



# Replaying a replay mess

## Botched call leads to tweaking of the rule

Several years ago, Beano Cook, who at the time was employed by ABC Sports, was having a discussion with an NFL broadcast executive under the late Pete Rozelle.

The conversation centered on the gambling influence on the television ratings of professional football that were soaring.

The league exec had a stat that a mere 10 percent of the sport's following was wagering on the outcome of games.

"If your numbers are correct," Cook bellowed, "they all live on my street!"

Beano's address then, as it is now, is Pittsburgh.

You can be assured that his block was in an uproar when the Steelers edged San Diego 11-10. For those of you who missed it or did not hear of the details, as time expired officials incorrectly took away a touchdown scored by Troy Polamalu when he scooped up an errant backward lateral and ran it in for what should have been a score.

The play was reviewed and the score held up. But the officiating crew met and declared there was an illegal forward pass involved. Score nullified. Play dead. Game over.

The crew on the field got it wrong.

Pittsburgh was a 5-point favorite, 4½ in some places.

Needless to say, when the 17-10 that was displayed on the television screens was changed to 11-10 after the words, "The decision on the field stands, touchdown Pittsburgh," were blasted through the Nevada sports books, there was mass hysteria. Winning tickets had been torn up. Stoopers were put on alert. Winners suddenly became losers.

Whatever you heard or read, the result did not matter much to the books. There was relatively light action on the game, very little line movement, and neither side was particularly "needed" by the Nevada houses, except for parlays at some places.

Only those who were holding tickets on Pittsburgh (say that five times real fast) were upset. That would include a substantial portion of the population of Western Pennsylvania.

"Steelers fans love to bet, even if it's just 20 bucks," another friend told me.

The irony of the story is that the Steelers were involved. Art Rooney, the original owner, came out of the gambling business. One of his partners was a gentleman named Milton Jaffe, who was part-owner of the Stardust Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas a long time after he was in business in Pittsburgh.

Back in the '70s, when I was working with Jimmy The Greek Snyder, we frequently dined at the Aku-Aku, a Polynesian restaurant at the Stardust. After dinner, The Greek would spend hours playing pinochle with Milton.



Wideout Malcom Floyd couldn't prevent Troy Polamalu from scoring a touchdown at the end of the San Diego-Pittsburgh game, but the officials did.

Digest Photo/MIKE FABUS

The league is in an awkward spot. After all, unless there is a point differential to be dealt with later, since the win/lose result was not affected, does it want to make an issue based on a decision that only impacted the wagering element of the game — translation, point spread.

In the all's-well-that-ends-well department, the Steelers did deliver a meaningless touchdown the following Thursday, almost like a make-good. They were 10½ to 11 points over Cincinnati. Leading by 10 in the waning moments, the Steelers drove for a touchdown and the cover with just over 2 minutes remaining.

And now they will tweak the replay rule to add a step that if the guys on the field want to challenge and overturn the ruling of the guys in the booth, they will take another look.

If it only applies to scores, they can call it the six-point teaser rule, giving a whole new expression to the term.



Bill Belichick has had a remarkable career in New England. We all know that.

Here is where Tony Sparano already has him beat. Belichick was 5-11 in his first year. Sparano has already exceeded that win number.

Now starts the challenge. In Year 2, Belichick reversed that record and won the first of his three Super Bowl titles. Since that first year, he had only suffered back-to-back losses once, and that was in 2006, Weeks 8 and 9 to Indianapolis and the Jets.

They were only 12-4 that year and lost to the Colts in the conference final.



Retired Giants general manager Ernie Accorsi can take much of the credit for the team's current success. He had two attributes that carried him: the courage of his convictions and the philosophy that you should always listen to your scouts.

When he traded for the draft rights to Eli Manning, his neck stuck across the Hudson River.

One writer kept referring to the younger Manning as Billy Ripken. Ernie kept the faith.

Accorsi remembered a big running back from Auburn who was lost in the shuffle with Ronnie Brown and Cadillac Williams. So he had one of the scouts check out Brandon Jacobs at Southern Illinois.

Ernie took the scout's advice and took Jacobs in the third round.

If only Rick Spielman had listened to his scouts. Seven years ago, his director of scouting, Tom Braatz, went to the mat on draft day trying to convince his boss to take Drew Brees in the first round. He was overruled and rather than go for the quarterback, the Dolphins took cornerback Jamar Fletcher, who rose to the position of journeyman.

Meanwhile, Brees is closing in on some of the single-season marks of another Dolphins fave, Dan Marino.

Think of the years of trial and error that could have been avoided.