



**REPORT OF THE  
NCAA DIVISION I SOFTBALL COMMITTEE  
JULY 11-13, 2022, MEETING**

**KEY ITEMS.**

- 1. Championship input from National Fastpitch Coaches Association.** The committee continues to work collaboratively with the National Fastpitch Coaches Association (NFCA) to identify opportunities to improve the softball championship. Key opportunities currently under review include the regional format, the designation of home and away teams, and whether the eight-run rule should apply in the final series.
- 2. Policy adjustments.** The committee made several policy adjustments for the championship by limiting the number of games played by one team to two in a day, removing the restriction that does not allow dugout props, and extending the 30-minute time period between a semifinal game and the if necessary game to 45 minutes.

**ACTION ITEMS.**

**1. Legislative items.**

- **None.**

**2. Nonlegislative items.**

- **Automatic qualification.**

- a) Recommendation. That the following 32 conferences receive automatic bids for the 2023 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.
- b) Effective date. Immediate.

- c) Rationale. Each conference meets the requirements to receive an automatic berth to the championship.
- d) Estimated budget impact. None.
- e) Student-athlete impact. None.

### **INFORMATIONAL ITEMS.**

1. **Review 2021 committee report and related Competition Oversight Committee information.** The committee approved the 2021 annual meeting report as presented and discussed various updates and recent business of the NCAA Division I Competition Oversight Committee, including the upcoming bracketing pilot program to seed 50% of the bracket in groups of four for women's soccer and women's volleyball.
2. **Review of 2022 selections.** The committee reviewed the selections process and agreed that the greater cross-region committee engagement (i.e., during regional advisory committee meetings) and more frequent discussions about top ranked teams on a national basis were benefits to the selections process. The committee also had an opportunity to learn directly from Kevin Pauga about the KPI as a possible metric to add to the evaluation of teams. While the committee did not believe the KPI should be added immediately as a stand-alone piece of selection criteria, there was general consensus that the KPI could serve as a good resource to sort teams for the selections discussion and asked that 2022 KPI, RPI, adjusted RPI, and seed assignments be summarized together as the basis for a future discussion about the topic. In addition, the committee noted support for and interest in hearing the results of the upcoming bracketing pilot program for women's volleyball and women's soccer that will seed 50% of the field.
3. **Regional and super regional review.** The committee reviewed regionals and super regional site administration and emphasized the importance of evaluating the information captured in the facility scorecards by site representatives and tournament directors and sharing important feedback to hosts. The committee expressed the need for greater crowd control in some instances and to establish clear expectations for providing comparable experiences for home/host and visiting team(s) particularly for practice structure (length of time, field access, batting cage access) and other access to team spaces (i.e., practice areas/cages, locker rooms, and proximity to bathrooms). In addition, the committee discussed the order of games for the first day of regional competition. A primary goal is to have as many games as possible with a linear broadcast platform for the greatest level of viewership; in some instances, this goal may require that the #1 seed/host team play the first game. The committee agreed to adjust language in manuals to confirm that the order of games on the first day will be determined by the committee and the NCAA broadcast partner.
4. **Team credential policy.** NCAA staff outlined some challenges with administering and enforcing the team credential policy for the 2022 postseason. The existing policy allows all rostered players in

uniform and up to 10 non-athlete personnel to be in the dugout; in addition, teams are permitted to have one credential for sports information and two credentials for administrators. The committee agreed that no changes are needed for the policy. Further, the committee affirmed that the allowance of 75 wristbands is enough for the national champion team to have on-field access following the awards presentation at the Women's College World Series.

- 5. Home and Away designations.** The committee reviewed the home and away team designation policy and agreed to modify the language to "The home team for the first round will be the higher-seeded team. In the event two unseeded teams will meet, the committee will determine which team is assigned the home designation." (Refer to Item No. 9 for information on action steps with the NFCA to consider possible changes to home and away designations for regional competition.)
- 6. 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.
- 7. Umpire program review.** NCAA Coordinator of Umpires Steve McCown provided an overview of the Softball Umpire Program's work over the last year, including enhancements to training material and plans for greater engagement with conference assignors. In addition, the committee received a summary about the first year of implementation for video review during the postseason from the NCAA Softball Umpire Program's Director of Video Services and Review Marty Abezetian.
- 8. Review of 2022 Championships – Women's College World Series.** The committee reviewed the Women's College World Series and addressed the following:
  - (1) Facilities.** 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 replenish equipment provided at the practice fields and identify personnel to work with committee's practice coordinator to implement practice set-up requested by coaches (including preparing all four batting cages for team use); 2) plan for use of practice fields for team off days as well as stadium bullpens pre-game (if first game of day); 3) secure indoor facility back-up in the event of inclement weather for pre-game; and 4) ensure that the new videoboard will display pitching radar speed. NCAA staff will meet with facility and local organizing committee personnel to coordinate improvements.
  - (2) Competition format.** The committee reviewed the first year of the new format and schedule for the Women's College World Series and noted the overall improved experience for teams. The committee will continue to evaluate whether the if necessary games following the semifinals should remain on the same day, but agreed on an immediate change to extend the 30-minute time period before the if necessary game begins to 45 minutes. The committee also discussed whether the eight-run rule per rule 6.14 of the NCAA Softball Rules Book should be applied in the final series as it is for all other postseason competition; no action was taken, but the NFCA will provide feedback to inform the committee's future discussion on this topic. Lastly, the committee was not in favor of proposing a change to the

determination of the matchups at the finals site by re-seeding the advancing teams.

