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An interview with:

STEVE SHAW

KEVIN TRAINOR: This morning it's our pleasure to start off with the SEC coordinator of officials, Steve Shaw.

STEVE SHAW: Thank you.

I'd like to welcome you to day three of our Media Days. What an amazing time of the year. If you've been outside this morning, it's a little cooler. It almost gives you that tempting of fall. But I know our weather here will go back.

We're excited about this time of the year. The pace quickens, the heart beats a little bit faster and we're getting ready to go for football.

There's no question it is football season now and we're getting ready. Everything we do, we're getting ready for our opening kickoff.

From an officiating perspective, we had a solid year last year. I was pleased with our season overall. But I want to tell you, we've been working hard in the off-season to get ready for this year. We've got to continue to improve our performance. We had some good movement in the off-season, we had three officials actually get selected to work in the NFL. We've had a few officials that won't be back with us.

But we've got some really good young officials ready to step into those roles. Quite frankly, I think we're going to be stronger this year, even when we lose a few people, than we were last year. I'm looking forward to that.

Now off-season work in our program started back in January. It's really not off-season for us. We did a ranking and rating session. I had an individual conversation with every one of our officials. We did that back in January.

We had two spring clinics that our officials attended. We had a referee training and leadership session, which was really, really good. We've had a replay clinic up in Chicago. We've had two coordinator meetings where we work on

national mechanics and consistency from a national perspective.

Our guys started taking a weekly quiz, rules quiz, back in February. They'll continue that all the way up till the season starts.

Next week we have all of our officials here in Birmingham. We're going to test their conditioning. They will be hoping for weather like we have today, but they won't get it. But we'll test their conditioning, their rules knowledge, then we'll have three days where we'll work on our on-field mechanics and our philosophy.

The goal of all of this in the off-season is to ensure that we're ready to go on opening kickoff. When our clinic is over, we'll start working scrimmages with our teams.

Rest assured, we'll be ready to go on the first snap on Thursday night when we kickoff the season.

As we discussed over the last few years, we have really as officials embraced technology. I'm excited about that. When I first came in, we kind of redid our video, our video review capabilities. We introduced the Crew Communication System two years ago, we piloted it. Last year we had all of our crews in it. We'll continue that. In fact, I'm excited to tell you I think the NFL is going to move to that, some other conferences. That's proved to be valuable from a technology perspective.

This year we're doing some work in our command center. We're really doing some upgrade there to enhance our review capability. We're going to continue to use technology to help our officials get better and better.

I really appreciate Commissioner Slive, our presidents, and the ADs who continue to invest in technology to make our product on the field even better and better. I really do appreciate that.

Before we dive into our 2014 rule changes, I want to take a moment and kind of do a quick review of our 2013. Really as we talked about last year, probably the biggest change in my officiating career, my 24 years of both on the field and as a coordinator, the targeting change that included

now the disqualification, was quite frankly the biggest change, the most significant and most important change that we had had in my tenure as an official.

What were the results of that? Well, first of all let me say we simply had to change player behavior for the good of the game. I believe we started to see this type of player behavior change that we were looking for.

We got a little chart here. What I want to hit on is if you look at it, this is tracking targeting fouls from last season. What you see from this little subtle view, but as the season progressed, we saw less targets activity. That's what we were looking for. As you all know, playing time is the most important commodity to a player, certainly to his coach. That had an impact on behavior.

If you kind of split the season, if you look at the back half, we had five targets fouls. That's a significant reduction in comparison to the first eight weeks of the season where we had 14 targeting fouls.

So the trend is good. This is a good trend. We've got to stay vigilant as officials, as coaches, and as players to do this.

I can tell you when I look at video, I see evidence of now players lowering the target, quite frankly times even pulling up on an unnecessary hit so they're not at risk for a targeting foul and disqualification.

I think the rule has done exactly what we wanted it to do. We have to stay with it. I would say this to fans. I heard a lot of fans say, This new targeting and disqualification is going to ruin the game.

I would tell you probably 2013 was one of the most exciting seasons on record. The targeting change is not ruining the game, it's making our game better, and that's what we're excited about. We're going to continue on that track and we'll talk about that.

There is a change in targeting this year which I think most of you will like and I know our fans will like.

So that really takes us into our rules discussion for 2014. Let me first say, just as a reminder of the process, we are now in a two-year rule cycle. So this year was an off-year for rules, meaning the only changes that we really could make were around player safety from a big rule perspective. Certainly there will be some, I'll talk about them today, editorial changes to the rules that will have an impact, but big changes were tied into player safety.

