

Southeastern Conference Football Media Days

Tuesday July 11, 2017

Steve Shaw

SEC Coordinator of Football Officials

STEVE SHAW: Good morning, and thank you, Kevin. It's great to be here. And as I stand here before you, we're two weeks and two days until our officials' report for our fall camp here in Birmingham. And that's three intense days of work. We'll test the rules knowledge. We'll check their physical conditioning, their mile and a half run. That's one of their favorite things. Then we'll spend a lot of time with video looking at mechanics, philosophies, and really all to culminate what we have done in the spring and summer to get us ready to go for scrimmages. So it's here.

Officiating now has become a year-long occupation. It's no longer come back to camp and getting ready. Our guys are getting ready right now. Normally we start with rule changes, but I want to hit one thing before we get into our rule changes.

Commissioner Sankey talked about it yesterday. I really want to thank Commissioner Sankey and our athletic directors for their commitment to technology to make our officiating better. Starting from when I first started there, we upgraded our video capability to help evaluation and really to grade games in a better way and to teach in a better way.

We went to the 020, Official-to-Official communication. We were the first to experiment with that. That's the wireless system. And now every major conference in the NFL uses that. We upgraded all our video instant replay equipment in stadium last year. And probably most significantly, and we're going to throw up a picture of it, we built a video center in the conference office and started a centralized collaborative replay process and just wanted you to see this. Commissioner mentioned it.

And in this room, this is where we have our three instant replay officials. And any time we have a stop in a game, those three officials collaborate together and with the instant replay official in the stadium to ensure that we have a correct outcome. And so it was very successful last year. As Commissioner mentioned, we're going to continue it this year. And our hope is it becomes a permanent rule change.

And just a quick report out on that as we look at some of the numbers, and you can see these numbers here,



we average about 2.2 stops a game. And so it's critical that we're successful with these stops.

And as you see here, our goals from last year, our first goal was not perfection. Perfection is in the eye of the beholder. But the two goals that we had; consistency, we wanted consistency from the morning to the night from September to November, but even more important than that, we wanted to avoid incorrect outcomes. And we were very successful with that. We evaluate every stop for the year.

And basically, for the year, we feel like the center helped us avoid. It was about an 8 percent improvement in avoiding incorrect outcomes, and that's what we were looking for. It was also some help. It was not primary, but was some help as you can see, with getting the game stopped, but we got to still make some improvements there, but that really has to come from the replay official in the stadium.

Now, one of the biggest concerns last year in this was the average time of replay. And as you can see on the chart, we averaged 1 minute, 26 last year, which was right on our two-year average. So we didn't extend the game. So, here's the point -- and there were learnings as we went throughout the year. Week one -- so it was a 13-week season. Week one, we were 1 minute, 45. Week two, we were 1 minute, 44, but then we started to drive efficiency in the system and was able to throughout the balance of the year get the number back right on our average.

So we intend to continue that. We'll talk about time of games, and everybody has concerns there, but Commissioner has given us pretty direct feedback. Without losing the fundamental components of this, we still have to be accurate, but we need to drive that time even lower. And so that's one of the things that we're going to really work on this year. And in addition to, as you can see, the missed stops, we really want to avoid missed stops.

But you think of that with our up-tempo teams, the hardest decision sometimes that replay official has to make is stopping the game. In the old days, he got plenty of time, look at many replays. Now he may get one replay and has to make a decision. So that's very difficult. That's another area where we're really going

to push on this year.

We saw collaborative replay as something that helped us. We see other conferences now adopting it, and I think it's here to stay. So we're looking forward to improvements in efficiencies this year over last year, and we're excited about that.

All right. Now, shifting gears, let's talk about our rule changes. And before I get started, one last thing Commissioner mentioned that I want to address, I will, on September 1, take over as NCAA secretary-rules editor, and I am -- I'm humbled. I'm honored by that. I've always been a student of our rules. I have a strong passion for our rules and obviously our game. And I think our game is in great shape today, but the challenges we face today are very, very different than we've ever faced before. The game has never been safer.

