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NCAA Rule Changes 2011-12

After a four-year hiatus, the NZGOA guide to the NCAA Rule Changes has returned. Since the last time this document was published there have been a number of significant changes to the rules and officiating community in the United States. The rule book is now produced only every two years. Rogers Redding has taken over from John Adams as Secretary-Editor and has launched a quest to make the rules simpler to understand and easier to enforce and there are again a large number of editorial changes this year that are simply rewordings. Possibly the most influential change, though, is the establishment of College Football Officiating. This new body, formed by the NCAA and the Collegiate Commissioners Association in 2008, aims to have an overarching role to ensure that the rules and mechanics are consistent across the whole country and to provide a central resource for information on how the rules should be interpreted and enforced. This has meant that we now have a much better source for information on the rule changes than in the past, making the task of producing this document much easier. Sadly, the first National Coordinator, Dave Parry, died this year and the season in the US has been dedicated to his memory. He was succeeded by Rogers Redding and, for the first time, the responsibility for the production of the rules and their application on the field lies with one and the same person.

This year there are 13 major rule changes, two of which took effect last year but which are only appearing in the rule book for the first time, and 27 significant editorial changes. The major changes include a 10-second subtraction penalty for the last minute of each half, elimination of the illegal participation rule, restrictions on defensive linemen on place kicks, a change to the intentional grounding rule, ring-fencing of 15-yard penalties so that they only apply to personal fouls, unsportsmanlike conduct fouls and pass interference, and enforcement of USC as a live-ball foul rather than as a dead-ball foul. Most interesting, though, has been the change to the blocking below the waist restrictions which underwent 'clarification' after the rule book was published to such an extent that the rule was substantially changed.

In past years I attempted to identify and make comment on all editorial changes. The rationale for this was that significant changes were often deliberately or accidentally introduced this way. Redding has been much more open about the process of editorial change as well as being more active in rewording the rule book. All significant changes are listed in the front of the rule book, as they were in the 2009-10 book. Consequently, I feel more comfortable that rules changes are no longer 'flying under the radar' and have only commented on those changes that have a material effect. However, the concept of a 'minor change' appears to have crept in. These changes, highlighted in the text of the rule book in the same manner as the major rule changes but not listed in the front, were not necessarily publicised in any memos, which has meant some analysis and interpretation.

I have not yet received my paper copy of the book but it appears to be larger than in previous year. An incidental, but rather irritating change, to the format of the book is that the header on each page, while listing the rule number, no longer includes the section number. This is quite frustrating when jumping between pages and can lead to bouts of momentary disorientation and bewilderment.

Below are all of the major rule changes, the minor changes and the significant editorial changes for the coming season, together with some analysis of their implications. They appear here in the same order

(more or less) as in the rulebook, with the major changes first, followed by the minor changes, the editorial changes and the Approved Rulings. The wording is exactly as it appears in the book.

As always, I am grateful to Dick Honig, Tony Martin and Andrew Vignaux for their contributions.

This document is circulated to the NZGOA, AGOA and BAFRA and may be freely quoted and re-circulated. However, an acknowledgement of the author would be very nice.

Major Changes

Rule 1-4-6-b

There is no restriction on the color of gloves. [Exception: This rule is effective for Divisions II and III in 2012.]

After a number of years of regulating the colour of gloves, most recently making them all a uniform shade of grey, all bets are now off and there are no restrictions. The rule was originally introduced to ensure that players did not camouflage their hands by wearing gloves that matched the colour of their opponents' jerseys. However, it was felt that this was no longer relevant. As yet, I haven't seen any commentary to suggest that players are gaining an advantage from the change.

Rule 1-4-11-Exception

Monitors may only be used to view the live telecast or webcast. The home team is responsible for assuring identical television capability in the coaches' booths of both teams. This capability may not include replay equipment or recorders.

This is a change to the rule regarding monitors in the coaches' booth and is not relevant to us.

