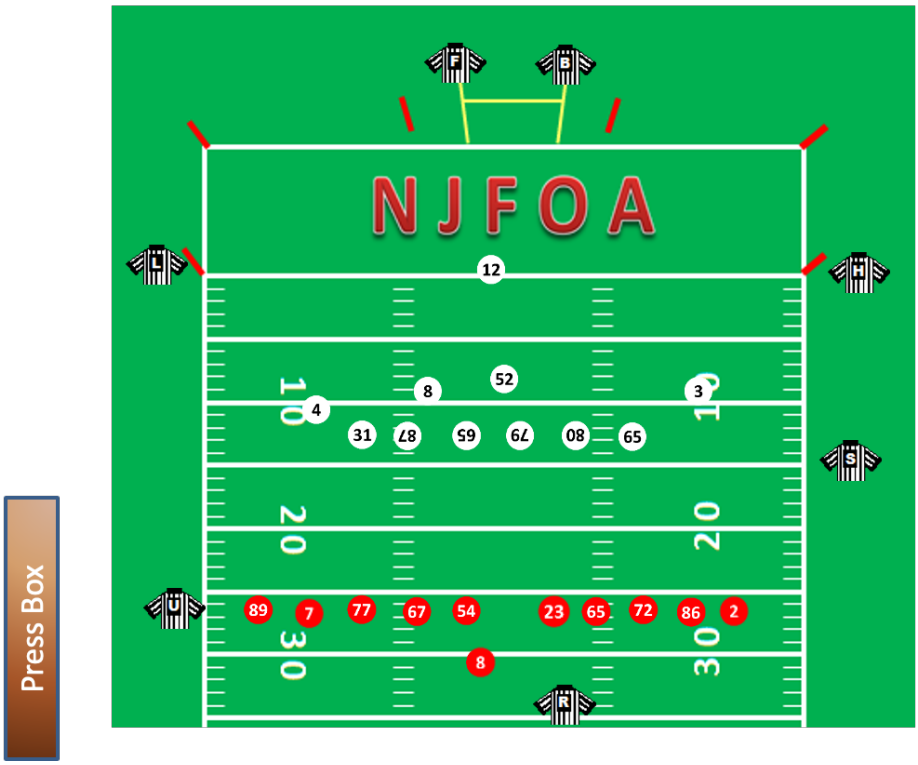


Though not very common, all officials must be aware of both the rules and the mechanics necessary to administer a free kick following a safety. The Back Judge, Umpire, Field Judge and Side Judge assume their standard positions for any free kick relative to K's free kick line (K's 20). The Head linesman and Line Judge line up five (5) yards behind R's deepest receiver. The Referee lines up in the center of the field ten (10) yards behind the deepest Team R receiver. R, HL, and LJ must be aware that a fair catch becomes a possibility, especially if Team K chooses to free kick by punt.

Free Kick

Following a fair catch

The proper officiating positions for a free kick following a fair catch are illustrated in the following drawing:



Though extremely rare, all officials must be aware of both the rules and the mechanics necessary to administer a free kick following a fair catch.

Remember that this kick—though rare—is still a free kick and all free kick rules apply.

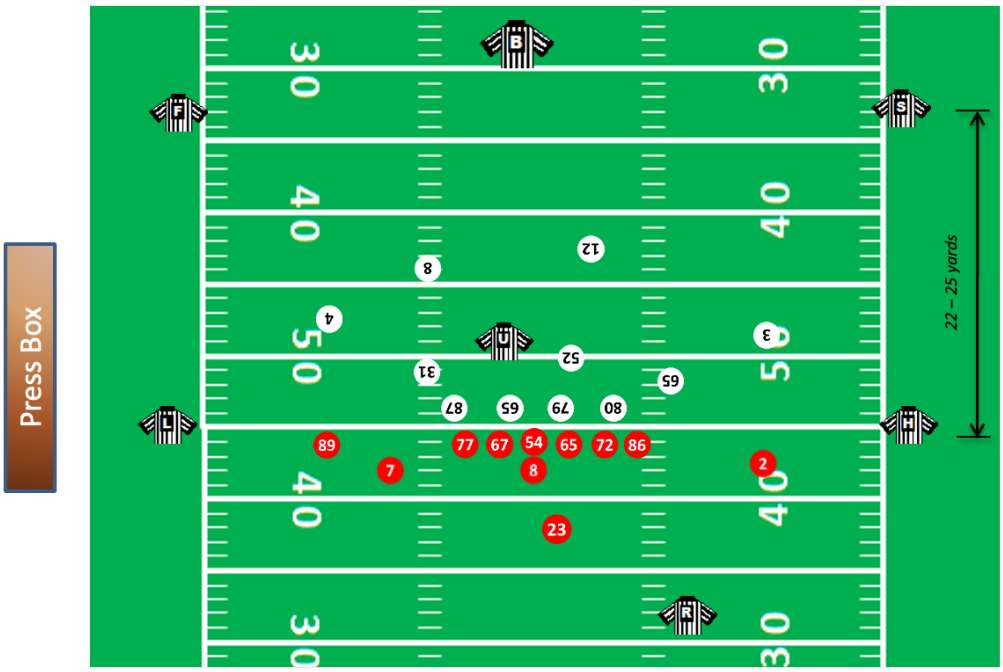
Scrimmage Plays – Back Judge Responsibilities

