

Central Massachusetts Conference of Football Officials (CMCFO)

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) for New Officials

I. General Information

Q. How do I become a certified high school football official in Massachusetts?

A. You'll first want to select a football officiating board to be associated with, like CMCFO. You will be required to take and pass a rules test, as well as register with MIAA through their website for football. If you have not had an MIAA background check in the past three (3) years, you'll be required to submit to and pass one.

Q. What organization governs high school football officiating in this area?

A. We are governed by MIAA, and we adjudicate games in accordance with the NFHS Rule Book.

Q. What are the membership requirements for joining CMCFO?

A. A current registration and background check with MIAA, a passed rules exam, paid dues, and attendance to the minimum required number of meetings (4 of 7 - Auburn Clinic & Social both count!) all make you a 'Member in Good Standing' with CMCFO.

Q. How do I register with the MIAA and NFHS?

A. No need to 'register' with [NFHS](#), however it's wise to become familiar with their website. Click [HERE](#) to register with MIAA through Arbiter (*MIAA Home Page > "You Are..." > Officials > "Getting Started as a High School Official > Arbiter Registration*).

Q. What are the annual dues or fees for membership and certification?

A. MIAA:

- Background Check (every 3 years): \$35
- Annual Registration Fee: \$10 per sport

CMCFO:

- Annual Dues: \$100

EXAMPLES:

- Member requiring background check registering for three sports would pay **\$165** (\$100 + \$35 + \$10 + \$10 + \$10)
- Member with existing background check registering for just one sport would pay **\$110** (\$100 + \$10)

Q. Can I write fees and dues off on my taxes each year?

A. Yes you can and should.

Q. How often must I renew my certification or take a rules exam?

B. You will recertify/register with MIAA each year (July 1 - June 30). Currently CMCFO does not require a recurring rules examination for existing members.

Q. What equipment and uniform items are required for high school football officials?

A. Here's a starter list:

- ☐ Turf Shoes or Cleats (All black or Black w/ minimal white - no other colors are permitted)
- ☐ Black Socks (consider warmer socks for cold-weather/late-season games)
- ☐ Football Official's Shorts & Pants (single white stripe the length of the pantleg; recommend two of each)
- ☐ Black Belt (Wide officials/officers belt preferred)
- ☐ Short Sleeve & Long Sleeve Football Referee Shirts (2" stripe; American flag optional, but preferred; recommend two of each; as the weather gets colder, lined/waterproof versions can be a lifesaver!)
- ☐ Black football official's hat with white piping (usually fitted, so know your measurement or go in person to try them on or buy a 'stretch' version)
- ☐ 2+ yellow penalty flags
- ☐ 2+ bean bag markers (blue or white preferred)
- ☐ Wristband down indicator
- ☐ Whistle (Fox 40 Classic Finger Whistle recommended for beginners)
- ☐ Chain Clip
- ☐ Football game cards (single use pad and multi-use plastic recommended)
- ☐ Folding game card holder
- ☐ Mini pencil w/ eraser

Q. Is money spent on officiating equipment considered a tax write-off?

A. Yes it is, and you should.

Q. Where can I purchase approved officiating gear and uniforms?

A. Here are some options:

- [Purchase Officials](#)
- [Blow Your Whistles](#)
- [Smitty Official's Apparel](#)
- [Ump Attire](#)
- These are the top online options - your mentor may have additional recommendations

Q. Are there variations in the uniform for different levels or weather conditions?

A. Yes. Be prepared for hot weather, wet weather, cold weather, and worst of all, cold wet weather. Consider: sunscreen, insect repellent, waterproof and/or cold weather undergear (layers!). The 2" striped shirt and single striped pants are always required - undergear is your friend.

Q. What's the proper way to wear the uniform and present myself on the field?

A. We are professional. The best advantage you have is to set a great first impression with how you dress. Clean, neat, ironed (if necessary), tucked in, apparel that fits you! If you look sloppy, how can you expect site administrators, coaches, players, spectators, and even the rest of your crew to take you seriously? Take pride in your appearance, and make your first impression count!

II. Training & Development

Q. What training or clinics are available for new officials?

A. New officials receive virtual & in-person training classes from seasoned CMCFO officials (late-May/early June), access to the rules book and case book, access to training videos, an assigned mentor, and on-field training at the Auburn Football Clinic (early-to-mid-August).

Q. Are CMCFO meetings or training sessions mandatory?

A. Yes. Training sessions are considered mandatory. Attending a minimum of 4 regular meetings is also required (attending the clinic and/or end-of-season social can each count toward the required meeting minimum).

Q. How are mechanics and positioning taught to new officials?

A. This is where the on-field training at the Auburn Clinic is critical. Additionally, you will learn these through training videos, discussions, and shadowing opportunities.

