

# Do You Have a Presnap Check List?

Little about officiating is easy. If it were, anyone could do it, right? But you can make the job easier for yourself by developing and following a presnap check list. Here are some of the questions that might appear on your list.

☒ What down is it?

Knowing the down is an absolute necessity. Each official should confirm the correct down with at least one other official before each snap. The referee should also announce the distance to be gained for a first down.

☒ What's the situation?

Knowledge of the game situation can help prepare you for what is to come. The play selection will almost assuredly vary for

third and one than for third and 12.

If a team shows itself to be "right-handed," sending the runner to the right side behind a talented tackle, you can bet that tackle will be involved in a short-yardage play or one near team B's goalline. If number 20 has been punting for the first three quarters, but number 18 is in deep formation on a fourth-down play in the fourth quarter, you might anticipate a fake. Those kinds of mental notes can put you a step ahead of the action.

☒ What is the line to gain?

Noting the yardline of the line-to-gain will help you determine more quickly whether the play warrants the clock being stopped for

a possible first down.

Noting the yardline of the snap can aid in determining whether the passer has crossed the neutral zone. Finite knowledge of both yardlines, snap and line-to-gain, can help reconstruct chain placement if the chain crew errs.

☒ Is the clock running?

By mentally noting the clock status when the ready is whistled, there need not be much discussion as to whether to restart the clock on the ready after a dead-ball foul or an injury timeout. Also noting the time remaining can help determine if the clock has malfunctioned.

☒ How many players are on the field?

Each official usually has

responsibility for counting a particular team. Noting the incoming substitutes for that team can aid in detecting substitution infractions such as a player entering and leaving during the same dead-ball period.

Putting it all together, the mental rundown would go something like this: "Third and five from team A's 32 yardline. First down is at team A's 37 yardline. The clock is running; about five minutes to go at the ready. No. 43 brought the play in for the offense."

It took you about 10 seconds to read the preceding paragraph. Can you think of a better way to spend 10 seconds between each down? □

## QuickTip

Officiating is knowing how to apply the rules in a given situation and how those rules will affect the play. **Knowing why a rule was written and the effect it's supposed to have on the game is equally important.** Rules have been instituted to make the game safer, or to ensure a fair balance between offense and defense. Keep that in mind and you'll more quickly gain an understanding of the spirit and intent of a rule. Visualize situations in which the rule may come into play. That will help you see why the rule makes sense and how you will apply it when necessary. Keep up not only with the latest rule changes, but review changes from the last few years. It's easy to become so focused on what is newest that we forget less recent changes. Study also the points of emphasis. Those are rules officials have been lax in enforcing, or trends that are disturbing to rulesmakers.