



**REPORT OF THE
NCAA DIVISION III SOFTBALL COMMITTEE
JUNE 15-17, 2020, VIDEOCONFERENCE**

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 2021 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, 2020.

- (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 2020-21 sponsorship numbers.)
- (4) Estimated budget impact. None.
- (5) Student-athlete impact. None.

b. Committee chair.

- (1) Recommendation. That Renee Hellert, associate director of athletics and senior woman administrator at Moravian College, serve as chair of the NCAA Division III Softball Committee.
- (2) Effective date. September 1, 2020.
- (3) Rationale. Ms. Hellert will replace Kim Tatro, whose term on the committee ends in September 2020. Ms. Hellert has served on the committee for the past four years, including the past two years as the vice chair, and she will be an excellent leader and spokesperson for the group. [Note: The NCAA Division III Nominating Committee recently approved a one-year term extension for Ms. Hellert. Her term will now end August 31, 2021.]
- (4) Estimated budget impact. None.
- (5) Student-athlete impact. None.

INFORMATIONAL ITEMS.

- 1. Welcome and announcements.** The committee chair welcomed the committee members.
- 2. Meeting schedule and agenda.** NCAA staff reviewed the meeting schedule and agenda.
- 3. 2019 annual meeting report.** The committee approved the 2019 annual meeting report as submitted.
- 4. NCAA Division III Championships Committee actions.** The committee reviewed actions the NCAA Division III Championships Committee took in 2019-20 relevant to the work of the softball committee. Staff noted that the new 10-region alignment for softball and the increase in the number of softball committee members from eight to 10 was approved and will be effective September 1, 2021. Also, the bench size for softball will increase from 30 to 32, effective for the 2020-21 season, and coaches will be permitted to adjust their

softball rosters from game to game during each round of the championship, rather than being unable to adjust the roster until after the round of competition has been completed.

5. **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 2019.
6. **Division III governance update.** NCAA governance staff provided updates on several topics, including: a) COVID-19 (e.g., actions taken within the governance structure, related resources available on ncaa.org, etc.); b) name, image and likeness; c) the NCAA transfer portal; and d) the Arrington concussion case settlement.
7. **Academic and Membership Affairs update.** NCAA academic and membership affairs staff discussed virtual recruiting with the committee.
8. **COVID-19 impact and recent developments.** Each committee member provided a summary of plans for the fall for their respective institution and conference. Staff noted that for the 2020-21 academic year, as cost-cutting measures, banquets will not be conducted at NCAA championships and sport committee annual meetings will be held via digital platforms instead of in person. In addition, reimbursement for ground transportation expenses will be suspended through the 2023-24 academic year.
9. **National and regional advisory committee rosters.** The committee reviewed the 2019-20 committee roster and noted vacancies for 2020-21. The committee also reviewed a draft of the 10-region committee roster that will be effective in 2021-22, noting that five of the 10 members will be new to the committee that year. Staff confirmed that conference commissioners have been informed that they are permitted to extend the term of spring sport regional advisory committee members for an additional year.
10. **Committee chair and vice chair.** The committee recommended that Renee Hellert, associate director of athletics and senior woman administrator at Moravian College, serve as the committee chair in 2020-21 (see Action Item 2-b). Marie Curran-Headley, director of athletics at State University of New York at Cobleskill, will serve as the vice chair.
11. **Sport sponsorship.** The committee reviewed the 2019-20 pool document and noted conference membership changes and institutions that are reclassifying in 2020-21.

The committee reviewed the automatic-qualification applications for 2020-21 and recommended that 42 conferences receive automatic qualification to the 2021 championship (see Action Item 2-a). The committee also reviewed the new 10-region alignment model.

- 12. Joint discussion with NCAA Division III Baseball Committee regarding championship date formulas.** The committee met with the baseball committee and reviewed the results of the joint softball and baseball championship date formula survey. The softball committee submitted a separate report to the NCAA Division III Championships Committee for its June 22-23, 2020, meeting that includes a recommendation that the championship date formula for the softball championship be revised to one week later than the current formula. The proposed change would be effective for the 2023 softball championship (in conjunction with the first year of the next four-year site selection process).
- 13. Softball playing rules and bat testing updates.** The committee discussed several topics (e.g., concussion substitution rule, use of technology in the dugout, props, professional attire of coaches, etc.) with the NCAA softball secretary-rules editor, who confirmed that 2020-21 is not a rules-change year. The committee noted that it is challenging for the Divisions II and III softball committees to consistently enforce a policy of not allowing props in the dugout when announcers during televised Division I softball games highlight the use of props in the dugout. The secretary-rules editor indicated that each divisional softball committee can separately address the issue of the use of props.

The softball equipment consultant noted that bat-testing results were limited this year because of the short season due to COVID-19. Mandatory softball bat testing before each regular-season game is scheduled to begin for Division III on January 22, and each institution will determine its own testing protocol. The consultant plans to post a packet of bat testing information on the Arbiter website, where it will be available without paying a fee for access, by August.

The consultant also noted that the Pictor Group, which is conducting comprehensive reviews of the state of collegiate officiating on behalf of the Division III Conference Commissioners Association and the NCAA overall, will be presenting its reports within the next few weeks.

- 14. NCAA Softball Umpire Program (SUP) update.** The national coordinator of the NCAA Softball Umpire Program reported that two coordinators have been hired on the SUP staff, and their responsibilities will include assisting with evaluating umpires, conducting umpire training clinics and serving as the umpire-in-chief for either the Division II or Division III Softball Championship.

