

Line-to-Gain Crew Card

For the people game management supplies — the chain crew, the ball helpers and the two timers — at a Vermont high school game. Print it, hand it over fifteen minutes before kickoff, and walk it through.

Associations amend these — check Vermont's guidance before teaching it.

YOU ARE PART OF THE OFFICIATING CREW

Not part of the home team.

- **You must be impartial.** No cheering, no criticising the officials, no remarks about players or coaches, no opinions about any ruling or call.
- **No phones.** No electronic devices at all while you are on the chains.
- **Do not talk to the visiting team.**
- **Adults, in a vest, jacket or hat** supplied by game management, so everyone on the field can see who you are.
- **You take instruction from one official: the Head Line Judge.** He works your sideline. Any problem or question goes to him, and it is his to resolve, not yours.
- If someone on the crew can't or won't do the job, the Referee and the home head coach or athletic director are told.

THE CREW AND THE KIT

Four is preferable.

Down indicator	One person, on the box.
Stakes	Two people, one on each pole.
Clip	One person on the clip. May also be asked to record penalties.
Three only?	The box operator does most of the clip work while the trailing stake holder takes the box, or the other way round.
Never	Nobody on the chains doubles as a ball person or anything else.

Where the chains live: the sideline **opposite the press box**. If an unofficial auxiliary down box is used, its operator works the press box side and meets the **Line Judge**. Both wing officials check that the official equipment is on the correct side and that everything works and is legal.

When you meet: the Head Line Judge on your sideline, at least **15 minutes before kickoff**, and again **five minutes before the second-half kickoff**.

SETTING THE CHAINS

Every first down.

1. **Wait.** The Head Line Judge goes to the sideline and marks the spot for the box with his **downfield heel**. Nothing moves before that.
2. **Move fast** to the next position. The **rear stake goes behind the box**.
3. **Clip the chain** at the intersection of the sideline and the **5-yard line nearest the trailing stake**.
4. **Move off the sideline** — chain and box both about **six feet** back, with the box **in front of** the trailing stake so the officials can see it.
5. **Lead holder keeps the chain taut** at all times. **Trailing holder stands firmly on the chain** so it stays tight and the rear stake doesn't get dragged when the lead stake is pulled.

The clip is the safety valve. If the chains have to be moved — in error, or for safety — the clip is what puts them back exactly where they were.

DURING THE GAME

Every down	The box goes where the Head Line Judge says — the foremost point of the ball — and the number changes when he says so.
Nothing moves	Until he tells you. Not on a long gain, not on a change of possession — he waits for the Referee's signal first. He may tell you to move on the Referee's signal directly.
You see a flag	If he tells you to move and there is a flag down, say so .

Play coming at you	Drop the chains and the box and get clear. Player safety first, every time.
Don't slow the game	If you are not ready when the Umpire has spotted the ball, the Head Line Judge drops a beanbag where the box should go and play carries on.
Line to gain is the goal line	Only the box is needed. He will give the box holder a beanbag to mark the spot in case the box gets moved. The chains are laid down safely out of the way.
Try attempts	Only the box.
Between quarters	Between the 1st and 2nd, and the 3rd and 4th: the Head Line Judge grabs the chain at the clip , you reverse direction and carry it to the matching spot on the other side of the 50, as he directs.

MEASUREMENTS

The Referee calls for one.

Down box	Moved behind the lead rod first — that is the reference point if the line to gain gets lost.
Onto the field	The Head Line Judge carries the chain in from the sideline with you. He puts one hand on the links either side of the clip so the right link survives even if the clip falls off.
The spot	The Line Judge marks with his foot where the clip goes — the intersection of the 5-yard line and a line through the ball. The clip is placed on the back edge of that line.
Front rod	The Umpire takes it from you and pulls it taut.
The ruling	The Referee decides whether the ball is beyond the front rod.
During	The box stays on the sideline at the front stake until a new series is declared or the chain goes back where it was.
After	The Head Line Judge comes all the way back to the sideline with you and shows you where the new series begins. The Referee does not mark the ball ready until he signals that you are set.

BALL HELPERS

One per sideline, if there are two of you.

- **Keep up with the play.** Normally you mirror the wing official on your side.
- **On a field goal or try you have the end line.** Put one ball on the ground behind the goal post and stand well back of the posts to retrieve the kicked one. An official may pick up the ball behind the post for the next kickoff or snap.
- **Dead ball out of bounds, or nearer the sideline than the hash:** get a ball to the nearest official as fast as you can, then retrieve the one that went out. If the ball is dead inbounds, wait with the covering official until he no longer needs it, then take it off.
- **Bad weather:** your ball stays dry and clean. Game management supplies the towels.
- **On the field?** The manual recommends against it — it risks injury and interference with a live play. Ask the crew what they want in pregame.

THE TWO TIMERS

Two clocks, two operators, two officials.

The **game clock** operator's contact is the **Line Judge**, who is also the crew's on-field backup clock in crews of four and five. The **play clock** operator's contact is the **Back Judge** — the **Referee** in a crew of four. They are different jobs and different conversations.

GAME CLOCK

Watch the covering official	When a play ends at the sideline, look for the stop-the-clock signal. Also on a change of possession, and on a first down.
A try is untimed	Always.

Halftime	You time the intermission and the mandatory three-minute warm-up that follows it.
Overtime	Put three minutes on the clock for the intermission. After that the clock is not needed unless there is a second overtime, which gets a two-minute break.
Auto horn	Off. A horn must never sound while a play is in progress.

There is a fuller version of this for the timing table on the Clock Officials Cheat Sheet.

PLAY CLOCK

Start it on the signal	One of four, and only one is used: dead ball (one arm straight up) means the play ended inbounds; start the clock means it ended inbounds near a sideline; stop the clock means out of bounds; incomplete pass means the game clock stops.
Interrupted?	Always reset to 25. Never resume the count where it stopped. Same if there is an appreciable delay spotting the ball and you are down to 20.
The reset signal	Signal 17 — one arm straight up, palm up, pumped three times. Both hands means reset to 40.
Late start	Start it as soon as you notice. Still running after the snap? Reset to 25 or 40 during the play.
Reached zero before the snap	Leave it at zero until the penalty is enforced, then reset.
Overtime	The play clock is used.

If the play clock keeps malfunctioning the Referee may have it turned off, and the count moves onto the field with the Back Judge signalling the last five seconds.

Reflects the 2026 NFHS rules year. Built from the 2026 and 2027 NFHS Football Game Officials Manual — §1.6 Line-to-Gain Crew, Timers and Ball Helpers (pp. 25-28) and §4.6 Measurements (pp. 130-135). Last checked September 2, 2026. Confirm with the association before relying on this.