2026 NCAA ALL DIVISIONS

INSTANT REPLAY COACHES MANUAL

NCAA Football Instant Replay Summary

The Objective:

To allow for certain specific types of officiating calls to be immediately reviewed.

The Standard:

There must be clear and obvious video evidence for an on-field officiating call to be changed by the Instant Replay Official, who is working from a private booth in the press box. Additionally, the play must have a direct competitive impact (ball possession, first down or score in question) on the game to warrant game stoppage for review. The Replay Official has authority to review a play, to stop game action and render a decision on any replay. On-field officials have no authority to request a review. Each head coach is allowed two challenges per game which he exercises by requesting a timeout for purposes of instant replay. He may have a third challenge, for a maximum of three, only if one of the first two challenges are successful and he has a timeout available.

The Source:

All reviewable video will come from network television (such as NCAA Syndicated Productions, ESPN, ESPN2, ESPNU, ESPN Classic or CBS College Sports Network) or from other video means on site (e.g., web streaming cameras); the video to support instant replay will be taken from the respective production truck or from these cameras and be fed to the booth by multiple independent high-definition broadcast production feeds.

The Replay Officials:

The NCAA Football Instant Replay System will have three officials in the booth: 1) The Instant Replay Official, who will make all decisions regarding replay; 2) The Communicator, who will assist the Instant Replay Official with such duties as obtaining the video replays and in communication; and 3) The Technician, who will be responsible for setting up and maintaining the operating condition of the equipment throughout the game.

Additionally, the host institution shall provide one or two volunteers (the host institution is approved to use the same number of sideline assistants as they use during the regular season) to serve as a Sideline Replay Assistant (SRA) and will wear a DVSport Replay vest. The SRA will also wear the communications headset on the sideline always and be prepared to give the headset to the Referee in the event the game is stopped for a review. This person should stand on the press box side of the field on one of the 20-yard lines or near the line of scrimmage if wireless communication is being used. Both of the sideline assistants will also have a walkie talkie with an earpiece as a backup to the headset system so that the booth can ensure that communication to the field is maintained at all times. The SRA is a backup to the Official-to- Official Communications System that is used to clear scoring plays and change of possession plays when a stoppage is not warranted.

SECTION 1. Purpose and Philosophy

Purpose
ARTICLE 1. Instant replay is a process whereby video review is used to uphold or overturn certain on-field decisions (Rule 12-3) made by game officials.

Philosophy
ARTICLE 2. The instant replay process operates under the fundamental assumption that the ruling on the field is correct.

Criterion for Overturn
ARTICLE 3. To overturn an on-field ruling, the replay official must be convinced beyond all doubt by clear and obvious video evidence through one or more video replays provided to the monitor. Without such clear and obvious video evidence, the replay official must uphold the ruling on the field. (Exception: Targeting Rule 12-3-5-a).

SECTION 2. Eligibility for Instant Replay

PARTICIPATION:

ARTICLE 1. Instant Replay will be used for all rounds of the FCS playoffs through the National Championship game; semifinals and the National Championship game in Division II; and semifinals and the National Championship game in Division III. The Division II Football Championship will also use sideline instant replay for the first round, second round, and quarterfinal round.

SECTION 3. Reviewable Plays

As a general rule, the position of the ball in relation to the goal line is always reviewable by instant replay.

Scoring Plays

ARTICLE 1. Reviewable plays involving a potential score include:

a. A potential touchdown or safety. [***Exception:*** Safety by penalty for fouls that are not specifically reviewable.]
b. Field goal attempts if and only if the ball is ruled (a) below or above the crossbar or (b) inside or outside the uprights when it is lower than the top of the uprights. If the ball is higher than the top of the uprights as it crosses the end line, the play may not be reviewed.

Passes

ARTICLE 2. Reviewable plays involving passes include:

a. Pass ruled complete, incomplete or intercepted anywhere in the field of play or an end zone.
b. Forward pass touching the ground or touched by a player (eligible or ineligible) or an official, including whether the touching is beyond or behind the line of scrimmage.
c. Forward pass or forward handing when a ball carrier is or has been beyond the neutral zone.
d. A forward pass or forward handing after a change of team possession.
e. Pass ruled forward or backward.
    1. If the pass is ruled forward and is incomplete, the play is reviewable only if: The ball goes out of bounds; there is clear recovery of a loose ball in the immediate continuing action; or there is confirmation of the recovery by the officials on the field. If the replay official does not have clear and obvious video evidence as to which team recovers or the ball going out of bounds, the ruling of incomplete pass is upheld. (***Exception:*** Rule 12-3-1-a)
    2. If the replay official overturns an incomplete forward pass ruling and the ball is recovered, it belongs to the recovering team at the spot of the recovery and any advance is nullified.
f. Location of the ball in relation to the goal line when there is a ruling of intentional grounding on the field.

