

Rush to judgment

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Yahoo! Sports report on instant replay: [Restructuring replay](#) | [The blame game](#)

The biggest fumble in last season's epic national championship game between Texas and Southern California didn't occur on the field. It happened in the instant replay booth.

The error at the Rose Bowl was not mechanical, as the supervisor of officials told ABC broadcaster Keith Jackson. It was a human blunder, one that might have impacted the outcome of Texas' 41-38 victory, a game decided in the final seconds.

Yahoo! Sports has learned the wrong television feed had been plugged into one of the monitors of the video replay system. The mistake meant that replay officials did not have the necessary camera angle to properly review Texas' first touchdown. A replay official said the feed mixup might have led to another mistake earlier in the game. On that play, it was ruled that USC's Reggie Bush fumbled.



Vince Young's knee touched the ground before he lateraled. (ABC Sports)

Ten months after Texas' victory, replay officials and their supervisor still haven't formally addressed what went wrong. But this much is sure: Instant replay, instituted as a backstop to ensure proper calls were being made on the field, failed.

It failed in the championship game. It continues to fail, as evidenced by an erroneous call in this season's Oklahoma-Oregon game. And it very well could fail again, considering there have been no followup meetings or discussions to establish consistent, national standards and practices for the oversight, training and equipment for replay officials and technicians.

With millions of dollars at stake for schools vying for spots in the five Bowl Championship Series games, the problems that cropped up in last year's title game haven't been rectified. The instant replay system, though flawed, goes on, possibly impacting games throughout this season – possibly impacting who will win the next championship.

ROSE WOES

Details of the Texas touchdown in question and the confusion that ensued at the Rose Bowl on Jan. 4 remain fresh in the minds of the replay crew.

Second quarter. Just over five minutes left. Texas trailing 7-3 with the ball at the USC 22-yard line.

Quarterback Vince Young takes the snap, circles around the left end and runs 10 yards before a USC defender latches on. As the Texas quarterback tumbles, he pitches the ball to running back Selvin Young, who dashes 12 yards and into the end zone.

The referee signals touchdown.

To the naked eye, it was virtually impossible to tell if Young's knee had touched the ground before the pitch, which would have nullified the score and brought the ball back to the 12. But the ultimate decision no longer depended on the naked eye, or the officials on the field.

College football was using instant replay for the first time in the BCS championship game. Gathered in the replay booth were Jim Augustyn, head replay official; Dick Honig, assistant replay official and Mike McComiskey, the technician in charge of replay equipment. Augustyn watched the original shot from the ABC broadcast on his monitor as McComiskey rewind the footage with TiVo – a digital recorder available at any retail outlet for less than \$200 – and Honig watched a second monitor, waiting for ABC to air a second shot from a different camera angle that might provide a clearer view of the play.

"I've got nothing coming," Honig said.

McComiskey continued to rewind the original shot.

Augustyn continued to study it in vain. Honig continued to watch the second monitor and wait for ABC to show another camera angle.

"I've got nothing coming," Honig repeated.

Texas lined up for the extra point. Augustyn had only seconds to decide whether to stop the game. Once Texas attempted the extra point, it would be too late to reverse the call.

Without the benefit of another camera angle and without indisputable evidence that Young's knee had touched the ground, Augustyn let play continue. Texas missed the extra point and, seconds later, the replay officials realized they had blown the call.

While Augustyn had been reviewing ABC's original shot, the TiVo had recorded everything else ABC had aired after the touchdown – everything Honig assumed he was seeing on the second monitor. As the three men watched the recorded footage, they suddenly saw a replay from a different camera angle that clearly showed Young's knee was down before the quarterback pitched the ball.

"Where the hell did that shot come from?" Augustyn asked.

At that same time, Dave Parry, the supervisor of officials who helped usher instant replay into college football, was standing in ABC's broadcast booth in case announcers Jackson and Dan

INSTANT REPLAY GUIDELINES

How it works: Each crew includes a head instant replay official, an assistant replay official and a technician, who's responsible for operating the system. To overturn a call, the head official alerts the on-field referee with a pager and stops the game before the ensuing snap. Once the game is stopped, the crew has unlimited time to review the play in question and can call the TV production truck for additional shots from different camera angles. The head replay official is required to review every play of the game. But by NCAA rules, he can consider overturning the call only on plays that have a "direct competitive impact" on the game. He also must have "indisputable video evidence" to overturn a call. Each coach has one challenge, during which he must use a timeout to stop play for more extensive review. Though he can seek input from the replay assistant, the head replay official makes the final call.

