

FINAL TWO MINUTES

MECHANICS, CLOCK AWARENESS AND END-OF-PERIOD PROTOCOLS

Purpose: The mechanics do not become a different rule set in the final two minutes. The crew simply increases urgency, clock awareness, sideline accuracy and dead-ball control because the consequences of errors are magnified.

1. CREW MINDSET: CLOCK, BOUNDARY, DEAD BALL

In late-half and late-game situations, the crew should mentally prioritize three things on every snap:

- **Clock:** know whether the clock should stop, continue, start on the ready-for-play, or start on the snap.
- **Boundary:** get inbounds/out-of-bounds, forward progress and sideline status correct.
- **Dead ball:** stay with players longer and prevent late action or retaliation.

2. HOW OFFICIALS SHOULD ALTER THEIR MECHANICS

The crew should not freelance or abandon approved mechanics. The adjustment is to be more deliberate, more vocal and more exact.

- **Slow down mentally.** Avoid rushing signals, spots or penalty enforcement just because the offense is in hurry-up.
- **Use crisp clock signals.** Sell stop-the-clock, wind-the-clock and first-down status so the press box and crew are aligned.
- **Confirm the clock.** After every clock-sensitive play, at least one official should visually confirm the game clock.
- **Communicate start status.** Use crew language such as "snap," "ready," or "keep it running" when appropriate.
- **Know timeouts.** Wings should know sideline requests, remaining timeouts and whether the coach is trying to preserve clock.

3. POSITION-SPECIFIC BEST PRACTICES

Referee:

- Be more vocal with clock status and penalty options.
- Be aware of timeout requests and clock manipulation tactics.
- Use deliberate announcements and avoid starting the next play until the crew is aligned.

Umpire:

- Hustle the spot, but do not rush accuracy.
- Protect the ball and coordinate with the Referee on ready-for-play situations.
- Watch interior dead-ball action when emotions rise.

Wing officials:

- Own the sideline and sell inbounds/out-of-bounds decisions.
- Mark progress accurately before turning away from players.
- Communicate whether the clock should start on the snap or ready when a first down occurs inbounds.

Back Judge / Deep officials:

- Anticipate deep sideline and end-line throws.
- Maintain goal-line and end-line discipline.
- Help with clock awareness and dead-ball cleanup away from the ball.

4. SIDELINE, GOAL LINE AND HURRY-UP ADJUSTMENTS

- **Sideline plays:** hold the spot and face the action until players clear. Avoid turning too early to retrieve the ball.
- **Goal-line snaps:** think goal line first, especially inside the 20-yard line or on plays designed to reach the boundary.
- **Hurry-up offense:** move efficiently, triangulate or rotate the ball quickly, and do not delay the snap unnecessarily.
- **Officials should create angles, not just close distance.** Getting too close near the boundary can reduce vision and increase collision risk.
- **Do not let the final cheap shot happen.** Continue officiating until both teams separate and return to their side or huddle.

END-GAME CREW REMINDER

The last two minutes reward poise. Hustle with purpose, communicate clearly, verify the clock, and keep officiating after the whistle.

5. SPECIAL LATE-GAME SITUATIONS TO ANTICIPATE

- **Intentional clock tactics:** be alert for fouls intended to conserve or consume time.
- **Spike situations:** know whether enough time remains for a legal snap and immediate spike.
- **Clock corrections:** make clear corrections before the next snap when the timing error is recognized.
- **Measurements and close first downs:** be precise. A rushed spot in the final minute can decide the game.
- **Victory formation:** move closer, communicate expectations and officiate a clean, peaceful finish.

CLOSING SECONDS OF A PERIOD

MHSAA / NFHS TIMING PROTOCOL SUMMARY

6. WHO WATCHES THE FINAL SNAP?

Inside the final minute of a period, the official facing the clock - generally the Referee or Back Judge in a five-person crew, or the Umpire in a four-person crew - is responsible for determining whether a last-second snap occurs before time expires.

If that same official is also responsible for the play clock, focus on the clock with fewer seconds remaining.

7. TENTHS OF A SECOND

If the visible game clock legally stops with tenths of a second remaining, that time should remain unless the clock was improperly stopped. Officials should not remove tenths simply to take the clock to zero.

8. RULES OF THUMB FOR ONE FINAL PLAY

Clock Situation	Time Remaining / Action	Protocol Summary
Clock running	Snap with at least 2 seconds left	A legal immediate spike can stop the clock and leave time for one additional play.
Clock running	Snap with less than 2 seconds left	Only one play is realistically possible. An incomplete pass attempt will consume the remaining time.
Clock stopped, but restarting on the ready-for-play	Immediate snap after RFP with more than 2 seconds left	A legal immediate spike can stop the clock and leave time for one additional play.
Clock stopped, but restarting on the ready-for-play	Snap with between 1 and 2 seconds left	Only one play is possible. An incomplete pass will run out the clock.
Clock stopped, but restarting on the ready-for-play	Less than 1 second left	The offense may line up and attempt to snap, but no play is permitted. The Referee signals ready-for-play and then immediately ends the period.

9. CLOCK ADJUSTMENT PHILOSOPHY

- Not every minor timing issue requires correction, but critical end-of-half/game timing errors should be addressed.
- Outside five minutes remaining in a half, larger errors are normally required before adjusting the clock.
- Inside five minutes remaining in a half, clear timing errors should be corrected.
- A timing correction must be recognized and corrected before the next snap.

TRAINING TAKEAWAY

During the final two minutes, mechanics are less about moving faster and more about being exact: exact clock status, exact boundary rulings, exact spots, exact communication and exact dead-ball coverage.

Source note: Summary based on MHSAA football mechanics guidance, including timing responsibilities, closing-seconds protocols and clock adjustment philosophy from the open 2023 MHSAA Football Officials Manual. Content is paraphrased for training use.