

Big 12 Conference Football Media Days

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Walt Anderson

Coordinator of Officials



THE MODERATOR: We would like to welcome everyone to the Big 12 Conference Football Media Days. Walt Anderson is the Big 12 Conference Coordinator of Officials, and I found out this morning he is the inventor of the eighth official on the field and that's an interesting bit of trivia. Walt, it's yours.

WALT ANDERSON: Thank you, appreciate that, Peter, and always good being here. I have had some people ask me when did you come up with the number eight, and I tell them that was Aristotle, I think. He is the oldest mathematician that I can remember. It is something that has worked out well for us and I'm not going to spend anymore time on that. It's been adopted across the country and the NFL is preparing to do it as early as maybe next year.

I would like to go over the rules for the 2016 season. I have some video that I'm going to use to demonstrate plays on a couple of the changes. We did put a handout in the media room and available to you. If you don't have access to that you may want to stop by and pick that up. I will end up making reference initially to a few of the rules, but I'm going to go over these quickly. I've got 45 minutes up here where normally I will spend days with our officials going over these types of things.

Item 3 has been tabled. That's relative to the use of technology, computers in the press box by the coaching staff, tablet devices on the sideline. Those have been tabled to the 2017 season. The reason for that was that the conferences asked for that delay to really give them time to come up with protocol and policies and standards that would be a lot easier for them to implement rather than just coming out and turning things from a technology standpoint loose this year. You will end up hearing us talk a lot more about that next year once that comes into play.

Number 4, if we end up with time, whatever, I actually have the play. That's the change in the scrimmage kick rule or as it was probably come to be known the Mike Gundy Rule. That was a series of plays that was in one of the games and Mike was innovative in coming up with a way to legally -- I want to emphasize that -- take the wording of a rule that's been around for forty years, use that to his advantage. It became apparent that was probably not going to work going forward.

So the Rules Committee ended up finalizing a change from that. They came out in mid-season last year with a rules interpretation relative to that part of that which we followed for the rest of the year. That was an interesting scenario. I hope we end up getting time to show you that play.

Number 5 has to do with the change on the sliding quarterback. The basis of that rule is just to provide more protection to the quarterback. We've got one play relative to Targeting, which was called last year, and I'll use that play to give you a little bit of a video example of what we're talking about.

The nutshell of the rule is when the quarterback begins his slide, not waiting till he gets all the way on the ground, but once he begins his slide to give himself up and he is sliding feet first, the ball becomes dead at that point and he by rule becomes a defenseless player. So that's one of the additions to the category of defenseless player that has been added in terms of protecting the quarterback.

Number 7, dealing with length of timeouts. You're going to end up seeing this. But just so you know what you're looking at when you see it, the way timeouts work is in the past they've really been geared relative to their length based upon TV. If a team calls a timeout and TV decides to go to a media break that becomes what we refer to as a full time out and we'll punch out. They'll sometimes last a couple of minutes and then welcome back in.

In the past, if TV decided not to go out for a break then every timeout was a 30-second timeout. The strategy problem that coaches had with this was they were oftentimes late in the game when typically TV has exhausted their timeouts, their allotted timeouts where the coach felt like I need more than 30 seconds to come up with a play because I'm down by 4, it's fourth and 22 I need more than 30 seconds to come up with something on that.

So what the coaches petition and the Rules Committee agreed to is one of their three timeouts if the TV does not take the full break they can use one of their three time outs as a full timeout. So what you're going to see on the sidelines is you will see officials communicate

with the coach and over time we will get the coaches used to signaling either 30 seconds, which I think we've adopted that from basketball. I'm not a basketball guy, but that's what the basketball people tell me, 30 seconds, or if the coach extends his hands out that indicates to us he's going to exercise his option to use that as a full timeout.

So it's not a big deal but just so members of the media know what's going on relative to those timeout differences.

