



REPORT OF THE
NCAA DIVISION I SOFTBALL COMMITTEE
JULY 15-17, 2024, MEETING

ACTION ITEMS.

1. Legislative items.

- None.

2. Nonlegislative items.

- **Automatic qualification.**
 - a. Recommendation. That the following 31 conferences receive automatic bids for the 2025 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. 2025 NCAA Division I Softball Championship.
 - c. Rationale. Each conference meets the requirements to receive automatic qualification to the championship. The Northeast Conference will be in year one of a grace period with only five schools eligible to compete in the 2025 championship season.
 - d. Estimated budget impact. None.
 - e. Student-athlete impact. None.

INFORMATIONAL ITEMS.

1. **Review 2023 committee report and related Competition Oversight Committee information.** The committee approved the 2023 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 reinforced 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.

2. **Review of 2024 selections.** The committee reviewed the selections process and the RPI system along with the incorporation of the KPI as a reference point for team evaluations. Committee members noted that the KPI prompted additional evaluation of a team when the metric was markedly different than the RPI rank. The committee also agreed to publish the bracket with seed assignments within a given regional (i.e., 1 to 4) and to maintain assignment of schools to sport regions according to conference affiliation.
3. **Regional and super regional review.** The committee reviewed regionals and super regional site administration and clarified points related to game times. The primary points include releasing all regional game times at the time of the selections announcement, maintaining stated game times even if a prior game finishes ahead of schedule, and improving communication with teams when a revised game time or re-start time has been determined in the event of inclement weather. The committee also affirmed the need to share important feedback to hosts from site representatives, survey responses and facility scorecards. For preliminary round bids, the committee will increase the requirements for the visiting team room blocks to accommodate additional personnel that teams are bringing.
4. **Data and analytics.** The committee reviewed the use of Yakkertech (ball flight data) for the first time in conjunction with the Women's College World Series. While the limited reporting provided to all teams was a successful first step, the committee agreed to allow the transfer of the complete data file to participating teams for all games at the finals site going forward. In addition, the committee will allow similar data to be shared by host schools for regional and super regional competition according to the following which will be included in host and participant manuals:

The use of analytical or data collection camera/systems that are allowable per the NCAA softball playing rules is now permitted during all rounds of the NCAA Division I Softball Championship. The host institution is required to share any such data collected with all teams participating at the championship site and must do so for all games at the site.
5. **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 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 and agreed the revised bat testing schedule at the Women's College World Series worked well.
6. **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 Cody Little.

7. **National Fastpitch Coaches Association.** The committee met with representatives from the NFCA about championship topics, including the following:
 - **Visible action clock.** After a discussion about the successful implementation of the visible action clock, the committee agreed that, for the 2026 season, schools will be required to have a visible action clock to host a regional or super regional. Further, the committee stated a preference for the clock to be positioned with visibility by the pitcher and the umpire responsible for monitoring it.
 - **Game cancellations.** The group discussed whether mid-season game cancellations for reasons other than inclement weather should be addressed. While the group agreed that cancellations assumed to be about a team's RPI or win-loss record are a concern, participants also agreed that schedule decisions remain within the purview of the involved schools.
 - **Format topics.** The group picked up a discussion about the potential for a four-day regional, a separation of the if necessary games from the semifinals at the Women's College World Series, and the interest to move up the latest possible start time for games (e.g., 10 p.m. local time). The committee did not finalize any recommendations but agreed to further examine potential changes.
 - **General topics.** At the recommendation of the NFCA, the committee agreed to extend the amount of practice time for super regional teams to two hours.
8. **Review of 2024 Championships – Women's College World Series.** The committee reviewed the Women's College World Series and addressed the following:
 - **Team hotel assignments.** The committee discussed that the latest changes to the hotel assignment process created unintended challenges and agreed to return to the previous assignment process so that hotels will be assigned in advance according to super regional seed rank. And, consistent with plans for preliminary rounds, hotel room blocks will be increased to accommodate additional team personnel.
 - **Facility access and equipment for teams.** The committee confirmed that pitchers in the second game of a session can access the bullpens to warm up one hour prior to the scheduled game time as long as neither participating team occupies a bullpen. In addition, the committee's facilities subcommittee will evaluate the equipment provided at the practice fields, the stadium field (on practice day), and the indoor facility held on reserve to ensure that the appropriate type and quantity of equipment is accessible to each team.
 - **Facility and host management.** The committee commended USA Softball and

University of Oklahoma for serving as excellent hosts for the 2024 Women's College World Series. In looking ahead to the 2025 Women's College World Series, NCAA

staff summarized general operations requests and other suggestions intended to enhance the experience for participating teams. The committee also confirmed that there will be a minimum of one hour rather than 45 minutes in between sessions to clear the stadium and admit new spectators so that most can be seated prior to the first pitch of the new session.

9. **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 preliminary discussion about ways to improve the team experience related to the broadcast partnership, including ideas about more advance notice for teams assigned to Thursday super regional competition as well as the media day schedule and timing of if necessary games at the Women's College World Series.
10. **WCWS schedule to accommodate team with Sunday religious exemption.** The committee explored ideas to adjust the schedule for the Women's College World Series in the event a participating school is exempted from Sunday competition.
11. **Committee responsibilities and composition.** The committee reviewed upcoming changes to the committee roster, approved Kurt McGuffin as the returning committee chair for 2025, and thanked outgoing committee members Brian Kolze, Melanie Meuchel, Sandie Roecker and Keanah Smith for their tremendous service to the committee.
12. **Other business.** The committee proposed agenda topics for an upcoming joint meeting with the Division I Baseball Committee and agreed on virtual session meetings during the week of August 4-8 for the 2025 annual meeting dates.

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

Division I Softball Committee July 15-17, 2024, Meeting	
Attendees:	
Kristi Bredbenner, Wichita State University.	
Tara Brooks, University of Tennessee, Knoxville.	
Natalie Gonzalez Honen, Clemson University.	
Brian Kolze, University of the Pacific.	
Jessica Leger, University of Louisiana at Lafayette.	

Kurt McGuffin, University of Tennessee at Martin.
Keanah Smith, Western Michigan University.
Jane Wagner, Northwestern.
Absentees:
Lori Perez, Sacramento State.
Sandra Roecker, University of Massachusetts Lowell.
Guests in Attendance:
Meg Aronowitz, ESPN.
Dee Abrahamson, Bat Testing.
Larissa Anderson, University of Missouri, Columbia.
Carol Bruggeman, NFCA.
Michael Feinberg, ESPN.
Joanna Lane, NFCA.
Cody Little, NCAA Softball Umpire Program.
Dan Margulis, ESPN.
Steve McCown, NCAA Coordinator of Umpires.
Nick Rud, ESPN.
Eric Sexton, Yakkertech.
Willie Sleiman, Yakkertech.
Vickie Van Kleeck, NCAA Softball Secretary-Rules Editor.
Brian Victorero, Yakkertech.
NCAA Staff Support in Attendance:
Paige Newman, Championships and Alliances.
Sadie Redburn, Championships and Alliances.
Liz Turner Suscha, Championships and Alliances.
Kelly Whitaker, Championships and Alliances.
Other NCAA Staff Members in Attendance:
Matt Holmes, Championships and Alliances.
Natalie Steger, Championships and Alliances.

Report of the NCAA Division I Softball
Committee Meeting
July 15-17, 2024
Page No. 6

NCAA/09/23/2024/LTS:ser