

NCAA's Experimental Concussion Rules Stop Game Clocks and Protect Players

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Last month the NCAA passed an experimental rule for football programs allowing medical observers to notify game officials or teams' medical staffs when a player suffers a concussion. The observers are allowed to watch gameplay from an instant replay booth, and even stop the game clock to ensure an injured player can be safely removed from the field. The rule is discretionary, as universities can choose whether they wish to employ such observers. However, both the Big Ten and Southeastern Football conferences have made this rule mandatory, and members of the Pac 12 conference have employed similar officials since 2013.

This experimental rule comes one year after the NCAA overhauled its concussion guidelines. In its 2014 Sports Medicine Handbook, the NCAA outlined the signs and symptoms of concussions, and listed a six step return-to-play protocol for players diagnosed with a concussion. Additionally, in 2010 the NCAA Executive Committee adopted new concussion policies for institutions in all three divisions. These policies both state that institutions must have a concussion management plan, and proscribe mandatory removal from competition of players with concussion symptoms. Also, these policies state that a violation of Constitution 3.2.4.17, which establishes the team physician's authority to oversee medical services for student-athletes' injuries, shall be considered an institutional violation per Constitution 2.8.1, which details the Principles of Rules Compliance.

Client Tip: *Institutions should review their concussion policies, and ensure qualified medical professionals have the power to remove athletes with concussion symptoms from practice or games.*

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