I always remind everybody of this. Everybody thinks the officials make the rules. But the Rules Committee makes the vote. There is a playing Rules Oversight Panel that approves all rule changes. But that's done by the Rules Committee.

One point of note as we head into this, 2015, this next cycle, will be an on-year, meaning all changes are up. We can have anything even beyond player safety.

Let me hit the two biggest changes we have. We're going to do some video in here. I found that video is the best way to kind of see what we talk about. Sometimes what we talk about is dry, but when you look at it, it's real.

I want to hit the editorial changes. This is subtle, but this is going to help our replay guys as we evaluate potential targeting fouls.

We've had a slight changing in the words. It used to say no player shall target and initiate contact at the head or below or with the crown of the helmet. But the key change here is initiate to make forcible contact.

Why that change? Many times people would say 'initiate' means that first point of contact. If a guy nipped his shoulder, drilled him above the shoulders, you would say, Did he initiate it to the shoulder? Now we're looking for that forcible contact. That's going to help us in the replay booth.

Here is the big change. Most of you are aware of this. Now when we have a targeting foul, as you know, every targeting foul is reviewed, so every one will be reviewed by instant replay. Now if replay overturns a targeting foul, there will no longer be a 15-yard penalty assessed. Last year the 15-yard penalty stood no matter what. If the targeting foul was overturned, the player would get to go back in the game. Now if it's targeting only, not only does the player go back in the game, but we will not initiate a 15-yard penalty.

A word of caution. Anytime there's a targeting foul you need to really listen to the referee's announcement because here is what you will hear, and it's a subtle part of his announcement that it makes all the difference for replay.

If you hear him announce, Personal foul, roughing the passer with targeting, now regardless of the review, that 15-yard penalty is going to stand for roughing the passer. Same thing, kick catch interference with targeting, late hit with targeting.

In that announcement if there are multiple components to the targeting foul, the 15-yard penalty will stay in.

Replay will not reevaluate a judgment like roughing the passer. If it's multiple components and replay overturns it, the player goes back in, but we'll still walk off the 15-yard penalty.

We have Cole Cunningham. He runs all our video for the conference. We have three plays we'll look at to illustrate this rule.

This first play was from a game last season. What you're going to see is first of all the realtime view, bang, very, very hard hit. It looks like targeting. Actually we flag it.

Here would be a play this year where the new rule comes in. As we slow it down, right there he goes with his shoulder into the player's shoulder. We'll get another view. What you're going to see is this is not a targeting foul. This was a correct overturn last year. But last year we still penalized this 15 yards. This year we will not.

This one now the player would go back in the game, there would be no penalty.

Another play here. This was not an SEC crew working this game. Here is an example of how you can have multiple fouls on a play. Look at their runner right at the end of the play. We'll get a couple really good replays on it. What you're going to see is clearly there is targeting, but there's another foul component here. That player is down. That's a late hit. That's a dead ball personal foul.

This would be a foul whether he hit him in the head or not because that runner's down, there's no question, then, boom, he goes in.

In this situation, this would be dead-ball personal foul with targeting, so it wouldn't be overturned. If it was in this situation, we would continue with the 15-yard penalty, okay?

One more play we're going to look at. Here is another example. This is actually a play last year that on the field we had a targeting call, then replay overturned the targeting.

What I want to show about this, again to the ruling this year, we get a really good shot right here, so pause it right there, that ball is gone, that defensive back, looking at No. 4 there, he is probably five to six yards away from that receiver and that ball is gone. He has to recognize now this play is over. What you're going to see is he's going to continue on, deliver a blow there. Regardless, which is a foul, the 15-yard penalty will stand on plays like this even if it's overturned, okay?

So that's kind of the view of if it's targeting only and overturned, no 15-yard penalty. If there's targeting and another component with it, in that situation we're still going to walk off the 15-yard penalty but the player can go back in the game, okay?

The second biggest rule change for this year, again this is a player safety issue, it's to protect our quarterbacks or people that are passing the ball. As you can see, when an offensive player is in a passing posture, so he could scam, doesn't have to be in the pocket, he's in a passing posture, clear that a pass is going to be made, now a defender rushing unabated, that's the key word here, cannot hit him at the knee or below.

Again, the quarterback is most vulnerable when he's in that passing posture. This is a player safety thing.

I had to go to the dictionary and look up unabated. I'd encourage you to do the same thing. Basically what our officials are going to look at, when a player is under his own power, he is directing his own hit. If he chooses to go low, that is going to be a foul.

