



**REPORT OF THE
NCAA SOFTBALL RULES COMMITTEE
JUNE 13-15, 2023, ANNUAL MEETING**

ACTION ITEMS.

1. Legislative items.

- **None.**

2. Nonlegislative items. The NCAA Softball Rules Committee approved the following rules change proposals for the 2024 and 2025 seasons. The NCAA Softball Rules Committee requests approval from the NCAA Playing Rules Oversight Panel for the following items:

a. Bases – First Base (Rule 2.7).

1. Recommendation. To allow the use of a double base at first base.
2. Effective date. Immediately.
3. Rationale. This is currently an experimental rule. To potentially prevent collisions at first base while better protecting the runner and fielder. Also, to encourage batter-runners to utilize the runner's lane when running through first base. In general, the defense is restricted to using the white portion and the batter-runner is restricted to the colored portion. The double base at first base is required for USA Softball and permitted for high school competition and NCAA baseball.
4. Estimated budget impact. Permissive rule. If an institution chooses to use the double base at first base, it is approximately \$250 for the double base, however, installation costs vary depending on the type of field (e.g., potentially higher for a turf field).
5. Student-athlete impact. The use of a double base at first base may prevent collisions at first base and better protect the runner and fielder since the defense is restricted to using the white (fair) portion and the batter-runner is restricted to the colored (foul) portion.

b. Fences (Rule 2.15.2.1).

1. Recommendation. For all new construction, to require the fence distance to be 200 feet in left and right fields.
2. Effective date. Immediately.
3. Rationale. This is currently a recommendation. To acknowledge the continued offensive production in NCAA softball and create a more equitable experience.

4. Estimated budget impact. This is only for new construction therefore costs will be included in the budget for the new construction.

5. Student-athlete impact. None.

c. Bats – Knob/Handle (Rule 3.3.1.7.2).

1. Recommendation. To eliminate the requirement that bats have a ¼-inch knob protrusion to allow for the use of a manufactured bat with a tapered/flare/cone handle, a bat with additional layers of tape adjacent to the traditional knob or a bat with a tapering cone as long as it is completely covered by grip.

2. Effective date. Immediately.

3. Rationale. To allow for additional bat design options, including those that may limit the pressure on the hand.

4. Estimated budget impact. None.

5. Student-athlete impact. None.

d. Assistant Coaches (Rules 4.1, 6.5, 6.6 and 13).

1. Recommendation. To prohibit assistant coaches, who are not in a coach's box or serving as the acting head coach, from communicating with an umpire(s). This includes coming out of the dugout or bullpen area to appeal, question, argue or discuss any play on the field. The effect would be immediate ejection of the violator(s).

2. Effective date. Immediately.

3. Rationale. To emphasize that all communication from the team areas to an umpire(s) should be through the head coach, and to improve pace of play since there will be less stoppage to communicate with multiple coaches. Further, there has been an increase in assistant coaches being sent to argue calls with umpires.

4. Estimated budget impact. None.

5. Student-athlete impact. None.

e. Electronic Equipment (Rule 5.9.8).

1. Recommendation. To allow the use of an exclusively one-way electronic communication device from the dugout to the field for the purpose of relaying the pitch or play call.
2. Effective date. Immediately.
3. Rationale. To improve the pace and flow of the game and maintain the integrity of a team's signs.
4. Estimated budget impact. Permissive rule. If an institution chooses to use a one-way communication device, the cost will vary depending on the type of device (approximately \$50 to more than \$2,000).
5. Student-athlete impact. Minimal.

f. Video Review (Rule 5.9.9 and Appendix G).

1. Recommendation. To revise video review to:
 - a. Include runners leaving the base prior to the touch on a fly ball (tagging up), runners missing a base and runners leaving early on a pitch. NOTE: Runners leaving early on a pitch is only allowed by a coach's challenge and may not be initiated by an umpire.
 - b. Include all called/potential home runs.
 - c. Include catch/no catch in any situation.
 - d. Restrict hit batter (by pitch) reviews to: whether the ball hit the batter, whether the ball is entirely in the batter's box, whether the batter made an attempt to get out of the way of the pitch when required, and/or intentionally tried to get hit by the pitch.
 - e. Allow the review of any listed reviewable item(s) if the action on the field results in a dead ball.
2. Effective date. Immediately.
3. Rationale. To expand the use video review to include additional situations that could directly determine the outcome of a game.

