

Referee Certification — L3 — Elite Referee

National / Olympic Pathway — Instructor Guide & Participant Handouts

Total contact time: 24+ hours over a 3-day workshop + supervised tournament assignment

Program Manual — Version 1.0 | July 2026

Session Schedule

This guide covers all 7 modules for Referee L3 — Elite Referee, combining an instructor script with printable participant handouts for each module.

1. IFAF / International Rulebook Mastery	3 hr
2. Crew Chief Leadership & Assignment Management	3 hr
3. Elite Game Management & High-Pressure Scenarios	3 hr
4. Instant Replay / Video Review Protocols (Olympic Standard)	2 hr
5. Officiating Fitness Standards & Testing	2 hr
6. Mentoring & Development of L1/L2 Officials	2 hr
7. Capstone: Supervised Officiating at a National Tournament	Evaluated live

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: IFAF / International Rulebook Mastery

Duration: 3 hr

INSTRUCTOR GUIDE

Learning Objectives

- Officiate confidently under the full international ruleset without reference lookup.
- Know the specific procedural differences from state-level rules.

Instructor Script

Building on the coach track's international rulebook module from the officiating side, an L3 official must apply the international ruleset (field dimensions, timing, rusher-count enforcement, overtime procedure) fluently in real time, not by pausing to check a reference card — the international pace of play doesn't allow it.

Cover procedural specifics unique to international competition: mandatory pre-game equipment/flag-belt checks to a stricter standard, a formal coin-toss and captains' meeting procedure, and stricter substitution/roster-management rules an official must track.

Review the escalation procedure for a major international-standard incident (serious injury, serious misconduct), which requires immediate written incident reporting to the competition authority, not just a local club report.

Key Teaching Points

- Real-time rulebook fluency requirement
- Pre-game procedural specifics
- International incident-reporting escalation

Activity: Rapid-Fire Ruling Drill

1. Run through 15 international-ruleset scenarios with no reference materials allowed.
2. Score responses for speed and accuracy.
3. Review any missed scenarios as a group.

Participant Handout — Module 1: IFAF / International Rulebook Mastery

Notes & Worksheet

- ☐ Pre-study the international rulebook summary (not for in-session reference).
- ☐ Complete the incident-report template.

Reflection & Application

What's the international-rule difference you're most likely to default back to grassroots habits on?

Quick Check

1. Are reference cards allowed during live international-standard officiating?
2. What must follow a major international-standard incident?

Module 2: Crew Chief Leadership & Assignment Management

Duration: 3 hr

INSTRUCTOR GUIDE

Learning Objectives

- Lead a crew as chief official.
- Manage assignment logistics and pre-tournament crew preparation.

Instructor Script

The crew chief owns final authority on the field and is responsible for the crew's preparation before it, not just decisions during the game — teach a standard pre-tournament crew briefing covering mechanics review, assignment of primary zones, and alignment on how the crew will handle escalation and conflict per the L2 module.

Cover assignment management: reading a tournament's game schedule and matching crew rest/rotation to game importance and physical demand, since a tired crew makes worse decisions late in a long tournament day.

Address leading a crew that includes officials the chief hasn't worked with before — a fast, clear pre-game alignment matters more in this scenario than with a familiar crew.

Key Teaching Points

- Pre-tournament crew briefing
- Assignment/rotation management for tournament fatigue
- Fast alignment with unfamiliar crew members

Activity: Crew Briefing & Rotation Planning

1. Draft a crew briefing agenda for a sample tournament.
2. Build an assignment rotation plan matching rest to game importance.
3. Present and critique each other's plans.

Participant Handout — Module 2: Crew Chief Leadership & Assignment Management

Notes & Worksheet

- ☐ Complete the crew briefing template.
- ☐ Complete the assignment rotation planner.

Reflection & Application

How would you quickly build trust with an unfamiliar crew before a high-stakes assignment?

Quick Check

1. Who is responsible for crew preparation before the game, not just decisions during it?
2. Why does rest/rotation matter across a long tournament day?

Module 3: Elite Game Management & High-Pressure Scenarios

Duration: 3 hr

INSTRUCTOR GUIDE

Learning Objectives

- Manage a high-stakes final/medal-round game.
- Hold composure and correct decision-making under maximum pressure.

Instructor Script

Cover the specific pressures of a final or medal-round assignment: heightened crowd/media attention, higher-stakes coach and player emotion, and often a must-get-right scoring-play or time-expiration ruling with no margin for a quiet correction later.

