



**REPORT OF THE
NCAA DIVISION III SOFTBALL COMMITTEE
JUNE 17-19, 2019, MEETING**

ACTION ITEMS.

1. Legislative items.

- None.

2. Nonlegislative items.

a. Automatic qualification.

- (1) Recommendation. That the following 42 conferences be approved for automatic qualification to the 2020 NCAA Division III Softball Championship: Allegheny Mountain Collegiate Conference; American Rivers Conference; American Southwest Conference; Capital Athletic Conference; Centennial Conference; City University of New York Athletic Conference; College Conference of Illinois and Wisconsin; Colonial States Athletic Conference; Commonwealth Coast Conference; Empire 8; Great Northeast Athletic Conference; Heartland Collegiate Athletic Conference; Landmark Conference; Liberty League; Little East Conference; Massachusetts State Collegiate Athletic Conference; Michigan Intercollegiate Athletic Association; Middle Atlantic Conference Commonwealth; Middle Atlantic Conference Freedom; Midwest Conference; Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference; New England Collegiate Conference; New England Small College Athletic Conference; New England Women's and Men's Athletic Conference; New Jersey Athletic Conference; North Atlantic Conference; North Coast Athletic Conference; North Eastern Athletic Conference; Northern Athletics Conference; Northwest Conference; Ohio Athletic Conference; Old Dominion Athletic Conference; Presidents' Athletic Conference; Skyline Conference; Southern California Intercollegiate Athletic Conference; Southern Athletic Association; Southern Collegiate Athletic Conference; St. Louis Intercollegiate Athletic Conference; State University of New York Athletic Conference; Upper Midwest Athletic Conference; USA South Athletic Conference; and the Wisconsin Intercollegiate Athletic Conference.

Anticipated Pool Allocations

Pool A - 42

Pool B - 1

Pool C - 19

- (2) Effective date. September 1, 2019.

- (3) Rationale. Each conference meets the requirements of NCAA Bylaw 31.3.3 and has completed the automatic-qualification declaration form. (Note: Pool allocations may be adjusted based on 2019-20 sponsorship numbers.)
 - (4) Estimated budget impact. None.
 - (5) Student-athlete impact. None.
- b. Championship format – best-of-three game championship series.**
- (1) Recommendation. That the format for the best-of-three game championship series be changed from Game 1 and Game 2 on Monday, and the “if necessary” Game 3 on Tuesday, to Game 1 on Monday, and Game 2 and the “if necessary” game on Tuesday.
 - (2) Effective date. To be implemented for the 2020 championship.
 - (3) Rationale. The two teams that advance to the championship series have been competing for four consecutive days, usually in hot weather, by the time the championship series begins on Monday. Requiring the teams to then play a double header on Monday for the most important series of their season does not provide an adequate opportunity for rest for the student-athletes, particularly for the pitchers of teams that rely primarily on one pitcher. The committee originally requested the current format to minimize travel and per diem costs so that teams could travel home on Tuesday, even when there is an “if necessary” game on that day. In the proposed format, it is still possible that teams could travel home on Tuesday, especially if the series concludes in two games and only one game is played that day. (Note: The championship series has been completed in two games in five of the six years since the format was implemented in 2014, and most of the teams have traveled back on Tuesday even when they completed play on Monday.) Also, the proposed format for the championship series would be consistent with the current best-of-three game format for super regionals.
 - (4) Estimated budget impact. Maximum of \$2,500 for an additional half day of per diem for the two teams (\$50 x official travel party of 25 x two teams) if neither team travels back on Tuesday after the game(s). These costs would be less if one or both teams travel back on Tuesday, or if travel is booked for Wednesday morning as soon as the two advancing teams are confirmed on Sunday, rather than waiting until Tuesday after competition concludes to finalize travel arrangements. The current amount budgeted for per diem for the softball

championship is more than sufficient to cover these additional per diem expenses.

- (5) Student-athlete impact. The proposed format would provide additional rest for the participating student-athletes to prepare for the most important series of the season.

INFORMATIONAL ITEMS.

