



NCAA Soccer Points of Emphasis 2025 Season

The NCAA has established national points of emphasis for men's and women's soccer, which are effective for the 2025 soccer season. In collaboration with the NCAA National Coordinator of Officials and the Secretary-Rules Editor, feedback was solicited from conference coordinators in identifying areas deserving of special attention with the goal of establishing a more consistent application nationally as well as from conference-to-conference. There will be training videos on each point of emphasis published on RQ+ closer to the start of the season.

- 1. Coaching and Team Area Decorum.** Significant progress was made in this area last season, but there are still areas for improvement. Coaches, and other bench personnel, including players not in the game, are expected to behave in a manner consistent with good sportsmanship. Actions which show a clear lack of respect for game officials or the opposing team will not be tolerated. Officials are reminded that they are expected to punish this type of behavior with a yellow card (caution) or red card (ejection) as appropriate. The following will be emphasized: The coaching area is in front of the team area and must be properly marked with either cones or lines. The substitutes should remain in the team area behind the coaching staff unless they are warming-up. Coaches and substitutes should direct their remarks to their own team and not address opponents or officials. Coaches who leave the coaching area to argue with officials or engage in confrontations with the opposing team or coaching staff are at risk of ejection under Rules 12.7.8.1 and 12.7.8.2. At the same time, officials must be aware of the differences between NCAA Soccer Rules and the International Football Association Board (IFAB) Laws of the Game in order to apply the proper penalty for infractions (e.g., coaches were incorrectly ejected for holding on to the ball to delay restarts and reaching out to touch balls that were still in play).
- 2. Handling the Ball.** The NCAA Men's and Women's Soccer Rules Committee in recent years has worked to align the interpretation of handling offenses with the teachings of the IFAB Law of the Game. The interpretation of handling should be consistent with these teachings. The following will be considered handling violations:
 - a. Deliberately touching the ball with the hand or arm (Rule 12.2.8.1.1).
 - b. Either scoring either directly in the opponent's goal or immediately after the ball has touched the hand or arm, regardless of intent (Rules 12.2.8.1.2 and 12.2.8.1.3).
 - c. Touching the ball with the hand or arm after the player has made their body unnaturally bigger (Rule 12.2.8.1.4). Exceptions are made for situations in which a player first plays the ball legally and the ball then deflects to their hand or arm. (Rule 12.2.8.3.1).
- 3. Player Misidentification for Misconduct Issued and Need for All Officials to Confirm the Box Score (Rules 5.5.2.1 & 6.4.3).** There have been 58 protests over the last three seasons for cards being charged to the wrong individual. This number can be reduced by attention to proper procedures as follows:
 - a. The referee should isolate the player receiving the card so that the official scorekeeper and the other members of the officiating crew can identify the correct player.

- b. All members of the officiating crew should record information on each disciplinary card displayed during the game.
- c. If electronic communication devices are being used, the referee should verbally announce the number, jersey color of the player and the color of the card.
- d. All officials must confirm the information in the box score before leaving the site of competition. It is also best practice for the referee or fourth official to confirm misconduct information with the official scorekeeper at halftime when possible.
- e. Officials and head coaches should check box scores posted online on the host institution's athletics website. The conference coordinator of soccer officials should be notified immediately regarding any discrepancies or errors.
- f. In the case of misconduct issued to bench personnel, the referee should confirm the name of the individual receiving the misconduct to their conference coordinator/assignor to ensure the proper individual is charged with the misconduct. This is particularly important because the software used for soccer box scores does not allow the identification of bench personnel by name. Box scores showing cards to coaches usually display TM or #00. It is the responsibility of each institution to correctly track the cards issued to its coaching staff and enforce the appropriate penalties when card accumulation thresholds have been reached.

4. Proper Implementation of Misconduct Cards on Penalty Kicks. When a penalty kick has been awarded by the referee, players should be ejected for Denial of an Obvious Goal Scoring Opportunity ONLY under the following circumstances:

- a. A deliberate and cynical handling offense (same as the IFAB Laws of the Game); or,
- b. A pushing, holding foul or any other foul where the defender was not attempting to play the ball (same as the IFAB Laws of the Game).

In all other circumstances, the punishment for a penalty kick offense that denies an obvious goal scoring opportunity is a caution. Yellow cards should not be issued for penalty kicks that are considered attempts to stop a promising attack. Regardless of the above, actions that are considered Serious Foul Play or Violent Behavior should always be punished with an ejection.

5. Timekeeping. College soccer has unique timing rules that officials must be aware of and properly implement. Officials should concentrate on proper enforcement of the following:

- a. Rules 5.6.3 and 6.3.5.7 give the referee the ability to issue misconduct to the losing team during the last five minutes of regulation play without stopping the clock. The intent of the rules are to prevent incentivizing the losing team from committing misconduct in order to stop the clock. Officials are encouraged to use this tool to ensure that the losing team does not benefit from breaking the rules.
- b. Rules 3.8.8 and 6.3.5.4 require the clock to stop on any substitution involving the winning team in the final 15 minutes of the second half, any substitution by either team in the final 15 minutes of the second half or any overtime period when the game is tied. This rule was implemented by the Rules Committee to reduce the amount of time lost due to substitutions when teams might try to consume time by using substitutions to gain a tactical advantage.

- c. Rules 6.3.5.8 and 6.3.5.9 give the referee the authority to stop the clock without issuing a caution when they need to address participant behavior or when they feel time wasting is occurring. Proper use of these rules will allow for better game management.