

# Southeastern Conference Football Media Days

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## Steve Shaw

SEC Coordinator of Football Officials



KEVIN TRAINER: Good morning. Welcome to Day 2 of SEC Media Days. Leading off this morning we have the SEC Coordinator of Football Officials, Mr. Steve Shaw. Steve?

STEVE SHAW: Thank you, and good morning. It's great to be here. I'm really honored to be here with you guys, and to help kick off Day 2 of our Media Days. Now, for me, it's hard to believe this is my sixth year as coordinator, that I've been off the field that long. But what an honor to work with the absolute best coaches in America, the best athletes in America, and I feel the best football officials in America. It is truly an honor for me.

Now, I listened intently yesterday to Commissioner Sankey, and there was much to take away. But I wanted to hit on a couple things, and number one was his discussion about Nelson Mandela and his thoughts around change. And the comments to make an impact, you must first change yourself. I think that's impactful.

And I'm not sure people really think about officiating when they think about change and innovation, but I believe, as officials, we've got to continue to innovate, intentionally build new and better ways to officiate the great game that we have. And I would tell you, over the past few years, our innovation rate has been great. You know, better use of video to help the officials, not only evaluate their performance, but to help recognition of issues on the field, to prepare them to see those type plays over and over.

You know, we trialed and ultimately accepted our crew communication system, our wireless communication system, where we can all talk together in game. And even last year, what I called here at this podium a transformational step, by adding our eighth official to every crew has made a significant difference in the game.

And so we have to continue these initiatives, and even though I'm very proud of our performance from last year, I think we had a really good year. We got to continue to get better and better, continue down the path of innovation to keep up with our game. It's so important.

And I'll tell you today, instant replay is -- it will be the next target for significant change for us. And if you really think about it, other than high definition, over the last ten-plus years, there's been very little change in the process of instant replay. So, it's time to take a look at it and continue to drive for excellence in replay, and we can't just stay status quo. So I'm going to talk about that a little more in a few moments.

But the other takeaway yesterday from Commissioner, for me, is a strong expectation, a greater attention to the integrity in the SEC. I can tell you, he means it. He demands it. He expects it. He inspects it, and so do I. And we have built our foundation in our officiating program on integrity, and there will be no exceptions from that. And that's so important to us all.

Now, it's been a very busy offseason. You know, we have -- we did our end-of-year evaluations, I had a one-on-one meeting with every official. We had three big spring clinics. We actually added a third clinic this year, a developmental clinic where we identified and worked with new young minority opportunity candidates, and that was very good. And, in fact, I'm excited. Over the next few years, maybe this year, you're going to see some of those candidates coming out of that.

We had a national instant replay clinic, a national referee clinic, a referee leadership session. People don't think about that as much, we do more than just teach mechanics and work on the field. So leadership is so important. And really, all of that culminates the weekly quizzes, culminates in our upcoming fall meeting. And that's coming next week, three days, intense focus on our mechanics, our philosophies. We'll look at points of emphasis. We'll do a lot of video work, and we'll test our guys on the work -- I say "guys" gender neutral now, we had a female official work on the field -- but we'll test our guys for their rules knowledge and their physical conditioning.

They all love the mile and a half run, and we're ready to do that. But all of that is really to get us ready to hone our skills to get us ready for our first scrimmages and ultimately our opening kickoff in September. So we're excited. We're ready to go.

As we roll into our rule changes this year, I wanted to really start with the player safety initiative. And now in our Rules Committee, the lens of every discussion is focused on player safety. And so we're going to talk about our medical observer. We introduced -- as you see here, last year this was an experimental rule. It is now a rule change for 2016. So, the -- this rule allows instant replay to actually stop the game at the request of the medical observer. And so we used this last year as an experimental rule.

So what was the magnitude? Well, we actually had one play where we stopped the game for a potential injured player. And really we used the medical observer. It's about the third check. Obviously, our medical people do a great job on the sideline, the players themselves and the officials police it, but the medical observer had one time in the season where they saw that a player could potentially be injured and wanted to get him checked out further.

