

Big 12 Conference Men's Basketball Tipoff Media Day

Wednesday, October 23, 2024

Kansas City, Missouri, USA

John Higgins

Liaison to Officials

Media Day Press Conference



JOHN HIGGINS: First and foremost, I want to thank Brett Yormark and his team with the Big 12 for bringing me back into the league after a one-year absence off the court.

As people may know, I was the lead guy at the consortium out west with the Pac-12 and Mountain West and four other leagues, WAC, Big West, Big Sky, and I appreciate what he's done and I'm humbled that he brought me back in, and I'm excited to come back to my home.

The Big 12, I grew up in this league. I got hired in the Missouri Valley Conference in '87-'88 and then the next year I got hired out of the city in Kansas City for the old Big 8 days.

And I refereed a lot of games in this arena, a lot of games in the old Kemper Arena, and I'm excited to be back into the Big 12 and to lead the officiating program.

It's not just myself, it's Gerry Pollard, as you know, he was a longtime Big 12 referee had a double knee replacement, so I hired him as my direct assistant.

Eddie Jackson, he oversees the Missouri Valley and the Big West for me, also.

I also want to -- I'm looking forward to working with Commissioner Yormark, the ADs, coaches, players and officials. My job is to identify, I believe, train, teach, and obviously assign officials to the games around the country and in the Big 12, and my job is to put the best officials on the court every single night.

I know that's a tough chore, but we're going to go from coast to coast, obviously, and pull guys that you may not have seen before from the West Coast and the East Coast.

You'll see some different guys, and hopefully we see top-notch guys, the guys you haven't seen, Final Four guys that the league hasn't seen before. I'm excited about that.

I'm excited to lead it here, now and into the future.

One of my philosophies, and I talked when I got hired for this job, and I talked to officials, coaches and players. My philosophy with the officiating part of it, and I did it when I refereed, was -- I refereed this way. The coach's job is to coach, the players' job is to play, and the referees' job is to referee. Any deviation from that and you're subject to penalty, and that means all three people.

The one thing that we're going to do this year within the officials is we are going to be very transparent with them, with the game evaluation after each game, which in the past we've never received. When I refereed we never received those things.

Now in other words, I have an independent person, either a retired basketball official or coach, evaluate the game, game grade each play throughout the game, and within 48 hours we're going to give that evaluation to the official.

So at the end of the year I'm am transparent with about next year they're, A, going to be retained, or, B, get the number of games they think they should be getting.

Because every referee thinks they should work the Final Four and every referee thinks they should be working 100 games. This is something that we're going to be very transparent with the officials, administration people, coaches.

That being said, I don't know if anyone has any questions for an official or not.

Q. I'm interested in what you just talked about, so the transparency portion of it. This sounds labor intensive, but it sounds like it could help with one of the complaints that a lot of fans have, is consistency from game to game across the conference. Is this new not just for the Big 12 but for college basketball at large? And if so are you starting from scratch in terms of how you do this?

JOHN HIGGINS: Well, we started from scratch basically last year and we put together a team of evaluators like

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Jimmy Burr and Ted Hillary and Steve Olson, guys that refereed a bunch.

Now, nobody in the past has ever done it and given the evaluation. It's always been something they've had -- I would see maybe, nobody else would see. Coaches wouldn't see, referees wouldn't see. They'd just know that at the end of the year -- they basically knew nothing unless they went to the NCAA Tournament. We are basically just being transparent with it now.

The other part I forgot to mention is every two weeks there will be a training video that goes to our coaches, our players, and our officials, and it's guidelines on how we're going to teach and train officials on certain plays, whether it be black charge play, path play drives, interference, all those kind of things.

We never used to do that when I was refereeing. I wasn't a big video guy. Now I am since I watch every game on TV and/or watch it on DV Sports. That's a little bit different than probably the past.

It's just obviously technology is further enhancing our game, and we have to keep up with the times as far as officials go.

