

NCAA Men's and Women's Ice Hockey Rules Committee annual meeting

By Ty Halpin

The Men's and Women's Ice Hockey Rules Committee slightly altered its goal crease rule and continued its emphasis on proper rules enforcement during its meeting June 6-9 in Indianapolis.

The committee's proposals will be forwarded to the Playing Rules Oversight Panel for final approval.

The rule regarding the goal crease was changed to give the official some latitude when a goal is scored and an attacking player is in the crease. Previously, this goal would be disallowed, even when the attacking player did not interfere with the goalkeeper or have anything to do with the play. In several high-profile cases, goals were disallowed that likely would have counted during the regular season because of the use of video replay.

"First and foremost, the committee feels the crease rule is a good one as written for regular season play," said Rico Blasi, chair of the rules committee and head men's coach at Miami (Ohio) University. "In some situations when we have the benefit of video replay, goals were disallowed that would count otherwise. We decided to change this, but want to make it clear that our goalkeepers must have room to play their positions and officials must use this rule to keep players out of the crease."

In the new rule, the referee has the discretion to allow a goal if there is an attacking player in the crease, but the attacking player – by the referee's judgment – has no bearing on the play.

Boarding and charging were better defined to note that these penalties are "from the front or side." The committee hopes this will help officials to properly call hitting from behind more often and take away the option of a lesser penalty.

"We feel that, in many cases, hitting from behind is called as boarding or charging, when it should be hitting from behind by definition," Blasi said. "To rid our game of these types of plays, we changed the definition slightly."

Now, anytime a player is hit from behind into the boards, regardless of the result of the play, a major penalty and a game misconduct or disqualification must be assessed.

"This is a severe penalty, but the official does have some leeway to call a game misconduct or disqualification," Blasi said. "We will support the officials, as we have with the rules initiative last year, in cracking down on these dangerous plays. Players and coaches must adjust to take these dangerous plays out of our game."

Another major change involves a goal that is scored off of an attacking player's skate. The committee changed the rule to allow goals off an attacking player's skate, provided there is not a "distinct kicking motion."

"We felt like using a skate to direct the puck into the goal is a tremendous skill and that skill should be rewarded," Blasi said. "Clearly, any goal that is scored by kicking the puck will not be allowed."

The committee also approved video replay to be used in any game, provided one of two replay systems are used. The NCAA system, which is used in championships and any tournaments, requires a video replay official as the sole arbiter of the replay and that official has the final decision.

The Western Collegiate Hockey Association experimented with an ice level system last season, with approval from the committee, and the process was successful. Several other conferences indicated interest in using a system, if the rules committee approved use of video technology. Under this system, the same criteria are used for review, but the referee begins the process and reviews the replay at ice level.

"Obviously, what the WCHA did was successful," Blasi said. "We felt like any conference should be able to use it moving forward, provided the minimum criteria are met."

The committee again focused on overall rules enforcement as a point of emphasis, paying particular attention to diving and the strength and size of players who may be unduly penalized only because they are larger and/or stronger. The committee also made hitting from behind a point of emphasis for the upcoming season.

Other rules revisions:

--**Butt-ending and Sparring.** These penalties were redefined to include a major penalty and the option of a game misconduct or a game disqualification penalty at the discretion of the referee. Previously, the only option was a major and a disqualification.

--**Enforcement of Rule 4-7-e.** Goalkeepers are not allowed to freeze the puck (unless to prevent a goal) outside of the crease. The committee feels there are too many unnecessary whistles in situations where a shot is not taken and the goalkeeper freezes the puck.

--**Goalkeeper's equipment.** The committee voted to change the goalkeeper's equipment to be in line with the National Hockey League's equipment specifications, beginning in the 2006-07 season.

--**Spraying the Goalkeeper.** This penalty was changed to read: "A player shall not deliberately spray the goalkeeper. PENALTY – **Minor Misconduct.**"