But you say: So only one time? Well, if that was your son, it would have been worth it. But the big value in this, what we got from the feedback of the medical personnel, was the dialogue with the medical observer. Because the medical observer has the video, they can see hits. They can see impacts and they can pass information to our medical people about what happened on a specific play to help them diagnose and get a player back as soon as possible.

So, we've really gotten a lot of benefit there and we will continue that and we'll have a neutral medical observer at every game at an SEC venue. So now that is an absolute rule.

But the one I really want to spend most time this morning around, and that is the -- it's an experimental rule, but it's around instant replay, and so the experimental rule is going to allow a collaborative process in the instant replay process that we have now. So, let me talk about it a little bit and what we're doing in replay.

So, I mentioned we've had a lot of work in the offseason, a lot of work here as well. In stadium, we're going to be replacing all of our replay gear with a new quad system. Basically the new replay gear does everything the old system would do but now allows the replay official to get his views quicker. We'll now link in the coaches' end zone and sideline into that as well so they'll have access to that video, so it will be a help in the replay booth.

And we've also been building out our video center in the conference office. And we've -- we're in process of doing that. But we're going to have instant replay gear there as well. So part of this new replay process, we're

going to have three -- as I told our athletic director, we're going to have three house replay officials sitting in our video center in Birmingham, and they're going to have live feed and live communication to the stadium in every one of our venues.

Their role will be -- the three officials will be assigned specific primary on games, but if there's a stop in any one of our stadiums, the three will come together, collaborate together there and actually be collaborating with the replay official in the stadium.

Now, talking about the stadium, there's absolutely -- other than the technology added, there's no change there. The replay official in the stadium will still be the primary person to make the final determination of any overturn or not. They will also be primarily to stop the game. But with that collaborative communications, now, when we go into a stop, we'll be able to talk together and ultimately what we believe is come up with the right answer through that collaborative process.

A couple of things about it. The expectations that we have are really twofold. Number one is consistency. You know, if you have a targeting foul in an early game on a day, you want the same outcome in the targeting foul in the last game of the day or from September to November. We have to have that consistency in replay.

The second goal is to avoid any what I call incorrect outcomes. We can't live with incorrect outcomes. So, I think through this process we'll do that.

Now, will we add more time to the process? The expectation is no, but we're going to have to learn. Last year our average replay stop was 1:21. This is not about time, it is not about speed, it's about getting it right. But the expectation is that we will not add time to the process. And we've averaged -- last year we averaged about two stops per game, so if we can hold that time consistent, I don't think fans will even know that process is going on.

But let me tell you what this thing is not, and this is very important. What this is not, it is not perfection. Okay? Perfection is a difficult thing to define in officiating. They are gray plays. I can tell you, I can sit our 14 coaches at a table, put a play up, and there are some great plays that we wouldn't get agreement at that table. So it's not about perfection, but it is about consistency and avoiding any incorrect outcomes.

And my final comment on this, and I'll leave with this, is that this is an experimental rule. So, we've worked hard in the spring. We did it live in the spring. We're going to do it before we kick off the season again this year. But we're going to learn. We're going to learn.

So what we do in Week 2 will build on Week 1.

I don't want to lose sight that it is an experimental rule, but it is a process that we need to get better at replay, and I'm excited about moving with it this year.

And then staying on that same theme, from a rules-making perspective around instant replay, there's really broadened authority in the replay booth now around targeting. I know targeting gets so much press. It -- because of the implication of the player, the disqualification component, we have to be correct.

Now, let me preface this by saying there's no change to our officials on the field. The rule book says when in question, it's a targeting foul. It's not Shaw, it's not anybody else. The rule book says when in question, it's a targeting foul. And if it's close, we expect our guys to get the marker on the ground on the field.

But now I'm really excited about the broadened authority that replay will have, and the first part of this is now the replay official can create a targeting foul from the booth. And now it has to be an egregious situation. The first thing you say, oh, no, replay. Well, we went through all of last year, all of our video, and we actually had two plays for the season, two plays that we feel like the replay official would have come in. I want to share those two plays with you now. Cole Cunningham, our director of video, is going to put those up.

