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August 6, 2003

To: Big East Athletic Directors, Head Football Coaches, Directors of Football Operations, Officials, Technical Advisors, NFL Observers

Subject: Officiating Mechanics Issues

Roughing the Passer

At the 2003 officiating clinic at Syracuse University, it was reaffirmed that Big East Referees will continue to enforce **Roughing the Passer** the same way it is enforced in the NFL. Referees will be guided by the following principles:

- **Pass Leaving Passer's Hand: 1-Step Rule**

Roughing will be called if, in the Referee's judgment, a pass rusher clearly should have known that the ball had already left the passer's hand before contact was made. Pass rushers are responsible for being aware of the position of the ball in passing situations. The Referee will use the release of the ball from the passer's hand as his guidelines that the passer is now fully protected. Once a pass has been released by a passer, a rushing defender may make direct contact with the passer only up through the rusher's first step after such release (**prior to second step hitting the ground**); thereafter the rusher must be making an attempt to avoid contact and must not continue to "dive through" or otherwise forcibly contact the passer. Incidental or inadvertent contact by a player who is easing up or being blocked into the passer will not be considered significant.

- **Unnecessary Acts Against the Passer**

A rushing defender is prohibited from committing such intimidating and punishing acts such as "stuffing" a passer into the ground or unnecessarily wrestling or driving him down after the passer has thrown the ball, even if the rusher makes his initial contact with the passer within the one-step limitation provided for above. When tackling a passer who is in a virtually defenseless posture (e.g., during or just after throwing a pass), a defensive player must not unnecessarily or violently throw him down and land on top of him with all or most of the defender's

weight. Instead, the defensive player must strive to wrap up or cradle the passer with the defensive player's arms.

Any unnecessary action against the Passer after he release the ball, even if it is just a push, may draw a penalty depending upon the effect it has on the Passer. In addition, unnecessary action on the Quarterback when he is running an option offense and has pitched the ball to the trailing back should not be tolerated.

Position of Backs at the Snap

"**Backs**" (flankers, slots) at the snap positioned completely outside the normal tackle position in either direction, or in motion at the snap, are prohibited from **blocking below the waist**. This rule change in 2003 is a departure from previous years when it was legal for a player who was positioned within seven yards of the middle lineman to block below the waist legally toward the original position of the ball. The change presents an officiating problem because, in many formations, it may be virtually impossible to determine if the **Back** is positioned completely outside the tackle.

As decided at the officiating clinic, Referees will be responsible for the **Back** on his side of the tackle and will so indicate with a sweeping arm signal that the Back is not in a legal position to block below the waist back toward the ball. Back Judges will be responsible for the **Back** who is flanked on the side opposite the Referee. The Back Judge will give no signal but will make a mental note as to the legality of the **Back's** ability to block below the waist back toward the ball. In the event the wing official calls a penalty upon seeing the **Back** block below the waist back toward the ball, either the Referee or the Back Judge, depending upon what official made the call, will advise the calling official of the **Back's** status and will proceed with the penalty enforcement or "wave off" the flag. For your information, the Big 10 decided that the Referee will give the signal for backs outside the tackle on either side of the ball. The Back Judge is supposed to make a mental note but the Referee is primarily responsible for both backs.

Intentional Grounding

It is the responsibility of all officials to assist the Referee with Intentional Grounding by providing information as to whether or not an eligible receiver had a reasonable opportunity to catch a pass. When in question, the Team A player is considered to have a reasonable opportunity to catch the pass.

The Wing Officials, Head Linesman (HL) and Line Judge (LJ), in conjunction with the Umpire (U), must assist the Referee as to whether the passed ball crossed the neutral zone when the passer, who was five or more yards toward a sideline from the position of the ball at the snap, throws the ball to avoid loss of yardage.

