



NCAA Soccer Rules Questions and Interpretations
2026 Season, Volume 3
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This update includes issues addressed up to September 23, 2026.

1. **Continued focus on eliminating taunting.** Taunting is one of the points of emphasis for this season because of the negative impact it has on match control if not properly addressed. In [this clip](#), the attacking team challenged for a handball by the goalkeeper outside the penalty area. After the review, the goalkeeper clearly taunts the opposing bench and coaching staff. In [this clip](#), the goalkeeper for the visiting team engages with the home fans after the conclusion of the game, leading to a mass confrontation. In [this clip](#), notice the defender from the team in maroon. As soon as the attacker misses the penalty kick, the maroon player runs in to taunt him. This leads to a mass confrontation. A player from the white team is correctly ejected, but there is no punishment for the player in maroon. In this clip, the player from the white team taunts his opponent, who retaliates by striking him in the face. The player in the dark jersey is correctly ejected, but the referee does well to caution white #18 for provoking the incident by taunting. In [this clip](#), a player on the team in dark jerseys is seriously injured after a collision with the goalkeeper. The player's coach is on the field to check on his player. While they are leaving the field, a comment is made from the opponent's bench "Way to kill him," and players on the white team react positively to the comment. The coach of the black team told the player to shut up, which prompted a response from the coach of the white team. The coach of the black team then tells the other coach to "Shut the (expletive) up," leading to his ejection. While the ejection was proper, the referee should have been aware of and punished the remarks from the white bench that led to the exchange.
2. **Goal celebrations.** Dealing with substitutes who enter the field beyond the immediate vicinity of the touchline is a point of emphasis. [This clip](#) demonstrates why this is the case. The red team scores the potential winning goal, and the entire bench empties onto the field. One of the players who was not in uniform goes up to an opponent and taunts them, followed by a physical confrontation that results in an ejection. In [this clip](#), the coach of the team in black is correctly cautioned for the entire bench emptying onto the field. Because it is their second yellow of the match, they are ejected. Another aspect of celebrations is the team gathering at the corner flag. In [this clip](#), the corner flag is knocked over, but no cautions are issued. In [this clip](#), the referee issues a caution. The behavior is identical, and coaches are justifiably confused by the different outcomes. Referees should not be looking for reasons to give cautions during goal celebrations unless taunting occurs or the bench empties onto the field.
3. **Ejection reports.** The need to ensure the correct institution and individual being reported has already been addressed this season, but errors continue to occur. The following areas are in need of improvement:
 - Officials must submit the reports promptly and carefully to ensure the correct people receive the report.
 - Reports should contain certain basic information, such as the time on the clock when the ejection occurred and whether or not video review was used to make or confirm the decision.
 - The report should not identify the player solely by their first name. Please use first and last name, or Mr./Ms. followed by last name.
 - The description needs to match what shows on the video. Here is the text of one report:

“In the 86' of the game, (redacted) committed a late, sliding foul challenge with studs exposed, from behind his opponent, which endangered the safety of that opponent. The referee blew the whistle for the foul and showed (redacted) the RC. (Redacted) left the field without issue. Play resumed with a DFK for (redacted).” [Here](#) is the video of the play in question. While it is understandable that the referee may not have seen things accurately when deciding to issue a red card, the description of the play does not match the video. The contact is not made with the leading foot or with the studs. Instead, there is some contact with the bent leg that trips the opponent.

- Reports should contain factual information that is pertinent to the situation and not stray into areas of opinion or interpretation. Referees should make sure that the details included in any ejection report are accurate. For example:
 - a. Immediately following the final whistle, player (redacted), approached my position at the center circle. His demeanor was overtly hostile, and he began to direct a stream of repeated expletives in my direction. As he moved past me, roughly a few feet away, he specifically articulated, "I don't know how much (expletive) money you're getting paid, but they must have paid you good." This statement clearly implied professional impropriety and cast aspersions on my integrity and the fairness of officiating. In response to this severe instance of verbal abuse, dissent, and personal attack, I promptly produced the red card and issued a sending-off for Player (redacted), citing his gross unsporting behavior.
 - b. Later in the game, specifically in the 87th minute, Coach (redacted) received a second yellow card, which resulted in his immediate dismissal from the technical area. This subsequent disciplinary action was taken due to the egregious behavior emanating from his team's bench following a late goal. Several members of the staff and substitute players impulsively stormed onto the field of play in an unrestrained and reckless celebration, an act that culminated in a corner flag being violently uprooted and kicked down.
 - c. Minutes later as I was walking off the field, # 14 of (redacted) said to me loudly for others to hear, "You're a (expletive) piece of (expletive)." I immediately informed his coach that his # 14 had called me a "(expletive) piece of (expletive)". The head coach response to me? Why are you walking near our players in order to instigate them? Incredible response. He did NOT say "Hey (redacted), get off the field, how dare you say that to the ref. I'll see you in my office tomorrow morning at 9 AM". No, instead he was essentially blaming me for his player's vulgar behavior (and a player who had already received a red card for violent behavior). The head coach's petulant and immature behavior himself did not help defuse the situation, instead he added fuel to the fire. He had already received a yellow card before this incident for his inappropriate behavior at the end of the game towards me (arguing because they lost the game in the last 13 minutes which included a penalty kick in minute 77 against his team). I told him that his behavior on the sideline in the last 12 minutes with his continuous swearing and complaining to my 4th official was inappropriate. Some of the other comments I recall hearing from Colby players towards me after the game; "That was a sell job", "You robbed us", "You screwed

us", "You're terrible". This is another example and reason for a shortage of referees and why many decide to quit and walk away due to this type of vulgar abuse I experienced. A college student-athlete (redacted) called me a "(expletive) piece of (expletive)". That's incredible."

All of the comments underlined and highlighted in gray above represent an unnecessary injection of personal opinion into what is supposed to be a factual document. In addition, the report in c. above undermines the referee's own credibility. If the coach had been swearing and complaining for a prolonged period of time, why were they not ejected?

4. **Importance of match control.** Officials must remember that player safety and match control are their main priority. There have been multiple examples of situations where officials passed on multiple chances to call fouls, which led to escalating violence that ultimately resulted in ejections. Examples are found [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#). Officials should not try to apply philosophies about game flow that are better suited to the professional level in college matches.
5. **Feigning injuries to ensure an opportunity for Video Review.** The following email was received from a Division I head coach. "Any chance we can get a rule put in that if a player goes down injured to stop play/the clock, that a review cannot be initiated? We were down 4-1 with 3 minutes left tonight. They scored a goal that was called offside. (redacted)/their staff directed their player to go down injured before we could take the ensuing free kick - once initiated - the player looked back at the bench and asked if he was good to stand up now. The review had time to be initiated so he stood up and carried on. I have no issue with them issuing the review, but to have the staff tell a player to go down and fake an injury, so the clock stops and lengthens the time to initiate a review is completely unsporting. Just an observation of the rules being abused. They were better than us by a mile tonight so this isn't sour grapes. Just don't want this to happen in a meaningful game later. It's bad sportsmanship." This is a tricky area for referees. We do not want officials making medical judgments. However, when circumstances are suspicious, such as players going down to stop the clock or allow for more time to decide to challenge a call, officials should make sure that they use all the tools at their disposal to ensure fairness. In this case, the trainer should be summoned and the player forced to leave the field. If the crew has definite knowledge that the player is going down because of instructions from the bench, the referee should caution the head coach and seek to restart the game as quickly as possible.