

Prioritize the Pre-Game

The quote is simple and true: *“failing to prepare is preparing to fail.”* Even minimum preparation before a game solidifies a bond between partners, and comprehensive preparation establishes good communication before the first whistle blows. Without some amount of preparation you set yourself and your partners up to fail. This does not mean that if you prepare you will be perfect, but that by preparing you get closer to perfection.

Perfection is something we all strive for on the field yet as one top official often says; *“no one has ever called a perfect game. That goes for me and everyone I have worked with.”* Conducting a thorough and complete pre-game separates the official who wants to serve the game from the official who “knows it all.” Another quote is *“separation is in the preparation.”* You establish yourself as a professional far more regularly with a good pre-game compared with an official who walks onto the field without consulting the rest of the crew.

Every pre-game is an opportunity to test your knowledge of the rulebook, how to apply mechanics, determine answers for odd game situations, and create a sense of teamwork with your partners. To assist officials in preparing the Men’s Officials Training Group created four different pre-games:

- [Youth Official Pre-Game](#)
- [New Adult Official Pre-Game](#)
- [2-Person Mechanics Pre-Game](#)
- [3-Person Mechanics Pre-Game](#)

These documents gives Referees a standard template to guide a discussion as a crew. A few things should be emphasized in every pre-game:

- Rules Changes and Points of Emphasis
- Quality of Play
- Faceoff Mechanics
- Over and Back Mechanics
- Crease Mechanics
- Foul Threshold

Each of the four pre-games is designed to be completed in ten or twenty minutes. If, due to unforeseen circumstances the crew has five or fewer minutes to pre-game, then the following should be covered at a bare minimum:

- Rules Changes and Points of Emphasis
- Faceoffs
- Crease Mechanics
- Foul Threshold

It is the obligation of the Referee to conduct the pre-game, and the Referee is also responsible for guiding the conversation and involving the other officials. Conversations involving the entire crew build crew unity and cohesiveness; even with officials that worked together many times already. A Referee that takes the time to ask questions of his partners and consider different points of view also builds up the morale of his partners, which is especially helpful for less experienced officials who benefit from encouragement and engagement by the more experienced officials in an association.

Sometimes, a Referee will not conduct a pre-game either through choice or a lack of planning. If you are the Umpire or the Field Judge and your Referee does not lead a discussion prior to the game you must take the initiative to help mesh the crew. Appealing to your Referee's experience in the game is a great way to get a stalled conversation moving, as well as asking about recent games or unusual situations that happened.

Here are a few questions that help guide a conversation for everyone's benefit:

- I've heard of different ways to conduct a faceoff, can you show me the mechanic that we'll follow in this game?
- I had a weird situation happen last week, here's what happened...
- Did you see the game between X and Y on television yesterday? What do you think of the call at 3:15 in the 2nd quarter?
- How do you want us to handle close end line plays as the lead official?
- I'm having trouble being consistent with my play-ons. Do you have any tips?
- I had this coach last week and I called Unsportsmanlike Conduct on him because of _____. Do you think I handled that situation properly and how do you want us to handle this coach if he behaves poorly in this game?
- The scouting report shows the visiting team is brand-new this season and they're playing a team that made the semi-finals last season. We might have a blowout game on our hands, what are your thoughts?

While it is the Referee's responsibility to guide the pre-game discussion, the Umpire and Field Judge can assist in this moment just like they do during the game to ensure that the crew gets the calls right. Always take it upon yourself to assume responsibility that the crew will be prepared prior to stepping onto the field.

The players, coaches, fans, and the game deserve your best, prepared effort.