



 Sibson Consulting

Pac-12 Football Officiating Program Assessment Executive Summary

July 2019



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Project Introduction

About the Project

Sibson was hired to complete an independent, comprehensive review of the Pac-12 Officiating Program. A subcommittee of Pac-12 Athletic Directors was formed to guide and inform the process. Over the course of four months, we interviewed over sixty individuals from a variety of positions and backgrounds and analyzed data from several sources.

Process

- The findings, conclusions, and recommendations contained in this report were developed through three distinct processes:
 1. **Benchmarking** – Interviews with the heads of the Officiating programs at the other Power Five Conferences, and key personnel at the NFL and NCAA
 2. **Stakeholder Interviews** – Interviews with Athletic Directors, Head Coaches, Officials (On-Field, Replay, and Retired), Supervisors, and Pac-12 personnel
 3. **Analytics** – Analysis of data from a variety of sources
- For the purpose of this assessment, we requested and received numerous documents from the Conference office, and received everyone's full cooperation
- All interviews were done in a confidential manner to ensure interviewees were comfortable being forthcoming. As such, there are no specific quotes nor statements attributable to specific people in this report. All findings and recommendations were anonymized and placed in the appropriate context. For privacy and legal reasons, any feedback regarding specific individuals was reported separately to the Commissioner.
- All opinions and recommendations herein were developed independently by Sibson based on the information provided

1. Project Introduction

2. **Executive Summary**

Executive Summary

Overview

The Pac-12 Officiating Program is fundamentally sound. The structures of the Program are predominantly consistent with best practices in the industry. The Officials, the backbone of the program, show passion for their work, and are viewed positively by the majority of those with a stake in the Program. The Replay Command Center uses state-of-the-art technology.

Unsurprisingly, upon close review, there are a number of areas of the Program that could and should be improved. Since the intent of our analysis was to view the program through a critical lens, our report focuses on these findings, and provides a variety of recommendations. It is important to note that the Pac-12 Officiating Program most certainly does not need a complete overhaul, although certain aspects of the Program should be a key area of attention.

The following pages provide an overview of our key findings and recommendations by topic. The balance of the report provides supporting details.

Executive Summary *continued*

Assignments

- The method in which the assignments (post-season, regular season, and crew makeup) are handled is consistent with best practices

Grading and Evaluating

- The current ranking system is too dependent on subjective measures
- The weightings of various officiating metrics follow best practices; however, there is room for improvement in play selection for grading
- Fitness is overemphasized in the evaluation of the Officials, and the current system for evaluating fitness can be improved

Training

- The clinic does not provide the Officials with sufficient training, and needs to provide more clarity on specific play calling
- Training tapes and conference calls by the Position Supervisors need to be standardized, and all training tapes need to include more binary conclusions
- Officials do not have adequate personnel resources with whom to consult at the Pac-12 regarding rules and mechanics
- Spring games are an effective tool for training and preparing for the season

Executive Summary *continued*

Hiring and Recruiting

- An intentional increase in turnover may lead to an enhanced recruitment of high-quality talent
- Because of limitations in resources and scale, it may not be appropriate for the Pac-12 to have an Officiating Development Program similar to the NFL
- The Pac-12 does not need to go outside the geographical footprint to recruit high-quality talent
- The Pac-12 is the only Power Five Conference without an affiliated Group of Five recruiting and training partner for officiating, often called a “pipeline”, which is a major weakness
- According to most parties, the Pac-12 does an excellent job focusing on and maintaining a diverse officiating group

Communication

- We would recommend continuing to communicate on important and definitive circumstances to the public without significantly increasing the volume of this distraction
- The responses to Coaches’ questions should have an increased focus on giving clear answers as to how the play should have been and will be called in the future

Executive Summary *continued*

Replay

- It is essential that stakeholders can trust that an officiating program is operating without bias or influence. The WSU vs. USC Incident severely damaged that trust among the stakeholders and the public.
- Specific processes and procedures related to the above Incident have been developed and will be implemented next season. If followed, we believe these new processes and procedures will prevent the reoccurrence of such an event.
- Once finalized, the Manual, which outlines the processes and procedures noted above, should be distributed to the Coaches and Athletic Directors

Targeting

- The NCAA rule change (penalty must be confirmed by replay) should show an improvement in the consistency and interpretation of the rule
- Centralization of all targeting decisions to the Pac-12 Supervisor of Replay Officials will help ensure consistency
- The Supervisor of Replay Officials should develop a catalog of targeting calls for Coaches and Officials as a resource

Executive Summary *continued*

Department Structure

- The Pac-12 follows a straight-line reporting structure where the Head of Officiating reports to the Football Sport Administrator, who in turn reports to the Commissioner
- Conferences vary in the reporting structure relating to the Head of Officiating, as some separate the Officiating Department from the football program
- Particularly in light of the recent Incident, the Pac-12 should consider moving to a system in which the Head of Officiating reports directly to the Commissioner

Conference Personnel

Supervisors

- Supervisors generally lack both recent on-field experience and recent NFL experience
- Supervisors do not train consistently and effectively
- Grading is not consistent across the group, and many lack rigor in their grading process, including a lack of commentary and poor specificity

Executive Summary *continued*

Conference Personnel *continued*

Officials

- The Officials are viewed as a competent group
- The Officials are good on-field communicators
- Though the total call volume across the group is generally consistent, Officials are calling certain penalty types inconsistently across crews