



NCAA Soccer Rules Questions and Interpretations
2023 Season, Volume 5
Rich Grady, Secretary-Rules Editor

This update includes issues addressed up to October 16, 2023. Volumes 1, 2, 3, and 4 may be viewed on [Center Circle](#) under Rules of the Game or the NCAA playing rules [website](#) under Updates.

1. **Scoring team retrieving the ball from the net.** This issue was addressed in Volume 2 as well as in [Protest #31](#). There have been multiple ejections so far in October that resulted from confrontations that began with the attacking team running into the goal to retrieve the ball. [Here](#) is an additional example. Coaches are once again urged to educate their teams about this issue. Under NCAA rules, there is no reason for a player to run into the goal to collect the ball after scoring. The clock is stopped in these situations, so there is no tactical benefit to rushing to retrieve the ball. As we have seen throughout the season, there is a significant risk of creating or escalating a confrontation that need not have occurred, and coaches are at risk of losing players for crucial games because of mass confrontations that are entirely avoidable.
2. **Video review.** There must be a decision made and communicated on the field before a play is reviewed. That decision can be changed as a result of the review, but there must be an on field decision to default to if the video does not provide indisputable evidence that the call on the field is incorrect.
3. **Display of cards.** Issuing a yellow or red card often happens when emotions are running high on all sides. Officials must take their time and show the proper card. In [this clip](#), the referee calls a penalty kick in the final minute of a tied game. A player on the defending team confronts the referee and puts two hands on the official and makes a pushing motion. The official intended to pull out a red card for this, but they pull the yellow card by mistake. They then immediately show the red card once they realize their mistake. In [this clip](#), the referee intended to show a straight red card for the challenge, but they show the yellow instead. Because the defender is running at them, they instinctively issue a caution for dissent. It now appears to everyone that the defender has been ejected for two yellow cards rather than for the tackle itself. In these situations, referees need to do the following:
 - Take their time and show the proper card.
 - If an error is made, please make sure that the scorekeeper is aware of which cards were actually issued and delete cards that are not allowed by rule. In both clips, the player was issued a straight red, so there cannot be yellow cards awarded for actions that took place after the red card offense.
4. **Reporting of referee assault ejections.** As is the case in situations of fighting or violent behavior II, when issuing an ejection for referee assault, this must be announced before play restarts. 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.
5. **Timekeeping.** Officials must be aware that they should not stop the clock for the sole purpose of allowing a team to take a restart near the end of a period if there is no other

underlying reason to stop the clock. In [this clip](#) from a recent game, a free kick is awarded for a foul by the red team with 20 seconds remaining on the clock. No members of the defending team touch the ball after the whistle is blown. There is no misconduct committed by the defending team, nor is there a player injury, so there is no reason for the official to stop the clock. Once the official stopped the clock, they decided to caution the coach of the white team for dissent. The resulting restart almost results in the game winning goal. In this situation, the clock should not have been stopped. The white team is rewarded for the dissent by the coach by being allowed time to set up the restart, and the red team is penalized when it has done nothing wrong.

6. **Player management.** College soccer is an incredibly diverse sport, with student-athletes from a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds and from countries around the world. It is not a reasonable expectation that referees are fluent in every possible language that could be spoken on the field. If the referee does have fluency in a language, that information can be used during the game. For example, a player spoke to the referee in Bosnian, and the referee is from Bosnia. The translation of the comment was “Expletive your mother.” A red card was correctly issued. On the other hand, referees are not automatically entitled to assume that something inappropriate was said if two players are speaking to each other in a language the referee does not speak. Player’s actions and body language can be a good indication if a comment was problematic. Referees should not issue cards for comments they cannot understand without clear and convincing evidence that the comment was inappropriate.