

Out of Bounds

JASON SNYDER

NFL referees need help; instant replay is a necessity

If this past week in the National Football League isn't enough of a clue that instant replay and full time officiating is a necessity, then there needs to be some investigation of what the league officials are up to. Too often in the league's most crucial games, referees are making calls that they don't even see. It's getting to the point where the refs should just get in their little huddle and flip a coin to determine which team gets the benefit of the call. But wait a minute...we've all witnessed that maybe even heads and tails are too complicated for a zebra.

I've always tried to understand the point of view of referees and have always understood how difficult it must be to make all the right calls in the heat of the moment. We all have to admit that officiating is difficult and understand that a perfect game for an official in any sport is probably more difficult than a perfect game pitched in baseball and even more difficult than Denver's bid for perfection in 1998.

So maybe all the blame can't be put on the officials. When is the league going to do something to solve this problem? I mean, what are they waiting for? Maybe it's going to take a call that has a direct hit on the NFL as a whole. The biggest positive thing the league has right now is the Denver Broncos' 12-0 record that is bringing many eyes into the world of football this season. What if it isn't an opponent that puts a blemish on Denver's record, but instead a little yellow flag that some blind referee throws, hoping that he didn't make the wrong call on a play that happened 20 yards away from him?

Just as city officials can't wait for a car wreck to finally put up a stop sign, the league can't wait for disaster to strike for them to take some course of action.

Two NFL teams walked out of Week 13 this past week feeling a disastrous and unfair action was taken against them. The Pittsburgh Steelers and the Buffalo Bills are in the heart of the AFC playoff race with only four weeks remaining in the regular season. Both teams entered this past week with a 7-4 record, putting them tied with three other teams in the AFC for third place. Only Denver and Jacksonville felt somewhat comfortable in first and second, respectively. But with a few bogus calls, both teams (if playoffs were to start today) are involved in a four-way tie for the final two playoff spots, as opposed to being in a four way tie with all of those teams enjoying an extended season.

I'm sure most of you caught the whit of NFL writers following the "tail" end of the Steelers' game against the Detroit Lions on Thanksgiving. I myself even had to chuckle after reading all the phrases that go along with the flipping of a coin. But all joking aside, the implications of that coin toss and the many other missed calls throughout the contest put many fans in doubt of who should have really won that game. The interception and touchdown that

were unfairly taken away from the Lions could have put Detroit on top without a need for overtime. On the other hand, Pittsburgh witnessed their share of bad calls. But the most crucial blow came when the clock wasn't running...something as easy and routine as a coin toss.

Depending on whom you talk to, you will probably hear many stories about



what happened in that huddle. I've heard that Jerome Bettis said tails; began to say heads then said tails; Carnell Lake said heads and Bettis said tails; and even someone from Detroit said heads and Bettis said tails. So no one truly knows what happened which makes that coin toss about as mysterious as the Steelers' Immaculate Reception in 1975, when Franco Harris somehow ended up in the endzone, with no one else, including the officials, knowing what happened. Now the "Coin Toss of '98" might not be to the level of importance of that play in '75, but it definitely should bring a sense of urgency for something to be done.

If that wasn't enough, maybe the New England Patriot's last minute drive down the field this past Sunday against the Buffalo Bills will open someone's eyes. Overlooked, but arguably more critical and obvious, was the blown call on fourth down and nine for the Patriots. With the Bills clinging to a 21-17 lead, New England quarterback Drew Bledsoe threw a 10 yard pass to the sideline which was ruled complete. After one replay on TV, it was obvious that Shawn Jefferson's right foot never touched the ground when he had complete possession of the football. A confused referee only five yards away looked to another ref 20 yards down the field. Impossible to tell from the angle that he saw the play from, he called the pass complete. There was no way that he could tell if Jefferson had complete possession, nor be able to see if both feet were inbound.

So instead of the Bills just taking a knee and letting the clock run out, the Patriots were given new life. Then on football's most inconsistently called play, the Bills were cheated again. Bledsoe heaved a pass to the endzone where the ball bounced off his receiver's shoulder pad and fell to the ground. But out came the flag. In a rarely called penalty in the final second of a game, the Bills were called for pass interference. Clearly Buffalo's Henry Jones made contact with the Patriot's receiver, but the contact had nothing to do with the fact that New England dropped the ball. New England then got the ball set down on a silver platter at the one-yard line. I won't even give the Patriot's the honor of saying what happened next. The final score: 25-21.

In a football season that is headed for a finish that will more than likely exemplify heart and hard work, it will be a shame to see a team's possible playoff berth shattered with a flip of a coin or some mind-boggling call by an

official that doesn't understand or seem to care about the consequences.

"That's just part of the game," some people might argue. But if you really think about it, that doesn't make sense. Teams don't practice their arguing with officials during the week, nor do they come up with a game plan to avoid bad calls. Refs are on the field for one reason...to enforce the NFL rulebook. When it

is shown time and time again that they aren't capable of doing that, whether it is laziness on their part or just too difficult to keep track of everything, then some other plan of action must be taken.

There are two substantial acts that could be taken by the league. Full-time officiating and instant replay would give refs

the opportunity to figure out ways to better call a game and give them a second chance to make sure the call they made is right.

