NFL

Competition committee to recommend catch rule changes

Proposal could be voted on next week

By BARRY WILNER
AP Pro Football Writer

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. — The NFL's catch rule would get less complicated if team owners approve recommendations from the powerful competition committee.

One of the first orders of business when the league's annual meetings begin Monday in Orlando, Florida, will be a proposal by the committee to clarify what is a catch. Commissioner Roger Goodell said during the week of the Super Bowl he would urge simplification of the rules.

"Catch/no catch is at the top of everyone's minds," Troy Vincent, the NFL's football operations chief, said Wednesday before outlining the committee's recommendations.

The owners will be asked to vote on clarifications that eliminate parts of the rule involving a receiver going to the ground, and that also eliminate negating a catch for slight movement of the ball while it is in the receiver's possession. No calls in the last few years — not even pass interference — have caused more consternation than overturned catches in key situations, including those by Dez Bryant, Jesse James and Austin Seferian-Jenkins.

AP Photo/Matt Slocum, File

In this Feb. 4 file photo, Philadelphia Eagles' Corey Clement catches a touchdown pass during the second half of the NFL Super Bowl 52 football game against the New England Patriots in Minneapolis. The play was reviewed and called a touchdown. The NFL's catch rule would get less complicated if team owners approve recommendations from the powerful competition committee, when the league's annual meetings begin on Monday in Orlando, Fla.

"We were at the point as far as players and particularly coaches who asked, 'Why is that not a catch?'" Vincent said. "We talked to fans, coaches and players and we asked the groups, 'Would you like this to be a catch?' It was 100 percent yes.

"Then we began writing rules that actually apply to making these situations catches."

Here's what would constitute a catch if the owners approve the competition committee's alterations:

— control of the ball;

— getting two feet down;

— performing a football act or;

— performing a third step.

The stipulation that slight movement of the ball while the receiver still has control no longer would result in an incompletion. Vincent pointed to the touchdown catch by the Philadelphia Eagles' Corey Clement in the Super Bowl as an example of a player never losing possession of the ball despite slight movement.

"That's what the fans, coaches and players want," Vincent said. "They are the magical moments people are looking for, and that includes all of those (plays). It's the biggest (proposed change). Why we want this is this is one call shaping results across the sport."

Richard Sherman, the star cornerback who recently was cut by Seattle and signed with San Francisco, approves cleaning up the rules.

"I'm in favor of it because it gives the refs more clarity," Sherman said. "I think anytime you can give the referees more of a straight line, an edge, to call plays, I think it's better for the game.

"I think obviously there's been a lot of scrutiny on the catch rule. Last year, my team was at the wrong end of it. A guy caught the ball and ran three or four steps, put his hand in the ground, fell, fumbled the ball and nobody touched him, and they said it was an incomplete pass. It was the most ridiculous thing I think I've ever seen.

"I think that they need to do more rules like that. They need to take the gray area out of a lot more rules because the rule book is getting too crazy. It's getting too extensive. Every year, the refs are getting scrutinized left and right when it's a bang-bang play. This game is happening at a million miles an hour and there's really nothing you can do about it. The rule book is so complex. How many times can you think of 1,500 rules in a second of a play and see which ones apply to that particular play? So, I think any time they can simplify the rule book and simplify the ref's understanding and the public's understanding is better for the game."

Competition committee members are chairman Rich McKay, president of the Falcons; Broncos general manager John Elway; Cowboys COO Stephen Jones; Giants owner John Mara; Packers President Mark Murphy; Ravens GM Ozzie Newsome; Saints coach Sean Payton and Steelers coach Mike Tomlin.

They also are recommending:

— expanding protection of a runner, which also involves quarterbacks when they have given themselves up as a runner. Vincent cited Kiko Alonso's hit on Baltimore quarterback Joe Flacco last season, saying the NFL must avoid an "unnecessary shot."

"This is strictly a safety move," Vincent said.

— allowing the officiating staff at NFL headquarters in New York, using video review, to call for an ejection of a player committing an egregious non-football act. That would include throwing punches or being involved in a fight. Vincent pointed to acts by Rob Gronkowski and Mike Evans last season.

Vincent said there were no discussions within the competition committee regarding protocol for the pregame national anthem. Owners are expected to take up the subject on Monday or Tuesday, but no decisions are likely.

AP Pro Football Writer Josh Dubow contributed to this report.

