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Football Rules Committee Slightly Adjusts Targeting Rule, Defensive Substitutions

By Greg Johnson*NCAA.org*

The NCAA Football Rules Committee proposed an alteration involving the instant-replay review on targeting fouls during its Feb. 11-12 meeting in Indianapolis, which includes the ejection of the player committing the foul along with a 15-yard penalty.

Last season, the targeting rule was implemented and any player committing the penalty would be ejected and his team assessed a 15-yard penalty.

The committee recommended that if the instant replay official rules that a disqualification should not have occurred, and if the targeting foul is not accompanied by another personal foul, the 15-yard penalty for targeting should not be enforced.

However, if the targeting foul is committed in conjunction with another personal foul, the 15-yard penalty for that personal foul remains. For example, if a player is called for roughing the passer and targeting the head and neck area, but the instant replay official rules that targeting did not occur, the player flagged would remain in the game, but the roughing the passer penalty would still be enforced.

All rules proposals must be approved by the NCAA Playing Rules Oversight Panel, which will discuss the football rules changes March 6. The proposed changes are being circulated for membership comment.

“Overall, the targeting rule was successful and has had the intended impact of making play safer,” said Troy Calhoun, head coach at the Air Force Academy and chair of the committee, which met Monday through Thursday in Indianapolis. “This alteration keeps the intent of the rule, but allows replay to correct all of the consequences from a rare missed call.”

In games where instant replay is not in use, the committee recommended an option to permit on-field officials to review targeting calls during halftime that were made during the first half. This is a permissive rule by conference policy or mutual consent of the teams and is the responsibility of the home team to provide the parameters for the use of video. The review must be conducted by the referee in the officials’ locker room.

Officials could then reverse the targeting call and allow the player to compete in the second half. The committee noted that many Football Championship Subdivision, Division II and Division III games are not played using instant replay so this modification gives those teams greater flexibility to review targeting fouls during a game.

Defensive Substitutions

The committee also recommended a rules change that will allow defensive units to substitute within the first 10 seconds of the 40-second play clock, with the exception of the final two minutes of each half, starting with the 2014 season.

“This rules change is being made to enhance student-athlete safety by guaranteeing a small window for both teams to substitute,” said Calhoun. “As the average number of plays per game has increased, this issue has been discussed with greater frequency by the committee in recent years and we felt like it was time to act in the interests of protecting our student-

athletes.”

Under this rule proposal, the offense will not be allowed to snap the ball until the play clock reaches 29 seconds or less. If the offense snaps the ball before the play clock reaches 29 seconds, a 5-yard, delay-of-game penalty will be assessed. Under current rules, defensive players are not guaranteed an opportunity to substitute unless the offense substitutes first. This part of the rule will remain in place in scenarios where the play clock starts at 25 seconds.

The committee discussed the issue thoroughly before coming to the conclusion that defensive teams should be allowed some period of time to substitute. The committee believes that 10 seconds provides sufficient time for defensive player substitutions without inhibiting the ability of an offense to play at a fast pace. Research indicated that teams with fast-paced, no-huddle offenses rarely snap the ball with 30 seconds or more on the play clock. This rules proposal also aligns with a request from the Committee on Competitive Safeguards and Medical Aspects of Sports that sport rules committees review substitution rules in regards to player safety.

In the NCAA’s non-rules change years, proposals can only be made for student-athlete safety reasons or modifications that enhance the intent of a previous rules change.

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