You heard Coach Bielema talk about that yesterday, but everything we talk about from a rules perspective, everything, has to have -- it must go through the lens of player safety. So we're committed to that. There are great learnings from the game. There are great benefits. It creates leaders, leaders for our country, at a time we need that. It's a great game. We have to enhance it. We have to protect it, but it has to have player safety as a focal point.

I'm excited about that. But as we move into our rule changes for this year, the first thing I always like to remind everybody, we have a two-year rules cycle. This is an off year for rules. Basically what I mean by that is only changes this year can evolve around player safety. In an on year, anything is up. This year player safety are the only things.

As far as rule changes, pretty light year, but there's some mechanics things that I want to talk about that will have impact. And then finally, the process -- the Rules Committee votes, there's the prop Playing Rules Oversight Panel that evaluates that and must approve it. The new committee, it was mentioned yesterday as well, Scott Stricklin from the SEC is on this, but it's our Competition Committee, and the goal of that Competition Committee is really to take a long look at the game and give great feedback into the Rules Committee. And so we're just starting that up, but already that has shown promise as we start.

All right. As we roll into our rule changes, so the first one -- and this is where I mentioned Playing Rules Oversight Panel, so I want to start with the highlighted point there. Playing Rules Oversight Panel delayed implementation of this knee pad rule for one year. And so I'll talk about the rule. I'll come back and really explain why. But basically, the rule now is going to

state that you have to wear a kneepad. It's got to cover the knee, and the pant has got to cover the kneepad and cover the knee. And so that will not take effect until next season.

Now, how do you handle that? So as an official, if a player isn't wearing his equipment properly, then simply he's asked to leave the game, and then he's got to stay out of play until he gets it corrected. So, I think that will -- players, as we have learned, their most precious commodity to them is playing time. And so I think we're going to see players kind of work into this rule.

Why was it delayed? Well, a lot of our equipment managers had said I learned more about pants in the offseason this year than I've ever learned. But when you order pants, you can order the normal, a longer inseam, a shorter inseam. Because the player like to wear them short, many equipment managers have already ordered the shorter inseam bands, so it's difficult for those players to cover their needs. So they really needed a year to catch up on their equipment. That really is why it was delayed.

I want to make one point on this if we go to the next slide, this year, even though the rule doesn't take effect, players still have to wear pants. As you can see from this video, these really wouldn't qualify as pants. So even this year, even without the rule, we're not going to get technical is it's over the knee or under the knee, but if a player is wearing something that resembles shorts, we're still going to ask them to get out of the game. This is the look. Obviously player safety is important, but this not a good look in our game. But even this year where they wear these very, very short pants, we're going to ask them to leave the game. Remember that rule delayed until 2018.

Now, secondly, and this is a player safety, and we want to look at some video on this, but let me talk about it first. So we have changed leaping and hurdling on field goals and extra points. So basically, the old rule was very, very difficult. It mattered where you took off from, did you land on players or not, a lot of different components. So now the Rules Committee really simplified this. So what the rule now says that if a defensive player runs forward and leaps or hurdles to block a field goal or an extra point, then it's a foul.

Now, the exception to that is if you're in a stationary position within one yard of the line of scrimmage, then it's legal. Then you can jump. Now, it doesn't mean you can't run forward. You can go through a gap. You can do whatever, but you just can't leap or hurdle. Then you say why is this player safety. Let's look at a couple plays, a couple plays from last year. This first one we'll look at is from the Vanderbilt-Auburn game. You'll see pretty athletic play. Run that back, Cole,

Cole Cunningham in the back is our director of video. He does a great job.

You'll see this player run forward, leaps over everybody, blocks the kick. Everybody said that's just a great athletic play. And occasionally -- we saw that in the Super Bowl. Occasionally it works like this, however, more often than not what happens -- so here is actually the same day. The next video is from the Kentucky-Georgia game. Let me set the stage. Fourth quarter, three seconds, tie-ball game, so it's desperation. Right? So now what we're going to see, it's probably easier to see on the coach's film. Cole, let's go to the coach's satellite. Watch this player. He runs forward. But what happens to him? He goes straight down on his head. And that's what you see more often than not.