1. **Welcome and announcements.** The committee chair welcomed the committee members.
2. **Meeting schedule and agenda.** The NCAA staff reviewed the meeting schedule and agenda.
3. **2018 annual meeting report.** The committee approved the 2018 annual meeting report as submitted.
4. **NCAA Division III Championships Committee actions.** The committee reviewed actions the NCAA Division III Championships Committee took in 2018-19 relevant to the work of the softball committee. The Championships Committee took no action on the softball committee's request to permit any student-athlete included within the current bench size to dress in uniform. The Championships Committee will evaluate this request as it conducts its review of bench size across all sports. The Championships Committee is continuing to review regional realignment and will be soliciting input from sport committees regarding potential adjustments to the proposed models. Sport committees will be permitted to recommend changes that address competitive equity across regions, but all recommendations still must meet the three guiding principles of the regional realignment project.
5. **Division III governance update.** NCAA governance staff provided updates on several topics, including: 1) sports wagering; 2) the online certification of rules compliance; 3) the NCAA transfer portal; 4) legislative proposals for the 2020 NCAA Convention; 5) the composition of the NCAA Board of Governors; 6) eSports; and 7) Division III University.
6. **Committee report for National Fastpitch Coaches Association (NFCA) convention.** The committee reviewed the report staff presented to the Division III coaches during the NFCA convention in December 2018.
7. **Review of 2019 championship.** The University of Texas at Tyler hosted the softball championship finals. The committee reviewed survey feedback from participants, the host tournament director, site representatives, committee representatives and officials.

- a. Hospitality. The Texas-Tyler staff made everyone feel welcome, and they were very helpful and responsive to requests from teams and the committee.
- b. Community service. Participants provided positive feedback regarding the community service activity (i.e., each team was assigned to a different elementary school in the Tyler area and participated in activities with children at the school). The activities were organized and well run, and the designated contacts at the schools communicated well. Some teams indicated that they would have preferred to interact with the children in a less physical activity.
- c. Fan enhancements. Fans enjoyed the daily giveaways (stadium cups, sunscreen, cooling towels and lip balm) at the championship.
- d. Hotels. The nightly rate for the team hotel was very reasonable (\$114) and included a complimentary breakfast for up to two individuals per room and free parking. This was a priority for the committee after coaches whose teams participated in the championship the previous two years expressed concerns about the high hotel room rate and the additional charge for parking. Teams expressed a preference to have all their assigned rooms be located on the same floor.
- e. Facility. Suddenlink Field, the softball/baseball complex, is beautiful and the grounds crew does an excellent job of maintaining the fields. Coaches expressed concern that practice on the baseball field was limited due to the infield not being available to the teams. (Infield practice and ground balls on dirt were permitted only on the game field.) Coaches also expressed concern that there was no warning track on the softball field, no padding on the metal outfield fence and no locker rooms available for the teams.
- f. Merchandise. The championship merchandise was not inventoried in advance and the merchandise tent was not set up and ready for sales when the gates opened on the first day of competition. Additional volunteers need to be assigned to this role for next year.
- g. Recycling. Teams and fans noted that there were no containers for recycling available at the venue.
- h. Score updates. Fans, sports information directors and committee members were frustrated about the significant delay for most of the Division III softball game scores to be posted on the daily summary of results on ncaa.com (e.g., the results for the four games played that day were sometimes not updated until that evening), and the scoreboard feature on ncaa.com was not updated until the day after competition. As a result, individuals needed to check the websites of the participating institutions to

track on scores throughout each day. NCAA staff will follow up with the ncaa.com staff to address this issue.

