

SEC Football Media Days

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Steve Shaw



KEVIN TRAINOR: Pleased to bring to the podium the coordinator of officials for the Southeastern Conference, Mr. Steve Shaw.

STEVE SHAW: Thank you. Good morning. It's great to be here with you guys again. It's a great time of the year. The pace picks up. The heart beats a little quicker. Really it's when we begin our final preparations, just like the teams, for the 2015 season. Before we talk about that, it's been a very, very busy off-season for us as officials. We do all our final evaluations and rankings for the season, have a one-on-one with every official, and we kind of talk about performance and opportunities to improve. We've had two spring clinics. We work on fundamentals just like the teams do in the spring. We've had a national instant replay conference. We had a referee leadership session. And probably most importantly, we have rewritten our national mechanics completely. So we spent a lot of time in the spring and will this summer on that. I'll talk about that a little bit more as we get in here, but just as you yesterday, I really listened intently to our new commissioner. I took away a lot from yesterday. I really took away a lot. But there are two things that really stuck with me, and I wanted to mention them first off. That is, number one, I am, just as the commissioner stated he was, I am truly honored to be here. It is an honor to be the coordinator of officials in the SEC. I get to work with, without a doubt, some of the best coaches as a group in America, clearly the best athletes, and some really, really great football officials. So I am honored and humbled to be here. Really, the second thing that I took away -- and I'm sure you did too -- is clearly, the times are changing. Commissioner Sankey went through that. There's no question, my job has changed dramatically in the last couple years with now all the introspection on officiating, social media, instant everything, it's really changing. We have to get better -- I mean, the teams get bigger, faster, stronger. The game gets quicker and tougher to officiate. So we have to get better every year just to keep on pace. That's what we're working on, and change is a part of that. You're going to hear some change today. But I say change is about intentionally building a new and better way and really not just clinging and hoping to the old way. So you're going to hear some about that that really today -- you may look at the rule changes and think, you know,

this is a pretty light year in rule changes, and it is, but there are a couple things that are transformational, and I'm going to hit on that, and I mean that sincerely. Transformational from an officiating perspective and will make a difference in our officiating. So I'm very excited about that. Before we go there with the rule changes and kind of that transformational tease I said, there is one other big change. Commissioner Sankey mentioned it in his comments right at the end, and I want to talk about it, and that's our new medical observer. So as you follow along on the screen here, as you see -- and let me preface it with player safety undergirds everything we do, and it should. But we've got a rules experiment for 2015, where we're going to have an independent, conference appointed, certified athletic trainer sitting in the press box, really as a backup, observing for not all injuries, but mainly focused on head and neck trauma. So I want to talk about that a little bit before we kind of get into the guts of it. First of all, independent. These guys will have the same screening component as football officials. They can't work their alma mater. They can't -- if their wife works at a school, if they have a son or daughter that attends there, if they have any financial interest, if they played for or with a head coach, we have all that criteria that creates independent officials, and we'll apply that to this medical observer as well. I want you to frame it with this. This is a backup. So really in the line of defense, if you will, to player safety, it's really the fourth backup, and there may be others, but primarily the player and his teammates, they have responsibility to identify. They're taught what concussion symptoms are. So the player himself should identify that. That's number one. Second, and our teams do a great job with this, on the sideline, the medical team, the coaches are all very observant, looking for any sign of issue, and that's kind of the second way. Third is our football officials. Our football officials are trained to help recognize concussion and concussion-related symptoms. And they're kind of third in a responsibility to ensure that we get a player out of the game that needs to be. Finally, and almost no regrets, is a medical observer. This medical observer is actually going to sit in the instant replay booth. They'll have equipment where they have a monitor. They have simple rewind capability. They'll have communication to both benches. And they're going to be observing for this head or neck trauma. When they observe that, when a player demonstrates symptoms that they're

