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Change to football's kickoff rule recommended

Return teams could be allowed to fair catch kicks, start ensuing drive at 25-yard line

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The NCAA Football Rules Committee on Friday proposed altering the game's kickoff rules to allow the receiving team to fair catch the kick inside the 25-yard line and have it result in a touchback.

The committee made the proposal to address player safety on the kickoff and to address tactics that attempt to pin the receiving team close to its goal line. All other aspects of the kickoff play will remain the same.

The proposal is the latest in a series of changes the committee has made in recent years in hopes of making the play safer. Before the 2012 season, kickoffs were moved from the 30-yard line to the 35. The committee also changed the starting position on touchbacks that year so that the receiving team started its drive on the 25-yard line instead of the 20.

“The committee discussed the kickoff play at great length and we will continue to work to find ways to improve the play,” said Larry Fedora, chair of the committee and head coach at North Carolina. “We believe making one change will allow us to study the effect of this change in terms of player safety.”

All rules recommendations must be approved by the NCAA Playing Rules Oversight Panel, which is scheduled to discuss the football proposals via conference call April 13.

Blocks below the waist

After a robust discussion of the rules dealing with low blocks, the committee approved a package of proposals to simplify the rule and make those blocks safer. The most noticeable change deals with offensive blocks: If approved, the offense will not be allowed to block below the waist when the block occurs more than five yards beyond the line of scrimmage. Additionally, other than the interior linemen, all blocks below the waist must be from the front.

Pace of play

The committee was pleased with last year's efforts to reduce the dead time in the game without adjusting playing rules that impact the fabric of the game. With the enforcement of the 20-minute halftime period and other administrative adjustments, the overall game length in Football Bowl Subdivision games was reduced by more than four minutes.

The committee approved two proposals that continue its efforts to keep the game moving. After a touchdown, the play clock will be set at 40 seconds in order to expedite the extra point or two-point conversion attempt. Additionally, following a kickoff, the play clock will be set to 40 seconds in order to restart play more quickly.

"In discussions with the college football community, the committee's goal is to identify ways to keep the game moving and reducing as much as possible the down time in the stadium," said Steve Shaw, secretary-rules editor. "These changes will not take plays out of the game, but will positively impact the flow of the game."

During this week's meeting, the committee met jointly with representatives from the Division I Competition Committee, National Football League and others in an effort to continue to enhance the sport.

Other significant changes

- The addition of a 10-second runoff was approved when instant replay overturns the ruling on the field inside of one minute in either half and the correct ruling would not have stopped the game clock.
- The committee approved the continuation of a collaborative instant-replay decision-making model that is not limited to the press box in the stadium.
- Leaping rules on field goals and extra points were adjusted to mirror similar rules dealing with leaping the shield on punting plays. It is illegal to leap over the frame of the body of an opponent.
- On successful field goals, penalty enforcement will be the same as on made extra points. Namely, all personal fouls and unsportsmanlike conduct fouls by the defending team will have the option to be enforced on the ensuing kickoff.

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