2009 Problems and Observations: From Mike Webb

Week 1

There was a defensive interception between the BJ and the L and the U had turned to help. They got the interception correct and the three had a brief conference to be sure of what they all saw. A good piece of crew work. In the same game the R called an intentional grounding; this got him an “Atta-boy”. In the other Thursday night game it appears one of the team’s coaches did not cooperate with the new restricted area rule. A flag in the 3rd quarter seemed to have corrected the problem but I am sure that was probably too late.

East-West Stadium had their sidelines marked with 3 boxes, the Restricted area (6 feet from the sideline), then a box for the coaches (another 6 feet from the restraining line) then a second line for the teams. What a dream to be able to work the sidelines and not run into anybody, and also be able to make the critical calls on out-of-bounds plays. At least one coach in the state was penalized for being late upon arrival to the field after the 20 minute halftime.

We had one play where a defender ripped the helmet off a runner by pulling on the face mask. The play was blown dead but since the runner continued running the coaches got upset the play was killed.

Week 2

Just a bunch of stuff; illegal towels (with logos, numbers, etc on them, as well as colored towels), Play cards worn on belts, wings starting 20 feet out on field, inadvertent whistles, umpires not stepping off penalties from enforcements spots, referee permitting a captain to decline an offensive pass interference on a 4th down play, and last but not least a wingman leaping over a player lying on the ground. Whew, what a weekend.

Week 3

Some crews are not addressing the new sideline rule. The earlier in the game you flag the sideline misbehavior the less of a problem you have during the rest of the game. If we all do this, the sidelines will be a very small problem after a few weeks. For those crews who feel the new rule is not necessary, just remember the problem with the coach filing suit against the official, his association and others in Texas last fall. Some back judges are not moving laterally to better view their zone of coverage. Some back judges are not going back up their sideline after the try. We need 2 officials on both sidelines to help get them cleaned up.

Week 4

If there is a penalty during a play and an inadvertent whistle is sounded (heaven forbid), then penalty acceptance nullifies the inadvertent whistle. One un-named referee, called a foul on a player tackling a runner by pulling him down by grabbing the runner’s hair. This is not a foul! Sideline decorum seems to be holding its own. Wings, keep working at it. Referees and back judges, when the clock is to your back
and the period is about to end, do not look back over your shoulder when the snap is imminent. Trust your fellow official to get the clock information.

**Add on to Week 4**

Summers County-Liberty game. Summers County scores a touchdown. On the try and after the ready, Liberty jumps offside. SCHS wanted the option to take the penalty on the kickoff. We made the mistake of allowing that option rather than enforcing it on the try. Next; Greenbrier West is lined up in an illegal formation on a punt, while Independence blocks in the back on the return. We didn't offer Indy the chance to retain possession by declining the GW foul. They certainly would not have in this case since enforcement of their block in the back would have given them possession inside their own 10. However, it was a good learning situation and the "clean hands" principle is now a part of our pre-game.

**Week 5**

Oddball play – K is lined up for a try by kick and the would-be kicker goes in motion prior to the snap. The holder catches the snap while on his knee, then rises and tries to advance. Ruling: The ball is dead immediately upon possession by the holder. There must be a kicker in position for the dead ball exception to be applicable.

Play: R1 signals for a fair catch then the punt bounced about 4 yards in front of him and then right up into his hands. R1 just stood there and the BJ sounded his whistle. A player from K then drove right into R1. Ruling: Dead ball foul on the K player. The ball automatically became dead as soon as R1 got possession. R1 did not have typical fair catch protection, since the ball had been grounded but he certainly had protection from being hit after the ball became dead.

Since it was such a rainy weekend some crews took great care in keeping the ball off the ground when getting the used, wet ball out and a dry, new ball in. Others just flopped the balls all over the place. Guys, dry or wet, keep the ball off the ground.

**Week 6**

This did not happen in WV, thank heavens. **Play:** 4th and 10 for K on their 40. K1 punts the ball which is very high and short but it comes down over K’s 46 where R1 muffs the ball causing it to go back behind K’s line of scrimmage. While the punt was still in the air R4 illegally blocked in the back on the 50. Now then the play continues – K3 picks up the muffed kick behind his line (on his 38) and advances to his 43, is hit by R8 and fumbles. R8 picks up the fumble and races into the end zone for what looks like a TD. But wait, R fouled prior to gaining possession and the foul was a PSK foul. **Ruling:** Take the points off the board and penalize R for the PSK foul from the 50, where the foul occurred. 1st and 10 for R from their 40.

We seem to be having difficulties with “shotgun” quarterbacks moving forward to receive the snap but the movement is prior to the snap and there is no one-second pause prior to the snap. Now they are reaching forward and also stepping forward at the same time and all this movement is just prior to the snap (less than one second). In the past we have let the QB move his hands forward in a deliberate fashion (not to be confused with a false start) and receive the snap. We have always ruled a false start or illegal shift if a lineman, or back makes a move forward prior to the snap and there is no one second
pause. Let’s recall the offensive halfback who is in a 3-point stance, forgets the snap and quickly moves forward just prior to the snap. Should be called a false start. Yes, I have heard all the mumbling about him being able to go in motion but the motion must not be a quick act simulating action at the snap.

If we use the same philosophy and call a false start (that is what these are) in these actions by the quarterbacks we can get the play off cleanly. I recommend the false start rather than an illegal shift because you won’t need to bring back a TD scoring play to access the penalty for the dead ball false start. Talk to the coaches of these shotgun teams prior to the game and tell them what the rule is.

