

Overview of the NCAA Playing Rules Process

Basics

NCAA Playing Rules cover situations:

1. On the competition area (e.g., field, court, etc.);
2. When game officials are present; and
3. When the competition is between two teams.

Playing rules do NOT deal with the following:

- Recruiting
- Scrimmage
- Practices
- Compliance issues
- NCAA championship policies

In general, the playing rules book is intended to include only those things that a game official can reasonably control. There are some cases where the rules book may be the best place to house a certain rule (e.g., wrestling weight-management policies and procedures), but as a guiding principle, enforceability of rules for officials generally is a prerequisite for inclusion in the rules book.

Sports with NCAA Playing Rules

The NCAA publishes 15 rules books for the 18 sports listed on the next page (cross country, indoor track and field, and outdoor track and field, and men's and women's water polo are in one book) and has 15 playing rules committees/subcommittees.

Fall	Winter	Spring
Cross Country	Men's and Women's Basketball	Baseball
Football	Bowling	Men's and Women's Lacrosse
Soccer	Ice Hockey	Softball
Women's Volleyball	Swimming and Diving	Outdoor Track and Field
Men's Water Polo	Indoor Track and Field	Women's Water Polo
	Wrestling	

Non NCAA Rules Sources

In cases where the rules of an international or other governing body serve the needs of the NCAA membership, a sport may be played under these rules. In most cases, the championship sports committees will make minor modifications to these rules. These modifications go through a similar process as do proposals from NCAA playing rules committees (e.g., PROP oversight). The sports are listed below, noting the governing body handling these competition rules:

Sport	Governing Body
Fencing	United States Fencing Association
Field Hockey	International Hockey Federation
Golf	United States Golf Association
Gymnastics	Federation Internationale de Gymnastique
Rifle	USA Shooting
Rowing	United States Rowing Association
Skiing	International Ski Federation/US Ski Association
Tennis	Intercollegiate Tennis Association
Men's Volleyball	United States Volleyball

Relationship to NCAA Championship Sport Committees

All NCAA playing rules are used during regular-season and championship competition. Playing rules are written somewhat broadly in some areas to allow for the wide range of NCAA members during the regular season. However, championships committees may be more stringent with some policies (e.g., facility requirements, number of squad members, etc.).

Championship sport committees are given the opportunity to provide input and feedback during the rules process. However, a championship committee is not permitted to alter an NCAA playing rule or overrule a rules committee. Similarly, the playing rules committee is not able to create different rules for championship play or make policy that would affect only championship competition.

In many cases, the secretary-rules editor and chair of the rules committee serve as liaisons to the championship.

Secretary-Rules Editors

The NCAA secretary-rules editors are the official rules interpreters for each NCAA playing rules committee. This individual serves on the committee but does not have a formal vote. In general, secretary-rules editors are long-time members of their sport community with extensive backgrounds in coaching, officiating and educating. This position is critical to the success of the playing rules process and the work of these committees.

Secretary-rules editors are limited to two, four-year terms. The historical knowledge and understanding of rules history is a key element the secretary-rules editor brings to committee discussions and decisions.

Interpretations

There are times when the NCAA rules books do not cover a situation that may be encountered during play. In other cases, a new rule may affect competition in a way the committee did not expect, and a clarification may be required.

In between annual rules sessions, the secretary-rules editor may issue interpretations intended to amplify and clarify the spirit and intent of NCAA playing rules. These interpretations, which are made in consultation with the chair and sometimes the full committee, are to be taken as the rule for play immediately. At the annual rules meetings, the full committee will confirm or overturn these rules interpretations.

Officiating Programs

Many NCAA sports have an officiating improvement program, which is designed to educate and assign the best officials for NCAA championship competition. The sports with an officiating improvement program are listed below:

- Baseball
- Men's Basketball
- Women's Basketball
- Women's Bowling
- Field Hockey
- Men's Ice Hockey
- Women's Ice Hockey
- Men's Lacrosse
- Women's Lacrosse
- Men's and Women's Soccer
- Softball
- Women's Volleyball
- Men's and Women's Water Polo
- Wrestling

Several other sports have well established officiating programs with a national association (e.g., swimming and diving and women's volleyball), and the NCAA has contracted with those groups to assist in assigning and developing officials for championship competition.

Generally, the national coordinator of officials attends NCAA playing rules meetings sessions and provides input from an officiating perspective. This input is critical for the committee and has strengthened the bond between officiating and the rules process. Also, starting in 2007, the NCAA has allocated funding for an active official to attend each rules committee meeting.

Coaches Associations

The NCAA playing rules administration staff relies on the respective coaching associations for feedback from and communication with the coaching community. At each coaches association's annual convention, the secretary-rules editor, rules committee chair and NCAA staff member attend and present regarding the playing rules process and procedures.

