

Topeka Officials Association

Football Newsletter – Weeks Two & Three

I Can Already Hear the Comments – Where was Week 2? Now that he's retired, he can't find time to write a Newsletter? What is his deal?

Well, here is the deal: The job I did on Friday of week 1 may well have been the single worst effort of my nearly 40 year career. It all started with my preparation during the week – was it the fact that Mike Hayes would not be mt “R” for the first time in almost 35 years? Was it the fact that I felt terrible? Did I all of a sudden have no confidence in my partners? Was it the fact that the point-spread in newspaper was 50+ points. What the heck was the problem?

Before the game, I went with our “R” to visit with the coaches – I was so out of sorts that I failed to record the responses of the coaches to the equipment questions. Afterwards, i convinced myself that since I had nothing written, the “R” must not have asked the questions.

During our pre-game we covered kick-offs. I could not coherently tell the crew where I was to line up – let alone what my keys were. I was so “out of it” that I was truly wondering about my mental wellbeing. And, I certainly did not feel like writing a newsletter after the game.

Saturday was a much better day for me – I worked the North Texas – OU game in Norman and one of Big 12 officials working that game was Tripp Sutter. Many of you may remember Tripp from the couple of years he worked while living here in Lawrence. I mentioned to him my horror stories from the previous evening and all of a sudden it began to dawn on me that it had been years since I had had an evening like the Friday of week 1. Maybe it was just my turn – maybe things were not as bad as they seemed – maybe I needed a night like that as a “wake-up call.” Whatever the issue, I decided to wait until after our Week 2 game to write the next newsletter.

Week 2 was much, much better: Again, the margin was 50+ points but the game turned out to be much closer than that. We had a decent pre-game and for some reason I knew that I was ready for the contest. During the week I spent time in the rules Book as well as the Mechanics Book. I tried to engulf myself in football. Whether the rest of the crew was contemplating replacing me or just smart enough to leave me alone, I felt absolutely ready to work and, yes, “R” did ask the questions, and i did record the answers. None of us is perfect but we all need to prepare to be as close to perfect as possible. We never really talked about it, but the crew did everything right to better prepare me for our second game. That is the beauty of “crew.” We are only as good as the weakest member!!

The newest member of our crew is Dwight Neibling, who is working BJ – our BJ the last few years has been Tim Greenwood – he decided he wanted to work on the LOS – where our new R, Dean Pearce, has worked the past few years. It seemed almost providential that all these changes would actually work. But, they did and they do!

One of the issues we often face, even at the best of facilities, is less than ideal dressing rooms. Even at the almost new Mill Valley High School, the officials are placed in a part of the building at the north end of the field used for locker rooms, maintenance facilities and just about every other use one can imagine. The alternative? The school is several hundred yards from field and the school was built with NO locker rooms for officials of any sports. It just goes to show you that it makes no difference how many millions of dollars are spent on a building if they are not spent wisely (once again, kudos to USD 501 and the Hummer facility in Topeka – there are no better facilities in this area that I have seen!!).

So, here are five officials in a space of about 75 square feet – we naturally have to spill out into the “garage area” - just to accommodate my officiating bag, if nothing else. People are coming and going – there is no privacy and no way to concentrate on the pre-game. But somehow “R” Dean Pearce gets his points across amongst all the confusion and, after the nightmarish performance I had during Week 1, I felt a real sense of urgency to perform well.

The game itself was hard-hitting and played by two teams with a sense of urgency. It was a back and forth game with momentum changing on a regular basis. It also featured virtually no complaining by either team or either coaching staff and there were very few penalties. I felt very comfortable with what the crew was trying to achieve and what I wanted to get done on a personal basis – I had clearly in mind my pre-snap “ritual” and what I wanted to get accomplished during the play and following the play. Somehow, I had managed NOT to do ANY of those things during our Week 1 game.

Rituals – how critical they are before the snap – at the snap – during the play – and after the play. Know the players you are responsible for during all these periods of time – know what you are to be looking for! Develop your own ritual, as we have discussed many times! Failure to do so can mean you are in for a very long – very humbling evening. Just ask me about Week One!!!