

2011 NCAA FOOTBALL RULES COMMITTEE ACTION REPORT

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A. REMINDER: 2011 Changes Approved in 2010

1. UNSPORTSMANLIKE CONDUCT

Penalties for unsportsmanlike conduct fouls will be administered by rule depending on when they occur. That is, if the foul takes place while the ball is alive, the penalty will be administered as with any other live-ball foul. This represents a fundamental change from previous years, when such fouls were treated as if they had occurred when the ball was dead. If the foul occurs after the ball is dead the penalty will be administered as with any other dead-ball foul; this is no change from previous years.

Comment: The rules committee encourages officials to be consistent in calling fouls for unsportsmanlike conduct by following the guidelines established by the national officials' organization, *College Football Officiating LLC (CFO)*. College football will be better served by greater consistency in the way that the officials handle unsportsmanlike acts. The committee also firmly believes that student-athletes clearly have obvious responsibility for their own behavior. Any player who commits an unsportsmanlike act is at risk of relinquishing a touchdown for his team by actions such as in Example 1 below.

EXAMPLE 1 A ball carrier in the open field is about to score a touchdown. Before he crosses the goal line the ball carrier or one of his teammates taunts an opponent or makes an obscene gesture that results in a penalty flag. **RULING:** Live-ball foul, unsportsmanlike conduct. The score does not count and the 15-yard penalty is enforced from the spot of the foul. First and 10.

EXAMPLE 2 The ball carrier in Example 1 has crossed the goal line for a touchdown before the taunting or obscene gesture takes place. **RULING:** The touchdown counts. Dead-ball foul, unsportsmanlike conduct. The penalty will be enforced on the extra-point attempt or on the succeeding kickoff, at the option of the defensive team.

2. TELEVISION MONITORS IN PRESS BOX COACHES' BOOTHS

Starting in 2011 teams may place television monitors in the coaches' booths in the press box. The television capabilities must be identical for the home team and visiting team coaches. This will allow coaches in the press box to see the same television coverage that the viewers have at home, in other areas of the press box, etc.

NOTE: The television capability must not include replay equipment, recorders, or any electronic equipment other than to allow viewing the live telecast or webcast. The rules that allow only voice communication between the press box and the team area are still in place and are not affected by this change.

B. Proposed Changes for 2011

1. BLOCKING BELOW THE WAIST

The following replaces Rule 9-1-2-e (FR-117 in the 2009-10 Rule Book):

Blocking below the waist (other than against the ball carrier) is illegal.

Exceptions: Before a change of possession on scrimmage downs that do not include kicks, blocking below the waist is allowed as follows:

(a) Players of the offensive team who at the snap are (1) on the line of scrimmage more than seven yards from the middle lineman of the offensive formation, or (2) in the backfield outside the tackle box, or (3) in motion, may block below the waist only along a north-south line or toward the sideline adjacent to them at the snap.

(b) Players of the offensive team who at the snap are inside the tackle box or on the line of scrimmage inside the seven-yard limit may block below the waist.

(c) Players of the defensive team who at the snap are inside the blocking zone extended to the sideline may block below the waist inside that area until the blocking zone disintegrates (Rule 2-3-6-b).

PENALTY: Personal foul, 15 yards. Automatic first down for fouls by Team B if not in conflict with other rules. [S40]

It is very important to note that the *exceptions apply only during scrimmage downs that do not include kicks*. Blocking below the waist remains illegal on all kick downs and after any change of possession.

EXAMPLE 1 When the ball is snapped back A22 is lined up outside the tackle box to the left of his team's formation. Any time during the down he is allowed to block an opponent below the waist only if the direction of the block is "north-south"—that is, directly up or down the field longitudinally—or at an angle toward the sideline to his left (this is "the sideline adjacent to him"). If he blocks an opponent below the waist at any angle away from the north-south line toward the sideline to his right, it is a foul.

EXAMPLE 2 When the ball is snapped end A88 is on his line of scrimmage eight yards to the right of the snapper in a balanced-line formation. Any time during the down he is allowed to block an opponent below the waist only if the direction of the block is "north-south"—that is, directly up or down the field longitudinally—or at an angle toward the sideline to his right (this is "the sideline adjacent to him"). If he blocks an opponent below the waist at any angle away from the north-south line toward the sideline to his left, it is a foul.