These were the two plays that we thought through the entire season that replay would have come in. If you look at this first play, you're going to see a blind-side block late in the play. There it is. We're going to get a couple good replay looks at it. But as we know now, when you block a person, when you have a blind-side block, the person receiving that block is a defenseless player.

As you can see from there, the player comes in to make the block, he really launches in and makes forcible contact to the head. And we had a marker down on this play, but we didn't get this as officials. This would have been a play that we would have actually stopped the game and created a targeting foul from instant replay, and I think -- I hope you'd agree with that one.

This one is a little bit more subtle. We have a play here where we have a kick-catch interference so we have a flag down, but as you're going to see, it's a bang-bang play, hits the receiver. And remember, the receiver is a defenseless player as he's looking up. There you're going to see the player come in, lower his head and make forcible contact to the head area right there.

And from that, this was a play where we had -- we had

a kick-catch interference. The rule there, shoulder-width, if you're within one yard when he's making the catch, that's a kick-catch interference foul. We had the marker for that. We missed a little throat slash right there. But this would have been a play that the replay would have stopped it, and it would have been kick-catch interference with targeting. The only impact, it's still a 15-yard penalty, which we did here, but the difference would have been that the player would have been disqualified.

That's another reason why the collaborative replay, these targeting fouls we have to get right. We have to get right.

The other -- and I want to talk about this. Now, they've allowed replay to look at all aspects of a targeting foul. Before we were just looking for that contact to the head, but now the official in the booth, his broadened authority, he can look at is the player defenseless? Where was the contact? Was there a launch? What was the action of the defender?

So I want to put up one more play. Here's a play that, based on this expanded broadened authority, would have a different outcome in the upcoming 2016 season. Now, here's a play in a game. So what you're going to see is the receiver and strong contact. It's high. And we get a flag from our officials on the field. Absolutely you would expect that. We would expect it this year.

But here you're going to see that, you know, last year -- and you're going to watch. It is subtle, but right here you watch the receiver's head and you can tell there's helmet contact there. So this would have been a stand last year. But if you really look at the action of the defender, he's not launching, he's going with his shoulder. He's trying to lower his target. There's really not targeting action by that defender.

So here would have been a play with broadened authority, and replay that we would have actually overturned this in the new rule and not made this a targeting foul. So these are all very difficult plays, and that's where the collaborative part of replay I think is really going to help us.

Now, quickly we'll go through a few more of our other rule changes. So, the first one is a sliding ball carrier. So, really the change here is now by rule definition a sliding ball carrier -- and they've got to slide feet first, and the slide starts when they obviously give themselves up. But once they've obviously given themselves up, sliding feet first, they become a defenseless player.

What does that mean? Why is that important? Well,

even though before it could have been a late hit if he was down, but now because he's defenseless as a sliding ball carrier, if there's forcible contact to the head or neck area, it now converts to a targeting foul.

The opportunity here for defenders is when you see that player go into a slide, pull up, stay off his head, and hopefully there's a player change of behavior there that helps us. And, again, a player safety-type situation.

Now, next there's a change in our timeouts. So, the length of a charge team timeout. Before in a game -- every one of our games are on TV now. If all the TV timeouts had been exhausted and a team called timeout, they would automatically -- you see our referee signal 30-second timeout. Well, the coaches talked, and they said sometimes TV finish late in the game, but we really need to talk strategy, and a 30-second timeout is very difficult to do that.

So now once per half the head coach can extend. And this is the signal you'll use when communicating with the officials. If he calls a timeout and TV is completed and it would have been a 30-second timeout, he can now extend it to a full team timeout so he can discuss strategy with his team.

The other thing I'll mention, during extra periods, during overtime, you don't carry overtime timeouts, but each team gets one timeout per overtime period, and that one the coach can decide if he wants to extend it to a full team timeout.

And now briefly just some quick walkthrough of some of the other changes. I want to talk about this first one. We had a great discussion with our head coaches in Destin. For a number of years, if a player got two unsportsmanlike conduct fouls in a game, then he was automatically disqualified. But there was never any impact for the coach.

