

Eastern Association Intercollegiate Football Officials

"Spotting the Ball"

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SPOTTING THE BALL

(From an article by George Demetriou)

On scrimmage downs, when the ball becomes dead between the hashmarks, play is resumed at the dead-ball spot (unless the play was an incomplete legal forward pass; in that case, the ball is returned to the previous spot). If the ball becomes dead in a side zone, play is resumed at the nearest hashmark. Again the exception involves an incomplete forward pass.

After a touchdown, some umpires routinely place the ball in the center of the field for the try. More often than not, that's exactly what team A wants. However, that is one of the situations in which team A's captain can ask for specific placement between the hashes. In addition to the try, team A may designate the spot of the next snap for a kickoff, for the free kick for the start of each series in overtime or, in NFHS only, following a fair catch or awarded fair catch.

Once the ball is spotted in NCAA play, team A may have it relocated if they take a charged time-out. NFHS teams do not have that privilege; however, they may redesignate the spot if a dead-ball foul occurs or if the down is replayed. Under college rules, relocation of the ball can only follow team B fouls.

Kickoffs are not affected by the preceding restrictions. The ball may always be kicked anywhere between the hashmarks regardless of which team may have fouled after the ready for play (NFHS: 4-3-6, 7; NCAA: 3-1-3d, 6-1-2, 6-4 Pen, 6-5-1d, 8-3-2c, 8-5-2, 8-6-2).

Understand How the Rules Apply to the Game

Preparation begins with rules study in the off-season. While you may be able to memorize the rules book, the critical thing is to understand the game, and how the rules apply to it. This is one of the major differences between an average official and a good official. A good official has a sense of when to make a call and when to pass.

Stay Wide, Stay Wide, Stay Wide

For most plays, you can stay wide (outside the hash marks) even as you mark forward progress. There are some situations, however, for which you should close in after the action stops:

- It is very close to a first down. (Tell the referee, "It's close! Look at it.")
- There is a pile-up and scramble for a fumble.
- The goal line is threatened and you are not sure where the ball is.

Staying wide makes sideline control very important. Work with the head coach (or designated "get back" coach) to keep players and other coaches away from the sideline. Use statements like, "I need this area to work sideline plays. Help me keep the players back." It also helps to thank the coach for helping you.

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