



**NCAA Soccer Rules Questions and Interpretations**  
**2023 Season, Volume 4**  
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This update includes issues addressed up to September 22, 2023. Volumes 1, 2, and 3 may be viewed on [Center Circle](#) under Rules of the Game or the NCAA playing rules [website](#) under Updates.

1. **Team area behavior.** There have been multiple examples of coaches leaving their team and coaching areas to physically confront members of the opposing coaching staff. This is completely unacceptable and needs to be punished as misconduct. If a coach leaves their team area to confront another individual, it should be at least a caution. If the confrontation becomes physical, the coach should be ejected under Rule 12.7.4.5 for **other abusive, threatening or obscene language, behavior or conduct**. See this [video](#) for an example of a play where the officials correctly issued ejections.
2. **Video review.** Referees must meet with home team game management prior to the game to determine if video review equipment is available. If available, video review shall be used per Rule 5.7. Any device that is accessible to the referee at field level meets the requirement of the rule. Devices in the team areas can be used to satisfy the requirement of an available device, but they must be available to the referee on request. Coaches are not permitted to use video devices as a basis for arguing decisions. Referees are expected to issue cautions for this type of behavior.
3. **Discretionary vs. mandatory cautions.** This was addressed in Volume 3, but it continues to be an area of concern. Removal of a jersey in celebration of a goal is not a mandatory caution 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. Scoring a game-winning goal is a life-long memory for a player. Let them enjoy the moment with their teammates unless they do something that clearly displays poor sportsmanship.
4. **Reporting of violent behavior II and fighting ejections.** The determination that an ejection is for fighting or violent behavior II must be made before play restarts following the ejection. If available, video review may be used to assist in this determination. Referees are not permitted to retroactively upgrade an ejection after watching the video once the match is over. This [example](#) was called violent behavior I on the field, but it reported as violent behavior II when the referee watched video after the match. Cards must be reported as they were called on the field.
5. **Substitution rules.** If a player is removed from the game for a bleeding injury or for a potential concussion, and they are not replaced by a substitute, they are eligible to return during the run of play as per Rule 3.6.3.5 as long as they have been cleared by the

appropriate medical personnel (possible concussion) or an official (in the case of a bleeding injury).

**6. Abusive language.** Rule 12.7.4.5 provides for the ejection of individuals who use abusive, threatening, or obscene language. Officials need to correctly identify and punish abusive language with a red card rather than a yellow card for dissent. The following are direct quotes from ejection reports of remarks which were punished with only a caution:

- In the 47<sup>th</sup> minute of play, Player A got in the face of the referee and screamed, "You're <expletive> horrible." Player A received a caution for dissent. A few seconds later, at the same stoppage in play, Player A again went at the referee and continued to scream, "You're <expletive> horrible," in the face of the referee. Player A was shown the second caution for dissent and the subsequent red card in the 47<sup>th</sup> minute.
- In the 86<sup>th</sup> minute of the match, Player B was shown the red card and sent off for receiving a second caution in the same match. Player B was issued a second caution for dissent. Player B told the referee to "Go <expletive> yourself" in an open, loud and clear manner.
- Player X was shown a second caution in the 67<sup>th</sup> for dissent shouting "You are <expletive> crazy!" directly at me.
- Player Z publicly decried the call and loudly told the referee they were "<expletive> terrible". Player Z was issued their second caution resulting in an ejection from the match.

Language that is personal and abusive in nature must be punished with a straight red card.

**7. Cards issued in final five minutes.** Rule 5.6.2 permits the referee to allow the clock to continue to run when the losing team is issued a caution or ejection in the last five minutes of the game. The intent of the rule is that the fouling team should not be rewarded for their misconduct, particularly if the conduct is a cynical play that is designed to force the referee to stop the clock. If there is an injury, or other lengthy delay, the clock should be stopped, but referees should err on the side of keeping the clock running in these situations.