

Module 2 Assignment- Michigan Sign Stealing

Nic Doherty

Tusculum University

MSM 500

Dr. Nick Davidson

10 September 2024

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In 2023, the NCAA and Big Ten Conference investigated the Michigan football team for a sign-stealing scandal. In college football, it is illegal to do in-person advanced scouting and to use technology to steal signs, both of which Michigan was accused. Connor Stalions, who worked for the team as an off-field analyst was buying tickets for opposing teams and giving them to others so they could film future opponents on the sidelines. Stalions purchased tickets from twelve confirmed Big Ten schools. He bought tickets at over 35 games at 17 schools. In 2022, this included Tennessee, Alabama, Georgia, Clemson, and Oregon, which are schools that Michigan may have been facing in playoffs. This two-year operation could had the purpose of using the film to interpret the signs and have an edge on opponents (Meyer 2024; Russo 2023).

Jim Harbaugh, Head Coach of the Michigan Wolverines, claimed to have no knowledge of the Stalions' operation, however, the team started the season with Harbaugh under a three-game suspension for another NCAA violation unrelated to stealing signs (Russo 2023). This is where Risk Management first failed. With the head coach already in hot water, the entire football program should have heightened awareness of the rules and regulations.

With the suspension of the coach, they could have put in some time for education and training for the staff on what is allowed and what is not. It was reported that the sign-stealing scandal was partially funded by a donor (Meyer 2024). In hindsight, checking what donation money is used for may be a good addition to a risk management plan, and could help with the analysis aspect of seeing where something is going wrong.

Another tactic that could have been used is employee evaluations. Most university settings use them. While they aren't foolproof, they could lead to finding where the staff is not quite working the way they should. These can be done at the management level and at the lowest levels.

Michigan also needed to align their plan after the scandal took place. The timeline Detroit Free Press published shows that some were cooperative, Stalions bragged about his sign-stealing, and at one point, Michigan took out a restraining order against the Big Ten. Part of their crisis management plan should include whether employees or affiliated persons should talk about incidents to anyone or if they should keep quiet. Maybe designate one person to talk to press, lawyers, NCAA, etc. At the least, everyone needed to be on the same page.

References

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