In recent years, coaching associations have been increasingly helpful by assisting the rules committees in the distribution of surveys, bulletins and other materials. Coaching associations often have the most up-to-date databases and e-mail contacts for coaches, who are a key constituency for playing rules committees.

In some cases, the coaches associations have reserved space in newsletters and Web sites, and have allowed secretary-rules editors and staff to write articles for their publication. This enhances the communication with this important constituency.

Typical Playing Rules Cycle

The rules process involves four key steps. They are:

- Proposal development/annual meeting
- Approval process
- Feedback/communication
- Education/training

To illustrate how this process works, a typical cycle for football is listed below:

- *Proposal Development/Annual Meeting (February)*. This is the only time the committee meets in person as a group. At this meeting, the committee considers the results of the annual rules survey, reviews proposals from the membership and has a general discussion on the health of the game. Statistics, a balance between offense and defense, and other issues are also discussed.
- *Approval Process (March)*. Once the proposed rules changes are developed and voted on, the committee publishes its proposals. The proposals are sent to the membership for comment. At a minimum, a two-week window is provided for membership comment.
- *Feedback/Communication (April)*. The feedback is compiled by the NCAA staff and shared with the rules committee. If needed, the committee has the option of reconsidering or altering a proposal based on the feedback received.

Once finalized, the proposals and membership comments are submitted to PROP for approval. The PROP member assigned to each sport has a separate call with the secretary-rules editor, chair and staff liaison to review the proposals in more detail. The full Panel holds calls periodically to approve and receive reports from its committees. On the PROP call, the member assigned to each sport reviews the changes with the full group. If approved by PROP, the changes go into effect upon publications of the next rules book. If any proposals are not approved, NCAA staff communicates this to the membership and committee in a separate announcement.

- *Education/Training (May-July)*. Once PROP takes action, the rules book and other materials are produced, depending on each sport. In football, this includes the rules book, video, preseason guide and mechanics manual. The secretary-rules editor and national coordinator make presentations to various coaching and officiating groups at clinics and preseason sessions.

History of PROP

In 1996, when the NCAA federated most of its legislative operations, playing rules remained an Association-wide rules making group. In several instances (most notably the basketball three-point line and expanded lane proposal), the divisions disagreed on a rules proposal. Eventually, the Executive Committee was asked to break the impasse. It was determined that the Executive Committee was not the right group to be making determinations that dealt with the finer points of the game. Therefore, the Playing Rules Oversight Panel (PROP) was created. PROP's broad charge – other than breaking ties – is to review playing rules proposals for consistency and to assist NCAA staff in directing and supporting the efforts of the rules committees.

PROP Oversight

PROP has three specific areas it is responsible for reviewing with relation to rules committee proposals:

- Student-athlete safety;
- Financial impact; and
- Negative impact on integrity or image of the game.

PROP Composition

The composition of the Panel mirrors that of the rules committees. Half of its members are Division I; half come from Divisions II and III. Within the Division I membership, there are three members directly appointed to the Panel from the Collegiate Commissioners Association (CCA). Additionally, at least one member of the Panel sits on the Division I Championships/Competition Cabinet and one member each comes from the Division II and III Championships Committees.

Timeline of Important Dates : Two-Year Rules Process

WHAT ARE PLAYING RULES?

- Playing rules are what happens on the field, court, pool, pitch, mat, rink, lane, track, slope or range when an opponent and officials are present.
- Playing rules are the same for all three divisions.
- Playing rules are the same for regular-season and championship competition.

INFORMATION GATHERING STAGE – Year One

- During the season, the secretary-rules editor and committee members compile hot topics (comments , ideas, questions) from coaches, commissioners and athletics administrators. A rules survey may be conducted to determine how the membership feels about certain issues. A rules proposal may be forwarded to any committee member for consideration.

ANNUAL MEETING – Year One

- The committee meets to discuss and determine rules proposals to improve the game.

COMMENT PERIOD – Year One

- A list of proposals approved by the committee is sent to coaches and conference commissioners for feedback. This two-week comment period allows the membership to see and respond to the exact language of the proposals.

PROP APPROVAL – Year One

- The Playing Rules Oversight Panel (PROP) reviews all of the rules-change proposals the committee approved and all comments from the membership. PROP's charge is to review all proposals for financial implications, safety concerns and harm to the image of the game. Items approved by PROP are incorporated into the rules book.

TWO-YEAR RULES BOOK – Year One

- A complimentary copy of the playing rules book is mailed to head coaches and conference commissioners. Additional copies of the book may be ordered online at NCAApublishings.com or by calling 888/388-9748.

INFORMATION GATHERING STAGE – Year Two

- During the season, the secretary-rules editor and committee members compile hot topics. A nontraditional playing season rules survey may be offered.

ANNUAL MEETING – Year Two

- The committee meets to discuss item for future consideration and educational opportunities. The committee submits a report to PROP.

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