

Duties of the Number 4 Match Official

Suggested procedures to be followed in matches for which a Number 4 has been formally appointed.

Background

In minor premiership matches, players who are replacing or substituting for a team mate — or seeking to return to the field following a period of temporary suspension (i.e. a yellow card) — are required to enter the field of play only during a stoppage in play and via an assistant referee or touch judge.

A weakness in this system is that it does not lend itself to substitutions or replacements following a try or in other possible goal scoring situations when the assistant referees are positioned behind the posts waiting for a kick to be taken. In these cases scoring teams often take the opportunity to substitute players without any form of supervision by the on-field match officials.

On other occasions, players return to the field following a period of temporary suspension without first seeking the referee's permission to resume playing.

However, in recognition that finals series matches are usually played with greater intensity than minor premiership matches — and that referees and assistant referees already have a fair bit on their plate — for these types of games a fourth match official is sometimes appointed: the aptly named "Number 4".

In matches for which a Number 4 has been appointed, players seeking to enter the field of play to replace or substitute for a team mate will do so via the Number 4 (instead of via an assistant referee or touch judge). The Number 4 is responsible for ensuring that players enter the field of play as quickly as possible after the ball is dead and that when a player enters the field of play as a substitute or replacement, a team mate of that player actually leaves the field to make way for him or her.

In the case of players who have been shown a yellow card and temporarily suspended, the Number 4 will also keep time to ensure that the full period of temporary suspension is served. At the end of the period of temporary suspension the Number 4 will then take responsibility for ensuring that the player enters the field of play only when the ball is dead and that he or she reports to the referee to obtain permission to resume playing in the match.

By oversighting the entry and exit of players to and from the field of play and by timing temporary suspensions, the Number 4 takes some of the load off the other match officials and helps to ensure that neither team has more than the allowed maximum number of players on the field.

The suggested procedures to be followed by the Number 4 and the other match officials are outlined in the paragraphs below.

Normal Substitutions and Replacements

- Prior to the game let the bench players for both teams as well as both sets of team officials know that you're the appointed Number 4 for the match and that all replacements and substitutions **must** enter the field of play via you. Let them know that they'll find you waiting in touch somewhere around the halfway line.

2. During the match make sure that you carry a whistle and a yellow card and that you have a watch with which to keep time if necessary. While waiting for substitutions or replacements, ensure that you position yourself near where you told the players they would be able to find you. The whistle, yellow card and watch are important tools for a Number 4 and their uses are explained below.

3. When players approach and advise that they'll be substituting for a team mate, ask them if they know the jersey number or position of the player they're replacing. Younger players will often respond with a player's name rather than a jersey number. Knowing this information reminds the player who it is that he's replacing and helps you to identify the player who will be coming from the field.

4. Ask the players to wait with you near the touchline while you follow play as it moves along the field. Advise the players that you'll get them onto the field **at the next stoppage in play after the ball is dead**. Situations in which the ball is considered to be dead are:-

- at a stoppage to allow a scrum or lineout to be formed; or
- after a try has been scored; or
- after the referee has signalled time off to allow an injured player to receive medical attention.

IMPORTANT NOTE: The ball is **not** considered to be dead when a penalty kick or free kick has been awarded. This is in case the team awarded the kick decides to take a quick tap and play on. The ball may subsequently become dead if the penalty kick or free kick is converted into a scrum or the ball is kicked into touch.

5. On many occasions the stoppage required in order to get substitutes onto the field will take place some distance from where the Number 4 and the substitutes are waiting. After the referee has signalled a stoppage in play some distance away, the Number 4 may, if necessary, give two short, loud blasts on his or her whistle to attract the referee's attention.

To avoid confusion, it is important that the Number 4 only blows the whistle AFTER play has already been stopped by the referee.

Having now alerted the referee, the Number 4 will then raise his or her arms and give the "rolling hands" signal to inform the referee that players are available for substitution at that stoppage. The referee will acknowledge the signal and hold play to allow the substitutions to take place.

6. If the stoppage in play is reasonably close to where the Number 4 and the substitutes are waiting, it may be possible to attract the referee's attention without having to give the two short, loud blasts of the whistle mentioned above. Similarly, substitutions following a try or to replace an injured player can usually be organised without the need for the Number 4 to blow his or her whistle to alert the referee.

7. In matches for which the referee and assistant referees have been "wired" for two-way communication, rather than giving two short blasts on the whistle to attract the referee's attention, the Number 4 should ask the nearest "wired" assistant referee to communicate to the match referee at the next stoppage in play that substitutions are ready to be made. When the referee acknowledges his or her agreement for the substitutions, the "rolling hands" signal can be given and the required substitutions effected.

8. Having gotten the substituting players onto the field, the Number 4 must also ensure that the players who have been substituted actually leave the field of play. That is, if two players go on, then two others from that team must come off.

When the substitutions have been completed (i.e. the players being substituted are either off the field or are well on the way to leaving the field and are not in a position in which they might inadvertently become involved in play), the Number 4 should raise an arm above his or her head to signal to the referee that play may be resumed. The referee will raise an arm to acknowledge the Number 4's signal and then re-start play.

Management of Temporarily Suspended Players

9. A player who has been shown a yellow card and temporarily suspended will spend the period of suspension seated inside the playing enclosure near the halfway line. A chair is usually provided for that purpose near the official timekeeper's table. The period of temporary suspension starts as soon as the player leaves the playing area.

10. To assist the referee, the Number 4 will take responsibility for timing the period of temporary suspension and will advise the player when the suspension period has expired. If the player indicates an intention to return to the field immediately upon the expiry of his or her temporary suspension, he or she must do so via the Number 4 at a stoppage in play when the ball is dead. In these cases the Number 4 will advise the player that he or she must report to the referee upon return to the field.

11. To ensure that the referee is aware that a previously temporarily suspended player is about to return to the match, the Number 4 will hold up a yellow card prior to giving the "rolling hands" signal to the referee. When the referee acknowledges the signal, the Number 4 will again remind the player to report immediately to the referee.

12. The referee should then speak with the player to ensure that he or she understands that, having already received a caution in the match, a second cautionable offence will result in an automatic send-off (i.e. a red card).

13. If team officials for the player whose period of temporary suspension has expired decide that he or she will not be returning to the field immediately, the team may now substitute or replace him or her with another player. The Number 4 will arrange for that substitute or replacement player to enter the field at a stoppage in play in the "normal" manner described earlier.

14. Before informing the previously yellow carded player that he or she may now re-join team mates on the bench, the Number 4 should remind the player that if he or she intends returning to the match later, he or she must first report to the referee. If that player subsequently presents himself to the Number 4 as a substitute or replacement, the procedures in paragraphs 11 and 12 above must be followed on the first occasion that player seeks to re-enter the playing area.

Bob Watson
VP Registration & Accreditation
Sydney West Rugby Referees' Association

association website: www.swrra.sportzvault.com