



Crime & Punishment

James Alan Fox on criminal behavior and the justice system

MISCELLANEOUS

Simulated shooting should be punished by NFL

I'm waiting to see what the behavior police at the National Football League will do in response to the display of unsportsmanlike conduct at last night's nationally televised Eagles-Giants game.

I'm not talking about the sequence of post-whistle skirmishes between the two rivals of the gridiron or the fight that resulted in offsetting penalties on players from both teams. I'm also not referring to the stupid taunts from Eagles DeSean Jackson directed toward the entire Giants team after the receiver pulled in a 50-yard pass right in front of the opponent's bench -- a truly juvenile act that prompted a penalty flag negating the big gain.

I'm much more concerned about a spontaneous celebration from Eagles linebacker Brian Rolle midway through the second quarter, a rookie mistake that warrants an NFL sanction. You may have missed it -- the refs apparently did. And the NBC announcers failed to take notice, even when the player's antics were shown on replay.

Immediately after he and his defensive mates had cornered a Giants ball carrier several yards behind the line of scrimmage, Rolle jumped up and started mimicking machine-gun fire. With a deliberate back-and-forth sweeping motion, Rolle appeared as if he were aiming and shooting at the Giants home crowd.



Had Rolle pointed his imaginary weapon at one of the Giants players, he likely would have been penalized 15 yards for taunting. According to a footnote in the NFL Rule Book, a "machine gun salute" also constitutes taunting, presuming that such a gesture directed at the crowd is included.

You may think that my reaction to Rolle's reaction is just a bit Pollyannaish. But consider how the NFL has responded to other vulgar acts of celebration. Years ago Randy Moss, forever a flamboyant receiver then for the Vikings, was fined \$10,000 when he mimicked mooning the Green Bay crowd behind the end zone and then pretended to use the goal post to wipe his backside. Of course, other just-plain-silly TD celebrations got a rise out of the League office, including when Joe Horn of the New Orleans Saints pulled a cell phone hidden inside a goal post pad to call home and when Forty-Niner Terrill Owens took out a sharpie to autograph a TD ball.

The NFL, in its current no-nonsense posture, has shown little tolerance for vulgarities directed at players or spectators. Green Bay Packer A.J. Hawk was fined for holding up his middle finger after recording a quarterback sack, and Jets Coach Rex Ryan was punished for swearing at a fan during halftime of a recent game against the Pats.

So NFL brass, what are you going to do here? Is pretending to massacre fans with an "air automatic" any less vulgar than flipping them the bird? In my book, it is many times worse. Even though Rolle was certainly not being malicious in his high-spirited move, such behavior should not go unpunished.

POSTSCRIPT: On November 25, four days after this blog post, the NFL fined Rolle \$10,000 for his actions.