



**NCAA DIVISION I COMPETITION OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE
REPORT FROM THE NCAA DIVISION I SOFTBALL COMMITTEE
JULY 15-16, 2019, MEETING**

KEY ITEMS.

- 1. Facility and Hosting Requirements Audit.** Facilities, accommodations, safety and security (crowd control and fan behavior) and gamesmanship, as it relates to the student-athlete experience, are major concerns for championship participants. Therefore, the committee is developing an audit/scorecard of facilities, crowd management and game management requirements set forth in the Division I Softball Pre-Championships Manual. If an institution fails the audit and/or has not made acceptable interim compliance plans they will not be in compliance and thus, will not be eligible to host, even if they are a seeded team.
- 2. Student-athlete welfare and student-athlete experience.**
 - a. Increase in squad size/travel party.** The committee recommends a squad size increase from 20 to 22 and a travel party size increase from 28 to 30 or the travel party may remain at 28.
 - b. Day of rest between semifinals and finals at the WCWS.** Providing a day off between semifinals and the best of three games finals series. The current schedule could have a team play as many as five games within four days including two games on day three and two games on day four. Providing a day of rest would allow student-athletes the rest and recovery that is most beneficial heading into the national championship finals.

ACTION ITEMS.

1. Legislative items.

- None.

2. Nonlegislative items.

- **Automatic qualification.**

- (1) Recommendation. That the following 32 conferences receive automatic bids for the 2020 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. October 1, 2019.
- (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.

INFORMATIONAL ITEMS.

1. Review of 2019 selections.

- **Team selections.** The committee discussed ways to improve selection preparation for both the regional advisory committees and the national committee.
- (1) **Regional Advisory Committee.** The committee explored various options for improving information received from RACs and sharing that information between the RACs and the national committee. The committee adjusted the process to enhance the information provided from RAC members. The process will be as follows:
 - RAC teleconferences will begin early April (instead of March) and will be conducted weekly (instead of biweekly).
 - Each RAC member will send feedback regarding teams in their region that are under consideration for an at-large bid to the RAC chair prior to the teleconference.
 - The RAC, led by the national committee representative, will be responsible for discussion and evaluation of teams that are under consideration for an at-large bid, those “on the bubble” and the teams that are trending up or down.
 - The RAC will forward teams (regardless of the number) they believe should be candidates for at-large bids to the national committee for their deliberations. (There will be no regional rankings.)
 - The committee believes this format will increase the number of teams discussed, increase the quality and quantity of information provided by the RAC members, and increase attendance and preparation by coaches involved on all RACs.
 - (2) **National Committee Preparation.** The committee will embark on one or more “mock selections” exercises (via webinars) prior to selection weekend to prepare for

selections and identify missing or additional information needed prior to selection weekend.

- (3) **Rating Percentage Index (RPI).** The committee discussed options, including the game location (home, away or neutral sites) and adjustments to RPI quadrants. Although no changes were made at this time, the committee asked staff to explore additional options for review during their fall teleconference. The committee recognizes the importance of the location criteria to the coaching community and will continue to review this criterion.
2. **Review 2019 championship/2020 preparation.** The committee reviewed the championship, including regionals, super regionals and the Women's College World Series, and addressed the following:

 - a. **Preliminary rounds.** The committee reviewed feedback from participating teams and noted areas for improvement.

Facilities, accommodations, safety and security (crowd control and fan behavior) and gamesmanship, as it relates to the student-athlete experience, are major concerns for championship participants. Some seeded teams do not have appropriate locker room/team room or restroom facilities for visiting student-athletes even after an emphasis was placed on facilities for 2019. Therefore, the committee is developing a facilities audit/scorecard that is expected to include peer and/or self-evaluations, timelines for compliance and an interim plan, if necessary. This has become a health and safety issue for student-athletes so starting in 2020, institutions that fail the facility audit and/or have not made acceptable interim compliance plans will not be in compliance and thus, will not be eligible to host, even if they are a seeded team.

- (1) **Facility requirements.** Facilities, use of facilities and the lack of facilities including restrooms/locker rooms, dugouts, and practice facilities, have become, in some cases, a health and safety issue and unacceptable to the Division I Softball Committee.
- (2) **Gamesmanship.** Gamesmanship during the NCAA postseason is an issue that affects the student-athlete experience. The committee and NFCA will continue to address this with coaches. Hotels, crowd control, fan behavior and general treatment of visiting teams (atmosphere) are major issues to be addressed.
- (3) **Hotels.** Four (three if the host team is not staying in a hotel) **separate** regional hotels must be secured at the time of the bid process. Hotels will be of equitable quality, amenities and distance from the competition venue. (Hotel room doors shall not open to an outside environment for safety reasons, unless approved by the NCAA). Distance from the venue shall be less than 30 minutes driving time.

