

On a recent trip to Tumwater, Washington to do an officiating clinic I had the opportunity to spend some time with Doug Ringenbach who talked about “Live Mind Officiating”. He has some excellent thoughts and perspectives, which might be valuable for all of us to consider...

Bill LeMonnier

“Live Mind Officiating”

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As a former player and football coach, I wanted to get back on the field and experience the excitement of the game. The thrill of the town people and students coming into the stadium, the band marching on the field, the cheer staff leading their fans with encouragement, the teams warming up for the big game – I missed that *Friday Night Feeling*.

Reading the sports page one morning, I noted an article for readers to contact a number to find out how to become a football official. I made the call, found out about the pre-season meeting, and started the steps to getting on the field. That was six years ago. As I reflect on the process to becoming an official on the field that includes meetings, taking tests, field clinics, watching video, reading the football rule and mechanics manuals, I found out an official needs to be a life time learner. In the process I learned that there are basic concepts the official must take on the field each game.

The status of the ball is either “live ball” or “dead” ball. During the live ball play, the officials needs to be looking at the players in their area, know where the eligible receivers are located, rule on catch or no catch, fumble or incomplete on a pass play, forward progress of the ball carrier, be ready to throw the flag on a multitude of penalty possibilities that may occur, and keep officiating until the ball becomes dead.

At one of my early football meetings, one of the presenters stated that we must become “good dead ball officials”. I was not sure of the meaning of that

statement. I asked questions. I went to games as a sideline observer. I wanted to find out what a good “dead ball official” does.

After six years of officiating and talking with other officials, I have arrived at some conclusions about dead ball officiating in my wing officiating assignments. I found that one needs to keep officiating even after the ball is dead. In this learning process, I have arrived at the term “Live Mind Officiating” This term to me notes the many mental processes that a good official goes through when the ball is not in play. The following is a sequence of thoughts that may apply.

The down ends – ball becomes dead

- ✓ Has the line to gain been reached? Is it close?
- ✓ Is there any action after the play that is unnecessary and requires a penalty flag or verbal warning?
- ✓ What is the status of the clock – Should it be running? Not running?
- ✓ Is the down marker correct on the box and on my wrist?
- ✓ Did I confirm the correct down with the Referee and other officials?
- ✓ Substitutes – are they entering and exiting properly and timely?
- ✓ Player count: eleven players on the field for Team A and Team B.
- ✓ Do I have time to talk to the coach about penalty information requested?

Thinking Ahead

- ✓ Where the line to gain on the sideline is – how far does Team A need to advance for a first down?
- ✓ Will the distance be greater than ten yards? Do we have double stakes?
- ✓ What is the game situation? Pass or run? Trick play? Backward pass? Reverse?

Enforcement

- ✓ Restrictive Zone: Are there coaches or players in the Restrictive Zone when the center snap is about to be made.
- ✓ Are there any players in the neutral zone after the ready whistle?

- ✓ Are there seven players on the line of scrimmage when the center snap is made?
- ✓ Is there a player in motion – what is my responsibility for that player?

All of these thoughts need to be addressed during the game – a mental check list. The football may be dead by rule; however, the football official's mind should stay active. The time between downs is not dead! And so I use the term "Live Mind Officiating" when the ball is not in play. A time to be sure the action for the next play meets the application of the rules. Also, I want to know if I have enough information to gain an advantage of knowing what possible plays may develop.

An officiating crew who stays active physically and mentally for the entire game have a high potential for a game to run smoothly. The "Live Mind" starts with the pre-game and continues through to the final horn and post-game review. Then the football official can walk out into the Friday night atmosphere with a sense of accomplishment for a job well done.