

## Anticipation Takes Hesitation Out of The Equation

Many times only the offense knows what will happen after the snap. Communication from the sidelines or a brilliant idea from a player on the field results in the offense knowing how to line up and what to do when play begins. The defensive players may not know what may occur even though they get signals from their coaches.

If you're one of the officials, you may be even more clueless. At other times, you may have a good idea what might ensue. Visual indicators and game situations help you anticipate what will transpire when a play starts. Here are guidelines to help you absorb what you see in an offensive alignment and how to apply specific game factors to have an educated guess as to how to position yourself and what to expect for upcoming downs.

Let's first cover obvious types of plays.

### Punt.

It will be apparent the next play is a punt when it's fourth down with several yards to go and the punt team comes onto the field. Hard to miss what the offense plans to do then. One of the wing officials on crews of less than five will need to move closer to the punt receiver. Officials need to start thinking about [rules regarding scrimmage kicks](#), such as numbering exceptions, ramifications if the kick is touched by the kicking team, post-scrimmage kick enforcement, etc.

### Try for point.

There's a high possibility a kick try will follow a touchdown, and that will be validated by a kicker and holder coming onto the field. A regular formation means a two-point attempt. A swinging gate lineup may not initially tell you a team's intentions. If the gate stays open, it's most likely a two-point try. If the gate closes with a kicker and holder in place, it's probably a one-point attempt. Foresee other try scenarios such as what to do if the kick is blocked and if either team can advance after possessing a blocked kick (no in NFHS, yes in NCAA).

### Field goal.

As you move to your pre-snap field goal positions, think about your coverage if a fake kick involving a run or pass ensues. At the snap you may have two officials under the goalpost and only one on the line. So be prepared to rotate to another location. The same applies for a fake kick try.

### Onside kick.

The obvious clue is game situation. You'll see team R's "hands team" on the field (the forward line will be populated by players with numbers lower than 50 or higher than 79 rather than the usual beefy characters). In that case, the referee should tell the crew to go into onside kick positioning (which varies by crew size). Look for team K encroachment (NFHS) or offsides (NCAA), who first touches the kick and where, whether the kick is drilled into the ground in the manner of a ball kicked off the tee and the blocking that precedes touching by either team.

### Hail Mary.

With seconds left in the game, team A behind and many yards to the end zone, everyone knows a long desperation pass is coming. Some associations allow the wing officials to start the play deeper than normal in anticipation of the play. In any event, watch for illegal grabbing, pushing or restricting by players of both teams.

### Other considerations.

Multiple substitutions, especially prior to kick plays, increase the need to count players. Prevent the snap if a player count reveals either team has 12 or more players on the field. Fewer than 11 might result in an illegal formation.

On second or third down with short yardage, there is a high probability for a running play. Wing officials must be especially accurate on forward progress, and if it results in a first down. Also focus on team A, especially the snapper and the quarterback, trying to coax the defense into the neutral zone. The quarterback may not use a head bob or "walk into" the snap.

Other visual signs indicate what most likely will happen after the snap. An example is strength of formation, like one tight end or multiple receivers on one side. That indicates a higher probability the play will go to the strength side where there are more blockers or receivers.

What about a covered receiver? He is ineligible and cannot go downfield if a pass crosses the line. That may be planned and he will stay behind the line to block. In that case, you may see no receiver on the other side of the line, leaving a player with a lineman's number on the end of the line. There is no issue for a running play from that formation or a pass completed behind the line.

How about double tight ends, multiple backs between the tackles and only one or no wide receivers? A running play is probably coming.

Pay attention to substitutions. They may tell you what the next play may be. For example, a blocking back replacing a receiver (running play) or extra receivers coming in and only the quarterback in the backfield (pass play). The substitute "wildcat" player behind the snapper usually runs.

A high football IQ can help you anticipate the next play. Try to think like a coach. Evaluate the tempo, flow and momentum of the game. As the contest progresses, try to detect play patterns for given circumstances. Research a team's tendencies before the game. Teams that huddle give you more evaluation time, whereas no-huddle offenses force earlier decisions.

Ask coaches in the pregame meeting about unusual and trick plays. Then you know what to expect when you see uncommon formations. For example, a coach says substitute number 12 (backup quarterback) will line up as a slot receiver. After catching a backward pass he will throw a forward pass.

Officials don't want to be caught off guard or out of position for what might next ensue. Anticipate what is most likely to happen based on offensive lineups, down, distance, time in the game, score, game flow and substitutions.