- *Monitors all timing involving the 25/40-second play clock. At venues where visible play clocks are used, have red arm bands available in case play clocks become inoperable.*
- *Ensure that the play clock is started at the correct time in every situation throughout the game.*
- *If the play clock hits :00, look immediately at the ball; if the snapper has not begun the snap, that is, the ball has not started moving, stop the game and penalize the offense for delay of game.*
- *Counts the defense. Confirms count with F and S*
- *Read your keys and know your eligible receiver responsibilities.*
- *The basic starting position is 25 yards from the line of scrimmage or 5 Yards beyond F and S, in the middle of the field. Focus initial attention on the strength side of the field (the side with more eligible receivers outside the tackles).*
- *After the snap, observe action on or by eligible receivers on which you are keying.*
- *Move laterally and backward to observe actions of players ahead of the runner as the ball moves toward a sideline and assist the Umpire with second level blocking.*
- *Be ready to take over on cutback and breakaway runs. Go to the football when it becomes dead in your immediate area.*
- *When the play is not in your area, hold your position and observe the action after the ball becomes dead. Assume coverage of any runner who breaks loose and goes downfield. When the runner goes out of bounds, cover the area around the runner.*
- *On long runs, be prepared to rule on goal line plays*
- *Be prepared to assist in spotting the ball after long Team A advances*

Scrimmage Plays

(outside B's 25)

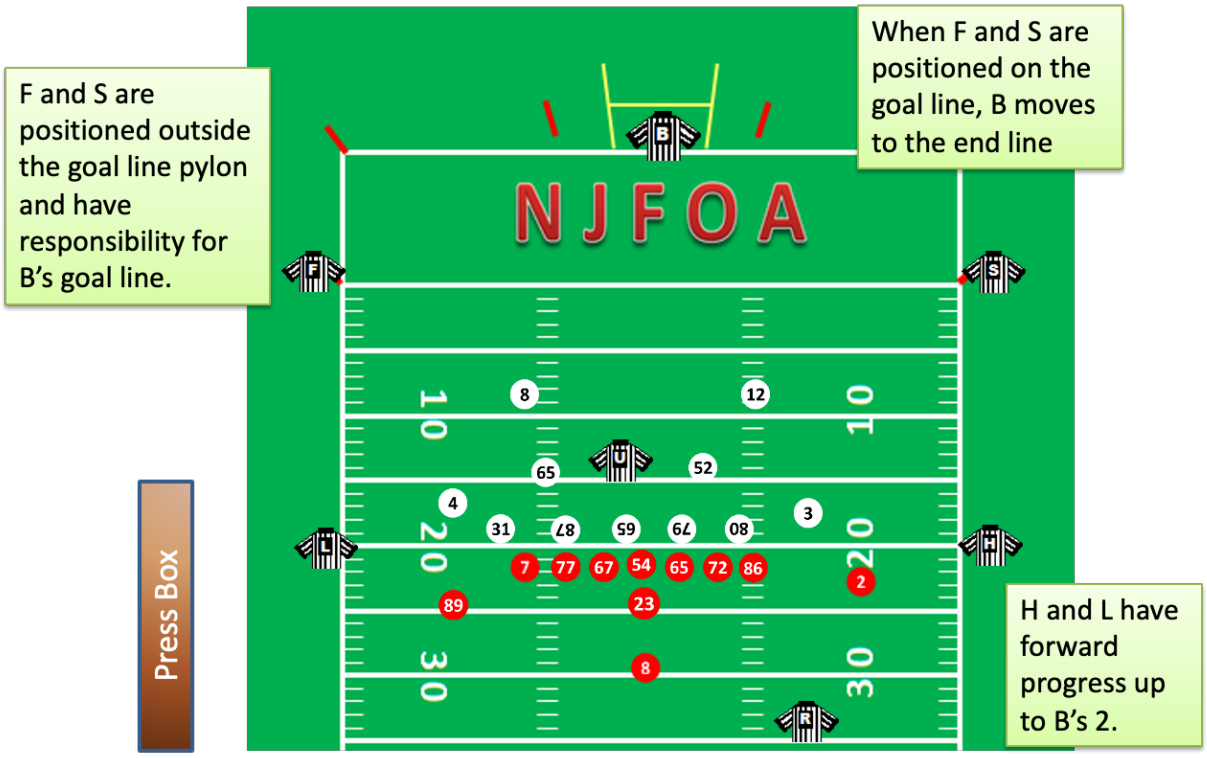
The proper initial officiating positions for scrimmage plays outside B's 25 are illustrated in the following diagram:



Side Judge and Field Judge: *When the ball is snapped outside Team B's 25-yard line, starting position is the same as for any scrimmage play.*

Back Judge: *When the ball is snapped outside Team B's 25-yard line, starting position is the same as for any scrimmage play.*

Scrimmage Plays
(inside B's 25 up to B's 7)

