

MIAA changes the game



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During any sporting event, there is a select group of people who take the most heckling. They receive the threats, the profanities and the violent gestures. They have the power to crush dreams and make them come true. Often they are the most scrutinized people on the field. They are the referees.

Today, the Bulldogs will play the 65th annual Old Hickory Stick game against the Northwest Missouri State Bearcats. Running along the sidelines and in the middle of the field, the referees will be forced to make the tough calls, with the added pressure of calling the oldest trophy game in NCAA Div. II.

Phil Laurie, MIAA Football Supervisor of Officials, said the referees have been training harder than ever to ensure they can reduce mistakes.

"I sent a memo out to all of the officials that I was challenging them to get in better athletic shape," Laurie said. "When we had our clinic in August, we had 53 officials at that time, and they lost 621 pounds. [Getting in better shape] helps them get in better position and if you're in good position, you're going to make good calls."

The weight loss program for the officials will help them accurately enforce the new rules put forth by the MIAA this offseason.

Laurie said the new rules start with the "10 second subtraction rule." This rule gives a team the choice to run 10 seconds off of the clock instead of enforcing a yardage penalty on the offending team, should a penalty be called on them in the final minute of either half.

"The clock runoff [rule] is really a big deal," head football coach Gregg Nesbitt said. "If there's a penalty in the fourth quarter with 10 seconds left in the game then the game's over."

The MIAA also implemented new rules concerning unsportsmanlike conduct. Every unsportsmanlike conduct penalty automatically is a 15-yard penalty.

Laurie said the officials will call the penalty in more situations.

"If a kid is just excited because of a great play he made, we're not going to call it," Laurie said. "However, any degrading unsportsmanlike act will be a foul."

In the event of an unsportsmanlike conduct penalty being called, the ball will be whistled dead at the spot of the foul. For example, if a player broke away from the defense and high-stepped into the end zone, the touchdown would be forfeited and the 15-yard penalty would start at the spot the player started showboating.

There is also a new rule concerning intentional grounding. The new rule states that the ball no longer has to be catchable by the targeted receiver to be safe from an intentional grounding rule. If a receiver is close to where the ball flies or falls it will be ruled an incomplete pass. This differs from last year's rules that stated the ball had to be catchable to be ruled an incomplete pass instead of intentional grounding.

There were a few smaller rule changes as well. A play now will be whistled dead immediately following a 12 men on the field ruling instead of letting the play run and then whistling it dead. Also, this is the last year the conference will require gray or somewhat gray gloves. Starting in 2012 players will be allowed to wear multi-colored gloves.

Laurie said he has ensured all the MIAA schools were informed of the rules.

"I visited all 14 of our schools and talked to the teams and the staff about the new rules, so they all understand them," Laurie said. "They know the rules, they have videos just like the officials do about the new rules, so they're up to date on [the changes]."