

UNSPORTSMANLIKE CONDUCT: Suggested Guidelines

Given the national attention that continues to roil around player behavior and unsportsmanlike conduct, it might be helpful for me to share some thoughts as we go forward. Calling or not calling these fouls places our officials in a difficult situation; it is the nature of the business to be criticized, and it seems especially true when we try to apply 9-2-1. These are judgment calls, as are all the decisions officials make during the action of the game.

As officials apply their judgment, perhaps these guidelines will be helpful:

- Remember that the game is one of high emotion, played by gifted teenagers who are affirmed by playing a game at which they are exceptionally talented.
- Do not be overly technical in applying this rule.
- Do allow for brief spontaneous emotional reactions at the end of a play.
- Beyond the brief, spontaneous bursts of energy, officials should flag those acts that are clearly prolonged, self-congratulatory, and making a mockery of the game.

A list of specifically prohibited acts is in (a) thru (h) on FR-122,123; this list is intended to be illustrative and not exhaustive. We can all agree that these acts are clearly intended to taunt or demean, and they should not be allowed—not only because they are written in the book, but because they offend our sense of how the game should be played. We now have enough experience with this rule to know what “feels” right and wrong. Note that most if not all of these fall outside the category of brief, spontaneous outbursts. Rather, they present themselves as taunting, self-glorification, demeaning to opponents, or showing disrespect to the opponents and the game.

When such a situation arises, I encourage officials to wait a count, take a deep breath, and assess what they feel about what they have seen.

If it feels OK, let it go.

If it feels wrong, flag it.

It will never be possible to be totally specific in writing what should and should not be allowed. But we trust our officials to be men of good judgment who know in their hearts what should and should not be allowed in the heat of an emotional game.

Rogers Redding

SEC Coordinator of Football Officials