

**Try Your Hand at The “Hardest” Call – Judging Javelin Flats**

**Presented by Scott Phoenix**

**Session Overview**

- Focused training and discussion on judging javelin “flat” landings across rulebooks, positioning, measurement, and practical field techniques.
- Format included silent and slow-motion video reviews of five landing scenarios, real-time group judgments, and best-practice consolidation.
- Emphasis on consistent, confident officiating, safety, and minimizing protests through proper positioning and observation.

**Definitions and Rules**

**Flat Landing Definition:**

- A javelin is flat when the entire shaft contacts the ground simultaneously, excluding taper transitions at tail and head-tip junctions.

**Rulebook Differences:**

- NCAA: Requires “irrefutable first contact” with the metal head; flat/tail-first contact not allowed; challenge window introduced for on-field disputes.
- USATF Open/Masters: Follows World Athletics-style prohibition of flats/tail-first; referee may use “any available source” for video review in USATF.
- USATF Youth/NFHS (High School): Flat landings allowed; measure regardless of point/tail/flat contact.
- World Athletics: Generally aligns with requiring head-first contact; accepts any available video for referee decisions.

**Measurement Point for Allowed Flats:**

- Measure from the back of the grip (closest point to the runway/arc at the landing), regardless of javelin orientation after potential mid-air flip.
- Edge cases:
  - If javelin lands with point toward the runway due to mid-air flip, “back of the grip” is still the side closest to the arc.

- Analogy:
  - Treat like shot/discus trailing edge: mark from the nearest point to the arc/runway.

## **Positioning and Technique**

### **Optimal Official Position:**

- Stand outside the sector, perpendicular to the landing path, low to the ground to see first contact clearly.
- Adjust position during warm-ups based on athlete styles, expected landing zones, wind, and sun/shade to maximize visibility.

### **Elevation and Body Posture:**

- Get low: squat, kneel, sit on hip—do whatever is necessary to reduce eye height and improve angle on close calls.
- Being upright makes close flats harder to judge; low elevation reduces protests and improves accuracy.

### **Consistency and Crew Setup:**

- Ideally one official calls flats to ensure a single vantage point and consistent judgments.
- If resources are limited and one official must also mark distance, prioritize getting the correct mark; still attempt to judge flats but distance accuracy comes first.
- With two officials: one marks best distance; the other, positioned outside sector and perpendicular, focuses on flats.

## **Observation Best Practices**

### **Full-Flight Monitoring:**

- Watch the javelin from release through impact; track tip behavior to anticipate final attitude at contact.
- Look for tip “trending down” in the final phase as an indicator of point-first contact.

**Environmental Factors:**

- Wind can change attitude just before landing; tailwinds may push into flat late in flight—maintain vigilance to last moment.
- Grass length, camera angle, and field slope can mislead; judge based on actual ground contact, not grass or perspective artifacts.

**Behavioral Cues and Sound:**

- Flats often produce a resonant, “bow fiddle” or sprung clang sound; useful corroboration but not sole criterion.

**Warm-up Intelligence:**

- Pay close attention in warm-ups; identify athletes likely to produce near-flat landings and adjust position accordingly.
- Anticipate probable landing zones based on thrower proficiency and prior throws; avoid preconceived outcomes on landing mode.

**Video Review and Challenges****On-Field Challenge/Protest Handling:**

- Always mark the landing and stay with the mark; measure even on fouls (kill black mark) so a provisional can be resolved if challenged.
- NCAA: Challenge window exists between the current and next called athlete; video may be used if officially available.
- USATF: Referee can use any available video source, including private recordings.
- NFHS: Flats allowed; protests over flat vs. point are moot for fairness, but still ensure consistent measurement practices.

**Practical Takeaways from Video Cases:**

- Case 1: Tip trending down—point-first; not flat.
- Case 2: Tail-first strike—flat-like bounce but illegal under NCAA/USATF open/masters; allowed in youth/NFHS.
- Case 3: Clear point-first; not flat.
- Case 4: Borderline; benefit of the doubt goes to the athlete when uncertain; slow-motion can sway but field calls must be made at real speed.

- Case 5: Camera not perpendicular; appeared point-first; avoid relying on non-perpendicular angles for close decisions.

## **Javelin Runway Rules Context**

### **Runway Line Fouls:**

- In javelin, stepping on the runway boundary lines is a foul, analogous to stepping outside the discus circle boundary.
- The 4-meter “back-out” mark:
  - Serves to indicate acceptance and manage time; exiting beyond 4 meters after a throw is administratively used but does not alter landing validity.
- Legacy runways:
  - Narrow-to-wide runways complicate consistency; rules apply across entire runway width as designated for that venue.

## **Key Conclusions and Guidance**

- Pay attention during warm-ups; adjust positioning dynamically.
- Stand outside the sector, perpendicular to landing, and get low to judge first contact accurately.
- Watch the entire flight; track tip trend; never assume outcome before contact.
- Measure from the back of the grip (closest to arc at landing) for allowed flats.
- When uncertain, give benefit of the doubt to the athlete; make calls confidently and consistently.
- Always mark and measure, even for fouls, to support challenges/protests and avoid lost distances.
- Limit flat-calling to one official where possible; ensure consistent vantage for all attempts.
- Use available video per governing rules; USATF permits any source, NCAA/NFHS have constraints.

## **Action Items**

- ❖ Train field officials to position outside sector and perpendicular to expected landing paths.

- ❖ Incorporate “get low” posture drills (squat/kneel/hip) into officiating practice for close calls.
- ❖ Establish warm-up observation protocol to identify thrower tendencies and likely landing zones.
- ❖ Standardize measurement from the back of the grip for allowed flats across youth/NFHS events.
- ❖ Implement “always mark and measure” policy to support challenges/protests.
- ❖ Brief crews on rulebook differences (NCAA, USATF open/masters, USATF youth/NFHS, World Athletics) before competitions.
- ❖ Equip referees with guidance on permissible video sources per event sanctioning body.
- ❖ Communicate consistent hand signals for fair vs. foul throws to reduce confusion with coaches and athletes.