



**REPORT OF THE  
NCAA DIVISION I SOFTBALL COMMITTEE  
JULY 10-12, 2023, MEETING**

**KEY ITEMS.**

- **KPI.** The committee recommends that the KPI be approved as an additional consideration during ranking and selection effective with the 2024 championship.

**ACTION ITEMS.**

**1. Legislative items.**

- None.

**2. Nonlegislative items.**

**a. Ranking and selections – KPI.**

- (1) Recommendation. To use the KPI as an additional consideration during rankings and selection.
- (2) Effective date. 2024 NCAA Division I Softball Championship.
- (3) Rationale. The KPI is an established tool used in several Division I sport selections. The committee studied the KPI as a potential addition following both the 2022 and 2023 seasons. The committee determined that having another metric to consider when comparing teams is helpful and the addition of the KPI would be beneficial to the selection process. The committee has maintained communication with the National Fastpitch Coaches Association over the past two years about the potential for adding the KPI.
- (4) Estimated budget impact. None.
- (5) Student-athlete impact. The KPI will increase the number of data points considered for teams thereby positively impacting the selection process overall.

**b. Automatic qualification.**

- (1) Recommendation. That the following 32 conferences receive automatic bids for the 2024 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; 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. 2024 NCAA Division I Softball Championship.
- (3) Rationale. Each conference meets the requirements to receive automatic qualification to the championship. The West Coast Conference will be in year one of a grace period with only five schools to compete in the 2024 season.
- (4) Estimated budget impact. None.
- (5) Student-athlete impact. None.

#### **INFORMATIONAL ITEMS.**

1. **Review 2023 committee report and related Competition Oversight Committee information.** The committee approved the 2022 annual meeting report as presented and discussed various updates and recent business of the NCAA Division I Competition Oversight Committee, including updates about the bracketing pilot program to seed 50% of the bracket in groups of four for women's soccer and women's volleyball and other championships. The committee also mentioned that upcoming conference realignments will result in larger conferences that could impact the parameters for bracketing, specifically the requirement to separate conference opponents through two rounds of competition.

The committee also picked up discussion from an earlier meeting to consider best ideas for increasing the number of teams in the championship field per the Division I Transformation Committee's concept to achieve an access ratio of approximately 25 percent. The committee explored ways to accommodate an additional eight teams (from 64 teams to 72 teams) that would be logistically feasible for timing, format and hosting requirements, maintain competitive fairness, and allow for appropriate rest for teams. The committee agreed to study the matter further during future meetings, understanding the obligation to develop a working model for consideration by the Competition Oversight Committee and Division I Council later this year.

2. **National Fastpitch Coaches Association.** The committee met with representatives from the NFCA about championship topics, including the following:
  - **Host requirements – allowable infield surface.** The group discussed the benefits and challenges of allowing turf as an allowable infield surface for the postseason. The committee did not take action to change the existing policy that only allows for a skinned dirt surface. The NFCA agreed to help the committee gather information

- about the number of infield surfaces currently in use among Division I softball programs so that the issue can be studied further.
- **Home and away designation.** The group reviewed again the results of a 2022 survey about 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. The committee did not take action to change the existing policy as the responses did not indicate strong support for a change.
  - **Format topics.** After the group discussed the regional format and the if necessary games at the Women's College World Series, the committee did not recommend action concerning the potential for a four-day regional format or a separate day for the potential if necessary games for the Women's College World Series. There was general agreement that it is best to complete the review about the potential to add more teams to the bracket before reviewing and proposing changes to the existing three-day regional format. Also, continuity of fan interest and optimal broadcast exposure were important points raised in the discussion about the if necessary games at the Women's College World Series.
  - **Data and analytics tools.** NFCA representatives offered insight to assist the committee with the future consideration to allow data and analytics tools to be available to teams in the postseason.
3. **Review of 2023 selections.** The committee reviewed the selections process and the RPI system and agreed that the continued 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 meet with Kevin Pauga again about the KPI as a possible metric to add to the evaluation of teams. The committee reviewed 2023 KPI, RPI, adjusted RPI and seed assignments and agreed that the KPI could serve as a good resource to sort teams for the selections discussion (refer to nonlegislative action item 2b.).
4. **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 discussed the requirements for team/locker rooms and underscored the need to provide two adjacent to the field for teams playing and two additional spaces for the remaining teams which can be located further away with appropriate amenities, including access to a bathroom. The committee agreed that the facilities subcommittee would continue to evaluate ways to refine the language in the host requirements and train site representatives to ensure expectations for team spaces and access to warm-up and practice facilities are met by hosts. In addition, the committee reviewed the results of participant surveys and noted comments about the type of

mementos provided to teams, specifically that medallions (preliminary rounds) and watches (finals site for national champion) may be outdated, and teams indicate a preference for apparel. It was also clarified that teams receive the same set of awards, mementos, and NCAA corporate and equipment partner gifts when compared to baseball championship participants.