Number 10 is going to be a significant change that's blocking below the waist. I'm going to get into some video examples on that, but in a nutshell the old low-blocking zone which went from tight end to tight end has been shrunk to the tackle box. So the tight ends have been taken out of the ability to block low from the side inside that tackle box like they have in the past. They're really just like wide receivers who can't come back in and crack back. When I show you the video examples it's going to be a significant change for a lot of teams.

I'll be honest, in the Big 12, I often struggle to find video of a tight end, you know, in terms of formation. So it's not going to be probably as significant to our conference just because of the style of play and the way most of our teams operate. As it will be in some conferences, but it's a pretty significant change and I will cover that in detail when we get to the video.

Number 12, it's not really a change in the rule. But it is a change in who is subject to the rule and that's the Unsportsmanlike Conduct Rule, which for a number of years has been in place that if player has two in a game he's automatically by rule disqualified. That now applies to the coaches. If a coach has two unsportsmanlike fouls in the game then he is subject to the same penalty as a player from the standpoint of disqualification.

We hope that doesn't happen, but the Rules Committee did feel that it was important. It's a point of emphasis just relative to the image of the game, the demeanor on the sideline and the conduct and the interaction between coaches and officials is important to the Rules Committee. It's important to the game, and that's the way that they felt like they needed to get coaches sort of in line with what the expectation is with players in terms of conduct.

Then the fourth, which, again, we'll cover pretty extensively in the video is relative to the Targeting Rule. Not really a change at all in the rule as to what is or what is not targeting. The big change, though, is in the ability of constant replay now to get more involved in two areas with targeting.

I'm going to show you some video examples -- actually I hope we get to some of the plays that really created the impetus of creating the change. There are so many rules. There are often discussions among rule makers that that's a good idea. We want to continue studying that, but there's not enough support nationally to get certain rules changed. Typically it's only a matter of time for the right people or the certain either conferences or commissioners or coaches depending upon whether or not they sit on the Rules Committee. When things happen to them and they sit on the Rules Committee they usually have a tendency to pay a lot more attention than those of us who might be recommending the same change and it takes a few years to get certain things through. But the replay official can look at the entirety of the Targeting Rule as opposed to what has been limited in the past which was only whether or not there was contact made to the head, not really the act building up to it, the intent of the action by the player or the whole context of the play. So it's a really good rule, and I'll explain that a little bit, a little bit later.

The second part, and it doesn't happen a lot, but it does generate interest when it does happen is when we end with that play and I will have one that occurred in our conference last year to show you, when you end up with that play that is clearly immediately egregiously obvious to everybody that targeting occurred on the play, and unfortunately, we in the officiating, we missed it. We didn't call it, for whatever reason. We didn't see it or judge it accurately to be targeting, but it's clear and object to everybody that it's targeting. The replay official now has the opportunity and the authority to stop play. He can review the play and he can create the targeting foul.

Everybody needs to understand that that doesn't mean we're stopping every big hit in a football game just in case it might be targeting. It's got to be the one that stands out pretty immediately to everybody that it is targeting. The terminology we use in terms of training the officials because, and I'm going to show you, I've got a 9-minute video of what we call Live From the Replay Booth to share with y'all.

But what the replay official is doing is looking at the line feed, which is typically the 50-yard-line shot from a high angle. If it's pretty evident on the line feed that it's targeting, that's usually an indicator that they probably need to stop play. If it's not evident on the line feed then we are probably not going to end up stopping play even if after the fact that there may be certain angles that show it could have been targeting.

So the language I told the officials is we're going to stop play on the should have's. We're not going to stop

play on the could have's, if that makes sense. What we're going to do now is switch over, and most of you will never have an opportunity to sit in a replay booth to observe what occurs in a replay booth in the a football game. The way the college system works, every play is reviewed and analyzed and the few seconds we've got to do that by the replay official, and these guys have to make pretty quick decisions about whether or not to stop play.

