

Upon Further Review...

**By Reg P. Wydeven
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Last month we got to see our Kimberly Papermakers win their fourth consecutive state football championship. The game was also Kimberly's 56th consecutive win, which is the longest current winning streak in the country.

In the third quarter with the game tied at 14-14, Franklin completed a 78-yard touchdown pass. But the play was called back due to an illegal man downfield penalty. The Sabers then had to punt and the Papermakers scored twice more for a 29-14 decisive win.

Unfortunately not all high school football games end so conclusively.

The day after Wisconsin's state championship, Illinois played their state semifinal games. Plainfield North faced off against Fenwick High for a chance to play in the Class 7A championship game.

With just four seconds left in the game, Fenwick was leading 10-7. On fourth-and-fifteen, the Fenwick quarterback dropped back to pass and heaved the ball downfield to let the clock expire and seal the win for the Friars. However, Fenwick was called for intentional grounding, which is a loss of down penalty. As a result, the referees awarded Plainfield North the ball and gave the Tigers one untimed down. Plainfield North kicked a game-tying field goal to put the game into overtime. Both teams scored in the extra period, but Plainfield North successfully completed a two-point conversion to beat Fenwick 18-17.

While Plainfield North celebrated, Fenwick protested, claiming the referees never should have awarded an extra play at the end of regulation. The Illinois High School Association (IHSA) agreed, stating, "On the final play of the fourth quarter in today's IHSA Class 7A Semifinal Football game between Fenwick High School and Plainfield North High School, an error was made by the officiating crew, which resulted in an untimed down being awarded to Plainfield North."

The IHSA went on to say that according to their state football rule book, "the game should have concluded on the final play of regulation and the untimed down should not have been awarded." But even though the referees clearly blew it, the IHSA ultimately held that their decision was final. The rule book further reads that "the decisions of game officials shall be final; protests against the decision of a game official shall not be reviewed by the Board of Directors."

The IHSA invited Fenwick to appeal, then decided not to hear their appeal. In response, the school filed a lawsuit in the Circuit Court of Cook County, Illinois, "seeking declaratory, injunctive and other relief against IHSA." To support its position, Fenwick cited the IHSA's reversal of a 2008 state wrestling tournament, along a 2008 Mississippi decision involving a similar situation. The school's attorneys argued in court that "the reality of it is we won...this can be fixed. This isn't a situation where Humpty Dumpty can't be put back together."

Not wanting to establish a precedent that the courts can overturn officiating errors, Judge Kathleen Kennedy ruled in favor of Plainfield North, handing Fenwick another devastating loss in less than a week. The ruling reinforced the concept that membership organizations like the IHSA should be able to self-govern within the rules set by its member schools.

There's an old maxim in sports that "the ball don't lie," meaning things eventually work out evenly in a karmic way. Coincidentally, Plainfield North lost to East St. Louis, 26-13, in the Class 7A title game.

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