



WELCOME and THANKS

Welcome to the Observers Committee of NYSACFO-Syracuse. Observers serve an important role in the development of officials and the promotion officials for postseason assignments. Your role is invaluable to improving officiating across the chapter. This handbook will provide you with the expectations for Observers, as well as, instructions and guidance on how to provide officials with a constructive and positive experience. We thank you for your passion and dedication in taking on this task. Your commitment to the NYSACFO-Syracuse program is appreciated.

Purpose of the Observers Program

The purpose of the Observer program is to assist the NYSACFO in identifying potential and future tournament officials by providing contributions to officials' overall performance analysis, candid explanations of performance deficiencies and areas in which they excel. Most importantly, this program is designed to help all registered officials (new, improving and veteran) learn, develop and grow through constructive criticism and positive reinforcement provided by experienced, caring observers. Through the Observer program, the NYSACFO-Syracuse hopes to improve officiating, increase consistency of officiating throughout the chapter and provide officials with increased support and mentoring.

Timeline and Expectations for Observers

1. Reach out to the host school administrator at least a day in advance to notify him/her of your expected attendance and to ask for, or make, any special arrangements or requests.
2. Identify yourself at the facility entrance by using the identification card provided to you by Section 3, indicating the sport and year for which you are registered. Observers may not request free admittance for additional persons (*e.g., friends, family, colleagues, etc.*).
3. You must determine the appropriateness of seating requests, and under no circumstances should you demand to be located in a specific location. Observers enter facilities as the guests of the schools and should comply with any restrictions or requirements the school sets.
4. Do not voluntarily make yourself known as an observer to spectators or personnel other than the athletic administrators.
5. Plan on being in attendance for the entire contest in which you observe. If you are not able to attend the full contest, you should still submit a Contest Observation Form for the portion of the contest observed. Observation Forms can be found online using the website <https://www.nyscfosyr.com>.
6. Record as much information as possible. Not everything needs to be included in the report or shared with the officials, but you should not share important details with the officials that you would not include in a written report to the NYSACFO – and vice versa.
7. You may use notebooks, computers, tablets or voice recorders to catalog observations during contests; however, the information may only be officially submitted to the NYSACFO using a Observation Form.
8. Thoroughly review the Observation Standards as published in this guide. Feedback should always be based on the official's performance during the observed contest as it comports to NFHS and NYSACFO rules and interpretations and the approved mechanics for the sport. You should not substitute your personal preferences for those outlined in the documents listed above.
9. Make every effort to meet briefly with the officials following the contest to discuss its details, any unusual situations and to provide them your observations and thoughts on their performances.
10. Submit completed report(s) to the NYSACFO-Syracuse office within 10 days by email to lee.m.martin@gmail.com.

Tips for Successful Observations

SHOW YOUR FACE

Officials deserve to be told what areas require improvement and need the reinforcement that positive feedback offers. Information is best conveyed in person and reduces the possibility of miscommunication. Furthermore, these face-to-face interactions allow observers to ask questions, receive clarifications and even learn new things themselves. In-person critiques are more personal and tend to be found more valuable.

A discussion with the officials to debrief following the contest is important. This is the time where you can ask for clarifications on anything that you might not understand or questioned during the contest. If there is a major altercation or an ejection, ask the official(s) about the details. Discuss with the official(s) the areas where he/she/they excelled and were positive and areas of deficiency where improvement is needed.

It's okay, and even recommended, for an Observer to reach out to the officials before the contest to let them know he/she will be observing. If you would like to visit the officials before the start of the contest, you should ask permission from them (crew chief if on a regular crew) during this initial contact. Visits with officials should be limited to prior to and after the conclusion of the contest. Visits between games or at intermissions should be avoided unless an obviously incorrect and serious issue needs to be addressed. An observer's disagreement as to rule enforcement or judgment decisions would not be considered serious enough to justify getting involved. This would primarily be reserved for potentially dangerous situations or safety concerns that may be prevented through intervention.