trained to recognize, and the snap becomes imminent, the team's not going to get him out of the game, the officials, the player's not going to self-identify, then they will communicate to the replay official, hey, we need to get No. 12 for the offense out of the game. Then that's where the experimental rule comes in. Now we're going to use the communication capability of replay to alert the officials and the referee specifically, hey, we need to stop the game. We need to get No. 12 out. We're actually going to use -- we introduced a couple of years ago our headset system, and they'll communicate down to the referee and say, hey, we need to get this individual player out of the game. We'll stop the clock just as any other injury time-out. We will not publicly identify this player, but then we will get No. 12 or whoever it is out of the game. The referee will make a simple announcement that it was a stop for an injury time-out. It's third down. And then we're just going to play. And then once we do that, once we go through that process, as it says up here, then the provisions of Rule 3-3-5 take effect. Any time we stop the clock for injury, then the player has to go out. He must stay out one play, and he's evaluated by the medical staff, and then only they say when he can go back in. He will have to stay out one play. You can't buy him back in with a time-out. But once we get to stop the clock and get the player out, then the rule applies with one exception, and that exception is we will not invoke a ten-second runoff. As you know, a rule change we had a few years back, if a player is injured in the last minute of either half, then there's a ten-second runoff. The reason behind that rule was around players, it was to dissuade them from faking an injury or try to stop the clock or whatever. Since this has no player decision point in it, it's all coming from the press box, then it's appropriate that we do not have the ten-second runoff. So that's a quick synopsis of what we're going to do. We actually piloted this a little last year. The University of Florida did this in a number of games, and actually one game, when they played Georgia, both teams had a medical observer. But this year the difference obviously is an independent person, and we're going to do it in all conference games and really any time our conference team is playing in their home stadium. If there's a visiting team there, they'll have the opportunity to opt in or opt out. So if a visitor from another conference for some reason wants to opt out, they can, but really I think this is a next step innovation in ensuring player safety. People have asked, so what's your expectations? All I can tell you from the past is we used it in several games last year. We never had a stop. So I can't really tell you the frequency of this. I think it will be minimal, but we have to work through it. But if we have one stop and we save a potential concussion issue with a player, it's all worth it. So that is something that is very, very new for our season this year. So let me move now into kind of the rule change. We always start with the rule change

process, and I want to talk about that because there's something new inserted here. As you guys all know, the rule changes now, it's a two-year rule cycle. So this year was an on year for rule changes. In the off year, you can only make changes that revolve around player safety. But this is an on year. We get coordinator input. Coaches get input through surveys. But ultimately it comes down to the Rules Committee, and they vote through new rules. Then there's the PROP, Playing Rules Oversight Panel, they come in and weigh in and either approve or not the action by the Rules Committee, and that's how we get our new rules each year. Now, very different -- and you've probably heard about this -- this season, there is going to be appointed a Competition Committee, and I think this is the right time to do this. So a Competition Committee that really is composed of people that are very integral to the game and really with, not term limits, like on the Rules Committee have a broad term, and really are looking at the bigger picture of the game. So they won't necessarily write incrementally the ifs, ands, and thes of the rule, but they'll be looking at the broader issues of the game, pace of play really across the board, and come back with recommendations to the Rules Committee. So just as a note, for 2016, the NCAA is thinking about looking at potentially flipping the cycle, and 2016 would be an off year for rule changes, but I think with the impact of the Competition Committee, they're looking at making 2016 as an on for rule changes. So stay tuned on that. But I think this will be very, very good with a Competition Committee to give good input to the long-term view of our game. Now, let's talk about the major changes for this upcoming season, and we're going to insert some video in here. So I have to take my watch off here because I start watching video, and I get cranked up, and we'll go too long. I talked about a transformational change, and number one here that we're going to identify is the Rules Committee. As all you guys know, we had been experimenting with eight officials. We had one crew last year that worked with eight. But the rule book now allows a conference to use eight officials in the game. So for us, we are going to use all our crews, eight officials. I just want to say, why do we need eight? The first thing is, oh, man, more penalties. We tracked it last year. Of our nine crews, the one crew that worked eight all season long fit exactly in the middle. So there were four crews that had more penalties per game. There were four crews that had less penalties per game. They were dead in the middle. So it really doesn't necessarily say we're going to have more penalties per game with the eighth official. We're going to get better preventive officiating, but we need that better look. I go back to a meeting we had with the athletic directors back in December. I'll ask you to do this. Step back for a moment. I want you to think. Where were you in 1986? Now, Cole Cunningham, our video coordinator, he wasn't born in 1986. But in 1986