So the rule change now is if we have two unsportsmanlike on a specific coach, so it could be the head coach or coordinator, whatever, but two on a specific coach, then that coach is disqualified as well.

Now, let me make an aside statement. In my ten years as coordinator, we never had two on a coach, and I expect our guys to work that sideline and manage the behavior. But it is there as a deterrent from a coaching perspective and probably a good change. A change in blocking below the waist.

I won't spend a lot of time with that other than to say the rules committee is tightening in, blocking below the waist.

So the primary change of this. Where you could block low is now moving from the eight yards wide which would include the tight end to now the tackle box. So those people in the tackle box can block below the waist until the ball leaves that tackle box. And a player in the backfield that's lined up stationary there can block below the waist but can't leave it and come back in and block. That eliminates the H back kind of looping around and blocking around. Again, another change to make the game safer.

Another one on safety. We all know tripping in the game. And tripping is defined not just tripping a guy up, but using below your knee and kind of cracking him across the shins to trip a player. You can't do that, but there was always an exception. You could do that to a runner.

We saw last year a number of times when guys kind of tripped the runner, kicked the runner and it wasn't a foul, it created injury, so this is a good, again, player safety change where so now any type of tripping is a foul.

Definition of the game clock in the last two minutes of the half. If there's a foul by the team ahead in the score, some parameters around it, but the clock will start on the snap. And that really is a good change, because before -- and we used like the last five minutes of the half where the referee kind of has his discretion, but now in the last two minutes it's set by rule, and so that's good.

And the last bullet up here I'll mention, there's going to be a lot of discussion on this through the offseason, but it is around technology for coaching purposes. The rules committee initially said that we could use technology. The coaches could use technology in the coaching booth and in the locker room.

A lot of debate: How do we do it? How do we make it consistent? We need more dialogue on this nationally. So the rules committee went back in and postponed this to 2017. But you're going to see a lot of discussion around that in the offseason.

And then I want to talk about the points of emphasis, not a lot different here, but targeting and dangerous contact fouls, it stays number one with our officials. In the Southeastern Conference last year, we had 20 targeting fouls, five overturns. Okay? And really that's -- there was a trend up a little in targeting, but we've added so many more components where we have defenseless player. We're seeing a player behavior change, and I think we're making good progress around targeting.

Coaches' sideline management control. We talked



about the two unsportsmanlike, but we again used our warnings. Last year we had 16 warnings, and we only had three 15-yard penalties on the sidelines. I think that's a good process. I would like to get that to zero.

And managing pace of play and substitutions, a couple quick facts. We added an eighth official. I mentioned that up front. Really very successful. We managed the game, the up tempo very well, but everybody's fear was we're going to add this guy, a lot more penalties in the game, right? Well, the Delta year over year -- in 2014 we had 12.96 fouls per game. Last year, 13.0. So the Delta was 0.04 increase in fouls. So we help manage preventive officiating, and I think all of that was good.

And then unsportsmanlike conduct fouls was the focus. I think we made good progress there again. We had on average less than one per game in the SEC last year. So we need to continue that trend. I know a few years ago we made some changes there. We thought we were ruining the game. But I think we made the game better. We don't see these great demonstrations as a guy is running for a touchdown. So I think that's been good.

That's a flow-through of the rule changes. There's a few more that we talked with coaches, but those are the main ones that you'll notice.

So the expectation that everybody has on our officials is perfection. Absolute perfection. And I'm going to tell you, that's a lofty goal. That's a tough goal. And really my expectation for our officials is that each official is performing at their upper limit. They're meeting or exceeding the standard, the high standard that we set in the SEC for officiating.

And I want you to know you've got my personal commitment that our officials will work hard in preparing, they're going to work hard in their execution on game day, and they're going to work in the postgame to take learnings from the week and incorporate that into their performance going forward.

I'm excited to get this season underway. Our officials are working hard, and they are going to work very hard to deliver this fall. And why? Why do we work so hard? Well, as you heard yesterday, it just means more down here. Thank you.