

Referee Certification — L1 — Foundation Official

Grassroots Entry Level — Instructor Guide & Participant Handouts

Total contact time: 8 hours in one day

Program Manual — Version 1.0 | July 2026

Session Schedule

This guide covers all 6 modules for Referee L1 — Foundation Official, combining an instructor script with printable participant handouts for each module.

1. Introduction to Officiating & the LA 2028 Pathway	0.5 hr
2. Core Rulebook: Field, Scoring, Flag-Pull Legality, Illegal Contact	2 hr
3. Signals & Communication	1.5 hr
4. Single-Official Positioning & Mechanics	2 hr
5. Safety Enforcement & Player Welfare	1 hr
6. Code of Conduct & Basic Game Management	1 hr

How to Use This Manual

Each module below contains two parts: an Instructor Guide (learning objectives, a full delivery script, key teaching points, and a structured activity) followed immediately by a Participant Handout page designed to be photocopied and given to each attendee (notes/worksheet items, reflection prompts, and quick-check questions). An Instructor Answer Key for all quick-check questions is provided as an appendix at the end of this manual — it is not intended for participant distribution.

Module 1: Introduction to Officiating & the LA 2028 Pathway

Duration: 0.5 hr

INSTRUCTOR GUIDE

Learning Objectives

- Describe the referee's role and mindset.
- Understand the officiating pathway.
- Understand why officiating quality matters for the sport's growth.

Instructor Script

Officiating in flag football carries more relative weight than in tackle football because there's no line judge crew, no instant replay at grassroots level, and often just one official for an entire small-sided game — your call is the call.

Frame the mindset for new officials: consistency matters more than perfection; a rule applied the same way all game is fairer than a rule applied 'correctly' once and inconsistently the rest of the time.

Introduce the L1-L2-L3 officiating pathway and connect it to the same LA28 context as the coach track — officiating standards are part of what makes the sport credible enough to be taken seriously as an Olympic pathway sport in Uttar Pradesh.

Key Teaching Points

- Single-official reality at grassroots level
- Consistency over perfection
- Officiating pathway and its stakes

Activity: Group Discussion

1. Ask: 'What's harder about officiating with no crew to help you?'
2. Collect answers as a group.
3. Introduce the pathway diagram.

Notes & Worksheet

- ☐ Review the pathway diagram and where L1 sits.
- ☐ Note two things that would be hardest about officiating alone.

Reflection & Application

What personal habit might make you inconsistent as a new official, and how would you guard against it?

Quick Check

1. What matters more for a new official: consistency or perfection?
2. Why is a single official's call especially significant at grassroots level?

Module 2: Core Rulebook: Field, Scoring, Flag-Pull Legality, Illegal Contact

Duration: 2 hr

INSTRUCTOR GUIDE

Learning Objectives

- State field dimensions/zones, scoring values, and downs.
- Distinguish legal flag-pulling from illegal contact.
- Distinguish 'guarding the flag' from illegal defensive contact.

Instructor Script

Cover the field layout and downs system — 70 yards including end zones, 4 downs to cross midfield, 4 more to score — but frame every rule from the enforcement angle: what does this look like when it's broken, and what's your call?

Cover scoring values (touchdown 6, conversions 1 or 2, safety 2) and the legal flag-pull motion versus illegal contact (grabbing cloth, tackling, blocking).

Spend extra time on the two calls new officials get wrong most often: guarding the flag (an offensive player using a hand/arm/spin move specifically to prevent the flag pull) and illegal contact by a defender (grabbing cloth, wrapping up, or a stiff-arm-blocking motion) — both are fouls, but they penalize different teams, and new officials often confuse which one just happened.

Key Teaching Points

- Field/scoring/downs from the officiating angle
- Guarding the flag vs. illegal defensive contact
- Foul attribution — which team is penalized

Activity: Call-Recognition Drill

1. Show 10 short video/photo clips of plays.
2. Participants call it before the answer is revealed.
3. Discuss any missed or confused calls.