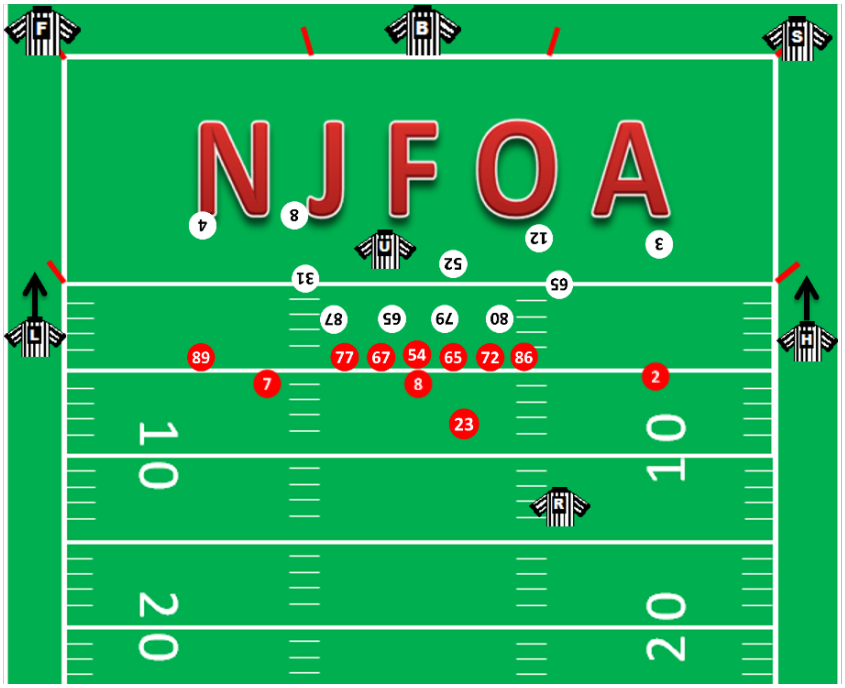


Side Judge and Field Judge: *When the ball is snapped from inside Team B's 25-yard line to Team B's seven-yard line, starting position is on the goal line at the pylon and you are responsible for the goal line. You should never take an initial position between the five-yard line and the goal line.*

Back Judge: *When the ball is snapped on or inside Team B's 25-yard line to the goal line, starting position is on the endline. You may get help from the deep wings on passes to the corners of the end zone.*

Scrimmage Plays
(Inside, or at B's 7)

The proper initial officiating positions for scrimmage plays at or inside B's 7 are illustrated in the following diagram:



Press Box

H and L have goal line and all forward progress. Move to GL at snap and officiate back into the field of play.

Side Judge and Field Judge: *When the ball is snapped from Team B's seven- yard line in, starting position is on the endline where it intersects with the sideline, one step off the sideline at a 45-degree angle from the endline corner pylon.*

Back Judge: *When the ball is snapped from Team B's seven-yard line in, you will get help on the endline from the deep wings. If necessary, on a close play, look through and coordinate with the official facing the receiver.*

Passing Plays

General Rules For Pre-Snap Initial Responsibilities ("Keys")

The following general rules govern the assignment of pre-snap keys:

1. As a general rule, in determining pre-snap keys, it does not matter whether an eligible receiver is on or off the line of scrimmage. All that matters is where each receiver is laterally on the field relative to other receivers.
2. The priority for assigning pre-snap keys is as follows:

   a) Deep officials
   b) Back Judge
   c) Wing Officials

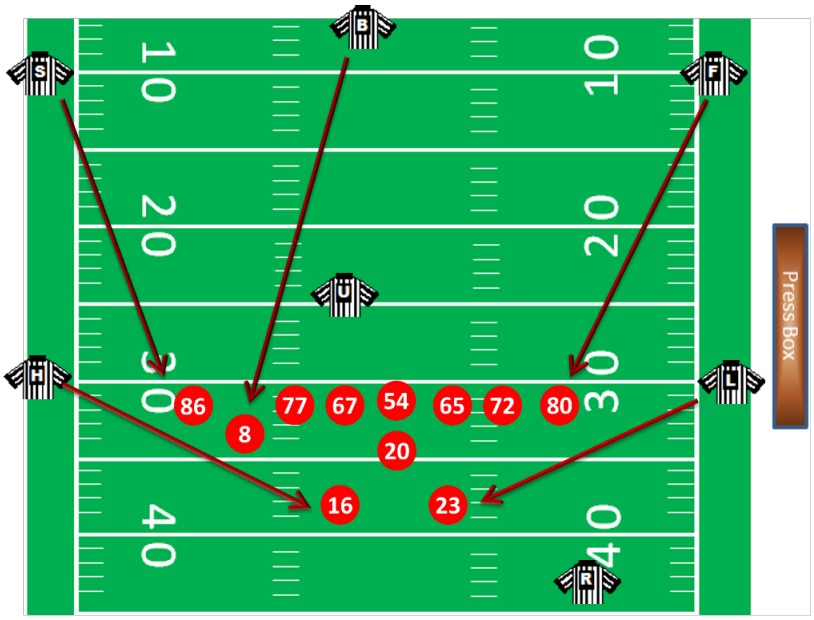
   This means that the deep officials select their keys first, followed by the back judge. Only afterwards do the wing officials select their keys.