Rule 3-4-4

ARTICLE 4. a. With the game clock running and less than one minute remaining in either half, if a player of either team commits a foul that causes the clock to stop, the officials may subtract 10 seconds from the game clock at the option of the offended team. The fouls that fall in this category include but are not limited to:

1. Any foul that prevents the snap (e.g., false start, encroachment, defensive offside by contact in the neutral zone, etc.);
2. Intentional grounding to stop the clock;
3. Incomplete illegal forward pass;
4. Backward pass thrown out of bounds to stop the clock;
5. Any other foul committed with the intent of stopping the clock.

The offended team may accept the yardage penalty and decline the 10-second subtraction. If the yardage penalty is declined the 10-second subtraction is declined by rule.

b. The 10-second rule does not apply if the game clock is not running when the foul occurs or if the foul does not cause the game clock to stop (e.g., illegal formation).

c. After the penalty is administered, if there is a 10-second subtraction, the game clock starts on the referee's signal. If there is no 10-second subtraction, the game clock starts on the snap.

d. If the fouling team has a timeout remaining they may avoid the 10-second subtraction by using a timeout. In this case the game clock starts on the snap after the timeout.

This new Article introduces a NFL-style 10-second deduction penalty. It applies only in the last one minute of each half of the game. If the clock is running and there is a foul that has the effect of stopping the clock, for example a false start or defensive offside, the offended team has the choice of enforcing a

10-second runoff in addition to the distance penalty. It does not apply if the clock was already stopped or if it stops for any other reason, for example a score or a first down. There are a number of permutations as to what happens:

- They can decline the runoff and accept the distance alone but they may not take the runoff without the distance.
- If they do accept the runoff then the clock will always start on the ready.
- If they decline the runoff, then the clock will always start on the snap.
- If the penalty does not include the runoff, then there is no change to clock procedures (it starts on the snap or ready as before).
- The fouling team can trump the runoff by taking a timeout, though.
- If there is a mixture of fouls that include and exclude the runoff, the runoff only applies if the penalty to which it is attached is accepted.
- Offsetting fouls eliminate the runoff. Dead ball fouls by both teams, though, may include the runoff.
- Lastly, if there was less than 10 seconds remaining in the period and the runoff is enforced then the period is over. Any subsequent dead-ball fouls would then become interval fouls. If there is more football to play (either the second half or overtime), then those penalties would carry over. If the game is over, then the fouls are cancelled by rule.
There is an anomaly here, though. Generally the rule is “enforce the distance and then the runoff.” In one of the bulletins released by Rogers Redding with play situations to demonstrate this rule, one of them clearly states that if a personal foul or USC foul stops the clock and there is less than ten seconds, then the runoff is enforced first and the 15-yard penalty is carried across to any succeeding period. I have checked this with our friends in the Big 10 and they agree with me that this is an anomaly that does not appear to be supported by the rule and they are contacting Redding for further clarification. Until then, their advice is to enforce as per the bulletin.

Rule 3-5-3

ARTICLE 3. a. Team A may not break the huddle with more than 11 players nor keep more than 11 players in the huddle or in a formation for more than three seconds. Officials shall stop the action whether or not the ball has been snapped.

b. Team B is allowed to briefly retain more than 11 players on the field to anticipate the offensive formation, but it may not have more than 11 players in its formation if the snap is imminent. Whether the snap is imminent or has just occurred, the officials shall stop the action.

PENALTY [a-b]—Dead-ball foul. Five yards at the succeeding spot. [S22]

c. If officials do not detect the excessive number of players until during the down or after the down is over, the infraction is treated as a live-ball foul.

PENALTY—Live-ball foul. Five yards at the previous spot. [S22]

This is a brand new Article introduced because, more often than not, illegal participation only occurred because the officials did not or could not detect that there were too many players on the field before the snap occurs. It is therefore not fair to penalise a team an additional ten yards in such circumstances. There are a few changes here:

- The penalty for more than 11 men on the field is now just 5 yards regardless of whether it is a live-ball or dead-ball foul. The old illegal participation penalty and signal have been retired.
- We should kill the play if we detect more than 11 players on the field for Team A. The rule suggests that this should happen regardless of how long into the play we detect the foul, but in reality we should only be doing so quickly after the snap.