Committee members agreed that for umpires to be selected for the Division III postseason, they should not be required to work a minimum number of Division III games if they are working NCAA games and postseason tournaments in other divisions. The committee emphasized that conference assignors who are currently active umpires are 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 for the “under consideration” list as early as possible so that the individuals are aware of the opportunity to work the Division III postseason and block those dates. NCAA staff will share the list of umpires who worked any round of the 2019 championship with regional advisory committee members and members of the NFCA Division III head coaches committee to begin to develop a list of the top umpires in each region. This will help the national coordinator and the SUP coordinators develop a “Top 100” list. The committee asked the SUP staff to recommend four umpires for the finals site for approval immediately after the annual meeting, and then recommend the remaining two umpires for the finals site no later than early April so that the committee can approve and notify them as well. These early confirmations of top-rated umpires will minimize potential schedule conflicts with assignments for Divisions I and II.

15. **National Fastpitch Coaches Association update.** The committee participated on a videoconference with the Division III liaison from the NFCA and the NFCA coaching representative for Division III. The group discussed the results from the championship date formula survey, noting consistency in the results with the feedback provided by the coaches during the Division III coaches caucus at the NFCA convention in December. The NFCA liaison confirmed that when the 10-region alignment model is implemented in 2021-22, the NFCA will adjust the regional alignment used for its all-America awards from eight to 10 regions and mirror the NCAA’s regional alignment. As in past years, NCAA staff will work with the NFCA staff to solicit recommendations for postseason umpires from the Division III head coaches committee. Staff members also will collaborate to identify an appropriate format to honor NFCA all-Americans at the 2021 championship finals site (e.g., via video), given that there will not be a banquet.
16. **Committee timeline.** The committee reviewed the timeline and adjusted the annual meeting dates to continue to be three weeks after the championship.
17. **“Return to Championships” guidelines and best practices.** The committee reviewed the “Back to the Ballpark Recommendations” developed by USA Softball and discussed whether their institutions or other state or local entities had published guidelines specific to softball for safely returning to competition in the COVID-19 environment. Staff noted that the championships staff has begun work on sport-specific guidelines and will likely ask sport committees to provide feedback and suggestions during the process.
18. **Plan for 2021 championship.** The Old Dominion Athletic Conference and the City of Salem will host the 2021 NCAA Division III Softball Championship. The committee participated on a videoconference with Salem staff members, who shared exciting plans for renovations and enhancements to the Moyer Sports Complex in 2022-23.

The committee also recommended the changes below for the championship:

- a. Roster submission.** The committee noted that the Division III Championships Committee, during its February 2020 meeting, approved that softball teams will be permitted to submit a different roster each game (rather than one roster per round of competition) to identify the 20 student-athletes who will be in uniform that game. Coaches will be directed to submit the list 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 flexibility 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 game or first day of competition; they will now be able to be in uniform for subsequent games. This will not increase the bench size or squad size for the game.
- b. Format for regionals.** The committee noted that with the cancellation of all spring 2020 championships due to COVID-19, the new regional format that had been approved to be implemented in the 2020 championship will now be used for the first time in the 2021 championship. For the 62-team field, the committee will assign four teams to 15 regional sites and two teams to one site instead of assigning four teams to 14 regional sites and three teams to two regional sites. At the two-team site, a best-of-five-games format will be used, and the preferred schedule 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.
- c. 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. Staff will provide tournament directors a blank evaluation form in advance so they are aware of the feedback being requested, and also provide them a copy of the completed form after the tournament. Staff should schedule follow-up calls as needed with regional and super regional hosts to address issues identified on the evaluation forms.
- d. 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. Softball coaches have indicated that they would welcome this option, and administrators have confirmed they would use the account throughout the regular season and for other sports. The committee asked staff to follow up to determine if NCAA interns could oversee or assist with this project.

- e. **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 2021 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.
 - f. **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 should be used to dress up the game field fence, backstop, press box, etc.
 - g. **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.
 - h. **Professional attire for coaches.** The committee discussed expectations regarding professional attire for coaches during the championship. The committee noted that the NFCA may want to address the issue of professional attire of coaches for all three divisions to have some consistency in expectations.
 - i. **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. [Note: Banquets were eliminated from all 2020-21 NCAA championships as a cost-cutting measure.]
 - j. **T-shirt exchange.** The committee expressed interest in implementing a T-shirt exchange for the teams participating at the 2021 finals site.
19. **Future dates and sites.** The committee reviewed the dates for regionals, super regionals and the finals for 2020-21 through 2025-26. The committee identified June 21-23 as the dates for the 2021 annual committee meeting.
20. **Site selection recommendations for 2023-26.** The committee reviewed the bid chart for each year of the bid cycle and began discussing the pros and cons of each potential site. Staff will schedule additional committee meetings to continue the discussion and finalize site recommendations, which are due by July 31. [Note: If the committee’s recommendation to move the championship date formula one week later is approved, staff will need to follow up with each recommended host to confirm their availability to host based on the new date formula.]

21. **Strategic plan.** The committee reviewed a template for a strategic plan for the championship. The committee will work to finalize the plan during the 2020-21 academic year.

Committee Chair: Kim Tatro, Lawrence University, Midwest Conference

Staff Liaison: Jan Gentry, Championships and Alliances

NCAA Division III Softball Committee June 15-17, 2020, Videoconference	
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.	
Rachel Turoscy, DeSales University.	
George Wares, Central College (Iowa).	
Absentees:	
None.	
Guests in Attendance:	
Dee Abrahamson, NCAA Softball Equipment Consultant.	
Renaë Hartl, Luther College.	
Carey Harveycutter, City of Salem.	
Dave Hines, National Fastpitch Coaches Association.	
Craig Hyde, National Coordinator of NCAA Softball Umpire Program.	
John Shaner, City of Salem.	
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.	