Q. Are there any specific points of emphasis this season for officials for games?

JOHN HIGGINS: Well, it's the same as they were last year. I forgot to mention there's really only one rule and it's really not much of a rule change. It's when we have an elevator screen type play and a guy tries to run up between the two screeners, these two guys can't hook arms. If they hook arms it's automatic foul and the referee picks one or the other guy.

That's really the only thing besides the new out of bounds at the end of the game. I don't know if you remember the TCU-Georgetown game where the guy stepped out, came back in, hit the shot at the buzzer and it went in the basket. The only time you can obviously review that play is when there's zeros on the clock. If there is two or three tenths on the clock, you can't review the play.

Those are the only rule changes in a non-rule change year, but they did edit that, and I think that may get maybe some change prior to the year. That's the rumors around the referee world.

But other than that, there's no real -- we're going to referee like we're going to referee. And one of the coaches talked about -- I'm not sure which coach talked about this is the Big 12; it's big boy basketball. It's the hardest, the best

league in the country. It's the hardest league to referee.

I remember 10 years ago when a buddy of mine refereed, it was maybe the Kansas-Kansas State game. He came over from ACC and he said, is it like this every night? I said yeah, every single night.

It's the hardest and obviously the best league in the country, and that's why we're going to -- we try to get the best guys to referee it.

Q. The report that you're talking about that's going to the refs, is that going to include any kind of additional public accountability, communicating any of that information to fans or media or anything like that?

JOHN HIGGINS: No. That won't go out to the public. I lived through some really tough stuff in my career, and anything to the public and to the fans, unless there's something really egregious that we screwed up or we screw up a rule, that will go out.

If we screw up a rule, we'll be very transparent on that. And guess what? As referees, and I tell it to coaches and players, we are going to miss calls every single game. Six to ten at minimum on a 130, 140 possessions is not a terrible amount of plays to miss, and I'll guarantee you that we will miss plays.

Q. We've gotten to ask a lot of the coaches how things have changed with the conference getting larger. For officials, as the conferences balloon and get larger, does that change things for you guys at all?

JOHN HIGGINS: Not really because referees now, especially the top referees that I'm employing in this league referee from coast to coast, so it really doesn't change that much.

It gives them maybe a little bit more opportunity to -- if they're on the West Coast they can go work -- if I have them at Arizona or Arizona State or BYU Utah, wherever I have them, they could probably go work another game in a similar area. That's a part of it that helps some, the officials, as far as the travel goes.

It hasn't really changed because a lot of the top officials that are going to work our league are going to work in the ACC and the Big East and the SEC. You'll see guys from all those leagues, and the Big Ten.

Q. Building on that, a couple years ago ESPN put up your travel schedule for one week, and it was a lot. I know these officials, many of these officials travel all over the country, like you said, all season. Can the



reports that you're going to provide these officials help them quickly take in that information to help their officiating and make things more consistent across the conference, given the travel schedule?

JOHN HIGGINS: Oh, yeah, and that travel deal that they put on ESPN was my game got changed that day from the West Coast from 1:00 to 7:00. In full disclosure, I asked my boss, listen, this game changed until 7:00, I'm taking a red eye just so you know, and they were all okay with that. That just happened. That was a freak deal.

Now, when I do the scheduling I try to get guys where they don't have to go from the West Coast back to the East Coast to the middle of the country there. I try to do it in regions, and I'm working also with other consortiums.

So say we're at Central Florida and the official is there. They don't want to just go there for one day. They can go there, then they can go to some other schools in that area, which will be good for the official.

But yeah, hopefully they learn by everything we send them because they'll go in and look at the video because they all get the DV Sport videos. Then within that, if there's five or six plays that we want them to look at -- it's not an I gotcha. It's a training and teaching moment. This is why we think you missed it, either too wide or closed down too much, you had the wrong look, you called it from the wrong area. That's what it's -- it's here to train and teach them to be better.

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