- The rule is now clear that Team B may also not have more than 11 on the field prior to the snap if it is not waiting to see what personnel it needs for the upcoming play. If the snap is imminent or has just occurred, kill the play.
- If the play is well underway or we only detect the excessive numbers after the ball is dead, it becomes a live-ball illegal substitution foul.

Rule 6-3-14

If Team A is in a formation to attempt a place kick (field goal or try) it is illegal for three Team B players on their line of scrimmage inside the blocking zone to align shoulder-to-shoulder and move forward together after the snap with primary contact against a single Team A player (A.R. 6-3-14-I and II).

The purpose of this rule is to prohibit the triple-teaming of offensive players who are set to protect the kicker rather than charging out to block. This has been a cause of injury in recent times. Interestingly, this is not considered a personal foul as the NCAA Rules Committee did not feel that it was as serious an infraction so it remains simply an illegal formation. An important point to note is that there does not need to be a kick for there to be a foul, simply that Team A is in a place kick formation. Also, whilst the rule is specific about the number of players it is reasonable to infer that a larger number of players would incur the same foul, although it could be argued that such action is bordering on unnecessary roughness.

Rule 7-1-3-b

The previous rule prohibiting offensive linemen other than the snapper and the linemen on either side of him from locking legs has been removed.

Rule 7-3-2

The passer to conserve yardage throws the ball forward into an area where there is no eligible Team A receiver.

The key statement here is the last 11 words and they have been applied to both the illegal forward pass and intentional grounding rules. It is now no longer necessary for the receiver to have a reasonable opportunity to catch the ball, merely that he is in the vicinity. This reverts to a previous version of the rule and brings it into alignment with the NFL, relaxing the rule significantly. There is the matter of interpreting what is in the 'area' and the advice I have received is to be generous. A further, silent, editorial change to Rule 7-3-2-a-Exception makes it clear that only the player who receives the pass can throw the ball away if he has been outside the tackle box as long as it crosses or lands beyond the neutral zone extended.

Rule 9-1-6

ARTICLE 6. There shall be no blocking below the waist (Rule 2-3-2) (A.R. 9-1-6-I-VII).

Exceptions:

1. Against the runner.
2. Before a change of possession on scrimmage downs that do not include kicks, blocking below the waist is allowed as follows:
 - (a) Players of the offensive team who at the snap are:
 - (1) On the line of scrimmage more than seven yards from the middle lineman of the offensive formation; or
 - (2) In the backfield with any part of the body outside the tackle box; or
 - (3) In motion;

may block below the waist only along a north-south line (Rule 2-12-9) or toward the sideline adjacent to them at the snap.

(b) Players of the offensive team who at the snap are completely inside the tackle box or on the line of scrimmage inside the seven-yard limit may block below the waist.

(c) Players of the defensive team who at the snap are inside the blocking zone extended to the sideline may block below the waist inside that area until the blocking zone disintegrates (Rule 2-3-6-b) except against a Team A player in position to receive a backward pass.

This is probably the most substantial change to the rules this year and also the one that has provoked a clarification which changes the final point. Let's deal with that first.

On 24 June, the Rules Committee issued a clarified wording that states:

Players of the defensive team may block below the waist until the ball has gone more than five yards beyond the neutral zone.

However, they may not block below the waist against a Team A player in position to receive a backward pass. They also may not block below the waist against an eligible Team A receiver beyond the neutral zone unless attempting to get to the ball or the ball carrier.

The most important thing to note about this rule change is that the default for blocking below the waist has gone from being legal to being illegal.

When the rule change was originally approved, Team B players were completely banned from blocking below the waist except in the blocking zone extended to the sideline. As this blocking zone quickly disintegrates it was felt that this was a little inequitable and tipped the balance unfairly towards the offense. The addition in the printed rule book of an additional prohibition protecting a Team A player in position to receive a backward pass pushed it even further resulting in a highly unusual memo changing the wording. Now the rule is a little broader, allowing Team B players to block below the waist until the ball has gone five yards downfield. However, the restriction in favour of the Team A player remains and is joined by eligible receivers beyond the neutral zone unless the Team B player is attempting to get to the ball or the ball carrier.