8. **Plan for 2020 championship.** The committee discussed several recommendations for all rounds of the championship. The University of Texas at Tyler will host the NCAA Division III Softball Championship again in 2020. The committee participated on a teleconference with Texas-Tyler staff members to review the 2019 championship and discuss changes for the 2020 championship finals.
 - a. Roster submission. The committee confirmed that for all rounds of the championship, teams that travel with more than 20 student-athletes will be permitted to submit a different roster each day (rather than one roster per round of competition) to identify the 20 student-athletes who will be in uniform that day. The list should be submitted during bat testing each day. This change will allow coaches to provide an opportunity for additional student-athletes to be in uniform, which will enhance their championship experience. This will also provide relief in situations when a student-athlete is not able to join the team (e.g., due to taking a final exam, injury, etc.) until after the first day of competition; she will now be able to be in uniform for subsequent games. This will not increase the current bench size or squad size for each game and will not provide a competitive advantage to teams that carry larger rosters.
 - b. Format for regionals. The committee discussed the format for the regional tournaments. With a 62-team field, the committee traditionally has assigned four teams to 14 regional sites and three teams to two regional sites. At a three-team site, one team (the lowest seed) is required to play two games the first day and potentially is eliminated the first day. There is no bracket for a three-team site; rather, there is a formula that identifies pairings based on results of games played. The teams that participate at the three-team sites continue to express dissatisfaction with the format, indicating that it is a less desirable championship experience than that of teams at four-team sites. Teams in the West region have been much more likely than teams from other regions to be assigned to a three-team site, given the mandate to minimize flights during the bracketing process.

The committee reviewed a letter from a coach in the West region whose team had participated at a three-team regional site and who expressed several concerns regarding the format. The softball committee discussed this issue with the baseball committee, which currently uses a two-team, best-of-five game format for three of its 16 regional sites and has received positive feedback from the involved teams. The softball committee and the baseball committee agree that the two-team format is a more fair and desirable format than the three-team format, and the preferred schedule for the two-team format is Game 1 on Day 1, Game 2 and Game 3 on Day 2, and Game 4 (if necessary) and Game 5 (if necessary) on Day 3. Based on this discussion

- and other feedback received, the softball committee intends to assign the 62 teams to 15 four-team regional sites and one two-team regional site beginning with the 2020 championship.
- c. Game times for super regionals. The committee confirmed that Game 1 of super regionals should be scheduled at 2 p.m. local time. The host may request an alternate time if mutually agreed upon by the participating teams. For Game 3 of super regionals, if it is played, the higher-seeded team shall be the home team, rather than determining the home team by the double coin flip procedure. The home team determination form will be updated to reflect this change.
 - d. Championship series. The committee determined that for the best-of-three game championship series at the finals site, Game 1 will be played on Monday and Game 2 and Game 3 (if necessary) will be played on Tuesday (see Action Item 2-b). Also, the schedule will be adjusted to include an additional 30 minutes between Game 2 and Game 3, which is consistent with the Day 2 schedule at super regionals.
 - e. Site evaluation form. The committee directed staff to develop a site evaluation form for the site representative of each regional and super regional site to complete. The forms will help the committee evaluate each host's performance and the participating teams' experience at the respective site. Tournament directors will also receive a copy of the evaluation form, so they are aware of the feedback requested.
 - f. Music. The committee continues to believe there is value in creating an NCAA championships Spotify account to identify 100 or more songs that are "pre-approved" (i.e., appropriate content) to be played at NCAA championships. Coaches and administrators have indicated that they would welcome this option and would use it throughout the regular season and also for other sports.
 - g. Protocol for team introductions. The committee confirmed that a consistent protocol for team introductions should be followed for all rounds of the championship: Nonstarters will be introduced first and go immediately to the baseline as each is introduced (e.g., no huddle to delay going to the baseline) on the end closest to home plate; starters will be introduced next and go immediately to the baseline as each is introduced; and coaches will be introduced last and go immediately to the baseline closest to the base.
 - h. Daily email previews. The committee confirmed that the daily email previews to coaches outlining key information (bat testing schedule, batting cage schedule, uniform colors, etc.) for the following day's games implemented during the 2019 championship were helpful and should be continued in future years. In addition, a copy of the pre-game format should be posted in each dugout.

