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### **STATEMENT BY NFL SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT RAY ANDERSON**

The NFL released the following statement today by Senior Vice President of Football Operations **RAY ANDERSON**:

As a result of a play in the Kansas City-Cincinnati game and another in the Seattle-Detroit game last Sunday also involving a sliding quarterback, clubs were reminded today of the importance of defenders and quarterbacks understanding their respective responsibilities in the sliding quarterback situation.

Player safety is an ongoing point of emphasis in our league. On sliding quarterback plays, the responsibility of defenders is to avoid a sliding quarterback while the responsibility of the quarterback is to use the protection properly. This rule will continue to be strictly enforced and violations are likely to result in disciplinary action.

The injury to quarterback **TRENT GREEN** in the Kansas City-Cincinnati game was unfortunate and has drawn much commentary, but it is not a foul.

An extensive review of this play showed that Green began a late slide as **ROBERT GEATHERS** of the Bengals broke down to tackle him. Simultaneously, the defender was blocked in the back by a Kansas City player. As a result of the block in the back, Geathers was no longer in complete control of his body. Anticipating contact with the sliding quarterback, Geathers twisted his torso in order to avoid helmet-to-helmet contact or driving his helmet into Green's body. Nonetheless, Geathers' right shoulder contacted Green's right shoulder, driving Green's upper body and head into the ground.

In other instances this contact might be illegal, since a defensive player has the responsibility to avoid unnecessary contact even when he is blocked by an opponent. However, in this case, the late slide and the block in the back were mitigating factors.

The play in the Seattle-Detroit game provided examples both of the type of act that will result in a penalty (and potential fine) and of the preferred type of act by a defender attempting to avoid contact. After Seattle quarterback **MATT HASSELBECK** left the pocket and ran up the middle, with defenders in front of and behind him, he began his slide. The defender in front of the quarterback, **ERNIE SIMS** of Detroit, had the opportunity to avoid contact, but instead drove his helmet into the quarterback, resulting in a 15-yard penalty for unnecessary roughness. In

contrast, the trailing Lions defender, **CORY REDDING**, leapt over the sliding quarterback in order to avoid contact. This play is being reviewed by our office for a possible fine.

All NFL clubs were reminded today of two important aspects of the sliding quarterback rule:

1. When a runner begins to slide feet-first, a defensive player must pull up and avoid unnecessary contact. Rule 7, Section 4, Article 1 provides that the ball is dead and the down ended when any part of a sliding runner's body, other than his hands or feet, touches the ground. This rule was created in 1985 to provide additional protection for a sliding runner by ending the down prior to contact by a defensive player. Therefore, as our Officiating Department has conveyed to coaches, players, and officials at league meetings and clinics for many years, a sliding quarterback should be treated the same as a runner who has been downed. Though it is not necessary for a defensive player to touch the runner to end the down, this does not mean that all contact by a defender is illegal. If a defender has already committed himself, and the contact is unavoidable, it is not a foul unless the defender makes some other act, such as helmet-to-helmet contact or by driving his forearm into the runner.
2. Quarterbacks who desire to take advantage of the protection provided to a sliding runner are responsible for starting their slide before contact by a defensive player is imminent. After the current rule was passed in 1985, some quarterbacks began using a "late slide." Whereas the rule was intended to provide protection for a quarterback who elects to end a run in order to avoid potentially injurious contact, some quarterbacks sought to gain as many yards as possible before beginning a slide when defenders were already close at hand. In the 1989 Competition Committee Report, the committee addressed this problem and reminded the clubs that the sliding quarterback had the obligation "to make his intentions clear;" if he did not, and waited until the last moment to begin his slide, he put himself "in jeopardy of being tackled like a regular ball carrier."

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