

Southeastern Conference Football Media Days

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Hoover, Alabama, USA

Coordinator of Football Officials

John McDaid

Press Conference

COMMISSIONER SANKEY: John and I have encountered each other over the years. He was a football official in the SEC starting in 2015. So the year that I became commissioner. When Steve Shaw accepted the national coordinator role, we had big shoes to fill, as they say. So I've had that "big shoes to fill" line used on me.

And John and I spent some time visiting in January of 2020. Remember what life was like in January of 2020? We'd heard about COVID, but a very different experience. Offered him the role. He accepted the role, never expecting that everything would be done from a distance.

And he did some remarkable things -- along with our staff, Cole Cunningham, who's down in front, we've had other staff, Grace Sanders, who works in our administration of football -- to make last year happen from an officiating perspective. And we support the Sun Belt and Southern Conference officiating as well, so an enormous task by our staff.

John was a Bowl subdivision football official beginning in 2001, worked in the Big East, the American Athletic Conference, eventually moving here. Been in 16 Bowl games, six New Year's Six games, the 2010 BCS National Championship Game as a Big East official working on a neutral crew, and our championship game in 2017.

He's a Harvard graduate, worked for Microsoft in computer engineering and technology with government security and homeland security in aerospace industries. So as we thought about security procedures for our office, John is chairing that committee, which is really helpful, in all seriousness, as we look at continuing to adapt to technology around the game, including instant replay.

So I want to express my appreciation to John, for the first time in an introduction, for taking what is a challenging job, and that's what he wanted is a challenging job, but to build back in to officiating in an important way and to guide us through a pandemic that none of us knew was going to



erupt the way it did when he accepted the role.

SEC coordinator of football officials, John McDaid.

JOHN McDAID: Thank you, Greg. As an individual for 31 years of officiating at some level, trying to remain unseen, this week being my first Media Days has been quite interesting. It's a first, but very happy to be here.

We did survive the 2020 season, and once we got the kickoff, the officiating was more or less like normal. We had masking to take care of. We had a short stint with electronic whistles that we actually didn't even start the season with. We had them in the training camps. Maybe some issues with the artificial fan noise being piped into the stadiums.

But other than that, it's a football officiating that we normally would see. So with that, we have the ability to reflect on the season and evaluate and collect the data. I believe we delivered some fairly fine officiating for the 2020 season. Yes, we had our low points, but when we reflected in January, figure out what we need to do better, retinkered with our training and development program to account for that, and here we are going forward.

Really proud to be a part of the SEC team that resolved how we were going to have football for the 2020 season, helped write a playbook for something that didn't exist. I don't necessarily look to do that again in my career, if at all possible.

So I have a presentation for you today that are the 2021 new playing rules and some updates in our replay program.

Before I get into the new rules, just talk about how the new rules come about. First of all, there's an evaluation of the season that just transpired, just like we do with our football officiating, and typically new rules are going to come out of three areas. They're going to come out of unusual plays that occur where in postgame we realize that the playing rules may have never even thought of that particular circumstance.



There's always the concern for student-athlete safety. So always evaluating the game to see where we can get it to a better place for playing safety environment. The changes to free kick rules are a great example of that. Then lastly, they're going to look at trends and any kind of statistical analysis.

So I'm going to bring you some data here that helps understand what the Rules Committee and the Football Oversight Panel was referring to and consulting when they went through the rules changes this year. So let's look at some high-level statistics and how they compare historically from the 2020 season.

This is a graph of overall game time at a national average, all Division I conferences from 2016 through 2020. The SEC came right in at the national average at a game time of 3:21. The jump from '19 to '20 is a 2.6 percent increase, getting into the area of being statistically significant.

The Rules Committee and FOP doesn't necessarily look at this graph and trend as much as it looks at what are the percentage of the game that takes longer than 3 1/2 hours? The answer to that question across all of Division I last year is 30 percent of all games took more than 3:30 to complete. The number in the SEC was 26 percent.

So this is game time, something that we always want to manage. What are some of the factors that we compared against? So let's look at some of those typical factors.

This is a graph that shows you the scoring trend. Again, averaged nationally across all Division I conferences from 2016 to 2020. You're going to see that there has been about a 3.6 percent increase over the last five years. It's fairly flat, and I don't necessarily see a strong cause and effect between these two curves, particularly if you look at 2016 through 2018. You have one -- they're inversely affecting each other. One's going down while the other one's going up.

It's also worth noting that the Rules Committee and FOP are looking at scoring per game to see what it might be telling them about offensive and defensive balance and to make sure that that's where they want it to be.

