

College Football

Targeting calls increased again, Pac-12, SEC had the most

By ERIC OLSON
Associated Press

Targeting penalties in the top tier of college football reached an all-time high this season and the Pac-12 and Southeastern conferences had the most players flagged, according to an analysis of NCAA data and research by The Associated Press.

It has been 10 years since the crackdown started on forcible hits above the shoulders of players determined to be defenseless. This season, the NCAA reported 188 enforced targeting calls in 832 regular-season games of the Bowl Subdivision; that is 30 percent more than last year, when there were 144 in 839 games. The per-game average has risen 35 percent, from 0.17 last year to 0.23 this season. It is the fourth consecutive season that targeting calls have increased.

That might seem alarming, but the increase doesn't indicate a trend of head-hunting in the sport, said Rogers Redding, the NCAA's national coordinator of officials. He attributed the increase to officials getting better at detecting the penalty, more willingness of replay officials to call fouls missed on the field and the expanded definition of what constitutes a defenseless player.

The calls may be up, but play is likely safer.

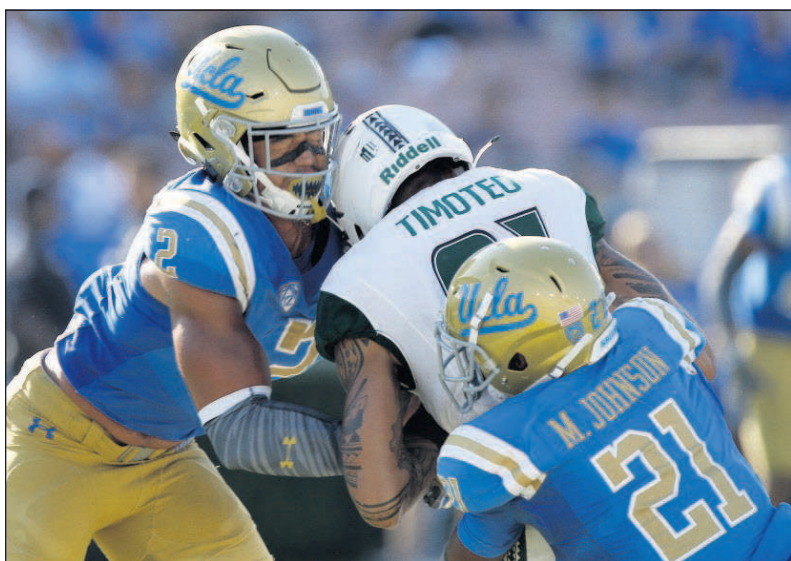
"Players are getting their head out of it, they're lowering their strike zone, you don't see as much of a launch, but you still see a crouch and upward thrust," he said. "Even though the numbers are up, the player behavior overall has changed."

The NCAA compiles its numbers through reports submitted each week by conferences. A conference report includes any targeting call made by its officiating crews, even if the penalty was against an opponent from another conference. The NCAA report, therefore, would not always reflect the actual number of targeting fouls committed by players in a particular league.

The AP verified the circumstances of 176 targeting calls this season through official play-by-play sheets, media accounts and with the assistance of school and conference sports information directors.

The SEC confirmed 27 instances of its players being flagged for targeting but declined to provide details of five calls not reported on play-by-play sheets or by the media. In all, the AP could not account for seven targeting penalties out of the 188 reported by the NCAA.

Among the AP's findings:
— The Pac-12 had a nation-high 30 targeting calls against its



AP Photo/Alex Gallardo, File

In this Sept. 9, 2017, file photo, Hawaii wide receiver Kalakaua Timoteo, center, drops the ball as he gets hit by UCLA linebacker Josh Woods, left, and defensive back Mossi Johnson (21) at the goal line, during the second half of an NCAA college football game in Pasadena, Calif. Woods was penalized for targeting and ejected.

players, with UCLA and Utah having five apiece.
— Five other FBS schools had five targeting calls: Akron, New Mexico State, Ohio State, Temple and Texas A&M.

— Akron cornerback Alvin Davis Jr. was flagged for targeting three times, most in the nation, and seven other players were each flagged twice.

— On 152 running or passing plays when targeting occurred, 46 calls were against safeties, 43 against defensive linemen, 33 against linebackers and 20 against cornerbacks.

— Of the 176 verified calls, 113 occurred on pass plays, 39 on runs, 21 on kickoffs or punts, and one each on a point-after touchdown, 2-point conversion try and field-goal attempt.

— More than half of the possessions in which targeting was called ended with a score for the offended

team — 83 touchdowns, 18 field goals.