It's often, some people may -- when you see it, some of you may describe this as chaos. We hope you describe it as organized chaos. We're certainly trying to do that, but what we are doing when training our officials is we're always searching for ways to utilize video to help with training. We're very limited on the number of football games that are played.

So it's not like we can send people out every other day to work a football game to give 'em a lot of practice and experience. So with replay, what we did and what we have done -- we don't do it at every game, but we have found it to be a very good tool, is we set up multiple cameras, in this game we put five cameras in the replay booth and we focus those cameras on the different people up there as well as the shot out the window, which is what we have to look at from their live view of the game and we mic'd the booth.

So we've got audio as well as video that matches what's going on in the replay booth. So I took a 9-minute segment, continuous, unedited, it's going to run all the way through for you to see what goes on in the replay booth. I took a series -- it was West Virginia at TCU, and we took a series in which we had a stoppage of the game, so you can see what goes on when the decision is made up in the replay booth to actually stop play.

We end up -- there is a penalty enforcement that's done up there, which we asked the replay officials in our case because we have an assigned observer from my staff at every game.

Then we have other plays, a long pass, teams in a hurry-up, throughout the entire series so you don't have a lot of time. So it gives you a good example. We're going to start the video, and it's going to be nine minutes, just run through. Then when we get finished, we're going to switch over and I'm going to cover the video examples on the rule changes. If you've got questions about the replay process from what you see on the video I will be glad to try to answer those for you. But what this gives you is an idea of what's going on up in the replay booth.

When you see the video, it's going to be six individual views. The top middle is the live broadcast on TV, so

you're not going to hear what the -- what you're going to hear is what's going on in the replay booth. We don't pipe in the audio from the network feed, but we do pipe in the video. The top right, I believe, is the wide angle -- the view outside the window of the replay booth. The view right below -- the middle on the bottom is the replay official. That's the guy that's in charge up there. The guy on the bottom right is the technician. The guy on the bottom left is the communicator, and then in the top right is the actual replay monitor that the replay official will see.

So just to set you up a little bit, what you're going to see on every play is you will see the play happen live and immediately what you'll see is the replay official, he then hits one button and it automatically takes him back to the beginning of the play, and he's then going to be looking at that play again in slow motion to determine if there was something right away that occurred on that play that I need to be prepared to stop the game for.

The technician who is on his right has already what we call "marked" that play so it gets it to a point where instantaneously he can get back to that play. The communicator on his left, he's the guy talking to the producer in the TV truck. So you're going to hear a lot of dialogue. The person that you can't see on the video, because he's up in the second level, is our observer. So you will end up hearing him, and he's the person that's in direct communication to the referees on the football field through his head set and through the audio system that we use.

One of the things you're going to end up seeing here because it's ended up catching us and we've made some mistakes in the past where we didn't get games stopped in time and you will actually see a pager system in use, and you're going to hear the audio system in use now that we use to try to more quickly get the game stopped.

So when the decision is made, I think it's about the second play of this series, might be the third play. When a decision is made to stop play, you're going to watch how fast this has to occur. You are also going to see two to three second delay from the time the replay official who is in the bottom middle video image, when he hits that button, we actually keep a pager up in the replay booth so they'll know that it's going off. But it's about 3 seconds between the time he hits that button, and you'll hear that pager going off.

The observer, you will hear him talk to Coop, when you hear Coop that is Cooper Castleberry's short name. He's already called down to the referees to get plays stopped. What we have found in the college game, plays happen so fast you really only have a few

seconds to make that decision to get it stopped. And when you wait those few seconds, it's often too late. The next snap has occurred, and then by rule we can't get it stopped. We've got nine minutes, and if we can go ahead let's start this video and I may point a few things out, but I'm going to try to resist the urge to talk and we'll all listen to it.

(Video playing.)

WALT ANDERSON: You will hear some mildly embarrassing moments. Somebody thinks we can't count to 10. That's the communicator talking to the producer in the truck. So we're in a timeout. What you can see from this especially when we have a stoppage, these guys have a lot of work to do during this break because it's required that they record quite a bit of information relative to this stoppage, both their decisions and the reasons for their decisions as well as time factors.

