NCAA Soccer Rules Questions and Interpretations
2026 Season, Volume 4
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This update includes issues addressed up to October 15, 2026. Additional video examples can be found on the NCAA Soccer Center Circle Central Hub on RQ+ in the 2026 NCAA Soccer Rules Questions and Interpretations Volume 4 document.

1. **Substitutes leaving the team area to participate in an altercation.** Officials and coaches need to be cognizant of Rule 12.7.10.3.2, which specifies that players who leave the team area to participate in an altercation shall be ejected for Violent Behavior. In terms of post-match discipline, leaving the bench area to go to the area of the altercation is adjudicated as Violent Behavior I, with a one game suspension. Physically contacting an opponent will be adjudicated as Fighting, with a two-game suspension. Coaches must make it a priority to prevent their players from entering the field during these situations, and officials are expected to enforce the rule properly. (Additional examples and video available on RQ+)

2. **Offside.** Both referees and assistant referees need to heighten their awareness when there is a defender who is off the field. Per Rule 11.3.5, "A defender who leaves the field of play, deliberately or in the normal run of play, is considered to be on the end line for the purpose of determining offside position until the next stoppage of play or until the defending team has played the ball towards the halfway line and it is outside the penalty area." (Additional examples and video available on RQ+)

3. **Bench area markings**. All institutions and officials are reminded that both the coaching area and the team area should be marked on the field, and if they are not marked with permanent lines, then cones should be used. Enforcement of this has slipped recently. In addition, there have been multiple examples of substitutes and coaches not staying in the area. As a reminder, substitutes preparing to enter the game may leave the team area to warm up, but other than that, they should remain in the team area unless checking in or celebrating a goal with their team at the corner flag nearest their team bench.

4. **Requirements for ejected personnel**. There have been multiple reports of ejected individuals who have not left the area of the playing field. As a reminder, "A player ejected from the game must leave the playing field, including the coaching and team area, and be out of sight and sound of the playing field. A coach or other bench personnel ejected from the game must leave the playing field, including the coaching and team area, and is prohibited from any communication or contact, direct or indirect, with the team, coaches and/or bench personnel until the completion of the contest, including the overtime periods."

5. **Noisemakers in bench area and prerecorded music.** Rule 5.6.9.2 permits musical instruments and noisemakers in the spectator areas. They are not permitted in the team areas. Referees should instruct offending teams to immediately cease the use of noisemakers and musical instruments from the team areas. Non-compliance after a warning should result in a caution to the head coach. According to Rule 5.6.9.3, "Artificially amplified or prerecorded music can only be played prior to the game, during intervals between periods, or any time the clock is stopped." While the letter of the rule may permit the playing of such music prior to the taking of a penalty kick, such a practice is not consistent with the spirit of the rule and is therefore prohibited.

6. **Promptness of ejection reports.** There continue to be concerns with ejection reports, including listing the wrong team, listing the wrong player and not including the time of the ejection. Most concerningly, there have had multiple ejection reports for Violent Behavior submitted 72 hours or more after the fact. This is unfair to everyone involved, as it unnecessarily prolongs the review process for violent behavior ejections.

7. **Goal celebrations.** As addressed in previous interpretations this season, officials are reminded the cautions are expected for celebrations where substitutes clearly enter the field beyond the immediate vicinity of the touchline. The offense in this case is entering the field, not leaving the team area. Substitutes running to the corner flag on their half of the field should not be punished with the yellow card to the head coach. (Additional examples and video available on RQ+)