So this was player safety not only for the hurdler or the leaper, but also from the standpoint of as he's leaping, if the center pulls up, he can kick him in the head or whatever. So the Rules Committee felt that we just needed this play out of the game. And so now by this rule change, it will be, so a player safety component.

And then finally, really the third primary change this year is around horse-collar tackle. So, the change is very subtle, very slight. You know, before to be a horse collar, and we know horse collar is when you get your hand in the shoulder pads or the collar of the jersey and immediately pull that player back or down, that's a horse-collar foul.

And so what we saw is players that met -- you know, we would look at the video on Monday and try to determine did his fingers get in there or not, but they were grabbing high on the jersey. And it was the same snapping action back, the dangerous component. So now what's been added to the horse collar is the nameplate area. So if a player grabs, you know, in the collar or in the nameplate area, and we get that immediate snapback, then that is a horse collar.

And just, you know, FYI, because some people don't know this rule, it doesn't apply to a ball carrier, including a potential passer who's inside the tackle box. I just want you to be aware of that. But in open field, we've expanded the horse-collar rule, and so now the name-plate area. And you say why is it called name-plate area? There's some teams that don't have nameplates, so -- or if they move their nameplate around, it's that normal name-plate area right below the collar, okay?

So that's really it for the rule changes. So you look at it and say, yeah, that's a pretty slight year. So a couple mechanics changes, and this first one I want to talk about probably has garnered the most discussion with our coaches. But this year, we're going to really

continue our journey on sideline management. So let me preface this to say, the coaches, especially the head coaches, they are the face of our game. They are iconic in our game. And so officials probably haven't done as good a job as we should have done in keeping the sideline clear. So we've had coaches kind of come out on the field in protest. In fact, somebody said to me, you take a lot more off a coach than you ever would with a player. That's very true. Some of the things we would have flagged a player immediately.

So this year, and this is not just Shaw and the SEC, this is a national component. And we have talked to every coach about it. If a coach comes out onto the field of play, so in the green grass, and protests an officiating decision, it's an automatic unsportsmanlike conduct foul. So as we look at some of the words -- and this isn't a surprise. We actually looked at a lot of video with our coaches in Destin. We talked about this fully. And the goal is not to flag coaches, not in any way. The goal is really to change coaching behavior, keep them -- and if they stay in the white, if they stay on the boundary, they'll be given all of the latitude that they've gotten over all these years, but if they come out onto the field of play, then it's going to be an unsportsmanlike conduct foul.

This has the total support of the Rules Committee. It has the total support of the Competition Committee, and it's a national mechanic, and we're going to adhere to it. And we communicated it well with our coaches.

Go to the next slide, Cole. And here's some of the words -- we actually got a document that we sent the coaches. Like I said, we looked at a lot of film. They're fully versed on the sideline. Now, one other thing I will remind you a couple years ago the change was made if you get two unsportsmanlike conduct fouls in a game, you're disqualified. So hopefully here we're not doing this to penalize coaches. We're doing this to change the coach's behavior, keep them in the team area, in the white, if they want to have a discussion with our officials.

That will be a pretty big change, but I think our hope is our coaches adjust, and it becomes a nonissue. And then -- but it doesn't change. We still have a sideline warning if they're crowding the sideline or the team is out of the team area. We still have a sideline warning. It's a warning, a five yard, a five yard then a 15-yard penalty. This other you can go to immediately if they come out to protest an officiating decision, but we still have the other warning process.

However, one change you will see, in the past, on the warning, we didn't drop a flag. We are going to drop a flag now on the warning. Okay? The other thing I want to talk about briefly is targeting. And so we made no

rule changes. In fact, the Rules Committee, I believe, is very comfortable that the targeting rule is being affected. Now, in season last year, we made some modifications. So I'm going to borrow your prop if that's okay. In season, we had some clarification. You know, what is crown of helmet? A lot of people have thought the button, you know, the button on your cap or the helmet was crown of helmet, crown of the helmet hit, but we really got clarification to say, where the facemask bolts into the helmet, there is a halo, if you will, all of the way around the helmet and that becomes the crown.