BRIEFLY

Youth flag rugby starts up, taking registrations

PENDLETON — The sport of rugby has grown in Eastern Oregon in the past decade, beginning with the founding of the Sasquatch Rugby Club for high schoolers a decade ago. Now, the club founder is opening up the game to the youth of Umatilla County.

Beginning this spring, third graders through eighth graders throughout Umatilla County can learn the game and try it out for themselves in a flag rugby league. The youth program is led by Eric Gabriel, who founded of the Sasquatch Rugby Club in 2009, who has more than 25 years of experience as a player and a coach in rugby.

Practices and matches will run on Saturday's from 9-11 a.m. from April 7 through May 12. Registration can be done through the Pendleton Parks and Recreation Department and the cutoff date is March 26.

"It's a great opportunity for the kids, parents and community to experience first-hand the beautiful culture of the fastest-growing sport in America," Gabriel said in a statement.

For more information visit East Oregon Youth Flag Rugby on Facebook.

NHL

GMs call for change on goalie interference challenges

By STEPHEN WHYNO
Associated Press

Coach's challenges for goaltender interference and the ensuing arguments aren't going away.

There will just be a new place to direct the complaints.

With the goal of refining the consistency of goalie interference challenges, NHL general managers on Wednesday recommended shifting the decision from on-ice officials to the league's situation room in Toronto. The change could go into effect as soon as the playoffs, which begin April 11, if approved by the board of governors and NHL/NHL Players' Association competition committee.

The recommendation came out of the annual March GMs meeting in Boca Raton, Florida, this week. Commissioner Gary Bettman said only perhaps a half-dozen of about 170 challenges this season were controversial, yet GMs overwhelmingly were in favor of a centralized location for final decisions.

"The objective is to be as close to perfect as possible," Bettman said, noting goalie interference is a judgment call. "The recommended change is intended to help resolve the rare cases in which the situation room and the referees might have different opinions of a particular play and is intended to produce more predictability for our players and coaches."

AP Photo/Wilfredo Lee, File

In this 2017 file photo, Florida Panthers center Jared McCann, left, scores a goal during the third period of an NHL hockey game against the Tampa Bay Lightning in Sunrise, Fla. A review overturned the initial on-ice ruling of goalie interference and allowed the goal to stand.

Currently, on-ice officials have the final say on whether a goal should count or be disallowed when challenged. Under the proposed change, the officials would continue to be involved, but a member of the NHL Officiating Management Team — made up of former referees — would be part of the decision-making process.

Washington Capitals coach Barry Trotz said this won't affect how he approaches challenging goalie interference but believes having someone outside the area making the call is a positive.

"There's some referees who are more established and, I'd say, sure of themselves, they won't reverse the calls," Trotz said. "They almost say, 'That's the way I saw it and that's the way it is and live with it.' And others get swayed by what they see or maybe the crowd or another coach or how the game's going.

"So it's no different than the student marking their own papers. Let's have a non-emotional person who has no skin in the game and is not in an emotional environment to make those calls and I think you'll find it will be more consistent."

Coaches and goaltenders have complained about the inconsistency all season. Bettman said during All-Star weekend in late January that officials might be "overthinking" reviews and that the intent was, "Take a quick look, but don't search it to death."

The league sent a memo to all teams outlining the standard, which is closer to what Dallas Stars coach Ken Hitchcock prefers. Hitchcock said he and his colleagues want to lean toward allowing more contact and counting more goals.

"We're tie goes to the runner," Hitchcock said. "I think that's how a lot of the coaches feel is that when you see a situation that is a positive-area sacrifice (for players), give the runner the benefit."

It took years of debate for GMs to approve coach's challenges for offside and goaltender interference, which are in their third season. The gray area in interpretation still causes issues.

"I don't know what is and what isn't," New York Islanders coach Doug Weight said recently. I think there's a lot of confusion. That's tough. It's frustrating for us."

The hope is to lessen the frustration by letting a rotation of former officials take over. But nothing about the way goalie interference is called is being changed.

Former player Ray Ferraro suggested adopting the international standard that says a goal is waved off if a skater interferes with a goalie's positioning but allows it to count if the goalie initiates contact.

"You're never going to find a solution for this because what you see when you're 200 feet away in a press box is different from what you see on TV, which is different from what is happening on the ice," goaltending analyst Justin Goldman of The Goalie Guild said. "I feel bad for the referees because it's so hard to make that call in that moment, but to go to Toronto and expect Toronto to get it right every single time, you're at the mercy of what they're seeing on a TV screen, not what actually happened on the ice. For the goalies, that's super frustrating."

