



**NCAA DIVISION I COMPETITION OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE
REPORT FROM THE NCAA DIVISION I SOFTBALL COMMITTEE
JULY 19, 2021, VIDEOCONFERENCE**

KEY ITEMS.

- 1. Student-athlete welfare and student-athlete experience.**
 - a. Women's College World Series format adjustments.** The committee recommends a format expansion for the Women's College World Series (WCWS) that accommodates all games within a 9-day period by eliminating the automatic double-header for teams that lose on Day 1 of the WCWS and adding a day of rest for the two teams that advance to the finals of the WCWS.
 - b. Squad size increase.** The committee recommends a squad size increase from 20 to 22 and a travel party size increase from 28 to 30.
- 2. Selections and bracketing principles.** The committee expressed an interest to seed the top 32 or 50% of the field (versus 25%) in order to generate a bracket with better competitive parity and avoid imbalance with respect to the relative strength of regional assignments. The committee recognizes that seeding 50% of the field would likely create additional travel expense in the bracketing process and would be a consideration for all team sports.

ACTION ITEMS.

- 1. Legislative items.**
 - None.
- 2. Nonlegislative items.**
 - a. Automatic qualification.**
 - (1) Recommendation. That the following 32 conferences receive automatic bids for the 2022 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; Colonial 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; Pac-12 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.

- (2) Effective date. Immediate.
- (3) Rationale. Each conference meets the requirements to receive an automatic berth to the championship.
- (4) Estimated budget impact. None.
- (5) Student-athlete impact. None.

b. Women's College World Series format adjustments.

- (1) Recommendation. That the format for the Women's College World Series (WCWS) be changed to accommodate all games within a 9-day period by eliminating the automatic double-header for teams that lose on Day 1 of the WCWS and adding a day of rest for the two teams that advance to the finals of the WCWS (refer to Attachment for details of current 7-day and proposed 9-day formats).
- (2) Effective date. 2022 Championship.
- (3) Rationale. The current format for the WCWS has limitations in two key ways: 1) it does not have the flexibility to reasonably absorb a weather delay that occurs within the first four days; and 2) it does not appropriately prioritize student-athlete rest and recovery and team preparation. The committee engaged the National Fastpitch Coaches Association (NFCA) to develop priorities and provide focused feedback on an alternative format that overcomes these limitations while still preserving the format components that allow for a competitive and streamlined experience for teams and fans.

The revised format will eliminate the automatic double-header for teams that lose on Day 1 and add a day of rest for the two teams that advance to the finals of the WCWS. Currently, the lack of a day off before the finals requires that head coaches and several student-athletes participate in media obligations while preparing for a same-day game and that does not account for scheduling challenges that may have been caused in the preceding days due to inclement weather. While the committee notes that the revised format will eliminate two teams from the WCWS on Day 2 (versus Day 3), the adjustment is required in order to avoid excessive time off for teams that win their first two games. For a similar reason to avoid excessive time off, the committee is not recommending that the if necessary games 13 and 14 be held on a separate day before the finals series in the event either one or both teams advancing to the finals does not play an if necessary game; the new, dedicated day of rest (Day 6) will allow for the needed rest and recovery heading into the finals.

Host leaders with USA Softball and the Hall of Fame Stadium can accommodate the format change as soon as the 2022 championship.

- (4) Estimated budget impact. The estimated budget impact is \$42,000 which is the additional per diem required.
- (5) Student-athlete impact. The proposed adjustments to the WCWS format will allow for greater rest and recovery for student-athletes through the duration of the series, particularly in instances when inclement weather disrupts the planned schedule.

c. Squad size increase.

- (1) Recommendation. That the squad size (i.e., players in uniform and eligible to compete) be increased from 20 to 22 with a corresponding increase to the travel party from 28 to 30. In addition, that teams be permitted to have up to an additional three student-athletes (for a total of 25) in uniform within the dugout limit. If teams use the full complement of 30 within the travel party, 22 of those individuals must be student-athletes eligible to compete.
- (2) Effective date. 2022 Championship.
- (3) Rationale. Reinforced by continual input from the NFCA over the last several years, an increase in the squad size from 20 to 22 will address significant participation growth in the sport. The growth is generated by both campus decisions to commit to larger roster sizes along with the increasing physical demands, especially for pitchers, which make it necessary for teams to increase their roster size. In the past, it was unusual for a team to have more than two pitchers; now most programs have three or more pitchers and are more likely to have specialization in position play, increasing the average squad size to over 20 (average is 21.9). As softball programs increase their rosters, the committee believes the championship squad size should also increase so that student-athletes who have been part of the squad all season may participate in the championship. Teams will still be allowed to bring up to 25 student-athletes to be within the dugout limit of 35. These additional up to three student-athletes will be allowed to be in uniform, but will not be eligible to enter the game and teams will have the ability to change the designated squad size (22) members from game to game even within the same regional, super regional or WCWS site.
- (4) Estimated budget impact. The estimated budget impact is \$246,000 and accounts for additional travel, per diem, and awards expenses.