If the calls made by officials are crucial to the outcome of games (which was proven this past week), then officials need to be doing more than just showing up for a few hours every Sunday to call a game. Just like every other team in the NFL needs to practice all week, so do officials. With practice, the refs can come up with better ways to call the game and review their previous week's game. This may sound funny for refs to watch game tapes, but if it means that they are more prepared, then it is beneficial.

But even full time officials wouldn't be able to see everything. Which gives more strength to the argument to bring back instant replay. From 1986-1991, the league used instant replay and it was found that it slowed down the game and, when a mistake was made, it gave the replay officials a bad name. But with the progression of technology comes a more accurate account of what happened on the field. The only way to solve the problem of the game being slowed down would be to have a time limit. It doesn't take commentators any more than a minute to review a play so why should it take any longer for an official?

"I think all the officials are honest people. Honest people can make mistakes," said NFL senior vice president George Young. But the argument of most fans doesn't deal with the honesty of a referee. It deals with the fact that players and teams do what they have to do to win. When that is done and someone that isn't part of the game takes their hard work from them, then the credibility of football loses. The fact that refs are honest people doesn't solve the problem. That isn't the answer. The answer is to give the referees help so less mistakes occur. It's time to get officials out of the negative spotlight and put the heart, dedication, and competitive drive of the players back at the forefront.

Snyder is the sports editor for the Beacon. Out of Bounds appears weekly on this page.

INTRAMURAL ROUNDUP

Intramurals

5 vs. 5 Basketball

M, W

-Sign ups are in fall semester

-play begins spring semester

Registration Deadline:
December 11

Spring semester Intramural schedules are available in the IM office.

Housing and Food Service Athlete of the Week

November 16 - November 23

Name: Andy Lawrence

Sport: Men's Basketball

Class: Junior

Position: Forward

Andy Lawrence, a junior forward, has been named the Housing and Food Service Athlete of the Week. Lawrence helped lead the Behrend Lions to the 1998-99 Hamot Classic Championship in the opening weekend of the season.

"Andy played really well after missing pretty much all of last season," said head coach Dave Niland. "He had two great games and picked up right where he left off." Lawrence was the leading scorer for the Behrend Lions in his first two seasons and last year before injuring his foot. He has scored 716 points in his career.

In Saturday's opener, Lawrence was 6-9 from the floor for 15 points and passed out five assists. On Sunday, in the championship game against Whitman College from Walla-Walla, Washington, he scored 15 on 6-10 from the field, grabbed three rebounds and had two assists.

Lawrence is a graduate of Saegertown High School.

November 23 - November 29

Name: Jason Paloskey

Sport: Men's Basketball

Class: Senior

Position: Guard

Jason Paloskey, a senior guard on the men's basketball team, has been named the Housing and Food Service Athlete of the Week. Paloskey scored 18 points in Behrend's 80-70 loss to Cornell University. He made 6 of 9 shots from the field including five three pointers against the Division I opponent. Paloskey also had five rebounds and three assists in the game.

"Jason played exceptionally well on Tuesday," said head coach Dave Niland. "JP knocked down some big shots and kept us in the game. He is shooting the ball really well to this point."

Paloskey is leading the team in scoring with a 14.3 ppg average and is nearing the 1,000 point plateau for his career. Paloskey is shooting an amazing 60% on his three point attempts this year, making 12 out of 20 through the first three games. He is also averaging 2.7 rebounds and 2.7 assists per game. Paloskey and the rest of the Behrend Lions will be facing a tough stretch of games that includes regional contests against Elmira and Fredonia State.

The Behrend Classifieds

SPRINGBREAK Florida, Texas, Cancun, Mexico, Jamaica, etc. Browse www.icpt.com and call 800-327-6013. Best hotels, prices and parties. Reps, organizations, and promoters wanted. Inter-Campus Programs.

Part time position in a residential program for individuals with developmental disabilities. Responsible for assisting in meal planning and grocery shopping, providing ongoing monitoring and instructions relating to money management and coordinating weekly schedules. Requires 25 working hours/week including evenings and weekends and required staff to sleep at facility five nights a week. Bachelor's degree in Human Services preferred. Associate degree or equivalent status required with some experience working with developmentally disabled adults. Act 33/34 clearance also required.

Mike D,
Thanks for a great
21st!!!!
Lynn

Interested Candidates please send resume to:

Dr. Gertrude A. Barber Center
Human Resource Department
136 East Avenue
Erie PA 16507

or
E-mail MaryS@drbarbercenter.org

Students and employees of Penn State Behrend are invited to submit a free classified ad in *The Beacon*. Types of ads may include personal messages and items for sale. Maximum classified length is 25 words. Persons who submit ads must state their affiliation with Behrend. Classifieds are meant for individual use. Official notices and group events should be submitted to the Calendar editor. Businesses must pay regular advertising rates. *The Beacon* can not guarantee the publication of all classified submitted for space purposes. Classifieds should be sent to the Classified editor at *The Beacon*, Reed Building or dropped off at *The Beacon* offices, or sent to behrroll4@aol.com. Deadline for submission for publication in that week's paper is Monday at 5:00PM.

*Earn credit while writing
for the Beacon*

sign up for Communications 001 Mondays 5:20-6:00