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WEEKLY FLASH
8/25/03

All:

After meeting with our Atlantic 10 Coaching Staffs for the last few weeks to review and discuss this seasons rules changes, mechanics, reporting, and our new “web site” it has become obvious to me that the single biggest question that needs to be addressed and understood by both our coaches and our officiating staff involves the new “kick catch interference” rules. I have put together a list of “guidelines” below to be used this season. Please review them thoroughly.

Rule 6 Section 5 Article 1.a.

When a Team B player makes a fair catch, the ball becomes dead where caught and belongs to Team B at that spot (**Exception: When a valid fair catch signal is made, the unimpeded opportunity to catch a free kick or scrimmage kick is extended to a player who muffs the kick and still has an opportunity to complete the catch. This protection terminates when the kick touches the ground. If the player subsequently catches the kick the ball is placed where it was first touched.**

Guidelines (when a Team B player is positioning himself to catch a kick – with or without a “fair catch” signal)

1. A kicking team player (“*gunner*”) may not:
 - stop near the *receiver* as he positions himself normally to catch the ball
 - be in the *receivers* path as he moves to position himself to catch the ball
 - run near or sprint passing by (“*buzz*”) the receiver
 - shout at the *receiver*
 - wave his hands/arms at the *receiver*

Keep in mind that all of the above acts are designed to “break down the concentration of the receiver who is very vulnerable as he gets ready to catch the ball”. All would be considered fouls without contact.

2. The proximity of the *gunner* to the *receiver* in these situations is the primary factor in determining when a foul has occurred. We need to allow the *receiver* an opportunity to “reach out or up” to catch the ball. This reaching distance by a *receiver* may vary but under most circumstances should be the distance from the players shoulder to the fingertips. This distance is a good method to apply when making your

judgment. Keep in mind that this foul may occur as the *gunner* stops in front of the *receiver* or as the *gunner* passes by the *receiver*. If the *gunner* passes by the *receiver* during the time the *receiver* is turning to make the catch a foul would have occurred since this would have limited the receiver's adjustment. However if the *gunner* had already passed by the *receiver* prior to any adjustment this may not be a foul. The covering official needs to see the play complete itself before determining whether or not a foul occurred.

3. Legal and illegal contact with the *receiver*:

During a play in which a “valid fair catch signal” has been given by the *receiver* he may not be hit. He must also be permitted to complete the catch after a muff, bobbling the ball or mishandling the ball (providing the ball does not hit the ground). He may not in any way be impeded from moving to catch the ball or to establish possession after first touching the kick in the air. The *gunner* may not be in the receivers path as he approaches the ball or after a muff/bobble as the receiver takes a new or continued path to establish possession.

During a play in which no “fair catch signal” has been given by the *receiver* he should be given a reasonable opportunity to complete the catch after touching the ball. If the *receiver* completes the catch cleanly (no muff/bobble) he may be contacted after the catch is completed. If after touching the ball but prior to completing the catch he muffs/bobbles the ball thereby not cleanly handling the catch he may be contacted immediately. He may also be contacted by the *gunner* as he attempts to regain the ball since both players now may pursue the ball to catch or recover it. **Example # 1 -** *The ball first strikes the receiver on the fore arms, upper arms or shoulder causing him to muff/bobble the ball thus being unable to complete a catch cleanly, the gunner may contact him.* **Example # 2 -** *The ball strikes the receiver as above and deflects away from the receiver causing him to move away from his original position to chase the ball and catch it. The gunner may contact him and is not responsible to allow the receiver an unimpeded path to regain the ball.*

When a receiver who has touched the kick and clearly completed the catch cleanly, he may then be contacted. The receiver who has touched the kick and muffs/bobbles the ball before completing the catch has not completed the catch cleanly he may be contacted during this very short period of time.

This is a “very fine line” which happens very, very quickly. The officials need to concentrate and focus on the play. The coaches need to be sure their “gunners” understand the differences. In most cases an “immediate catch then hit” by the *gunner* on the *receiver* will be a foul. The gunners need to allow the receiver this very short time span to have the opportunity to catch the ball. It remains the responsibility of the kicking team members to always know the position of the ball in the air as it travels toward the receiver and to determine when the receiver may be legally contacted.

Keep in mind that violent contact, hits directed above the receivers shoulders, launching and failure to “slow up” may also warrant a disqualification penalty. A slower flag to allow you to see the results of the play should be considered.