is when the SEC went from six officials to seven. So I ask you this, has the game changed any since 1986? We had teams running the wish bone, the veer. The game has dramatically changed, and the eighth official is an innovation that will really help us officiate. Rather than me just trying to sell it, Cole, let's run the video. I've got four quick plays I want to look at and really set up what an eighth official is all about. You can see in the video, here's our eighth official. He's opposite the referee. Here's a play where last year looks like nothing there, but, boom, you're going to see a flag come in from the center judge. That's a different triangular angle. When you look at the replay, our referee and umpire would not have seen a foul, but that other angle, and now when we get a different view of what you just saw, you're going to see, there's a significant foul here. Nobody would have seen that. So that other angle from where that center judge is gives us another triangular view to help us pick up fouls like this. So this was a good catch. Now, next play we're going to look at -- and we're going to look at this tackle right here. So let me just say real quick on this formation, we've got three receivers on this side. All our officials have keys. So the line of scrimmage official would have No. 2, our deep wing has No. 1, our back judge would have No. 3. If these guys all release out, this tackle in these certain situations with trips could be uncovered because in our last year mechanic, the referee was looking through this tackle. So we're going to roll this video, and you're going to see, here's a play where we have a pretty significant hold. The quarterback scrambles back there, he pulls him back in, and there's our center judge getting that. We would not have seen that. We would not have had that other look without our eighth official. So a good play there. We're going to go to the next play to continue to illustrate. We didn't have a foul on this play, but I want you to watch the quarterback. We're going to have a change of possession. As you all know, a rule change recently -- when the change of possession occurs, the quarterback -- let's go to the coach's cut, Cole. The quarterback actually becomes a defenseless player. What does that mean? It doesn't mean you can't block him, but you can't hit him above the shoulders. As you can see right here -- pause it. Our center judge -- so the referee's got goal line. As the referee digs for goal line, nobody's watching this quarterback. You can see here our center judge actually sits down to watch that. We didn't have a foul here, but look at all the action around that. We need eyes on that. Now we have a person that can do that. We're actually flipping the mechanics. The center judge is going to go to goal line based on our learnings, and the referee will stay at quarterback. That's another play. Finally, the last play I'll use to illustrate is here's a play -- and let's pause it for a second. You can see it maybe better on the coach's cut. You'll see our umpire responsibility for counting the offense. Let's go ahead and run the play.

You can see the umpire. He's still counting. We're starting to play. We're in an up tempo. The play comes this way. He's got to officiate the play. Let's go to the coach's cut, Cole. He's having to wait for substitutions. Now he's moved back. He's not able to do his presnap routine. He doesn't get his count. He doesn't get formation. He knows something's up, but he's got to officiate the play. As soon as the play is over, he's still counting guys. He turns around, but he doesn't see the other guy. Now, run it back one time. What you see here, watch this player right here. They actually have 12 on offense, and we didn't get it. This player kind of knows. You're going to watch his actions. He's like, I think I maybe need to get out of here. So he goes out, and then our umpire turns around. He's looking for his 12th guy, and he's not there. This now, we're going to allow with the center judge spotting the ball and taking care of the substitution component with the referee, the umpire will be relieved to do his normal job. So the net of all this is we'll be better officials. People ask, is this -- you're putting him in there to go faster. We're not. We're putting him in there to manage the game properly, and that's what it will all be about. Tempo will be the same. We're not going to change, but we'll be able to manage the whole process much better. So I think this is something that will really help us as we go through. So now as we go through this, the second on here is overbuilt facemask. We've got a slide to kind of show you what overbuilt facemask -- you know it. You see it. People say, did the Rules Committee just not like the look of this and they wanted to outlaw? Really, no. There was some good medical research around it. What they found out was the weight of these facemasks -- I mean, there's always a concern, somebody sticks a finger in there or whatever. The weight of the facemask did two things. One, it could jeopardize the structural integrity of the helmet, but second, the weight tends to pull your head forward. And the thing we teach players is heads up tackling, and the last thing you want is a player with weight pulling his head down. So the Rules Committee said no more overbuilt facemasks, and we worked with the schools in the spring, so we shouldn't have an issue there. But I just wanted you to be aware of that and see what an overbuilt facemask looked like. The next change we're going to talk about is illegal player -- or illegal equipment. And we're kind of treating this -- you may think of it just kind of like we do with helmets off now. Before, when our officials would try to get them -- wear your jersey properly, whatever. We talk about the jersey. So now, rather than beg and plead the players to get their equipment right, the officials simply, if he's not wearing his equipment properly -- and we'll be good, we'll warn them. But if they're not going to wear their equipment properly, we just send them out of the game. They have to go out of play just like with the helmet off. The coach could call a time-out and buy