SCOREBOARD

Local slate

PREP BASEBALL

Thursday
Walla Walla (WA) at Pendleton, 4 p.m.
Dufur at Pilot Rock, 4 p.m.
Friday
Umatilla vs. Bonanza (at John Day), 12 p.m.
Union at Heppner (DH), 1 p.m.
Lakeridge at Hermiston, 3 p.m.
Pendleton at Walla Walla (WA), 3 p.m.
Irrigon at Tri Cities Prep (WA), 3 p.m.
Riverside at White Salmon (WA), 4 p.m.
Saturday
Stanfield at Weston-McEwen (DH), 11 a.m.
Umatilla vs. Lost River (at John Day), 11 a.m.
Kennewick (WA) at Hermiston, 4 p.m.

PREP SOFTBALL

Thursday
Heppner at Irrigon (DH), 2 p.m.
Southridge (WA) at Pendleton (DH), 3:30 p.m.
Wa-Hi (WA) at Mac-Hi, 6 p.m.
Friday
Tri Cities Prep (WA) at Irrigon, 3 p.m.
Vernonia at Pilot Rock, 3 p.m.
Pasco (WA) at Hermiston, 4 p.m.
Riverside at Stevenson (WA), 4 p.m.
Saturday
Lost River at Pilot Rock, 11 a.m.
Chiawana (WA) at Pendleton, 12 p.m.
Mac-Hi at Banks (DH), 1 p.m.
Enterprise at Pilot Rock, 3 p.m.

PREP TRACK AND FIELD

Thursday
Pendleton, Hermiston, Mac-Hi, Umatilla, Riverside, Heppner, Weston-McEwen, Stanfield, Helix at Buck Track Classic (Pendleton), 11 a.m.
Saturday
Mac-Hi at Colfax (WA), 11 a.m.

PREP TENNIS

Thursday
La Grande at Pendleton, 3:30 p.m.
Weston-McEwen at Mac-Hi, 3:30 p.m.
Friday
Pasco (WA) at Hermiston, 3:30 p.m.
Helix at Riverside, 3:30 p.m.
Umatilla at Stanfield, 3:30 p.m.
Saturday
Hermiston (boys) at Kamiakin (WA), Noon
Kamiakin (WA) at Hermiston (girls), Noon

PREP GOLF

Thursday
Pendleton, Hermiston at Big River Golf Course (Umatilla), 10 a.m.
Mac-Hi at Vets Memorial, 2:30 p.m.

PREP LACROSSE

Saturday
Hermiston at Wenatchee (WA), 1 p.m.

COLLEGE BASEBALL

Saturday
Clark College at BMCC (DH), 11 a.m.
Sunday
SW Oregon at BMCC (DH), 11 a.m.

COLLEGE SOFTBALL

Friday
BMCC at Walla Walla CC (DH), 2 p.m.
Saturday
BMCC at Big Bend CC (DH), 12 p.m.
College of Idaho at EOU (DH), 2 p.m.
Sunday
College of Idaho at EOU (DH), 11 a.m.

COLLEGE TRACK & FIELD

Saturday
EOU at Northwest Nazarene (ID), all day

Basketball

NBA

EASTERN CONFERENCE

	W	L	Pct	GB
x-Toronto	53	19	.736	—
x-Boston	48	23	.676	4½
Cleveland	42	29	.592	10½
Philadelphia	40	30	.571	12
Indiana	41	31	.569	12
Washington	40	31	.563	12½
Miami	39	33	.542	14
Milwaukee	37	34	.521	15½
——				
Detroit	32	39	.451	20½
Charlotte	31	41	.431	22
New York	26	46	.361	27
Chicago	24	47	.338	28½
Brooklyn	23	49	.319	30
Orlando	21	50	.296	31½
Atlanta	21	50	.296	31½

WESTERN CONFERENCE

	W	L	Pct	GB
y-Houston	57	14	.803	—
y-Golden State	53	18	.746	4
Portland	44	27	.620	13
Oklahoma City	43	30	.589	15
San Antonio	42	30	.583	15½
New Orleans	42	30	.583	15½
Minnesota	41	31	.569	16½
Utah	40	31	.563	17
——				
Denver	39	33	.542	18½
L.A. Clippers	38	33	.535	19
L.A. Lakers	31	39	.443	25½
Sacramento	23	49	.319	34½
Dallas	22	49	.310	35
Memphis	19	52	.268	38
Phoenix	19	53	.264	38½

x-clinched playoff spot
y-clinched division

Wednesday's Games
Cleveland 132, Toronto 129
Philadelphia 119, Memphis 105
Charlotte 111, Brooklyn 105
Miami 119, New York 98
Denver 135, Chicago 102
L.A. Clippers 127, Milwaukee 120
New Orleans 96, Indiana 92
San Antonio 98, Washington 90
Thursday's Games
Memphis at Charlotte, 4 p.m.
Philadelphia at Orlando, 4 p.m.
Detroit at Houston, 5 p.m.
L.A. Lakers at New Orleans, 5 p.m.
Utah at Dallas, 5:30 p.m.
Atlanta at Sacramento, 7 p.m.