The language in Rule 7-3-2-f, pertaining to passes, which reads: **“lands beyond the neutral zone”** does not change the rule interpretation of 2-19-3-a, which states: **a legal forward pass “has not crossed the neutral zone when it first strikes the ground, a player...or anything in or behind the neutral zone.”**

John Adams, Secretary-Rules Editor, stated that the phrase **“lands beyond the neutral zone”** is NFL language. He is well aware that the Rule Book contains conflicting terms but the interpretation is still the same: **“if touched behind neutral zone, the ball has not crossed the neutral zone”**. In spite of that, however, Mr. Adams, at the CCA Supervisors’ Meeting in June 2002, offered the interpretation that if the passed ball lands beyond the neutral zone, after being touched behind the neutral zone, it shall not be considered to be intentional grounding if the requirements in Rule 7-3-2-f-Exception are met. This is a common sense interpretation in keeping with the spirit of the rule and with what has been traditionally accepted in college football.

Coin Toss

After the coin toss, the Umpire will stay in the center of the field until all officials gather to record the results of the toss, and may then proceed to the 35 yard line where he will hand the ball to the kicker.

Rule 1-4-2-b. Exceptions to the Mandatory Numbering Rule on Scrimmage Kick Formations

It is important to note that teams who line up in a scrimmage kick formation are exempted from the rule which requires at least five offensive players on the line of scrimmage numbered 50-79. However, such an exemption may limit a team’s flexibility when it shifts from the muddle-huddle or swinging gate back to the area where the center, kicker, and holder are positioned.

If a player is identified by his initial position as an exception to the rule, that player remains an ineligible receiver until the down is over, a timeout is charged by the referee, or a period ends. Consequently, if a team shifts the “ineligible” player to an eligible position, a foul for illegal formation occurs at the snap.

Some important points to remember about the rule:

1. If a team has five players on the Line of Scrimmage (LOS) numbered 50-79, it need not concern itself with exceptions to the numbering rule. It needs only to concern itself with normal shift requirements.

2. If a team has less than five players on the LOS numbered 50-79, simply lining up for the PAT and kicking the ball, without shifting from the muddle-huddle, is legal. The team may also run or pass the ball as long as the receivers are in eligible positions with eligible numbers.

Please refer to my September 17, 2002 mailing for further clarification.

The Umpire and the Side Judge (SJ) have specific responsibilities on these play situations but the following will apply:

1. The Umpire will go with the “muddle huddle” to note numbering exceptions to Rule 1-4-2-b.
2. The Side Judge will stay with the snapper.
3. The Side Judge will focus on the defensive overload (pull and shoot) and may have to go behind the Umpire more than once on muddle huddle situations.

Let us not concern ourselves with form over substance; let’s cover the play the same way every time. If a team is committing an infraction when it shifts from the muddle huddle to a scrimmage kick formation, then take the time to explain as best you can what must be done to correct the situation. Preventative officiating can save teams and officials unnecessary fouls.

Hand Pads

There is no definition for hand pads except that they must be gray in color and must conform to Rule 1-4-5-b.

Receiver Going Out of Bounds

Big East officials will throw their hat when a receiver or a kicking team player goes out of bounds during the down. This change, which conforms to the NFL mechanics, will alert other officials that something unusual has occurred and conveys information to the media and to spectators. It was approved by Collegiate Supervisors in June 2003.

On-side Kickoff

The Big East staff will cover the on-side kick situation by positioning six officials at five yard intervals starting at the 35 yard line and ending at the 45 yard line. This procedure is similar to the NFL mechanic and will provide better coverage in critical situations during the game. It was approved by the

Collegiate Supervisors in June 2003. Please refer to the **Priority Check List** and the **Initial Positions** diagrams that were distributed in March 2003 for Short Free Kicks for your duties and responsibilities. **For on-side kick situations, the kicker's restraining line is treated as a "plane" if a short free kick is made.**

Fair Catch Interference – Head Linesman

When a scrimmage kick is to the Field Judge's side of the field, the Head Linesman needs assistance from Back Judge (BJ), Field Judge (FJ), and Side Judge as to whether or not a valid or invalid signal has been given in the event the receiver blocks after giving the signal. This information is vital to the HL and determines if a penalty has been committed.