4. Estimated budget impact. None.

5. Student-athlete impact. None.

g. Postgame Review of Suspensions (Rules 5.9.10 and 13).

1. Recommendation. To allow a postgame review of only those ejections that include a suspension. The request to review, including video of the incident, must be filed within 48 hours of the completion of the game and be submitted by the conference office or conference coordinator of umpires. A committee consisting of the NCAA Softball Secretary-Rules Editor, NCAA National Coordinator of Softball Umpires and one NCAA Softball Regional Advisor, who is not affiliated with the team or conference, will consider the review and render a decision.

2. Effective date. Immediately.

3. Rationale. To provide institutions and conferences with an avenue to ensure suspensions are appropriate and fair based on the rules.

4. Estimated budget impact. None.

5. Student-athlete impact. None.

h. Positions of the Offensive Team – Warmups (Rules 6.5.4.1 and 11.1.1). *This rule was subsequently rescinded by the Softball Rules Committee during its July 19, 2023, videoconference.

1. Recommendation. To allow the on-deck batter to use either on-deck circle (home or away).

2. Effective date. Immediately.

3. Rationale. To provide the on-deck batter the option of which on-deck circle will allow them the best opportunity for warming up.

4. Estimated budget impact. None.

5. Student-athlete impact. None.

i. Obstruction (Rule 9.5.1).

1. Recommendation. To change the obstruction rule to:

Obstruction occurs when a defensive player, neither in possession of the ball nor in the act of fielding a batted ball, impedes a batter's attempt to make contact with a pitch or impedes the progress of any runner who is legally running bases on a live ball. It can be intentional or unintentional.

While not in possession of the ball, it is obstruction if the defensive player:

- a. blocks any part of the leading edge of first, second or third base or home plate (as defined); or
- b. otherwise blocks the runner from advancing or returning to a base.

The defensive player is not considered obstructing if they are in possession of the ball or they are making a legitimate reaction to the trajectory of the ball after it is thrown. (See also Rule 12.13.)

Notes:

1. Once in possession of the ball, the defensive player can be positioned between the runner and the base/plate.
 2. Obstruction may be ruled even though there is no physical contact.
 3. If in the umpire's judgment, the runner would have clearly been put out then obstruction is ignored.
 4. Obstruction can occur on a force or tag play.
2. Effective date. Immediately.
 3. Rationale. To more clearly define the basic tenets of the obstruction rule to help coaches teach their defensive players how to properly defend at the base/plate and to assist umpires in making the correct ruling in these situations.
 4. Estimated budget impact. None.
 5. Student-athlete impact. None.

j. Step/Stride (Rule 10.5.4).

1. Recommendation. To allow pitchers to disengage from the playing surface during the delivery. The pitcher's pivot foot could become airborne with one push from the pitcher's plate. However, pitchers would not be allowed to replant their pivot foot resulting in pushing off from a second point and the pitcher being farther away from the pitcher's plate.
2. Effective date. Immediately.

3. Rationale. To align with international softball pitching rules, improve the consistency of enforcement of illegal pitches and recognize that currently the majority of NCAA softball pitchers lose contact with the playing surface to a certain degree. Unlike a pitcher who replants, pitchers do not gain a significant advantage by disengaging from the playing surface and therefore should not be penalized.
4. Estimated budget impact. None.
5. Student-athlete impact. None.

k. Time Allowed Between Pitches (Rules 10.18 and 11.2.1).

1. Recommendation. To change the time between pitches from 25 seconds (10/10/5) to 20 seconds. The time begins when the pitcher receives the ball or the umpire calls, "Play ball." The pitcher must begin their windup before the time expires or a ball will be awarded to the batter.

