2026 NCAA Major Ice Hockey Rule Changes and ACHA Additions

All six ACHA Divisions have approved the following rules.

The ACHA divisions are:
Men's Division 1
Men's Division 2
Men's Division 3
Woman's Division 1
Woman's Division 2
American Collegiate Development Conference (ACDC)

The American Collegiate Hockey Association will use the 2026-2028 NCAA Ice Hockey Rule book with the following guidance.

Please download and review the 2026-2028 NCAA Ice Hockey Rule book:
https://ncaaorg.s3.amazonaws.com/championships/sports/icehockey/rules/PRXIH_RulesBook.pdf

Once the 2026-2028 NCAA Ice Hockey Rule book is available for purchase it can be found here:
https://ncaapublications.com/collections/ice-hockey

NOTE: Rules listed below apply to ALL six ACHA divisions.

Rule 7.2 Starting Lineup
If the team that scores a goal on the first shift of the game challenges the starting line-up of the opposing team, and the opposing team did not have the correct starting line-up, the scoring of the goal would nullify the bench minor penalty, and no further penalties would be assessed.

Rule 9.4 Helmets
A player who intentionally removes their helmet during play will be assessed a minor penalty. If a goalkeeper intentionally removes their helmet and/or facemask when the opposing team is on a breakaway, a goal will be awarded to the non-offending team.
Refer to rule 67.1 for additional definition.

Rule 19 Coincidental Penalties
Last Five Minutes and Overtime - During the last five (5) minutes of regulation time, or at any time in overtime, when a minor penalty (or double-minor penalty) is assessed to one player of Team A, and a major (or match) penalty is assessed to one player of Team B at the same stoppage of play, the three-minute (or one-minute) differential shall be served immediately as a major penalty. This is also applicable when coincidental penalties are negated, leaving the aforementioned examples. In such instances, the team of the player receiving the major penalty must place the replacement player in the penalty bench prior to expiration of the penalty. In the case of a major and game misconduct or game disqualification, the team must place the replacement player in the penalty bench immediately. The differential will be recorded on the penalty clock as a three (3) minute or a one (1) minute penalty (as applicable) and served in the same manner as a major penalty. This rule shall be applied regardless as to the on-ice strength of the two teams at the time the above outlined penalties are assessed.
Note: See Appendix G (Page 138) of the 2026-2028 NCAA Rule Book for examples.

Rule 20 Major Penalties
A second major penalty in the same game is an automatic game misconduct.

28.2 Major or Misconduct Penalty to Goalkeeper
A goalkeeper shall not be sent to the penalty bench for an offense which incurs a major or misconduct penalty, but instead, the major or misconduct penalty shall be served immediately by another member of his team who was on the ice when play is stopped and the penalty assessed. This player is to be designated by the Coach of the offending team through the Captain and such substitute shall not be changed.

When a goalkeeper is assessed a major penalty plus a game misconduct, which is coincidental with a major or game misconduct penalty to the opposing team, no player is required to serve the goalkeeper's penalties in the penalty box, since he has been ejected from the game.

Rule 48.1 Fighting
The definition of fighting to be "one player punches or attempts to punch an opponent repeatedly." A singular punch to be penalized as roughing.

Fighting or Punching - A fight shall be deemed to have occurred when at least one player punches or attempts to punch an opponent repeatedly or when two players wrestle in such a manner as to make it difficult for the Linespersons to intervene and separate the combatants.

The Referees are provided very wide latitude in the penalties with which they may impose under this rule. This is done intentionally to enable them to differentiate between the obvious degrees of responsibility of the participants either for starting the fight or persisting in continuing the fight. The discretion provided should be exercised realistically.
PENALTY—Major plus Game Disqualification.

Rule 53.3 Sucker Punch - Women's Game Only.
A major penalty shall be assessed to a player who punches any unsuspecting or unwilling combatant or opponent that could cause injury.
PENALTY—Major.

NOTE:
While the officials have a wide latitude under the new rule interpretations, fighting in ACHA games should penalized as such. Review Roughing rules 53.1, 53.2 and 53.3 for additional definition.

Rule 49 Head-Butting
Allows a minor penalty to be called for an attempted head-butt or a head-butt that is not done forcibly. Reserve the Major and Game Misconduct penalty for a forcible or egregious head-butt.

Rule 50 Checking from Behind
Remove "in open ice" from the checking from behind rule.

Rule 53.3 Hitting after the Whistle
Eliminate "hitting after the whistle," classify this contact as roughing or unsportsmanlike conduct when it occurs.