Dead Ball and Loose Ball

ARTICLE 3. Reviewable plays involving potential dead balls and loose balls include:

a. Loose ball by a potential passer ruled a fumble.
b. Loose ball by a passer ruled incomplete forward pass when there is clear recovery, or the ball goes out of bounds in the immediate continuing action after the loose ball.
    1. If the replay official does not have clear and obvious video evidence as to which team recovers, does not have confirmation of the recovery by the officials on the field, or the ball going out of bounds, the ruling of incomplete pass is upheld.
    2. If the replay official rules fumble and the ball is recovered, the ball belongs to the recovering team at the spot of the recovery and any advance is nullified.
c. Live ball not ruled dead in possession of a ball carrier.
d. Loose ball ruled dead (Rule 4-1-2-b-2), or live ball ruled dead in possession of a ball carrier, when the clear recovery of a loose ball occurs in the immediate continuing football action.

1. If the ball is ruled dead and the replay official does not have: Clear and obvious video evidence as to which team recovers; confirmation of the recovery by the officials on the field; or if the ball goes out of bounds, the dead-ball ruling is upheld.
2. If the replay official rules that the ball was not dead, it belongs to the recovering team at the spot of the recovery and any advance is nullified.

3. If a passer is ruled down or out of bounds prior to throwing a pass and the replay official has clear and obvious video evidence that the ball was released prior to the dead ball ruling, replay can rule on the immediate continuing action. If the pass is caught by either team, they are awarded possession at that spot with no advance. If the pass is incomplete, the down counts.

e. Ball carrier's forward progress, spot of fumble, or spot of out-of-bounds backward pass, with respect to a first down or the goal line.
f. Catch or recovery of a fumble by a Team A player other than the fumbler before any change of possession during fourth down or a try.
g. Ball carrier in or out of bounds. If a ball carrier is ruled out of bounds, the play is not reviewable, except as in Rules 12-3-1-a and 12-3-3-d.
h. Catch, recovery or touching of a loose ball by a player in bounds or out of bounds, or an eligible receiver who had been out of bounds and returned inbounds.
i. A loose ball touching on or beyond a sideline, goal line, or end line, touching a pylon, or breaking the plane of a goal line.
j. Catch or recovery of a loose ball in the field of play or an end zone.
k. Forward fumble that goes out of bounds with respect to a first down.

Kicks

ARTICLE 4. Reviewable plays involving kicks include:

a. Touching of a kick.
b. Player is or has been beyond the neutral zone when kicking the ball.
c. Kicking team player advancing a ball after a potential muffed kick/fumble by the receiving team.
d. Scrimmage kick crossing the neutral zone.
e. Blocking by players of the kicking team before they are eligible to touch the ball on an on-side kick.
f. A player touching or recovering a kick or loose ball who is or has been out of bounds during the kick.
g. Receiving team advancing after a fair catch signal.
h. Spot where a kick that has touched the ground in the field of play crosses the sideline.

Targeting

ARTICLE 5 a. The replay official shall review all targeting fouls, Rules 9-1-3 and 9-1-4. For a player to be disqualified and the Targeting foul to be enforced, all elements of a Targeting foul must be confirmed by the Instant Replay Official. If any element of Targeting cannot be confirmed, then the Replay Official shall overturn the targeting foul.

Targeting elements include:

1. Rule 9-1-3:
   (a) A player takes aim at an opponent for the purposes of attacking with forcible contact with the crown of the helmet.
   (b) An indicator of targeting is present.
2. Rule 9-1-4:
   (a) A defenseless opponent (Rule 2-27-14).
   (b) A player takes aim at a defenseless opponent for the purposes of attacking with forcible contact to the head or neck area.
   (c) An indicator of targeting is present.

The replay official may create a targeting foul from the booth when all elements of targeting can be confirmed, and the foul is not called by the officials on the field. Such a review may not be initiated by a coach's challenge.