START WITH A "3"

Observer ratings scale ranges from 1 to 5 (1 is low and 5 is high) and corresponds with the following descriptions:

- **Superior (5)** – Performance demonstrates an exceptionally high degree of competence and knowledge of the category.
- **Above Standard (4)** – Performance exceeds the standard and performance better than average official in the category.
- **Meets Standard (3)** – Performance is standard and expected, and official is functional and competent in the category.
- **Marginal (2)** – Performance barely acceptable and corrective action is suggested in the category.
- **Below Standard (1)** – Performance unacceptable and corrective action is clearly necessary in the category.

It is recommended that all officials start a contest with a “3” in each category. There is nothing wrong with a “Meets Standard”. In fact, the largest number of officials should fill this category. When an official does something particularly good, his/her rating should be moved higher. When an official does something that doesn’t fit with the standards expected, his/her rating should be moved lower.

CONSISTENCY MATTERS

Like so much in officiating, the biggest expectation for Observers is that the feedback provided is consistent in both content and from one observation to another. The observation program is primarily designed to improve performance and put the best available officials on the most important contests. That’s why it’s critical that officials know what standards by which they’ll be observed, and that they’ll be compared against other officials being observed by the same standards.

THE IMPORTANCE OF “WHY?”

Observers should ask at least as many questions as they make statements. Asking “why” provides you three main benefits: (1) You are able to determine whether an official knows the mechanics to use and rules to enforce and whether he/she is doing the right things for the right reasons. (2) Asking questions encourages a good dialogue. It creates an environment of openness and invites honest responses from the official. Most officials avoid giving explanations at the risk of seemingly making excuses – to be known as a “yeah, but” guy/gal. (3) It can prevent you from making a fool of yourself. From time-to-time, even the very best and brightest officials make mistakes. By asking questions about something observed and believed to be incorrect, you may get insight into something that makes you reconsider your position. This can’t be done if he/she were to stake a claim to a position before knowing all of the information.

SPREAD THE WEALTH

Attempt to see as many different officials as you can. Observations of veteran officials or those that are consistently working late into the postseason may be more effectively directed to new or up-and-coming officials. Observing as many officials as possible will both provide NYSACFO with insight on the development of the next generation of talent, and it will also show that every level of official is important and appreciated.

MANAGE PERSONALITIES

Observers should be conscious of who they are observing, especially when providing negative critiques. Many veteran officials may be set in their ways and not as receptive to criticism. This does not mean weaknesses and other areas that need to be corrected shouldn’t be pointed out; but the way this

message is conveyed will play a large role in how/whether it is accepted. Some of the officials you observe may be Observers themselves. Take into consideration that this is an avocation where officials never stop teaching OR learning.

PUT IT IN WRITING

If you're not willing to say it in person, don't put it on paper... and you should be willing to put things on paper. Following up with officials in writing with the same things that were said to them emphasizes the importance of the information an observer offers. It also allows them to reference specific critiques when they encounter similar circumstances in the future. Finally, written observations are needed because it allows the NYSACFO to compile records to which can be referred at the end of the season for tournament consideration and to determine if patterns develop with a particular official's work.

PROFESSIONALISM WINS THE DAY

A professional approach to the Observer position is necessary. This begins even with the dress in which you arrive. The clothes you wear should be befitting of the position and as if you were working the contest yourself. It can be especially embarrassing if the observer provides a critique on professionalism if the observer is dressed unprofessionally himself/herself.

Language, both in person and in writing, should be appropriate for the situation. Slang terms should be avoided for more generic and layperson language. There's no need to be confrontational or argumentative with officials. An explanation of what you observed and the reason(s) for a particular rating should be provided. You should be mindful of any potential conflict of interests and avoid areas where bias may be alleged or your impartiality might be challenged.

Discretion is a very important piece of professionalism as well. The contents of observations should be kept between yourself, the officials being observed, the assigners and associations the observations are made on behalf and with the NYSACFO. They should not be shared with or amongst officials outside the crew, coaches or school administrators.

USE A POSITIVE SANDWICH

Be as constructive as possible in your criticisms, while avoiding sugar-coating areas of deficiency that could impact future contests. Also consider that while every game is the most important to someone, we're still just dealing with high school sports and high school officials. They shouldn't be observed and critiqued as if they're working the Super Bowl.