Participant Handout — Module 2: Core Rulebook: Field, Scoring, Flag-Pull Legality, Illegal Contact

Notes & Worksheet

- ☐ Complete the call-recognition worksheet for the 10 clips.
- ☐ Keep the rules quick-reference card for gameday.

Reflection & Application

Which of the two commonly-confused fouls (guarding the flag vs. illegal contact) do you find harder to spot in real time?

Quick Check

1. Who is penalized for 'guarding the flag' — offense or defense?
2. Who is penalized for illegal contact like grabbing cloth or tackling?

Module 3: Signals & Communication

Duration: 1.5 hr

INSTRUCTOR GUIDE

Learning Objectives

- Perform the core hand signals correctly.
- Communicate a ruling verbally and audibly to both benches.

Instructor Script

Teach the core signal set: touchdown (arms straight up), incomplete pass (arms waved side to side at waist height), a dead-ball infraction before the snap, illegal contact, and first down (arm pointed downfield).

Emphasize that a signal without a verbal call is only half the job at grassroots level, where there's often no PA system or scoreboard operator relaying information — state the down and distance out loud after every play, and announce any penalty by naming the foul and the team it's against before signaling.

Practice signal sharpness: a crisp, held signal (not a quick flick) is what allows players, coaches, and parents at a noisy sideline to actually see and understand the call.

Key Teaching Points

- Core signal set
- Verbal + signal combination
- Sharp, held signal mechanics
- Announcing down/distance every play

Activity: Mirror-and-Call Drill

1. Pair participants up.
2. One calls a scenario aloud, the partner signals and states it back.
3. Swap roles and repeat with new scenarios.

Participant Handout — Module 3: Signals & Communication

Notes & Worksheet

- ☐ Practice each core signal against the reference sheet diagrams.
- ☐ Complete the self-practice checklist.

Reflection & Application

Which signal do you find hardest to make crisp and held rather than a quick flick?

Quick Check

1. What should you do in addition to signaling a penalty?
2. Why is a held signal better than a quick flick?

Module 4: Single-Official Positioning & Mechanics

Duration: 2 hr

INSTRUCTOR GUIDE

Learning Objectives

- Position correctly as the sole official for a small-sided game.
- Move to maintain the best angle on the flag-pull and line of scrimmage.

Instructor Script

With one official covering an entire field, positioning is a trade-off — you can't see everything, so position to see the two things that decide most plays: the flag-pull/ball-carrier and the neutral zone at the snap.

Teach the default position (roughly 5–7 yards off the line of scrimmage, offset to one side, deep enough to read the whole backfield) and the movement principle: work to get an angle on the play rather than chasing straight-line behind it, which produces the worst angle for judging a flag pull.

Cover pre-snap responsibilities (confirming the defense is set behind the neutral zone, starting the play clock if used) and post-play responsibilities (marking the ball, resetting position) before the next snap.

Key Teaching Points

- Default position and offset
- Angle over straight-line chase
- Pre-snap and post-play responsibilities

Activity: Positioning Walk-Through & Live Rep

1. Walk through positioning on a marked field.
2. Live-rep a 5v5 mock series solo, applying the movement principle.

3. Debrief positioning choices after each play.

Participant Handout — Module 4: Single-Official Positioning & Mechanics

Notes & Worksheet

- ☐ Complete the positioning diagram worksheet.
- ☐ Complete the pre-snap/post-play checklist.

Reflection & Application

What's the biggest positioning mistake you can imagine making in your first live game?

Quick Check

1. What is the default distance off the line of scrimmage?
2. Why is chasing a play straight-line from behind a bad approach?

Module 5: Safety Enforcement & Player Welfare

Duration: 1 hr

INSTRUCTOR GUIDE

Learning Objectives

- Recognize and stop unsafe play immediately.
- Know when to pause a game for an injury.
- Understand the official's authority over player safety.

Instructor Script

An official has the clearest, most immediate authority to stop unsafe play — teach zero-tolerance enforcement of the illegal-contact fouls from the core rulebook module, since inconsistent enforcement of contact rules is the single biggest safety risk in a 'non-contact' sport where players are moving at speed.

Cover injury stoppage protocol: stop play immediately for any visible injury, do not allow the coach or player to talk you out of a stoppage that safety requires, and hand off to the team's designated first-aider rather than assessing the injury yourself.

