

WHO IS THAT GUY?

The Man in the Green Hat Makes Every Second Count in NFL Games

You probably haven't heard of Larry Prosi. But when the whistle blows, he's one of the most powerful men in the NFL. The 50-year-old San Diego native is a member of an elite group of 31 men who wear and are known as "Green Hats." When it comes to starting and stopping NFL action, their word not only is gospel, it's the law.

Introduced in 1993, Green Hats (officially titled NFL Sideline Television Coordinators) virtually run the game. As the league's liaison between game officials, the network television directors, and the NFL "Eye in the Sky" observer, Green Hats decide when the game is to be interrupted for a television commercial and when play is to resume.

Working alongside a television coordinator (called Orange Sleeves) employed by the networks, Prosi is accountable for literally every second of every NFL game played at San Diego's Qualcomm Stadium.

"The NFL did a study and found that after each of the eighteen to twenty television breaks taken during a game, between ten and twenty seconds often were unaccounted for," he explains. "Green Hats were

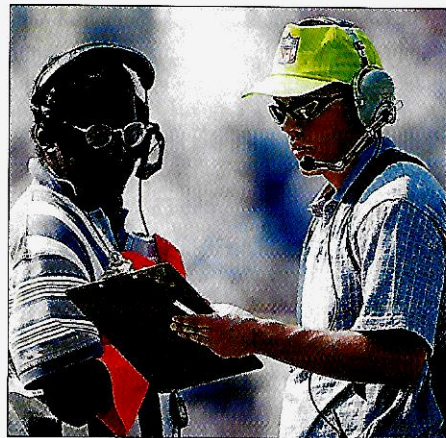
brought in to control the game and reduce the overall time it takes to play an NFL contest." Since the inception of the Green Hats, the game has been streamlined in an attempt to meet the NFL's goal: games that last approximately three hours.

"If the producer doesn't go to break on time, he runs the risk of coming back in the middle of a play," Prosi says. "I work with the Orange Sleeves to communicate when a break is needed and when it's time to restart play."

The NFL pays Prosi, a 22-year veteran of the Chargers sideline, \$125 per regular-season game. His sideline view of the action is one of the perks of the trade. He jokes that at Super Bowl XXXII, "People were paying \$300 or more for a ticket. The NFL actually paid me \$350 to watch the game from the sidelines."

When he takes off his green hat, Prosi is an insurance broker. He has not missed a Chargers' home game in five years and greatly appreciates his unique perspective.

"Normally the only people who get this close to the game are players, coaches, and officials," he says. "I'm a big Chargers fan, and I'm fortunate to get such a close-up



JOHN H. REID III

POWER BROKERS: Green Hats such as Larry Prosi (right) work with Orange Sleeves to virtually run the game.

view of the team." He often hears players talking strategy during a game and even interacts with them on occasion.

"Junior Seau and other Chargers know what I do and often ask me if the next break is a forty-second time out or a full two-minute break. Knowing that helps them prepare for the next play or take a rest."

Being so close to the action can have drawbacks, Prosi admits. "[Vikings receiver] Randy Moss ran over me in the preseason," he says, "and [Chargers kicker] John Carney [has] knocked me over from behind. But sometimes it's hard to avoid collisions because the sidelines are crowded. It makes me feel like I'm part of the game."