We seem to be having difficulty with coaches and officials who do not know what is in the Rules Book. Read page 84; Wearing Illegal Equipment/Adornments item 6. The banded play cards may be worn on the wrist but no where else. Pay attention officials!

Week 7

Play: Team B calls a timeout and their players huddle with their coaches near the sideline. We blow the whistle to inform both teams that there are 15 seconds remaining in the timeout. Team A comes back on the field promptly, but team B is still huddled on the sideline when the 60 seconds are up. We tell team B to get on the field twice within an additional 15-20 seconds, but they are still huddled on the sideline. Finally, the referee gives the ready-for-play signal and Team A snaps the ball while the defense is barely breaking up their huddle on the sideline and their QB runs for a touchdown.

The coaches screamed at us saying that we could not start the play until they were ready because they were the ones who called the timeout. We then explained that they were allowed a maximum of 1 minute for a charged timeout, and that we gave them an extra 15-20 seconds before we marked the ball ready-for-play. Did we do the right thing?

Answer & Ruling: No, penalize B (or R if it is a kickoff) for delay of game, see 3-6-2f, immediately after the 60 seconds. Do not give B an additional amount of time. If you do mark the ball ready and A snaps the ball, kill the play and penalize B for delay. Be careful of clock time. Although we have to give the offense (or kicking team) 25 seconds to put the ball in play, they will get a delay of game penalty if they do not meet the timeline. Let’s not tinker with the timing rules.

Good News. Watched a crew Friday night where the timing was almost perfect. The ready’s were within the prescribed limits, the ready after time-outs were at the 60 second mark, the interval between quarters was 60 seconds, etc. Really demonstrates how our guys are working to get better. They also worked a pretty good game. At the threat of eating my words, our mechanics are much improved and we are making a limited number of rules errors.

Week 8

What can happen when you don’t know the rules? Play: R1 gives an invalid fair catch signal during a punt play, at his 4-yard line. The kick goes into the end zone where R2 makes the catch and advances. R4 clips K2 on R’s 10-yard line, K3 then slugs R4 and the coach of K runs out on the field screaming that he is getting screwed. By the way - R2 was tackled on his 35-yard line. Ruling: The kick was dead as soon as it passed through the plane of R’s goal line so the officials should have blown the play dead. The invalid fair catch signal was a PSK foul and since the kick ended in R’s end zone the basic spot would
have been R’s 20-yard line. The foul was behind the basic spot, so it will be accessed from R’s 4-yard line making it 1st and 10 on R’s 2-yard line. The other fouls are all dead ball action and if the clip by R4 was deemed a personal foul by itself it will be penalized first, from R’s 2 to the 1-yard line. The foul on K3 will be penalized out to R’s 16-yard line. Then the foul on K’s coach will be penalized out to R’s 31-yard line. All of this could have been avoided if the officials working this game knew the rules.

Linesmen: You are responsible for the line-to-gain equipment. Check every now and then to see that the chain has been stretched taut. A play involving a chain that had not been stretched may have enabled a team to gain a small advantage. The ball seemed to have passed the front stake (because it was not where it was supposed to be) and the LJ stopped the clock for a first down. It was discovered that the chain had not be pulled taut and this gave a team time to get their act together to run a play. They had used all their timeouts. We also had a young quarterback, turn 180 degrees to spike the ball to stop the clock. Of course, this is just like a fumble and the ball remains live. Some crews are permitting a Team’s seniors to line up at the hashes for the coin toss. Please read 3-2-2; get them back on the sidelines or in the end zones.

Week 9

Does it seem like it has rained every Friday since the middle of September? Not much to report on this week. Seems like we have finally settled down to following accepted mechanics and have caught up with the rules.

However -- PLAY 1: Illegal forward pass and BJ had interference. R offset the penalties. Wrong! RULING: The illegal forward pass is a running play, so it is impossible to have defensive pass interference. PLAY 2: We did have a PSK foul by R2 then R1, who gave a fair catch signal, trying to advance after his catch. RULING: Both penalties must be enforced, since the advancement is a dead ball foul. It will still be 1st and 10 for R.

Watch out for the “Guard Around” that is shown in the following video.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a3KpAED0DH4

I am not sure the guard is always 1 yard behind his line of scrimmage when he is handed the ball. If he is, no problem.

Week 10

I discovered a new mechanic to start a football game. After the coin toss the referee goes to the goal line of the KICKING team. He then proceeds to hustle up the middle of the field to the RECEIVERS goal line. Pretty impressive! Wonder what the advantage of this is?

In rainy weather we sometimes don’t officiate dead ball stuff prior to getting a new ball in. Be careful! No one will do anything until we get the new ball in. OBSERVE PLAYERS.
Review Rule 3-3-4 b. 3. - If a penalty has a loss of down provision the period is not to be extended

I have looked at 22 crews so far this year and most are doing the correct things. For some reason a few have not received the information we give out at the Interpreter’s Clinic prior to the beginning of the season. They also have not read and understood our NF Officials Manual. I find it hard to believe they would just make up their own mechanics. ???

Week 11

We have not had this mechanic discussed for a long time. When an unsportsmanlike or dead ball foul occurs at the end of a period – signal, enforce then change ends. Illegal snaps are dead ball fouls – be sure to shut everything off with your whistles.

A coach came onto the field and was hit with an unsportsmanlike foul from a wingman. He demonstrated his displeasure by jumping up and down and doing a "discus throw" with his head set. Another official flagged him for his unsportsmanlike conduct. Two unsportsmanlike fouls in succession. Sometimes it is worth the reporting just to reward guys like this.

Observed a crew who had no pre-game, to speak of. As you might guess their game showed a lack of concentration and preparation.