



Need-to-Know Rule Changes for 2017 College Football Season

CFO and NFF team up to highlight the changes designed to protect players and increase safety.

IRVING, Texas (Aug. 23, 2017) – As the season draws near, the month of August provides the perfect time for the National Football Foundation (NFF) & College Hall of Fame to highlight the key rule changes that will take effect during the 2017 college football season.

Since 2011, the NFF has partnered with **Rogers Redding**, the national coordinator of College Football Officiating (CFO), to help generate awareness for the rule changes in college football through a series of regular columns distributed by the NFF. The CFO functions as the national professional organization for all football officials who work games at the collegiate level, and the organization held its annual winter meeting of conference coordinators for football officials in late January for the fifth consecutive year at the NFF headquarters in Irving, Texas.

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Having officiated football for more than three decades, Redding started his career working high school football in Texas. He later officiated in the Southwest Conference from 1988-93, served as a referee in the Southeastern Conference for nearly a decade and worked three national championship games. He received his bachelor's degree from Georgia Tech and later obtained a masters and PhD in physical chemistry from Vanderbilt. Redding was honored with the NFF's Outstanding Football Official Award in 2010.

The NCAA football rules committee recommended a very small number of changes for the 2017 season, and these were approved earlier this year by the Playing Rules Oversight Panel (PROP). Because 2017 is the "off year" for changes, the committee was limited to making rules that directly impact the safety of the players. Here are the 2017 major rule changes as summarized by Rogers Redding:

Horse Collar Tackle

The nameplate area of the jersey is added to the inside collar of the shoulder pad and jersey as places where it is illegal for a tackler to grab a ball carrier and immediately pull him to the ground. The committee recognizes that on occasion a tackler grabs the nameplate area and jerks the ball carrier down, with the same effect as if his grip was on the collar.

Leaping and Hurdling

No defensive player who runs forward from beyond the neutral zone may leap or hurdle in an obvious attempt to block a field goal or try. Before this change, a player committed a foul only if he landed on another player. This year, the committee took note of some players being injured in making these moves when trying to block a place kick, so the change is an attempt to take this leaping and hurdling action out of the game.

2018 Rule Change – Knee Pads

Beginning in 2018, players' pants must have knee pads such that the pants and the pads cover the knees. Previously, the rules recommended that the knees be covered, but this was not required. The committee is delaying implementation of the mandate until 2018 because a number of schools have already bought equipment for the year. There is great concern throughout the football world about the tendency for some players to wear "biker's shorts" that only come to within several inches of the knee. This is a safety issue as well as one that does not present a good look for the game.

Point of Emphasis – Game Length

Length of games is a topic under active discussion among conference commissioners, athletics directors, television people and other stakeholders of college football. The NCAA football rules committee has also been looking at this, as game times have crept up over the last several years.

Since 2008, when games at the FBS level averaged three hours and nine minutes, game time on average in 2016 stretched to three hours and 22 minutes, an increase of 13 minutes. Of course, this is an average that washes out a lot of detail. But it is clear that with a growing number of teams running high-powered offenses that generate more plays and more touchdowns, the overall length of games has naturally gone up.

In discussing this trend, the rules committee has not settled on an optimum game length. But the general sense is that times as long as three and a half hours would not be good for the game. As the committee seeks ways to deal with this, there is little support for making rules changes that would take plays out of the game. And so it will look for ways to manage the length of the game by addressing how to manage the dead-ball times. Officials are charged with the responsibility of being efficient in handling dead-ball intervals and plays where the game clock stops, such as incomplete passes.

One point of emphasis for the officials this year will be to have better control of the length of halftime. By rule the halftime is 20 minutes, but there are often some delays in starting the countdown. Also, current rules allow the schools to mutually agree that the halftime will be longer than 20 minutes. One small but perhaps significant editorial change for 2017 is this: the teams will be allowed to agree on a shorter halftime, but they may not make it longer than 20 minutes. And the referees are being instructed to start the 20-minute halftime countdown as soon as the first half ends, per the language of the rule. The hope is that these steps will halt the trend for longer game times.

About College Football Officiating, LLC

College Football Officiating (CFO) was formed in 2008 by the NCAA and the Collegiate Commissioners' Association for the purpose of ensuring consistent application of NCAA football playing rules and officiating mechanics; establishing a central leader for officiating; enhancing the existing Division I conference officiating programs to ensure officials and conferences adhere to NCAA and CCA rules and policies; and positioning the officiating community for the future in an attempt to present players, coaches and fans with the best experience possible. For more on the CFO, go to <https://cfo.arbitersports.com>.

ABOUT THE NATIONAL FOOTBALL FOUNDATION & COLLEGE HALL OF FAME

Founded in 1947 with early leadership from General Douglas MacArthur, legendary Army coach Earl "Red" Blaik and immortal journalist Grantland Rice, The National Football Foundation & College Hall of Fame is a non-profit educational organization that runs programs designed to use the power of amateur football in developing scholarship, citizenship and athletic achievement in young people. With 120 chapters and 12,000 members nationwide, NFF programs include FootballMatters.org, the College Football Hall of Fame in Atlanta, The William V. Campbell Trophy presented by Fidelity Investments, annual scholarships of more than \$1.3 million and a series of initiatives to honor the legends of the past and inspire the leaders of the future. NFF corporate partners include Delta Air Lines, Fidelity Investments, Herff Jones, New York Athletic Club, Pasadena Tournament of Roses, PrimeSport, the Sports Business Journal, Under Armour and VICIS. Learn more at www.footballfoundation.org.

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