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When not practicing, lawyer leads football refs

By Jerry Crimmins
Law Bulletin staff writer

To keep up with his profession, one workers' compensation lawyer jogs three miles a day and always shows up a day before the contest.

That's because Daniel F. Capron of Capron & Avgerinos P.C. works two jobs.

When he's not practicing law, he is president of the Big Ten Football Officials' Association. He was elected by 56 of his fellow football officials.

The Big Ten football season begins, he said, Labor Day weekend and runs traditionally to Thanksgiving.

This year, however, "for the first time ever, there will be a Big Ten championship football game in Indianapolis" on Dec. 3.

Also for the first time, the Big Ten will have 12 teams this year: the 10 traditional teams, Penn State University (in the conference since 1990) and 2011's newcomer University of Nebraska.

Capron has been a lawyer since 1981. He has been an official in football also since 1981 when he started refereeing grade school games.

He worked his way up, and this year will be his 12th as an official in Big Ten football contests.

"It's the most challenging, but also the most enjoyable thing I do with my time. Nobody gets to do it forever," Capron said.

He is 54. He said football officials tend to retire between the ages of 60 and 65.

Even though this year he will be head of all the Big Ten football officials, he will still be on the field.

For a Saturday game, "I usually get there at the game site sometime around noon on Friday." Capron is crew chief of the seven officials on his crew.

His legal cases are not scheduled on Fridays during the season.

In his workers' compensation practice, he said, "my opposing counsel are all very understanding," as are the arbitrators at the Illinois Workers' Compensation Commission.

"They all pretty much know what I do. They think it's pretty cool," he said.

"I've got a very understanding client



Daniel F. Capron of Capron & Avgerinos P.C. has two jobs — one as a lawyer and the other as a Big Ten football referee. He was recently elected as president of the Big Ten Football Officials' Association.

base. I represent the injured workers. So they like turning on their TV on Saturday and saying, 'Hey, there's my lawyer.'"

His partners and staff are also very supportive, he said.

For football fans, Capron said this year is "probably the single biggest year of rule changes we've had in many years."

Starting this year, touchdowns can be disallowed for "taunting," or inappropriate celebration before the score.

The new "taunting" rule will penalize the team that committed the foul 15 yards from the spot of the foul, Capron said, and if the offending player scored, the touchdown won't count.

The taunting rule is "to put an end to this nonsense" of players putting on a show before they score, he said.

In pro football, showboating is "part of the entertainment," but "college football will not tolerate unsportsmanlike conduct," Capron said.

In previous years, taunting before a

touchdown was a dead ball foul in college games, and the penalty was assessed only on the extra point or ensuing kickoff. Taunting after a touchdown will still be a dead ball foul and the touchdown will still count.

The second big rule change is what Capron called "the 10-second runoff."

This will mimic a rule found in the NFL. The new rule holds that "if a team commits a foul in the last minute of either half, the effect of which is to stop the clock, then the team that didn't commit the foul can run 10 seconds off the clock," he said.

This is an option for the opposing team, Capron said, but if that team doesn't wish to, they don't have to run 10 seconds off.

Each crew of Big Ten football officials is geographically balanced for the conference, Capron said, and they work together for the whole season.

The night before a game, the seven officials on the crew sit together to watch

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videos of good calls and bad calls from around the Big Ten the previous week and from their own last game.

They also discuss players to watch in the upcoming game, especially any stars who may be the object of “ganging up” by the opposition.

“The number one thing every week is to protect the players,” Capron said.

Six of the seven officials get \$2,000 a game, and the crew chief gets \$2,100. Capron gets nothing extra for being president of the Big Ten football officials.

“On TV, he is very particular, very concise and presents himself very well,” said his law partner, Nick J. Avgerinos. The two men have been friends for 28 years and partners in their own firm since 1989.

“His time officiating does not interfere with his practice,” Avgerinos said, because of Capron’s “self-discipline, preparation and hard work.

“He is very productive, very efficient and works very hard to make sure he is taking care of his clients and the firm.”

His referee work may even bring in busi-

ness, Avgerinos said, “because people feel confident putting their trust and their case in the hands of someone who is accomplished professionally both as an attorney and in his profession as an official.”

Asked if Capron makes the right calls in the game, his partner said, “Always.”

In Capron’s view, Big Ten officials make the right call on flags thrown for violations “well over 90 percent of the time.”

Regarding fouls “that should have been called but weren’t,” he said they might miss two or three a game.

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