Teach the composure routine elite officials use: a brief physical reset (a breath, a fixed look at the ball/clock rather than the crowd) before delivering any high-pressure ruling, and a commitment to the same process used in a low-stakes group-stage game — the process doesn't change because the stakes did.

Discuss the specific discipline of not letting an earlier missed call (by the crew or otherwise) affect the next ruling — each play is independently officiated.

Key Teaching Points

- High-stakes assignment pressures
- Composure/reset routine
- Process consistency regardless of stakes
- Independence of each ruling from the last

Activity: High-Pressure Simulation

1. Run a compressed mock 'final' with staged high-leverage rulings.
2. Apply the composure/reset routine before each ruling.
3. Debrief afterward.

Participant Handout — Module 3: Elite Game Management & High-Pressure Scenarios

Notes & Worksheet

- ☐ Complete the composure routine card.
- ☐ Complete the high-pressure scenario debrief sheet.

Reflection & Application

What's your personal physical or mental 'reset' that would work best for you under pressure?

Quick Check

1. Should the officiating process change based on the stakes of the game?
2. Should an earlier missed call affect how the next play is officiated?

Module 4: Instant Replay / Video Review Protocols (Olympic Standard)

Duration: 2 hr

INSTRUCTOR GUIDE

Learning Objectives

- Operate correctly within a formal instant-replay system.
- Understand the request/review/announce procedure and overturn standard.

Instructor Script

Unlike the limited state-level review from L2, Olympic-standard competition uses a formal instant-replay system with a dedicated replay official, defined reviewable play categories (scoring plays, time-expiration, occasionally turnover/possession calls), and a formal communication protocol between the on-field crew chief and the replay booth.

Teach the procedure: the crew chief requests or is notified of a review, play stops with a clear signal to both benches, the replay official reviews multiple angles against a defined standard (typically 'clear and obvious evidence' to overturn, not a 50/50 read), and the crew chief announces the final ruling to the field.

Cover the discipline of the on-field crew accepting the replay ruling fully and immediately, without visible dispute, to preserve the system's authority.

Key Teaching Points

- Formal replay system structure
- Request / review / announce procedure
- 'Clear and obvious' overturn standard
- Crew acceptance of replay rulings

Activity: Mock Replay-Booth Exercise

1. Describe a play to the group.
2. Review it against the 'clear and obvious' standard as a mock replay official.
3. Issue and announce the final ruling.

Participant Handout — Module 4: Instant Replay / Video Review Protocols (Olympic Standard)

Notes & Worksheet

- ☐ Complete the replay protocol flowchart.
- ☐ Review the overturn-standard reference card.

Reflection & Application

Why might the ‘clear and obvious’ standard (rather than a 50/50 read) matter for preserving trust in the system?

Quick Check

1. What is the overturn standard for Olympic-standard replay review?
2. How should the on-field crew respond to a replay ruling?

Module 5: Officiating Fitness Standards & Testing

Duration: 2 hr

INSTRUCTOR GUIDE

Learning Objectives

- Meet the physical fitness standard required for elite officiating.
- Understand the testing protocol and maintenance expectations.

Instructor Script

Elite officiating requires sustained sprinting and change-of-direction capacity comparable to the players being officiated, since a poorly positioned official produces worse rulings regardless of rules knowledge — cover the fitness test protocol (a shuttle/interval test benchmarked against LA28-aligned standards) and the minimum passing thresholds for L3 certification.

Address ongoing fitness maintenance expectations between assignments, not just passing a single test, since officiating fitness (like playing fitness) degrades without regular training.

Key Teaching Points

- Fitness-positioning-quality link
- Test protocol and passing thresholds
- Ongoing maintenance expectation

Activity: Supervised Fitness Test

1. Administer the shuttle/interval fitness test.
2. Record results against LA28-aligned thresholds.
3. Discuss individual maintenance plans.

Participant Handout — Module 5: Officiating Fitness Standards & Testing

Notes & Worksheet

- ☐ Complete the fitness test protocol sheet.
- ☐ Draft a personal training maintenance plan.

Reflection & Application

What's your current biggest gap between your fitness level and the L3 standard, and how will you close it?

Quick Check

1. Why does officiating fitness matter for rule enforcement quality?
2. Is passing the fitness test once enough to maintain L3 status?