NCAA Men's Tournament

EAST REGIONAL
Regional Semifinals
At TD Garden, Boston
Friday
#1 Villanova (32-4) vs. #5 West Virginia (26-10), 4:27 p.m. (TBS)
#2 Purdue (30-6) vs. #3 Texas Tech (26-9), 6:57 p.m. (TBS)

SOUTH REGIONAL
Regional Semifinals
At Philips Arena, Atlanta
Thursday
#7 Nevada (29-7) vs. #11 Loyola of Chicago (30-5), 4:07 p.m. (CBS)
#9 Kansas State (24-11) vs. #5 Kentucky (26-10), 6:37 p.m. (CBS)

MIDWEST REGIONAL
Regional Semifinals
At CenturyLink Center, Omaha, Neb.
Friday
#1 Kansas (29-7) vs.#5 Clemson (25-9), 4:07 p.m. (CBS)
#2 Duke (28-7) vs. #11 Syracuse (23-13), 6:37 p.m. (CBS)

WEST REGIONAL
Regional Semifinals
At STAPLES Center, Los Angeles
Thursday
#7 Texas A&M (22-12) vs. #3 Michigan (30-7), 4:37 p.m. (TBS)
#9 Florida State (22-11) vs. #4 Gonzaga (32-4), 7:07 p.m. (TBS)

NCAA Women's Tournament

ALBANY REGIONAL
Regional Semifinals
Saturday
At Albany, N.Y.
#2 South Carolina (28-6) vs. #11 Buffalo (29-5), 8:30 a.m. (ESPN)
#1 UConn (34-0) vs. #5 Duke (24-8), 10:30 a.m. (ESPN)

SPOKANE REGIONAL
Regional Semifinals
Saturday
At Spokane, Wash.
#1 Notre Dame (31-3) vs. #4 Texas A&M (26-9), 1 p.m. (ESPN)
#2 Oregon (32-4) vs. #11 Central Michigan (30-4), 3 p.m. (ESPN)

KANSAS CITY REGIONAL
Regional Semifinals
Friday
At Kansas City, Mo.
#4 N.C. State (26-8) vs. #1 Mississippi State (34-1), 4 p.m. (ESPN2)
#3 UCLA (26-7) vs. #2 Texas (28-6), 6 p.m. (ESPN2)

LEXINGTON REGIONAL
Regional Semifinals
Friday
At Lexington, Ky.
#6 Oregon State (25-7) vs. #2 Baylor (33-1), 4 p.m. (ESPN)
#1 Louisville (34-2) vs. #4 Stanford (24-10), 6 p.m. (ESPN)

Hockey

NHL

EASTERN CONFERENCE

Atlantic Division	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
x-Tampa Bay	73	50	19	4	104	264	205
x-Boston	72	45	17	10	100	240	186
Toronto	73	43	23	7	93	246	208
Florida	71	37	27	7	81	219	218
Detroit	73	27	35	11	65	189	228
Montreal	74	26	36	12	64	185	237
Ottawa	72	26	35	11	63	199	251
Buffalo	73	23	38	12	58	173	240
Metropolitan Division	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Washington	73	42	24	7	91	229	217
Pittsburgh	74	42	27	5	89	243	225
Columbus	74	41	28	5	87	210	206
Philadelphia	74	37	25	12	86	222	220
New Jersey	73	37	28	8	82	219	221
Carolina	73	31	31	11	73	197	232
N.Y. Rangers	73	32	33	8	72	211	236
N.Y. Islanders	73	31	32	10	72	235	263

