

## **OSSAA Umpire in the Offensive Backfield Mechanics**

After much consideration and discussion, in an effort to provide the opportunity for a safer game for our officials, OSSAA Mechanics Coordinator Ethan Rolen and OSSAA rules Interpreter David Gore are approving the **option** to move the Umpire to the offensive backfield for the 2023 season. This is a major change in the OSSAA approved mechanics. **For the 2023 Football season, this change is optional.** However, we strongly encourage all crews to use this mechanic at some point during the season. Crews can use the mechanic during scrimmages or non-district games or throughout the season. The best way to evaluate the effectiveness of this option is to have as much feedback as possible. This new mechanic involves the entire crew. Every position will be required to make adjustments. Due to the fact we only have five officials, there are “gaps” and these areas require special attention. These “gaps” can be covered with focus and hustle. With the Umpire moving away from the defensive side of the ball, there will be a large area in the middle of the field that every official will need to be aware of on every snap. The mechanics that follow are our recommendations for the best coverage of this area. **It is important to understand that when the Umpire is in the offensive backfield, he is still the Umpire and his basic area of responsibilities do not change.**

We have provided the recommended mechanics below. We are hoping to get as much feedback as possible as we use the coming season as an opportunity to learn and evaluate. Thank you for making a genuine effort to provide the best feedback possible on this optional mechanic in 2023. **You may be surprised to discover that the Umpire will move less and be safer!**

### **REFEREE and UMPIRE**

Your initial alignment will mirror each other. 13-15 yards behind the LOS and 1-2 yards outside of the normal Tight End position with the Referee to the QB’s right side and the umpire to his left. You will both count the offense and confirm that you have 5 linemen numbered 50-79. (Be alert for any numbering exceptions in a scrimmage kick formation!)

Pre-Snap responsibilities – U has the Guard, Center, Guard and R has the offensive backs. The line of scrimmage officials will have the Tackle on their side of the formation.

At the snap, your focus will be the initial engagement by offensive linemen from the ball to your side of the offensive line that are covered by a defensive opponent as the play develops. The Umpire will take the G, T, and TE on his side and the Referee is responsible for the G, T, and TE on his side of the line plus any backs aligned between the normal tight end spots. The snapper could go to his left (U’s responsibility) or to his right (R’s responsibility). **The Referee will have total responsibility for protecting a passer during the duration of a passing down. Stay with the passer wherever he goes!** If the passer scrambles in front of the U opposite the R, then R will also pass in front of the U. The U will stay with the action of the linemen. The R will take the passer until he is no longer a potential passer.

On inside runs between the normal tight end spots, immediately focus on the point of attack to determine legal contact by the offensive and defensive opponents. On wider runs to your side, focus ahead of the runner to watch the critical blocks that allow the runner to get to the outside. On wider runs away from your side, focus on the line play behind the runner. If a passing down develops, focus on the pass blocking of your keys as you stay wide and be prepared to step backward to avoid interfering with the action. **Again, the Referee protects the passer!**

\* **Spotting the ball for the next down** – with a crew of only 5 officials, it is critical to understand that any official on the crew must be prepared to assist with the retrieval and placement of the ball for the next down. The Referee and the Umpire are likely to spot the ball most of the time for the next down depending on which side the ball ends up on the previous play. It is also a possibility with this new mechanic that the Back Judge could be in a position to spot the ball if the result of the previous play is a lengthy gain downfield well beyond the LOS. The most likely responsibility of the 2 wing officials would be to start the relay of the ball back toward the middle of the field when the ball ends up near or outside of the numbers. **The crew must discuss this issue and decide how each official may be involved in the retrieval and spotting of the ball! We must always try to have the ball on the ground ready for the next play with all officials in place at the 30-second mark of a 40-second play clock!**

\* **When the Offense is in obvious hurry up situations, the U can leave when the pass is released and will leave any clean up behind the play to R.** The Umpire will spot the ball in most hurry up situations and back out as quickly as possible. The Referee will not allow the snap to occur until the Umpire is safely out of the way by communicating with the QB. If it is an obvious situation where the Offense will legally spike the ball to conserve time, the U should take his original spot behind the defensive line.

\* **On the rare occasion that the snap needs to be delayed,** it becomes necessary to carefully communicate to the appropriate players quickly. The Referee must be prepared to immediately communicate with the player in position to receive the snap and with the Umpire. At that point, the Umpire must be prepared to communicate with the snapper. It is always helpful to know the first name of the snapper and the QB!

\* **Dead ball officiating is always important,** and it becomes especially critical where there may be the “gaps” that were mentioned earlier. As a crew discusses the various adjustments they will make with the Umpire on the offensive side of the ball, the 2 officials that are likely the greatest distance from the dead ball spot need to be prepared to focus on these open areas until the players separate. **(As always, avoid being a ball watcher!)**

\* **Scrimmage kick downs** call for added responsibilities for the crew and these must be discussed in any pre-game conversation. The Umpire should **strongly consider** returning to their traditional spot behind the defensive line for a punt, field goal or kick try situation to make certain that the snapper is protected and this places the Umpire closer to the middle of the field to help cover these possible kicking situations. The other 4 crew members will not likely need to change what they have done for many years.

\* **Passing downs also call for added responsibilities** and it is especially critical to thoroughly discuss the duties of the 2 wing officials. Ineligible receivers going downfield too early must be monitored carefully in addition to the spot where the forward pass was thrown, where the forward pass was first touched and by whom plus where the pass was caught and the possibility of the recent rule change allowing for the legal grounding of a forward pass. These are critical decisions to be made and the wing officials do have a full plate on passing downs. **Let's make certain that their duties are clearly discussed and everyone understands and is prepared!**

\* **Suggested duties for the wing officials on passing downs** – the **HL** moves 3 yards beyond the LOS to monitor any ineligible receivers beyond that point and also monitors any activity in the 10-yard belt beyond the LOS. The **LJ** remains on the LOS to monitor the spot where the forward pass was thrown, where it was first touched and by whom, did it cross the LOS plus the issue of a legal or illegal grounding of the forward pass. This remains the same when you change sides.