And so as we know, if you used the crown of helmet to deliver a blow, then that's a foul. So we got some clarification there. But if you look at the stats from last year in the SEC, we had 26 targeting fouls for the season, 5 of which were initiated in the replay booth. And remember, the Rules Committee gave replay more authority to look at all aspects of a targeting hit, but also the ability to stop the game if the foul was not called on the field. And we did that five times. We had five overturns from last year. So it's not something -- the way we talk about it, you would think there's hundreds and hundreds of these. They're very few, but they are hits we really need to get out of the game. And I really think we're making progress.

Coach Bielema talked about if you watch film, those head hits are coming out. I think that's really good. We're going the right direction on targeting. And length of game, everybody's talking about length of game. Here's some stats from the SEC, our average, 3 hours and 26 minutes. We have a couple games that went less than 3 hours. We had four games that went over 4 hours. Two of those were overtime. The style of game is different. People are concerned about this time. However, the question being asked by the Rules Committee, what is the optimal time. Nobody's really answered that question yet. Everybody knows it's creeping up, and so we've gotten very direct feedback from our Rules Committee about what is to be done about pace of these games.

So if we go the next slide, the Rules Committee did not want to make any change in the playing rules that would change the dynamic of the game or take plays out of the game. Okay? That's kind of the last step. So they have given us specific guidelines that involves officials as well into help moving the game along, keep the game moving. And so the first of those that you'll notice is halftime. Now the rule book says halftime is 20 minutes. And this year, halftime is going to be 20 minutes. This, again, is a national perspective.

So what you'll see by the referee, last play, the clock runs out, last play of the first half, you'll scan the field and make sure there's no fouls, no injured players.

He'll make sure that, you know, no replay is getting involved in the play. He'll make sure there's no coach's challenge, but when the play is settled, then he'll declare the half over, and he'll wind the clock immediately. So we won't wait for the coach interviews and all that. So we're asking our game management to really help, get the coaches on the boundary so we can get the bands out or the activity started.

But halftime is going to be 20 minutes. And when the 20 minutes goes to zero, our officials are going to break. We are going to blow the whistle and kick it off. We had great conversation with your TV partners, both SEC and ESPN. We are at our national rules meeting, but this will save some time in the game. A couple other things, again working with our TV and media partners to be efficient getting in and out of the game. And so we're going to work very, very well with our officials to do that.

And then finally, we have some mechanics things nationally that we have looked at so we have consistency in restarting the clock. An example would be, we have a run out of bounds. So then by rule, when the ball is ready, we wind the clock back except for the last two minutes.

Well, when is the ball ready? So now we have given them specific guidelines when the center judge is spotting the ball, start the clock. If we still have substitutions, we're still going to allow the substitutions, but we'll start the clock even if we're holding it for substitution process as designated by the rules. Officials need to be consistent in keeping the game moving. Halftime, in and out of media timeouts, after scores, we'll keep the game moving. That's the impetus we've gotten from the Rules Committee and that's the expectations we have of our officials.

And so one last thing I'll mention before I close, is we've got a coach's survey going right now. Player safety again, blocking below the waist, and we really want to get coach's feedback on blocking below the waist and ineligible receivers down field. That's a safety issue, but we really want to know where the coaches come out and really what their feedback is for the good of the game. And so we look to get that in the offseason, and we'll get that. Actually it's coming in as we speak.

So, finally our points of emphasis, we talked about every one of these including unsportsmanlike. We've really made great progress with players on unsportsmanlike conduct. So no change from that perspective. So really, to net it out, we're excited about this season. You know, we've got our officials coming in. The game is changing. The game gets faster. The game gets tougher to officiate. And the things that

worked last year won't work this year. So as coordinators, we're committed through video study, you know, through time with our officials, to get our guys better. You know, my commitment to you, is when we kick it off, our guys will be ready to go. I appreciate your time today. Thank you.