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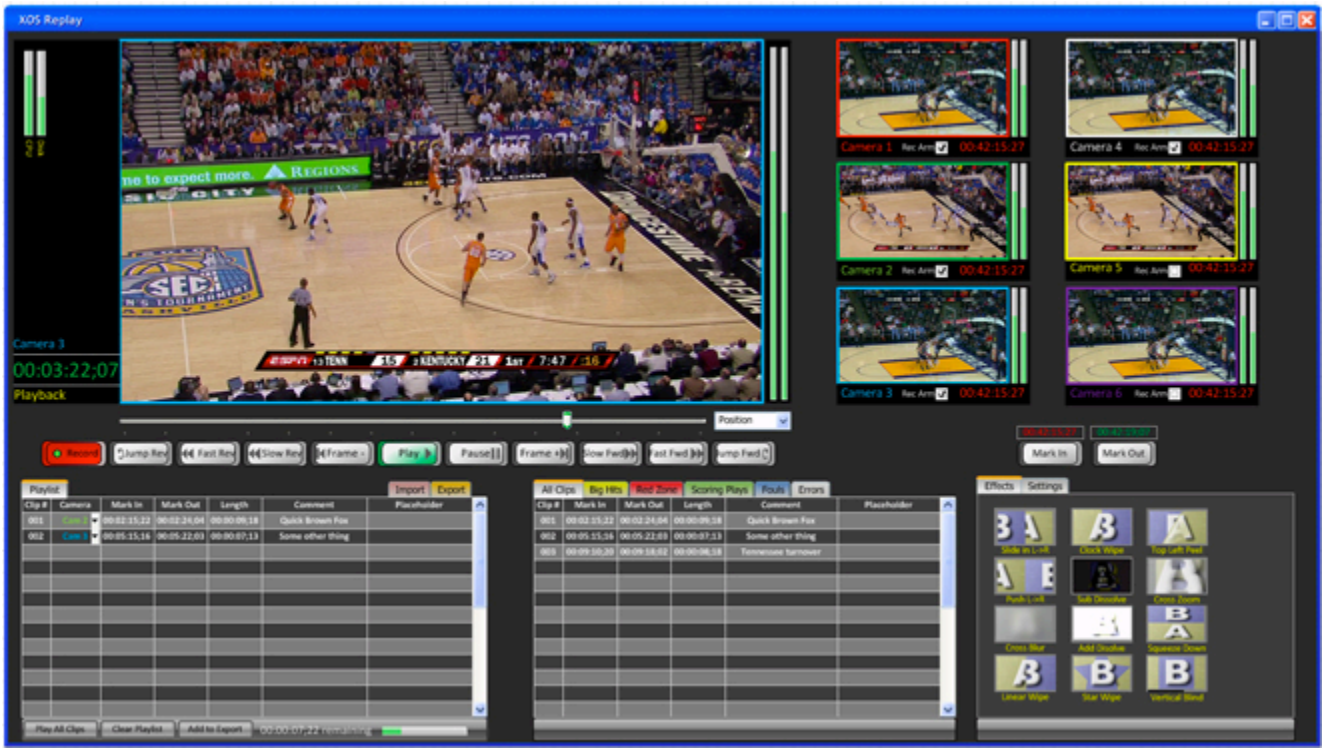
Final Four Gets HD Instant Replay for Close Calls

By Kyle Stack April 1, 2011 | 6:00 pm | Categories: Data, Equipment



A rash of controversial in-game calls during college basketball's tournament season have screamed for some kind of technology to address it. One company thinks it has a system to do just that.

XOS Digital has unveiled an HD replay system for college basketball that will offer game officials a clearer way to rule last-second shots and other close calls It's available at this weekend's Final Four in Houston.

The key here is the use of cameras throughout an arena to synchronize the shot clock with streaming video. XOS HD Replay could give even the smallest college basketball programs (with minimal broadcast expenses for their games) the kind of multiple-camera access employed by full-scale productions.

The system is highlighted by using a minimum of two high-def, IP-enabled cameras, each of which is fixed on one half of the court. A flex camera taken from any other video feed in the arena can also be

utilized.

The system's goal is to flow the video stream of the shot clock provided by one of those fixed cameras into a court camera video feed, which can then display the current state of the shot clock on the officials' courtside monitor.

Tom Fuller, XOS Digital's director of product development, told Wired.com the process gives game officials a more accurate measurement of how much time is left on a shot clock during any number of in-game reviews and rulings. "There have been issues in the past where the broadcaster's [feed] has been wrong," he said.

XOS Digital has grown cognizant of the needs of college basketball teams through its three-year-old standard-definition replay system, which was used this past season by the Western Athletic Conference, Sun Belt Conference and Mid-American Conference. With hubs in Boston and Orlando, XOS Digital already produces an HD-replay system in college football, which was used by the Southeastern Conference, Big 12, WAC and Conference USA during the 2010 season, as well as in 18 bowl games earlier this year.

The clarity provided by an HD system is unmistakable. Bryan Bedford, XOS' director of business development, said the availability of high-definition replays will help referees make more accurate rulings on several types of calls, including a foot on the three-point line or out-of-bounds line.

"You're able to see some things on the floor that you weren't able to see previously," he said.

Yet Fuller and Bedford both feel the replay system's advantages go beyond just the benefit of reviewing plays in HD. The ability to record game data for post-game analysis gives the system legs after the game ends.

Replay technicians can tag and mark plays based on the type of foul or violation committed and which ref called it. Bedford explained that conferences continually evaluate their officiating programs by reviewing each week's fouls and controversial calls from all games. In the past, a team might protest a call by mailing a DVD of the game or e-mailing an expansive FTP file containing game clips to conference officials.

Now, each call can simply be reviewed in HD on a laptop and e-mailed to the appropriate office. Given the lack of an overarching officiating committee in college basketball, teams and conference officials must find ways to communicate more efficiently.

"That's why we created XOS Review," Bedford said. "It allows the leagues to take replay to the next level for their officiating programs."

Available with a subscription to the HD-replay system, XOS Review is a web-based software app that manages, grades and even schedules games for conference referees.

Each play that's marked by a technician is available to view in video, along with a full report from that game that details the official, review type, violation and foul. Plays marked as "critical" are immediately exported from the HD-replay system into Review and e-mailed to the director of officials

for that conference, with a link to the video clip of that reviewed call.

Neither Bedford nor Fuller would reveal the cost of the HD replay system, stating only that they have tried to make it affordable for any college basketball program. XOS Digital hopes the cost savings teams might receive through the replay purchase can be surpassed by the time saved in using a replay system that's more accurate and efficient than what's already out there.

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Photo: Courtesy XOS Digital

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