How it differs from NFL: From 1986 to 1991, the NFL used a system almost identical to the one used by college football but abandoned it because it led to too many stoppages. The NFL system in use since 1999 is prompted primarily by coaches challenges. Each coach has two challenges, when he can stop play for review. But after the two-minute warning, only the instant replay officials can stop play for review. With assistance from the replay booth, the on-field referee makes the final call.

Notable: Unlike NFL coaches, college coaches cannot use TV monitors to help them decide whether to challenge calls. NCAA rules bar use of any such technology, with officials saying the rule was put in place to level the playing field for schools that can't afford the technology.

Fouts had any questions. Suddenly Jackson, Fouts and millions of viewers who'd seen footage that showed the touchdown should have been overturned were asking the same thing: What just went wrong?

Embarrassed and perplexed, Parry headed for the replay booth in search of answers. He returned to ABC's booth for the second half, told Jackson the replay equipment had malfunctioned and Jackson relayed the report to his viewers. But Parry was still concerned about the incident.

"We thought we were going to get all kinds of e-mails and letters and all kinds of people raising Cain," Parry said during a recent interview. "We only got three letters. Surprisingly, very little outcry. But Keith Jackson did announce there had been a malfunction and that seemed to put it to rest."

But there was no equipment malfunction.

Contrary to what Parry told Jackson and Jackson relayed to the TV audience, there were preventable human errors.

As McComiskey discovered, too late, the wrong television feed had been connected to the second monitor. Honig never had the benefit of seeing the shot of Vince Young's knee clearly hitting the ground, as ABC's broadcast feed showed. The replay officials had stopped play twice before in the game but apparently got the shots they needed on the first monitor to make the correct calls.

Though replay officials routinely check television feeds before games and check again as the game begins, they did not do so this time – not with the national title on the line.

BASIC EQUIPMENT

All instant replay systems feature at least two monitors, one for the head instant replay official and one for the instant replay assistant.

THE SYSTEMS

- **DVSPORT** – The high-end system features touchscreen capability that distinguishes it from competitors' products. No remote needed. Just a tap of the finger boots up replays. In addition to having the touchscreen capability, instant replay officials can view the image of up to nine replay angles on one of the two monitors. The system noted for its speed was developed by former Boston College placekicker Brian Lowe. Estimated Cost: \$15,000 to \$20,000 per school. Used by: ACC, Big East, Big Ten, SEC.
- **XOS** – A TiVo-based system noted for its speed and operated with a 10-button remote control. Assistant replay official saves each replay – known as "tagging" or "marking" – as it flashes on one

Nor did the instant replay crew have state-of-the-art equipment. Instead, it was using a TiVo and two television monitors – a basic setup that costs about \$2,000 compared to the \$125,000 system used by NFL teams and a \$20,000 system that was used for other college bowl games. McComiskey said the crew might have avoided the breakdown if it had used DVSPORT, a more expensive system that the ACC, Big East and SEC used during the 2005 season.

"The DVSPORT would have been greatly helpful," he said.

The Big Ten, which took in more than \$100 million in revenue during the 2004-05 academic year, considered buying the DVSPORT system, McComiskey said. The decision not to purchase DVSPORT saved the Big Ten approximately \$400,000. After the 2006 Rose Bowl, the conference dumped TiVo and bought DVSPORT.

Big Ten commissioner Jim Delany could not be reached for comment.

McComiskey, the Big Ten's assistant commissioner for technology, said the decision to upgrade equipment had nothing to do with the blown calls during the national championship game. He said the schools' football coaches and administrators simply asked the Big Ten to reevaluate the available technology.

"We came back after the evaluation and we picked the system that we thought would be the best at this time," he said. "The DVSPORT system is a very good tool."