Miscellaneous

ARTICLE 6. Situations that may be addressed by the replay official:

a. The number of players on the field for either team during a live ball, or when there is a flag down for illegal substitution.
b. Clock adjustment and status when a ruling is reviewed and overturned anytime after the Two-Minute Timeout in the 2nd or 4th quarters.
c. Anytime after the Two-Minute Timeout in the 2nd or 4th quarters when a replay review results in the on-field ruling being overturned, and the correct ruling would not have stopped the game clock, then the clock will be reset to the time the ball is declared dead by replay. The referee will subtract 10 seconds from the game clock and the game clock will start on the referee's signal. Either team may use a team timeout to avoid the runoff.
d. Clock adjustment at the end of any quarter.

If the game clock expires at the end of any quarter, either during a down in which it should be stopped by rule through play when the ball becomes dead or after the down upon a request for an available team timeout, the replay official may restore time only under these conditions:

1. The replay official has clear and obvious video evidence that time should have remained on the game clock when the ball became dead or when the team timeout was granted;
2. If time expires in a half, and the clock would start on the Referee's signal after review, there must be at least 3 seconds remaining when the ball should have been declared dead to restore time to the clock. With 2 seconds or 1 second remaining on the clock, the half is over unless Team A has a timeout remaining

   (This does not impact situations when the clock is stopped and will remain stopped until the snap such as an incomplete pass or a ball carrier out of bounds.);
3. In the fourth quarter only, to restore time, the score differential must be eight points or less; (after a touchdown, all potential results of the try down must be considered).
4. The replay official's video evidence includes the timeout signal by an official in the case where the game clock should have stopped for a requested team timeout.

e. If there is clear video evidence that time expired at the end of any quarter prior to the ball being put into play, the replay official will end the period regardless of the outcome of the play. Personal or unsportsmanlike fouls must be enforced.
f. Correcting the number of a down.
   1. This includes the result of a penalty enforcement that includes an automatic first down or loss of down.
   2. The correction may be made at any time within that series of downs or before the ball is legally put in play after that series.
g. Any person who is not a player interfering with live-ball action occurring in the field of play (Rule 9-2-3).
h. An injured player at the initiation of the medical observer.
i. Fouls that carry 5-yard and 10-yard penalties are not enforced if the ruling is overturned and the foul occurred after the replay overturn point.
j. Personal fouls and unsportsmanlike conduct fouls are always enforced, regardless of the outcome of a replay review.

Limitations on Reviewable Plays

ARTICLE 7. No other plays or officiating decisions are reviewable. However, the replay official may correct obvious errors that may have a significant impact on the outcome of the game, including those involving the game clock, whether or not a play is reviewable. This excludes fouls that are not specifically reviewable (See Article 8, following).

Reviewable Fouls

ARTICLE 8. The following plays are reviewable, and the replay official may create a foul

when there is no call by the on-field officials:

a. Player making a forward pass or forward handoff when the player's entire body and the ball is or has been beyond the neutral zone or after a change of possession (Rule 12-3-2-c and -d).
b. Player kicking the ball when the player's entire body and the ball is or has been beyond the neutral zone (Rule 12-3-4-b).

c. Blocking by players of the kicking team before they are eligible to touch the ball on an onside kick (Rule 12-3-4-e).
d. The number of players on the field for either team during a live ball or when there is a flag down for illegal substitution (Rule 12-3-6-a).
e. Illegal touching of a forward pass by an originally eligible receiver who has gone out of bounds or touching of a forward pass by an originally ineligible player (Rules 12-3-2-b and 12-3-3-h).
f. A player touching or recovering a kick or loose ball who is or has been out of bounds during the kick. (Rule 12-3-4-f).
g. Forward pass that becomes illegal as a second pass after an on-field ruling of a backward pass is overturned (Rule 12-3-2-e).
h. A clear and obvious targeting foul (Rule 12-3-5-b).

SECTION 4. The Equipment:

The NCAA will use the HD Digital Replay System developed by DVSport, Inc. of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, to provide technology for its Instant Replay System. DVSport will provide technical support for games involving booth replay.

All equipment used to review a play during the replay process and the personnel using that equipment shall be located in a separate, secure location in the traditional press box area. This room shall not be available or accessible to any person not directly involved in instant replay.

The host institution provides the sideline instant replay for the first, second, and quarterfinal rounds of the Division II Football Championship.

SECTION 5. Initiating the Replay Process

Game Stop

ARTICLE 1. There are two methods to stop a game to review a ruling on the field.

Replay Official Stops the Game

a. The replay official and their crew shall review every play of a game. The replay official may stop a game at any time before the ball is next legally put in play (***Exception:*** Rule 12-3-6-d) whenever they believe that:
   1. There is reasonable evidence to believe an error was made in the initial on-field ruling.
   2. The play is reviewable.
   3. The outcome of a review would have a direct, competitive impact on the game.

