

SPORTS

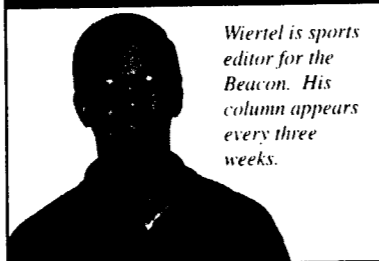
Don't Get Me Started

Teams battle courts for right to pray

For many athletes, part of their pregame ritual includes a prayer asking their creator, whomever it might be, for protection during the game. Sometimes prayers are led by coaches or students inside the locker room or before the national anthem. But according to a recent ruling by the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, pregame prayers are illegal.

In Texas, where high school football is extremely popular, pregame prayers have become an integral part of the game. For years, students have led the fans and teams in prayer before the game begins. In Santa Fe, Texas, any student who leads a prayer

Matt Wiertel



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at this Friday's game will be "disciplined as if they had cursed" says superintendent Richard Ownby. Under pressure from the superintendent, Stephanie Vega, who normally leads

the students in prayer, has changed her mind. Vega says that, "she doesn't want to get expelled for using the word God in a reverent manner."

The ruling has prompted several schools across the country to ban prayer by the students or coaches before the game. For the most part, players and coaches pray so that no one gets hurt and rarely does anyone object to praying. Under the court ruling, coaches can no longer lead a team prayer before or after the game. If the coach does lead a prayer, that will say that he is showing preference towards one religion or another,

which under the current interpretation of the law, is illegal for any school employee to do.

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), claims that when a coach leads his team in prayer he is forcing his personal beliefs on the players. But the way I see it, is if a player is offended by the prayer, that player can refuse to take part in it. For many athletes, prayer is an important part of their preparation for the game. The prayer unites the team and helps them focus on the task at hand. To take away this crucial part of the game is an injustice.

Now I will go along with the ab-

sence of prayer in the classroom, but this ruling has gone too far. Has our society been degraded so far that we now refuse to recognize religion? Apparently it has and it is time for the American public to lash back against these types of rulings that undermine our value base. For years, coaches and players have said prayers before games, now all of a sudden it has become illegal. It should be expected from a court system that grants multimillion dollar settlements to people who spill hot coffee on themselves. The political correctness and "I can't say that because it might offend someone" envelope has been

pushed too far. We shouldn't have to constantly worry about offending someone if we really believe in what we say and it is said in good taste. To my knowledge these prayers only asked that no one got hurt and that the players gave 100% of their talent to the task before them. Nowhere do I see any phrases that would directly offend one person or another. It's time to get out of this "I can't say that" mentality and back into reality. What's next, they will say that we can't wear jewelry that symbolizes religion. Oops I forgot the government already outlawed that. Will the madness ever end?

Under a 7-year review, replay is back

by Curt Sylvester
Knight-Ridder Newspapers

After a seven-year absence, instant replay is back in the NFL. The new system - which is in effect for one season - allows coaches to challenge officials' calls. The final decision will be made by officials on the field rather than in the press box. Each team gets two challenges a game. If the challenge isn't upheld, the team will be charged with a time-out. During the last two minutes of each half, challenges will be taken out of the hands of the coaches. During that time a re-

play official in the press box will decide if a play should be reviewed.

All replay reviews will be conducted by the referee on a sideline monitor after consultation with the official who made the initial call. Only if the replay shows indisputable visual evidence will a play be reversed.

Reviewable plays are those governed by the sideline, goal line, end zone and end line. That includes scoring plays, passes, out-of-bounds decisions and fumbles. In general, the system covers complete or incomplete passes, touching of a pass, illegal passes, runners not down by contact,

touching of a kick and number of players on the field.

The maximum time to be used in reviewing a play is 90 seconds. The other significant rule change involves handling of the footballs to be used by punters and placekickers. They no longer are allowed to break in new footballs by rubbing them up and working on them.

Because some teams over- or under-inflated balls or altered them in other ways, such as putting them in a dryer, the NFL ruled that only new balls - stamped with a K - will be used in kicking situations.

New rules in college football: so long, do-rags

by Curt Sylvester
Knight-Ridder Newspapers

Last year, the NCAA went after socks. The fashion cops wanted them visible - and matching for teammates. They made it a rule. This year, the fashion rules-makers addressed another delicate issue - bandannas. They're out in college football - at least if they are visible.

So long, do-rags.
"The theory of the coaches was that sometimes bandannas denote gang membership," said John Adams,

NCAA football rules committee secretary and rules editor. "When you have a visible bandanna on the field of play, it's a penalty. The penalty is a charged time-out. If a kid has a bandanna on and it's covered by the helmet, it's OK."

Adams has heard complaints that the rule is directed at black players. "but it's not," he said. "Coaches just thought it wasn't part of the game. It doesn't have anything to do with anything racial."

Two rules changes affect penalty yardage:

- Holding behind the line of scrimmage will be penalized 10 yards from the previous spot of the ball, not from the spot of the foul. This will eliminate 14- and 16-yard holding penalties, which occurred when a lineman was penalized for an infraction behind the line.

- Intentional grounding will result in a loss of down from the spot of the foul, not a loss of down and a five-yard penalty from the spot of the foul. If a quarterback is called for grounding at his 43, the next play will start there.

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