- i. Batting cage schedule. The home team should be scheduled in the batting cage 90 minutes before the game, and the visitor should be scheduled in the batting cage 60 minutes before the game. Teams will be permitted access to the game field 45 minutes before the game. The pregame protocol will be updated accordingly.
- j. Practice protocol. The committee emphasized the importance of teams being permitted to take ground balls on the dirt of both the practice field and the game field.
- k. Bat girls, host families and ball shaggers. The committee encouraged the host to identify and assign bat girls and host families to each team for the 2020 championship. Bat girls should be at least 10 years old, and it is not required that they be from a host family. Ball shaggers also should be confirmed for each game.
- l. Facility preparation. The committee emphasized that the facility should be “game ready” (e.g., all signage in place) before the committee walkthrough of the facility Tuesday afternoon. Team banners should be hung in alphabetical order on the outfield fence of the championship field before the walkthrough. Additional signage and decals are needed to dress up the game field fence, backstop, press box, etc.
- m. Tent locations. In 2019, the two team cool-down tents were situated side by side and did not provide adequate separation for coaches to address their teams in privacy after games. The location of the tents will be adjusted for 2020 so that the hospitality tent is situated between the two cool-down tents. In addition, the tent used for the press conferences was located close to the main building at the complex in order to access electricity, but this was next to the gate where parents and fans greeted teams as they left their cool-down areas. In 2020, the press conference tent will be moved farther from the public areas.
- n. Banquet location. Rather than conducting the student-athlete banquet in a gymnasium on campus, the host is exploring alternate venue options for the banquet that will accommodate 350 guests.
- o. Scripts. The committee asked staff to provide separate scripts for each game for the public address announcer and update the section of the script preceding the national anthem (i.e., “Gentlemen, please remove your hats”) with more inclusive language.
- p. Minimum expectations for hosts. The committee recommended that staff develop a bulleted list of minimum expectations (e.g., facility requirements, team hotels, webcasting, press conferences, hospitality, cool-down areas, public address/sound system, tarp, etc.) for hosts of preliminary rounds and the finals site. The list should be posted online with the bid materials and reviewed during the potential host teleconferences.

- q. Coach attire. The committee discussed expectations regarding professional attire of coaches.
 - r. Props. The committee expressed concern that although the directive to not allow props in dugouts was consistently enforced for all rounds of the Division II and Division III Softball Championships, numerous instances of props in dugouts were highlighted on televised broadcasts of Division I softball games. The committee requested further clarification regarding the policy and expectations regarding enforcement of the policy.
 - s. Banquet speakers. The committee asked staff to develop guidelines to provide to the student-athletes who will speak on behalf of their team at the banquet.
 - t. T-shirt exchange. The committee expressed interest in implementing a T-shirt exchange for the teams participating at the 2020 finals site.
9. **National and regional advisory committee rosters.** The committee reviewed the committee rosters and noted vacancies for 2019-20.
10. **Committee chair and vice chair.** The committee confirmed that Kim Tatro, associate director of athletics and head softball coach at Lawrence University, will continue as the committee chair in 2019-20, and Renee Hellert, associate director of athletics and senior woman administrator at Moravian College, will continue as the vice chair.
11. **Committee timeline.** The committee reviewed the timeline and added a potential site rep teleconference and a session specifically for sports information directors immediately following the confirmed host teleconferences for regional and super regional hosts.
12. **Committee resource sheet.** The committee reviewed and revised the committee resource sheet.
13. **Sport sponsorship.** The committee reviewed the 2019-20 pool document and noted conference membership changes and institutions that are reclassifying.
- The committee reviewed the automatic-qualification applications for 2019-20 and recommended that 42 conferences receive automatic qualification to the 2020 championship (see Action Item 2-a).
14. **Regional advisory committee training.** The committee reviewed the PowerPoint for the regional advisory committee training sessions and made no changes. The committee discussed the regional advisory committee member selection process and encouraged

conference commissioners to review responsibilities and time demands with potential committee members before confirming a conference representative.

15. Regional advisory committee balloting procedures. The committee reviewed the balloting procedures and confirmed that RAC members should be directed to submit their ballot within one hour of the conclusion of their respective RAC ranking call.

