

D.O.K. #8 - Patriots coach says his team plays by the rules

By Associated Press, adapted by Newsela staff
01.29.15



New England Patriots head coach Bill Belichick talks to reporters at Gillette Stadium, Jan. 24, 2015, in Foxborough, Massachusetts. He defended the way his team preps its game footballs. The Patriots were found to be using underinflated footballs in their game against the Indianapolis Colts. Photo: AP Photo/Steven Senne

FOXBOROUGH, Mass. — On January 18, the New England Patriots beat the Indianapolis Colts 45 to 7, earning the chance to play in the Super Bowl.

During the game, officials realized that something was strange about the footballs the Patriots were using to play: they were underinflated.

According to experts, this could have been an advantage for the Patriots, because underinflated footballs are easier to throw and catch. In other words, the Patriots may have been cheating.

The question of how the footballs got to be underinflated has become national news. Reporters and social media users have nicknamed the incident "deflategate," and investigators are trying to figure out what exactly happened.

"We Followed The Rules"

For his part, Patriots head coach Bill Belichick says his team did not do anything wrong.

The Patriots did not do anything "to try to gain an advantage," Belichick said on Saturday afternoon, eight days before the team will play the Seattle Seahawks in the Super Bowl. "We feel like we followed the rules of the game to the letter," he added. "We try to do everything right."

When the story about underinflated footballs came out, Belichick said that the air pressure of footballs was not something he knew much about. On Saturday, however, he had more to report.

If you take a ball from a warm place to a cool place, it loses air pressure, he said. The balls were inflated in a warm room by NFL officials and then used in the game, which was on a cold, rainy day.

He also explained that the Patriots had looked into how they prepare balls before each game.

Teams are allowed to rub new footballs after they're inflated to make them softer and easier to grip. Belichick suggested that the friction caused by rubbing the balls could have raised their temperature, which would raise the air pressure. After they were taken out of the room, and into a colder environment, there would be an even bigger drop in temperature, and a bigger drop in air pressure.

"I'm not a scientist. I'm not an expert in footballs; I'm not an expert in football measurements," Belichick said. "I'm just telling you what I know."

Discovered At Halftime

Each team provides its own balls on offense, so the Patriots and Colts were playing with two separate sets of footballs. During halftime, the Colts claimed that the balls used by the Patriots offense were underinflated, and NFL officials tested them. The balls were found to be underinflated, so another set of balls were used during the second half of the game.

"Deflategate" began almost immediately after the game ended. On the night of the 18th, Indianapolis TV station WTHR reported that some of the balls used by New England were underinflated. The NFL began investigating and soon confirmed that some of the footballs used by the Patriots in the first half of the game were underinflated.

Suspicion fell on Belichick, Patriots assistants and also on Patriots quarterback Tom Brady. Like Belichick, Brady denied having done anything against the rules and said he did not know how the footballs came to be underinflated.

This was not the first time that the Patriots have been accused of cheating. In 2007, the team was punished after Belichick was caught videotaping the coaches of an opposing team during a game. Belichick used these videos to see what signals the other coaches were giving to their players, letting him predict what his opponent was going to do.

Belichick admitted that he broke the rules in 2007, but denied that the Patriots had a habit of cheating.

"It was wrong. We were disciplined for it. That's it," Belichick said of the videotaping. "We never did it again. We're never going to do it again."

Praises His Patriots

Belichick complained that trying to explain "deflategate" has taken up a lot of his time in the two weeks leading up to the Super Bowl.

"I'm embarrassed to talk about the amount of time that I've put into this," he said. Instead of preparing for the Super Bowl, he has been studying the science of football air pressure, learning about "bladders, air gauges, stitching, pressure, game day football preparation, rubdowns and so forth."

Belichick seemed most emotional when he was defending his players. Following "deflategate," Patriots players have been asked if they cheated to get to the Super Bowl.

Belichick thinks this is unfair. He praised his team, which won 12 of 16 games this season and has gone to the Super Bowl six times in the last 15 years.

He argued that the Patriots were the best team in the playoffs this year. "I know that because I've been with them every day. And I'm proud of this team," he added.

Vocab: underinflated, advantage, confirmed, denied, officials

Level One:

1. What is “deflategate”?
2. What did Coach Belichick do instead of preparing his team for the Superbowl?

Level Two:

3. What does Coach Belichick mean by "We feel like we followed the rules of the game to the letter,"?
4. What are 2 ways the temperature of footballs can be raised?

Level Three:

5. What evidence does the article state that might lead someone to believe the New England Patriots cheat?

Level Four:

6. Based on what you know from the article and what happened in the Super Bowl (the Patriots defeated the Seahawks), do you think the Patriots played fair this season?
Remember that this is an opinion paragraph.