

I received an email today with this question regarding the mechanics for starting the game clock...

When the ball carrier goes out-of-bounds, when should the Referee wind the game clock? Is there a time range that should be hit on the play clock? Should it be when the ball is placed on the ground? Do you wait for the chains to be set?

At times, I have had it started so quickly that I didn't know if it was stopped.

Should you blow your whistle when winding the clock?

Here's my thoughts on how we handled this...

First of all we're obviously talking about situations 2-minutes or more before the end of the second or fourth quarters... situations where after the runner goes out-of-bounds that we will start the game clock.

In most cases the play clock will be a 40-second clock so with that in mind, a quick pace to start the game clock will not jeopardize Team A in any way. As soon as the Umpire or Center Judge have spotted the ball, the Referee can/should start the game clock.

Remember, just because you started the game clock does not mean Team A can snap the ball. Similar to a play ending inbounds, short of the line-to-gain, the play clock begins to run, the game clock is running, Team A snaps the ball when you're ready.

Most times Team A won't be over the ball when the U/CJ spot it, but if they are the U/CJ stay on the ball instructing the Team A Center to wait for his hand cue (normally a point) before snapping.

As far as aiming for a time to wind the clock, I didn't worry about that unless for administrative reasons the play clock was down to 20-seconds or less. Maybe we were getting a new ball, checking to see if the line-to-gain was made, or crew conferencing, etc., if that were the case then we'd push up for a new 25-second play clock while the game clock was running. Assuming the play clock operator reset and started quickly we continued on. If there was a delay in the reset, then we shut everything down to make a formal announcement before starting the game & play clock together.

As far as waiting for the chains, no I didn't wait for the chains... it's first down, you're starting on the edge of a new yard line in most cases. The box man will

get there first and the chains shortly thereafter. Worst case scenario, the HL or LJ drops a beanbag to mark the spot for the box man.

Did I blow my whistle to start the game clock on these situations? Yes and no... we were instructed to blow our whistle but I usually just gave a "courtesy toot" just to conform with the issued mechanic. The clock operator wasn't going to hear it anyway so it was more important for him to see my signal than hear my whistle. Make sure you're out in the open where you are easily visible to the game clock operator.

Now we discussed handling the game clock at 2-minutes or above in the 2nd & 4th quarters... let's also talk about starting the clock in other situations below the 2-minute mark. I've advocated moving quickly and starting the game clock in the previous paragraphs. Now under 2-minutes it's time to slow down... when it comes to a new first down inbounds or starting the clock after a penalty or other administrative stoppage, we're going to be deliberate and let the kids decide the game, not the officials. We'll wait for the box and chains. We'll be more deliberate in spotting the ball and moving the U/CJ off before winding. Again, let the kids decide the game rather than the officials winding the clock when no one is ready and time runs out. It's their game, not ours.

Game times have increase due to the number of plays being run by the no huddle offenses. What used to be 170 plays per college game is now 200 to 225 plays a game. Get the game clock started quickly whenever possible. You're not cheating anyone out of playing time. Mark my words if things continue, we'll see the game clock not stopping on first downs similar to the NFL. Run as many plays as you can but nearly four-hour games are dragging things down.