Observations should be given using the "positive sandwich" philosophy. Each in-person observation should be started with a positive point or two. This should then be followed up with areas for improvement or deficiencies that need to be remedied. You should then wrap up the observation on

a note referencing a positive point from the contest. This will allow the official to receive both positive and critical feedback in a way that doesn't discourage or frustrate him/her.

STAY IN YOUR LANE

Observers should be more than capable to relay advice to officials regarding rules, interpretations, mechanics and signals; however, offering authoritative opinions on NYSACFO policies, protocols, and regulations should be left to administrators from the NYSACFO office.

It's also okay for you not to have all the answers. If something occurs during the game, or a question is raised during the post-game meeting, which you missed or do not know the answer, it is perfectly acceptable to direct the officials to another authority figure or let them know that you will follow up with them at a later time. If you commit to the latter, make sure to follow up quickly and to everyone involved.

DEFINED STANDARDS for OFFICIALS' OBSERVATIONS

FOOTBALL

Positioning

The official is aligned correctly prior to the snap, and completes all pre-snap responsibilities from that location (counting the defense or offense, setting the chains, etc.). The official continues to be in the proper position at the snap and during the play, moving to adjust and react to developing plays and situations.

Recognition & Reading Keys

The official is reading their assigned player(s) at the snap in determining the type of the play, and focuses on their areas of responsibility during the down based on the reading of that key. The official exhibits the knowledge and correct perception of how plays will develop through correctly anticipating where, how and the speed at which the play will occur.

Judgment for Decisions

The official observes and makes objective and accurate decisions, rulings and penalizations based on the action that occurs.

Consistency of Decisions

The official is consistent during a game (play to play, quarter to quarter, half to half) when having similar or like plays.

Decisiveness

The official demonstrates a high level of confidence in their movements, calls and non-calls. The official is not timid or weak, and projects confidence, decisiveness and credibility during the contest.

Four- and/or Five-Person Mechanics

The official works the correct mechanics as prescribed in the NFHS Mechanics Manual during a scholastic contest. The official uses the approved high school mechanics when working a high school game, and does not use NCAA or NFL mechanics which are different from those approved for high school play.

Communication with Partner(s)

The official works effectively with other members of the crew through voice and signals before and during plays, as well as between downs. The crew comes together and discussing situations when appropriate, working together to get all plays called correctly.

NFHS Playing Rules Application

The official demonstrates proper understanding of the NFHS playing rules by consistently applying the rules, and subsequent penalties when applicable. The official does not confuse NFHS rules with other rules codes (*i.e.*, *NCAA and NFL*) when working a scholastic contest.

Common Sense and Fair Play

The official demonstrates a use of common sense when applying the rules correctly and consistently. The official understands the importance of player safety, and manages the game accordingly. The official understands the difference between fouls at the point of attack versus fouls that occur away and that have no bearing on the play.

Style & Signals

The official gives clear and authoritative signals in a smooth, relaxed style that projects confidence and does not draw undue attention to the official. The official shall make signals visible and crisp to give a professional appearance. All signals and mechanics used are those prescribed in the NFHS Football Rules and Mechanics books.

Situation Management

The official maintains professional control during the contest, while not being overly aggressive or overbearing. He/she effectively communicates as necessary with contest personnel and handles difficult situations appropriately (*e.g.*, *sideline issues, warnings, penalties, ejections, etc.*) in light of the game situation.

Focus

The official has consistent concentration on the crucial elements throughout the entire game. This includes giving attention to developing plays and situations. The official demonstrates an awareness of all that is going on within a game and remains alert without regard of score, weather or the standings of the teams involved.

Poise

Steady and in control in high-intensity circumstances.

Hustle

The official displays movement with a purpose during a play to get into proper position to cover plays. The distance to be covered by the official will often dictate the speed or method the official uses to get into position (*i.e., running vs. jogging*).

Appearance & Demeanor

The proper display of uniform as defined in the NYSACFO bylaws and Officials Manual is used during the game. The uniform itself is clean. The official demonstrates a fit and athletic appearance within the uniform.

Mobility

The official possesses the physical ability to move into proper position on field to cover all possible plays for which they have responsibility.

Fraternization

The official avoids excessive, casual and/or unnecessary conversation with coaches, student-athletes or other game personnel during a contest. At no time is the official to converse with or address spectators during the game.