(Video continues to play.)

Okay, so that was just a quick series, a number of plays that we feel gives you a little bit of a teaser, so to speak, in terms of what goes on in the replay booth. The environment up there is very stressful. It's simply because of the pace of the game and the numerous decisions that have to end up being made by multiple people up there in the booth. One of the things that in that brief time I hope you have an appreciation for is the absolute necessity just like out on the football field with the team that everybody does their job and they do it precisely and that they don't get sidetracked in into trying to pay attention to somebody else's job. The technician, the replay official, the communicator and the observer and we actually have a fifth person up there, the assistant technician who has some other responsibilities you didn't really hear him there but he was present.

It's an environment that is often not easy to teach and that's why we started coming up with this method of filming this with audio just to be able to help them. So if you've got questions about that I will be happy to answer that.

What I would like to do now is to go back to the two, from a game standpoint, significant changes for this year and cover these. Here we go. Targeting. The first thing I like to say relative to targeting is that -- and these first several plays are going to demonstrate that. We review every play of every game in all of our games and the thick that we have observed first and foremost is the change in behavior and the style of play and technique that our players are demonstrating and it's through good coaching.

The coaches have bought into the Targeting Rule. They understand not only the importance but the emphasis that will be placed on it. We have worked with them with coming up with techniques. We have four high-risk indicators, four low-risk indicators that we share with them in terms of helping to teach their players safe techniques.

So what you end up seeing is constant examples, in this case you're going to see the player here who is going to come in and deliver a blind side hit to this player here, legally. He's turning his head to the side. He's turning is trying to make contact with his shoulder. He's not attacking the head and neck area. He's lowering that strike zone and this is what we see play-in and play-out numerous times. Let me get down here. You're going to end up watching the wide receiver on this particular play.

He's going to be lining up this player, delivering what's deemed a blind side block. In the past, we would often have players just going right at the head. Often those were referred to as "head hunters" and here you can see -- again we see numerous examples of these, the player is turning to the side, getting his head out of the way. He is lowering his strike zone and making a hard and oftentimes vicious hit, but it's perfectly legal. I'm sorry.

This is a classic, classic example of a textbook hit. Achieves the same purpose as what an illegal hit might achieve in terms of causing the receiver or the ball to be dislodged and make the pass incomplete. But it's a classic example of more and more the coaches, this is what they coach, head up, head to the side, wrap up, lower your strike zone. This is what we're looking for, and this is what we see time-in and timeout. It's often easy and we need to continue to be sure that we are observant of illegal actions which we're going to look at.

But it's, I think, even more important to understand that the far majority of plays are legal hits by players and that emphasis on safety is going to continue. To get some things in perspective, just so I get 'em right. Last year in Division I, there were 151,365 plays that were run. Targeting was called at Division I 161 times last year, 44 of those were reversed to no foul. Which meant there were 117 targeting fouls that were enforced last year.

In the Big 12 Conference, it was called eight times. We reversed four of them. One of which we should not have reversed. So we should have ended up with five targeting fouls, and we ended up the season with four. I'm going to show you the one that we reverse to do no foul, but we should have left because it was, in fact, targeting. But out of those 151,365 plays, when you

have 117, those 117 are important. They're plays that we need to continue to emphasize to get out of the game.

But it's also important to keep in perspective that's a small percentage of the plays that are run out on the football field where you've got big bodies at high velocity making collisions, there's going to be contact occasionally to the head and at times very often, but most of the time it's not illegal.