Head Coach Challenge

b. The head coach of either team may request that the game be stopped, and a play be reviewed by challenging the on-field ruling.

   1. A head coach initiates this challenge by taking a team timeout before the ball is next legally put in play (***Exception:*** Rule 12-3-6-d) and informing the referee that they are challenging the ruling of the previous play. The head coach has two replay challenges per game. If a coach wins either of their first two challenges, they are awarded a third challenge.
   2. After a review has been completed, if the on-field ruling is overturned, that team's timeout will not be charged.
   3. After a review has been completed, and the on-field ruling is not overturned, the charged team timeout counts as one of the three permitted that team for that half or the one permitted in that extra period.
   4. A head coach may not challenge a ruling in which the game was stopped, and a decision has already been made by the replay official. However, a head coach may challenge an aspect of the same play if that component of the play was not considered by the replay official as part of the initial review. If a head coach requests a team timeout to challenge an on-field ruling and the play being challenged is not reviewable, the timeout shall count as one of the three permitted team timeouts during that half of the game or the one permitted in that extra period.
   5. A head coach may not challenge an on-field ruling if the team timeouts are not available or have been exhausted for that half or in that extra period.

When To Stop a Game

ARTICLE 2. a. A game may be stopped, either by the replay official or by a head coach's challenge, at any time before the ball is next legally put in play (***Exception:*** Rule 3-2-1-c and 12-3-6-d).

c. No game official may request that a game be stopped for a play to be reviewed.

SECTION 6. Reviewing an On-Field Ruling

Procedures

ARTICLE 1.

a. When a game is to be stopped either by the replay official or by a head coach's challenge, the designated officials on the field will be notified by a paging system or other appropriate means.
b. If the review is initiated by the replay official, the referee shall announce:
"The ruling on the previous play is ... (brief description of ruling). The play is under further review." If the game has been stopped due to a head coach's challenge, the referee shall announce:
"The (name of institution) head coach has challenged the ruling of (state the ruling). The play is under further review."
c. All reviews shall be based upon video evidence provided by and coming directly from the televised production of the game or from other video means available to the replay official that is also available to the television producer (if applicable).
d. After the referee has conferred with the replay official and the review process has been completed, the referee shall make one of the following announcements:
    1. If the video evidence confirms the on-field ruling or if the evidence is not clear and obvious to overturn the on-field ruling:
    "After further review, the ruling on the field is upheld."
    2. If the on-field ruling is overturned (Rule 12-7):
    "After further review, the ruling is [followed by a brief description of the video evidence], Therefore, [followed by a brief description of the impact of the ruling]."
e. If a ruling is overturned, the replay official shall supply the referee with all pertinent data as needed (next down, distance, yard line, position of the ball, clock status/adjustment) in order to resume play under the correct game conditions. If replay has all of the information required to overturn the on-field ruling, O2O may be utilized to facilitate the process.

Restrictions

ARTICLE 2.

a. There is no restriction on the number of times the replay official may stop a game for reviews.

b. The expectation is that the replay official will not exceed two minutes to complete a review. If the review has end of game impact or has multiple aspects as a part of the review, it should be completed efficiently but will have no stated time limit.

SECTION 7. Sideline Instant Replay

For the first three rounds of the Division II Football Championship, the sideline instant replay process will be in use. This process is highlighted in Rule 12-2-1 and is detailed below. Note that its use must be in full compliance with Rule 12 with the following exceptions:

1. Exceptions to Rule 12-4: Instant Replay Personnel, Equipment and Location:

The Referee will be the sole decision maker on any review and may include one additional crew member to consult on the review.

The equipment used in the review must be located outside the limit lines on the sideline or end zone and must be completely outside the team area.

The referee and additional crew member must be provided a separate, secure location away from fans, and sideline personnel with a tent or similar type shelter structure.

2. Exceptions to Rule 12-5: Initiating the Replay Process:

The Referee will stop the game to review all Targeting Fouls that are called on the field. The only other method to stop a game for a replay review is through a head coach challenge as specified in Rule 12-5-1-b. When the head coach requests a timeout for replay review, the replay challenge flag must be dropped on the field of play.

Other than for a Targeting review, the crew on the field may not initiate an instant replay review.

3. Exception to Rule 12-3-5: Targeting:

   The head coach may initiate a Targeting review if the team has a timeout available

   and a coach's challenge remaining.

4. Game Clock Corrections:

   The officials may reset the game clock, in accordance with other rules, only when a burn in or embedded clock is accurate and available.