- b. Women's College World Series.** The committee reviewed the Women's College World Series and addressed the following:

(1) Facilities. The committee discussed the 2019 changes in the USA Softball Hall of Fame Stadium and were very pleased with the renovations. The new media areas, additional locker rooms, ESPN broadcast location, concourse and workspaces were significant in the administration of the championship. The renovations for 2020 will include upper level bleachers (4,000 additional seats), accompanying infrastructure for concessions, restrooms, and shuttle and pedestrian ingress/egress improvements. In addition, there will be enhancements to the field, dugouts and bullpens. Staff will monitor and meet with the facility personnel, ESPN and the local organizing committee as construction progresses.

(2) Team ticket allotments. The committee discussed increasing the team ticket allotments. While the current ticket allotment in Sections 8 and 11 may not be expanded, an additional 50 seats are available elsewhere in the stadium. Additional seating in 2020 may provide an opportunity for additional team seats and will be discussed with ticket personnel.

(3) Credentials. The committee determined that 38 team credentials shall be issued to each team. Additional credentials may be available under specific circumstances.

- 3. Student-athlete Welfare and Experience.** The committee discussed several concerns that impact student-athlete welfare and the student-athlete experience. Both items below may be future budget requests.

a. Squad size and travel party. The committee discussed a continual request from the coaches to increase the squad size from 20 to 22. Softball has grown rapidly, and the game has become more physically demanding, especially for pitchers, making 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, increasing the average squad size to over 20 (average is 21.6). 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. The committee would prefer a squad and travel party increase (20 to 22 student-athletes and 28 to 30 travel party); however, if funds are not available for a travel party increase the committee would recommend a squad size increase only which would not be a budget impact. *Note: If a squad size increase is not available for the entire postseason, a squad size increase at the Women's College World Series is also a recommendation.* Approximate budget impact of \$290,000.

- b. Rest day between semifinals and finals.** Providing a day of rest between the semifinals and the finals series (best of three games). The current schedule could have a team play as many as five games within four days including two games on day three and two games on

day four. Providing a day of rest would allow student-athletes the rest and recovery that is most beneficial heading into the national championship finals. Continued discussions with stakeholders are underway reviewing all options and concerns regarding moving the championship by one day. This would be a minimal budget impact for the NCAA; however, a significant impact for ESPN. Approximate NCAA budget impact of \$16,800.

4. **ESPN.** The committee met with ESPN via teleconference to review the ESPN/NCAA programming and broadcast ratings. ESPN expanded their coverage during the regionals and super regionals with 7 Innings Live and Pitch-by-Pitch and added Baseball Tonight to the coverage at the WCWS. Rating highlights included a thirty-six percent increase in super regionals viewership (most watched since 2008) and a ten percent increase at the WCWS averaging over 1 million viewers per game (15 games).

5. **Playing Rules and Officiating.**

- a. **Playing Rules.** The committee engaged in a discussion regarding video review and while they see the merit of video review, they do not believe the collegiate game of softball is ready at this time. A deliberate and concise evaluation of the process, what *to* review and the logistics *are* crucial to not slow down the pace of play and/or other changes that may distract from the current game.
- b. **Four Umpire System.** The four-umpire system was a positive asset to the postseason and was well received by the coaches. Continued training and refinement of the system will improve the delivery. The first-year performance was impressive and will continue in 2020.

6. **National Fastpitch Coaches Association.** The committee met with representatives from the NFCA regarding the following:

- a. The preliminary rounds and WCWS student-athlete welfare and experience.
- b. Preliminary-round facilities, hotels, game management and gamesmanship.
- c. Selection, seeding and bracketing (travel and site assignments).
- d. Use of technology including tagging and charting pitches, radar and video review.
- e. RPI, including the location of contests.

Committee Chair: *Brandi Stuart, University of Central Florida.*
Staff Liaison: *Sharon Cessna, Championships and Alliances*

Division I Softball Committee July 15-16, 2019, Meeting	
Attendees:	
Jenny Allard, Harvard University.	
Sandra Atkins, Troy University.	
Ericka Hanson Barnes, University of Arizona.	
Sarah Baumgartner, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, Newark.	
Ashlie Kite, Long Beach State University.	
Matt Larsen, North Dakota State University.	
Michelle Meadows, Longwood University.	
James Pinkerton, Iowa State University.	
Shalini Shanker, Colorado State University.	
Brandi Stuart, University of Central Florida.	
Absentees:	
None.	
Guests in Attendance:	
Joanna Lane, NFCA	
Carol Bruggeman, NFCA	
Karen Weekly, University of Tennessee, Knoxville.	
NCAA Staff Support in Attendance:	
Sharon Cessna, Championships and Alliances.	
Laura Klee, Championships and Alliances.	
Other NCAA Staff Members in Attendance:	
Tommy Barrett, Championships and Alliances.	