

Atletico threaten legal action as Barca sign Griezmann

Spanish champions Barcelona announced the signing of striker Antoine Griezmann on Friday for 120 million euros (\$135 million) from a fuming Atletico Madrid, who said the Catalan club had not paid enough to trigger the player's release clause.

France forward Griezmann, 28, rejected a move to Barcelona last year but announced in May that he was leaving Atletico, where he has spent the last five seasons since signing from Real Sociedad in 2014.

Barca have been trying to lure Griezmann to the Nou Camp since November 2017, but the forward signed a new five-year deal with Atletico in June 2018 that had a 200 million euros buy-out clause, which dropped to 120 million euros on July 1 this year.

Atletico said that Griezmann's May 14 announcement that he was leaving the club is proof a deal had already been struck between the player and Barcelona before his buy-out clause dropped.

"Atletico Madrid considers that the deposited amount is insufficient to cover (Griezmann's) buyout clause, since it is obvious that the agreement between the player and FC Barcelona was closed before the clause was reduced from 200 million euros to 120 million euros," the club said in a statement.

"It was also prior to the date on which the clause was modified the communication that the player made on May 14 announcing his disassociation from the club. (RTRS)



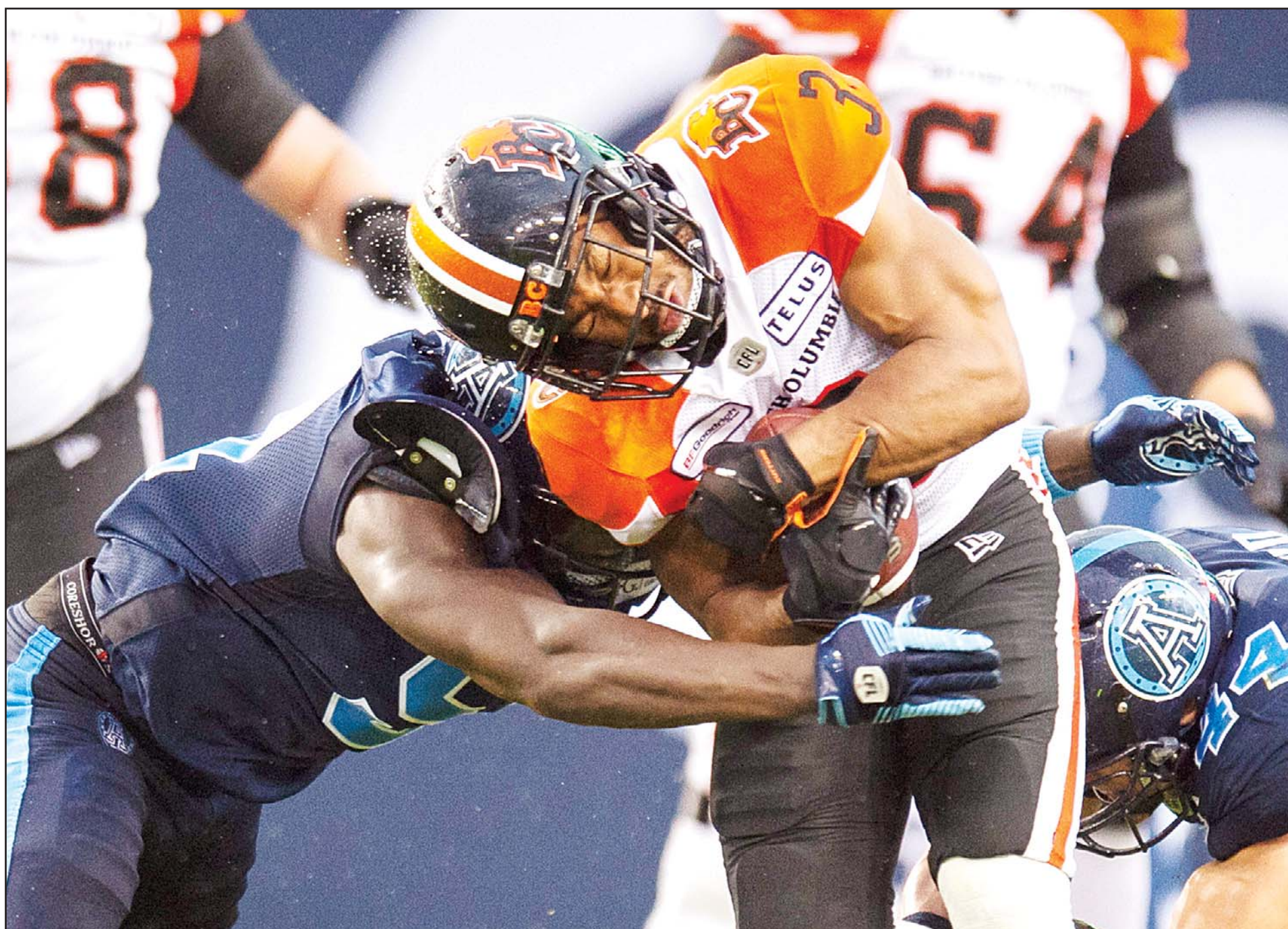
In this file photo, Atletico Madrid's Antoine Griezmann arrives for the Golden Ball, 'Ballon d'Or' award ceremony at the Grand Palais in Paris, France. Barcelona says France forward Antoine Griezmann has agreed to join the Spanish champions after they paid his buyout clause to free him from rivals Atletico Madrid. (AP)