The next variable we'll look at are the overall number of plays per game. Here we see a little bit more dependency between the two curves. The national average plays per game is 181, just over 181 plays per game. The SEC average was just short of 180 plays per game. 2018 looks to be quite an anomaly. We went up quite a bit in plays per game, but we went down in overall game time. There was no rules change that particular year that would explain that. Between myself and questions I've asked my peers, we

haven't really necessarily divined why the statistics were that way.

Obviously, plays per game is something that factors into the overall game time, so that's certainly being watched.

Now, let's go look at replay and how the number of stops for replay maybe have some causality into overall game time. Much more interesting curve here. We see a couple of things here. We see the number of replay stops per game going up fairly -- I don't want to say dramatically, but, again, statistically significant. On average across the Division I conferences, 2.5 replay stops per game. The SEC was at 2.9. That is quite a bit above 2.5.

When you consider that the duration of how long we stop, the review time for each one of the stops, there's a multiplying effect here. Let's take a closer look at that over the last ten years, replay stoppage time and replay review time.

So the first thing I'll note here is that the number of stops per game -- again, this is national average, all Division I conferences -- is going from 1.5 to 2.5 over a ten-year period. That's a 67 percent increase. If we were to have that same trend for the next ten years, we'd be looking at 4.2 stops per game in 2030. The law of averages, for every game I only have one or two stops, if my average is 4.2, that means I have a fair number of games where I'm having six or seven stops.

This is something that's registering with the Rules Committee and FOP. There isn't any changes to the game yet, but I know this is something that's been talked about and I believe will be one of the more major topics during the next off-season when these groups meet.

Looking at review times, it's fairly flat. There was a jump nationally of 9 seconds per stop from 2019 to 2020. I can tell you that the SEC was at 1:19 for their average review time for the 2020 season, which matched what the national average was the previous season.

The way the Rules Committee looks at review times, again, it's not how do we shave seconds off 1:20 or 1:17? It's it goes and looks at the number of replay stops that took more than two minutes. That's the low-hanging fruit to go get your review times down. A .4 stops per game -- so 16 percent of the stops nationally -- lasted more than two minutes. That's the target. When we're talking about managing the game, such that we manage at game time, that's the target they're looking at when it comes to replay stops and replay reviews.

So what conclusion can come from all of this data? I'm

trying to speak for the Rules Committee. I was not in the room while they met. I'm trying to speak for the Rules Committee and FOP, but they're looking at two major things. They're looking at the data to do the balance of offense and defense and see if there's a trend to see if something needs to be done. Scoring per game is going to tell you something about the balance between offense and defense. And not just plays per game, I don't have this data, but plays per game with possessions per game are going to tell you something about that balance as well.

If possessions per game is rising with plays per game, well, then, the balance seems to be still the status quo, whereas if you had statistics where the plays per game would continue to go up and possessions was flat or maybe even going down, that would tell me the balance is tilting towards the offense even more than it was in previous seasons.

We're also looking at replay, game stops, and the overall review times because it's an image of the game factor, and I'll come back to this concept in a second. There's nothing concrete here. I would say this is still more in the exploratory stage. They are beginning to talk about the paradigm of replay in college. When I say paradigm, I'm going to compare and contrast it to the replay that's used in the National Football League.

Ours is a system where we're looking at every single play, with replay having the ability to interject itself on any play during the game where the National Football League has a system where the majority of the game, it's coach initiated and only during a certain amount of time during each half is it initiated from the replay booth.

There is a potential for a hybrid model sometime in the future in college football, where there are not necessarily times in the game, but parts of replay, scenarios in replay, that maybe become more reliant on coach initiated, and I'll give you an example. We have a scenario for scoring plays, and we have a scenario for catch/no catch. If it's a catch/no catch in the end zone, we don't record it as a catch/no catch. It's a scoring scenario. The catch/no catch scenario, which is anywhere in the field of play between the goal lines, is 26 percent of the overall replay stoppages nationally during the 2020 season.

I know that the Rules Committee is asking themselves, do those reviews all have an impact in the game such that we need to stop the game for that? There's schools of thought that are thinking, maybe we go to more of a hybrid where we put that in the coach's hands and let them decide if it's impactful and we need to stop the game.

So let's move over to the actual rule changes for the 2021

season. This is a reminder, the NCAA for all of their sports has a two-year rule cycle we're in. For football, odd years. We don't have major rule changes.

So let's give you a little bit of a reminder of what is in play. What is in play is anything to do with student-athlete safety. We can introduce a rule change. Anything that has to do with image of the game -- different order than the bullets here. Anything that has to do with the image of the game, that's something that can be addressed in an off year.