— Targeting most often occurred on first down (59 times).

The 14-team Atlantic Coast Conference had only six enforced targeting calls. Redding said differing styles of play can lead to variances across conferences, but he said the ACC figure was surprisingly low and he initially thought it was the result of a reporting error.

ACC coordinator of football officiating Dennis Hennigan said it's no mistake. He credited league coaches for doing a good job of teaching proper tackling technique and what's legal, and the players for adapting to targeting rules. Hennigan said he was satisfied with how his officiating crews performed.

"I don't know if it was the luck of the draw this year, but we simply didn't have a lot of targeting in our conference. Just one of those years," he said. "Obviously, I hope that (ACC) trend continues."

Todd Berry, executive director of the American Football Coaches Association, also noted the disparity between the ACC and the Pac-12 but said one year is too small a sample.

"If those numbers come back, we need to look at, 'Is the Pac-12 officiating it right or is the ACC not officiating it right?'" Berry said. "We need to look at several years of data."

The targeting penalty was introduced in 2008 not just because of growing concerns about the sport's concussion risk but also as a response to research showing catastrophic head, neck, spine and brain injuries at all levels of football spiked in the 2000s.

Targeting initially was a personal foul, but starting in 2013 it resulted in a player ejection, and since then all targeting calls are subject to video review and can be

overturned. In 2016, replay officials were given the discretion to call targeting fouls missed by field officials, and this year their charge expanded to stopping the game to call any targeting foul they see.

The number of calls initiated by replay officials more than doubled this year, from 22 to 57. Redding also pointed out that in the last two years the definition of a defenseless player has expanded to include a sliding ball-carrier and a player who is blocked from his blind side. "That opens it up for more susceptibility for more targeting fouls," he said.

Redding said the NCAA Football Rules Committee sees no need to change the rule at this point.

"My advice to the committee is going to be let's not mess with this now," he said. "Let's let this sit and bake for a while. I think we need to get everyone used to where the rule is."

The AFCA's Berry said coaches are frustrated that players are ejected for targeting on plays where they couldn't avoid the type of contact that got him flagged. An example, he said, is when a receiver jumps for a ball. As he comes down, he tends to curl up, and the defender can't get his head out of the way in that "bang-bang moment."

Redding said targeting wouldn't be called if the defender's contact was not forcible. Removing the ejection from the type of play Berry described was discussed, and dismissed, by the rules committee last year.

"The football committee and officiating community cannot be seen backing away from this rule," Redding said. "The game is still under attack. The rule has worked very well. The optics of backing away from this rule would be really terrible, so the committee is not in a mood to do that at all."

College Football

Early signing period creates more challenges

By STEVE MEGARGEE
Associated Press

An active coaching carousel has added more uncertainty to this week's early signing period and its impact on this year's recruiting cycle.

A new policy allows high school seniors to sign national letters of intent Wednesday through Friday of this week in addition to the traditional February signing date.

That left a short recruiting window for the 11 Power Five programs that changed coaches in the last month, a figure that increases to 12 including Mississippi's decision to remove the interim tag from Matt Luke's title. The list includes eight schools that signed top-25 classes last year according to a composite ranking of recruiting sites compiled by 247Sports: Florida State, Florida, Texas A&M, Tennessee, Oregon, UCLA, Nebraska and Mississippi State.

"It's difficult because of the relationships you have to build, which is so important in recruiting, and you have such a short time building those relationships," Florida State coach Willie Taggart said. "So it's a challenge, but I look forward to it."

The newly hired coaches have plenty of ground to make up.

As of early Tuesday afternoon, Nebraska was in the 40s while Tennessee and Florida

State were outside the top 50 in the 247Sports Composite. Those classes lost numerous verbal commitments amid coaching changes.

Under the old recruiting calendar, coaches that took over programs in December had a couple of months to sway recruits. Now they just have a couple of weeks.

As it looks now, many of those new coaches will have to fill their class from a small pool of available prospects when the February signing date approaches.

"The transition classes from schools that have new coaches are going to be lower rated than we've ever seen in some cases because now they don't have that extra month of January for a lot of these kids to change their minds," said Mike Farrell, the director of recruiting for Rivals.

The early signing period also creates complications for veteran coaches preparing teams for the postseason. That's particularly true for teams that played in bowls last weekend as most programs were hosting prospects.

"Our message there is while staffs are out there recruiting, we're playing, which is what you want to be doing that type of year," said Boise State coach Bryan Harsin, whose Broncos beat Oregon in the Las Vegas Bowl on Saturday.

Alabama's Nick Saban

expressed his frustration with the early signing period, saying, "I have not talked to a coach that's happy with it."