While McComiskey suggested more sophisticated equipment could have saved the instant replay crew from embarrassment in the Rose Bowl, Augustyn and Honig assumed part of the blame, saying they should've stopped the game and called ABC's production truck from a phone in the booth set up expressly for the purpose of checking if the network had additional replays to review. Parry said he told Jackson all he knew about the breakdown and that he never understood extent of the problem.

"I'm not a technology expert," Parry said.

But Augustyn said he offered a more detailed explanation when Parry came looking for answers at halftime.

"He came in and he asked what happened and I said we didn't have the right feed and we weren't getting the replays," Augustyn said. "... I guess he believed us because he was trying to figure out a way that he could go back and explain that to Keith Jackson and Dan Fouts that might make some sense as to why we didn't run the play back. ... I think Dave was worried."

McComiskey had set up the replay equipment for all of the Big Ten schools. But the Rose Bowl

of the two monitors. As the head replay official sorts through the saved replays, he can view the first image of each camera angle. XOS Technologies provided video equipment for dozens of college and professional teams before developing the instant replay system. Estimated cost: \$7,000 to \$10,000 per school. Used by: Big 12, Pac-10, Mid-American, Sun Belt.

- **Digital Video Recorder** – he system was developed specifically for Conference USA. It features an upgraded DVR, a consumer-based product. Estimated cost: \$7,500. Used by: Conference USA.

- **NALU** – Similar to the TiVo-based systems and developed by NALU, a company-based in Honolulu. Based in part on the TiVo model originally used by the Big Ten. Estimated cost: \$5,000 and \$7,500. Used by: Western Athletic Conference.

- **TiVo** – The most economical of all replay systems. Used in 2004 and 2005 by the Big Ten, which ushered instant replay into college football on an experimental basis in 2004. Also serves as the backup system for DVSPORT and XOS. Estimated cost: \$2,000 per school. Used by: Mountain West.

Editor's note: Cost can vary depending on additional software, equipment and services provided by the manufacturing companies.

was only the second game he had worked as a booth replay technician, and he made his debut only a week earlier at the Holiday Bowl in San Diego, according to Augustyn.

"My understanding as to why they flew him down there was because he was the so-called expert from our conference," Augustyn said.

When questioned further about the breakdown at the national championship game, Parry said, "To come back and blame someone and say you're wrong and somebody was at fault, that just wouldn't be fair."

In the aftermath, there appeared to be no sense of urgency to determine who or what was to blame. Parry did not discuss details of the breakdown in January when the NCAA called a special meeting for instant replay, three officiating supervisors said. Nor did he discuss details when he presided over the officiating supervisors biannual meetings, one in February and another in June.

TOO FAST?

In May, when the NCAA approved instant replay for all conferences, it issued guidelines on reviewable plays and criteria for overturning calls – indisputable video evidence. But the NCAA issued no standards for training replay officials or for the technology used and designated no one to monitor the system nationally.

Ty Halpin, the NCAA liaison for the Football Rules Committee, said the absence of an expert to field concerns and questions regarding instant replay is "probably a relatively valid concern."

"I think if we can somehow have a centralized clearinghouse. ... that'd be great," Halpin added.

"We're just not 100 percent sure where that's going to go."

Verle Sorgen, supervisor of Pac-10 officials, has taken it upon himself to circulate e-mails with questions and concerns about the system to other conference

officiating supervisors. But Sorgen has failed to disclose details to the media or his counterparts about the most notorious instant replay breakdown yet: the fiasco during the Oregon-Oklahoma game that one of Sorgen's Pac-10 crews worked.

Interviews conducted by Yahoo! Sports indicate the confusion has yet to be sorted out and potential problems remain uncorrected.

DUCK AND COVER?

The fiasco on Sept. 16 in Eugene, Ore. began in the fourth quarter when Oregon recovered an onside kick, leading to the winning touchdown in the Ducks' 34-33 victory. Video replays showed that on the kick, an Oregon player touched the ball before it traveled the required 10 yards, meaning Oklahoma should have been awarded the ball.

HOW REPLAY CAME TO BE

During the 2002 season, Penn State coach Joe Paterno complained about two calls that went against his team. That triggered a rash of complaints by other Big Ten coaches and led the conference to review its officiating practices. Two years later, with approval from the NCAA, the Big Ten introduced instant replay on an experimental basis. The following year, nine of the 11 Division I-A conferences used instant replay on an experimental basis, with only the Sun Belt and Western Athletic conferences holding out. In 2006, the NCAA approved uniform guidelines for instant replay, and all 11 Division I-A conferences are using it this season.