Rule 55.5 Throwing the Stick
The penalty for throwing the stick outside the playing area from a Misconduct to a Game Misconduct.

Rule 55 Goalkeeper Leaving Stick
If a goalkeeper, upon leaving the ice, leaves the stick or other equipment, or piles snow that stops an "imminent goal," a goal shall be awarded.

Rule 59.1 Interference
When any member of the defending team, including the Coach or any non-playing person, throws or shoots any part of a stick or any other object or piece of equipment at the puck or puck carrier in his defending zone, a penalty shot shall be awarded.
Refer to Rule 55.3 Penalty Shot for definition.

Rule 60 Obstruction/Interference
This rule has been removed from the 2026-2028 rule book.

Rule 67.5 Awarded Goal
During the course of a breakaway, a player or goalkeeper shall not deliberately displace the goal post, or deliberately remove the helmet and/ or face mask.

Rule 67.6 No Line Change
In the event that the puck is shot into the end zone by the attacking team from their own side of the center red line, and the opposing goalkeeper freezes the puck resulting in a stoppage of play, the ensuing face-off shall be conducted at one of the end zone face-off spots in the goalkeeper's defending zone.

The defending team shall not be permitted to make any player substitutions prior to the face-off.
In addition, for both situations outlined in this section, for the ensuing face-off in the defending zone, the attacking team will have the choice of which end zone dot the face-off will take place.

Rule 79.3 wording changed from Ethnic/Racial Slurs to Offensive Language
Making profane, threatening, vulgar, or derogatory remarks or personal comments relating to race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, gender, gender expression, gender identity, sexual orientation, or disability.
PENALTY—Game Disqualification, with the exception of medical personnel. Medical personnel are subject to supplementary discipline penalties.

79.5 Spitting
A player shall not spit on an official, player or non-playing person.
PENALTY—Major and Game Disqualification.

Rule 81 Faceoffs
Requires the blade of the stick to be flat on the ice during faceoffs.

The sticks of both players facing-off shall have a full blade on the ice, within the designated white area.

At the eight face-off spots (excluding center ice face-off spot), the defending player shall place their stick within the designated white area first followed immediately by the attacking player. When the face-off is conducted at the center ice face-off spot, the visiting player shall place their stick on the ice first.

Rule 84. Hand Pass
Defensive Zone - Play will not be stopped for any hand pass by players in their own defending zone. The location of the puck when contacted by either the player making the hand pass or the player receiving the hand pass shall determine the zone it is in.

Rule 84.4 High Stick
When a high-sticking the puck violation by the defensive team in the defensive

zone, a change of players will be permitted by the offending team.

Rule 84.3/84.4 Faceoff Location following Hand Pass or High Stick
The face-off location following a hand pass or high stick violation will take place at the faceoff dot nearest the point of the infraction with the least territorial advantage gained.

Rule 86.1 Offside
A player must control the puck with their stick prior to their skates going into the offensive zone.

A player controlling the puck who shall cross the line ahead of the puck shall not be considered "off-side," provided they have possession and control of the puck with his stick prior to both skates completely crossing the leading edge of the blue line.

92.1 Time-outs
For regular season games each team shall be permitted to take one (1) one-minute time-out.

Only one time-out, commercial or team, shall be permitted at any one stoppage of play. For the purpose of this rule, a commercial time-out is deemed an "official time-out" and not charged to either team.

Back-to-back timeouts are not permitted.

No time-out shall be granted following a face-off violation.

NEW: No time-out shall be granted to the defensive team if they are not permitted to substitute as outlined in Rule 80.3.

NEW: Only one time-out, commercial or team, shall be permitted at any one stoppage of play. For the purpose of this rule, a commercial time-out is deemed an "official time-out" and not charged to either team.

When a penalty shot has been awarded to either team by the Referee, no time-out will be granted once instructions have been given to the player taking the shot and the goalkeeper defending the shot.
No time-out will be granted during the shootout.

92.2 Time-out During Regular Season Overtime
NEW: There shall be no additional time-outs (in overtime) if the game is tied after 60 minutes of play.

Refer to the ACHA manual or ACHA overtime/shootout guidelines posted on the ACHA website for specific ACHA divisional overtime and shootout instructions.
https://www.achahockey.org/officials

91.2 Tied Games - Regular Season – Shootout
Refer to the ACHA manual or ACHA overtime/shootout guidelines posted on the ACHA website for specific ACHA divisional overtime and shootout instructions. https://www.achahockey.org/officials

All players are eligible to participate in the shootout unless they are serving a ten minute misconduct or have been assessed a game misconduct or game disqualification penalty. When a goalkeeper has been assessed a misconduct, the player designated to serve the misconduct penalty becomes ineligible for the shootout. If the misconduct is assessed to the goalkeeper during the course of the shootout, the player designated to serve the misconduct must be a player who has yet to shoot and thus becomes ineligible to shoot.