- (3) Game film tagging.** The committee consulted with representatives of the NFCA about game film tagging and possible changes to the existing policy. In the past, game film tagging (i.e., by participating teams) was permitted away from the competition field but not behind home plate and/or within view of the team dugouts to eliminate the possibility of information-sharing during competition. After evaluating all considerations, the committee agreed that game film tagging is an important part of a team's operation and is typically best conducted as close to behind plate as possible. As such, postseason competition hosts will be asked to provide one seat per team the most optimal location for game film tagging and in a manner that is equitable for each of the competing teams.
- 9. National Fastpitch Coaches Association.** The committee met with representatives from the NFCA about a number of championship topics, including the following: 1) ideas to best deliver consistent practice and warm-up experiences for all teams at a site and from site to site; 2) home and away designations during regional play – the NFCA agreed to issue a survey to coaches to respond to possible alternatives to the existing designation formula, including always designating the higher seed as home or always giving the higher seed the choice to be home or away; 3) administrative and team support improvements throughout the postseason and specific suggestions for the WCWS; 4) additional time between semifinals and if necessary games (refer to Item No. 8); 5) incorporating various types of technology in the postseason that are permitted during the regular season, particularly at the finals site; 6) alternatives to the existing regional format, including adding a fourth day for competition; the NFCA agreed to issue a survey to coaches and the feedback will be used as the committee examines possible changes to the postseason timeline that takes into account the selections weekend, turn-around time before super regional play and the impacts for television broadcast coverage; and 7) an outline of topics to consider for the upcoming NFCA Convention.
- 10. ESPN.** The committee met with NCAA broadcast staff and ESPN representatives to review the ESPN/NCAA production, programming, and ratings for the championship. The review included a discussion of game speed and the increasing length of games.
- 11. Other format and policy adjustments.** The committee reviewed its decision during 2022 regional competition to limit the number of games played by one team to two in a day and affirmed that the decision would become standard policy going forward for all rounds of the championship. In addition, the committee removed the restriction that does not allow dugout props given the limited impact of dugout props on the conduct of competition. Further, the restriction had been in place for several years but was difficult for site representatives and committee members to enforce.
- 12. Strategic plan.** The committee reviewed and discussed a process by which to adjust its strategic plan. NCAA staff will provide some ideas to the committee for changing the order of priorities or considering additional priorities.
- 13. Committee responsibilities and composition.** The committee reviewed upcoming changes to the

committee roster, approved returning committee member Kelly Gatwood as the next committee chair, and thanked outgoing committee members Sandy Atkins, Erika Hanson Barnes, Michelle Meadows, and Natalie Poole for their tremendous service to the committee.

*Committee Chair:* Sandy Atkins, Troy University.  
*Staff Liaisons:* Liz Turner Suscha, Championships and Alliances  
Kelly Whitaker, Championships and Alliances

| Division I Softball Committee<br>July 11-13, 2022, Meeting |  |
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| <b>Attendees:</b>  |  |
| Keanah Ata Smith, Western Michigan University.             |  |
| Sandra Atkins, Troy University.                            |  |
| Kelly Gatwood, Conference USA.                             |  |
| Ericka Hanson Barnes, University of Arizona.               |  |
| Brian Kolze, University of the Pacific.                    |  |
| Michelle Meadows, Longwood University.                     |  |
| Melanie Meuchel, University of Montana.                    |  |
| Natalie Poole, University of Memphis.                      |  |
| Sandra Roecker, University of Massachusetts Lowell.        |  |
| Stephanie Simmons, University of Kentucky.                 |  |
| <b>Absentees:</b>  |  |
| None.  |  |
| <b>Guests in Attendance:</b>                               |  |
| Marty Abezetian, NCAA Softball Umpire Program.             |  |
| Meg Aronowitz, ESPN.                                       |  |
| Carol Bruggeman, NFCA.                                     |  |
| Kate Drohan, Northwestern University.                      |  |
| Michael Feinberg, ESPN.                                    |  |
| Joanna Lane, NFCA.   |  |
| Dan Margulis, ESPN.  |  |
| Steve McCown, NCAA Coordinator of Umpires.                 |  |
| Kevin Pauga, KPI Sports.                                   |  |
| Nick Rud, ESPN.  |  |
| Vickie Van Kleeck, NCAA Softball Secretary-Rules Editor.   |  |
| <b>NCAA Staff Support in Attendance:</b>                   |  |
| Sadie Foster, Championships and Alliances.                 |  |
| Liz Turner Suscha, Championships and Alliances.            |  |

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| Kelly Whitaker, Championships and Alliances.   |
| <b>Other NCAA Staff Members in Attendance:</b> |
| Ashlee Follis, Championships and Alliances.    |
| Matt Holmes, Championships and Alliances.      |
| Natalie Steger, Championships and Alliances.   |
| Michelle Watsky, Championships and Alliances.  |