



**REPORT OF THE
NCAA DIVISION I SOFTBALL COMMITTEE
OCTOBER 24, 2023, VIDEOCONFERENCE**

KEY ITEMS.

1. **Bracket expansion.** The committee finalized its idea for increasing the number of teams in the championship field to achieve an access ratio of approximately 25 percent. (See Informational Item 3.)
2. **Visible action clock.** The committee agreed that the visible action clock, now permitted by NCAA softball playing rules, would enhance postseason competition where there are host capabilities. (See Informational Item 4.)

ACTION ITEMS.

- **None.**

INFORMATIONAL ITEMS.

1. **Recent committee business, operations manual and upcoming timeline.** NCAA staff referred the committee to the report of the 2023 annual meeting and noted that, since the committee met in July, the action item proposing the KPI as an additional consideration during ranking and selection was approved by the Division I Competition Oversight Committee, effective with the 2024 championship. The committee also reviewed the committee operations manual and key dates for the 2024 championship season.
2. **Joint meeting with Division I Baseball Committee.** The committee suggested agenda items for the upcoming joint meeting with the Division I Baseball Committee, including turf as an allowable infield surface, the application of data and analytics technology, the use of a visible action clock, the accommodation of additional teams if there is bracket expansion, and continued conversation about the optimal postseason experience for baseball and softball student-athletes.
3. **Bracket expansion.** The committee also picked up discussion from earlier meetings to finalize the idea 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 account for logistical and timing impacts and maintain competitive fairness.

The bracket currently consists of 16 four-team double elimination regionals. Adding eight teams to the championship would create eight five-team regionals and eight four-team regionals.

- Four-team regionals remain double-elimination, no changes.
- Five-team regionals would add an opening-round single-elimination game with the winner advancing to the normal double-elimination portion of the bracket.

- The eight lowest-rated teams (likely AQs) and the last eight at-large teams compete in a single-elimination game with the winner advancing to the double-elimination portion of the bracket.
- Winner of opening-round games featuring the eight lowest-rated teams would advance to play the #1 seed in the regional.
- Winner of opening-round games featuring the last eight at-large teams would advance to play the #2 seed in that regional.
- No changes to the format of the Super Regionals or Women's College World Series.

The committee emphasized the importance of treating the opening-round games as part of the regional weekend and recommended that the games take place on Thursday evening to both allow enough time for travel and preparation following the selections announcement and capture interest from spectators at the host venue and on a broadcast platform. The committee's idea will be considered along with those from the other sport committees currently undergoing the same review, including the proposal from the Division I Baseball Committee, which has the same idea for bracket expansion.

In addition, the committee explored an alternative to specify that the 9-16 seeds be assigned the five-team regionals and would plan to re-examine this concept if it is determined that teams will be added to the bracket. Further, the committee had significant discussion about bracket expansion at a time when conferences are expanding membership. It will become increasingly challenging to adhere to NCAA Bylaw 31.1.3.2.5, which requires that conference opponents be separated in the first two rounds of competition. Specifically, the proposed idea for bracket expansion calls for a predetermined placement of the opening-round games, which may not align with the bylaw requirement. The committee welcomes any input from the Division I Competition Oversight Committee about the application of NCAA Bylaw 31.1.3.2.5.

- 4. Rules discussion – visible action clock and double first base.** NCAA Softball Secretary-Rules Editor Vickie Van Kleeck joined the committee to discuss two recent permissive changes to the NCAA softball playing rules and consideration of these changes for postseason competition. The committee also reviewed the timeline baseball followed to incorporate the visible action clock into postseason play and ultimately as a requirement by rule (effective with the 2024 regular season). The committee agreed that the visible action clock would enhance postseason competition where there are host capabilities. NCAA staff will confirm the capabilities to display visible action clocks at the Hall of Fame Stadium for the Women's College World Series, develop language to include in bid specifications for preliminary-round hosts (permissive use, not required to host until a future year), and draft operator guidelines. Regarding the double first base, the committee will not make this a requirement to host. However, consistent with the NCAA softball playing rules, a double first base may be used if there is mutual agreement of both coaches.

Note: During a December 13, 2023 videoconference, the committee reconsidered the permissive playing rule that allows a double first base to be used if there is mutual agreement of both coaches. After discussing questions about the consistency of application that were shared during a recent NFCA meeting, the committee determined that the double first base will not be used for NCAA championship competition.

5. **Other business.** The committee briefly reviewed the establishment of two new subcommittees to oversee facilities and umpire issues. In addition, committee chair Kurt McGuffin and NCAA staff will attend the NFCA convention in early December to discuss several topics with coaches.

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 October 24, 2023, Videoconference	
Attendees:	
Keanah Ata Smith, Western Michigan University.	
Kristi Bredbenner, Wichita State University.	
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.	
Melanie Meuchel, University of Montana.	
Desiree Reed-Francois, University of Missouri, Columbia.	
Sandra Roecker, University of Massachusetts Lowell.	
Jane Wagner, Northwestern University.	
Absentees:	
None.	
Guests in Attendance:	
Vickie Van Kleeck, NCAA Softball Secretary-Rules Editor.	
NCAA Staff Support in Attendance:	
Sadie Foster, Championships and Alliances.	
Paige Newman, Championships and Alliances.	
Liz Turner Suscha, Championships and Alliances.	
Kelly Whitaker, Championships and Alliances.	
Other NCAA Staff Members in Attendance:	
Ashlee Follis, Championships and Alliances.	
Matt Holmes, Championships and Alliances.	