We have a couple plays I want us to look at in conjunction with that. Let's spin up the video. Here we're going to see the live action, then we'll take a look at the coach's cut.

Here you don't get a good view of it where you see the hit on the quarterback. When we look at the end zone view, this is the type of hit that can be very, very dangerous against a quarterback where the player chooses to go low, he's coming off the corner. It doesn't mean no contact with any offensive linemen, but he made a decision to go low. That's the type of foul that our referee is going to be looking for when they're in the pocket.

We have another play from last year, you'll see it live action where a player goes low. We'll go to the end zone view again. This is the type of hit again, when you see that, when that player comes in, the quarterback is in such a vulnerable position, he goes low, that is very, very dangerous.

So really now people have almost said, Do you have a strike zone for quarterbacks? And there really is. Now you hit them above the knee and below the neck. That's really the strike zone for defenders.

This rule change I think will create the player behavior change as the player is coming in.

A couple notes. If a player is being

blocked into the quarterback in that situation, it's not a foul. So we're going to use good judgment. But this is where the player is under his own control and goes low. That's a foul.

Now, there's a couple changes from instant replay. A couple quick comments on replay. We're continuing to mature replay. People think it's integral to the game, but we've been playing college football 140 years and we've had a short window with replay. We're adding a few things. We just note these in.

So the location of the passer. This, believe it or not, was not reviewable. Obviously if he's in the field of play, we have a ruling of intentional grounding that would result as a safety, now that play is reviewable. Basically if you have intentional grounding from the end zone, that results in a safety. Now it's reviewable. Is he in the field of play or was he actually in the end zone when the official made that call?

Now, really, all cases of catch or recovery of a loose ball in the field of play or an end zone is reviewable. We have to see clear evidence of a recovery, not a big scrum pile-up. Many of you thought this was reviewable anyway. But now a backwards pass that goes out of bounds immediately is reviewable.

As we continue to work replay, we're going to continue to have subtle changes there.

Now, there's some other changes. We won't hit all of these. But I want to talk about a couple of these.

The first one bullet is we're expanding the experiment of using the eighth official. I want to talk about not only what we're going to do in the SEC, but I want to talk about the eighth official and why it's there because I think there's this misconception we're adding an eighth official to go faster and faster and faster.

In the SEC, we are selecting one of our crews, they're going to work with the eighth official all year. When we met with the ADs, they want to ensure that this official saw every crew all year so we could have good feedback on it to see if this is a direction we ultimately want to go. The intent of the eighth official is not to go faster, not to go slower, but to help our guys officiate the game better.

I'll make two observations. First is now the game is changed with spread offenses. You can have up to five receivers in a route and many times we get that. If you think about our officials, we have three deep, two wing officials, all have keys on these receivers. If they go out, they're occupied

with their key, that leaves the referee and umpire to handle all the other stuff in the middle. That's a tall order.

On top of that, what you see is a lot of times now with our up-tempo teams, the umpire and the wing officials are not able to get their presnap routine. Our umpire is to count the offense, recognize the offensive formation, and then pick his keys from that offensive line and anticipate what's getting ready to happen.

Now a lot of times when we have substitutions, the umpire is having to stay at the ball, he can't do his presnap routine. So the eighth official is to help us officiate better.

I would tell you from a pace perspective, I'm going to talk about that in a few minutes, but my expectation is our crew of eight will go no faster and no slower. We've got to be consistent across all of our crews on pace of the game. So that's really the intent.

We had just a quick snippet that kind of illustrates the presnap routine. Here is a play where we're going up-tempo. The umpire is having to stay, check off. Right there at snap -- even our line judge has got the spot on the ball now, he's flipping the ball off, right at snap I have one official with his back turned, he's going to turn around, the snap. This is where our eighth official is going to help him. We'll call him the center judge.

The center judge will spot the ball on every play and will interact with the referee on substitutions. That's going to free up our umpire and our wing guys to go do their presnap routine. We worked this in a lot of spring games.

I'm encouraged that it's really helpful to us. That's the intent. It's not to go faster, not to go slower. It's a consistent pace, but to get our officials ready to officiate the play.

Now, I mentioned earlier the expanded use of crew communication system. That has been a great tool to help us not only communicate with the crew better, get better information to the coaches quicker, and ultimately make us better officials. So that's going to continue and, as I said, nationally expand. You may not notice this, but this is one of the things the coaches really wanted.