- (5) Student-athlete impact. By expanding the squad size by two, student-athlete participation in the NCAA championship will better reflect the experience of the regular season and conference championships.

INFORMATIONAL ITEMS.

1. **Review 2020 committee report and related Competition Oversight Committee information.** The committee approved the 2020 annual meeting report as presented and discussed various updates and recent business of the NCAA Division I Competition Oversight Committee, including the summary of work accomplished by the Championships Finance Review Working Group.
2. **Review of 2021 selections.**
 - **Team selections.** The committee reviewed the selections process and affirmed that it ran similarly to prior years. In addition, the committee expressed an interest to foster greater communication and understanding about the selections process with the NFCA. Some key principles to highlight: 1) components of the RPI, including bonus/penalty structure; 2) emphasis on approved selection criteria versus considerations such as coaches poll or conference standings; and 3) top 16 seeding process and resulting bracket structure.
 - **Rating Percentage Index (RPI).** The committee discussed whether there should be consideration for game location (home, away or neutral sites) incorporated into the RPI. The committee recently evaluated the same consideration and noted that game location consideration resulted in minimal to no change in the adjusted RPI. The committee also preliminarily discussed whether to consider win-loss record on the road as separate criterion.
 - **Selections guidelines review.** The committee reviewed the contents of the selections guidelines document which compiles for committee use during selections the evaluation criteria, the approach to discussing and voting in teams, and principles for seeding and bracketing teams. The committee noted that the seeding process allowed for a thorough review of the resumes of the top teams and did not necessarily follow the order prescribed by the adjusted RPI metric. The committee also expressed an interest to seed the top 32 or 50% of the field (versus 25%) in order to generate a bracket with better competitive parity and avoid imbalance with respect to the relative strength of regional assignments. While the committee recognizes that seeding 50% of the field would likely create additional travel expense in the bracketing process and would be a consideration for all team sports, members would like to see the concept explored.

- **Regional Advisory Committee.** The committee reviewed preparation and information sharing with the RACs and the national committee. The committee was very satisfied with the contributions from the RACs, particularly given the challenges of the year. If future years require the committee to predetermine regional host sites again, the committee suggested that an additional RAC meeting to provide final feedback on team strength would be merited before site selection.
- 3. Regional and super regional review.** The committee reviewed regionals and super regional site administration and noted the following: 1) the site representatives who served brought great experience and were highly effective, but the pool of available site representatives should be expanded; 2) greater emphasis must be applied to site representatives to complete the facility scorecards so that the committee can fully evaluate site administration; 3) the compilation of common issues and questions (via gathering through Group Me app and Google-sheet) is important to maintain consistency across sites in future years; 4) hosts should be encouraged to gather status on hotel construction, status of offering full amenities, or other issues before recommending them in the bid process; and 5) NCAA staff to reconcile or eliminate conflicting information contained within the various championship manuals.
- 4. Review of 2021 Championships – Women’s College World Series.** The committee reviewed the Women’s College World Series and addressed the following:
- (1) Facilities.** The committee discussed the success of many of the recent improvements at the USA Softball Hall of Fame Stadium that were in place for the 2021 championship even while incorporating COVID-19 protocols. In an interest to sustain and enhance the experience further, the committee noted some additional areas of focus to work on with the host organization: 1) upgrade and replenishment to equipment provided at the practice fields; 2) better protection from weather elements, including high temperature and humidity, for practice field batting cages and stadium bullpens; and 3) general improvement to upkeep and set-up, particularly for areas accessed by teams. Staff will monitor and meet with facility and local organizing committee personnel to review opportunities for immediate, short-term and long-term improvements.
 - (2) Policy/administration.** The committee agreed on the need to express clearly in championship manuals the policies that impact coaches as they prepare and manage the NCAA postseason (e.g., game film tagging, use of pitching radar, etc.).
 - (3) Student-athlete experience.** The committee discussed ideas to enhance the student-athlete experience which include but are not limited to: 1) ensuring teams the opportunity to take a professional team photo on the stadium field on the practice day; 2) improving the hotel experience to ensure full-service and

