



**NCAA Soccer Rules Questions and Interpretations**  
**2023 Season, Volume 3**  
**Rich Grady, Secretary-Rules Editor**

This update includes issues addressed up to September 8, 2023. Volumes 1 and 2 may be viewed on [Center Circle](#) under Rules of the Game or the NCAA playing rules [website](#) under Updates.

1. **Difference between violent behavior and serious foul play.** There have been several instances of referees ejecting players for violent behavior II for nasty tackles committed while challenging the player who has possession of the ball. Looking at the relevant rules, Rule 12.7.4.1.1 defines serious foul play as “a tackle or challenge for the ball that endangers the safety of an opponent or uses excessive force or brutality. It must be against an opponent, between players competing for the ball, committed on the field of play, and a direct free-kick foul.” Rule 12.7.4.7 notes that violent behavior I and II, “may be against anyone (for instance, opponent, teammate, official or spectator) not competing for the ball, may be on or off the field of play, and the ball may be in or out of play.” Further, in Rule 12.7.4.7.2 examples of violent behavior II are given as: “head butting, elbow to the face or head, stomping, kicking a defenseless person, hair pulling, spitting at, coughing at/on or biting an opponent or any other person.” The intent of violent behavior II is to punish acts that are not soccer plays more severely than dangerous fouls that are still a normal part of the game. Two examples of recent protests where violent behavior II was incorrectly called on the field are [here](#) and [here](#). The correct decision in both plays should be a red card for serious foul play.
2. **Ejection reports and box score accuracy.** Officials need to check the box score for accuracy and, when ejection reports are required, submit the correct information. Within the last week, there have been multiple examples of ejection reports that listed player names, numbers, and even institutions incorrectly. When submitting the ejection form, the top portion of General Information with Offending Institution Affiliation, Sport and Institution all refer to the **institution that received the ejection/red card**. This does not refer to the home institution unless that team received the ejection/red card. We have also had examples of cautions being charged to the wrong player. Once again, attention to detail as a crew is imperative in order to eliminate these avoidable errors.
3. **Discretionary vs. mandatory cautions.** While many soccer officials work competitions with different rules books and expectations, it is important for officials to be aware of the differences among various sets of rules. While removing a jersey in celebration of a goal is a mandatory caution under FIFA rules, that is not the case under NCAA rules. Rule 12.4.3.5 lists some acts that could be considered unsporting behavior, including “taunting, excessive celebration, simulating a foul, exaggerating an injury, baiting, substituting illegally or ridiculing another player, bench personnel, officials or spectators.” Because the official time is stopped after a goal is scored, officials should not be looking for reasons to caution players for celebrating goals unless the player’s actions clearly cross the line into taunting the opposing team or their spectators. Please see [this](#) example from a recent game. On this play, the team runs to the corner flag after scoring, and the goal scorer punches the corner flag. The referee issued a caution for this action, which was the player’s second of the game. This is the type of incident where referees should not look for problems. No one on the

opposing team is being taunted or targeted here, and there is not an unduly long delay in restarting. This is not a caution that should be given in an NCAA soccer game.

4. **Referee uniforms.** First, a reminder that all officials are expected to be wearing the new approved uniforms. We understand that there may be supply chain issues in rare cases, but these should be managed on a case-by-case basis. There is no reason for officials to be wearing US Soccer or any other organization's approved uniforms and posting photos of these uniforms, complete with conference badges, on social media. Second, referees should be cognizant of NCAA rules regarding team uniforms. There have been many games where the officials are wearing a color that does not distinguish them from the field players on both teams. NCAA rules do not require the officials to have a different color from the goalkeepers. Officials should not wear purple when a team is in dark blue. The reason for having three different colors (yellow, orange and purple) is that one color is always available to avoid a conflict with the field players' jerseys.
5. **Substitution rules.** Current rules prohibit the re-entry of a field player in the first half after being substituted, unless the player was being examined for a head injury, was bleeding, or was injured on a play where the opponent was cautioned or ejected. Officials should strive to be proactive and prevent violations of this rule rather than punishing illegal re-entry after it is detected.