Sports Plus



Compromise possible in push for 18-game schedule

Interference or not, NFL refs preparing for replay reviews



In this file photo, BC Lions running back John White IV (3) gets tackled by Toronto Argonauts linebackers Micah Awe (left), and Ian Wild (44) during the first half of a Canadian Football League game in Toronto. (AP)

By Stephen Hawkins

Veteran NFL referee Tony Corrente was quick to make the distinction about what changes now that pass interference can be challenged by coaches and reviewed by officials.

"First of all, the rule has not changed whatsoever. Pass interference is still the same rule that we have had in the past," Corrente said Friday. "We haven't changed our perspective toward it, we haven't changed our interpretations of it whatsoever. It's just the addition of replay."

The significant difference, however, is the subjective nature of plays that are typically judgment calls that can now be reviewed, beyond objective standards such as whether a player stepped out of bounds or where the ball should be marked.

"That's the new box we've opened," said Corrente, going into his 25th season as an NFL official and 22nd as a referee.

All 122 NFL officials are taking part this weekend in their annual clinic. The gathering comes about four months after NFL owners approved by a 31-1 margin to allow pass interference or non-calls to be challenged by coaches until the final two minutes, when officials in the booth can then stop the game for such reviews.

It is an one-season experiment that could very well stick after an egregious missed call in the NFC championship game in January that cost the New Orleans Saints a trip to the Super Bowl.

The NFL competition committee in May decided against making any changes to the new rule approved by owners.

"We understand the play that elevated and got us to where we are today," said Alberto Riveron, the NFL's senior vice-president of officiating.

But Riveron stressed that league officials have been discussing the possibility of such reviews for several years, long before the non-call in the closing minutes of regulation after Saints receiver Tommy Lee Lewis was hit by cornerback Nickell Robey-Coleman in a game the Los Angeles Rams went on to win in overtime.

"The competition committee and ownership is constantly looking at ways to get better. We have discussed replay before as it pertains to other situations. Pass interference, holding, personal fouls," Riveron said. "But we do understand a play of this magnitude elevated us to the point where we are today. But again,

it's not new."

Referee Ron Torbert said officials won't change their approach or what they do on the field. He said the change is just an addition to the list of situations that are subject to review by instant replay.

"We'll still do what we've always done, which is try to get every play right," Torbert said.

During the rule's one-year trial this season, coaches still can challenge until the two-minute warning of each half or overtime. A replay official would be responsible for any reviews after that, but would need "clear and obvious visual evidence" to review and overturn potential pass interference in an attempt to avoid too many stoppages.

The replay official will have only the angles on the television broadcast available to overturn an on-field decision. Pass interference still is

defined as an act significantly hindering the opportunity to make a play on a ball, and all pass plays will be subject to review.

When there are such reviews, Torbert and Corrente said referees will be part of a collaborative effort with Riveron and replay officials in New York looking at the plays. The referees can relay why an official called pass interference - or why they didn't throw a flag.

"That collaboration occurs with any reviewable play," Torbert said. "Not just pass interference."

While the concept of a future 18-game NFL season is nothing new, with players objecting to the wear and tear of an added two games, the Wall Street Journal reported a potential compromise Friday.

In early negotiations regarding the league's current collective bargaining agreement, which expires after the 2020 season, an addition to the schedule reportedly has been discussed with the owners proposing the players remain limited to 16 games in an 18-game schedule.

Teams would have to stagger two games off for each of their players on the roster.

NFL Players' Association executive director DeMaurice Smith confirmed to ESPN that the possibility has been raised, but added that the players don't have any incentive to support it.