Lastly, if there's a previous year rule change that wasn't having the impact or it wasn't working out like it was envisioned, that could be addressed as well. We don't have anything in that category going into 2021, but we have some very minor examples -- or very minor rule changes and even an editorial change I wanted to bring to your attention.

Before we do that, let me give you my version of what the playing rules are, and we'll take a look at that. It's very simple. There's four buckets, if you will. That book is about as dense as any North American sport. Our rule book is about 125 to 130 pages. It basically boils down to four buckets. The first is definitions of the game. What's the size of the field? What is legal and illegal equipment? How do you score, and how many points is it?

The next bucket are the playing rules of what defines the balance between the offense and the defense. How does the offense line up and snap the ball? How can you legally block? What are the rules that dictate what is legal and illegal for the passing game and the kicking game?

Then the last two buckets I have here are basically Rule 9, where half of Rule 9 is where personal fouls are -- the definitions of personal foul are written, and this is how we bring player safety to the game. The second half of Rule 9 is unsportsmanlike conduct, and unsportsmanlike conduct, fouls, and everything it encompasses, that's how we protect the image of the game.

So let's go on and look at these approved rule changes. The first is the team box, very simple one. For the 2020 season, we extend the team box from the 25 to the 25 down to the 15 to the 15. We did this simply just to create more real estate on the sidelines for teams as they were trying to socially distance and comply with our pandemic protocols. For the 2021 season and going forward, we've adopted the halfway point as a permanent rule change.

The box is now from the 20 to 20. This doesn't impact anything we're doing officiating on the field and obviously gives our teams a little bit more space to do their thing.

Extra period scoring rules has had a fairly significant change. The statistics looking at games with extra periods show that there's 14.1 plays that are added for every extra period that's played, and from, again, a student-athlete safety standpoint, that is statistically significant. We had a game here in the Southeastern Conference in 2018 that went seven extra periods, and in terms of number of plays, that's like adding almost a whole new quarter, a fifth quarter, if you will, to the game. It's just too much football after having played, let's say, 180 to 190 plays during regulation.

So '21 going forward, first extra period, should you score a touchdown, you have the option of kicking for a point or going for another touchdown for two points. Should you get to a second overtime or extra period and you score a touchdown, you only have the option to go for two. Then if the game gets to a third extra period or any subsequent period after that, we're going to put the ball at the 3-yard line and we're only going to have two-point conversions from that point on.

Again, player safety issue. This is done to drive down the probabilities that we're going to have four or five or six overtime periods.

There is a point of emphasis this year and also a change in the rule book. The rules have always talked about jerseys and what is a legal jersey, and its length has been important. We had in the game approximately 12 to 15 years ago jerseys becoming untucked and coming down to like the thigh pads, and the rules were rewritten or modified at that point in time that stipulated that the jersey had to be tucked into the pants. We also had just the reverse, right? You can remember back in the '80s and '90s, the student-athletes would take the jerseys and tape them up from the inside and have their midriff showing. It was also meant to combat that.

The jersey designs have changed, and if any of you have been around a jersey, they're made of material to cling to the player's body, and they don't necessarily tuck in anymore because they don't have to. Even if they come out of the pants, they're so tight to the body, we don't have the issue of them creeping up. But what has happened is undergarments have come longer, and the undergarment is starting to come out from underneath the jersey. This is not much of a safety issue as much as it's an image of the game issue. You can see in this photo here what it looks like.

I promise you, this is a halfback, and he started in a position in the backfield, and this jersey was well below his waist covering most of the thigh pads before the ball was snapped. He didn't get into that position just out of play.

That's the editorial change. I'll talk more about this when we get to points of emphasis.

One last editorial change I do want to talk about, I was talking earlier, concerned about the number of replay stoppages per game and overall review times. In 2020 and prior, any time we had a replay reversal, we're reversing the ruling on the field, we would go and look at the game clock and try and get the game clock reset should it need to be reset.

The editorial change, they're only going to do that now, under two minutes in the first half and under five minutes in the second half. What's unchanged is when we change the clock during a replay reversal. It's only in the scenario where the ruling on the field either sustains or creates a running clock, and the replay reversal creates a stop clock. That's when we go back, look at the clock at the point where we're now creating a stop clock.

So think about we've completed a pass, not for a first down, and it's ruled a complete pass on the field. Clock continues to run. After about 15 seconds before the next ball, the next snap occurs, replay stops the game, looks at it, reversed to no catch. Now we're going to go put that 15 seconds back on the clock.

That hasn't changed, but we're only going to do it now in under two minutes in the first half, under five minutes in the second half.

Let's now go look at the football code and changes to the points of emphasis. All five of the items here have appeared in the past. Several comments I could make. No changes to targeting, but that's not to say we're being asked, and we will be ever vigilant to officiate it and adjudicate it like we've been doing since it's been introduced into our game.

