

Football Rules Committee proposes enhancements to targeting rule

The group also recommends allowing additional use of electronic devices by coaches

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The NCAA Football Rules Committee has approved several proposals to enhance student-athlete safety and allow electronic devices to be used in some areas of stadiums for coaching purposes.

The committee, which wrapped up its four-day meeting today in Orlando, Florida, will distribute all of its proposals for NCAA membership comment next week before forwarding the proposals for consideration by the Playing Rules Oversight Panel on March 8. If approved, the changes would be implemented in the 2016 season.

The football committee held its annual meeting in Orlando this year to coincide with the NCAA Sports Science Institute's football summit. The summit provided an opportunity to share information and ideas about ways to improve the health and safety aspects of the sport.

In one decision regarding safety, the committee, after reviewing numerous video examples and receiving strong feedback on its annual rules survey, voted to expand the instant replay officials' authority by requiring them to review all aspects of targeting fouls. Additionally, the instant replay official will be able to stop the game and create a targeting foul in situations where an egregious action has occurred.

In a small number of cases, the committee believed players were incorrectly disqualified from games. The elements of targeting that replay officials will watch for include launching and forcible contact to the head, among other factors.

Additionally, an instant replay official will be able to stop the game and call a targeting foul in situations where an egregious action occurred but was not seen by on-field officials.

“The targeting rule is serving the game well, and has enhanced player safety,” said Bob Nielson, chair of the committee and head coach at the University of South Dakota. “Because this is such a severe penalty, we are instructing replay officials to review plays to ensure that the required elements of targeting exist. We are also adding the ability for the replay official to stop the game when a potential targeting foul is not detected on the field.”

After a yearlong review of technology items, the committee also voted to allow electronic devices to be used for coaching purposes in the press box and locker room during the game. However, that equipment will still be prohibited on the sideline, in the team area or on the field. The committee will continue monitoring the use of those devices next year in addition to other potential technology enhancements it believes could improve the game.

The rules dealing with ineligible receivers downfield also were discussed at length. Ultimately, the committee decided to instruct officials to stringently enforce the 3-yard limit and adjust officiating mechanics to better officiate those plays.

Three additional adjustments were approved to enhance student-athlete safety:

- First, the rules dealing with low blocks were adjusted to prohibit a player who leaves the tackle box from blocking below the waist toward the initial position of the ball.
- Second, the rules pertaining to a defenseless player will include a ball carrier who has clearly given himself up by sliding feet first.
- Finally, the deliberate tripping of the ball carrier (with the leg) was approved as a foul.

“These rules changes reflect the continuing effort by the committee to simplify rules and better protect student-athletes,” Nielson said.