INSTANT REPLAY...: TV CAMERA TURNS FANS INTO INSTANT EXPERTS FROM ...

Chapin, Dwight
Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File); Oct 11, 1971;
ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times
pg. D1

INSTANT REPLAY . . .

TV camera turns fans into instant experts from 50-yard line seats in their living rooms

BY DWIGHT CHAPIN, Times Staff Writer

It's commercial time on television's pro football game of the week and Gus Fan leaves his chair in front of the set and moves toward the refrigerator. Somewhere between the kitchen and living room on the return trip he hears the announcer saying:

"Brodie is back to pass. He throws long down the left sideline for Washington. Gene's got it, behind Kassulke, and he's going to go all the way!"

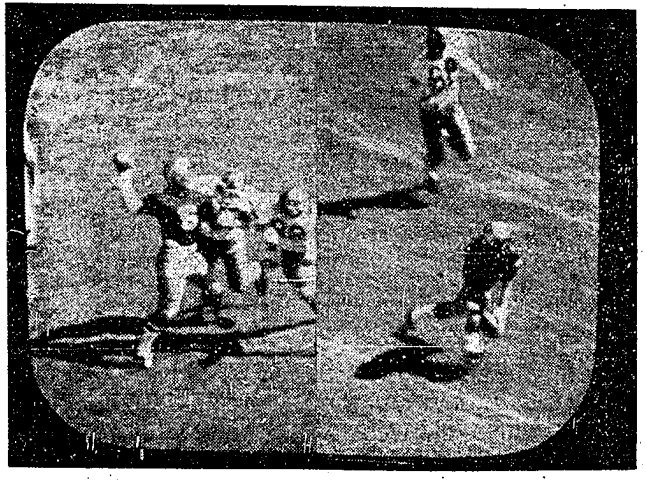
Five years ago, the fan might have hurled his beer can through his TV set after missing a play like that. But now he can relax and wait for the instant replay to show him the pass, the catch and the TD from umpteen different angles.

The instant replay, since its refined development by Ampex Corporation in 1967, has become almost as important a part of athletic lexicon as the forward pass or the fastball. It was even turned into the title for a best-selling book and now has been applied to a popular record.

The instant replay camera has turned fans into instant experts, often giving them a better view from their homes than they could get from the 50-yard line.

Many people thought it would become an embarrassment to officials, putting them on the spot on close plays. It has proven just the opposite. Said W. D. (Shorty) Lawson, a Southwest Conference football official, "It has been more good for us than anything going. Instant replays have shown that officials made the right call on controversial plays 95 per cent of the time. I think it has given added prestige to the job."

Please Turn to Page 8, Col. 7



SPLIT SCREEN – During instant replay, this split-screen technique allows viewers to watch action of passer and receiver.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

INSTANT REPLAY

Continued from First Page

The camera has thrust sportswriters into a difficult position because they get one look at a play from a faraway press box, while the armchair quarterback can see it several times, from closeup.

And, it has put formerly anonymous people such as offensive guards into an unaccustomed but agreeable and more lucrative limelight.

"Before the instant replay," says Rams' guard Tom Mack, "the only players anybody ever saw were the quarterbacks, running backs and receivers. The rest of us were just spear carriers . . . just part of the background. And the quarterbacks got all the money in the salary budget. Why pay an offensive guard if he isn't really in the game but is just background?

"Suddenly, with instant replay, everybody in the world can see that there are really 11 men on a football team and that offensive guards are as essential as quarterbacks.

"People still look at the man with the ball first time around, of course, but on instant replay, they are forced to see the rest of us."

The immediate playback of sports action—in color and slow motion, fast motion or reverse motion—isn't an easy process, but not as difficult as you might think. And it's a far cry from a keep-your-fingers crossed gimmick that began in the early 1960s with conventional videotape recorders.

The Ampex recorders, first used by ABC Sports during the U.S. skiing championships in 1967, employ highly polished disks for recording surfaces instead of reels of tape employed on conventional videotape records. The disks permit variable speed playback, plus stop motion, not easily possible with tape recorders.

Access to recorded pictures can be accomplished much more quickly and accurately, since there is no rewind process, as with tape.

Almost 100 color instant replay machines now are in use by networks and TV stations throughout the nation. In an important game, two or three cameras are assigned to feed action pictures to the machines.

The "iso" camera, located in the end zone, usually focuses on a wide receiver, and picks up his maneuvering against a defensive back.

A second camera is assigned to the offensive team and a third, perhaps, to the defensive team . . . to follow a key block on offense or a blitz on defense.

In addition to these cameras, as many as five others are sending live pictures into a bank of small television monitors in a TV van located outside the stadium where the game is being played.

The decisions on what is broadcast are made by people in the vans who never see a live play. The program director communicates by intercom with all of his cameramen, the operators of the instant replay recorders and with the technical director manning a control button board that selects the camera output to be shown on the air—and what is fed into the "iso" recorders.

Even with all the preparation, the instant replay cameras sometimes miss a big play, or a favorable angle. Because of this, announcers are warned not to tell their viewers that the play has been recorded.

Fans have grown so accustomed to getting a repeat look at important plays, however, that they often write stations when one isn't shown again.

Like anything involving machinery, technology and man, the instant replay sometimes misfires, too. In a college football game last fall, a reverse button was accidentally pushed during the replay of an exciting pass reception. The ball appeared to sail toward the pass receiver, stop short of his hands, then return to the quarterback.

Seeing the mistake, an engineer corrected the action of the recorder and the ball stopped again, went back to the receiver and landed in his arms for a catch.

"Well," said the announcer, "he missed it the first time but he caught it the second."

Even Gus Fan couldn't disagree with that.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.