

Southeastern Conference Football Media Days

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Steve Shaw

SEC Coordinator of Football Officials

COMMISSIONER SANKEY: Welcome, everyone to day two of SEC Football Media Days. Our first speaker this morning is Steve Shaw. Steve is beginning his ninth season as the SEC's coordinator of football officials. I will explain what that job explains.

Tomorrow you'll hear from him about the substance and activity within our specific officiating program. Today Steve is also the NCAA's secretary-editor for football rules. We'll talk about rule changes, and points and emphasis for the coming season. Steve Shaw, the SEC's coordinator of football officials.

STEVE SHAW: Well, good morning and welcome. I'm excited about the start of our season, and really, yesterday, Commissioner talked a lot about our officiating program, and that lead into a very, very busy offseason.

In addition to our evaluation process that we go through, our camps and our clinics, we had a great clinic, media clinic, at the Georgia spring game. In addition to all that, we spent a lot of time with some consultants really to look at our program from the toss to the final whistle, and to look at ways that we can get better.

And in fact, Commissioner began to challenge not own myself, but all of our officials starting last December in Atlanta in a meeting that we had, and we're going to look at -- he challenged us to look at ways to get better, what resources do we need. So that's what we've been about in this offseason.

As you know, as he mentioned yesterday, we engaged Deloitte Consulting. And they've come in and interviewed all of the people that Greg talked about, and there are a number of takeaways. I'll tell what my biggest three takeaways from our Deloitte process was, number one, they affirmed our selection process, our training process, and our evaluation process.

And, in fact, it compared favorably to, not only our peer conferences, but they looked internationally. And so I think that's a positive thing that we can use and build on. But also my second takeaway was around analytics. We have a lot of data, and we look at this data in a lot of different ways. There's opportunity to



kind of go to the next level in this new analytics world. And I think that's something we'll embark on.

And finally, and maybe the most impactful, is around communications. And they were very positive on our communications with our coaches, our athletic directors, back to our schools and what we do there, things we can build on. But that's pretty positive. Where there's opportunity for improvement is communications with, not only you, our great media partners, but with our fans in the SEC as well. So that's something that we'll be looking at and working at.

And so I think, as an outcome of all of this, you're going to see us embrace some new things, some new ideas, and our officiating program, this is nothing new as far as change. I mean, we've been innovative out there. We were the first to introduce the O to O, the official-to-official communications. We've done the voiceover videos to coaches.

Even last year we introduced a TV time-out clock that was really successful. So we're going to embrace change. But I think in 2019, you're going to see some things change from us. It's already started. Commissioner mentioned we sent the referees, our white hats, to Destin to meet with the coaches, make better communications there.

We're going to put -- we're going to put our crews in with our schools for a two-day camp, as we start preparing for the season. We're going to have a monitor on the sideline to help communications back to the coaches on reviews. So there's a number of things we're going to do. But I think most importantly, this thing we talked about is communications to media and to our fans is something that is going to be very important for us.

Now, all of these new ideas, all of these new techniques, really leverage all three points I want to make. The first point, Commissioner mentioned it yesterday, we have honorable people working our games. We have honorable people. That's very important.

Second, a reality of my job, mistakes are going to be made, but what I want you to know that we're going to work incessantly to correct those mistakes and

hopefully prevent them from happening at all. That's our job.

And then finally, the more you see of what we do -- and let me pause and give a commercial -- you want to be back tomorrow at 8:30 because we're going to have an inside view of SEC officiating, and also an opportunity for a "you make the call" a clicker exercise. Cole Cunningham, our video director, won't let me call them clickers. They're interactive devices. But we'll put them in your hands and you make the call. We'll talk through that. It will be a fun, interactive session. But this morning, the more you see of what we do, the more we think you'll embrace and understand our program. I'm excited about that, and I hope you come back tomorrow.

Let's transition into rule changes as we head into the 2019 season, and let me tell you what you're going to see in our rule changes is a continuing effort to enhance player safety. Now, this is an off year for rule changes. You're familiar with the rule change process. It's a two-year cycle. This is an off year, which means there's a number of things we can do, but everything we're going to talk about today, this changing in our game, is to enhance player safety. And that's where we need to be. That's where our rules committee is. So, a lot of great input now coming back into our rules committee, not only from commissioners, from officials, from coordinators, from the coaches themselves through AFCA, we get great input back into it, but it all evolves around player safety, very important to note.

