

General Instructions for Football Game and Play Clock Operators - 2019

By on April 12, 2019

football

A. The game and play clock operators should report to the game officials at the stadium at least 30 minutes before game time for the following purposes:

1. To synchronize timer's watch with official game time as established by the game official responsible for timing.
2. To advise game officials whether the game clock operator and/or play clock operator will be in the press box or on the sideline. Determine procedure for communication with timer and check this procedure prior to the game.
3. To discuss coordination of starting, stopping and adjusting the game clock or play clock in accordance with the playing rules.
4. To discuss if the game clock horn (mechanical signal) can be turned off. Preference is for the game clock horn (mechanical signal) to be turned off for the duration of the game.

B. The field clock is normally started 30 minutes before game time. The halftime intermission will start on the referee's signal when the players and game officials leave the field. All pregame and halftime activities will be synchronized with the official game clock. The mandatory three-minute warm-up period will be put on the game clock after the intermission time has elapsed and shall be started immediately.

C. The game clock operator shall have an extra stopwatch available. In case of failure of the game clock, the game clock operator shall immediately contact the game officials, giving them the correct data regarding the official time. The game official responsible for timing will then pick up the correct game time on the stopwatch. If the field clock becomes inoperative and is subsequently repaired, it will not be used again until the next period or when the referee determines it is operational. The public-address announcer will indicate the field clock will not be official until the malfunction is corrected and a subsequent announcement is made on the public-address system.

D. Game Clock Procedures

1. The game clock operator is an integral member of the officiating crew and game administration. Unfair advantages occur when the game clock is not started or stopped correctly by rule. Great care must be exercised to see that no time lag occurs in starting or stopping the game clock.
2. On all free kicks, the nearest game official(s) will signal the legal touching of the ball by indicating that the game clock should start.

3. Any game official may signal a time-out; therefore, the game clock operator should be alert to stop the game clock.
4. The incompleteness signal will stop the game clock.
5. The game clock operator will automatically stop the clock following a touchdown, field goal, touchback or safety after the appropriate scoring signal has been made.
6. After the game clock has been stopped, the referee will start it again on the referee's start-the-clock signal and if no such signal is given, the game clock operator will start the clock on the snap without the signal from the referee.
7. The referee may start the game clock again in certain instances before the ready-for-play.
8. The try is not a timed down.
9. There are instances when a period shall be extended by an untimed down. During these extensions, leave the game clock at :00. Do not reset the game clock for the next period until the referee declares the period over by facing the press box and holding the ball overhead.
10. Each state association may decide whether or not to utilize a running game clock in certain situations, and the procedures for those situations.

E. Play Clock Procedures

1. The following set of instructions is for the play clock operators to assist with the 2019 NFHS football rule change to the play clock that now involves a 40-second or 25-second possibility for a delay of game. The following are the instructions for the 40-second and the 25-second play clock, to be used if and when visible play clocks are available to be used.
2. Note to the Play Clock Operator: Starting the 40-second play clock "immediately" is to be interpreted as starting the 40 seconds as quickly as the covering official signals the end of the down using Signal #3 (time-out) or Signal #7 (dead ball with one arm straight up) or Signal #10 (incomplete pass). These are the only three signals you should expect at the end of a down prior to the 40-second play clock starting.
3. The following addresses the play situations that require the 40-second option:
 - (a) The Team A (offense) runner is stopped inbounds short of a first down. The game clock continues to run and the 40-second play clock is started immediately except at the end of a 4th down.
 - (b) The Team A (offense) runner is stopped inbounds beyond the line-to-gain (first down). The game clock is stopped for the first down and the 40-second play clock is started immediately. The referee will then restart (wind) the game clock (no whistle involved) as quickly as the football is placed on the ground and ready for play.
 - (c) The Team A (offense) runner or a Team A fumble or a Team A backward pass goes out of bounds. The game clock is stopped and the 40-second play clock is started immediately. The game clock will not start again until the next legal snap.
 - (d) A Team A (offense) legal forward pass is incomplete. The game clock is stopped and the 40-second play clock is started immediately. The game clock will not start again until the next legal snap.
 - (e) A double change of possession during the down occurs resulting in Team A in possession at the end

of the down. The game clock is stopped for a first down and the 40-second play clock is started immediately. The game clock may then be restarted (wind with no whistle) or not depending on whether out of bounds was a factor. (Example: Team A's forward pass is intercepted and Team B then fumbles during its return and Team A recovers.)

4. There is no signal/whistle from the referee during the 40 seconds except to restart the game clock following a first down inbounds. It is important to note that none of the situations listed above involve an administrative stop/interruption in play. All of those possibilities are addressed in the next section.
5. Administrative Stoppages/Interruptions: It is always possible for the situations that are listed below to occur during the game that are administrative issues/interruptions to the normal flow of play. This list does not necessarily include every possibility.
6. Note to the Play Clock Operator: Every situation listed below will result in a 25-second play clock that is not started immediately at any time, but you will wait until the situation has been addressed and the referee will then utilize Signal #1 which is the very common ready-for-play (with the whistle sounded) or Signal #2 (wind) which restarts both clocks (with the whistle sounded). Game Situations:
 - (a) any foul occurs;
 - (b) play is stopped for an injured player;
 - (c) any down that involves a score;
 - (d) either team is granted a time-out;
 - (e) a player's helmet has come completely off;
 - (f) any down that includes a legal kick;
 - (g) a measurement for a first down;
 - (h) team possession changes during or after a down;
 - (i) the beginning of any period;
 - (j) an inadvertent whistle; and
 - (k) an untimed down.This list includes most 25-second play clock situations, but an extremely rare situation is also a possibility (a dog runs across the field; the lights go out; weather conditions).
7. **General Statements**
 - (a) Always set the play clock back to 40 during a down in progress. You will have plenty of time to change it back to 25 at the end of the down if necessary.
 - (b) The common ready-for-play whistle/signal is not used for a 40-second play clock.
 - (c) It is very important that the same individual in the press box is not responsible for both clocks. An official on the field will be responsible for the play clock if and when visible play clocks are not available to be used.
 - (d) The game clock operator must always be ready for the referee to wind/start the game clock when it is stopped. The game clock will always start on a legal snap if it is not already started/running prior to the legal snap.
 - (e) Make certain that you always run the 25-second play clock prior to an extra point try, prior to a kickoff and prior to the kick following a safety.
8. Finally, the play clock operator must always be ready for the referee to reset the 40-second clock to 25 seconds if and when the 40 seconds has run down past and below 25 seconds and the football is still not yet on the ground ready for the next down. The referee's signal for this is a pumping motion with one hand up and down near his head.