Rationale: In making this change the rules committee demonstrates its ongoing concern for the safety of the student-athlete. While continuing to be an effective and safe football technique in some circumstances, the block initiated below an opponent's waist is of growing concern to many in the football community as an increasingly dangerous action. This 2011 change is important in two respects: (1) it establishes the principle that blocking the waist should be a foul except for some limited circumstances where its danger is less than in many others, and (2) it reduces the times and areas of the field where the block is allowed.

2. [THREE-ON-ONE BY DEFENSIVE LINE ON FIELD GOALS AND TRY](#)

New Rule:

On a field goal or try kick attempt it is illegal for three Team B players on their line of scrimmage inside the blocking zone to align shoulder-to-shoulder and move forward following the snap.

PENALTY: Live-ball foul. Five yards, previous spot. [S19]

Rationale: Player safety. The intent of this rule is to prevent defensive linemen from triple-team action against offensive linemen who are in a kick-protection situation.

3. [BLOCKING OUT OF BOUNDS](#)

New Rule:

It is illegal for any player to initiate a block against an opponent who is out of bounds. The spot of the foul is where the blocker crosses the sideline in going out of bounds.

PENALTY: Personal foul, 15 yards. Automatic first down for fouls by Team B if not in conflict with other rules. [S38]

Rationale: The current rules do not prohibit a player from going out of bounds to block an opponent. A consistent spirit of the rules and a principle of player safety is that the game should be played between the lines. While it may happen that a block initiated in bounds might continue as the players cross the sideline, no player should go out of bounds to block an opponent, just as the ball carrier may not be tackled out of bounds. This rule codifies the principle.

4. [10-SECOND RUNOFF OF THE GAME CLOCK](#)

New Rule:

With the game clock running and less than one minute in either half, if a player of either team commits a foul that causes the clock to stop, the officials may subtract 10 seconds from the game clock at the option of the offended team. The fouls that fall in this category include but are not limited to:

- (a) Any foul that prevents the snap (e.g., false start, encroachment, defensive offside by contact in the neutral zone, etc.);
- (b) Intentional grounding to stop the clock;
- (c) Illegal forward pass thrown from beyond the neutral zone;
- (d) Backward pass thrown out of bounds to stop the clock;
- (e) Any other foul committed with the intent of stopping the clock.

The offended team may accept the yardage penalty and decline the 10-second subtraction. If the yardage penalty is declined the 10-second subtraction is declined by rule.

Notes:

- 1. The 10-second rule does not apply if the game clock is not running when the foul occurs or if the foul does not cause the game clock to stop (e.g., illegal formation).
- 2. Following enforcement of the penalty and 10-second subtraction (if any) the game clock starts on the referee's signal.

3. If the fouling team has a timeout remaining they may avoid the 10-second subtraction by using a timeout. In this case the game clock starts on the snap following the timeout.

EXAMPLE 1 Second and 10. Team A trails by five points with 11 seconds remaining in the fourth quarter and the game is clock running. Team A has used all its timeouts. Guard A65 in a three-point stance lifts his hand from the ground, drawing a flag from the umpire who whistles the play dead. The game clock reads 0:08. **RULING:** Because there are fewer than 10 seconds remaining in the game, with the 10-second runoff applied the game is over. Team B wins.

EXAMPLE 2 Second and 10. Team A trails by five points with 11 seconds remaining in the fourth quarter and the game is clock running. Team A has used all its timeouts. When Team A snaps the ball they have five players in the backfield, drawing flags from the head linesman and line judge. Immediately after receiving the snap the quarterback throws the ball forward directly to the ground, ending the down and stopping the game clock, which reads 0:08. **RULING:** The game clock was stopped because the quarterback spiked the ball and *not* due to the illegal-formation foul. Therefore the 10-second subtraction does not apply. Team A is penalized five yards and will have second and 15. The game clock starts on the snap.

Rationale: A team should not gain a clock advantage by forcing the clock to stop by committing a foul.

5. INTENTIONAL GROUNDING

Change to existing Rule 7-3-2-d and f, FR-102 of the 2009-10 Rule Book:

To conserve time or avoid loss of yardage a passer may legally end the down by throwing the ball into an area where there is an eligible receiver. The requirement that the receiver “have a reasonable opportunity to catch the ball” is no longer a part of this rule. While under Rule 7-3-2-d the passer may end the down to conserve time by “spiking” the ball, he may not legally spike the ball to avoid loss of yardage.