Rule 94 Rules for Woman's Ice Hockey
94.1 Body Checking
Body checking is not permitted in any area of the ice.
Body checking occurs when a player delivers a distinct and definable moment of impact using overt (blatant) hip, shoulder, arm or torso action in an attempt to separate the puck carrier from the puck.
PENALTY—A minor, major and game misconduct or major and disqualification, at the discretion of the referee.

2026-27 NCAA Women's Ice Hockey Point of Emphasis:
Modernizing the Application of Rule 94 (Body Contact)

Goal: To promote a fast, physical, and skilled game by providing clear distinctions between legal tactical contact and illegal body checking. The focus is on rewarding players who use superior angling and positioning to win puck possession and to further prepare the puck carrier to expect body contact.

Definitions
(i) Body Contact – Women's ice hockey permits competitive body contact that results naturally from angling, puck pursuit, and lane control in the course of legally playing the puck. Players may use body position to impede or contain opponents; however, forceful body checking intended primarily to separate the opponent from the puck through impact remains prohibited.
(ii) Legal Body Contact Mechanics – To be considered legal body contact, the initiating player must:
• Maintain a skating lane or angle consistent with the puck's location.

• Deliver shoulder-to-shoulder contact from a position even or ahead of an opponent.
• Avoid contact initiated from a position behind an opponent where they reasonably cannot expect contact.
• Keep the stick on the ice or in a position to immediately play the puck.
• Avoid any distinct and definable moment of impact using overt (blatant) hip, shoulder, arm or torso extension to deliver force (opposite direction hit).
• Avoid any “explosive” upward or outward motion (driving through the opponent).

Interpretations and Scenarios
To ensure consistency among officials and players, the following scenarios are classified as Legal Body Contact:

Scenario 1: Parallel Possession Pursuit
The Play: Two players are skating in the same direction while one has possession. The defending player is even with or ahead of the puck carrier and initiates shoulder-to-shoulder contact to lean the opponent off the puck.
The Ruling: Legal. Provided there is no extension or “opposite direction” hitting motion, using body weight to separate an opponent from the puck while moving in the same direction is a fundamental defensive skill.
Note: This holds true anytime players are moving in the same direction including when one player is skating forward and the other is skating backward.
Note: Creating contact from a body position behind the puck carrier should be called a body check due to the blind-side nature of the hit as the puck carrier is deemed vulnerable/defenseless.

Scenario 2: The End-Wall Pursuit
The Play: During a pursuit below the goal line, the second player into the zone maintains one hand on their stick and the other guides the puck carrier with a hand on their hip. The pursuing player makes contact to guide the opponent into the boards, keeping their stick on the ice and releasing immediately once the opponent’s momentum is neutralized.
The Ruling: Legal. This is considered “steering” rather than “boarding” or “checking,” provided the player does not extend to shove the opponent excessively.

Scenario 3: The Forward Angle & The “Cut-Back”
The Play: A defender has established a forward angle on a puck carrier. As the puck is released, the defender finishes the angle, resulting in contact. Alternatively, the puck carrier “cuts back” into the space already occupied by the angling defender, causing a collision.
The Ruling: Legal. A player is entitled to their skating lane. If the defender is committed to a legal angling route, they are not required to vacate that space if the puck carrier creates the collision by changing direction into them or tries to continue a route through ice that is not available.

Scenario 4: The 50/50 Puck Battle
The Play: Two players approach a loose puck. Both players engage in body contact to “win the lane” or create a “bubble” of space to protect the puck once it is gathered.
The Ruling: Legal. Players entering a 50/50 battle must expect body contact. As long as the contact is a byproduct of winning the lane and does not involve an opposite direction hit with extension, no penalty shall be assessed.

Guidance to Officials:
When evaluating contact that results in a player going to the ice, the official must judge the action, not the outcome. If the action was a legal attempt to win a lane or maintain puck possession, the play shall continue. The deciding factor between a Minor Penalty for Body Checking and Legal Body Contact is the delivery. A player may position their body to impede, but they may not propel their body to impact.

Note: Body contact that occurs without puck possession falls under the guidance of Rule 59: Interference to determine a penalty.

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