

Pregame Conference

Everything the crew settles before the toss, everything each of you owes the field before kickoff, and what the crew owes the game afterwards. The white hat runs the conference; everybody answers.

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

THE CREW CONFERENCE

There is no magic formula. There is a list.

WORK DOWN IT

- **Rules changes and level differences.** Especially early in the season, and especially if someone on the crew also works small college or youth ball.
- **Special coverage.** Hurry-up. Obvious onside. Lightning suspension. A fight. Decide how the crew handles each before it happens.
- **Making the call.** Which crew signals you use — receiver off the line, two sticks, the player counts and what "enough / too many / too few" looks like. Shared coverage means eye contact, and everyone officiates the dead ball.
- **Reporting fouls.** The Referee says how he wants them. Offence and defence, or jersey colour? Include the status of the ball at the foul and the result of the play. Wings tell the coach who, what, and any special enforcement.
- **Time-outs.** Who times it, where everyone stands, how the teams are told it is over, and who tells each coach how many they have left — after every one.
- **Bench decorum.** Agree what is out of line, so two officials on the same crew don't have two standards. Wings find the get-back coach.
- **An injured official.** Generally a crew of four carries on without a Line Judge and a crew of five without a Back Judge. Down to two: one works as Referee, one as Head Line Judge.
- **Halftime.** Do you let the teams leave first? The recommendation: meet at a designated spot, let them go, Referee signals the timer to start the clock. Settle who notifies the teams and the crew of the time remaining.
- **Leaving the field.** Together, or on your own.
- **Game expectations.** Any history between these two schools that will show up tonight.

MEETING THE HEAD COACHES

Referee plus one — usually the Umpire. Home coach first.

WHAT HE MUST DO

- Verify **verbally** that his players are legally equipped and will use no illegal equipment.
- Acknowledge that everyone is expected to show good sportsmanship.
- Identify any player with a protective guard, cast or brace that needs inspecting.
- Name the representative who will **request time-outs** from the sideline. That person stays the same all game except in an emergency.
- Name the representative — coach or player — who will **decide penalty acceptance or declination**.

WHAT YOU ASK HIM

Get-back coach	The assistant who keeps players and staff out of the coaching belt. Get his name.
Captains	Numbers, and names if you can. A captain called by name helps you calm a teammate later.
Toss	What he wants if he wins it. If the captain then says something different, ask "are you sure that's what you want?"
Quarterback	Right- or left-handed. The Referee's position on every scrimmage down depends on the answer.
Kickers	Right- or left-footed, punter and place kicker both. Same reason.
Trick plays	Unusual formations or plays either team plans. Foreknowledge means it gets officiated correctly.
Medical	Where the trainer will be. Whether a lightning detector is available and how weather will be communicated.

WHAT YOU TELL HIM

- When the toss is (normally 3 minutes before the game, unless your association says otherwise).
- That he is responsible for having his team on the field for the mandatory **3-minute warm-up** after halftime.
- Any planned extended halftime.

Introduce the crew and hand him a card with everyone's names on it. Avoid conversation about what the other team does.

ON THE FIELD, 30 MINUTES OUT

The crew takes the field together, in uniform.

WHO DOES WHAT

- R** Walk both sidelines and both end lines. Spot-check players warming up — tinted eyeshields, knotted jerseys, decorated towels. Obtain and approve the game balls. Then check the crew: has the Umpire inspected the tapings, has the Head Line Judge met the chain crew, has the Line Judge met the timer and ball helpers.
- U** Inspect player equipment, casts, braces and tapings. Spot-check the warm-up the same way the Referee does.
- HL** Inspect the down indicator and chains — securely attached, no kinks, ends properly covered. **No tape at the chain's midway point? Get some from a trainer and mark it.** Meet the line-to-gain crew.
- LJ** Walk both sidelines and both end lines. Goalposts straight, undecorated, pads fastened, pylons placed. Meet the line-to-gain crew. In a crew of 4, also keep the game balls and meet the ball helpers and the timer.
- BJ** Keep the game balls — gauge them if they reach the locker room, inspect by hand if they arrive on the field, and **mark the approved ones with your initials** so only those get used. Meet the ball helpers and the timer.