- access to team meeting rooms and ample food options (in and outside of the hotel); and 3) incorporating elements such as “walk-up” music to enhance the event presentation.
5. **Women’s College World Series format adjustments.** The committee discussed and reviewed extensive feedback from NFCA and ESPN broadcast stakeholders to formulate a 9-day alternative to the current 7-day format for the WCWS. Refer to Nonlegislative Action Item 2-b for the recommendation and its related rationale and estimated budget impact.
 6. **Championships gender equity review.** The committee discussed several areas related to the equitable experience and resources committed to the Division I softball championship in relation to the Division I baseball championship. These ideas and additional discussion in August were the basis of the committee’s questionnaire responses provided to the External Gender Equity Review of the NCAA conducted by Kaplan Hecker & Fink LLP.
 7. **Playing rules administration.** The committee met with NCAA Softball Secretary-Rules Editor Vickie Van Kleeck to review recent business conducted by the NCAA Softball Rules Committee. The rules committee agreed to adopt the permissive use of video review. Pending the results from the ongoing rules proposals comment period and, ultimately, the approval by the Playing Rules Oversight Panel, the softball committee will formulate a recommendation, including the associated budgetary expense, to implement video review in the postseason.
 8. **Umpire program review.** NCAA staff updated the committee on the status of the search for a new national coordinator of umpires.
 9. **National Fastpitch Coaches Association.** The committee met with representatives from the NFCA regarding the following: 1) prioritizing rest and recovery and team preparation for the WCWS by adding days of rest (refer to Nonlegislative Item 2-b); 2) seeding 50% of bracket (32 teams) to address the increasing competitive parity among top teams (refer to Informational Item 2); 3) increasing dialogue among committee and coaches about the selections, seeding and bracketing principles; 4) expanding the allowable squad size (i.e., players in uniform and eligible to play (refer to Nonlegislative Item 2-c)); 5) considering the use of various types of technology in the postseason that are permitted during the regular season; 6) addressing administrative and team support improvements throughout the postseason and specific suggestions for the WCWS; and 7) reinforcing the importance of securing hotels with full service amenities for teams competing in the championship.
 10. **ESPN.** The committee met with ESPN representatives to review the ESPN/NCAA production, programming, and ratings for the championship. The review addressed challenges that came with the handling of inclement weather during regional play. In

addition, NCAA broadcast team members provided updates on programming changes planned for regional play.

11. Committee responsibilities and composition. The committee reviewed upcoming changes to the committee roster, approved returning committee member Sandy Atkins as the next committee chair, and thanked outgoing committee members Matt Larsen and Jamie Pinkerton for their tremendous service to the committee.

Committee Chair: Matt Larsen, North Dakota State University.

Staff Liaison: Liz Turner Suscha, Championships and Alliances

Division I Softball Committee July 19, 2021, Videoconference	
Attendees:	
Keanah Ata Smith, Western Michigan University.	
Sandra Atkins, Troy University.	
Debbie DeJong, Stony Brook University.	
Kelly Gatwood, Conference USA.	
Ericka Hanson Barnes, University of Arizona.	
Matt Larsen, North Dakota State University.	
Michelle Meadows, Longwood University.	
James Pinkerton, Iowa State University.	
Stephanie Simmons, University of Kentucky.	
Absentees:	
None.	
Guests in Attendance:	
Carol Bruggeman, NFCA.	
Kate Drohan, Northwestern University.	
Joanna Lane, NFCA.	
Vickie Van Kleeck, NCAA Softball Secretary-Rules Editor.	
NCAA Staff Support in Attendance:	
Liz Turner Suscha, Championships and Alliances.	
Other NCAA Staff Members in Attendance:	
Tommy Barrett, Championships and Alliances.	
Matt Holmes, Championships and Alliances.	
Julie Kimmons, Championships and Alliances.	

Softball - WCWS Proposed Format and Rest Days

ATTACHMENT

Current Format

Day	Thurs 1	Fri 2	Sat 3	Sun 4	Mon 5	Tues 6	Wed 7		
	A vs B	A vs C	B vs D	A vs G	A vs E	A vs E	A vs E		
	C vs D	E vs G	H vs F	E vs C					
	E vs F		C vs B	A vs G (if)					
	G vs H		G vs F	E vs C (if)					
Teams OFF		B, D, H, F	A, C						
		Winner's Bracket	Loser's Bracket						

Proposed Format

Day	Thurs 1	Fri 2	Sat 3	Sun 4	Mon 5	Tues 6	Wed 7	Thurs 8	Fri 9
	A vs B	B vs D	A vs C	C vs B	A vs G		A vs E	A vs E	A vs E (if)
	C vs D	F vs H	E vs G	G vs F	A vs G (if)				
	E vs F				E vs C				
	G vs H				E vs C (if)				
Teams OFF		A, C, E, G	B, F	A, E		A, E			
		Loser's Bracket	Winner's Bracket						