



January 5, 2018

Mr. David Coleman  
Vice President, Officiating  
Pac-12 Conference  
360 3rd Street, 3rd Floor  
San Francisco, CA 94107

Dear Mr. Coleman,

I am writing this letter to address the officiating during our football team's appearance in the Franklin American Mortgage Music City Bowl.

I will begin with the decision to eject sophomore running back [REDACTED] for making contact with an official. [REDACTED] frustration over what he perceived to be a late hit and passion for the game are why he reacted the way he did, but he was not deserving of an ejection. The intent of the no-contact rule – protection of officials – was not adhered to in this case. Video of the incident does not support the call made on the field or the statement made by the officiating crew postgame and later supported by the Pac-12. Moreover, the character and intent of a quality young man in our program have been unfairly called into question as a result.

Protecting the students who compete for our teams is our foremost charge, but I do not believe that was handled effectively during the Music City Bowl. One incident best illustrates that point. Late in the second quarter, our quarterback, [REDACTED], was hit by a Northwestern player after throwing an incomplete pass. Video clearly shows that he was not only hit after releasing the ball, but taken down and driven into the ground out of bounds by the defender. No penalty was called.

Following the play, [REDACTED] lay on the ground needing medical attention for an injury that would force him to miss the remainder of the half. As he was being evaluated, the officials signaled for play to continue. Darren Johnson, our team doctor and the chairman of UK's Department of Orthopedic Surgery and Sports Medicine, reached out to our administration and athletic training staff to tell us he had never seen such a thing in his many years of experience, calling it a safety issue for both the player and those treating him for play to continue. As this incident progressed, based on the interaction our coaching staff, players and I had with the officiating crew, I perceived a lack of care for the well-being of our players that I believe needs to be addressed.

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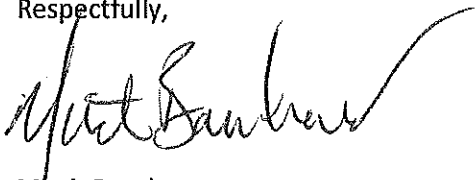
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Specifically, head referee Chris Coyte seemed to have no care for our injured player or willingness to allow our team a few moments to prepare a substitute quarterback to replace him, which is normal protocol in such a situation. His interaction with our staff, in my opinion, did not meet the standards of professionalism needed to manage the difficult task of officiating a high-level college football game. In addition, as frustration mounted, line judge Tim Messuri similarly failed to meet those standards of professionalism. Messuri, hearing that frustration, screamed to our staff, "Do you want some more of this?" threatening more penalties like the unsportsmanlike conduct penalty called on our bench in the midst of the incident.

To summarize, in the course of two plays, replays showed to be late hits out of bounds, a player was injured and another was ejected and we received two penalties and a threat of more by an official. All in all, we feel great disappointment that what was supposed to be a quality bowl experience for our young people and our university was marred by these incidents.

Thank you for your attention. I welcome any further conversations regarding this matter. I can be reached via email at [mbarn@uky.edu](mailto:mbarn@uky.edu) and by phone at (859) 257-8015.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mitch Barnhart". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping tail that extends to the right.

Mitch Barnhart  
Athletics Director  
University of Kentucky