

Be felt, not heard! Tips for successful game management

Below are tips, situations, and rules to recognize and keep in mind when officiating flag football. Remember, all officials must know the rules and mechanics, but the most successful officials also have strong communication skills, conflict resolution abilities, and situational awareness.

SITUATIONS THAT LEAD TO CONFLICT

Forms of Physical Contact

- A. Players (particularly ball carrier) knocked into the sidelines or to the ground
- B. Collision of players contending for a forward pass
- C. Rough contact between rushers and blocking backs
- D. Rough contact against the QB or a 'star' player can cause problems – teams want to “protect” these players because of their impact on team performance
- E. Close plays at a zone line-to-gain
- F. Any type of obviously deliberate hard contact foul
- G. Players who become frustrated over the course of the game – often because they feel they are being physically ‘worked over’ through bumping, holding, gamesmanship tactics; or, it may be due to a star player producing a sub-par performance

Officials must fully supervise players through voice and physical presence to defuse a situation. If the Rules support it, penalize when appropriate.

Unsporting Behavior

- A. A “match-up” involves opponents who work against each other for most of the game; match-ups allow for potentially dangerous situations which can escalate if not monitored
- B. Trash talking, taunting, and baiting
- C. Any verbal disagreement or disrespectful behavior from players, coaches, or fans which goes unchecked

These situations become particularly sensitive on “momentum change” plays such as scores, sacks, interceptions, long gains, defensive plays which lead to possession changes (e.g., 4th downs), or calling undue attention to the misplay/mistake of an opponent.

“Controversial Calls”

- A. Close plays at the zone-line-to-gain
- B. Catch/no catch situations
- C. Collision plays (e.g., penalty or not)
- D. QB sack vs. “ball’s away” call on a pass
- E. Runner deflagged vs. “back” call on a backward pass

Unsportsmanlike Conduct Flags/Verbal Warnings

- A. These fouls often call themselves and must be made when appropriate
- B. It is important to execute these penalties dispassionately, with little flair, and without “showing up” the player – this only further incites the situation
- C. Verbal warnings should address ACTIONS not PEOPLE – they should be done without embarrassing the player

General Tips for Addressing Conflict

- A. Determine the leaders and/or outstanding players for each team – these individuals are often tied to the success of the team

- B. Assess the “personality” of each of the participating teams
- C. Be aware of body language, motivations, and frustration levels
- D. Recognize & address the presence of game control issues

UNSPORTSMANLIKE CONDUCT VS. PERSONAL FOULS

What's the difference between an unsporting and personal foul?

Unsportsmanlike fouls are non-contact acts; personal fouls usually involve contact between opponents (exceptions: Unfair Acts, Hurdling). If the contact is against an opponent during a dead ball situation, it is still a personal foul. Examples of the two are intentionally contacting an official (flagrant unsportsmanlike conduct foul) and fighting (flagrant personal foul).

How do unsportsmanlike and personal fouls relate to ejections?

A player can be ejected for a personal foul, if it is deemed flagrant (e.g., tackling the runner, fighting, etc.). Additionally, a player can also be ejected for receiving one (1) unsportsmanlike conduct, if it is deemed to be flagrant (e.g., intentionally contacting an official or entering field during a fight). If a player shoves, strikes, or verbally/physically abuses you, they receive one (1) flagrant unsportsmanlike foul and are ejected from the game.

Why is it important to signal the proper call, unsportsmanlike or personal foul?

It is important for the recording of fouls and correct administration of the rules. Per the rules, unsportsmanlike fouls accumulate during a game. The 2nd unsportsmanlike foul by a player in the same game results in disqualification. The 4th unsportsmanlike foul by a team results in forfeiture of the game.

What are some examples of situations where we would expect to throw an unsportsmanlike foul?

Here are some game situations that should be penalized accordingly:

1. Spiking the ball during dead ball
2. Intentionally kicking at the ball (other than punt or kicking toward their sideline to get ball off field)
3. Throwing the ball high into air during dead ball
4. Disrespectfully addressing official
5. Profanity, taunting, insulting, or vulgar language/gestures (Note: officials must recognize difference between profanity directed toward self and those words directed toward an official/opponent) – these include any premeditated celebrations
6. Diving into the end zone with no opponent in the area

What are some things officials can do to minimize unsporting behavior?

Officials can certainly address jewelry and uniform violations before the game. It is never good game management to have to throw a flag for these issues if we can prevent it in the first place. If you see jewelry, ask that they remove it. If they don't remove it, they can receive a UC for disregarding your directive. If you see illegal equipment, ask them to fix it before participating. Preventive officiating in other situations can also drastically help your game management. Some of these situations include the following:

1. When a TD is scored, get to the player before he/she can do something that would cause an unsportsmanlike foul. It's certainly fine to tell the player, "Nice play, can I check your belt?!"
2. Talk to the players about what you are seeing – especially contact away from the play that you are not flagging because there was no advantage gained. This is easy to do as a Referee or Back Judge when you have a good vision of the plays down the middle of the field.
3. Remind players between downs to tuck shirts in, align belts properly, etc. The players appreciate the help and will be more responsive to requests in other situations (e.g., asking them to watch the contact).
4. Pay attention to body language, chatter between opposing players, and reactions to defining moments (scores, turnovers, big plays, etc.).
5. Do not be oblivious to telltale signs of discontent that develop into major sportsmanship related problems.

Too often, officials worry about the black and white rules of the game and don't pay attention to the attitudes and emotions. The best officials are those who recognize changing emotions and prevent issues before they occur. Lastly, remember that you can't misquote silence, so be aware of what you are saying and who may be hearing it.