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Football taunting rule could be tougher by 2011

Rules committee also takes action regarding concussions

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The NCAA News

The NCAA Football Rules Committee endorsed a proposal Wednesday that penalizes unsportsmanlike conduct as a live-ball foul beginning in the 2011 season.

The change would mean, for example, that if a player makes a taunting gesture to an opponent on the way to scoring a touchdown, the flag would nullify the score and penalize the offending team from the spot of the foul.

Penalties for dead-ball misconduct fouls (for example, unsportsmanlike behavior after the player crosses the goal line) would continue to be assessed on the ensuing kickoff or the extra point/two point conversion attempt.

The proposal to penalize unsportsmanlike acts as live-ball fouls received near-majority support in the committee's annual rules survey and during discussions at the American Football Coaches Association convention in January.

"Our committee firmly believes in the team concept of college football," said Mike Bellotti, chair of the committee and athletics director at Oregon. "Taunting and prolonged individual acts have no place in our game, and our officials have generally handled these rules well. This is just another step in maintaining our game's image and reflecting the ideals of the NCAA overall."

The NCAA Playing Rules Oversight Panel must approve the proposed change before it can be implemented for the 2011 season.

Committee members also took steps at their annual meeting this week in Indianapolis to ensure player health and safety by endorsing a rule requiring all injured student-athletes, including those who exhibit signs of a concussion, to be cleared by an appropriate medical professional (as determined by the institution) before returning to competition.

Bellotti said the proposal extends current policies regarding injured players to specifically cover possible concussions.

The action comes on the heels of the Playing Rules Oversight Panel's endorsement of recommendations from the NCAA Committee on Competitive Safeguards and Medical Aspects of Sports to manage concussion issues more effectively. At its meeting in January, PROP instructed playing-rules committees to review their policies in the areas of stopping play for injuries and to consider instituting rules that may further prevent head injuries.

"First, the committee strongly believes that the football community is fully behind our main charge of maximizing the protection of the student-athlete," said Bellotti. "Our committee actions reinforce this stance and extend the positive policies that are already in place."

The committee also reviewed the success of its efforts to curb dangerous contact. Last season, the

committee enhanced its rules that cover dangerous contact, specifically collisions that target a defenseless player. During the 2009 season, conferences were mandated to review all fouls of this nature and consider suspensions for egregious violations.

"The committee is generally pleased with how the new rule was implemented and enforced, but there will always be the need for improvement and continued focus on this issue," said Bellotti. "To change behavior, the consequences for dangerous actions must be clear. Therefore, the committee is encouraging more stringent enforcement of this rule and, when warranted, encouraging ejections of players who violate it."

In other news, the committee clarified several equipment issues for 2010, including an issue regarding "eye black." The committee agreed that if a player elects to wear eye shade, it must be solid black with no words, numbers, logos or other symbols.

The committee also took the following actions:

- Removed the reference in the rules book requiring a player's pants to cover the knees at all times. Also, socks no longer have a length requirement, but must continue to be of the same color and general design.
- Elected University of Connecticut coach Randy Edsall as the new chair of the committee. He will succeed Bellotti, whose term as chair ends this year.
- Discussed the possibility of prohibiting an intentional wedge of three or more receiving team players on free kicks. Members will obtain more information by assessing the experience of the National Football League, which introduced such a rule in 2009.
- Agreed to suggest changes to the complicated rules regarding blocking below the waist. The committee will discuss the matter further at the 2011 meeting.
- Recommended that conferences that do not have a pregame warm-up policy use a 10-yard no-player zone between the 45-yard lines beginning 60 minutes before kickoff. This reinforces the Statement on Sportsmanship, which was adopted by the committee for inclusion in the 2009-10 NCAA Football Rules Book. The committee will consider formally adding this to the rules book in 2011.
- Agreed that effective in 2011, television monitors will be allowed in the press box coaches' booths. The home team has responsibility for insuring that coaches' booths for both teams have identical television capability.

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