Some guidelines for “Pick Plays”

1. Be particularly aware of these types of illegal plays against the defense inside 20 yard lines although they can occur anytime, anywhere particularly in “short yardage” situations.
2. Most of these plays occur when the defense is in “man to man” coverage anywhere on the field. You should recognize this coverage when you see more than one defensive back playing “heads up” to a receiver and directly across from the receiver on the line of scrimmage. Some teams will “audible” when the QB recognizes “man to man” coverage by calling a “mesh” or “brush” pass pattern specifically design to contact or “cut off” a defensive player. Be awake since this can take place any.
3. Watch the receiver’s facemask for a hint. If he is facing the receiver and ignoring the QB when he makes contact with the defensive player it is probably a “pick”. If you see his facemask facing at least in the direction of the QB he may be legal.

WEEKLY FLASH

9/10/03

All:

Sidelines

It remains very important for us to always be aware of the congestion on the sidelines. Foremost, we need to protect ourselves from potential injury; additionally we need to have adequate room in which to operate. Referees need to address potential problems regarding teams and their staffs at the pre-game meeting with each coach. Gently, remind them that we will may need assistance and ask them if they have assigned a “get back” coach to help us. The crew should also review your procedures regarding how to effectively administer the “get back” process as well. Be sure each of you clearly understands the “sideline warning” rule and all of its cumulative implications. Use it if you think it is necessary, but always use it early, first!

You also need to be aware of media, camera operators, and miscellaneous sideline guests. Firmly and consistently remind them to stay behind the line. Be careful to address them in a non-threatening manner since there are times we are not sure exactly who they may be. (Could be an A.D.) If they do not cooperate, stop the game, notify the Referee, identify the “game manager”, and request his assistance. Never allow yourself to be in a position where you could be injured because you did not “police” your area. You are entitled to operate in your “white area” end line to end line.

Forward Progress

“GET GOOD SPOTS!” “GET GOOD SPOTS!” “GET GOOD SPOTS!”

Each of you should know and understand by rule what constitutes “forward progress”.
Each of you should know and understand the mechanics for determining “the spot”.
Each of you should know when a “live ball” becomes a “dead ball”.

Review this at your pre-game this week!

You should always KNOW the “down and distance” prior to each play. Make a mental note of the “line to gain” by establishing a reference point downfield prior to the snap. Coordinate with good “eye contact” with your cross-field counterpart to determine all forward progress spots and assist with “soft spots” when necessary. The key is the “eye contact”. You don’t need to be “looking down at your feet” to hold the spot. Let you foot do that job and keep your head and eyes up. Look “cross-field” and help your partner! Good hustle and “squaring up” will help you sell the spot, particularly if it’s close.

Remember “hustle, square, advance, heads-up, eye contact, then a high and clear signal!! Be accurate!

Tips - Never say “it’s close”. Always say “take a look” on close spots

Don’t debate spots

Umpires can use the LJ spots and avoid the criticism of “seeing the sticks”

When positioning a fresh ball make sure of the placement before removing the side zone ball.

Work in the “white zone” not on the field or behind the “white zone” unless the play dictates adjustment.

“demand the ball” if you are holding a “close spot”

WEEKLY FLASH

9/24/03

I want to thank all of our staff members, particularly those who went beyond the normal “call of duty” last weekend to travel to the games. It was a difficult week for all of us but our Virginia “gang” overcame some huge obstacles to travel to their game sites and should be commended for their superb efforts. The western Pennsylvania and northern New York “boys” also “busted their tails” and we are all proud of you as well. And let’s not forget the Florida “bunch” who spent several nerve-racking hours in the air through the entire storm just to get to a football game. It was truly a marvelous and much appreciated effort by all of you. THANKS!!!

All:

Each of you should be visiting the Web Site on a weekly basis to check for updates. By now, all of you should have reviewed your personal information and checked your schedule. You are responsible to keep your profile current particularly regarding phone numbers and Email addresses. You should also “privatize” your password. By the end of the season I would like all photos to be color (not black & white) with you wearing a jacket and tie. Soon you will be able to “download” most of our documentation i.e. exams, letters, forms, answer sheets, etc. I check the Web Site daily to review both content and usage. If you are not “onboard”, you need to “get onboard”!

Frank Kosman, a former E.C.A.C. and Conference U.S.A. umpire has recently joined our staff as a “Technical Assistant”. Besides being a very good friend and a great official, Frank, brings 35 years of officiating expertise to our Conference. I know you will enjoy working with him and that you will find his advice to be excellent.

