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August 22, 2003

To: Big East, A-10 Staff Officials, Technical Advisors, NFL Observers

Subject: Officiating Mechanics Issues

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.

PAT's and Field Goals

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.

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 kicker 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. **Note: A change has been made to Priority 3. The H & L are responsible K Formation Legality not the U & B. Handbook Priority Check List Page 5 will be revised to reflect this change.**

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.

Bean Bags

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

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. I do not believe it is prudent to make the HL solely responsible for the quick “slant in” or “out” pass at the goal line.

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.

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. The SJ and FJ will receive their cards from the BJ and LJ respectively prior to entering the field. 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.