5. **Game film tagging.** The committee revisited the game film tagging policies developed last year and reinforced that game film tagging is best conducted as close to behind plate as possible so that radar can be captured; if radar capture by teams is not possible, hosts should post radar on the venue's scoreboard. For the Women's College World Series, the committee agreed to allow teams to tag the film of any game from the media workroom; however, only teams competing on field are permitted to tag film from behind home plate.
6. **Timing sheets.** The committee worked with NCAA event presentation and broadcast staff members to adjust the pregame protocol. Specially, full team introductions will occur on the first day of the regionals and super regionals and Day 1 of the Women's College World Series as well as the games within the championship series; for all other games, only starters will be introduced.
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 and several rules change proposals that will be considered by the NCAA Playing Rules Oversight Panel during an upcoming August meeting. In addition, the committee met with Bat Testing Coordinator Dee Abrahamson to revise the bat testing schedule at the Women's College World Series: 1) initial testing on the practice day during an evening window of time; and 2) subsequent testing each competition day (Day 2 and after) during a morning window of time.
8. **Umpire program review.** NCAA Coordinator of Umpires Steve McCown provided an overview of the Softball Umpire Program's work over the last year. In addition, the committee received a summary about video review during the postseason from the NCAA Softball Umpire Program's Director of Video Services and Review Marty Abezetian. The committee discussed potential ways to enhance the umpire program and agreed to form a subcommittee or designate a committee representative to participate in the program's work. NCAA staff will also plan to provide an overview at the NFCA's convention about the umpire selections evaluation and selection process for the postseason and identify ways to increase the response for umpire evaluations by coaches.
9. **Review of 2023 Championships – Women's College World Series.** The committee reviewed the Women's College World Series and addressed the following:
  - **Media obligations.** The committee discussed ideas to improve the organization and timing of media obligations on practice day to alleviate the challenges experienced by

teams. NCAA staff will evaluate options, including the possibility of moving the media obligations (except the press conference) to meeting room space at a downtown hotel.

- **Team hotel assignments.** The committee agreed to adjust the hotel assignment process so that: 1) the order of team assignment will be determined by a random draw; and 2) teams will have the opportunity to indicate a preference order for assignment based on the list of available properties and their characteristics (e.g., hotel chain, location, service level, bus parking availability, and allowance for outside food). For future hotel selections (2025 and beyond), the committee will discuss whether to include only full-service properties and/or only properties that will allow teams to bring in outside food (with the potential for more than one team to stay at a given hotel).
- **Facility and host management.** The committee commended USA Softball and University of Oklahoma for serving as excellent hosts for the 2023 Women's College World Series and noted several key areas of improvement over prior years. In looking ahead to the 2024 Women's College World Series, NCAA staff summarized general operations requests and other suggestions intended to enhance the experience for participating teams. Also noted was the commitment by USA Softball to send staff observers to the 2023 Men's College World Series to identify opportunities to ensure a comparable experience for participating teams.

#### 10. Additional format review.

- **Women's College World Series weekend sessions.** The committee discussed but did not recommend that the current single sessions on the Saturday and Sunday of the Women's College World Series be separated. While there is substantial time in between the start times of the two games in each session, separating the games would require additional time to clear spectators from the venue. The committee noted the optimal afternoon broadcast opportunity for the first game and raised concern about setting a later start time for the second game due to the bracket crossover and resulting matchups for the next day's games.
- **Limit on games per day.** The committee clarified that a halted game resumed on the following day constitutes a game when considering the policy that a team plays no more than two games in one day. Further, the committee reinforced that a rescheduled or resumed game resulting in two games in a day is a necessary component of managing inclement weather issues and the interest to return to the established scheduled at the earliest possible opportunity.

11. **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 the increasing length of games and encouragement for the committee to consider broadcast impacts when discussing possible format or rules changes.

- 12. Committee responsibilities and composition.** The committee reviewed upcoming changes to the committee roster, approved returning committee member Kurt McGuffin as the next committee chair, and thanked outgoing committee members Kelly Gatwood and Stephanie Simmons for their tremendous service to the committee.
- 13. Other business.** The committee agreed on July 15-17 for the 2024 annual meeting dates. Also, the committee will receive an informational presentation about the possibilities to incorporate data and analytics tools into the postseason at a future meeting.

*Committee Chair:* Kelly Gatwood, Conference USA.  
*Staff Liaisons:* Liz Turner Suscha, Championships and Alliances  
 Kelly Whitaker, Championships and Alliances  
 Paige Newman, Championships and Alliances

<b>Division I Softball Committee July 10-12, 2023, Meeting</b>
<b>Attendees:</b>
Keanah Ata Smith, Western Michigan University.
Kurt McGuffin, University of Tennessee at Martin.
Kelly Gatwood, Conference USA.
Kristi Bredbenner, Wichita State University.
Brian Kolze, University of the Pacific.
Jessica Leger, University of Louisiana at Lafayette.
Melanie Meuchel, University of Montana.
Natalie Gonzalez Honen, Clemson University.
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.
Dee Abrahamson, Bat Testing.
Larissa Anderson, University of Missouri, Columbia.
Carol Bruggeman, NFCA.

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.
Paige Newman, Championships and Alliances.
Liz Turner Suscha, Championships and Alliances.
Kelly Whitaker, Championships and Alliances.
<b>Other NCAA Staff Members in Attendance:</b>
Matt Holmes, Championships and Alliances.
Natalie Steger, Championships and Alliances.
Michelle Watsky, Championships and Alliances.