



REPORT OF THE
NCAA DIVISION I SOFTBALL COMMITTEE
AUGUST 5-7, 2025, VIDEOCONFERENCE

ACTION ITEMS.

1. Legislative items.

- None.

2. Nonlegislative items.

- **Automatic qualification.**
 - a. Recommendation. That the following 31 conferences receive automatic bids for the 2026 Division I Softball Championship: America East Conference; American Athletic Conference; Atlantic Coast Conference; Atlantic 10 Conference; Atlantic Sun Conference; Big East Conference; Big Sky Conference; Big South Conference; Big Ten Conference; Big 12 Conference; Big West Conference; Coastal Athletic Association; Conference USA; Horizon League; The Ivy League; Metro Atlantic Athletic Conference; Mid-American Conference; Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference; Missouri Valley Conference; Mountain West Conference; Northeast Conference; Ohio Valley Conference; Patriot League; Southeastern Conference; Southern Conference; Southland Conference; Southwestern Athletic Conference; The Summit League; Sun Belt Conference; West Coast Conference; and Western Athletic Conference.
 - b. Effective date. 2026 NCAA Division I Softball Championship.
 - c. Rationale. Each conference meets the requirements to receive automatic qualification to the championship.
 - d. Estimated budget impact. None.
 - e. Student-athlete impact. None.

INFORMATIONAL ITEMS.

- 1. Review 2024 committee reports and related Sports Oversight Committee information.**

The committee reviewed the 2024 annual meeting reports and discussed various updates and recent business of the NCAA Division I Sports Oversight Committee, including an update to confirm that the 2026 bracketing principles will include a change to seed 50% of the bracket in groups of four as is the current practice for women's soccer and women's volleyball. NCAA staff also provided an overview of the upcoming changes to the Division I governance structure and the establishment of the Division I Softball Oversight Committee.

2. **Review of 2025 selections.** The committee reviewed the selections process and the RPI system. In addition, representatives from 6-4-3 Charts joined the committee to provide an overview of the Diamond Sports Rankings (DSR) predictive metric as a complement to the existing data the committee reviews during the selection process. The committee agreed to seek additional information and input from the National Fastpitch Coaches Association (NFCA) and the Division I Baseball Committee and requested supplemental information from the DSR representatives to review at a later date. The committee also consulted NCAA staff members about the RPI system adjustments to quadrant views based on home, away or neutral location of game that the Division I Baseball Committee applies to determine if a similar change could benefit the softball rankings and selections process particularly when evaluating at-large bubble teams and final seed determinations; more information will be gathered for a future meeting.
3. **Playing rules administration, umpire program and video review summary.** The committee met with NCAA Softball Secretary-Rules Editor Vickie Van Kleeck to review recent business conducted by the NCAA Softball Rules Committee and rules change proposals that will be considered by the NCAA Playing Rules Oversight Panel during an upcoming August meeting. Bat Testing Coordinator Dee Abrahamson summarized key activity from the year. Coordinator of Umpires Steve McCown provided an overview of the Softball Umpire Program's umpire evaluation and selection process and provided highlights about the postseason video review process.
4. **USA Softball.** USA Softball Director of Stadium Operations Troy Canaba joined the meeting to provide a high-level summary of facility improvements planned for Devon Park in Oklahoma City.
5. **National Fastpitch Coaches Association.** The committee met with representatives from the NFCA about championship topics, including the following:
 - **Local end times.** The group discussed the best approach to manage extended game length particularly when a game starts as late as 11 p.m. local time. The committee acknowledged team logistical and recovery issues in this scenario and, while the start time policy will not be adjusted, agreed that reconsideration of an established game time for the following day could be necessary to accommodate appropriate rest time.
 - **Infield turf.** NFCA representatives encouraged the committee to discuss again whether to change the facility policy to allow infield turf surfaces for preliminary round competition. Following subsequent discussion, the committee took no action.
 - **Data/analytics systems.** The committee agreed to require that a preliminary round host must activate a data/analytics system during regional and/or super regional competition if the venue is equipped with one and it was used during the regular season. The type of system must be outlined in the participant manual provided to visiting teams and system's reports must be shared with all teams for all games at the site.

- **Video review.** The committee agreed that hosts must include a map of camera positions in the participant manual provided to visiting teams. ESPN uses these locations as the basis for the broadcast production which, in turn, provides the video used by DVSport for video review. The additional information will help coaches become familiar with the angles that will be used during the video review process.
 - **Squad size.** NFCA representatives encouraged committee members to adjust the squad size of 22 (the number of players eligible to enter postseason games) to equal the recently established Division I softball roster cap of 25 effective with the 2026 championship. Committee members generally agreed with the recommendation but will seek feedback through conference offices to inform a decision during a future meeting. Any change would come without an increase to the travel party given that such a change requires budget approval.
 - **Practice times for preliminary rounds.** The committee received input to revise practice times and agreed to increase regional practice to 2 hours and super regional practice to 3 hours (to include a warm-up period).
6. **Regional and super regional review.** The committee reviewed regional and super regional site administration and emphasized the importance of sending feedback to preliminary round hosts to make improvements to be eligible for future hosting. The committee also evaluated the home/away designation for regional play, specifically whether to: 1) allow the higher seed the choice of home/away for the first game; or 2) assign the higher seed as the home team throughout the regional. NCAA staff will gather home/away designation information from conference tournaments to inform a future discussion. In addition, the committee determined that the visiting team will go first for line drills throughout all rounds of the championship to allow a smoother transition into the introduction of starting lineups. The facilities subcommittee will work on a daily team schedule that captures all team obligations including bat testing. NCAA staff provided an update regarding an increase to the minimum ticket prices established for preliminary round games.

