



## 2021 Major Rules Change and Experimental Rule for Softball

*\*Note – This rule change will not be reflected in the hardcopy rules book until the 2022/2023 version.*

<u>Rule</u>	<u>Rule Change and Rationale</u>
8.6	<p>8.6 Reentry</p> <p>8.6.1 Any of the starting players, including a designated player and the flex, may be withdrawn and reentered once, providing players occupy the same batting spots whenever in the order. The starting player and her substitute(s) may not be in the lineup at the same time. A substitute who is withdrawn may not reenter.</p> <p><u>8.6.2 A player who exhibits signs, symptoms, or behaviors consistent with a concussion (See Appendix H) must be immediately removed and receive appropriate medical evaluation. She may not return until cleared by the appropriate medical personnel.</u></p> <p><u>8.6.2.1 While the evaluation is taking place, the injured player, whether a starter or a substitute, may be replaced by any eligible player who has not yet participated in the game.</u></p> <p><u>8.6.2.2 If the injured player is cleared to resume participation, she may resume her lineup spot. The temporary replacement player may again participate in the game as a substitute in the same lineup spot only, and provided she was not already a withdrawn substitute or a reentered starter before becoming the temporary replacement player or otherwise becomes ineligible.</u></p> <p><u>8.6.2.3 If a team has no remaining eligible players, a starter or substitute who has previously participated in the game may replace the injured player. <b>Exception:</b> A player rendered ineligible by ejection cannot replace the injured player.</u></p> <p><b>Rationale:</b> The NCAA Committee on Competitive Safeguards and Medical Aspects of Sports (CSMAS) recommended a rule change to allow a player to be removed from the game to be evaluated for a concussion without being disqualified. Current softball rules allow a starter one reentry if removed from the game for any reason, including the need to be evaluated for a concussion. However, by current rules, a substitute who is removed from the game for any reason, including the need to be evaluated for a concussion, would not be able to reenter if cleared. As a result, current rules may indirectly discourage or impede the timely reporting and/or evaluation of a possible concussion. This recommendation is consistent with other recent recommendations made by CSMAS to the playing rules committees of other sports (e.g., soccer; wrestling) with rules that could be perceived as impeding the reporting and/or timely evaluation of injuries during competition. This rule change would allow a player (starter or substitute) to be removed for a concussion evaluation and replaced by any eligible player who has not yet participated. If the player is cleared to resume participation, she may reenter in her original lineup position</p>

	<p>(this includes a substitute who would otherwise not be able to reenter under current reentry rules). The temporary replacement player may again participate in the game, but only in the same lineup spot, provided she is not otherwise ineligible (e.g., withdrawn substitute or a reentered starter). Should a team have no remaining eligible players, a starter or substitute who has previously participated in the game may replace the player removed for a concussion evaluation.</p>
<p>Experimental Rule</p>	<p>Allow conferences to experiment with video review during conference games (when two conference teams play each other in a conference game), including the conference tournament, in a limited number of situations. The experimental rule is below. By December 31, 2020, any conference wanting to experiment with video review must submit the request in writing to the NCAA Softball Rules Committee through Vickie Van Kleeck, <a href="mailto:ncaasbsre@gmail.com">ncaasbsre@gmail.com</a>, and Ashlee Follis, <a href="mailto:afollis@ncaa.org">afollis@ncaa.org</a>. Any Division I, II or III conference may request approval. Any conference granted permission to experiment is required to collect data and submit it to the rules committee by June 4, 2021.</p> <p><b>Rationale:</b> In recent years, enhanced technology in multiple sports has led to the implementation of video review to assist with getting the call right. Softball is a sport that has not delved into video review but is a sport that has been a benefactor of increased coverage, fan interest and technological advances. The Southeastern Conference experimented with video review during the 2019 SEC Softball Tournament and the rules committee and PROP approved video review as an experimental rule during conference games and conference tournaments during the 2020 season before cancelation due to COVID-19.</p>