So, as we move into the changes, this is the one that probably gets talked about the most. Obviously, targeting is one of the most important calls in our game. And I want you to remember as we talk about this, this is not a rule that is trying to be punitive to the player, it is to change player behavior. We want them to play the game in a safer way. Keep their head up, see what they hit. Really take the head out of the game. So that's what targeting's all around.

But the change this year, which I think is a really good change, is evolving around instant replay. And although this rule has been very successful in changing player behavior, there was a component in it that -- that could be a gotcha, and that was almost a double negative. We tell the officials on the field, when in question, put your marker down. It's a foul. That's the instructions that they get.

And part of that was from the history of this rule, would officials even call it, we have to change the game. So, we're not changing anything as far as how we instruct our officials on the field to make a call. What we are changing is in replay. Because there were times when we would, you know, it's a high hit, it's fast, it's violent, it

happens quick. We put the marker on the field. You know the philosophy around replay. The ruling on the field is correct unless there's indisputable video evidence to overturn it. We're changing that for targeting.

What we're going to do, we're going to tell the replay official now, when you get a targeting foul, we want you to start back at the beginning of it. And for it to stay targeting, you must be able to confirm all aspects of a targeting foul for it to be confirmed. There is no option anymore for stands in targeting. It will either be confirmed or overturned. And to be confirmed, all aspects must be there. So, that's a very important kind of note for replay officials, is we're not just falling to the ruling on the field is correct. They have to validate all of it. So no option for stands.

And so let's walk through really the elements of targeting. As you can see, we have two flavors. There's targeting with the crown of the helmet, and there's targeting a defenseless player. The elements if you're targeting with the crown of the element -- and I want to look at a few of these words because they are very important -- a player takes aim at an opponent for the purpose of attacking -- that's an important word; you're going to see that repetitive in here -- attacking with forcible contact with the crown of the helmet. And secondly, an indicator of targeting must be present, and we'll walk through those.

In our 9-1-4, which is targeting a defenseless player, number one, you have to have a defenseless player. Number two, you have to take aim for the purposes of attacking -- again that word -- with forcible contact to the head or neck area, and then finally, an indicator of targeting must be present. So, if it's targeting a defenseless player, replay must confirm three things before the targeting foul is enforced and the player is disqualified.

So, let's talk about what are the indicators. I know this is a lot. We won't spend a lot of time here but it's important you know this is a component that must be confirmed as well. So, if you go back to the -- really the definition of targeting, it again uses that word "attacking" and forcible contact. So that's a component of it.

But the indicators, they are not limited to these. There can be other indicators. But what we see 95-plus percent of the time in targeting is these are the indicators.

Number one is the launch. We're all very familiar with that. But the second is a crouch followed by an upward and forward thrust. So many times it's not a full launch, but you see that upward thrust. That's an indicator.

Leading with the helmet or other components can be an indicator. And then finally just lowering the head before attacking can be an indicator. So, that's an important part of this.

So, let's take a look at some plays. And I want to put these up and kind of talk through them. So, here's a play, and this one is pretty straightforward. So, from the line feed, you really don't see a lot there. Unfortunately you see the player down. Here you see what a replay official would look at. And as we back this up, this is the crown of the helmet targeting. So, two things. Number one, is there forcible contact with the crown of the helmet? I think we can all agree, check that box.

The second is, is there an indicator and what you see at the last moment, this player ducks his head. That's a dangerous move. He needs to keep the head up. So he ducks his head. Both elements here because this is crown would be confirmed. This player would be disqualified.

Let's look at another play that would really highlight and illustrate the need for the rule change for this year. Here's play -- we would support the ruling on the field of targeting. It's a big hit to a defenseless receiver. It's a high hit. Then as we look at it, then what you have to say, all right, now you're the replay official, do you have a defenseless player. No question. This receiver is a defenseless player. So you check that box. Is there forcible contact to the head or neck area? Boom!

Right there. Yes, there is. Is there an indicator? If you watch this player, he's not attacking the receiver. He's really playing the ball. You see hand's outstretched. He's really running through the receiver. He's not attacking him. Their helmets collide, but there's no attack here. This would not a targeting foul. This would be overturned by replay based on our new component of not being able to confirm all aspects.

