



2026 NCAA FOOTBALL RULES CHANGES

Approved March/April 2026; Effective with the 2026 Season

Targeting Penalty

Approved Change – Rule 9-1-3 & 9-1-4 Penalty

This change will be an experimental rule for 2026.

Targeting fouls that are upheld will include a disqualification for the current game, and the rule will eliminate the carryover disqualification for fouls in the second half.

If a player receives a second Targeting foul within the same season, disqualification for the remainder of the game and the first half of the team's next scheduled game within that season.

If a player receives a third or subsequent Targeting foul within the same season, disqualification for the remainder of the game and that player will receive an automatic one-game suspension in their team's next scheduled game of that season.

If a player receives a second and/or subsequent upheld targeting foul within the same season, the conference has the option to consult the national coordinator of football officials who would then facilitate a video review. Based on the review, if and only if the national coordinator concludes that it is clearly obvious the player should not have been disqualified on the first, second or any subsequent targeting foul, the suspension will be vacated. If the national coordinator supports the disqualification, the suspension for the next game will remain.

Rationale: This continues the evolution of this important player safety rule. The committee believes the rule has had a profound positive impact on technique and removing the carryover aspect of second-half fouls is appropriate. Increasing the progressive penalty aspect is intended to underscore the continued importance of this rule.

Numbering Exceptions - Scrimmage Kick Formation

Approved Change – Rule 7-1-4

In a scrimmage kick formation at the snap (Rule 2-16-10) Team A may have fewer than five linemen numbered 50-79, subject to the following conditions:

- The snapper and two adjacent linemen on either side of the snapper, not numbered 50-79 who are lined up in (or touching) the tackle box are ineligible receivers by position and become exceptions to the numbering rule when the snapper takes his position.
- Any and all such numbering-exception players must be clearly on the line of scrimmage, and all backs must be clearly in the backfield. Otherwise, Team A commits a foul for illegal formation.

Rationale: Current rules in this area have allowed for significant confusion and created difficulty for the defense and officials to identify ineligible receivers on these plays. This proposal clarifies responsibilities and alignments for all.

Offensive Pass Interference - Penalty

Approved Change – Rule 7-3-8-b

The penalty for offensive pass interference is being adjusted to 10-yards.

Rationale: The committee believes the previous penalty (15 yards) was too stringent.

Play Clock Following a Replay Review after the Two-Minute Timeout

Approved Change – Rule 3-2-4-c-12

The play clock is set to 25 seconds following an Instant replay review with the following exception:

- After the Two-Minute Timeout in the 2nd or 4th quarters, when the Replay Official stops the game for review, the play clock will be frozen at that point and will be restarted following the review when the ball is made ready for play by the Referee's signal.
- If the play clock displays less than 10 seconds when it is frozen, it will be reset to 10 seconds and started when the ball is made ready for play by the Referee's signal.

Rationale: This change avoids teams from gaining an advantage when video replay is involved late in either half due to the status of the play clock.

Modernize the Unsportsmanlike Conduct Rule

Approved Change – Rule 9-2-1-a

The Rules Committee is satisfied with the solid judgement that officials are demonstrating evaluating Unsportsmanlike Conduct.

In order to update the rule and stay in pace with the modern game, Rule 9-2-1 is being adjusted to ensure that officials will use good judgement in penalizing actions that interfere with orderly game administration, taunting actions that are directed at an opponent, and abusive, threatening, or celebratory actions that are demeaning to the game or an opponent.

The list of automatic unsportsmanlike conduct fouls will be minimized and will be consistently penalized including:

- Any form of gun violence including brandishing a weapon.
- A slashing of the throat or a nose wipe signal.
- A player removing their helmet after the ball is dead (with exceptions for timeouts and equipment adjustments).
- Dead-ball contact fouls such as pushing, shoving, striking, etc. that occur clearly after the ball is dead and that are not part of the game action.
- After the ball is dead, using forcible contact to push or pull an opponent off the pile.

Rationale: The committee believes the sport is in a positive place overall with unsportsmanlike conduct and this adjusts the rules to meet enforcement on the field.

Game Stop – Additional Coach Replay Challenge

Approved Change – Rule 12-5-1-b

A head coach initiates a challenge by taking a team timeout before the ball is next legally put into play 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 at least one of their first two challenges, they are awarded a third challenge. A challenge can only be made if the team has a timeout remaining and available and if the challenge is successful, the team's timeout will not be charged.

Rationale: The committee believes including an additional replay challenge is appropriate and in the cases a challenge is successful, teams should be rewarded.

Fair Catch Kick

Approved Change – Rule 6-5-1-e

Following a fair catch, the ball shall be put in play by a snap or a Fair Catch Kick by the receiving team at the spot of the catch.

To trigger the Fair Catch Kick, a fair catch must be completed of an opponent's scrimmage kick or free kick. The receiving team may choose to attempt a Fair Catch Kick from the spot of the fair catch or the succeeding spot after penalties.

- If the fair catch occurs as time expires in a half, the team is allowed to make the Fair Catch Kick as an untimed down.
- The fair catch kick line for the kicking team is most forward point of the spot of the fair catch (or the succeeding spot after penalties).
- The fair catch kick line for the receiving team is the yard line 10 yards in advance of the kicking team's fair catch kick line.
- The formation requirements for a fair catch kick will follow Rule 6-1-2-a, b and c.
- The kick must be a field goal place kick with a holder (no tee) or a drop kick, and if the kick passes over the crossbar and through the uprights, a field goal is scored and 3 points are awarded.
- If the Fair Catch Kick is unsuccessful, all rules pertaining to scrimmage kicks and the Next Play provisions of an unsuccessful field goal apply.

Rationale: This rule, used successfully in most other levels of football, provides additional strategy in the kicking game, particularly at the end of a half or game.

Steve Shaw

CFO National Coordinator of Football Officials

Secretary-Rules Editor, NCAA Football Rules Committee

April 2026