

Shhh! New SWAC Rules Curtail Grambling Band

Contributed by Darryl D. Smith -- Black College Wire
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Strict guidelines limit when band can play

"Play something!" shouted one angry fan at a recent game. Other fans agreed.

The World Famed Tiger Marching Band sat silent, unable to play to the fans' wishes.

The Southwestern Athletic Conference has started enforcing its rules regarding band performances. The rules were issued to the SWAC band directors on Aug. 19, according to a document obtained by The Gramblinite.

The document states that bands "shall not create any noise that prohibits a team from hearing its signals."

When an "offensive team breaks the 'huddle' and approaches the line of scrimmage, the band shall cease playing." The bands also cannot use drum rolls or beats, cymbals clashing, horn sounds or any other kind of musical instrument while the ball is in play.

The penalties for violating the rules the first time result in a warning. The second violation results in a suspension for one game and a fine. The third violation results in a suspension from the league for the remainder of the season.

Duane Lewis, assistant commissioner of communications for the SWAC, says there has been a lot of "misinformation about the restrictiveness of the policies."

"It's not as restrictive as it appears to be. It's not limiting the band," he said in a telephone interview. "The most important part is that we don't the band to play while the offensive team is on the field. There cannot be noise piped in once the team breaks the huddle."

Lewis also mentioned that teams in the National Football League (NFL) did not have bands, so their players are able to hear the signals.

"It's all about enhancing the play on the field," Lewis said. "It's enhancing the entire experience."

Players have complained about the bands playing, often with the quarterback asking the band to be quiet. However, some fans have complained about the bands as well. One of those complaints was that the two bands would play at the same time, trying to blow out the other one.

The new rules prevent the bands from playing at the same time.

"Something is sacred about that," said Dr. Larry Pannell, director of the World Famed.

Pannell has always been a stickler on following the rules, rarely breaking them. Despite his efforts, he feels the fans' pain.

"We get criticized by Grambling's fans for not playing enough in the stands," he said. "The rules have been there. We don't make the rules; we abide by them."

The new rules aren't just irking the fans; it's also affecting band members as well.

"We can't give the people what they want," said Brian Wright, a saxophonist. "Without the band playing, it makes the game boring."

Many fans echoed that sentiment, booing the band for ending songs early or not playing.

"I'm mad and depressed," Wright added. "I'm depressed because all of our hard work is going down the drain. We can't showcase our talent."

Lewis, however, disagrees.

"There are many opportunities for the band to play during the game," he explained. "As soon as the play ends, the band can play. It's just structured specifically for when the offensive team breaks the huddle so they can hear the play. Everything else is pretty much the same."

Pannell said he wants to please the fans, but violating the rules makes everyone suffers.

"If we get kicked out for the season and can't play in the games, then I'm going to be the one being asked questions," he explained.

"I know our fans love and support us, but they have got to understand that there are some rules that we have to abide by that we don't agree with."

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Darryl D. Smith wrote this article for The Gramblinite, the Grambling State University student newspaper, which originally published this article.