

NCAA FOOTBALL RULES COMMITTEE

2012 Rules Changes

Because 2012 is a year in which there normally would be no changes, the following rules are directly related to the safety of the student-athlete. The Playing Rules Oversight Panel approved these proposals, which will go into effect for the 2012 season.

KICKOFF

A. The kickoff will be at the 35-yard line. The free kick following a safety will remain at the 20-yard line.

B. After the ball has been made ready for play all players on the kicking team except the kicker must be no more than five yards behind their restraining line. If one player is more than five yards behind the restraining line and any other player kicks the ball, it is a foul.

PENALTY—Illegal Formation. Five yards from the previous spot and re-kick, or five yards from the spot where the dead ball belongs to the receiving team.

C. A player of the receiving team who is in position to receive the ball has the same kick-catch and fair-catch protection whether the ball is kicked directly off the tee or is immediately driven to the ground, strikes the ground once and goes into the air in the manner of the ball kicked directly off the tee.

D. If a free kick results in a touchback the ball will belong to the receiving team at its 25-yard line. On all other touchbacks the ball will be placed at the 20-yard line.

Rationale: *Data show that injuries occur far more frequently on kickoff returns than on any other play. This change is intended to increase the number of times the ball is kicked into*

the end zone, increase the number of touchbacks, and reduce the probability that the kicking team players will be at full speed when covering the return. It also provides the kick receiver the same kick-catch protection whether the ball is kicked directly off the tee or quickly bounced off the ground, most often occurring for on-side kicks.

BLOCKING BELOW THE WAIST

Team A

A. Before a change of team possession any Team A player who is beyond the neutral zone may not block below the waist toward his own goal line, at any angle with a line parallel to the goal line.

B. The following players of Team A are **restricted** with regard to blocking below the waist:

1. A lineman who at the snap is more than seven yards from the middle lineman of the offensive formation.

2. A back who at the snap is aligned with the frame of his body completely outside the tackle box or completely outside the frame of the body of the second lineman from the middle lineman of the offensive formation in either direction toward a sideline.

3. A back who is in motion at the snap and had been outside the area in B-2 any time after the ball was ready for play.

All other players are **unrestricted**. In particular, a player who is in motion at the snap and is never outside the area in B-2 is unrestricted.

C. Inside the area in B-2 a restricted player may not block below the waist against any opponent.

D. Outside this area a restricted player may not block below the waist in a direction away from his adjacent sideline. He may block below the waist along the north-south line or toward his adjacent sideline (subject to the restrictions in Paragraph A).

Team B

Blocking below the waist by players of Team B before a change of team possession is allowed only within the area defined by lines parallel to the goal line five yards beyond and behind the neutral zone extended to the sidelines. Blocking below the waist by players of Team B outside this zone is illegal.

Rationale: *This change clarifies the eligibility of players who are allowed to block below the waist. It is also intended to narrow the occurrence of dangerous blind-side blocks, including the peel-back block.*

HELMET COMES OFF

A. If during the down a player's helmet comes completely off, other than as the direct result of a foul by an opponent, the player must leave the game for the next down. The game clock will stop at the end of the down. When the helmet coming off is the only reason for stopping the clock the following conditions apply:

1. With one minute or more remaining in either half the game clock will stop and will start on the referee's signal. The play clock will be set at 25 seconds if the player is on offense and at 40 seconds if the player is on defense.
2. If there is less than one minute in the half the game clock will stop and the opponent has the option of a 10-second runoff. The play clock will be set at 25 seconds and the game clock will start on the referee's

signal. If a timeout is available the 10-second runoff may be avoided by the use of the timeout.

B. If the player is the ball carrier the ball is dead (Rule 4-1-3-q). If it is a player other than the ball carrier the ball remains alive but he must not continue to participate in the play beyond the immediate action in which he is engaged. Prolonged participation is a personal foul. Such a player by definition is a player obviously out of the play (Rule 9-1-12).

PENALTY—15 yards plus an automatic first down for fouls by Team B.

C. A player who intentionally removes his helmet during the down commits a foul for unsportsmanlike conduct.

PENALTY---15 yards plus an automatic first down for fouls by Team B.

Rationale: *This change is intended to provide the players with incentive to wear properly fitting helmets or lose playing time. The safety of the student-athlete is greatly compromised when he continues to play (e.g., pursuing a ball carrier) without his helmet.*

DEFENSIVE TEAM PLAYER LEAPING THE SHIELD ON A PUNT

A Team B player may not attempt to block a punt by jumping over a Team A player behind the neutral zone inside the tackle box. It is not a foul if the player jumps straight up and does not jump over the opponent. It is also not a foul if the player jumps through the gap between two players.

PERSONAL FOUL: 15 yards, previous spot and automatic first down.

Rationale: *The popularity of the three-man shield to protect the punter has led to a number of injuries to players who attempt to leap over the shield. The change specifically does not prohibit a player from jumping straight up or leaping*

through the gap to block the kick.

INTERFERENCE WITH THE OPPORTUNITY TO CATCH A KICK

The following sentence will be added to Rule 6-4-1 to further protect the receiver of a kick:

Before the receiver touches the ball, if a member of the kicking team enters the area defined by the width of the receiver's shoulders and extending one yard in front of him, it is a foul.

PENALTY—Same as for current foul.

Rationale: *The receiver of a kick is vulnerable to injury by the coverage player who times his approach to arrive just after the receiver touches the ball and is still in a defenseless posture. This change provides a brief but important buffer area to allow the receiver a better opportunity to be prepared for the contact.*