As you know, the “heart” of our Conference schedule is beginning and the competition will become extremely intense. Be firm, but, be patient and respectful with the coaches. Don’t be overly technical with your calls. “Get the big ones”! Try to be aware of the game situation at all times. If you are not absolutely sure about a foul, “leave it alone”!

Be professional when addressing strangers on the sideline. If they are continue to “question or hassle” you, ask them if they are associated with the team or school. If this is the case, remind them that need to exhibit professional behavior. If they continue, ask the game management via the Referee to warn them. Finally, if that strategy fails you may request that they be removed. Remember, your tone, body language, and response needs to measured since you may be directing it toward an unrecognized A.D., University President, or Dean. This happened!!

When you may disagree with a crew mate on his call approach him calmly and ask him “What did you see”. This phrase should alert him. Let him explain then decide what to do with the Referee. Picking up a flag is always acceptable providing we are correct in doing so. The calling official should not automatically capitulate without a discussion. He, too, could be correct.

All signals are to be high and sharp!!!

Referees

When the players are “border line out of control” during the game don’t be afraid to stop the game. Stop the game clock firmly then wave one team towards you. Get them into a huddle and firmly explain to them that unless their behavior improves you well eject them as needed. Then visit the opposing team huddle and repeat the “speech”. Be sure everyone sees you do this. Finally, visit each head Coach and inform him that you expect their assistance in maintaining their team’s composure. This then shares the responsibility of game control and minimizes the crew being told that they “lost control of the game”. I call it the “no more shit” speech!

If you decide a flag needs to be “picked up,” explain the original call on the microphone and why you are not enforcing the foul. Don’t forget to include this on the penalty report.

Quick 3 or 4 steps on all plays and slow to walk as the play ends similar to deep officials.

Wing Officials / Umpires

When the defensive player penetrates the neutral zone prior to the snap a foul may occur. Once the defensive player’s head passes beyond the waistline of the snapper (which also happens to be an offensive reference point) with or without contact we will “kill the play” And penalize the defensive team. Additionally, many times when this occurs and there is defensive contact the offensive player reacts by shoving or pushing the aggressive

opponent. This is still a defensive foul “only”. Do not penalize the offensive player who has just reacted to being hit providing his reaction is instantaneous and not a personal foul. (slug, punch, etc.) Let him know he should not react and that you are penalizing the defense. This is a “talk too”.

Deep Officials

When you are chasing a play “keep your head UP! You need to see what is occurring nearby as you run. Some of our officials are running like sprinters down the sideline to get to the play or goal line with their heads down and missing everything occurring around them.

Come out of the end zone together on PAT’s and field goals. Use identical signals.

WEEKLY FLASH

10/23/03

WEB SITE NEWS

Check it out! The A10 officiating manual is now available on the site in two versions. One is for review and the other is printable. Weekly Flashes and NCAA Bulletins are also available. You should be checking the web site weekly. Your Supervisor checks your “log- ons” weekly!

All:

It is very important to remember when meeting with coaches that all of us refrain from discussing prior games, future games, specific game related problems from film review or “flashes” or any other incidents involving other officials. All of our coaches know we review films of plays but it is a breach of confidence if we discuss what we see with opposing coaches (whether we are asked or not) other than to simply respond (if asked) that the Supervisor reviewed the information with us.

Examples: During sideline small talk before a game on of our officials good-naturedly teased a Head Coach by saying “Good to see you! Boy, did you get me in trouble last season by sending in a film clip showing the block in the back our crew missed. It made our “highlight film”. Needless to say the Coach responded politely since the game had not begun but if he wasn’t happy last year with the play what on earth would make someone think that had changed. This is certainly a very poor “ice breaker”!

During a pre-game visit a Coach refers to plays he has seen on tape of his (past, present or future) opponents games. One response this year was “that was on the film last night, Jim said that crew cost the team the game!” I wouldn’t consider this to be a particularly good “confidence builder” just prior to the game. A much better response would have been “Jim reviewed the play with all of us”.

Some coaches will want to discuss specific issues regarding that days’ opponent. Neither agree nor disagree just let the Coach know you will review his concerns with the crew.

Always listen respectfully, respond generally, never indict anyone, keep your opinion to yourself, and then pleasantly move on to another topic of conversation. What happens on the staff, in your crew or in the Conference should remain there.

If you have not received at least one Marriott V.I.P. cards with your name on it by 10/31/03 please send me an Email.

