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SC-Hurricane brawl has some national repercussions

By [Mitch Vingle](#)

TECHNICALLY, it is Rule 1-1-8, under the heading of "The Game, Field, Players and Equipment."

Not technically at all, it is the "Hurricane-South Charleston Rule."

After the disaster that was the end of the Nov. 19, 2010, Class AAA football playoff game between the Kanawha Valley schools at Laidley Field, the National Federation of State High School Associations has acted to protect itself in the event of future such incidents.

You may remember. If you live in the Valley, it's hard to forget. At the end of the quarterfinal game, won by South Charleston, a brawl ensued.

It was ugly. Fists flying. Police intervention. Reports of tasers. A video that made the national news . . .

Afterward, there was the suspension of five South Charleston players, which led to a lengthy legal battle in which parents of Black Eagle players received a court injunction to let four compete in the playoff semifinals against Brooke. When that injunction was then overturned by the state Supreme Court, SC had to forfeit its win against Brooke and was denied a chance to play in the finals and capture a third straight football title.

The Class AAA game was postponed. There were appeals aplenty. At the crux of the litigation, however, was this ruling by Kanawha County Circuit Judge Carrie Webster, which pointed at the West Virginia Secondary School Activities Commission:

"In this case, the [game] officials violated the rules and the WVSSAC abused its statutory authority. Once the officials' jurisdiction has ended through the referee's declaration [that a game has ended], any subsequent suspensions are purely within the province of that school's principal."

There will no longer be confusion. In an interview with NFHS executive director Robert Gardner and a subsequent press release from the national governing body, it's clear the matter has been addressed.

"In Rule 1-1-8," says the release, "language was added to note that 'game officials maintain administrative responsibilities for the contest through the completion of any required reports or correspondence in response to any action occurring while the officials have jurisdiction.' The revised rule further notes that 'state associations may intercede in the event of unusual incidents after the officials have signaled the end of the game or in the event a game is terminated prior to the conclusion of regulation play.'"

According to SSAC executive director Gary Ray, "we follow NFHS rules ... with very few exceptions."

The national rule change is a done deal in football. Gardner said it's being considered for other sports, and the "NFHS Board will likely take action in April."

"We're pleased with the move in that direction," Ray said. "It will allow officials to get the job done."

The obvious follow-up question centered on video review. The Hurricane-SC scene was videotaped. Why not use technology if it's present? Right now, national and state rules don't allow video use in decisions of discipline. Wouldn't use not only help correctly pinpoint offenders, but

also help cover the organizations' backsides?

"Right now we've not changed our stance on video," Gardner said. "We're pretty narrow in scope on that. State associations can vote to use it, but we haven't on a national scale. Right now there are more states that don't use it."

Ray said he has "mixed feelings" about the use of video.

"The problem in West Virginia, as with many states, is the quality of video replay," Ray said. "Some have it. Some don't. It's not like NCAA games, which have cameras to get every angle. So we have to be careful. But I'll go into our discussions with an open mind."

The SSAC head said video can currently only be used at the end of basketball games, like the state finals. He added his organization has "rules interpreters" in each sport. For football, it's Mike Webb. For swimming, which is now holding its state event, it's Scott Wilson, etc.

"We'll bring them all together in April," Ray said. "I've already talked to a couple of them [about video]. I'm not sure we'll recommend any changes."

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The "Hurricane-SC Rule" is one of 11 rules changes approved by the NFHS Board of Directors. Among the most interesting is the new definition of a chop block.

It is now "a combination block by two or more teammates against an opponent other than the runner, with or without delay, where one of the blocks is low (at the knee or below) and one of the blocks is high (above the knee)." It used to be just a delayed block at the knees or below while a teammate was also in contact. Also, a low-low combination block is no longer a chop block.

And then there's the rule change we've all been awaiting. (Not.) The much-anticipated restriction on eye shade, which, according to the release, "must be applied using a single solid stroke under each eye."

A warning for all considering using two strokes.

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