Here's another play, things that sometimes look like targeting, you have to be in replay, go back, so, you see, boom! A big high hit. Ruling on the field was targeting. But then you start to look at it, defenseless player, yes. Is there a launch? Absolutely. This -- I'm not sure I can see a bigger launch, so we have an indicator. But is there forcible contact to the head or neck area, you can't confirm that there. So, this would be a play that would be overturned.

And then we'll look at one more or a couple more. This is a play that's a hit on the quarterback. And we always think a helmet to helmet, but this is a targeting foul. This is a crown of a helmet hit. You see the player, he lowers his head. Even though he makes no contact into the helmet of that quarterback, he attacks

with the crown of his helmet into his opponent. That's a foul. And again that's a dangerous play. That's the type play we're trying to get out of the game.

And then finally, and here's where you're go see situations where under the new rule, a guy makes a play that we really don't like, but it could get overturned. Now, here's an important thing I want you to note, on this play, the ruling on the field was roughing the passer with targeting. And any time you hear that phrase "with targeting," know this, even though we go to replay, we're going to have a 15-yard penalty. The roughing the passer is not reviewable, but the targeting is.

So here, is it a defenseless player, no question. Is there an indicator? Yes. You see him go forward high. But can you confirm that there's forcible contact to the head or neck area? Really the head to the side, can't confirm that. So we would overturn the targeting, but there would still be a 15-yard penalty here for the roughing the passer component.

Now, another aspect of targeting, which is important to note, and this is really a signal by the rules committee to talk to those players that really need to work with their technique. So we're calling it a progressive penalty. So if a student-athlete gets a third targeting foul in the same season, then they would be disqualified for the game they're in and then the following entire game. Okay. This would be on the third targeting foul, and it's really designed as an encouragement to get that player to work on his technique, if he commits multiple targeting fouls, there must be something there from a technique that we need to work on. So encouraging to get with the coach to figure this out, where we don't have a risk of putting that player in a progressive penalty.

Let me say two components about targeting, so as we said now, stands is no longer an option. We had roughly 12 percent of targeting fouls in FBS nationally that were stands last year. Will that hold? Will that be the number? I don't know, but that's kind of the back data. And we also, in FBS, there were three players last year that had three targeting fouls. So when I -- it's not going to be everybody, but we're really trying to work on those players that need to work on their technique.

Okay. Overtime scoring. So this is a change to our overtime. Many of you all recall the LSU/Texas A&M game at the end of the season. In that game, 255 plays. That is a lot of plays. And think of the student-athletes on the field for that timing, we needed to take a look at -- at some point, we've got to get the players off the field. However, nobody wants a tie. That's number one. Number two, and the rules committee

talked about this, our overtime procedure is really good.

In fact, a lot of people think it's probably better than maybe the NFL, better than the high school rule. So the rules committee didn't want to ruin the overtime, but at some point, we needed to get the players off the field.

So as we talked through it, there's a natural break right now. If you notice after the second overtime, then the third overtime, after two, the third, you must go for two. The idea is two-point plays or a 50/50 opportunity. So the chance now that the teams will, you know, not match and score, so that was a way to help in the game. So the rules committee said let's leave the first two overtimes as is. We have a natural break. Let's leave the second two overtimes, but if we finish four overtimes, then it's time to make a change and that change is simply this. In the fifth overtime, it will all be handled administratively the same way. Whoever's choice it is will choose offense, defense or the end of the field will play that overtime period. But we're going to go immediately to the two-point play. We will not have a series. We'll put the ball on the 3-yard line and one team will have an opportunity, flip it over, ball on the 3-yard line, the other team will have an opportunity.

It's a way to still ultimately decide the game, but it's time. There's too many plays on some of these games. So this will be a great way to do it without changing the fabric of overtime. So I think that's a good change.

Now, here's another, and again this is rooted in player safety around kick-offs. And so quick, kind of history on kick-offs, we're working to make this play a safer play. As you know, last year, we introduced the fair catch to actually allow a team to have a play that looks like a touchback. And the reason that was important in our game was that play we had seen touchback plays have a lower injury rate. Well, here's the net of what happened last year, the injury rate on kickoffs came down.

