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COLLEGE SPORTS

Mountain West moves to 8-man officiating crew

Wyoming coach Craig Bohl picks up the tab, a loss on same day

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LAS VEGAS — With very few rule changes in college football this year — an all-time low, actually — the biggest change in officiating for the Mountain West crews this year will be their numbers.

Last year the conference tested an eight-man crew, with half of the games using the new rotation first brought about by the Big 12. This season, it will be a permanent move, one Air Force coach Troy Calhoun said is a positive one for the game.

"Love it. Absolutely love it," Calhoun said. "I think there are certain expenditures you carry out that are prudent, that make sense, that make for a more quality game. That's one of them. That's a good investment."

Calhoun said the average fan in the stands may not notice a difference, but athletic directors might, having to pay an additional \$2,000 every contest.

But Mountain West supervisor of officials Greg Burks, who met with the media Wednesday as the conference held its annual media days, said it makes a big difference for the crews and how they can see and call a game.

For Burks, an active official, one of the biggest advantages with more eyes on the field is the ability to check offensive substitutions and allow defenses to counter those moves.

"If the offense does not substitute, they can go as fast as they want," Burks said. "We don't change how we spot the football, how we referee.

"As soon as they substitute, if the defense sends somebody I (slow play) and that's a 3-second window for the defense to make a substitution."

Rule changes for the upcoming season Burks noted were:



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Wyoming coach Craig Bohl, entering his second season with the Cowboys, met with the media Wednesday at the Mountain Division took its turn at Mountain West media days in Las Vegas. (Mike Brohard / Loveland Reporter-Herald)

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- Under illegal equipment, facemasks must be constructed so that a finger cannot get caught in it. Also, back pads must remain covered at all times by the jersey. In any case of illegal equipment, the player must leave the field for at least one play, though teams may spend a timeout.
- Teams must finish pre-game warm up and leave the field at least 22 minutes before kickoff.
- Onside kicks are now reviewable. Burks said that stems mostly from teams sending blockers

down field to take out players in an effort to recover the ball. Rules now state a kicking team may not block players until the ball has cleared the 10 yards needed for them to recover it. Infractions will lead to a 5-yard penalty and a re-kick.

Coffee break — Wyoming coach Craig Bohl shared a story from last season and a chance meeting with Boise State coach Bryan Harsin at a Starbucks in Laramie before the game. The two were getting their morning cup of Joe and spent a little time talking about the game.

The bad news for Bohl was not only did the Broncos win the game 63-14, but Bohl picked up the tab for the coffee.

"Isn't that bad," Bohl quipped. "You pay for the coffee and you get your butt whipped by 60-some points. It was rough. It was a good thing I was seasoned veteran, because that was a rough night. I bought the guy a coffee. Waive the flag, pull your guys out."

Air game — New Mexico coach Bob Davie said his option attack is evolving, and he's hoping to throw the ball a little bit more than in the past, maybe approach a 70-30 run-to-pass split. It's possible his new quarterback recruit, Silver Creek product Austin Apodoca, can help in that regard.

Davie recruited him out of high school, but Apodoca first went to pass-happy Washington State, then left there and played at Mesa Community College last season.

"He can run. He's a big athletic guy that can run," Davie said. "He's not a slug. I won't say triple option is his niche or his strength, but he can run and he can really throw it. He's provided a lot of competition for Lamar Jordan."

Jordan, who started the final four games of the season for the Lobos last year (appearing in 11 overall), completed 52.7 percent of his passes for 895 yards, has the edge, Davie said, adding that Apodoca will be given amply opportunity.

Championship payoff — Last year's MW championship game at Boise State generated a net of \$1.9 million for the conference last year, an increase from \$1.6 million the first year at Fresno State. According to Bret Gilliland, the MW deputy commissioner, the \$800,000 title sponsorship from Sports Authority made up the difference, as well as covering added expenses.

The Sports Authority sponsorship was a one-year deal, Gilliland said, with the conference looking to find another agreement this season. It led to more revenue for member schools, which were each distributed \$90,700, up from \$78,500 the year before.

Commissioner Craig Thompson said Tuesday the league is happy with having the team with the best record host the game, with no discussions toward finding it a permanent home.

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