Okay, so the ones that are illegal. This is actually one play where you're going to see two examples of potential targeting. One I believe is going to be this play right here. This is a legal hit. This is a blind side block; but, again, good technique. Head's to the side, strike zone is low, contact is at the shoulder. This is illegal. We'll have a good replay of this. And this is what we want to continue to emphasize. This was called targeting on the field. The replay decision on this play took about 10 seconds to confirm this. No difference in the rule. Every targeting foul that's called will automatically be reviewed and what you can see here is the player how he comes in with his head. He has the quarterback going to the ground and he is now beginning to be and in a defenseless posture. So whether there is forcible contact to the head and neck area or use of the crown of the helmet on any body part which this is actually targeting by both 913 and 914. This is clearly a foul in this case by No. 42 of the defense. So this was reviewed, quickly confirmed and the player is disqualified.

Action over the middle, you have a receiver going up high in the air. He's by rule defenseless, so he's given an afforded protection from unnecessary contact, forcible contact to the head and neck area. This will continue. There's a required conference that has to be held by the officials anytime targeting is called before it's reported to the referee. And we explained that previously, but just in case you don't know, that's just so that we sorta get things under control, make sure that, obviously the official that calls this understands the consequences of the call. We want to make sure he has an opportunity for another official who maybe had a different angle to provide input if he needs to. Here again you see the player who has every opportunity to exercise low-risk indicators, but he doesn't.

He thrusts upward almost in a launching position, makes forcible contact to the head and neck area, targeting correctly called and the penalty was correctly enforced. This is an example of the play we had last year, correctly called targeting. But it's a good example of the new rule change relative to expanding the time frame in which the quarterback is affording defenseless player protection. We'll go to the review.

The new rule change this year is right about now, once we see that butt drop of the quarterback, it's as if he's already on the ground. So by rule the ball is dead. So he actually can't fumble the ball if it should come loose after this point and that fact is also reviewable just like any aspect of the ball being declared dead by rule.

So when he gets to this point, sliding feet first, starts going to the ground, that ball is dead. This player is defenseless. What you see is the player coming back into him, making forcible contact to the head and neck area.

This is the play here where targeting was called on the field. You'll see the back judge make the call. It went to review, I'll fast forward a little bit. Unfortunately we made an error in that decision. I understand Coach Kliff Kingsbury, he didn't think it was targeting. Here he comes thrusting up and that is targeting. This is the one play that, this is the rule change relative, when can the replay official actually stop play? It has to be one that's so obvious. This is the line feed. I'll let you see this. This was clear and obvious and evident and egregious on the line feed. You end up with a replay on this, but even in the absence of that that's the type of play that across the country occurred on a couple of occasions where he comes in here, clearly targeting the opponent, lowers the head, makes contact not only with the crown of the helmet, but is making no effort to lower the strike zone and avoid this. It should have been called on the field. We missed this and this would be one that this year we would want the instant replay official to stop.

Real quick, let me move on to the Low Block Rule, just so that we end up covering that for you. The big change this year is going to be the low block zone. Any player who is inside the tackle box and stationary, so the five linemen and in this case these three backs, they can block low from the side. You're going to see the tackle. He comes out, ends up blocking the linebacker. The big difference this year is this all has to occur within the tackle box which is right at the line of scrimmage and in back and between the tackles.

It's no longer down field, so the big rule change for many, let me see, I believe this is going to be an example right here. This is not the tight end, but this is a tackle. You're going to see the tackle come down and he's going to block the linebacker from the side. Last year, that was a legal play. This year that is illegal. That linebacker is beyond the tackle box. The contact is from the side, and so he can't do that.

If this were a tight end, if this player were a tight end, he couldn't come back and as an example cut this player low from the side. So it's a big blocking scheme change that the coaches will have to deal with. We're

not going to see that a lot. Like I say, I struggle to find plays with tight ends in 'em, from that standpoint. But it will be a significant change across the country. Those are the two questions. We got a little bit of time for questions if there are any. I will try to answer those as quickly as we can. While they're getting to them, our pace of play continues to be fast. The average number of plays at the Division I level last year was 182 plays a game. The Big 12 had the highest number. We are at 198 plays a game. The number two conference is the Pac 12. They're nine plays below us at 189.