3. No official should key the same receiver as an official ahead of him in the priority scheme. For example, the back judge should not key on the same player as one of the deep officials has; the wing officials should not key on the same receiver as the back judge or either of the deep officials.
4. By convention, if eligible receivers are in tandem/stack, the one nearest to the line of scrimmage is considered to be the widest. For a bunch formation, the 'headpin' receiver is considered the widest. For both stack and bunch, these formations very quickly break into different routes which ultimately help determine which receiver an official is keying on. This is worthy of pre-game discussion
5. In a 7-man game, if there is a balanced formation, e.g. "double-double," the back judge declares strength to the line judge's side of the field.
6. Any formation that is extremely unusual or new requires that the crew of officials verbally or visually communicate and confirm keys with each other.

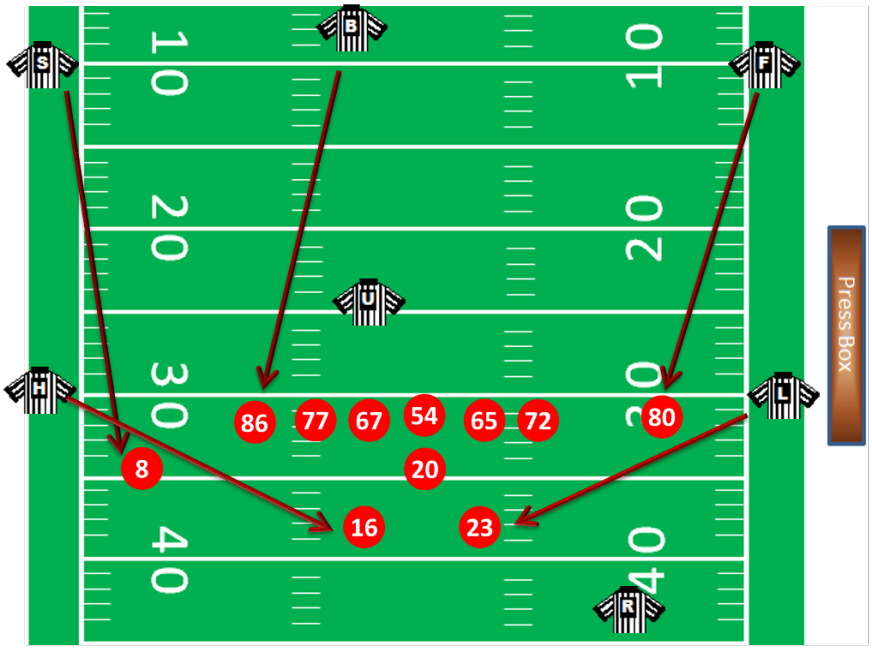
Specific Rules For Initial Responsibilities ("keys")

1. The deep officials (FJ & SJ) always key on the widest eligible on their side of the formation.
2. The back judge normally takes the most inside eligible receiver positioned outside the tackle on the strength side of the formation. Again, this will probably be a tight end or a slot.
3. The wing officials will key on the second eligible receiver on their side of the formation. Since that receiver would never be the widest receiver, the only concern is not to double-cover the back judge's key. Normal coverage therefore is the nearest back in the backfield. A wing official would only key the tight end if there were two in the formation in which the back judge would take one and the opposite wing official would key the other.
4. For trips (say, to the HL's side), SJ takes the widest receiver (#1), BJ takes innermost receiver (#3), and HL takes middle receiver (#2). If after the snap #3 stays in to block, HL and BJ immediately swap keys. [This is the NFL technique for handling trips.]

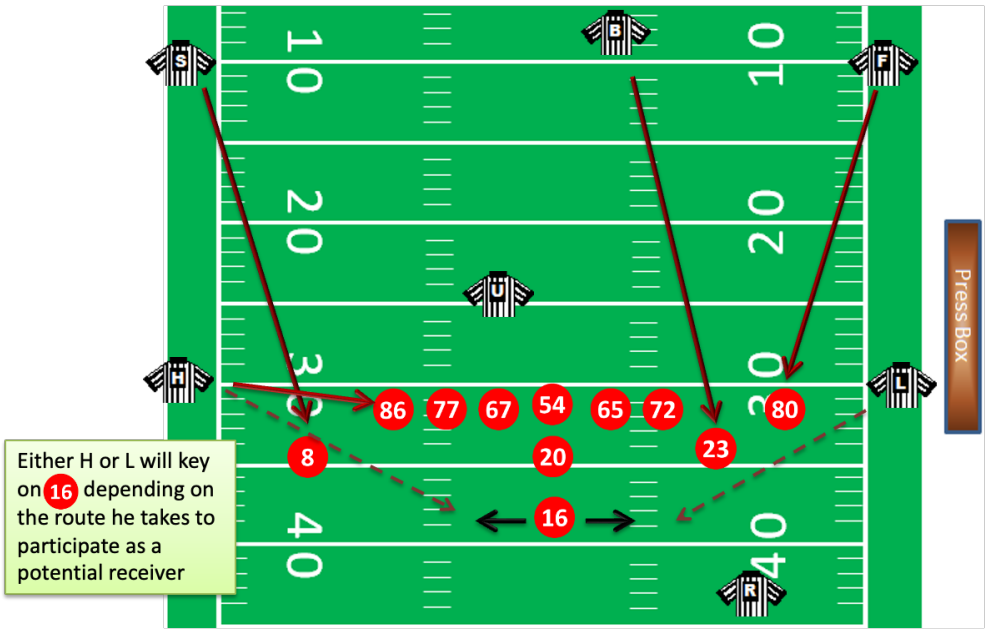
Passing Keys *(strength to H; slot receiver)*



