

NCAA Rule Changes 2015-2016

Umpires Conferencing on a call

The NCAA Playing Rules Oversight Panel approved a rules change in baseball that allows umpires to conference in order to confirm or overturn an original call on whether a fielder caught a ball hit to the outfield.

Current NCAA baseball rules allow umpires to conference on certain close plays in order to get calls right. Catches in the outfield now have been added to that list of plays.

Video Replay

Panel members, who met via conference call Tuesday, also approved expanding the experimental video replay rule to include “catch” and “no catch” plays. Starting in 2015, conferences will also be able to request through the rules committee to use the experimental video replay rule in regular season games in addition to conference tournament games.

The video replay rule has been in effect at the Men’s College World Series since 2012 and is expected to last another two seasons. The “catch” or “no catch” scenarios will join the following plays that can be reviewed:

- deciding if an apparent home run is fair or foul;
- deciding whether a batted ball left the playing field for a home run or a ground-rule double;
- spectator-interference plays (only on plays involving home run balls); and
- deciding if a batted ball is fair or foul.

So far the replay rule has not been used at the MCWS.

Under the “catch” or “no catch” rule, if a play to the outfield originally is called a catch but is overturned by umpire conference or through video evidence, the play will be declared dead and the batter will be placed at first base. Each base runner will be advanced one base from the position occupied at the time of the pitch.

If the play is overturned in foul territory, it will be ruled a foul ball and all runners will return to the base they occupied at the time of the pitch.

On plays to the outfield that are overturned from “no catch” to “catch,” all action prior to the ball being declared dead will be disallowed. The batter will be declared out and all runners returned to the base they occupied at the time of the pitch.

The NCAA Baseball Rules Committee also wants conferences to apply to use the experimental video replay rule next spring. In 2014, the committee granted permission for the Southeastern Conference, the Atlantic Coast Conference and the West Coast Conference to use the instant replay rule in conference tournament games.

The West Coast Conference had two video reviews in its 2014 conference tournament. One review confirmed the call of a foul ball hit down the left field line, and the other review didn’t have a conclusive angle on a ball hit down the right field line that was ruled fair, allowing the original fair-ball call to remain.

Hit batter

The panel approved a new rule change regarding batters hit by pitches.

Starting in 2015, a batter must make an attempt to avoid being hit by the ball. If the umpire rules the batter did not make an attempt to get out of the way, or that he leaned into the path of the ball or intentionally tried to be hit by the ball, a pitch inside the strike zone that touches the batter will be called a strike. If the pitch is outside the strike zone, it will be called a ball. In either case, the batter will not be awarded first base.

Foul poles

The panel approved a proposal that requires all foul poles on fields operated by NCAA schools to be painted fluorescent yellow by the 2016 season.

The NCAA Baseball Rules Committee received feedback that some facilities have white, red or blue foul poles, but fluorescent yellow is the best color to help umpires determine whether a potential home run is foul or fair.

Seven-inning games

Panel members approved allowing a seven-inning game that was originally scheduled as part of a doubleheader but cannot be started – or had been halted or suspended – to be played as a seven-inning contest the following day or at a future time.

However, stand-alone seven-inning baseball games are prohibited in NCAA play, so the NCAA Baseball Rules Committee wanted to provide specific guidance to ensure the double-header rules are applied consistently around the country.