**2021 Softball Experimental Rule**

In conference games (when two conference teams play each other in a conference game), including the conference tournament, the crew chief may initiate a review of designated plays at his/her discretion beginning with the 6<sup>th</sup> inning in any game. Additionally, each head coach has two challenges to initiate a review for the entirety of the game, which must be indicated before the next pitch, before the pitcher and all infielders have clearly vacated their normal fielding position and left fair territory, or before the umpires have left the field of play. The following are the plays that shall be subject to review via initiation by the crew chief or via a head coach’s challenge:

1. Deciding if a batted ball called fair is fair or foul.
2. Deciding if a batted ball called a ground rule double or home run is fair or foul.
3. Deciding if a batted ball called foul that could result in a ground rule double or home run is fair or foul.

4. Deciding if the ball actually left the field on a home run. Any ball higher than the top of the foul pole when it leaves the field would specially not be reviewable.
5. Deciding on a foul tip/foul ball at the plate, including a dropped strike.
6. Spectator interference.
7. Deciding scoring plays at home plate inclusive of collisions (illegal and/or malicious slides), obstruction by a defensive player or timing plays.
8. All aspects of a scoring/timing play are reviewable to ensure a run rightfully earned is scored and to prevent a run from scoring which a team did not rightfully earn.
9. Obstruction and interference are reviewable at any base only if the play in question results or would result in the third out of an inning AND relates to a timing/scoring play.
10. Deciding if malicious/flagrant contact occurred. Umpires are allowed to initiate this review without requiring a coach's challenge at any point in the game to ensure student-athlete safety.
11. Force/Tag Play Calls: Plays involving all runners acquiring the base before the defensive player's attempt to put the runner out at any base.
12. Hit-by-Pitch Calls: Those plays for which there is a possibility that a pitched ball touches a batter or her clothing, which shall incorporate a review of the ball in relation to the batter's box, if it is determined upon review that the ball hit the batter or her clothing.
13. Placement of Runners: An umpire's placement of all runners (per the rules/case book) after any blocked ball call.
14. With runners on base, a no catch can be changed to a catch only if it results in a third out. With no runners on base, a no catch can be changed to a catch at any time.

The following criteria shall be used by conferences using video review:

1. All equipment should be tested by appropriate personnel before each game.
2. A ruling on the field will only be changed if there is indisputable video evidence to reverse the call. Absent that evidence, the original ruling on the field will stand.
3. A review must be verbally or visually indicated before the next pitch, before the pitcher and all infielders have clearly vacated their normal fielding position and left fair territory, or the umpires leave the field of play.
4. Coaches have 30 seconds to verbally or visually lodge a challenge.
5. The video review may be conducted on-site by the crew chief or by an off-field official at a centralized video review location.
6. If video review is conducted on-site by the crew chief, the video review area shall not require an umpire to walk through spectators or dugouts to view the coverage. At least one umpire must remain on the field.

7. During the video review, the defensive team shall maintain their position on the field and may warm-up if desired. Offensive base runners and the on-deck hitter shall maintain their position. Other personnel shall remain in the dugout. Any defensive or offensive conferences will be charged as during any other part of the game.
8. Once the review is completed, the crew chief will communicate the ruling to both head coaches and the official scorer using the following criteria. This should also be communicated to the broadcasting booth, if applicable, via the umpire who has a microphone.
  - a. Ruling on the field is confirmed;
  - b. Ruling on the field is reversed; or
  - c. Ruling stands due to no indisputable evidence to reverse it.
9. If the reversing of a call results in the need for decisions on the placement of base runners, the crew chief shall use his/her best judgment and/or the appropriate rule to determine where to place the runners as if the call had been made correctly
10. The final decision may not be argued by either coach. A coach who argues the final decision shall be immediately ejected.

#### **Data Collection**

If this experimental rule is used, the following data must be collected and reported to the NCAA Softball Rules Committee:

1. Number of reviews in each game and the situation reviewed in each instance;
2. Whether the review was coach or umpire initiated;
3. For each review, whether the call on the field was upheld or overturned;
4. For each review, the length of the review; and
5. The length of each game (from first pitch to last out) and length of regular season TV games (from first pitch to last out) for comparison purposes.