Still, there are coaches who have embraced it.

Clemson's Dabo Swinney said he liked the early signing period and noted it allows prospects who made their college choices months ago to finalize their decisions.

"Most of our guys are committed, and I think it allows everybody the chance to kind of move on," Swinney said.

Here are some things to watch this week during the early signing period.

HOW MANY WILL SIGN EARLY? Because this early signing period is a new thing, nobody knows for sure how many seniors will capitalize on it. Farrell believes about 70 percent of senior prospects will sign this week.

PROSPECTS TO WATCH: At least eight uncommitted top-25 prospects from the 247Sports Composite are expected to sign this week. The list includes defensive ends Micah Parsons, Eyabi Anoma, K.J. Henry and Brenton Cox, offensive tackles Jackson Carman and Cade Mays, offensive guard Jamaree Salyer and receiver Terrace Marshall.

BIG WEEK FOR CLEMSON: The defending national champions already have verbal commitments from

two of the nation's top three overall prospects in quarterback Trevor Lawrence and defensive end Xavier Thomas. They're also in play for Salyer, Carman, Mays and Henry among others. "They could potentially have five of the top 10, six of the top 16 players in the country," said Barton Simmons, the director of scouting for 247Sports.

ALABAMA'S CONCERNS: Alabama has topped the 247Sports Composite team recruiting ranking seven straight years but could have a tough time making it eight in a row. Alabama is ranked seventh and should move up this week, but the early signing period could make it difficult for the Crimson Tide to produce its typical February rush with fewer top prospects available at that point.

SWITCHING SCHOOLS: As the early signing period approaches, about 50 recruits have withdrawn their verbal commitments over the past week. Farrell says that in many cases, those decisions are being made by the school rather than the prospect. "When coaches aren't commenting on prospects, a decommitment can look like a kid's decision, but we all know those can be mutual, it can be a kid saying that I don't want to go to that school or it could be coaches saying you don't have a spot here," Farrell said. "There's been a lot more decommitments

ALL-STATE: Pendleton, Mac-Hi Hermiston players also earn recognition

Continued from 1B

A few other local soccer stars earned all-state recognition this fall as well. In Class 4A, Mac-Hi's Kobbie Carillo was a first team all-state selection, helping his Pioneers. And in Class 5A, Pendleton junior Denisa Senkerikova earned first team honors and on the boys side Hermiston's Miguel Hoyos and Noe Silva earned second team honors.

3A/2A/1A Boys All-State honors

Player of the Year — Quincy Castillo, Riverside
Goalkeeper of the Year — Fritz Frerichs, Catlin Gabel
Coach of the Year — Francisco Velasquez, Riverside
First Team
Quincy Castillo, Riverside, sr.; Gabe Arce-Torres, Taft; Glen Sutter, Riverdale; Ben Karp, Catlin Gabel; Kevin Madrigal, Riverside, sr.; Luka Cvijanovic, St. Mary's; Brian Garten, OES; Sam Shuetz, Pleasant Hill; Jose Peralta, Riverside, sr.; Victor van Alebeek, Catlin Gabel; Fritz Frerichs, Catlin Gabel

Second Team
Yamil Morales, Delphian; Parker Lam, St. Mary's; Nico Aguilar, Columbia Christian/Portland Christian; Felix Songolo, De La Salle; Harris Martin, Western Mennonite; William Calderon, Taft; Mason Lee, OES; Miscal Madrigal, Riverside, sr.; Luis Olvera, Riverside, sr.; George Shabani, De La Salle; William Brooks, Taft

3A/2A/1A Girls All-State honors

Player of the Year — Laura Staropoli, Westside Christian
Goalkeeper of the Year — Ally Priest, Catlin Gabel
Coach of the Year — Justin Wolvert, OES
First Team
Laura Staropoli, Westside Christian; Megan Ruoff, OES; Joanna Cloutier, OES; Annike Holliday, Catlin Gabel; Aspen Trujillo, Pleasant Hill; Stephanie Finley, OES; Skylar Wightman, Riverside; Allison Smathers, Cresswell; Anniko Lovstrand, OES; Meghan Michels, St. Mary's

Second Team
Sara Klott, St. Mary's; Ann Louise Naito, Catlin Gabel; Kiely Griffin, Western Mennonite/Perrydale; Cascade Christian; Rebecca Peasley, Pleasant Hill; Sophie Ward, Catlin Gabel; Morgan Croxford, Amity; Emma Sadle, Catlin Gabel; Alex Conley, Lakeview; Briana Anaya, Blanchet

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