Module 6: Mentoring & Development of L1/L2 Officials

Duration: 2 hr

INSTRUCTOR GUIDE

Learning Objectives

- Mentor a developing official.
- Contribute observation reports to the officiating pipeline.

Instructor Script

Mirror the coach-track mentorship structure: observe a developing L1/L2 official for a full game, identify one strength and one specific growth area, and follow up with a concrete next step.

Cover the L3 official's pipeline responsibility: providing structured, honest observation reports that feed L2 candidates' practicum evaluations, and being willing to have their own games observed by peers as part of maintaining that same culture of feedback.

Key Teaching Points

- One-strength-one-growth-area structure (shared with coach track)
- Pipeline observation-report responsibility
- Culture of mutual observation

Activity: Mentorship Role-Play

1. Use a fictional mentee game write-up.
2. Role-play the mentorship conversation in pairs.
3. Debrief what made the feedback specific and actionable.

Participant Handout — Module 6: Mentoring & Development of L1/L2 Officials

Notes & Worksheet

- ☐ Complete the mentorship observation template.
- ☐ Draft the feedback conversation using the script.

Reflection & Application

Are you comfortable being observed and given growth-area feedback by a peer? What would make that easier?

Quick Check

1. How many growth areas should mentorship feedback focus on?
2. What do L3 officials' observation reports feed into?

Module 7: Capstone: Supervised Officiating at a National Tournament

Duration: Evaluated live

INSTRUCTOR GUIDE

Learning Objectives

- Officiate live at a national tournament under panel evaluation as the final certification gate.

Instructor Script

Each L3 candidate officiates (often as crew chief) at a sanctioned national tournament while a certification panel observes across every domain in the pathway: rules mastery, crew leadership, composure under pressure, replay protocol adherence, and fitness/positioning quality.

This is scored pass/fail with a full written panel report and is the final gate before L3 certification is awarded.

Key Teaching Points

- Live, full-context evaluation across all prior domains
- Pass/fail with written panel report

Activity: Live National Tournament Assignment

1. Candidate is assigned to officiate (often as crew chief) at a sanctioned national tournament.
2. Panel observes across all evaluation domains.
3. Written report and certification decision follow.

Participant Handout — Module 7: Capstone: Supervised Officiating at a National Tournament

Notes & Worksheet

- ☐ Complete the candidate self-reflection form after the practicum.

Reflection & Application

Of the domains being evaluated (rules mastery, leadership, composure, replay protocol, fitness), which are you most and least confident in?

Quick Check

1. What is the outcome format of the L3 capstone?
2. What role does the L3 candidate often play in the crew during this assignment?

Appendix: Instructor Answer Key

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

Module 1: IFAF / International Rulebook Mastery

1. Are reference cards allowed during live international-standard officiating? — No — an L3 official must apply the rules fluently in real time.
2. What must follow a major international-standard incident? — Immediate written incident reporting to the competition authority.

Module 2: Crew Chief Leadership & Assignment Management

1. Who is responsible for crew preparation before the game, not just decisions during it? — The crew chief.
2. Why does rest/rotation matter across a long tournament day? — A tired crew makes worse decisions late in the day.

Module 3: Elite Game Management & High-Pressure Scenarios

1. Should the officiating process change based on the stakes of the game? — No — the same process should be used regardless of stakes.
2. Should an earlier missed call affect how the next play is officiated? — No — each play is independently officiated.

Module 4: Instant Replay / Video Review Protocols (Olympic Standard)

1. What is the overturn standard for Olympic-standard replay review? — Clear and obvious evidence — not a 50/50 read.
2. How should the on-field crew respond to a replay ruling? — Accept it fully and immediately, without visible dispute.

Module 5: Officiating Fitness Standards & Testing

1. Why does officiating fitness matter for rule enforcement quality? — A poorly positioned official (due to low fitness) produces worse rulings regardless of rules knowledge.
2. Is passing the fitness test once enough to maintain L3 status? — No — ongoing maintenance between assignments is expected.

Module 6: Mentoring & Development of L1/L2 Officials

1. How many growth areas should mentorship feedback focus on? — One — the same principle as the coach track.
2. What do L3 officials' observation reports feed into? — L2 candidates' practicum evaluations.

Module 7: Capstone: Supervised Officiating at a National Tournament

1. What is the outcome format of the L3 capstone? — Pass/fail, with a full written panel report.
2. What role does the L3 candidate often play in the crew during this assignment? — Crew chief.