Q. Can I work scrimmages or youth games for practice or evaluation?

A. Yes. You will be assigned both scrimmages and youth games as long as your availability allows.

Q. How can I improve my rules knowledge outside of formal meetings?

A. Read, highlight, and study the rule book. Read and study the case book. Watch the [Tom Brow training videos](#). Be careful seeking additional online training collateral. While we encourage this, you must be sure what you're accessing is NFHS rules and not NCAA, NFL, or other - this can cause great confusion! Our favorite option is [The Art Of Officiating](#).

Q. What study materials or rulebooks should I review before my first season?

A. The NFHS Rule Book and the NFHS Case Book. There is also a great deal of rule materials and training materials on [the NFHS website](#) under 'Rules', 'Courses', and 'Resources'.

Q. Are there recommended online videos or tutorials for mechanics and signals?

A. Yes. We recommend the "Tom Brow" videos, which can be found [HERE](#). Tom works with the ANEFO board. There is also a site called '[Art of Officiating](#)' that has some great content.

Q. How long does it typically take to move up to varsity-level games?

A. This depends on you, your learning curve, and your availability. Some new officials may get assigned a varsity-level game within their first year or two! This is a great discussion to have with your mentor.

Q. What are the steps to advance to college or higher-level officiating?

A. There are many paths a high-school official can take to advance to higher-level officiating. All require top performance at current level, and skill/knowledge testing. This is a great discussion to have with your mentor. You can also reach out to nearby college boards to learn when they take applications and conduct exams. Attending officiating clinics/camps also provides both an educational as well as networking benefit.

III. Game Assignments & Scheduling

Q. How do I get assigned to games through CMCFO?

A. Our board has an assigner who will assign games based on availability and skill level. All games get assigned through Arbiter, so it's very important to have the application updated with your current information and availability. Your Arbiter should include a photo (so crew members and site administrators can recognize you), your name, address, email, and cell phone number.

Q. What levels of games will I likely start with (freshman, JV, youth)?

A. Youth, Middle School, Freshman, and JV (referred to as "sub-varsity" games)

Q. When will I receive my schedule for upcoming games?

A. Assignments can come as early as a month or several weeks prior to the game, or as immediate as days prior. This is why keeping your availability updated is so important. Each season is 'fluid' and as the season advances, scenarios often arise which require assignments and/or reassignments

with little notice. This is not the assigner's fault, but rather our response to changes in the district, or at the AD level.

Q. How do I accept or decline a game assignment?

A. All game assignments can be accepted/declined through Arbiter. The mobile app is usually most convenient. Keep in mind, declining an assignment will automatically block that entire day for you.

Q. What happens if I must cancel a scheduled game?

A. Contact the assigner - do not try to do this within Arbiter. Be prepared to explain the reason for this type of cancellation, as it should only occur on rare/extreme occasions.

Q. How are weather cancellations or postponements communicated?

A. You may see the game get cancelled directly in Arbiter, however this is usually accompanied by an email or text communication from the assigner and/or the referee (white hat) for that game.

Q. Can I request certain dates off or avoid specific schools?

A. Yes and Yes. Arbiter allows you to block entire days or partial days, a specific date or date range, you can set a distance from home limitation, and can block certain schools as well. Have your mentor show you how to do this.

Q. Are there travel or mileage reimbursement policies?

A. CMCFO does not reimburse for travel/mileage, nor do the schools who pay your ref fee. The ref fee for the game(s) is intended to include travel costs.

Q. How are postseason or playoff game assignments determined?

A. This is determined by the state board in collaboration with MIAA. Our assigner will only be in charge of assigning the first two rounds of playoffs - after that it is out of his hands.

IV. Pay & Administrative Matters

Q. How much do officials get paid per game?

A. Varsity (**\$114**); JV (**\$88**); Thanksgiving (**\$134**); Youth/Middle School (**Varies**)

Q. Who issues payment — the school, the league, or CMCFO?

A. All payment comes from the host school (home team). Schools can pay directly through Arbiter (ArbiterPay), while others will mail you a check, which can arrive a couple weeks to a couple months after the game/event. We highly recommend you set up ArbiterPay so you can take advantage of the schools who pay this way - much faster payments.

Q. Do I need to submit tax forms such as a W-9?

A. It is common that the first time you work at a school, the site administrator will ask for a completed/signed W9. Many times they will provide you with a blank version. We recommend printing several completed copies for yourself, and just leave the date and signature blank until needed. This really speeds up the amount of paperwork you need to complete the day-of event.

Q. Are officiating fees reported for tax purposes?

A. Yes. Unless you've been paid cash (rare) - expect to pay taxes on your fees.

Q. Is there an online system to track games and payments?

A. Arbiter will track the game assignments, but it does not do a good job tracking whether you've been paid or not, especially for schools who do not use ArbiterPay. We recommend you keep track of this on your own, for your own records. Your mentor can share how they do it, or you can come up with your own system.

Prepared by:

Central Massachusetts Conference Football Officials (CMCFO)

Purpose: To assist new officials in understanding procedures, expectations, and best practices for high school football officiating.

Note: For official interpretations, policies, or procedures, refer to the CMCFO Charter and By-Laws, MIAA Handbook, and NFHS Football Rules Book.