Hazards — potholes, broken glass — go to game management to be fixed immediately. If the field is lined for another sport, make sure the crew knows which lines are football.

THE LAST FEW MINUTES

Duties done. Now watch.

The Referee, Head Line Judge and Back Judge move to midfield on the **Head Line Judge's side**; the Umpire and Line Judge to midfield on the opposite side. Watch both teams warm up without looking like you are inspecting them, and trade what you see before the kickoff.

Kickers	How strong are the legs? Does he slice it? How is the wind affecting the flight and the spin?
Formations	Double wide, slot, trips? Unusually wide splits? Do they rush the snap after getting set?
Blocking	Do the linemen block low? Is the tight end or slot back in the free-blocking zone?
Defence	Are the linebackers tight enough to be in the free-blocking zone at the snap?
Receivers	What patterns do they run?

Warm up yourself — run the sideline, and stretch out of bounds near the end zone if you need to. Keep pregame chat with players, coaches and spectators to a minimum; it reads as favouritism.

Professionalism. No alcohol or tobacco, and no impairment by any controlled or illicit substance, from arrival at the site until you leave after the game.

HOW LONG YOUR AUTHORITY LASTS

Jurisdiction, p. 217.

Your authority runs **through the Referee's declaration of the end of the fourth period or overtime**. It ends — and the final score is approved — when **all** game officials have left the visual confines of the playing area. Leave together and nobody is left alone with it.

What survives that is **clerical** authority: you keep it through the completion of any report responsive to something that happened while you had jurisdiction, disqualifications included. A state association may still

intercede over an unusual incident before, during or after your jurisdiction, or where a game was terminated before the end of regulation.

AFTER THE GAME

Postgame, pp. 217-219.

OWED TO SOMEBODY ELSE

Disqualification	Fighting, or two unsportsmanlike fouls on one person. The Referee contacts the conference officiating coordinator, and the report must say at what point of the game it happened. Many state associations want notice of poor sportsmanship as well.
Reports	Complete them in the locker room and send them immediately.
Clock trouble	A breakdown in cooperation with either clock operator, or either clock malfunctioning, goes to the state association or the assigning agency — reported by the official in charge of that timer. Timers are told to report crews back, so this runs both ways.
Disqualified coach	Out of sight and sound of the stadium for the rest of the game, and no coaching activity after the ejection.

THE CREW'S OWN REVIEW

Relax first — before the shower, after it, or at dinner; do whatever suits the crew. Then work down these:

- **Strange plays and rulings.** Confirm anything odd against the rules book and the case book, and confirm every unusual enforcement was handled properly. Did you take too long presenting options, or not long enough?
- **Points of emphasis.** Rough play, sportsmanship, dead-ball situations — were they handled? If not, what do you do differently next week?
- **Sideline decorum.** Did you let the coaches go too far? Were you approachable? Did they get penalty, time-out and clock information in time?
- **Tempo.** Did the game come to you, or did you assert yourself when you didn't need to? Did it find a flow?
- **Criticism, asked for and given.** "How'd I do?" expecting praise is not a question. Ask what you could have done better, take the answer, and be ready to give three things back to every crewmate. Working with someone new is the best chance you get: ask what their regular crew does differently.

Reflects the 2026 NFHS rules year. Built from the 2026 and 2027 NFHS Football Game Officials Manual — Pregame Conference (pp. 12-16), §1.5 On the Field Before the Game (pp. 23-24), Game Officials Jurisdiction (p. 217) and Postgame Conference (pp. 217-219). Last checked September 2, 2026. Confirm with the association before relying on this.