16. Selection and bracketing procedures.

a. Mock selection. The committee noted that the mock selection conducted during the committee ranking call the week leading into selections for all committee members and potential alternates on the selection call was valuable. This clarified the process and expectations for new committee members and the alternates and minimized delays in the selection process when alternates joined the selection call.

b. Site selections. Committee members agreed that they will consider factors in addition to a team's regional ranking when confirming regional and super regional hosts. These additional factors (e.g., safety, quality of facilities, facilities meeting playing rule requirements, fields with lights, hotel availability, administrative support, availability of adequate event personnel, team hospitality, etc.) significantly impact the championship experience of the participating teams.

c. Nonconference strength of schedule. The committee reviewed the nonconference strength of schedule criterion added to the secondary criteria for all Division III team sports in 2017-18. The committee noted that most ranking decisions are made based on the primary criteria, so this criterion was not used frequently since it is in the secondary criteria. For 2019-20, the committee will discuss further how to evaluate the nonconference strength of schedule numbers and when to "drill down" on the team sheets.

17. Umpire selection process. The committee reviewed a summary report from the umpire-in-chief at the finals site. The committee also met with the national coordinator of the NCAA Softball Umpire Program to discuss the umpire training and selection process. Committee members noted that they would like the opportunity to select the best available umpires and there should be no requirement to work a minimum number of Division III games if the umpires are working NCAA games and postseason tournaments for other divisions. The committee also emphasized that assignors who are working umpires should be eligible to work Division III postseason games and should not be excluded from consideration solely because of their status as an assignor.

The committee supported identifying umpires under consideration as early as possible so that they are aware of the opportunity to work the Division III postseason and can hold the

dates. NCAA staff will share the list of umpires who worked any round of the 2019 championship with regional advisory committee members, members of the NFCA Division III head coaches committee and site representatives to begin to develop a list of the top umpires in each region. This will help the national coordinator and the SUP regional coordinators develop a “Top 100” list. The committee identified four umpires to confirm immediately for the finals site and requested that the SUP staff recommend the remaining two umpires for the finals site no later than early April so that the committee can approve them and provide them notice to avoid schedule conflicts with assignments for Divisions I and II.

It was helpful for the NCAA championship manager to participate on the teleconference the national coordinator conducted with the crew chiefs before the regional and super regional tournaments to ensure that the information provided to the crew chiefs was consistent with information provided to the site representatives. The committee and the national coordinator of officials determined that the national coordinator will confirm the initial assignments for the crew assigned at each preliminary round. After each umpire has worked as the home plate umpire, the NCAA site representative and the designated crew chief will review the coaches evaluation forms together. To provide more subjectivity, the site representative (rather than the crew chief who serves as a working official) will confirm crew assignments for subsequent games based on the evaluations instead of following a predetermined rotation. The national coordinator will confirm and communicate the process that will be used to evaluate umpires during regionals and determine which umpires should advance to work super regionals.

- 18. Softball playing rules and bat testing updates.** The committee discussed several topics (e.g., artificial noisemakers, obstruction, batters out of the box, media format, technology in the dugout, props, professional attire of coaches, etc.) with the NCAA softball secretary-rules editor. The softball equipment consultant reviewed the results of post-championship bat testing. The consultant noted that Division I baseball will begin mandatory regular-season bat testing in 2020, and Division II and Division III baseball will begin in 2021. For softball to require mandatory regular-season bat testing, each institution would need a bat-testing machine, which is currently priced at approximately \$900. Committee members noted that there is some grant funding available (Tier Three funding through the NCAA Division III Conference Grant Program, the Women’s Sports Foundation, etc.) that can be used to purchase the machines.
- 19. National Fastpitch Coaches Association update.** The committee participated on a teleconference with the Division III liaison from the National Fastpitch Coaches Association (NFCA) to review feedback from coaches relating to the championship. The committee provided positive feedback regarding the new video format for the All-America awards presentation during the student-athlete banquet, noting that the individual recognition of honorees in attendance could be improved (e.g., invite honorees to the stage

after the video for a handshake and photo with a replica trophy). The committee continued to express concerns that the change the NFCA implemented in 2018 to not announcing All-Americans until the banquet prevents honorees whose team is not participating in the championship from attending the banquet. The liaison noted that the NFCA survey of coaches whose team participated in the championship indicated support for permitting coaches to submit a different roster each day of the 20 student-athletes who will be in uniform. The survey also showed support for requiring higher standards and minimum expectations for preliminary-round hosts to ensure a more consistent experience for all teams participating in the championship. The liaison indicated that if the regional realignment project is approved by the Division III Championships Committee and the softball committee moves to a 10-region model, the NFCA All-America awards process would likely transition to the same 10-region format, and the NFCA would then evaluate how many awards to provide per region.