Rationale: The rules committee believes that having a receiver in the area is sufficient justification for the passer legally to end the down.

6. LOCKING LEGS BY THE OFFENSIVE LINEMEN

Change to existing Rule 7-1-3-b-2, FR-97 of the 2009-10 Rule Book:

It is no longer illegal for offensive players on the line of scrimmage to lock legs.

Rationale: The committee finds no compelling reason to prohibit players from locking legs. It is not apparent that the offense gains any unfair advantage through this alignment.

7. [STATUS OF DISQUALIFIED PLAYERS](#)

Editorial Clarification to Rule 2-27-12, FR-60 of the 2009-10 Rule Book:

A disqualified player must leave the playing enclosure within a reasonable amount of time after his disqualification. He must remain out of view of the field of play under team supervision for the duration of the game.

Rationale: A player who has been disqualified from further play should not be allowed to remain in his team area nor any other part of the stadium that is in view of the field of play.

8. [EQUIPMENT](#)

[Gloves: Change to Rule 1-4-5-m, FR-36 of the 2009-10 Rule Book:](#)

There is no restriction on the color of gloves.

Rationale: The original reason for requiring gloves to be gray in color (to be in contrast with the opponent's jersey) is no longer justifiable under the current rules regarding players' use of hands. The committee fields numerous requests each year to allow team colors on gloves, so the membership clearly would like flexibility with this rule.

[Towels: Change to Rule 1-4-5-p-Exception, FR-37 of the 2009-10 Rule Book:](#)

Towels must be solid white with no words, symbols, letters, or numbers, and must be no larger than 4" by 12".

Rationale: Beyond a uniformity of color and the requirement of a reasonable size, the committee sees no compelling reason to legislate other aspects of players wearing towels.

[Communication Equipment: Editorial clarification to Rule 1-4-9-c, FR-39 of the 2009-10 Rule Book:](#)

The presence and location of communication equipment (cameras, sound devices, etc.) within the playing enclosure is under the jurisdiction of game management personnel.

Rationale: Game management personnel have the responsibility to insure that the all parties comply with rules involving cameras and other communication equipment in and above the team area, field of play, and other areas of the playing enclosure. This clarifies that the on-field officials are not responsible for the enforcement of these policies.

C. Other Considerations by the Rules Committee

1. [HELMETS](#) The committee shares the concern expressed by many in the football community that players' helmets seem to be coming off more easily in recent seasons. There is not a consensus about why this happens—that is, whether the main reason is the design of the helmets, or the manner in which the players wear the helmets. In its deliberations the committee considered a number of possible rules changes that would be disincentives for players to wear their helmets improperly. Ultimately the committee decided to make no changes.

As an intermediate step, officials are being asked to take the following actions:

- (1) To be especially diligent in insuring that players are adhering closely to equipment rules, in particular those regarding chinstraps; and
- (2) To make written note of the situations during games when players' helmets come off other than as a result of a foul by an opponent. This information, which should become a routine part of the officials' post-game report, will provide data that will help guide the committee as it continues to monitor the situation.

2. [POSITION OF THE UMPIRE](#) The committee discussed the National Football League's decision to move the umpire from his traditional position in the defensive secondary to the offensive backfield opposite the referee. While officiating position and mechanics are not the purview of the rules committee, CFO has asked the committee for guidance about whether or not college officiating should make this change. For a variety of reasons the committee members join with most coaches in favoring this change. To that end the committee recommends that officiating organizations use the practices and intrasquad games in the spring of 2011 to experiment with the new position a way both to evaluate the new position and to get officiating crews comfortable with making the change. The committee's discussion reflected the reality that such a change would impact not only the mechanics of the umpire position but those of the other positions as well. Strong consideration to move the umpire will be given at future officiating meetings, but no immediate change was made for the 2011 season.
3. [FEIGNING INJURIES](#) There is considerable concern among committee members about reports of teams having their players fake injuries as a means of slowing down teams that play the game at a faster pace. The committee takes this opportunity to remind the coaching community that the faking of injuries is expressly forbidden under the **Coaching Ethics section of The Football Code, paragraph 8** (page FR-13 of the 2009-10 Rule Book). This paragraph closes with the admonition that "such tactics cannot be tolerated among sportsmen of integrity." The rules committee reiterates its support for this stance.