NOTABLE BREAKDOWNS & BLUNDERS

Oct. 21, 2006: During a game between Louisiana-Lafayette and Florida Atlantic, an interception was awarded to Louisiana-Lafayette despite replays that showed Florida Atlantic should have retained possession. ESPN2 aired the telling shot during its telecast, but the Sun Belt officials never saw it because the Sun Belt – unlike every other Division 1-A conference – uses no TV video. The Sun Belt only uses video captured by its own cameras. That policy came under fire after Florida Atlantic's 6-0 defeat.

Oct. 7, 2006: In the first half of a game between Michigan and Michigan State, the instant replay crew failed to stop play to review Michigan's first touchdown, on a 13-yard pass. Video replays aired during the telecast showed Michigan receiver Adrian Arrington was out of bounds when he caught the ball. Michigan took a 7-0 lead on the touchdown and went on to win 31-13.

Sept. 23, 2006: In a game between the University of Houston and Oklahoma State, Oklahoma State recovered a fumble in what video showed was the correct call. But the head instant replay official reversed the call. Worse, he cited forward progress in an instance where it was non-reviewable. A runner's forward progress may be reviewed only to determine whether it resulted in a first down. Conference USA suspended the replay official for one game after Houston's 34-25 victory.

Sept. 16, 2006: In a game between Oregon and Oklahoma, the instant replay official incorrectly upheld a call awarding the ball to Oregon on an on-side kick. On the subsequent drive, Oregon scored what proved the game-winning touchdown in its 34-33 victory and the blown call set off a storm of controversy. The Pac-10 suspended the officiating crew for one game and Gordon Riese, the head instant replay official, took a leave of absence for the remainder of the season.

Jan. 4, 2006: In the national championship game, video replays showed Vince Young's knee hit the

But the field officials gave the ball to Oregon, and, after reviewing the play, the instant replay officials upheld the call. The Pac-10 conference suspended head replay official Gordon Riese and the entire officiating crew for one game.

Yet the technician who operated the instant replay system said the Pac-10's technology is sub par, that the reception on the replay monitor was blurry and the equipment was to blame during the Oregon-Oklahoma game. Jess Yates, the technician, said he was so upset following the game that he immediately sent an e-mail to Sorgen. He also said he reiterated his concerns about the equipment during a phone conversation with Sorgen.

"I feel so bad that Gordy had to take the fall for that," said Yates, who serves as the instant replay technician for all games at the University of Oregon. "... We're not up to speed yet with the equipment itself."

Pac-10 spokesman Jim Muldoon said the equipment has been "thoroughly reviewed" since the game.

"We're satisfied with the equipment and I think the fact we haven't had other issues with it supports that."

Five instant replay technology systems are being used by the 11 Division I-A conferences. The Pac-10 opted

for a less expensive system than the one used by four of the six other BCS conferences.

But in a recent interview, Sorgen said, "There was no problem with technology. ... There was a mixup in the (instant replay) booth that caused the glitch."

Riese complained during interviews after the game that he could not "freeze-frame" the video on the instant replay monitor and he didn't get a replay from the proper camera angle. When contacted by Yahoo! Sports, Riese was more cryptic.

"I'm still employed by the conference and they asked me not to talk," said Riese, who asked the Pac-10 for a leave of absence. "I'll take the heat for now, but eventually I'll have an announcement to make."

Halpin, the liaison for the Football Rules Committee, said conference officiating supervisors can work together to make sure they stay on the same page. But Parry and Sorgen have yet to share details of the high-profile breakdowns. Furthermore, several officiating supervisors described "turf wars," where officiating supervisors from different conferences interpret the rules how they want and position their officials how they choose despite instructions from Parry, the national coordinator, and John Adams, the secretary-editor of NCAA rules.