"I don't see an 18-game schedule - under any circumstance - being in the best interest of our players," Smith told ESPN. "If somebody wants to make an 18-game proposal, we'll look at it. I haven't seen anything that makes me think that it would be good for the players."

The idea of an 18-game schedule goes back to at least 2011. And even though the added work would add tens of millions to the payroll of each team, the players have held strong that more regular-season games are not their preference.

The longer season would require a shortening of the preseason schedule, which is typically four games for teams. The report cited an NFLPA analysis that an added two regular-season games for each team could increase revenue by \$2.5 billion league-wide.

"No players are banging down my door asking me to think about this," NFLPA president Eric Winston said, according to the WSJ.

"Why is it our job to figure out how to make 18 games work as players? You tell someone you're going to work longer and you figure out how to make it work? That doesn't work," Smith told ESPN. "It's not our job to put that square peg in the round hole."

Instead, the players seem keen on non-schedule increasing proposals like a quicker route to free agency, changes in the minimum salary guidelines, increased benefits and bonuses. (AP)

'The competition committee and ownership is constantly looking at ways to get better. We have discussed replay before as it pertains to other situations. Pass interference, holding, personal fouls'

Ex-Caribbean soccer official hit with \$79 million judgment

FIFA gets tougher on racism in disciplinary code update

ZURICH, July 13, (AP): FIFA is doubling its minimum ban for racist incidents to 10 games, and will start inviting players to make victim statements at disciplinary hearings.

Stricter handling of discrimination allegations is a key theme of the redrafted FIFA disciplinary code which takes effect next week.

"Topics like racism and discrimination have been updated, putting FIFA at the forefront of the fight against this appalling attack on the fundamental human rights of individuals," soccer's world body said on Thursday in a statement.

The minimum ban for players or officials rises from five to 10 games, and victims can soon be heard in person by FIFA judging panels.

"FIFA will not let down victims of racist abuse," FIFA said, adding they "may be invited by the respective judicial body to make an oral or written victim impact statement."

"For a first offence, playing a match with a limited number of spectators and a fine of at least 20,000 Swiss francs (\$20,000) shall be imposed on the association or club concerned," FIFA said.

In recent seasons, FIFA and European soccer body UEFA have



In this file photo, suspended FIFA executive Jack Warner gestures during a news conference at the airport in Port-of-Spain, Trinidad and Tobago. (AP)

closed cases of alleged racist abuse for lack of evidence beyond testimony of the players involved.

Overhauling its disciplinary rules, FIFA will also impose transfer bans on clubs which default on debts in cases processed in-house and at the

Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS). FIFA is also preparing to open the doors of some judicial hearings, offer free legal counsel to parties, and publish more verdicts online.

"For the first time, certain types of disciplinary hearings - concerning

doping and match-manipulation cases - will be open to the public if the parties request it," FIFA said.

To modernize and improve its work, FIFA worked with soccer's leading discrimination monitoring group, London-based Fare.

The new code now includes specific language including sexual orientation as a discrimination issue, bringing it into line with FIFA's statutes applying to 211 member federations worldwide.

When players are subject to abuse by fans, FIFA already has an escalating three-stage process for referees to act, leading to games being abandoned. It applies in all 2022 World Cup qualifying games which Fare observers will attend after assessing the risk of discrimination.

FIFA wants abandoned games forfeited as a 3-0 loss by the fans' team "unless there are exceptional circumstances."

Transfer bans - typically imposed for breaking rules to sign youth players - will be extended to cases of defaulting on debts to players, coaches or other clubs. Previously, clubs risked a deduction of league points.

"A transfer ban has been shown to be the most effective instrument for

this purpose," said FIFA, which will lift a ban when debts are paid.

Currently, teams are deducted points in about 10 mostly low-key cases per year which are not publicized.

FIFA's move toward more transparency will see judicial panel leaders make the final decision - to approve a request in a doping case or require it in a match-fixing prosecution - on allowing the media in and live-streaming proceedings.

This follows a European Court of Human Rights ruling last year which required CAS to relax secrecy around its traditional closed-door hearings. However, lawyers are rarely expected to recommend openness for their clients.

Also:

NEW YORK: A former Caribbean soccer official fighting extradition in the FIFA bribery scandal has been ordered to pay \$79 million in damages from a related US lawsuit.

US District Judge William Kuntz ordered the default judgment against Jack Warner in the 2017 civil action accusing him of embezzling tens of millions of dollars from the Confederation of North, Central American and Caribbean Association Football.

'Topics like racism and discrimination have been updated, putting FIFA at the forefront of the fight against this appalling attack on the fundamental human rights of individuals'