them back in, but it's really around good uniforms and player safety. So we've got a play. Cole, let's bring it up. Kind of illustrate how this could impact officiating as well. Here's a play in the game where we have a targeting official. No. 8 goes in, boom, we have other views, and makes a targeting foul. Our referee makes this call. Right there you can see he goes high right into the head, no question about it. As you all know, now with targeting, that player is disqualified. But we go to instant replay review, they reviewed this, they confirmed it was a good -- and let's pause it right there. We actually disqualify No. 8, and here you see the player, he's not wearing -- so his back pad is not covered. That thing could flip up and he get hit, but the reality is this guy isn't No. 8. He looks like No. 8. You would have identified him as 8, but he's actually No. 9. Thank goodness our back judge right before the next snap came in, shut the play down and said, hey, wait a minute. I don't know what we did. But here's the guy. He's still in the game. And we wound up having to make a change. It will have an impact on officiating, but it's really around player safety and the uniform. Now, this is another -- again, you might look at these and say not a big deal, but now reviewable in instant replay on an onside kick is blocking by the kicking team. So you say, well, that's a foul. We've tried to stay away from judgment calls. But now an illegal block on an onside kick is reviewable. So why do you say we take a judgment call and make it reviewable? It is such an impactful play in the game, it's usually a turnover, change of possession. So the Rules Committee felt it was such an impactful play, that we'll kind of cross over on this one specific circumstance where we're going to evaluate judgment calls, kind of like we do now with targeting. We review that, and there are a couple of others. But here's one, because of the impactfulness of the play. We have a video, and I want to illustrate. Here's your chance to be an official today. Right here we're going to get an onside kick situation. We'll run it through one time. It's a pretty interesting play. Boy, it's really tight. Was that thing touched? When did it go ten yards? The kickers can't touch it. Let me just talk about the rules on this. The rules are the ball has to go ten yards before the kicking team can legally touch or recover it. And part of the rule is they can't block until they can legally touch it. So it has to go ten yards. So in this situation, as we roll it again, I want you to watch. You're this guy right here. Did he touch it? Did he touch it? Did it go ten yards? Is he going to wait? Who's going to recover it? You have a lot to look at. That's a lot of stuff. Here's a ground level view. Put yourself in that. You've got to look. Did he touch it? Did he touch it? Is that ball -- when is it going ten yards? He's focused in. Let's back it up one time. You've got all that to do, but there's one other thing. I want you to watch the second guy in on this. As this ball's coming down, right there, boom. Can you see this player right here? That ball has not