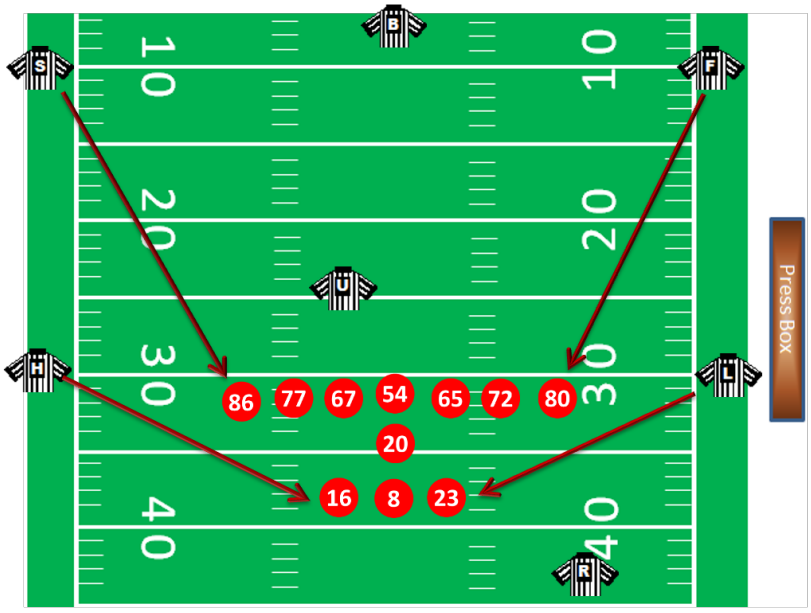
Passing Keys *(strength to H; pro-set)*



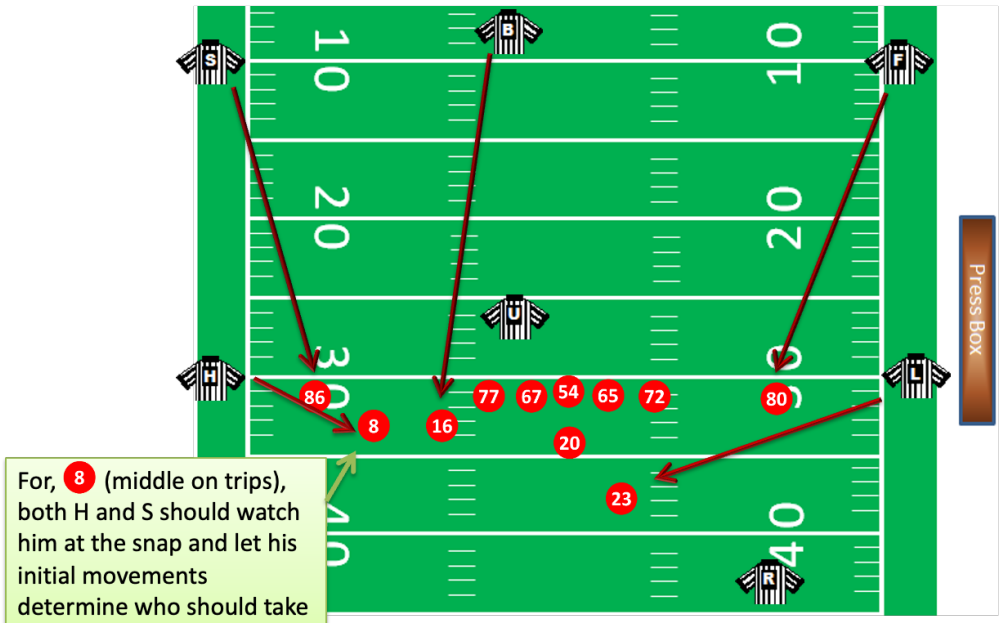
Passing Keys *(balanced; strength to L)*