So as you can see, there's a lot of activity going on out there. Our teams are continuing to play at the fastest pace. The game last year that had the most plays was TCU and Texas Tech. That game had 245 plays. Question?

Q. On the game September 26 between Oklahoma State and Texas, that was in Austin, in that game Texas had a season high 16 penalties for 128 yards some of which were in critical situations. After looking real deep and researching these plays, six were deemed legit, six deemed borderline, four deemed egregious, and the last one was an unsportsmanlike contact on Coach Charlie Strong in which the referee initiated contact. My question is, what policies and procedures do you put in place to be sure that there's accountability for when you see things on the deplorable and atrocious level to where it was to the point where it changed the dynamic of that game?

WALT ANDERSON: I don't remember, some of those adjectives must be yours because I don't remember that we had, I don't remember every using egregious on any of those. But as I said, we review every play of every game. One of the things that I instituted immediately eleven years ago when the Big 12 hired me was that we were going to have a program that had accountability, just like coaches and players have accountability.

Does that mean that every time we make a mistake that we're going to fire the official? No, that would be no different than any quarterback in our league and they all throw 'em. If they throw an interception we're taking the scholarship away. That's not going to be the case, but it is important for us to have accountability, and we do hold the officials accountable. And we have had quite a few officials through those eleven years that are no longer officiating in the Big 12 Conference. It's a cumulative assessment of their performance. We take a look at their play and their body of work.

If we find officials who over a period of time are not achieving the level and standards of performance that we set to them relative to accuracy, game control,

game management, communication with coaches, all of those things play a factor in that. So it's not something that we take lightly. I'm very much a performance-based person.

In the NFL, I'm part of a union, but I'm not politically correct. So I might as well go ahead and say this: But it really bothers me when people are rewarded just on the basis of their association with something as opposed to their performance. So we will continue to do that. Does that mean that we don't make mistakes? Absolutely not. We make mistakes in every ball game. My crew, we make mistakes in every ball game. Our key is to minimize those mistakes, learn from the ones we do make so we don't repeat those to try to achieve as high of a level of accuracy as we can. We are never going to be at 100% because it's humans that are out there playing the game, but we will continue to strive to be as accurate as we can.

Q. With the new Timeout Rule, if the defense has one of their full-time outs remaining and the offense is driving in a no huddle situation, can the defense call their full timeout in order to stop the flow of the game?

WALT ANDERSON: Yes, they can. If they haven't used that before, they can certainly do that. Just so you know, as a backdrop on that, when that rule initially came out, they were going to allow the coaches to use any of their timeouts if they had 'em as a full timeout. I quickly brought up the scenario, I said, did you want to have a team with all three of their timeouts left to ice the kicker for four and a half minutes at the end of the game? That becomes a very long time. So they backtracked on that a little bit and went back down to one, because I assure you that would have ended up happening with some. But it doesn't have to be the offense. It could certainly be the defense, but we probably had more coaches request it from an offensive standpoint because they're the ones that have got to come up with some kind of a play in a critical situation.

Are we done? We are? He's pulled the hook on me. I apologize. Again, I'm going to be around for the rest of the day. I'm sorry, he's already called, the game is over! Okay? I'll see you in the locker room. I'll be around for a bit if you've got other questions.

I will say this, and Bob Burda on our staff who works from all of you from a media standpoint and Ed Stewart and I from our operations standpoint with officiating, we really have worked at trying to drop the veil of secrecy with officiating. We have tried to make things as transparent as we can. We hope that you are understanding that we can't review every play of every game of every week from that standpoint. But at the same time we also know that you often need answers

to things, and we've really worked at trying to provide those to you. Many of you have attended our clinics and those are always open to members of the media. Those are not closed, and make those dates available to members of the media, and if at any time you want to come to our clinic and hear us and talk and ask questions and see how we get into the weeds, so to speak, with the officials at working to make us better, you're more than welcome to do that. Thank you for your time and appreciate you all being here.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks, Walt, appreciate it.