traveled ten yards, and he's going to knock this player back. That's clearly a block knocking him off the ball. Now there's ten yards. You've got a lot to do that's coming right in your lap. So that's the reason now, this is such an important play, a change of possession play. Now, if we get an illegal block, instant replay can come in on this and actually create a foul, if you will, and basically now we would have an illegal block on this. So I think this is a good change, a very innovative change from that perspective. We have a couple others that I'll hit. We now have an automatic on unsportsmanlike conduct or pulling players or knocking players off a pile. You've all seen plays. We've got hundreds of plays, but we've got one we'll illustrate, and we'll be done with our video today. Here's a kick play. A guy tries to recover it. Now what you're going to see is a big pile-up. We've already signaled it. This play's over. Then you're going to watch 14 come in here, pull this guy off. He's going to try to go back in. Every place you have people pulling people, the official goes down. We need our officials focused in on that pile. So part of the reason for this, pulling players off a pile, every time you pull a player off a pile, you're going to get a negative reaction that now we're going to have to officiate when we need to be focused in here. More importantly, what the Rules Committee has been doing is telling players, you can't do this. This is an automatic unsportsmanlike foul, and they will stop doing it. So that's the intent. That's the hope behind this. So now that goes into our list of automatics. Now, I'm going to hit -- with no more video, but I'm going to hit the rest of these. These are just FYI. Pre-game warmups, there's a change that allows the team to stay on the field at least up to 22 minutes before kickoff. We get some games where they have to go in 25, 28 minutes, and it's a player safety deal. So they're at least allowed to stay at 22. Most of our games, they stay out to 17, 18 anyway. So not big impact. A play clock reset, this is just FYI, the old rule said, if we didn't -- now, used to we would blow the ready for play every play. But now when the player is tackled, we put the ball down. The play clock starts at 40. But we have a situation, say, a play goes out of bounds, it takes us a while to get it sorted out. The old rule said if we didn't get the ball placed until 20 seconds on the play clock that we would reset it to 25. The coaches looked at that and said, hey, why don't you get your full 25. So now, if we don't get the ball down on the ground ready to go and the clock is below 25, what the rule says is we're going to stop it and reset it to 25 mechanically, and we'll do this nationally. What you're going to see, if we put it down and it's less than 25, you'll see the referee, what we call the pump-up signal. When he does this, it's an indicator to the play clock operator, reset it to 25. So simply, if it's 21 when we get down, he'll give the pump-up signal and pop it back up to 25 and keep the game going. If he doesn't recognize the signal, then we'll stop the game and reset it to 25. If you ever see the

referee do this, that means, I want the clock reset to 25. If you ever see him do this, it's not raise the roof. It's I want it reset to 40. Just so you know. That's a good change. Play clock helmet off the defensive player. All we did is hold it, if we have the defensive injury, we set the clock to 40. Now a defensive player in any situation, helmet comes off, we're going to reset the clock to 40, the play clock to 40. Finally, and I want to talk about this just briefly, the game administration interference, we're adding in the rule book a warning, and this was something nationally we worked on last year. As a mechanic, we did a warning, and it actually was very effective. The rules makers actually incorporated this into the rules. So we've really worked to get our teams back out of the white, really the coaches back into the coaches box, the players back into the team area. And we actually, just some stats from last year, when we used this, we had 15 warnings. We only had one five-yard penalty. So the second time you get a warning, it's not a warning, it's a five-yard penalty. But it doesn't mean you can't have right out of the gate a 15-yard penalty, you don't have to go to the warning if you have contact with a coach. And we actually had six 15-yard penalties. But if you watch our sideline, it was significantly improved. In my last couple of minutes, I want to hit two things. First of all, points of emphasis. Pace of play has been such a dramatic topic. I'm going to tell you, last year I really think our guys did a really good job managing pace of play. We're going fast, but we're handling the substitution process. When you see the referee with his outstretched arms, we're handling that. And really both teams now understand the process, and we're administering it very well. So no change in pace of play, and we've got to keep working hard. But with our center judge, we'll even be better at doing that. Targeting, we actually were down 10.5 percent in targeting fouls in the SEC last year. That's a great trend. We want to keep that. So there's no relent. We're going to be focused on these high hits and they're going to be penalized. We want the trend to keep going, taking those hits out of the game. Sideline management and control, we talked about that. It's still a national point of emphasis. And then unsportsmanlike conduct fouls will still be a point of emphasis, and I think we've gotten pretty good with that. So the net of all that -- and I appreciate you indulging me on the video -- even though the rule changes are not dramatic, the eighth official should be transformational to us and make us better. It has to make us better because the game gets faster and faster every year. So our focus, next week we're going to have all our officials in for three days. We're going to test their rules knowledge. We're going to test their conditioning. They run their mile and a half. That's one of their favorite days in the summer heat here in Birmingham. And then really work hard on mechanics as we work into this new eighth official. So we're

ready. The teams will be ready on week one, and we're going to be ready on week one as well. So I appreciate your support of the officials, and let's have a great season. Thank you.