



Monday, September 8, 2008 - Page updated at 12:00 AM

Permission to reprint or copy this article or photo, other than personal use, must be obtained from The Seattle Times. Call 206-464-3113 or e-mail resale@seattletimes.com with your request.

Pac-10 coordinator can't fault UW-BYU officials for following conduct rule

By Bob Condotta
Seattle Times staff reporter

Dave Cutaia, coordinator of football officiating for the Pac-10 Conference, didn't have to think long before figuring out how to respond to the controversy surrounding the penalty called on Huskies quarterback Jake Locker near the end of Saturday's Brigham Young-Washington game.

He just reviewed the rule, then decided the crew got it right, flagging Locker for an unsportsmanlike conduct penalty when he tossed the ball after scoring a touchdown with two seconds left. The Huskies, moved back 15 yards, had an extra-point try blocked and lost 28-27.

"The rule seems pretty cut and dried," Cutaia said of Rule 9, Section 2, Article 2c, which states that a player can be penalized for an unsportsmanlike act for "throwing the ball high into the air."

Cutaia added, "I can't say the official is incorrect if he's following the rule. Let's say the rule just said you can't celebrate or taunt — that would be a different story. But the rule is pretty clear that you can't throw the ball high into the air. Coach [Tyrone] Willingham runs a great program and I know Locker is a great kid. But unfortunately that's what it says in the rule book. I don't know what else to say."

The referee for the game was Larry Farina. Cutaia said he thought the call was made by the field judge, Mike McCabe.

Cutaia said he essentially agreed with what seemed to be Willingham's prevailing sentiment — that the real issue is that the rule is in place at all.

"It's a tough call," Cutaia said. "Maybe the problem is that it's there."

Cutaia, in his second year as coordinator of Pac-10 officiating after serving as a conference official for 24 years, said the rule is part of the NCAA's efforts at increasing sportsmanship. Cutaia said conferences were told before the season that the sportsmanship rules would be a point of emphasis.

"Many of these rules in the area of celebration came in 10 years ago," he said. "But they've expanded on them and increased them."

Also prohibited are kicking, throwing, spinning or carrying the ball any distance for an official to retrieve it, spiking the ball (as is allowed in the NFL), or any other unsportsmanlike act that delays the game.

"I can see people being angry about it," Cutaia said. "No official wants to make that kind of call at any time. But I don't know what to say because the rule is pretty clear."

Farina said after the game that throwing the flag in that instance "was not a judgment call," but Cutaia said "there's always a little bit of judgment." But Cutaia said he would expect that anybody throwing the ball in the air the way Locker did would get flagged.

"It's legal to celebrate with your teammates," he said. "Maybe what fans have seen are some other things that aren't against the rules, like you score a TD and you drop the ball. That's OK. The rule says to get it to an official or leave it there. You can't spike it, throw it or do any of that stuff."

The call received wide condemnation nationally Saturday night and into Sunday, with TV commentators Terry Bradshaw and Jimmy Johnson each ripping the officials during the Fox NFL pregame show. Many observers chalked it up to controversial Pac-10 officiating; many linked it to the infamous ending to the Oklahoma-Oregon game two years ago.

"You can bring that up all you want and do what you need to do," Cutaia said. "But what I'm saying is, how can I say the official is incorrect? Look at the rule and tell me I'm missing something."

Despite the call, the Huskies still had a chance to send the game into overtime. But Ryan Perkins' kick was blocked. Willingham said later that he thought the added 15 yards "changes everything" about the execution of the kick but that "it's still one that we count on" being able to make.

BYU coach Bronco Mendenhall said the penalty altered the way his team approached the extra point.

"Any time you can move the ball farther back, it usually lowers trajectory and gives you a better chance to block it," Mendenhall said. After consulting with an assistant, he made the decision to not worry about a fake and send everyone in an attempt to block it.

The block was credited to defensive end Jan Jorgensen.

Notes

- UW safety **Darin Harris**, taken off the field by ambulance after a scary incident in the fourth quarter, was released from Harborview Medical Center on Sunday. Harris tested negative for neck and spinal injuries but was diagnosed with a concussion. His playing status is uncertain.

Bob Condotta: 206-515-5699 or bcondotta@seattletimes.com

Copyright © 2008 The Seattle Times Company