

NCAA Football Rules Committee Approves Instant Replay System, Addresses Length of Game Issues

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INDIANAPOLIS --- The NCAA Football Rules Committee approved the use of instant replay and made recommendations concerning the length of the game at its meeting February 6-8. The committee's recommendations will be considered by the Playing Rules Oversight Panel for final approval before the rules become official.

After allowing instant replay to review a game official's call on the field for two seasons on an experimental basis, the committee approved one procedure for all institutions and conferences that choose to use it. The procedure, which was used by the majority of Division I-A conferences last season, calls for the replay official in the press box to review all plays on the field and stop the game. The official may only stop play if the play is in the list of reviewable plays and has a direct, competitive impact on the game.

"First and foremost, we believe instant replay overall was a tremendous success," said Charles Broyles, chair of the committee and athletics director and football coach at Pittsburg State University. "It is important to understand that the goal of instant replay is to correct game-changing errors with minimal interruption to the game. We think the system we approved accomplishes that."

The committee also decided to allow each team one challenge during the course of the game. The head coach may request a review by signaling for a timeout. If the challenge overturns the call on the field, the coach retains the right to challenge later in the game and is not charged a timeout. If the call on the field is not reversed in the challenge, the team is charged a timeout and the coach does not have the ability to challenge again in the game.

A challenge procedure was used in the Mountain West Conference last year. In 35 challenges, the call on the field was reversed five times.

"That may not sound like a lot, but if you have five plays that could change the game if not corrected, that is a pretty strong percentage," Broyles said. "We thought that providing a coach's challenge would act as an additional safety net and give the coaches more involvement in the process."

The committee noted that its rules on electronic equipment have not changed. Television monitors in the coaching booths will continue to be impermissible.

For consistency, the script the referee will use when reporting the results of a replay stoppage was included as part of the rule. Additionally, a visiting non-conference institution is not able to opt out of using replay if the host institution chooses to implement the system.

The committee also responded to the growing length of game times. Football games now routinely exceed three and a half hours in length and many games pass the four hour mark. As a result, the group decided to shorten the halftime allowance from 20 to 15 minutes, with the understanding that conferences or institutions may lengthen halftime upon mutual agreement of the participating teams.

"We're saying that we don't believe halftime needs to be more than 15 minutes," Broyles said. "We also understand that halftime shows, homecoming and other presentations are important to our institutions. So the allowance is there."

Three other changes figure to shorten the game without significantly disrupting the normal flow of the college game. First, the committee voted to start the clock on kickoffs when the foot touches the ball, not when the returning team touches the ball. Second, the committee shortened the length of the kicking tee to one inch, which will likely limit the number of touchbacks on kickoffs. The committee also decided to start the clock when the ball is ready for play on a change of possession. The latter change is expected to save about five minutes per game according to limited studies conducted by the Southeastern and Big Ten Conferences.

"We looked at quite a few proposals to shorten the game," Broyles said. "The consensus was that some were too drastic at this time. Starting the clock on the change of possession is probably our biggest change. We think this is a good change and that this will help reach our goals in this area."

Other items:

- After seeing the number of eye shield requests expand rapidly in the past four years, the committee voted to eliminate the use of tinted eye shields during games. In reports from the NCAA's Committee on Competitive Safeguards and Medical Aspects of Sport and the National Athletic Trainers Association, both groups supported eliminating this allowance. Both groups noted that there are alternatives to the helmet shields if an eye condition warrants protection (contact lenses, sport goggles, etc.).

- The committee changed the enforcement of all procedural fouls committed by the kicking team that occur prior to a scrimmage kick (except field goals). Now, the receiving team will have the option of accepting the penalty after the return or forcing the kicking team to kick again five yards from the original line of scrimmage.
- In response to a request from the Football Issues Committee, the committee will emphasize the equipment rules and instruct officials to send players that are improperly equipped off the field until the equipment is corrected.
- Unsportsmanlike conduct and excessive celebration fouls were also discussed and the committee continues to believe the vast majority of these fouls are called appropriately or addressed by conferences shortly after games. The committee will ask officiating coordinators to continue to educate their officials on celebration fouls to reach consistency.
- The committee voted to eliminate the Rule 3-3-3-f-4, which deals with crowd noise. The committee put this rule in place several years ago and, in general, these issues have been alleviated. In cases where the rule has been used by officials, it occasionally created more problems and was not effective.