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Scabs in Seattle

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It took all of three weeks but the excrement has finally hit the fan. It is not the end of the world, but it is the end of any further claims that the scabs impersonating NFL referees are competent. If they were competent they would already have been NFL referees and therefore would be locked out by the NFL.

The fiasco in Seattle last night has been coming down the road for three weeks now. In fact it could have hit the fan in Week One in Phoenix when the scabs gave the Seahawks an extra timeout in the red zone as time was running out. Had Seattle scored and won that game over Arizona, the noise coming out of Arizona would have matched the howling that began last night.

Lest we forget the NFL referees have been locked out by a league that is turning over billions of dollars, for the sake of a few millions. One commentator described the difference between the league and the refs as involving "chump change."

Given the ordeal that the NFL is putting itself through, one might assume that this is a life or death situation for the league that the very existence of the NFL is on the line. What is at stake is much less. A group of greedy owners want to show their power over the referees. Why? Because they can. And because they no longer exercise the same kind power over the players.

So what is Roger Goodell's role in all of this? Certainly he is doing the bidding of the owners, who are his collective boss. How much he believes in what he is doing and how much he really believes some of the idiotic comments he has been making is not known. One can hope that his levels of belief are low. If not, the NFL has a Commissioner who will lead them into a brick wall.

Roger Goodell has said on a number of occasions that he views his job as "Protecting the Shield." I would take that to mean that basically he sees his role as not screwing up a good thing. NFL franchises are now valued over one billion dollars. The NFL

is at the top of the American Sports pantheon, it is clearly the national pastime, and a magical money machine.

When the NFL on Goodell's watch was able to avoid a lockout of the players, sign a long term collective bargaining agreement, and follow that up with a fantastic television contract, one could never imagine that within a few short months it would be reduced to a laughing stock of the sports world. What has happened to Roger Goodell's golden touch or velvet glove?

Clearly this fiasco is not part of his plan to "Protect the Shield" or enhance the brand. In the face of this clumsy failure of labor relations the Commissioner had better be willing to challenge his collective boss, and push the owners to settle with the referees. Monday Night Football cannot be allowed to become Monday Night Raslin, a joke of the sports world.

The other thing that needs to be said about this mess involves the scabs. Commentators and players keep excusing their incompetence, saying that they are in over their head and it's not really their fault.

Well I'm sorry, but to some degree it is their fault. These are scabs that have made two choices. First, they have chosen to support the NFL owners who are trying to crush the NFL referees and they have done so by taking these jobs. These scabs are supporting in a direct way this unjustifiable action by the NFL owners. They are putting the knife to the NFL referees. They cannot escape that responsibility for their actions.

Second, these men have taken the jobs as NFL officials knowing they are not competent for this job. They may be better than you and I, but they are not competent to operate at this level.

I have spent a lot of time umpiring at the Little League, Babe Ruth league, high school, and the American Legion baseball level. Under no circumstances would I ever have thought I could walk onto a professional baseball field, let alone a major league field, and umpire a game.

These referees must have some sense of how good they are as referees, or how good they are not, and how that level of competence is not adequate for the NFL. If it was, they would already be NFL referees.

So what are they doing in the NFL? Are they performing a charitable act for the league? Are they making certain that America will not have to go without NFL football for a few weeks? Or are that fulfilling some misguided fantasy about being a NFL referee jumping at this chance to make the big time?

Sorry to say the NFL is not Fantasy Football. It is real football in which real money is at stake, in which players sacrifice their bodies on a weekly basis while trying to perform at the highest level possible. The NFL strives to put the best on the field every week, and is hypersensitive about the integrity of the game.

These scabs have no business on the field. The NFL has no business putting them on the field and pretending this is still the high level of football that the public so admires and indeed has come to love.

If Roger Goodell really thinks his job is to "Protect the Shield" he had better get at it, because it is now more than perfectly clear that the Shield is under attack and not just by the Scabs in Seattle.

On Sport and Society this is Dick Crepeau reminding you that you don't have to be a good sport to be a bad loser.

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