The runner retains his status as dog meat and can be legally blocked below the waist and the prohibition of all blocking below the waist after a change of possession and during a scrimmage kick down remains. Similarly, Team A players who are completely within the tackle box or who are less than seven yards from the middle lineman may still block below the waist in any direction. However, all other Team A players, i.e. those who at the snap are

- on the line of scrimmage more than seven yards from the middle lineman or
- in the backfield with any part of the body outside the tackle box (defined in Rule 2-34 as five yards either side of the snapper – don't be fooled by any training videos that suggest otherwise) or
- in motion

may only block below the waist if the direction of the block is in a north-south direction along the length of the field (there is no longer a need to remember the line through which the ball was snapped) or towards the sideline that was outside of them at the snap. This has added complication to the rule as it means that a player who was on the right side of the formation at the snap may only block below the waist towards that sideline. However, if he crosses the formation he can still only block below the waist towards that sideline. This means that we will need to keep close track of these players. This is a comparatively easy task on a 7-man crew, but a real challenge on a 5- and nigh impossible on a 4-man crew. If we don't then there is the danger that we would incorrectly penalise a player who has crossed the formation thinking that he was in fact in the wrong or worse not penalising an illegal block.

Another thing to note is that for Team A blocks it no longer matters where it occurs on the field. Blocks more than 10 yards downfield are as illegal as blocks nearer the neutral zone.

A word also on the concept of adjacent sideline. If the man is in motion, the adjacent sideline is the one outside of him at the moment of the snap. If his is directly behind the snapper at the snap then the adjacent sideline is the one towards which he is moving.

Sadly, it appears that one complicated and difficult to enforce rule has been replaced by another that is complicated and potentially difficult to enforce.

Rule 9-1-7-c

It is illegal for any player to be clearly out of bounds when he initiates a block against an opponent who is out of bounds. The spot of the foul is where the blocker crosses the sideline in going out of bounds.

Rule 9 has undergone a significant editorial restructure to make it clearer. The old late hit provisions were included within the general unnecessary roughness rule but this has now been separated out and added to with this new provision. This rule covers live-ball situations where, for example, a kicking team punter goes out of bounds to avoid blockers only for them to pursue him out of bounds to block him. This had previously been legal but is now illegal. However, there are some wrinkles. If the block starts inbounds and continues out of bounds it is not necessarily illegal unless there is some form of unnecessary roughness. Remember also that if this is a kicking play any Team A player that goes out of bounds may not legally return inbounds without committing a foul (unless he was blocked out). If the foul is by Team B during a punt or field goal attempt, PSK may apply.

The spot of the foul is the point at which the blocker crosses the sideline and it is a live ball foul. Any dead ball fouls are simply late hits or unnecessary roughness.

Rule 9-2-1

As widely announced over a year ago, unsportsmanlike conduct is now penalised as either a live-ball or dead-ball foul depending on when it occurs. Previously, the result of the previous play always stood as it was always enforced as a dead ball foul. Now, if a player taunts the opposition in the act of scoring a touchdown, if the taunting started before he crosses the goal line then the score is taken away from him. The penalty is therefore more severe than in the past but it does remove the previous anomalous enforcement.

A further change to the rule introduced at this year's meeting is that USC's by Team B now attract an automatic first down if not in conflict with other rules. This now puts personal fouls and USC's on an equal footing across the board.

Rule 9-4

The penalties for illegal batting or illegally kicking the ball (as opposed to an illegal kick) are now only 10 yards. This follows the new philosophy that only personal fouls, USC or pass interference qualify for 15 yards.

Minor Changes

Rule 1-1-3-b adds a requirement that no person outside the team area may be inside the limit lines. This is enforced by game management personnel.

Rule 1-4-6-a (the infamous towel rule) has been tweaked to allow anyone to wear a towel anywhere they like, returning sanity to the game.

Rule 1-4-9 now specifies that the coaches' certification must be in writing.