Referees

Be sure your microphone is “OFF” when you are in the locker room. Leave it in your locker until thirty minutes before game time then attach it to your belt. Imagine the surprise of one coaching staff this season when the teams were on the field during pre-game “warm-up” and their teams “unusual plays” were being discussed in the officials’ locker room but were also being “**broadcast on the field**” over the Stadium Public Address System.

Try to know “by feel” where the field microphone is located on your belt as well as the switch location and position. Prior to signaling many of you are looking down to find it. This looks very awkward on camera.

Always explain why you are “waving off” a penalty flag by using the field microphone. Record “wave offs” as a foul on the penalty report with an explanation.

Please note all penalties on the report that were called on any scoring plays with an “asterisk” (*).

You are doing a very poor job of FAXing me your “foul reports by Monday.

As you all should know but apparently do not (see website/hotels) you are supposed to confirm all Marriott reservations two weeks in advance and to set up video arrangements with the hotel (Richmond, Springfield, Manchester, Newport). This is not happening. “Clean it up!”

Pass Interference

When two receivers are running side-by-side and their feet tangle and they both fall this is normally a good “no call”. When they are running “one behind the other” and the trailing player trips on his own and falls on the back of the other receivers legs or heels causing him to fall this is pass interference if the ball was “catchable”. This can be a difficult call to see since it happens quickly but try to visualize “side by side” (or close to it) vs. one behind the other.

WEEKLY FLASH
10/30/03

All:

I am beginning to see some hotel room charges showing up on my credit card for non-cancelled room reservations. I have neither the time nor the patience to be contacting the hotels or credit card company to resolve these problems. Please be more diligent on your ends in **eliminating** this problem.

“A quick object lesson”

Most of the time our wing officials do an excellent job of maintaining an “open line of communication” with the coaching staffs, particularly the “Head Coach”. We pass along player numbers, listen to and address complaints, give explanations, and try to keep things as calm as possible. This is truly one of our strengths as a staff.

There are cases during the game, however; when the Referee **must** also remember to communicate with the coach as well. He should always be involved during player ejections, final time outs, unusual rulings, lengthily injury time outs, and coach’s request for a conference. Additionally, the Referee, after a visit to one sideline with a coach for the purpose of an explanation should immediately “jog” across the field to visit the other coach just to “keep him up to speed” with the latest developments. If one coach receives a special visit from the Referee you can be sure the other coach is going to be very annoyed if the visit is not reciprocal. Even though our “esteemed” wing officials are more than capable of “passing along” the information, the “non visited” coach will be “snubbed” if the explanation is not delivered personally by the Referee. It’s worth the time to “maintain the peace”! The coaches view the Referee as the “crew captain” and expect equal attention from him when required.

It is a very good practice to close your pre-game meeting with the coaches by simply saying “ Coach, if you need to speak with me during the game just let your closest official know and I will be happy to oblige as soon as I can”. Remember, if you make this commitment you will be expected to keep it by the coaches.

Reporting Numbers on Fouls

Scenario

You see a foul and make the call. You report a player number. It goes on the penalty report sheet. It goes to the coaches and to me. The coaches review the film. They question the call. I watch the tape at their request. I can’t find the foul based on the player number. I do find the foul on the tape by a player near by. It’s a correct call. I call the coach and tell him “good call, wrong number!” He responds “Yeh! Right!”

Sideline Officiating Reminders

Stay wide for the best perspective on the play
See everything that happens near the final spot
Don’t just ball watch
Use high, clear, concise signals (three)
Know the clock status and how each play affects the clock
Always let the referee know the “in bounds or out of bounds ball status” (finger wind signal or snap signal)
Concentrate between each plays by anticipating possible plays and how you will react

Be sure you have room to retreat or to gain a better perspective
Keep the sidelines clear for your own protection
Be a good communicator with coaches, players and officials
Remember the sidelines can be very emotional
Always know where you are relative to the sideline and yard lines.
Don't anticipate the athletic ability of our players. They are always capable of the unexpected.
Don't give signals or throw flags too quickly. Absorb the entire play first.
See the whole play or foul
Always, always see the ball.
When you "screw up" admit it!

Umpire Reminders

You control the game the Referee administers it.
Talk, talk, and talk to the players. Let them hear and feel your presence.
Be sure the Referee always checks with you on his fouls. Listen to him and correct him if necessary.
Key the guards
Move up to the L.O.S. on pass plays
Always know where the ball placement will be
Keep your whistle out of your mouth
See the ball, the play and the whole foul

Back Judges

Cushion, cushion, cushion
Clock, clock, clock
"if your gonna fish in your neighbors pond you need to be correct!"