

College Football Rules Committee recommends changes to enhance player safety

Plays involving field goals, equipment and horse collar tackles are addressed

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Last Updated - Mar 3, 2017 13:01 EST

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The NCAA Football Rules Committee recommended three changes to enhance player health and safety Friday as it concluded its annual meeting in Indianapolis.

One of the proposals, each of which must still be approved by the Playing Rules Oversight Panel, would prohibit defensive players who run toward the line of scrimmage from leaping or hurdling offensive linemen on field goal and point-after-touchdown attempts. Currently, defensive players can legally leap offensive linemen if they don't land on another player.

In another student-athlete safety proposal, the committee's recommendation would require players to wear knee pads and pants that cover the knees. Currently, it is only strongly recommended that the pants cover the knee.

The committee also proposed including the nameplate area of the jersey in the current horse-collar tackle rule.

"Our committee's most significant charge is to enhance the health and safety of our student-athletes when possible," said Bob Nielson, chair of the committee and coach at South Dakota. "Each of these rules changes address areas that help us accomplish this goal."

Although this is a non-rule-change year for football, changes directly related to health and safety are allowed. The Playing Rules Oversight Panel is scheduled to discuss the football rules recommendations for the 2017 season on April 19.

One area of health and safety discussion the committee decided to leave unchanged involved the targeting rule. There was considerable discussion regarding possible adjustments to the rule, but the committee decided to leave it unchanged for the 2017 season.

"The change we have witnessed in player behavior has been significantly positive," Nielson said. "The adjustment made last year to allow the replay official to examine all aspects of the targeting rule was a positive change."

Points of Emphasis

This week's meetings included collaborative sessions with the newly formed Division I Football Competition Committee and the National Football League, which met jointly with the rules committee earlier in the week.

As part of the meetings with the Division I Football Competition Committee, the groups discussed ways to address the continued concern about the increased length of games. To address it, the committee focused on administrative matters that do not impact the playing rules, which are used by all NCAA divisions.

“We believe our first step is to address issues that do not impact actual playing time, but focus on ways to allow the game to be managed more efficiently,” Nielson said. “Obviously, this is a complex issue, but the collaboration we had this week, including our television partners, will help us moving forward.”

The groups also endorsed placing a heightened focus on sideline management, particularly toward coaches entering the field to protest officiating decisions. A document detailing current rules and expectations was developed and endorsed by the committee and will be distributed to coaches and officials.

“This has become a growing concern throughout our sport,” said Rogers Redding, secretary-rules editor of the committee. “The committee encourages our coaches to be leaders in presenting a positive image of the game.”

Experimental Rules

In other action, the committee extended two experimental rules for another season. The committee decided to allow conferences to continue using a collaborative approach to instant replay that includes conference office personnel. Also, the committee approved the continuation of The Ivy League’s kickoff experiment that calls for the ball to be kicked from the 40-yard line and spotted at the 20-yard line after touchbacks. The committee wants a larger amount of data to be collected.

Survey

Because this is a non-rule-change year, the committee took a more holistic view of the game. The committee plans to launch a more detailed survey to the football community that focuses on two areas: blocking below the waist and ineligible receivers downfield. The committee is encouraging discussion on those topics during conference’s spring meetings.