Rule 1-4-11-g give jurisdiction of communication equipment within the playing enclosure to game management personnel.

Rule 2-12-2 specifies that the plane of the goal line extends between and includes the pylons. This is important to note as it links in with a change to Rule 8-2-1-a below.

Rule 2-12-9 defines the north-south line as an imaginary line that is parallel to the sidelines extending from end line to end line.

Rule 2-27-5 defines the passer as a player who throws a forward pass, not just one who throws a legal forward pass. This has interesting implications when considering roughing the passer fouls as the pass now no longer needs to be legal for the passer to receive protection.

Rule 2-27-12-b specifies that a disqualified player must completely leave the playing enclosure and may not even be within view of the field of play. This coincides with New Zealand practice where we interpreted the rule as a suspension.

Rule 3-2-3-a-1 now states that a period is not extended if a loss-of-down foul is committed by the team in possession. For example, if an illegal forward pass occurs when time expires, the period is not extended even if the penalty is enforced because of the loss of down. This concept was introduced in the last rule book by an AR.

Rule 4-1-3-b has added the words “at the snap” to again correspond with an AR that says that the ball remains alive when held by the holder for a kick or simulated kick while on the ground. This is simply clarification. It is also listed as an Editorial Change, which indicates that there is still some work to be done on how these are presented in the book.

Rule 4-2-4-e, which talks about the out of bounds spot when the ball carrier is airborne, has been deleted and incorporated as an exception to 4-2-4-d (a silent change).

Rule 7-1-2-b-5 specifies that what was an illegal shift when Team A never comes to a one-second stop prior to the snap is now a false start and therefore a dead-ball foul. This was signalled in the original memo as a major editorial change. Illegal shifts are now only live-ball fouls if the shift occurs after the team has been stationary for one second.

Rule 8-2-1-a removes the differentiation between players who were voluntarily airborne whilst scoring a touchdown and those who were involuntarily airborne. The plane of the goal line is now only extended beyond the pylons if the ball carrier touches the pylon or if the ball carrier is touching the ground in the end zone. Previously, if the player was airborne as a result of contact by an opponent then the plane was extended, but no more.

Rule 8-5-1-a-Exception 2 makes it clear that for the momentum rule to apply the ball must remain in the end zone to prevent a safety.

Rule 9-1-4 makes changes to the rule regarding contact to a defenceless player. It is now illegal to target and initiate contact to the head or neck area of a defenceless opponent with the helmet, forearm, elbow or shoulder. This is more specific than the old rule which did not list what was used to make the contact.

Rule 9-1-11-b-3 changes the leaping foul by stating that it is not a foul if an offensive player initiates contact against the player who leaps.

Rule 9-1-16-a-5 makes it a little easier for the Referee to judge roughing the kicker by exempting a player who is blocked into the kicker or holder by an opponent whether that block is legal or illegal.

Rule 9-2-6-b requires a disqualified player to leave the playing enclosure within a reason amount of time after his disqualification. Once gone, he must remain out of view of the field under team supervision. **Rule 9-1-b-2** penalises him for USC if he doesn't.

Rule 10-1-5 has a small change to correspond with the change to the USC rule to specify that truly dead-ball USC fouls are offset and the penalties cancelled in the same way as personal fouls if they are reported before any of the fouls have been completed.

Rule 10-2-5-a-1 adds USCs to personal foul penalties which can be carried over to either the try or the kickoff if they occur during a down that ends in a touchdown, further reinforcing that the penalties are treated exactly the same as each other.

Editorial Changes

Rule 1-1-3-b has been changed to clarify that the score is final when the referee declares the game to have ended.

Rule 1-2-8 now spells out the officials' duties when inspecting the field and when that responsibility is handed over to game management.

Rule 1-3-2-f now makes it clear that once the game balls have been handed over to the referee they remain under the general supervision of the officials throughout the game.

Rule 1-4, the player and playing equipment rule, has been reorganised and 1-4-2-b, mandatory numbering, has been moved to Rule 7.

Rule 2-4, which contains the definitions for catch, recovery and possession, has been reorganised. In fact, much of Rule 2 has been renumbered.