The overall injury rate is equal to a normal play. However, however, we still have a high percentage of upper body injuries, so we still have work to do. So, this year, simply stated, if a team forms a two-man wedge, two guys shoulder to shoulder within two yards of each other, it is now a foul, whether there's contact or not. If it's a touchback play, kick out of bounds or fair catch, it's not a foul.

Let's look at a couple plays from that. And we're just going to illustrate this from last year, things that were not fouls, but will be. If you see in the back end, these two players coming together shoulder to shoulder, that would now be a foul. Okay. And we see one on the

front end of the formation as well. What you see here are two players coming together. We'll highlight it, shoulder to shoulder, and so that would be a foul. We'll step through these quickly. Here's a situation -- now this is a touchback play, so there would be no foul, but on the back end, you see these two guys coming together. Had there been a turn, it would have been a foul. It doesn't eliminate double team blocks. I want to point out a block on the front end of this. You see right here, these guys are coming from different levels. They are not shoulder to shoulder. This is not a foul. This is an acceptable way to deliver a double-team block.

A couple more examples. Here is one. On a deep kickoff, if you look at the deep guys, they're really good. Good spacing. No issue there. But on the front end again, you're going to see these two players come together and form a wedge. And when you have a wedge, you have a wedge buster, and that's what can create the opportunity for injury.

And here's just another example, this is from an NFL game, but here you see a two-man wedge, that's a foul, but then in the middle of the field, what you're going to see is two guys doing it properly where they may set up for a double-team block, but they are not shoulder to shoulder. There's no wedge buster coming down, so that's a legal play. So that's a change around player safety that I really don't think you'll see this call much because our special teams coaches are going to adjust and not create these two-man wedges.

Another player safety change is around blind-side blocks. We kind of know what these blind-side blocks, you can read the definition here, but the key component is a block against an opponent that is initiated from outside that player's field of vision.

The rule is no player should deliver a blind-side block by, again, attacking an opponent with forcible contact. It's a personal foul, 15-yard penalty. So let's look at a couple plays from games. This is like the poster child of a blind-side block. From the blind side, and the player lights up this other play, whatever the vernacular is, and this is a dangerous hit, and quite frankly a hit that if he just made -- screened him or whatever, would have been an effective block.

Here's another one where you're going to see in the middle of the field, you're going to see two players deliver blind-side blocks. You can see it setting up right there. These two guys have a bead on these guys and deliver that block. So that would be a foul.

Now, let me just say what is allowed, obviously, if you deliver a block with extended hands, a screen, well, we've learned a lot of new terms, but here's one where

there is a screen block. The guy actually gets two players, and there's no forcible contact. That's a good play. And then we learned a new term, spray paint block. You're going to see one here. Right there, you can see the player really even made no contact. He just kind of sprints right by. And really if you just take them off of their pursuit angle, they're not going to make the play. The goal of this rule is to allow the guy to block, but have both players play the next play.

And here's one, not just kick plays, here's a play where you're going to see a receiver go in back toward the ball and blind side a guy with force. This would be a foul. So, again, his options, extended hands, screen, you know, absorb, but just not deliver and attack with forcible contact.

A couple other changes that we'll talk about, so now we're making a change for the defense. We've always had, when the offense was allowed to block below the waist and we made changes in that, when they were allowed to block below the waist. It had to be directed from the front.

But the defense did not have that same requirement. Now, the defense can block below the waist within five yards of the line of scrimmage below either way. There's a ten yard belt. Now they have the same requirement as an offensive player. That is their block, if it's low, must be directed from the front.

And one final change that we'll mention, and this is going to take effect in 2020, but now, the crew assignments will include instant replay, and they must all be from the same assigning organization. Years ago, there were split crews on the field where half the crew was from one conference, half from the another. Never really worked out well. A change made years ago said the crew is all from the same conference.

Now we're extending that, and beginning in 2020 it's going to be including replay all from the same conference. And this is really a good change from our officials that are used to working together. They're crew, they are paired up. And so I think this will be one that will be -- will be a benefit for us as crews to be more successful.

So, that's a flyover of our rule changes for the year. We're excited about the season. We understand from you guys and from the world, the expectations are high. Never been higher. We understand we're under incredible scrutiny, never has it been more with the technology out there. The world is changing. So, we're going to try to do some new things to, you know, help in communications, and we're really looking forward to it. So, we can't wait for kick-off. And hope you have a great day. Thank you very much.