Passing Keys *(full house; no backs outside the tackles)*

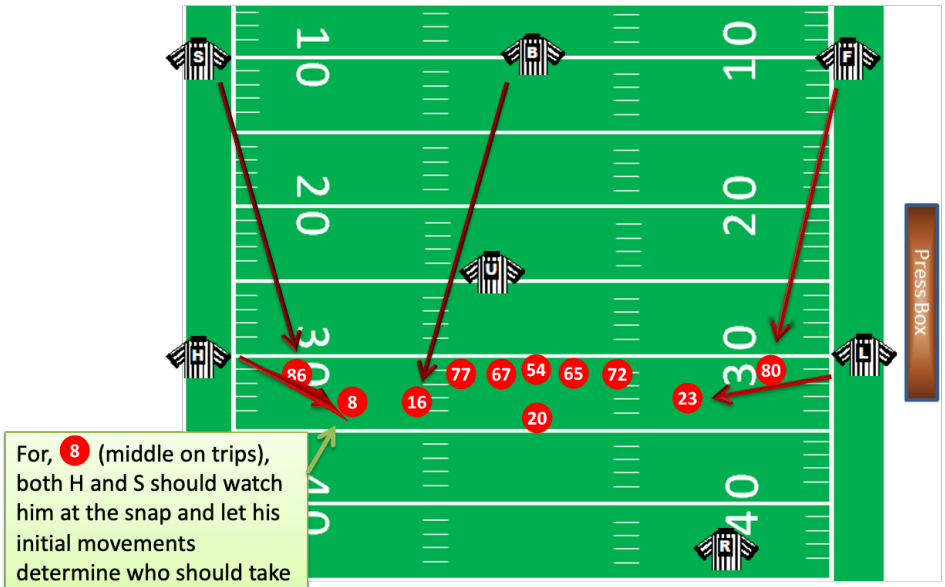


Passing Keys *(Trips)*



For, 8 (middle on trips), both H and S should watch him at the snap and let his initial movements determine who should take him. ("Share and Declare")

Passing Keys *(Empty backfield – Trips & Double)*

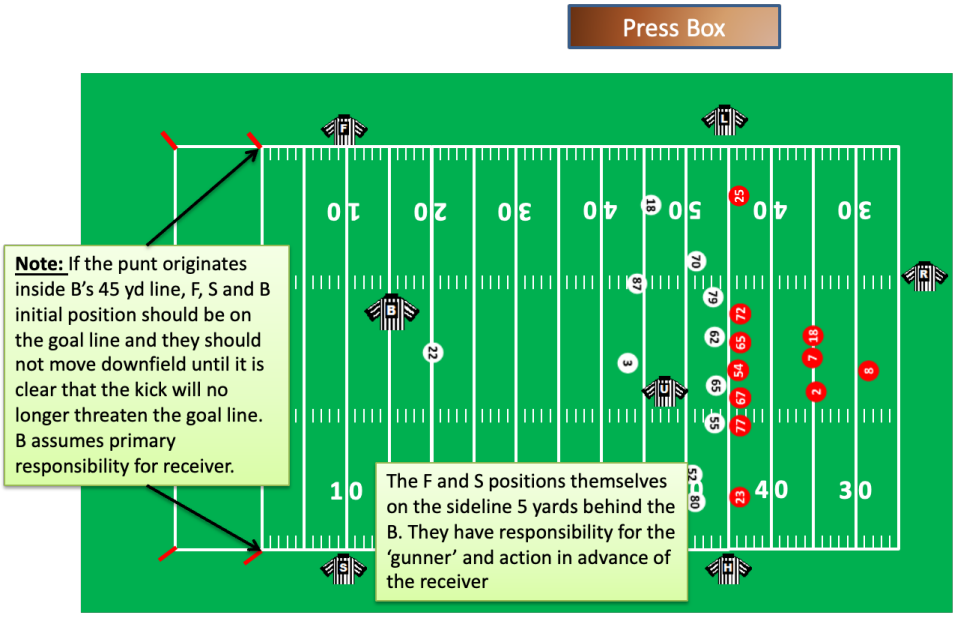


For, 8 (middle on trips), both H and S should watch him at the snap and let his initial movements determine who should take him. ("Share and Declare")

With an empty backfield, be thinking "a quick pass." Because of the speed with which this play unfolds, be alert for the possibility of picks being used. F and S…look for quick crossing patterns by your keys or quick sideline routes. Also, because of the quickness with which the play develops, be ready to stay with your keys—possibly for the entire play

Punts

The proper officiating positions for punts are illustrated in the following diagram:



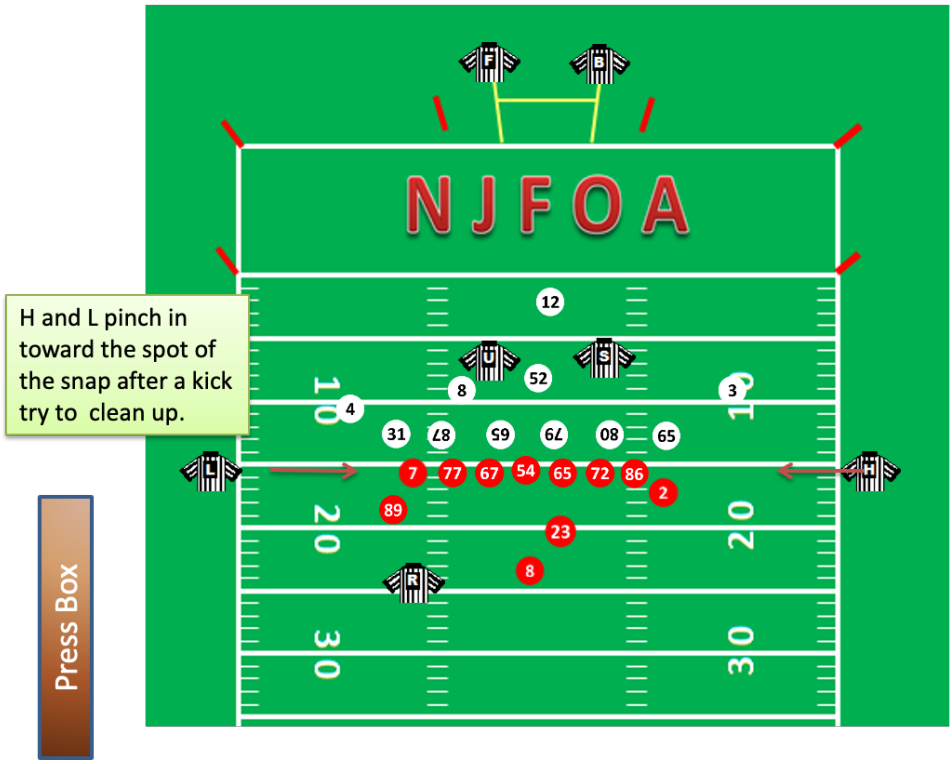
Back Judge: *The basic position is no less than five yards behind and at the side of the deepest receiver, favoring the wide side of the field. However, if the deepest receiver takes a position inside their 10 yardline, line up on the goal line. Work to maintain a 45-degree angle with the receiver while the ball is in flight.*