On the same subject, we as a staff did not do a credible job when the kick receiver had to move toward the line of scrimmage to catch the kick. Too frequently, the BJ did not move up with the receiver nor did the SJ and FJ move up on a timely basis when it was clear that the kick was going to be short. Officiate the play – positioning at the start of the play is simply the recommended position before the play evolves. Good officials are alert and react accordingly as they gain information once the ball is kicked. We do not need officials at the goal line once it is apparent the ball will come down on the 25-30 yard line. Again, officiate the play as it develops and adjust accordingly.

"Buzzing" the receiver is a flag only when the receiver is positioned to catch the kick. However, forcing the receiver to go around a kicking team player to get into position is a 15 yard penalty. It is the responsibility of the kicking team player to know where the ball is.

Please remember that interference with the opportunity to catch a kick is a 15 yard penalty from the spot of the foul.

Use of Bean Bags

Fair Catch Signaler First Touching

When a Team B player makes a fair catch and muffs the kick, the downfield officials must drop a bean bag at the spot of first touching. If the signaling player subsequently catches the kick, the ball is placed where it is first touched.

Muffed Backward Passes and Snaps

It was agreed at the 2002 clinic that staff would not bean bag muffed backward passes and snaps behind the neutral zone.

Backward Passes Behind the Neutral Zone

Line Judges will share responsibility for ruling passes forward or backward behind the neutral zone on drop back passes of 3 or more steps. The Referee and Head Linesman also have this responsibility. It is easier to determine whether a pass is forward or backward if it is thrown “away” from the official (i.e. to the other side of the field) than at him.

If there is no whistle from the LJ or HL when a pass strikes the ground behind the neutral zone, and the Referee is uncertain, then the absence of a whistle is an indicator that the pass was thrown backwards and is still a live ball. On QB scrambles deep in the backfield, the Referee may have to make this call since the LJ is holding the LOS and the HL is five yards downfield.

Remember: “When in question, it is a forward pass rather than a backward pass when thrown in or behind the neutral zone.” Rule 2-19-2-a

Officiating from the 5 Yard Line In – Side Judge and Field Judge

Although I believe there is merit to changing this mechanic so that there are two officials on both the goal line and end line, I am unable to approve the request from the Head Linesmen at the clinic. I spoke with Dave Parry and he indicated that the Big 10 will not do it because it is not an approved mechanic as yet. Other Conference Supervisors may be using this mechanic, but it is not CCA approved.

Consequently, there is no change in mechanics from last year. Outside the five yard line, the SJ and FJ will be positioned on the goal line. Although a good case was made for switching mechanics for the SJ to cover the end line with the BJ, our mechanics will remain the same. The supposed congestion at the goal line where the HL and SJ (or LJ and FJ) are almost at the same spot is not convincing enough to change our current mechanics. The goal line is the cash register in football. It is less important as to how we look on plays compared to whether or not the correct ruling is made.

On passes to the end line, the BJ will have to make those rulings on his own with help from the SJ and FJ.

Pass Coverage Mechanics

Officials should always be downfield looking back upfield at receivers coming at them. Proper spacing will allow the official to slow down or stop and make the call. There are times when officials will “get beat” to the goal line. Your job is to minimize those occurrences.

On pass plays at the sideline in the end zone, it is perfectly sound for the SJ and FJ to straddle the sideline and move into the end zone if the pass is thrown to your corner (endline and sideline) as long as you communicate visually with the Back Judge.

Broken Play on FGs and PATs

The Field Judge will move quickly to the goal line (from under the upright). The Line Judge will rule on the runner or receiver being out of bounds on his side of the field.