Reinforce that an official's authority over safety is not optional or coach-negotiable — it is the one area where the official's judgment overrides any competitive pressure from either bench.

Key Teaching Points

- Zero-tolerance contact enforcement as a safety tool
- Injury stoppage protocol
- Non-negotiable safety authority

Activity: Injury Scenario Cards

1. Give small groups a scenario card (e.g., 'the coach wants to keep playing but a player is holding their ankle').
2. Groups decide and justify the correct action.
3. Debrief as a full group.

Participant Handout — Module 5: Safety Enforcement & Player Welfare

Notes & Worksheet

- ☐ Complete the injury stoppage quick card.
- ☐ Complete the scenario worksheet.

Reflection & Application

Can you think of a moment you might feel pressure not to stop play, and how would you resist it?

Quick Check

1. Can a coach talk an official out of a stoppage safety requires?
2. Should an official personally assess/diagnose an injury?

Module 6: Code of Conduct & Basic Game Management

Duration: 1 hr

INSTRUCTOR GUIDE

Learning Objectives

- Manage a heated moment between players/coaches.
- Commit to the officiating Code of Conduct.

Instructor Script

Cover the officiating Code of Conduct: impartiality regardless of which team you know or favor, professional conduct with coaches and parents, and prompt, honest reporting of any serious incident.

Teach basic game management for a heated moment: address it immediately and briefly rather than letting it fester over multiple plays, speak to the individual rather than announcing to the whole field, and use a clear warning-then-consequence structure (state the expectation, and what happens if it's repeated) rather than an unexplained ejection out of nowhere.

Key Teaching Points

- Officiating Code of Conduct pillars
- Address-immediately-and-briefly principle
- Warning-then-consequence structure

Activity: Heated-Moment Role-Play

1. Role-play a heated-moment scenario in pairs.
2. Swap roles and repeat with a different scenario.
3. Debrief what worked in each approach.

Participant Handout — Module 6: Code of Conduct & Basic Game Management

Notes & Worksheet

- ☐ Sign the Code of Conduct sign-off sheet.
- ☐ Keep the game-management quick card for gameday.

Reflection & Application

What's your natural tendency under pressure — to address things too quickly/harshly, or to let them fester too long?

Quick Check

1. Should a warning be given publicly to the whole field or privately to the individual?
2. What structure should precede any consequence like an ejection?

Appendix: Instructor Answer Key

For instructor/assessor use only — not for participant distribution.

Module 1: Introduction to Officiating & the LA 2028 Pathway

1. What matters more for a new official: consistency or perfection? — Consistency.
2. Why is a single official's call especially significant at grassroots level? — There's usually no crew, no replay, and only one official — their call is the only call.

Module 2: Core Rulebook: Field, Scoring, Flag-Pull Legality, Illegal Contact

1. Who is penalized for 'guarding the flag' — offense or defense? — The offense (the ball carrier).
2. Who is penalized for illegal contact like grabbing cloth or tackling? — The defense.

Module 3: Signals & Communication

1. What should you do in addition to signaling a penalty? — Announce the foul and the team it's against verbally, out loud.
2. Why is a held signal better than a quick flick? — It's easier for players, coaches, and parents at a noisy sideline to see and understand.

Module 4: Single-Official Positioning & Mechanics

1. What is the default distance off the line of scrimmage? — Roughly 5–7 yards, offset to one side.
2. Why is chasing a play straight-line from behind a bad approach? — It produces the worst angle for judging a flag pull — work to get an angle instead.

Module 5: Safety Enforcement & Player Welfare

1. Can a coach talk an official out of a stoppage safety requires? — No — the official's judgment on safety overrides competitive pressure from either bench.
2. Should an official personally assess/diagnose an injury? — No — hand off to the team's designated first-aider.

Module 6: Code of Conduct & Basic Game Management

1. Should a warning be given publicly to the whole field or privately to the individual? — Privately, to the individual.
2. What structure should precede any consequence like an ejection? — A clear warning stating the expectation and what happens if it's repeated.