Have a bean bag in hand. Work to maintain a 45-degree angle with the receiver while the ball is in flight, and adjust your position to maintain the prescribed depth behind the receiver. When it appears the kicked ball will land anywhere other than obviously out of bounds, be prepared to rule on the status of a ball that goes into the end zone and the validity of a fair catch signal. Primary responsibility for interference with the catch opportunity and the legality of handoffs on the return. Bag the spot of the catch or recovery anywhere in the field of play, sideline to sideline. Follow the ball if the receiver fails to field a kick. When the runner advances, observe blocking in the middle of the field in front of the runner and give up coverage of the runner to the Side Judge and Field Judge. When it is obvious the kicked ball will land out of bounds or inside the area between sideline and nine-yard marks, concentrate on the action in front of the runner after the catch is made and move into position to cover play around the runner. If all deep officials are lined up on the goal line and there is a short kick, the Back Judge has primary responsibility for the ball and must leave the goal line if necessary.

Field Judge and Side Judge: *Primary coverage of the gunner on your side of the field. When it's obvious the kicked ball will not land on your side of the field, move to a position to observe action in front of the receiver. If the return is to your side, take over the runner as soon as they start to advance the ball. Be alert for fair catch signals and the actions of players when a signal is given. The offside official is responsible for blocking by the fair catch signaler. Be prepared to rule on interference with the catch opportunity by your gunner and the legality of handoffs on the return. Follow the ball if the receiver fails to field a kick in your area. If initial starting position is on the goal line, Field Judge and Side Judge must remain on the goal line until it is no longer threatened. If initial position is not on the goal line, Field Judge and Side Judge must move immediately to the goal line should it be threatened at any point during the down.* ***Never take a position between the 5-yard line and the goal line. When in doubt, line up on the goal line***

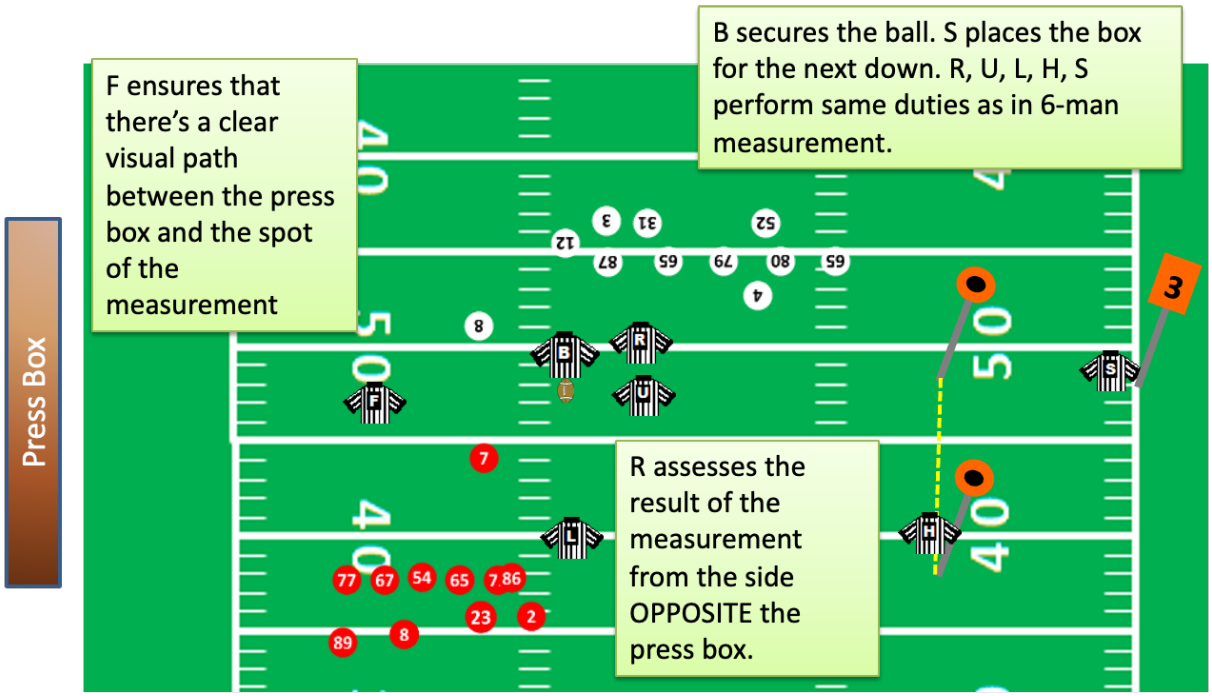
Field Goals, Tries

The proper officiating positions for field goal and try attempts from a scrimmage kick are illustrated in the following drawing:



Umpire and Side Judge: *The Umpire and Side Judge line up on Team B's side of the ball. The Side Judge's position is as a second umpire on the side of the field where he is currently working. The Umpire takes a position five to seven yards off the ball opposite the Side Judge while keeping the snapper in their view. After the snap, they are primarily responsible for action by and against the center and action by and against the two guards. The Side Judge should also be positioned five to seven yards off the ball. They observe action on and against the tackle and tight end on their side of the field. Both officials should be alert for the pull and shoot.*

Measurements



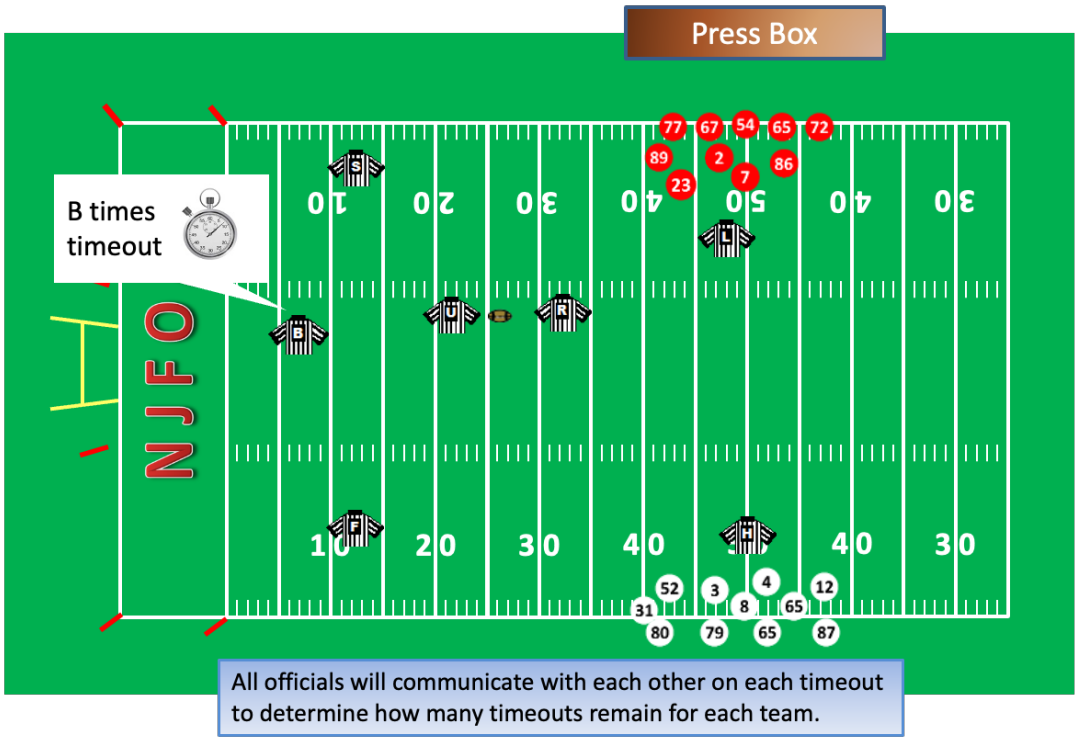
The diagram above illustrates positioning and responsibilities of officials for a measurement taking place during the second half of a game. For measurements taking place during the first half of a game, H and L positions and responsibilities are reversed. Same is true for the F and S. R, U, and B positioning and responsibilities are identical for each half.

Upon arriving at the measurement spot, the Line Judge or Head Line-Judge uses their foot to indicate the spot at which the clip should be placed. A good doublecheck is for the Head Line-Judge or Line Judge to state that the next down will be first if the ball is beyond the stake or the next down of the series if it is short. (Example: "It will either be first or fourth.")

The Back Judge holds the ball in place from the downfield side shading away from the press box

Timeouts

The proper officiating positions during timeouts is illustrated in the following diagram:



Depending on the ball's position of the field, either the short wings or the deep wings will be responsible for getting their respective sideline's team back out onto the field when the timeout is over.

Referee: *Stand away from other officials and the players. On the Back Judge's signal, which comes with 30 seconds remaining in the timeout, point to the appropriate sideline officials so they may tell the teams the timeout is over. On the Back Judge's subsequent signal that the timeout has expired, or if both teams return to the field before the time expires, blow your whistle and give the ready-for-play signal. If a team has used its last timeout of a half, the referee shall inform the head coach.*

Umpire: *Stand in position to prevent the snap until the Referee gives the ready-for-play signal.*

Side Judge and Field Judge: *Observe team on your side of the field and be ready to assist Head Line-Judge and Line Judge in getting teams back to the field promptly once the timeout expires. If a team huddles near the sideline, all players and coaches must remain outside the numbers and in front of the team area.*

Back Judge: *Time the timeout.*