Rule 2-16-7-c is a new provision that states that the kicker must be entirely beyond the neutral zone for a kick to be illegal. This brings the rule into line with illegal forward passes beyond the neutral zone.

Rule 2-22 contains a more fulsome definition of a shift.

Rule 2-25-8-h adds the momentum rule to the definition of the spot where a run ends.

Rule 2-25-11 adds an additional special case to the list of exceptions for PSK enforcement by adding Rule 6-5-1-b, which talks about a muffed fair catch attempt. In that case, the PSK spot is the spot where the receiver first touched the kick, which would also be the succeeding spot when he catches it.

Rule 2-27-4-a-2 (a silent change) now only requires that a lineman has his shoulder approximately parallel to his opponent's sideline.

Rule 2-27-14 has added the list of defenceless players that were rather oddly included in the points of emphasis last time.

Rule 2-31-6 has added a definition for the side zone. This was always a strange anomaly that side zones used to be referred to but never defined. This was corrected by defining them everywhere in the book except Rule 2. Fixed now.

Rule 2-34 makes it clear that the tackle box, like the blocking zone, disintegrates when the ball leaves it.

Rule 3-1-3-g adds USC penalties specifically to the list of those penalties that are carried across after a change of team possession in extra time. This is part of the new live-ball enforcement change.

Rule 3-2-2-h makes reference to Rule 12 for timing adjustments when Instant Replay is involved.

Rule 3-2-2-e-10 in the old rule book has been removed. This is a significant change as the clock is no longer stopped when a runner's helmet comes off and the play is immediately dead.

Rule 3-4-2-b-8 adds action clearly designed to delay the officials from making the ball ready for play to the list of illegal delay of game fouls. This could now be interpreted to include players who do not return the ball after a long incomplete pass. Our current interpretation is that the 20-second rule does not apply in those circumstances and Team A gets no benefit for not returning the ball. Interestingly, there appears to be a typo in Rule 3-4-2-a which talks about the clock resuming from either 30 seconds or 25 seconds. I have not found any comment on this at all and presume it to be a mistake.

Rules 7-1 and 7-3-2 have been reorganised.

Rule 8-5-1-a-Exceptions have been slimmed down significantly from the previously wordy versions.

Rule 9-1 has been completely redone to make it much easier to find the elements of the various personal fouls.

Rule 9-2-3-a, which talks about any person other than a player or official interfering with the play, has been moved from elsewhere.

Rule 10-2-3, the PSK enforcement rule, has been reworded and is now much easier to follow.

Wagging the dog – Changes to Approved Rulings

So often over the years changes to the ARs have led to rule changes in succeeding years as the Rules Committee realised that it had got ahead of itself. Having said this, it is noticeable that a change from 2001 (AR 7-1-5-III), which effectively introduced the NFL's unabated-towards-the-quarterback rule still has not been ratified by a genuine rule change.

This year there are 23 new ARs with no editorial changes listed, although some unlisted ARs are shaded to indicate that they have been changed. Some of these changes, including AR 3-4-2-II and the newly numbered 9-1-10-V, are identical to last year, which suggests that the publishers need to take more care when typesetting the book (too much copy and paste). All of the changes are either illustrations of the new rules or amendments to cope with rule changes or numbering changes.

AR 9-4-1-XI adds a 'common sense' provision by illustrating that if the ball falls from the tee just as the kicker starts his kicking motion and he actually kicks it, the crew should reset the play and give him another chance.

So there you have it: the wonder that is this year's rule changes. I hope you enjoyed reading about them as much as I enjoyed writing about them. If you don't have access to a printed copy of the rulebook, an online version can be downloaded from the NCAA's website:

<http://www.ncaapublications.com/DownloadPublication.aspx?download=FR12.pdf>

You'll need Adobe Reader to view it. Go to <http://www.adobe.com/> and follow the links. If you want something a little lighter and less prone to security challenges, try Foxit Reader:

http://www.foxitsoftware.com/Secure_PDF_Reader/

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions and I will endeavour to get an answer.

Happy reading.



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