

Instructional Observers

A new category of Observer, the Instructional Observer, was developed by USA Ultimate to provide a wider range of options for third-party officials to facilitate game play in various environments. These game officials serve in a distinct (and somewhat reduced) role, compared with standard Observers, and focus primarily on providing instructional information about the game, helping players learn to self-officiate, and monitoring logistical and other factors necessary to facilitate game play.

USA Ultimate recognizes the high value of newer players gaining a solid understanding of the rules of Ultimate and becoming comfortable with the process of dispute resolution in a self-officiated game. In some environments, such as a youth tournament or a learning league, too much active Observer intervention to resolve contested calls could easily interfere with this important process. Yet, some of the other objective functions of Observers, such as announcing time warnings and keeping track of the score, are a benefit to players at any level of competition, without taking away their control of the game.

The following list of Instructional Observer responsibilities provides more detail about how these duties are performed and which duties of a standard Observer should be avoided.

Follow Observer Code of Conduct

Spirit of the Game - Teaching “Spirit of the Game” is probably the most important thing you can help do in this role. It is worth emphasizing from the “Code of Conduct” the note about instilling basic concepts about spirit for new players. “Personal responsibility,” “mutual respect,” “adherence to the rules,” and “joy of play” are all key phrases that can be taught through the process of learning to compete in a self-officiated environment. Remember to remind players about one or more of these important factors during the game when the opportunity arises between points or during a call. Do this by noting and praising positive behavior as well as by constructively noting unacceptable behavior, and helping facilitate conflict resolution.

The Game Belongs to the Players – For this role, it is important to note that you are not empowered to make any calls during the course of normal play. Self-officiating is a skill that is learned by doing, although newer players may need some reminders about the specific processes or pointers about how to conduct themselves within those processes. For all calls, there is a process for getting the game started again. Help the players go through this process without doing it for them. If behavior becomes an issue, address as needed.

Professionalism – There is nothing much to add here except to note that often the you are used in an environment where the players are younger and interactions may be required with parents or school administrators. It is important to instill confidence in all of these different groups, to interact appropriately with each, and to realize that many of their initial impressions about the sport will be based on their experience with the game you are facilitating.

Teach the Rules

Provide information to participants about how to play the game, including reference to specific rules, rules interpretations, guidance on the process for players to handle contested calls or other disputes, and general guidance about the role of personal responsibility and Spirit of the Game in Ultimate. In order to teach the rules, you must know the rules. Always have a rule book handy for your own reference as well as to use as a teaching tool so that participants (players, coaches, parents) know where and how to find rules information on their own.

Be clear before the game about whether you or players should be able to stop the game for rules questions, or whether they will be handled during normal stoppages or between points. When a rules question arises, either on its own or in conjunction with a call, be sure everyone involved understands the question at hand.

If it is appropriate to the setting, potentially make the discussion larger so that others can learn from the situation as well. If the question is about a call, be sure that you do not state your opinion about what happened. Rather, explain the relevant rule and ask the participants to talk about what happened in the context of that information. For example, on a disputed line call where a player's foot landed on the line: was he or she in or out? That is the players' decision. Explain that the rule says the line is out and that the first point of contact after gaining possession is what dictates where a player landed. Perhaps explain about how straddling the line is viewed in the rules. Then ask the players what they saw. If they agree on what they saw, but just did not know the rule, they should be able to get started again from there. If they disagree on what they saw, help explain how to handle a contested call in that situation.

Remember that the rules are more than just about throwing and catching, fouls and goals. They talk about expectations for behavior, dispute resolution procedures, equipment, and even the culture of the Ultimate community. These are all areas where you should be prepared and willing to help teach about Ultimate.

Track Time Limits

Track and announce time between points, for timeouts, after a turnover, half-time as needed or instructed by event organizer. Communicate game start times and caps as instructed by event organizer. The extent to which you track limits is dictated by the needs of the event. Time penalties can be enforced if that is part of the competition rules for the event or game. Otherwise, announcing time limits should be enough to help keep the game moving, while also teaching players and coaches about that aspect of the game.

Monitor Conduct Issues

Enforce sanctions as necessary. Track and report violations and incidents. You should be empowered to use the Misconduct Foul System as described in this manual. Keep in mind that your role is to facilitate play, so use either informal or formal warnings to the extent necessary to teach appropriate behavior while being empowered to handle offensive, dangerous, or other inappropriate behavior with sanctions if necessary. Remember that the conduct system can be applied to coaches or spectators as well as players, and that may very well be where it becomes more necessary. But coaches and parents may also simply need to be informed about expectations for behavior. Be sure to note and report any incidents to the event organizer or league official.

Track Game Score and Timeouts

This is self-explanatory. Periodically remind the teams of both the score and their timeout situation during the game. Be sure that you report the final score and any other game or logistical issues to the appropriate event organizer or league official.

Pre-game Meeting

Follow the instructions provided in the **Error! Reference source not found.** chapter of this manual, excepting the parts about making active calls and rulings on disputed player calls. Be sure to reiterate the role of facilitating play and providing instruction on rules or other aspects of the game. Remind the teams that they should feel empowered to play without looking to you, but that you are there as a resource if needed. Explain the basics of the game (start, end, half-time, timeouts, etc.) and ask if they have questions.

Positioning

You can use any of the three Observer systems described in the USAU Observer Manual. Since you are not making rulings on calls or active line calls, the One Observer System is typically sufficient for following game play and providing information or guidance as needed. The Two Observer System could also be used in order to provide better field coverage.