So what we're going to do, we're actually going to take in the first half, our line judge and field judge, will be opposite the press box with the chains. At halftime, they're going to switch sidelines and the head linesman side judge will

work the chains in the second half.

So that's something you may notice that's a little different mechanic that we're going to do this year. We'll see the results of that. I think everybody is behind that and thinks that will be a good change.

Then these last three I'll hit very quickly.

There's a little bit of clarification and definitions and we're actually defining an inbounds and out-of-bounds player more clearly. It creates not a rules change but editorial change.

You have to establish yourself as a player inbounds or out of bounds. The example difference this year for this change is, in previous years, let's say you were a defensive back, you were standing out of bounds, you leap from out of bounds, you went up in the air, secured possession of a pass, and landed inbounds. By the old rule that was an interception. Now you would have to establish yourself inbounds before going up and catching that ball.

This year with this subtle change, if a player jumps from out of bounds, gets possession of the ball, lands inbounds, that would now be an incomplete pass. Subtle little change, but I think a good change, probably what most people thought anyway.

We've worked with -- and we're really working with our teams. We get all these jersey creations now that are different. We're trying to ensure you can read the numbers, the coloring is proper. There's actually some prescribed penalties if they don't meet the requirements there.

The one I kind of skipped over, we're changing enforcement on personal fouls. On a legal forward pass for the defense, it's always going to be tacked on to the end of a last run if they complete a pass beyond the line of scrimmage. That's a good change for our game and, again, one that where every personal foul now really will be enforced.

Now, let me briefly hit the national points of emphasis. These around just SEC points of emphasis, but national points of emphasis. We had discussion about pace of play in our off-season. That is a national point of emphasis from a couple perspectives.

Number one is nationally we have to be very consistent. The coordinators have met. We've talked. We've actually built our mechanics, and we have specific words, specific ways that we're going to handle pace of play based on the current rule.

I want to talk about that. But let me kind of get off to the side. I mean, clearly there needs to be healthy debate around this topic and other topics in our game. The commissioner even has suggested that maybe we look at a football Competition Committee to look at this issue and other issues to see what is in the long-term best interests of the game. I support that completely.

We're getting ready for the 2014 season. What's the rule today and how are we going to manage that consistently?

The rule today says when the ball is ready, the offense can snap it. So here is what we're telling nationally to all our officials. Whether it's the center judge spotting the ball or it's the umpire, the umpire, if we don't have a crew of eight. What we're saying is when the play is dead, the umpire or the person spotting the ball, you will not walk and you will not sprint. We're calling it a 'crisp jog.' We're trying to get all of our umpires on the same page on a crisp jog.

We won't just throw the ball down, we'll get a spot. We'll check the referee, if there's substitutions, we'll hold the ball. No substitutions, he'll release them, release the ball, then the offense can snap it.

I think what you're going to see is very consistent work nationally. I know there's athleticism differences sometimes between umpires. But we're really working for them all to do it the same way.

A couple things also. No let-up on targeting. Like I said, that is an important change in our game. Our officials will continue to stay very vigilant. So we penalize offenders when they do target another opponent.

Sideline management and control, we've talked with the coaches about this. We really want to clean up our sidelines. We're going to begin a journey to get that done this year, again, nationally. That's something that we'll have to work to.

Then we don't even talk about it much anymore, but unsportsmanlike conduct, that was big talk a few years back, another rule that was going to ruin the game. Quite frankly, I think it's cleaned our game up. We won't let up there. Again, our guys will use good judgment.

Anytime you taunt an opponent, that's an automatic. We do have automatics, the throat slash, a number of things. We will allow a player to celebrate with his teammates. Some quick, natural response will be allowed. But anything

choreographed, if it looks like he worked on it in his hotel room the night before, that's a penalty. We will stay vigilant again on unsportsmanlike conduct.

That's what we're looking at from an officiating perspective. I'm excited about the season. As I always talk, our aspirational goal as officials is to be perfect, never miss one. But that's a tall order. Quite frankly, what we will do, what we have been doing in our off-season, our clinic next week, in our pre-season work, is to absolutely be the best we can be.

We ask our guys to officiate to a standard, and we have a strong standard by position in the SEC. We expect them to meet or exceed that standard. We evaluate it hard.

But our guys work hard. They give a lot into this. It's a passion for them. We're excited about getting this thing started.

My goal with our clinic next week, get our guys physically and mentally ready to work, and then we just go execute on Saturday.

We can't wait to get it started. The season will be here before you know it.

I appreciate your time and support of our officials.

Thank you very much.

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