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Football rules panel addresses timing, safety

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[Football Rules Committee press release](#)

By Ty Halpin
The NCAA News

The NCAA Football Rules Committee is proposing a change in the timing of the game after a play in which a runner goes out of bounds. The committee, which met February 11-13 in Indianapolis, is proposing that except in the last two minutes of each half, the game clock will start on a signal from the referee, rather than on the snap.

The change is one of two the committee is proposing that would affect the length of games. The other is a 40/25 second play clock system approved after a year of consideration in an effort to standardize the pace of play. Unless the game is stopped for administrative reasons (for example, change of possession or injury), the offensive team will have 40 seconds to snap the ball after it is declared dead.

"These changes are part of the continuing efforts to maintain a reasonable length of games and create a consistent pace of play at all levels," said Michael Clark, chair of the committee and head coach at Bridgewater College (Virginia).

Those changes and others the committee proposed will be sent for membership comment and considered by the Playing Rules Oversight Panel before taking effect.

The rules committee also proposed changes intended to enhance and more strictly enforce rules related to student-athlete safety. The committee addressed helmet contact, players that target a defenseless opponent, horse collar tackling, and enhanced rules dealing with dangerous chop blocks.

"A main charge of the rules committee is to enhance the safety of our student-athletes," said Clark. "In recent years, the committee has attempted to address head-down contact and dangerous helmet contact in general. The committee is directing game officials to strictly penalize head-down contact as well as players that target defenseless opponents."

The committee has proposed adjusted wording to curb the incidences of dangerous helmet-related contact. In this change, the committee is giving game officials better guidance to penalize these hits.

"The committee is giving our game officials more tools to penalize potentially dangerous contact," said Rogers Redding, coordinator of officials at the Southeastern Conference and secretary-rules editor of the committee beginning March 1. "Specifically, the committee is addressing players that use the crown of their helmet and players that target defenseless opponents when making contact above the shoulders."

A proposal relating to the chop block rule clarifies this area and will assist in officials and coaches in the understanding of this foul.

"Previously, this rule had many factors that officials had to consider," said Redding. "We have eliminated many of the conditions which made this difficult to officiate while retaining the illegality of the dangerous aspects of this foul."

Another safety proposal deals with a dangerous tackle – commonly referred to as a "horse collar." Any player will now be prohibited from grabbing the inside back collar of the shoulder pads or jersey, or the inside collar of the side of the shoulder pads or jersey, and immediately pulling the runner down.

The committee also made the following proposals:

In the rules relating to instant replay, plays where a fumble leads to an immediate recovery may be reviewed.

In replay rules, a coach that challenges a play and is successful will retain the right to challenge one more time for a maximum of two.

When a kickoff goes out of bounds, the receiving team may accept the ball at the 40-yard line instead of the 35.

The incidental five-yard face mask foul was removed. All face mask fouls (pulling, twisting or turning) will be a 15-yard penalty.

A yardage penalty for sideline control was instituted.