

## New “Ball on the Tic” Ball-Spotting Procedure

If you watch NFL & College games, you RARELY see measurements any more. This is because they utilize the “Ball on Tic” procedures.

If working on a field with marks indicating all of the yard lines (not just lines every five yards), spot the ball with its nose on a yard line (Tic) when the play ends.

This is usually easily accomplished on change of possession plays; Free Kicks, Punts, Interceptions and Fumble recoveries. The exception to this would be whenever the dead ball spot is near a goal line. The other exception would be a 4<sup>th</sup> down play that ends up just short of the line-to-gain. If it’s close but short, we don’t want to point the other way and then move the ball! Leave it where it is and get back to the Tics on subsequent plays or 1<sup>st</sup> downs.

It is NOT MANDATORY to spot the ball on a Tic on every play, but it is preferable.

By spotting the ball on a Tic after a change of possession, the chains are easily set and the LTG is established as a Tic 10 yards away, which enables the crew to more easily determine whether a first down is made in the sequence of plays that follow - the officials will know that if the nose of the ball gets to the Tic yard line 10 yards away, a 1st down has been made.

By spotting the ball on a Tic after other plays, it allows the Umpire to quickly and easily find the spot at the hash. This is very important due to the new 40”/25” play clock rule.

When the ball is on a Tic and a dead ball foul occurs, it makes penalty enforcement quicker and easier: Tic-to-Tic. When the play starts on a Tic and you have a live-ball previous spot foul enforcement, it again makes penalty enforcement quicker and easier: Tic-to-Tic.

On most plays, the official with the dead ball spot is one of the wing officials. When the play ends somewhere clearly short of a 1<sup>st</sup> down (more than 2 yards is a good point of reference) the wing official should line his spot up with a Tic. This doesn’t mean that he gets his spot and stops, realizes that he is between Tics, and then moves one way or the other to a Tic. That’s too late – your original stopping spot should be on the tic.

Every time we give a progress spot it’s a “best guess”. Some official’s “best guesses” are better than others. You’ll never find coaches that agree with the spot when it’s close to

a 1<sup>st</sup> down. We know this by the way he's yelling about it. When the spot is not close to a 1<sup>st</sup> down, most coaches don't pay any particular attention.

Verbalizing to the Umpire ("We're on the 33") helps to expedite the process when the wing is in towards the numbers. Wings should never be in farther than the numbers for a spot unless it's close to the LTG, in which case the wings should "crash" to the spot and NEVER use a Tic. This of course also applies on the Goal Line.

### **Let's discuss some of the nuances of spotting the ball on the Tic:**

Allows the chains to be more easily and accurately set than if the ball is spotted between two yard lines. Again, this is important with respect to the new 40"/25" Play Clock rule where the 40" play clock starts running immediately, even on 1<sup>st</sup> downs.

It enables the use of cross-field ball spotting techniques which will help the Umpire set the ball more quickly and easily. In other words, if the Head Linesman has the spot and he's on the Tic at the 44 yard line, the Line Judge can easily see this and also position himself on the 44. As the Umpire turns to head back to the hash, he can see the Line Judge holding the spot on the Tic. This procedure cannot be used when the dead ball spot is close to a 1st down.

When a ball carrier runs out of bounds, there is plenty of leeway for the wing official to put the ball on the tic – remember, it's the position of the ball, not the position of the foot when he crosses the sideline. Again, if the spot is close to the line to gain, either just before or just past, don't use a Tic unless that's the most accurate spot.

Wing officials should know where the LTG is at all times. If we start on a Tic, this should be easy to accomplish – where are we snapping, and where is 10 yards from here?

If the wing official is giving the Umpire the spot and is standing close to the numbers, and perhaps not really lined up with a Tic, and not anywhere close to the LTG, the Umpire can use his best judgement and put the ball on the closest Tic.

### **Common sense is the key ingredient to using the "Ball on the Tic" procedures.**

If you are at the sideline and have a player stretch the ball out as he's being tackled, with the coach standing right there with you, and the ball comes down between the Tics – that's your spot – don't tempt fate.

I was asked in a meeting about the following: 1<sup>st</sup> and 10 from the 20 yard line. A runner gets tackled at the 24  $\frac{3}{4}$  yard line. The wing official marks the spot at the 25 yard line. On the next play, the defense encroaches prior to the snap. The Umpire marks off the penalty 5 yards from the 25 yard line to the 30 yard line, which is the LTG. This gives the offense a 1<sup>st</sup> down. Is this somehow a problem? Is there any official anywhere who finds himself in that situation who will be thinking to himself, "Geez, if I mark the ball on the Tic the defense might encroach on the next play and then the offense will get a 1<sup>st</sup> down because of me!" No way. Further, is there any coach who will be looking at the 5 yard gain on 1<sup>st</sup> down and thinking to himself, "Geez, if our defense jumps offsides (he would never think encroach) on the next play that will give them a 1<sup>st</sup> down!" He will also not be thinking, "Boy, if the spot on that previous play had been a little shorter, the offsides penalty wouldn't have given them a 1<sup>st</sup> down!"

This is a made-up scenario that has no connection to the reality of the situation on the field.

How important are spots? Over the years, we've measured for 1<sup>st</sup> downs on lousy grass fields that were poorly marked because it was really tough to tell from eye-balling it. We bring the chains in and we're short by a yard and a half. Were the yard line tics and the 5 yard lines even marked correctly? Were the chains really 10 yards?

Or, we measured and it was a 1<sup>st</sup> down by 2 inches. What did we do then? Did we bring the chains into the hash to make sure that the ball was positioned exactly 2 inches past the far stake? No, the ball was tossed into the Umpire and he plopped it down wherever and the chains went back to the sideline and lined up on the ball, wherever it was.

Don't overthink the Tic thing. It can help us administer the game in a much quicker, much more efficient way, but it's not the end of the world if we don't get the ball on a Tic every play. Common sense and experience using the procedure will make it easier and more comfortable to use. If you find yourself in a situation where you think using a Tic could cause a problem, you're probably right – don't use it!