The Side Judge should not try to get to the sideline but will hold his position and watch for illegal blocks and trapped passes. The BJ is responsible for the endline and the HL and LJ have their normal duties with one major difference. Each has his sideline all the way to the endline because of the repositioning of the SJ and FJ during FGs and PATs.

Guidelines for Helmet to Helmet Contact – Defenseless Players

The emphasis on helmet contact has not changed. The key is to determine if the tackler “dips” his head and then makes initial contact with it. If a player is to be disqualified, communicate with those officials who may have had the opportunity to view the contact.

In regard to fair catch interference, there is no change as to whether a disqualification is in order. The key factor is to determine if the Team A player “broke down” prior to hitting the receiver. If so, it is a 15 yard penalty. If flagrant and/or if the helmet is used, a disqualification is in order.

Clarifications Requested by Back Judges

- Hands on a receiver may not necessarily be pass interference. Hands or arms around waist is pass interference on a catchable forward pass.
- BJ will walk with the Referee to inspect the field 20 minutes prior to game.
- It is expected that the SJ, FJ, and Umpire will assist the BJ on whether the kickoff is first kicked into the ground. On Short Free Kicks (On-side kicks), the Head Linesman and the Line Judge will assist the BJ and the Umpire when the ball is first kicked into the ground.
- On kickoff returns, the BJ may get trapped in the middle on long returns and needs assistance from the SJ and FJ for goal line coverage.

Player Disqualification's

Referees shall notify Head Coaches when a player is disqualified. If the calling official is other than the Referee, then the official who ejected the player should accompany the Referee to the sideline to advise the Head Coach why the player was ejected. Two officials should be present when such information is given to the Coach. There should be no misunderstanding in this situation.

Training Room Visit

When the Umpire goes to the training room he should be accompanied by the Referee. Both officials should hear what the Trainer is saying to prevent any misunderstanding when information is conveyed to the rest of the crew.

Equipment Policy Procedures

The equipment policy was previously distributed to all officials by e-mail. It was discussed and modified at the clinic by designating the **Back Judge** and **Line Judge** as the two officials responsible for meeting with **Team Designees** 30 minutes prior to game time and, then again, 5 minutes before the game when the BJ and LJ go to the team's locker room.

Procedurally, the following should occur:

1. One hour prior to the game, the Side Judge and Field Judge will go out to the field to observe the teams in the pre-game warm ups. Each official will have an Equipment Card on which he will record equipment violations. Violations may include "sock length, knee pads, shirt out, no tail bone protector, etc." and should be entered on the "Equipment Violation" line with the player's jersey number.
2. The Head Linesman and Line Judge will enter the field 40 minutes prior to game time at which time the Side Judge will give his card to the HL and the Field Judge will give his card to the LJ. The HL and the LJ will confirm the equipment violations and may add or delete violations as noted or corrected.
3. Thirty minutes prior to the game the BJ will enter the field and will receive the equipment card from the HL. The BJ will meet with the visiting team's designee and the LJ will meet with the home team's designee at the 50 yard line. Each team designee will be given a copy of the equipment card with the violations noted.

4. At least 5 minutes prior to game time, before the teams leave the locker rooms, the BJ and LJ will again meet with the team designee. As the team exits to take the field, the designated game official (BJ or LJ) will once again inform the team designee of any equipment violations. Each official will note on his equipment card those violations which have been corrected. The official will sign the card and give it to the Technical Advisor after the game so it can be faxed to the Supervisor of Officials.

Summary

There are at least six officials actively involved in the new equipment policy prior to the game and all seven officials should have a comprehensive understanding of mandatory and illegal equipment.

As we gain experience with the above procedures, we may find that modifications may be necessary to improve the existing policy. I welcome your input because you are the ones who are on the field working with the Coaches and the team designees to ensure compliance with the rules for player equipment.

Thank you for your input and assistance throughout the clinic. Should you wish to discuss any items in the bulletin, please e-mail or call me.

I wish all of you a fine season.