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Ref for World Football League

Williams calls 'em as he sees 'em

By PAUL McGRATH
Staff Sports Writer

He stands on the field among the behemoths of the game ready to whip out his yellow flag at the slightest infraction of the rules. Despite his 45 years he must stay in equal or better shape than the players he presides over.

Jay Williams, director of Parks and Recreation in Bryan, spent his summer vacation and most of this fall as an official for the World Football League.

For 17 weeks, he and the other five members of his crew (referee Dave Brazell, umpire Ed Trexler, line judge Jerry Braznell, field

judge Tom Sarcinio and back judge Henry Bowman) traveled the circuit for the infant league.

Each of the men were informed of the games they were to officiate three weeks in advance. The same crew worked together the entire season and therefore got to know each other quite well. "They were all a fine bunch of gentlemen dedicated, experienced. You couldn't ask for five more congenial men," Williams said.

The crew had to arrive in the city holding the game by noon of the game day. All expenses were paid by the league. The crew benefitted financially on hotel cost since Bow-

men is a top official in the Hilton Inn chain and often saved his crew some expenses.

To become an official in the new league, Williams had to fill out an application and send it to the league office. The league was looking to see the number of years of officiating, the number of years refereeing college games and the various references that could be offered.

Some 4,000 applications were made to the WFL and these were narrowed down to 100 after much screening. These 100 had to then be interviewed by league director of officials, Henry Lee Parker. Although he did not know it at the

time, Williams learned that the FBI carried out a security check on himself and the other 42.

Unlike many of the players in the struggling young league, the officials had no problems as far as being paid. They have not yet received pay for the last two games however since it is league procedure to pay them at the month's end. The officials also received special pay for working playoff games.

Contrary to the rumor that some teams found rats in their dressing rooms, the referees had no problems in this category. "Of course some were better than others but all were acceptable," said Williams concerning the leagues dressing facilities.

One problem was presented in the new rules the refs had to conform with. There was no longer any fair catches, kickoffs were from the 30 yardline, an action point was added after touchdowns, the goal posts were moved back to the end line and new bump and run rules were made.

Williams said he had no difficulty adjusting after the first three or four games. After spending 14 years officiating high school football and 11 years covering college ball for the Lone Star, Southland and Missouri Valley Conferences plus Southwest Conference freshmen games; pro ball was quite a switch. Williams said he was "more nervous" and had "more butterflies" than before but the "better pay gave the incentive to do a better job."

Williams recalls that for some games, the officials had to be on their toes the entire game. Specifically, he remembered the Birmingham-Chicago game that was won by Birmingham 41-40 on the last play of the game. It rained almost four inches during the game and Williams recalled that you couldn't see across the field at times.

The hardest games to officiate were the ones with the lopsided score, Williams said. There is a tendency for the players to want to fight, he said.

Williams close relationship with athletics began in Rule, Texas where he played offensive center. He later played for Texas A&M at the same position. After graduation he decided to stay around athletics and chose to become an official. Officiating became more enjoyable to Williams because it gave "a country boy a chance to go to places he wouldn't otherwise get to see." He mentioned Soldier's Field, Anaheim, New York and the Liberty Bowl.

Going back over the season, Williams recalled some of the humorous incidents that occurred in the league as it went through its infancy. A lot of the WFL coaches would say to the refs during the course of a game, "what about this or that rule?" In reply the refs would say "you've been watching TV about the other league." The coaches would then usually end up agreeing with them.

Once Williams was refing a game in which former Aggie Ross Brupbacher was playing. It took three quarters for Brupbacher to recognize Williams and when he did he said, "My gosh, Mr. Williams, what

are you doing in here?" Williams answered him by saying "Trying to keep you straight." Williams has also had conversations with other former Aggies playing in the WFL such as Edd Hargett and Billy Hobbs.

Rumors are circulating that the WFL's first season may have also been its last. The league was formed in less than a year (Williams' application was sent in March while league play began in July). "Gary Davidson, John McDonough and Henry Lee Parker (the league founders) did a great job for the short period of time that they had. Sure, they had some problems administratively but these can be ironed out next year," he said.

Even if there is a league in 1973, Williams is not certain he will be rehired to work as an official. Films will be viewed by the league to select the best ones. Williams personally feels that his crew was one of the best on the league. In the meantime, Williams spends his time refing basketball and college football games.

So now all Williams can do is wait to see if a league that is shakily balancing on one leg will give him a call. However, should Williams not get a notice again from the WFL, he could always throw a flag and penalize the league five yards for illegal procedure or delay of game.

Bidding on for Hunter

NEW YORK (AP) — Commissioner Bowie Kuhn ruled Tuesday that the ban for bidding on free agent pitcher Catfish Hunter's services has been lifted.

Kuhn's decision cleared the way for the 24 major league clubs to approach Hunter with bonus and salary offers in the wake of his free agent status granted by an arbitration panel Monday.

The commissioner notified the 24 teams that they could approach Hunter starting at 9 a.m. EST Wednesday and that they could sign the pitcher anytime after midnight EST Sunday, Dec. 22.

"The purpose of this procedure is to assure Jim Hunter access to all clubs and to assure also all clubs a fair opportunity to prepare themselves and to discuss the situation with him," the commissioner said.

Hunter achieved the free agent status when the arbitration panel ruled that Oakland owner Charles O. Finley had breached his contract with the pitcher.

Kuhn's ruling left the way open for a possible price war for the 28-year-old pitcher who has won 106 games in the last five seasons with the A's.

Speculation has centered on baseball's richest franchises—the Los Angeles Dodgers, Boston Red Sox, New York Mets and New York Yankees—and the clubs appeared ready to make their offers.

"We'll be in there pitching," said Yankee President Gabe Paul of the bidding for Hunter. The hope for Paul was that he could convince Hunter to do his pitching for the Yankees.

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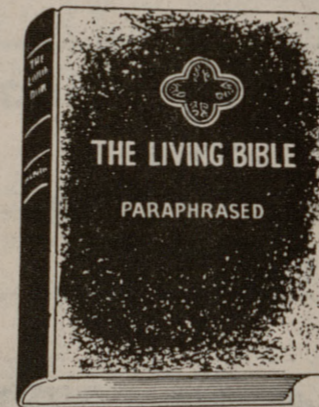
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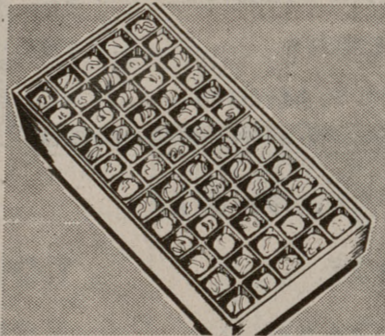
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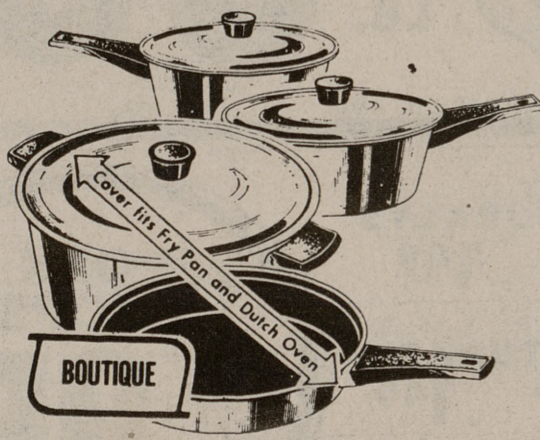
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