WESTERN CONFERENCE

Central Division	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
x-Nashville	72	48	14	10	106	236	178
Winnipeg	73	44	19	10	98	242	190
Minnesota	73	41	24	8	90	227	210
Colorado	73	40	25	8	88	236	210
St. Louis	73	40	28	5	85	203	194
Dallas	74	38	28	8	84	212	201
Chicago	74	30	35	9	69	209	228
Pacific Division	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Vegas	73	47	21	5	99	248	200
San Jose	73	41	23	9	91	225	201
Anaheim	74	38	24	12	88	210	197
Los Angeles	74	40	27	7	87	212	186
Calgary	75	35	30	10	80	204	226
Edmonton	73	32	36	5	69	208	234
Arizona	73	25	37	11	61	179	231
Vancouver	73	25	39	9	59	187	240

NOTE: Two points for a win, one point for overtime loss. Top three teams in each division and two wild cards per conference advance to playoffs.
x-clinched playoff spot

Wednesday's Games
Pittsburgh 5, Montreal 3
Arizona 4, Buffalo 1
St. Louis 2, Boston 1, OT
Anaheim 4, Calgary 0
Thursday's Games
N.Y. Rangers at Philadelphia, 4 p.m.
Arizona at Carolina, 4 p.m.
Florida at Columbus, 4 p.m.
Tampa Bay at N.Y. Islanders, 4 p.m.
Washington at Detroit, 4:30 p.m.
Edmonton at Ottawa, 4:30 p.m.
Toronto at Nashville, 5 p.m.
Vancouver at Chicago, 5:30 p.m.
Los Angeles at Colorado, 6 p.m.
Vegas at San Jose, 7 p.m.

Golf

PGA TOUR

WGC-Dell Technologies Match Play
Site: Austin, Texas.
Course: Austin CC. Yardage: 7,108. Par: 71.
Purse: $10 million. Winner's share: $1.7 million.
Television: Wednesday-Friday, 2-8 p.m. (Golf Channel); Saturday, 10 a.m.-2 p.m. (Golf Channel); 2-6 p.m. (NBC); Sunday, 10 a.m.-2 p.m. (Golf Channel), 3-7 p.m (NBC).
Defending champion: Dustin Johnson.
Last World Golf Championship: Phil Mickelson won the Mexico Championship.

Soccer

MLS

EASTERN CONFERENCE

	W	L	T	Pts	GF	GA
NYC FC	3	0	0	9	6	1
Columbus	2	0	1	7	5	2
Atlanta United FC	2	1	0	6	7	6
Philadelphia	1	0	1	4	2	0
New York	1	1	0	3	4	1
Montreal	1	2	0	3	4	5
New England	1	1	0	3	2	3
D.C. United	0	1	2	2	4	6
Orlando City	0	2	1	1	2	5
Chicago	0	2	0	0	4	6
Toronto FC	0	2	0	0	0	3

WESTERN CONFERENCE

	W	L	T	Pts	GF	GA
Los Angeles FC	2	0	0	6	6	1
Minnesota United	2	1	0	6	6	5
Sporting K.C.	2	1	0	6	7	7
Vancouver	2	1	0	6	5	6
Houston	1	1	1	4	7	4
FC Dallas	1	0	1	4	4	1
Real Salt Lake	1	1	1	4	3	6
San Jose	1	1	0	3	5	5
LA Galaxy	1	1	0	3	3	3
Colorado	0	1	0	0	1	2
Seattle	0	2	0	0	0	4
Portland	0	2	0	0	1	6

NOTE: Three points for victory, one point for tie.

Saturday's Matches
New York City FC at New England, 10:30 a.m.
Portland at FC Dallas, 12:30 p.m.
D.C. United at Columbus, 3 p.m.
Minnesota United at New York, 4 p.m.
Sporting Kansas City at Colorado, 6 p.m.
LA Galaxy at Vancouver, 7 p.m.

Auto Racing

NASCAR Cup Series
Upcoming Schedule
Sunday — STP 500, at Martinsville Speedway, 11 a.m. (TV: FS1)
April 8 — O-Reilly Auto Parts 500 at Texas Motor Speedway, 11 a.m. (FS1)

Points Standings
Through Mar. 18
1. Martin Truex, 216. 2. Kyle Busch, 207. 3. Joey Logano, 197. 4. Brad Keselowski, 183. 5. Ryan Blaney, 181. 6. Denny Hamlin, 176. 7. Kyle Larson, 174. 8. Kevin Harvick, 170. 9. Clint Bowyer, 155. 10. Aric Almirola, 148. 11. Kurt Busch, 144. 12. Austin Dillon, 141. 13. Erik Jones, 132. 14. Ryan Newman, 117. 15. Alex Bowman, 115. 16. Paul Menard, 115.