As far as unsportsmanlike conduct, the taunting part of it and sideline control, which is specifically coaches being out on the field for the purposes of demonstrating against a ruling that's made on the field, this is something nationally we felt we need to reintroduce as a point of emphasis.

That being said, I don't believe we have an upwards trend of these two things in the Southeastern Conference. There's certainly a small handful of examples that happened last year and we needed our officials to intervene, but I think we're doing a pretty good job in these two areas.

Uniform and equipment compliance, that's the undergarment coming out from underneath the jersey out I talked about. And what's crept back into the game again is

the pants being too short and not covering the knees. I am asking my officials, with undergarments coming out underneath the jersey, length of pants, to be more vigilant than we have been in the last couple of seasons.

That being said, I'm looking for us to not insert ourselves needlessly into the game. Offense comes out on the field, it's an up-tempo team, they snap the ball, and on the sixth or seventh play of that drive, we're not looking to stop the game to deal with a uniform issue.

I'm asking our officials to take advantage of pregame. I'm asking our officials to take advantage of dead ball periods such as media time-outs, other breaks in the game to officiate this, not to interrupt and interject ourselves into the game.

Feigning injury. This is something that's been talked about the last two or three years. A playing rule is not introduced to combat this because it turns out it's a difficult problem to solve. Feigning injury is going back to the reasons we talked about where they typically make rules changes. Feigning injuries is an offense-defense balance issue. Feigning injuries is potentially a player safety issue, and I'll give you an illustration of that in a second. And it's also, obviously, an image of the game issue.

The reason it's a player safety issue is all the change proposals they came up with to reduce injury introduced another safety issue for the players, and I'll give you an example. It's no secret that a team's center is integral for an offense operating at its maximum efficiency. The center touches the ball every single down, starts the down. Should a center legitimately become injured, need to come out of the game to be attended to, but we add a playing rule that says that player needs to be out for the rest of that series, that player needs to be out for three or four downs, that player needs to be out until his team achieves a first down, the center will probably say, you know what, I'm going to stay in the game because the team needs me.

So now you have a legitimately hurt student-athlete that's not coming out of the game because you changed the playing rules to combat feigning injuries. You're just moving the problem to somewhere else.

So what has been introduced this year is an administrative procedure whereby an institution that believes that its opponent was feigning injuries can take video and forward it to the national coordinator of football officials, Mr. Steve Shaw, and he will do an analysis to see would a reasonable person using this video evidence conclude that feigning injuries occurred in that particular game.

Any time that request is made of Steve, he will get back to

the institution that was in the video and give that feedback to the athletic director of whether or not a reasonable person using that video evidence would conclude it was feigning injuries occurring.

The playing rules have not changed here, and this administrative process will not reverse any aspect of an already concluded game, nor does this administrative process have any kind of discipline to it. There's no prescribed penalties or disqualifications for a player. It's simply a post-game analysis with the results being delivered to the athletic director of the institution.

Last update I have for you today has to do with replay. We have a technology upgrade of our system. DVSPORT is the vendor. DVSPORT has been adopted by virtually all Division I conferences for replay purposes.

It has two major features that I'm really excited about for our program. Our systems in 2020 and prior has the ability to bring in four camera angles in real time in parallel such that, as soon as a play concludes, all four of the video -- all four of the cameras' video can be immediately looked at by our replay official.

Many times our production teams have more than four cameras out there, and many times there's another camera angle that is really imperative to coming up with the right replay decision. Our new systems now have the ability to bring up to 12 cameras in simultaneously.

So let's say we have a game that has an overhead camera that has a shot that would help us with the replay or a handheld camera that's very strategically placed. If it wasn't one of our four previously, we'd have to work with the production trailer to get that camera angle played in the real TV feed, captured, and then use it.

Now, if it's one of the 12, we have it immediately after the play concludes. It should drive down our overall replay stoppage time, and it should improve our accuracy and our judgment in the replay booth.

The second is there's expanded technology that allows us to deconstruct what went on in the replay booth after the game concludes. This is going to help my staff evaluate the performance that's going on in the booth, and it's also going to help us put more training and development material together to train younger officials and to get our veteran officials that much better for the succeeding year.

That's it for the new rules. Fairly dried this year, not a lot of change. I don't think the average fan is going to recognize or notice in the normal playing of the game.

It's great to see everyone after not being able to do it last year. Excited to be here for so many reasons, but one of them is football is just around the corner. Thank you.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, John. As I mentioned, he'll be available the rest of today and around SEC Media Days if you have questions.

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