

## **The Coin Toss - by Judson Howard**

The first chance a crew has to make a good or bad impression on coaches, players and fans is the coin toss. If done wrong, you could lose everyone's confidence of having the ability to properly administer a football game. While rule knowledge and mechanics are important, we must pay equal attention to our game administrative duties. An important and visible task is the coin toss where procedures must be followed, options are given and important decisions are made and communicated. Coin toss mechanics vary based on crew size. However, basic procedures should always be followed. Here are suggestions on how to conduct a good coin toss ceremony.

The pregame meeting is where we start. Cover coin toss mechanics so all know what to do. Do not assume the crew knows where to line up, what side of the field to come in from, who gets captains, who brings in a team ball, etc. The coin toss is held three minutes before kickoff. At this time team captains, escorted by game officials, start to walk to mid-field to meet with the referee. All pregame duties must be completed so the coin toss can be done and the game can start on time. Before leaving the locker room, make sure you have a coin. A good umpire will insure their referee has a coin before going to the field.

The coin toss is the first encounter between players and officials and this should be a positive experience. After captains shake hands and introduce themselves, address them with words of encouragement. Tell them they are team leaders. Stress the importance of good player conduct and to be prepared to talk with you when there are penalty options. Federation Rule 1-1-5 requires the referee to talk to team captains about the importance of sportsmanship and this can be done at the coin toss ceremony.

Tell your crew which way you will be facing on the field. A suggestion is to face the scoreboard. By knowing this, officials can put their speaking captain closest to you before coming onto the field. When captains come out, they will be near the referee who can immediately talk to them. Show captains the coin and indicate which side is heads and tails. Ask the visiting speaking captain to call the toss while it is in the air and catch the coin. If you drop it, toss the coin again. Have the umpire stand near you to verify what is called and if the coin lands on heads or tails. The umpire can correct you if something is stated incorrectly.

When the winner is determined, place your hand on their shoulder to tell everyone who won the toss. A suggestion is to then ask the winning speaking captain, *"Do you want the ball now or in the second half?"* This will help a young athlete avoid making a mistake by giving an option that makes their team kick off in the first and second half. This also simplifies giving complex options into one of two choices instead of the lengthy statement, *"You may kick, receive, defend a goal or defer your choice to the second half."* Coaches usually tell captains what to do if they win or lose the toss. However, what a referee says may confuse them. That is why I use this simple option of two choices. The receive option is assumed if a captain says they want the ball now. Second half

option selection is the same as deferring, or a captain may say, “*defer.*” Rarely will you hear a team insist on the option to kick off or to defend a goal. If they do, you can explain their choice may result in them kicking off now and in the second half. However, be prepared to give the signals for these unusual options. The signal for kicking off is swinging a leg simulating a kick and for defending a goal, pointing with both arms extended toward the goal line a team wishes to defend.

If the defer option is elected, give the defer signal (signal number 10) while facing the press box. Then go to the other speaking captain and I suggest you say, “*You want the ball.*” Try to avoid giving them the list of other picks or asking for a selection. Again, you don’t want them to give an option that makes them kickoff twice. Lastly, get the choice from the “deferring” speaking captain as to which end of the field they wish to defend. Or you can ask which way they want to kick off. This same question is given to the losing captain if the winning captain wants to receive.

After you get both team choices, put captain’s backs towards the goal they will defend and give a signal to indicate winning captain’s choice. Given my simple set of two options, touch the shoulder of the winning captain and give the defer or receive signal (simulating a catch). If you give the defer signal, you also need to touch the losing captain’s shoulder and give their option, most likely the receive signal. If you give the receive signal first (no defer option selected), do not signal to indicate the other team is kicking. When captains return to their team area, the entire crew should huddle to review coin toss options and record them on your game data cards. Use this opportunity to give out any other game information if necessary. Then go to kickoff positions.

The meeting with captains for the second half is at mid-field three minutes prior to kick off. Budget your half time activities accordingly. Follow the same procedure to bring captains to mid-field to meet with the referee. Here is a suggestion to the official responsible to bring a ball to the field for the second half. Since it is more likely the losing or deferring team will want to receive in the second half, only bring in the other team’s ball. The referee gets the option from the captain that lost the coin toss or deferred. Then ask the other captain which goal they want to defend (or which way they want to kick off). Place captains with their backs towards the goal they will defend. Then give the receive signal while standing next to the team that will receive.

If a game is tied after four periods and rules of that game call for overtime, conduct a specialized coin toss. The overtime coin toss has three differences: 1) there is no defer nor kick choice, 2) options are different, and 3) referee only gives one signal. Ask visiting team captain to call the toss. The coin toss winner has two choices: 1) to be first on offense or defense, or 2) which end of the field the first overtime period will be played. The other team takes the option not selected (99% of the time the winning team wants to be on defense first). Then have captains face the direction they will be playing and give a first down signal, pointing in the direction the team first on offense will be playing. You have to think about this one because you may not be giving the winning team’s choice. Your signal tells everyone which end of the field play will occur and

who has the ball first. Typically, the first team with the ball is the team that lost the overtime coin toss. Therefore, you have to get the preference of the losing speaking captain before giving your signal.

If a tie exists after both teams run a series of plays, assemble again with captains at mid-field. Instead of another coin toss, reverse options from the first coin toss. The captain that lost the first overtime coin toss now has the choice of options for the first series of the second overtime period. For third and subsequent overtimes, alternate options in each succeeding overtime period.

Optional coin toss activities are the speaking captain being introduced to the referee by an official escorting that captain to the field and the referee introducing officials to captains. If you are wired with a stadium or TV microphone, you can announce the coin toss results.

A well conducted coin toss is a great way to start a game. When executed properly, your crew will gain everyone's confidence of having the capability to correctly manage a football contest.