Some NFL Teams Clamp Down on Tweets

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Editor's Note: I suppose after "spygate [1]," teams are feeling a bit paranoid.

(AP) -- The only tweets during the Miami Dolphins scrimmage Saturday will come from the officials' whistles.

The Dolphins are at the forefront of an NFL clampdown on Twitter and other social media, with new restrictions imposed on players, reporters and even spectators.

Miami's secretive Bill Parcells regime prohibits fans and media at training-camp practices from tweeting, blogging or texting. At least six other teams have also imposed such restrictions on reporters, even though the workouts are open to the public.

Twitter intolerance is no surprise in a league where paranoia is part of the playbook. Like many Americans, coaches are anxious and a little confused about the rapid pace of change in communication.

"I don't really have a Twitter policy," Denver coach Josh McDaniels said. "I don't know what it means; I don't know what it is. I don't know MyFace, Spacebook, Facebook stuff. I don't know what that is either."

McDaniels mangled the Web-site names in jest, and the Broncos actually do prohibit tweeting. Such restrictions run contrary to a recommendation from league headquarters that teams allow tweeting and blogging during training camp practices.

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"It is not practical to prohibit media from doing some reporting (via tweeting, texting, blogging, etc.)," a league memo to teams said.

Along with the Broncos and Dolphins, the New England Patriots, Buffalo Bills, Indianapolis Colts, New Orleans Saints and Detroit Lions disagree. They don't allow reporting from the practice field.

The Broncos also banned cell phones and computers at workouts to prohibit fans from tweeting or texting. The Colts went a step further by prohibiting reporters' notebooks (the spiral kind) at practice, but the ban was quickly rescinded.

Some teams, including the Dolphins, have urged their players not to tweet. Other teams are more lenient about the use of social media. All teams are weighing the impact of the new modes of communication.

"When cell phones came in," Dallas Cowboys coach Wade Phillips recalled, "one team had a player on the sideline during a preseason game who was on a cell phone. So you have to come up with rules when these new technologies come out."

The Cowboys don't prohibit players from tweeting. Neither do the Carolina Panthers.

"Not yet," Carolina running back DeAngelo Williams said. "But I know it's coming."

Driving the clampdown is a fear important information might leak out. Twitter allows for only 140 characters, but "I broke my leg" requires just 14.

"Coaches certainly are paranoid," Phillips said.

They fear opponents might gain a competitive advantage from even the briefest tweet about injuries, personnel decisions, trick plays or food. The Chargers allow players to tweet, but fined cornerback Antonio Cromartie $2,500 for using Twitter to complain about training camp chow.

NFL spokesman Brian McCarthy said the league encourages players to tweet, and about 300 do so. As of Wednesday afternoon, the league had 772,473 followers on its Twitter site.

"We've been at the forefront as technology has changed," said McCarthy, who said he follows 600 Twitter accounts. "We have embraced Twitter. The commissioner tweeted from the draft. When done properly, it's a tremendous opportunity to talk with fans."

Some coaches remain unconvinced. The Dolphins' Tony Sparano conceded he's not well-versed on the new social media, but he urged his players to steer clear of Twitter.

"Our policy here is that our information is our information, and it should stay in-house," Sparano said. "Something they think is innocent can really hurt an individual, can really hurt team chemistry, and maybe can lead to somewhere down the road a loss of a game. I believe that. I'm one of those guys that will try to take that variable out of the way if you can.

"But it doesn't look to me like something that can completely be controlled."

The Dolphins will try. They require the media to shut off all electronic gear - computers, cell phones, cameras - about 25 minutes into practice, when team drills begin. The Dolphins are also policing fans, a daunting challenge for a team that drew

more than 3,100 spectators to the opening workout last week.

"I would acknowledge that enforcing the restrictions can be difficult," said Harvey Greene, Dolphins senior vice president for media relations. "We're not looking over everybody's shoulder, but we do have a concern about information flow."

The Professional Football Writers of America has complained about the media restrictions at practices open to the public. The Jaguars and Vikings initially prohibited tweeting by reporters but lifted their bans following complaints.

"It would be a shame for a beat writer to get beaten on a story by a 12-year-old in the stands who is allowed to blog," said Charean Williams, president of the PFWA. "I appreciate the teams that have reversed their policies, and I think the league will listen to us and we'll get this changed for 2010."

Some teams are coming to terms with the new technology. The Eagles have an air-conditioned trailer at camp for bloggers. Jaguars coach Jack Del Rio sends text messages to reporters.

Browns coach Eric Mangini laughed when asked about concerns that information regarding an injury might leak via a tweet.

"There are all different avenues to communicate," Mangini said, "and I think they're great ways to communicate."

Even at Dolphins camp, the 21st century is making inroads. On Wednesday, Sparano said he just learned how to text.

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