The biggest problem, several officiating supervisors said, is that Parry faces a conflict of interest by working for the Big Ten and serving as national coordinator of football officiating. Several supervisors also said they suspected there was more to the instant replay breakdown during the national championship than Parry disclosed and that details might have been withheld to protect

ground before he pitched the ball to Selvin Young on a 22-yard touchdown play. But the replay crew never saw the video because they had the wrong television feed hooked up to one of the monitors. Texas went on to win, 41-38.

Jan. 4, 2006: Early in the second quarter of the national championship game, on a mad dash downfield, USC's Reggie Bush pitched the ball to a teammate. The ball fell to the ground, Texas recovered and maintained possession after on-field officials ruled the ball a fumble. But video replays showed the play was a forward lateral, meaning USC, not Texas, should have maintained possession of the ball.

Dec. 28, 2005: In the Alamo Bowl, which matched Michigan against Nebraska, the pager the instant replay officials were supposed to use to contact the on-field referee to stop the game reportedly malfunctioned. That forced Michigan coach Lloyd Carr to use a timeout to stop the game so replay officials had time to review video of a questionable touchdown by Nebraska. Officials overturned the call. Nebraska won, 32-28.

the Big Ten from national embarrassment.

"What's good for the Big Ten might not be good for everybody else," said Tim Millis, who retired as the Big 12's supervisor of officials after the 2005 season. "You might be willing to talk about problems in other conferences, but not your own.

"Dave is serving two masters, and that doesn't work."

Parry declined to say how much he earns as national director, but said the bulk of his income comes from the Big Ten.

"I don't think there's been a conflict of interest," he said.

But the national championship game has led to conflict.

Parry seemed taken aback when his Pac-10 counterpart, Sorgen, contended the Big Ten instant replay crew missed yet another critical call in the national championship game. The play in question took place early in the second quarter and before the officials realized the second monitor was hooked up to the wrong television feed.

USC led 7-0 and had the ball at its own 45. Quarterback Matt Leinart passed to Reggie Bush, who carried the ball to the Texas 20 before his attempt to pitch the ball to teammate Brad Walker went awry.

Texas recovered at the 18 and kept possession after officials ruled the ball was a fumble. But Sorgen said video replays showed the play was a forward lateral, which means USC should have maintained possession.

The Longhorns drove to a field goal, making the score 7-3.

"I don't know why the Bush lateral play has stayed under the radar the way it has," Sorgen, a USC graduate, told the *Riverside Press-Enterprise*.

Responded Parry in an interview with Yahoo! Sports:

"Verle is for the Pac-10, so of course he's going to push the envelope in their favor."

Later Parry agreed with Sorgen's assessment but defended the Big Ten's instant replay crew while saying video replays of Bush's supposed fumble "indicated the pass was a little forward. But that's going in slow, slow, slow motion." Of his instant replay crew, Parry also added, "Their view was they didn't have indisputable evidence, so they left it alone."

But in a recent interview with Yahoo! Sports, Honig, the assistant replay official, said the botched television feed might have prevented the crew from seeing the angle they needed to make the correct call.

There's no evidence that college football is taking aggressive steps to fix problems with instant replay, either.

Parry said he recently talked to the NFL's officiating supervisor, Mike Pereira, about setting up an offseason replay clinic for all 11 Division I-A supervisors. But before the 2006 season, three of the 11 conferences brought in the NFL's instant replay guru, Dean Blandino, during training sessions for their own instant replay officials. The conferences were so focused on training their own officials that no one bothered setting up a national training seminar.

Parry said he would have organized the session last year, but conferences were using different



Reggie Bush turned to lateral the ball while running forward. (ABC Sports)

instant replay rules. Asked how it would be any different after this season, with five different replay technology systems in use, Parry replied, "That's a good question."

Many questions remain. For example, Tommy Hunt, supervisor of officials for the ACC, has compiled a list of at least 50 plays where the proper call was open to interpretation. But without anyone overseeing the national implementation of replay, Hunt said he will wait until the conference officiating supervisors meet in February to get answers.

If everything goes as Parry hopes, the NFL might have a representative at one of the officiating supervisors' biannual meetings.

"We're talking about having a one-day deal," Parry said. "We haven't had a chance to run it by our CEOs, the commissioners, yet. But we hope we can set up a training day to work through some problems."

Josh Peter is a writer for Yahoo! Sports. Send Josh a [question or comment](#) for potential use in a future column or webcast.