

Coaches struggling to effectively manage the game clock

By Jared Shanker

BEFORE I start, let me preface this column by emphatically stating that I, in no way think I am smarter than even the least successful high school, college or NFL coach. I've never been one of the 110,000 armchair coaches — some of whom were sitting right next to me Saturday night — claiming to have the perfect play call or believe I'd be a better offensive coordinator than Galen Hall.



MY OPINION

Having said that, it blows my mind how poorly some coaches handle the game clock in the waning seconds of halftime and at the end of games. Fans in Baton Rouge, Philadelphia and State College collectively held their heads in their hands Saturday as their coaches put their teams behind the 8-ball with

poor clock management.

Let's start with the one everyone is talking about. After a long completion, Penn State was set to go for a touchdown with six seconds left in the half instead of kicking a field goal. The Lions had one timeout left to stop the clock.

But Joe Paterno didn't call timeout. Well, not until it was too late. The offense — and officials — rushed down to the Iowa goal as the sideline watched. Finally, Paterno and assistant Mike McQueary, both 40 yards from the line of scrimmage, signaled timeout a few seconds before the ball was snapped. The officials didn't see Paterno, and Bolden spiked the ball, wiping three seconds off the clock. The Lions then took a delay penalty and were forced to kick a field goal.

Paterno isn't above criticism. The clock was mismanaged and it cost the Lions a chance to get back in the game.

On Tuesday, Paterno said he was calling for a timeout as soon as Brackett went down. He was-

n't. But his attempt to point the finger was reminiscent of another coach, and as luck had it, said coach was back in the news Saturday.

Les Miles and LSU needed a touchdown from the 2-yard line against Tennessee with just 32 seconds left in Saturday's game. In typical bonehead Miles fashion, he put mistake-prone QB Jordan Jefferson in on second down and ran the ball. He was stopped with 28 ticks left, enough time to run two plays. But given no guidance from the sideline, Jefferson let the clock run down to three seconds before the center decided to just snap the ball to Jefferson, who watched the ball sail past him.

(The Tigers won the game on a Vols penalty, confirming increasing suspicion Miles has an accord with the devil signed in blood.)

It might have been for the best that Miles offered no sideline help. In a similar situation last year, Miles told Jefferson to spike it with one second left. The outcome was obvious: The second

ran off and the Tigers lost. Miles said he didn't know who told Jefferson to spike it.

Unfortunately for the cheeky Miles, the Zapruder footage shows Miles' hands going down and to the left — a clear signal to spike it.

Look, I understand that there are a million things going through a coach's head inside the last two minutes of the game: game preparation, game flow, injuries and past history to decide how to manage the final seconds. But these guys are getting paid upwards of \$7 million a year. They should be able to figure out how a clock works and the best way to spare it.

It may not always look like it, but these mistakes cost teams wins, an unfair punishment for players who rely on the coaches to make those decisions. Coaches are control freaks and have scared players into not calling timeouts on the field without consent. So responsibility lies on the coach.

Does Bolden or Jefferson bear

some of the blame? Absolutely. But the plan should have been made clear to Bolden and Jefferson when they took the field. The clock was stopped on successive plays for Penn State before the Brackett catch; Jefferson was coming from the sideline.

Maybe it's time head coaches start hiring "clock management coaches." This coach might actually provide some benefit. Get rid of a couple "quality control" coaches and get somebody on the sideline who can whisper into the coach's ear: "Hey, we only got six seconds left to run 49 yards. Maybe we should call timeout."

That can be me — the first "quality clock control" coach. With my current salary of \$0/week, I could use the added funds. And let's face it, some coaches could probably use the help.

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