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## Officials lacked common sense in UW-BYU game

By Jim Caple  
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The end of Saturday's Washington-BYU football game reminded me of when a friend and I coached a little league baseball team.

A few memories stick out from that season. I remember the mother who asked me to tell her son not to wear his shin guards to bed because they were tearing his sheets. I remember the girl who was forced to wear a cup when catching because of league regulations, though I do not know how we were supposed to check this. I remember the boy who asked me during batting practice what sex was like.

And I remember how the season ended.

It's the last game of the year, the winner goes to the playoffs. We're tied heading into the bottom of the sixth and final inning. The opposing team leads off with a triple. My friend and I decide to load the bases to set up a potential force play at the plate. We tell our catcher -- the one who wore his shin guards to bed -- to call for an intentional walk. He does so in the standard fashion. He stands up as the pitch is about to be thrown and steps off to the side.

The umpire calls a balk because he stepped out of the catcher's box.

My friend and I go nuts.

Yes, technically, the umpire was correct. The rules said it was a balk if the catcher stepped out of the box, but how was a 10-year-old supposed to know that? Plus, the catcher's "box" was basically imaginary because no one ever chalked it before the game. And although the odds were against our winning -- how many little league teams can hold an opponent scoreless if it already has the bases loaded with no outs? -- what bothered me most was that the umpire's call ended a season. It would have been much better for him to simply tell our catcher, "By the way, son, that's technically a balk. I know you didn't know the rule, so I'm telling you now. Next time, just don't step so far away from the plate."

Instead, he made a call that left this poor 10-year-old thinking he had screwed up and ended his team's season.

Which is similar to the referee's call at the end of the Huskies-Cougars game.

In case you didn't see the play or read the Huskies blogs, quarterback Jake Locker scrambled into the end zone with two seconds left to complete a long drive against BYU and make the score 28-27 in favor of BYU. As Locker jumped up from the ground in celebration, he tossed the football over his shoulder and into the air. It was not tossed in anyone's direction. It was not spiked to the ground. Locker did not get in anyone's face (other than the teammates he hugged). He was just a joyous young player reacting to



Does this look a player trying to taunt the opposition?

an apparent game-saving touchdown drive.

But the refs threw a flag for unsportsmanlike conduct. The 15-yard penalty backed up the Huskies' PAT to the 18-yard line, and BYU blocked the 35-yard conversion attempt. End of game.

The refs excused themselves after the game by saying that it was not a judgment call, that whenever a player throws the ball in the air, he *has to* throw the flag. That's nonsense. Every call is a judgment call of some sort. Was that holding? Was that pass interference? Could the pass have been caught? A good ref takes the entire situation into context. A good ref would have realized that the intent of the rule -- not showing up an opponent -- was not being violated. A good ref would have kept the flag in his pocket. A good ref would have calmly told Locker what the rule was and warned him to be careful in the future.

Let us suppose that Locker *was* guilty of trying to show up an opponent. (He was not.) Doesn't a 15-yard penalty seem a trifle excessive? You're telling me that celebration demands the most onerous penalty you can give a team? That reacting to a successful play with pure joy is as bad as maliciously hitting a player out of bounds or clipping him below the knees or doing anything that might result in a severe injury? Please.

It was one of the absolute worst calls I've ever seen in football. The only thing that tempers it somewhat is that BYU was the better team in this game and that Washington coach Ty Willingham planned to go for the tie rather than go for two and the upset win; it was pretty clear that there was no way the Huskies would have been able to stop BYU's offense in overtime.

Unless, of course, BYU did something heinous and unsportsmanlike, such as showing up the Huskies after scoring a touchdown, such as hugging one another and shouting and running off the field all superiorlike. I mean, that sort of behavior might fly in the Mountain West Conference, but by God, not in the Pac-10.

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