20. **Academic and membership affairs update.** A member of the academic and membership affairs staff provided an update regarding potential legislative proposals for the 2020 NCAA Convention.
21. **Mailings.** The committee reviewed and revised the correspondence and selections mailings for 2019-20 as appropriate. The committee noted that hosts should email hotel information to teams assigned to their respective site immediately following the online selection show, and that hosts also should email a participant manual (complete except for confirmed practice times) to the teams before the participant teleconference.
22. **Manuals and agendas.** The committee reviewed and revised the softball host operations manual, pre-championship manual, participant manuals, committee operations manual and site representative manual as appropriate. The committee recommended separating the host operations manual into two manuals: one for preliminary rounds and one for the finals site. The committee emphasized the need for all agendas, checklists and “cheat sheets” to be included in the site representative manual, with all supporting documents included in the order listed on agendas, to save site representatives time in preparing to serve in that role.
23. **Strategic plan.** The committee reviewed a draft of a strategic plan for the championship and provided feedback. The committee will work to finalize the plan during the 2019-20 season.
24. **Future dates and sites.** The committee reviewed the dates for regionals, super regionals and the finals for the softball championship for 2018 through 2022. The committee identified June 15-17 as the dates for the 2020 annual committee meeting.

25. Other business.

- a. Championship date formula. The softball committee met with the Division III Baseball Committee to discuss a potential proposal to push back the baseball and softball championships two weeks to minimize compressing the seasons into a very short period due to poor weather in the spring. A survey the baseball committee conducted through the American Baseball Coaches Association to determine support for extending the season by two weeks showed 87 percent of the coaches support the proposal, but only 59 percent of the coaches indicated that their institution would vote in favor of the proposal. The softball committee plans to survey coaches and administrators to determine support for two options: 1) moving the softball championship back two weeks; or 2) moving the championship back only one week. The NCAA championships staff will work with the NCAA research staff to develop a survey to be distributed this fall. The softball committee will submit a draft of the survey and the anticipated timeline to the Championships Committee for approval.

- b. Bid specifications for 2022-26 bid process. The committee reviewed and updated the bid specifications for the softball championship for the upcoming bid cycle. The committee confirmed that alternate dates for the championship finals (i.e., current championship date formula, one week later and two weeks later) should be included in the bid solicitation.

Committee Chair: Kim Tatro, Lawrence University, Midwest Conference

Staff Liaison: Jan Gentry, Championships and Alliances

NCAA Division III Softball Committee June 17-19, 2019, Meeting
Attendees:
Marie Curran-Headley, State University of New York at Cobleskill.
Denny Griffin, Alma College.
Renee Hellert, Moravian College.
Diana Pepin, Eastern Connecticut State University.
Janae Shirley, East Texas Baptist University.
Kim Tatro, Lawrence University.
George Wares, Central College (Iowa).
Kim Wilson, Rowan University.
Absentees:
None.
Guests in Attendance:
Dee Abrahamson, NCAA Softball Equipment Consultant.

Tim Fairhead, The University of Texas at Tyler (via teleconference).
Dave Hines, National Fastpitch Coaches Association (via teleconference).
Craig Hyde, National Coordinator of NCAA Softball Umpire Program.
Mike Reed, The University of Texas at Tyler (via teleconference).
Vickie Van Kleeck, NCAA Softball Secretary-Rules Editor.
NCAA Staff Support in Attendance:
Jan Gentry, Championships and Alliances.
Trina Simerly, Championships and Alliances.
Other NCAA Staff Members in Attendance:
Louise McCleary, Division III Governance.
Kaitlyn Purcell, Academic and Membership Affairs.