In addition, the committee agreed during a future meeting to develop goals and desired outcomes to consider a change to a four-day regional that would take into account budget, date formula, broadcast, and other impacts.

7. **Review of 2025 Championships – Women’s College World Series.** The committee reviewed the Women’s College World Series and addressed the following:
- **Timing for media obligations.** The committee discussed options to improve team experience related to the practice opportunity and media obligations prior to the start of competition; the current schedule combines both into one day. The committee had initial discussion about: 1) designating Tuesday as the practice day while maintaining Wednesday as the media day; and 2) limiting the practice on Wednesday to stadium practice only (i.e., 50 minutes). The committee will revisit the ideas during a future

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- meeting.
- **Semifinal if necessary game schedule.** The committee began discussion about whether if necessary games should be scheduled to take place on Tuesday (the off day) rather than immediately following the semifinal game on Monday. The committee noted the benefits of a format that requires teams to only play a single game in a day but acknowledged that a change would eliminate the day of rest in advance of the WCWS Finals. Notably, this off day was instituted to provide appropriate rest for the two teams advancing to the WCWS Finals and could absorb game postponements due to weather issues that occurred earlier in the series. The committee agreed to return to the discussion to address how weather delays would be managed in the event the two finalist teams could not be determined by Wednesday (the start of the WCW Finals) and to consult further with television broadcast partner ESPN.
8. **ESPN.** The committee met with NCAA broadcast staff and ESPN representatives to review the successful softball season, inclusive of production, programming, and ratings for the championship. The review included discussion about ways to improve elements of the video review process that impact production and viewer experience (e.g., length of review time and communication about video review results). The group also discussed other key topics including concepts for a four-day regional format, the semifinal if necessary schedule, and the schedule for team media obligations at the Women's College World Series.
 9. **Administrative items.** NCAA staff summarized the list of conferences eligible for automatic qualification to the 2026 NCAA Division I Softball Championship (refer to nonlegislative action item) and commented on updates that will be made to the championship's administrative manuals.
 10. **Committee responsibilities and composition.** The committee reviewed the upcoming committee composition changes and agreed to select a vice chair and chair upon the formation of the new committee. The committee thanked outgoing committee members Kristi Bredbenner and Lori Perez for their tremendous service to the committee.
 11. **Other business.** The committee proposed agenda topics for an upcoming joint meeting with the Division I Baseball Committee. The committee also responded to a question about whether the deadline for conferences to submit automatic qualifiers could move to Monday and confirmed that the existing deadline (Sunday) is appropriate and provides the necessary time for teams to prepare for regional competition.

Committee Chair: Kurt McGuffin, University of Tennessee at Martin.
Staff Liaisons: Liz Turner Suscha, Championships and Alliances
Kelly Whitaker, Championships and Alliances
Paige Newman, Championships and Alliances

Report of the NCAA Division I Softball

Committee Videoconference

August 5-7, 2025

Page No. 5

Division I Softball Committee August 5-7, 2025, Videoconference	
Attendees:	
Kristi Bredbenner, Wichita State University.	
Tara Brooks, University of Tennessee, Knoxville.	
Natalie Gonzalez Honnen, Clemson University.	
Heather Hunter, University of California, Davis.	
Jessica Leger, University of Louisiana at Lafayette.	
Kurt McGuffin, University of Tennessee at Martin.	
Lori Perez, Sacramento State.	
Keanah Smith, Western Michigan University.	
Holly VanVlymen, South Dakota State.	
Jane Wagner, Northwestern.	
Absentees:	
None.	
Guests in Attendance:	
Rick Ahlf, 6-4-3 Charts.	
Forrest Allen, 6-4-3 Charts.	
Meg Aronowitz, ESPN.	
Dee Abrahamson, Bat Testing.	
Larissa Anderson, University of Missouri, Columbia.	
Carol Bruggeman, NFCA.	
Sarah Caffery, 6-4-3 Charts.	
Troy Canaba, USA Softball.	
Ian Dunning, ESPN.	
Mallory Kenny, ESPN.	
Joanna Lane, NFCA.	
Steve McCown, NCAA Coordinator of Umpires.	
Nick Rud, ESPN.	
Vickie Van Kleeck, NCAA Softball Secretary-Rules Editor.	
Derek Weldon, 6-4-3 Charts.	
NCAA Staff Support in Attendance:	
Paige Newman, Championships and Alliances.	
Liz Turner Suscha, Championships and Alliances.	
Kelly Whitaker, Championships and Alliances.	
Other NCAA Staff Members in Attendance:	
Randy Buhr, Championships and Alliances.	
Ashlee Follis, Championships and Alliances.	
Matt Holmes, Championships and Alliances.	
Natalie Steger, Championships and Alliances.	
Michelle Watsky, Championships and Alliances.	
Jeff Williams, Championships and Alliances.	