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Officiating has always been a black-and-white vocation since a call made by any given zebra is either surprisingly right or horribly wrong.

Fitting then, that the Canadian Football League's new video replay technology debuts this year in stark contrast to the previous system in place since 2006.

"Night and day," said Tom Higgins, director of officiating. "Absolutely night and day."

The league is moving away from standard definition replays viewed by a referee under a hood on the sidelines to high definition replays viewed by former referee Jake Ireland in excruciatingly slow motion in the league's brand new Toronto command centre.

"High definition. That's the simple answer," said Keith Lowe, chief operating officer of DVSPORT Software, the Pittsburgh company whose state-of-the-art, fifth generation replay software has been purchased by the CFL. "The tools are better as well, but the benefits of HD are obvious," said Lowe. "This is the first year of high definition replay."

So the CFL is on the cutting edge. Imagine that.

"We've moved replay from good to better," said Higgins, "who made the command centre a priority upon his hiring just over a year ago and said the league "spared no expense" on the DVSPORT technology since they had to buy only one system. "But it's never going to be perfect. There is a human element and human error.

"I hope people don't think it will ever be perfect."

Nobody ever accused Higgins of perfection when he coached in Edmonton or Calgary. And there are more than a few Eskimos fans who will never forgive Ireland for a botched call in the 1996 Grey Cup, though it wasn't even his quick whistle that gave the Argonauts new life on a third-down gamble en route to the win. After 30 seasons and 557 games worked, Ireland retired after last season's Grey Cup and was named the league's lead replay official on Friday.

His workplace this year will be the so-called command centre at the CFL head office, a room outfitted with four high-definition video monitors. The moment a call is challenged by a head coach in Regina or Hamilton and six other cities this season, Ireland will employ the touchscreen technology to immediately begin viewing the disputed play on a frame-by-frame basis. The referee will go directly to the scorer's table, strap on a headset and begin communicating with

Ireland, who has the final word in all cases. It should provide a quicker, more accurate resolution to each challenge.

And it will certainly strain Ireland's eyes. He used to work about 15 games per season and watch one or perhaps two more per week. Now he's on the hook for all 77 this season. That's almost 10 full days' worth of televised football. He's going to need a comfy chair.

Handing over control to Ireland means the CFL has patterned its system after that of the National Hockey League. Higgins said referees were disappointed with the quality of replay available to them and he thought the process created too much pressure on referees because they had to speak to crew members, then the head coach who threw the challenge flag, then go under the hood to make a quick decision, often in a hostile environment.

Ireland was one of those referees just last year. He thinks his former brethren won't be offended by the loss of the final word.

"Based on the quality of film that was available to us from stadium to stadium, I don't think so. It's one less worry. It's one less burden for them."

And it really ought to improve the quality of the product, which is another of Higgins' stated priorities. Last year there were 105 challenges and 66 calls were upheld. But 34 others were overturned after review. What is that like for a referee?

"It's really not that big a problem," said Ireland. "There are some calls you've got no hope of seeing on the field. Sometimes you're on the field praying it gets reviewed because you didn't have a hope of seeing it. If it's a bad call, it's like any bad call you make, you suck it up and move on."