



COLLEGE FOOTBALL OFFICIATING, LLC

COMMISSIONER JON STEINBRECHER: REMARKS AT CFO NATIONAL REFEREES CONFERENCE

Dr. Jon Steinbrecher, Commissioner of the Mid-American Conference and chair of the CFO Board of Managers, delivered the opening address to the plenary session of the CFO National Referees Conference, Dallas, April 26, 2019. Here is a transcript of that address.

Good morning! Great to be with you.

I just spent two days with the other FBS/CFP commissioners and I bring their greetings.

This is an interesting avocation that you have. You voluntarily put yourself in a position in which thousands if not millions of people are going to critique your every move.

All for a modest fee.

Thank you for doing so.

I want to touch on a handful of topics and simply lay out a few thoughts.

Leadership –

Let's start with leadership.

You are the leader on the field. You set the tone. How do you build teamwork and foster collaboration? When someone is struggling, how do you help that person work through their difficulties? Are you willing to accept more of the blame when things go wrong and give more of the credit to others when things go correctly?

The quality of a leader is reflected in the standards they set for themselves. If you accept average – then that's what you will get. We are not about average! Expect more and deliver more.

Integrity

Integrity is central to being an official. Zig Ziglar said, "It is true that integrity alone won't make you a leader, but without integrity you will never be one."

This applies not only to what you do on the field, but how you live your life off the field. Avoid self-inflicted wounds. You can recover from a missed call on the field; however if something occurs that brings into question your integrity, your honor – you may not get a second chance on that.

The scrutiny we are putting officials under – background checks for instance – will not be lessened. If anything, there will be more of that, with more depth and intensity to it.

Which leads me into the issue of *sports wagering* . . .

Gambling

Sports wagering is now legal in 15 states and expect that number to grow to 34 states within 18 months. We all have an interest in insuring that the games are legit and on the up and up. More specifically that involves coaches, players, and officials.

You can be sure that people are tracking how your officiating crew is against the spread. I can point to a handful of crews last year, who when they worked a game, the favorite never beat the spread. Does not mean that anything was done wrong – but it does bring attention and scrutiny. People track this stuff and pay attention to it.

Information is of vital importance. People will be seeking it. Thus, what you say or what you share is something you must be conscience of. Stated bluntly – protect all information. You don't share where your assignments are, you don't share what you know about the condition of any players, you don't share what you think about coaches.

For the bookmakers to set the line for a game – they need to know: where the game is played, expected weather, field surface, which players are expected to play, and who is officiating.

Don't allow anyone to pump you for information. ANY INFORMATION.

Social Media

If you are on social media, you need to be scrubbing what you have posted in the past and be exceptionally circumspect about what you post. People are looking, and as we have seen in the past year – it can cost you assignments or your career depending on what has been posted.

Do you have any pictures posted of you in the shirt of your favorite school or alma mater? Think about it. This is an area with a lot of self-inflicted wounds. You may want to consider getting off social media.

Composure

You are the leader on the field – you must keep your composure.

In my office I have hanging on the wall by my door a framed copy of the famous poem by Rudyard Kipling, titled “If.” Portions of the poem are printed on a sign that hangs over the door as you enter center court at Wimbledon.

“If you can keep your head when all about you are losing theirs and blaming it on you . . .” is how the poem begins.

That is dead on. Only two people are authorized to get upset during a game – and that is your coordinator and your commissioner. No one in this room and no one on your crew is permitted to get upset during a game. If you lose your mind – we are done.

You control what goes on, on the field. I don’t ever want to hear about a coach being “mean” to you, or he wouldn’t get out of your ear. Do you have a flag in your pocket? – There are appropriate times to use it.

Preventive officiating with the players, preventive officiating with the coaches. . . Know what the limits are, be consistent, and enforce the limits.

I have a good friend who is a very good basketball coach and he told me this story about an interaction he had with an official this season. He is normally very mild mannered on the court, but for whatever reason he was up and on the officials from the opening tip on this night. Really pushing the boundary. Late in the first half during a free throw, the lead official slid over near his bench, and while watching the action told my friend (the coach) that he knew he was coaching hard and trying to do his job. And, he was officiating hard and was going to work a good game for the players. And that let’s just both do our jobs and it’s going to great game. That short conversation, delivered without sarcasm, or profanity, or any attempt to be humorous defused the whole situation. Calmed my friend the coach down and the rest of the night proceeded without incident.

Keeping composed and doing a great job of communicating handled what could have been an escalating situation. Communication skills are what separate the great officials from the rest. Can you develop the ability to march into a tense situation, deliver the message – and remember you are not there to give a clinic, perform a stand-up routine or be their friend? You are there to provide appropriate information and if necessary inform the head coach when he or any players are out of line. Master that skill set!

The Art & The Science of Officiating

You know better than anybody, that officiating is more than simply knowing the rules. You must know the rules, and you must know them cold. But it’s more than that – there is an art involved. When is a hold not a hold?

There is the letter of the rule . . .

There is the spirit of the rule . . .

And there is the context around which the rule is enforced.

Get a feel for it.

Consistency

My comments are aimed not only at all our referees, and in fact all our football officials, but also the coordinators who I will be meeting with in a little over a month. Folks, it's time we see, we call, and we enforce rules the same way all across this country. At the top of this list is targeting. We HAVE TO build strong consensus about what is, and what is not targeting. Both are equally important. I, along with the entire CFO, are expecting Rogers and Dean to hold our Coordinators accountable, and we expect the Coordinators to hold you accountable. I am tired of hearing that this conference interprets a foul one way while another conference looks at it another way. No more! Let's make it a goal to be back here in a year and be able to celebrate improvement in this area. This is important!

Let me close by saying that each one of you are the best of the best in college football officiating. You are ELITE. You made it into this room with hard work, study, more hard work, teamwork, collaboration, film study, a healthy dose of humility, a great deal of sacrifice, and then more study and hard work.

On top of that – you have been placed into a position of leadership – you are wearing the white hat. You are the assigning conference's representative on that field. You have a commissioner who has faith and trust in the coordinator. And a coordinator who has placed his faith and trust in you. You have to earn it – every play of every game. There are no throwaway plays and no throwaway games. On top of that – you have the responsibility to manage and lead your crew. Will your crew be better in the third game than in the first game? Will you be better in the seventh game than in the fifth game? If you or members of your crew have a rough game, are you going to redouble your efforts, dig in, work on your weaknesses or errors, and come out raring to go your next game?

I'm a big history buff – in 2008, HBO did a seven-part series on the life of John Quincy Adams, a founding father of this country and the 6th president of the United States. Great series by the way. In any case, President Adams said, "If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader."

That's what we ask of you. It's what we require of you. And what we expect of you.

Have a great season!