Batters still must be within the batter's box within 10 seconds of the pitcher receiving the ball or the umpire calling, "Play ball." If the batter is not within the batter's box within 10 seconds, a strike will be assessed to the batter. *Note – This is not a change, but is included to help clarify the responsibilities of the batter during the 20 seconds.

2. Effective date. Immediately.
3. Rationale. To improve the pace and flow of the game.
4. Estimated budget impact. None.
5. Student-athlete impact. Minimal.

l. Visible Action Clock (Rules 10.18, 6.7 and 11.2.1).

1. Recommendation. To allow a visible action clock(s) to assist in enforcing all timing rules equitably.
2. Effective date. Immediately.
3. Rationale. To assist in effectively and equitably enforcing the time between innings and time between pitches and improve the pace and flow of the game. The use of a visible action clock(s) has been effective in Major and Minor League Baseball and NCAA baseball at improving pace of play and assisting umpires in properly administering these timing rules.

4. Estimated budget impact. Permissive rule. If an institution chooses to use a visible clock(s), the cost will vary depending on the type of clock(s) (approximately \$500 to more than \$2,000).
5. Student-athlete impact. None.

m. Warmup Pitches (Rule 10.19.2).

1. Recommendation. To allow the pitcher one throw to any base during the allowed warmup time.
2. Effective date. Immediately.
3. Rationale. Currently, the pitcher is only allowed one throw to first base during warmups. This change is intended to allow the pitcher flexibility on how to use their warmup throw.
4. Estimated budget impact. None.
5. Student-athlete impact. Minimal.

INFORMATIONAL ITEMS.

1. **Welcome and announcements.** Shena Hollar, chair of the Softball Rules Committee, welcomed the committee and invited guests and thanked them for their time.
2. **Review schedule, agenda, committee operations manual and Playing Rules Oversight Panel directive.** The Softball Rules Committee reviewed the meeting schedule and agenda. The Softball Rules Committee also reviewed the operations manual, which included the NCAA conflict of interest policy, guidance for committee members regarding meeting reports, notes and email, voting procedures, principles for rules writing, and experimental playing rules guidelines. The Softball Rules Committee was reminded of the directive of PROP from 2014. This directive encourages all rules committees to strongly consider providing at least a one-year delay for Division II and Division III institutions before implementing any rules changes that have financial or facility implications.
3. **Approval of the May 8 videoconference report.** The Softball Rules Committee approved the report as written.
4. **Playing Rules Oversight Panel report.** Emily Parkins, PROP liaison to the Softball Rules Committee, reviewed the following topics of discussion from PROP's annual meeting in January.

- a. Federated playing rules process – PROP approved a recommendation directing the divisional governance bodies to pursue the appropriate legislative actions to eliminate the requirement that playing rules shall be common for all divisions of the Association. It was noted that PROP emphasized that there should continue to be a multi-divisional panel to maintain oversight of the playing rules process and determine which playing rules are federated. The DI, DII and DIII proposed processes for reviewing playing rules were reviewed.
 - b. Uniforms – The DII Implementation Committee recommended removing the bylaw that outlines the use of logos on equipment, uniforms and apparel and move it into the playing rules. It was noted PROP was not in favor of this concept.
 - c. The use of playing rules in nontraditional seasons – PROP requested each rules committee contemplate the use of playing rules in the nontraditional season and provide a recommendation for PROP to review and consider. The Softball Rules Committee agreed that in general playing rules should be followed and noted coaches should mutually agree on the rules that will be used. Health and safety and equipment rules, including bat testing, must be followed. It was noted that most coaches are unaware of the language in the front of the rules book outlining the requirement to use playing rules during the nontraditional season with listed exceptions.
5. **Secretary-rules editor report.** The secretary-rules editor provided a report to the Softball Rules Committee, which included a recap of their travel and meetings over the past year and a review of the ejection reports from the 2023 season. It was noted an interest in meeting with ESPN more often during the season to give information on interpretations and answer any questions.
 6. **National coordinator of umpires report.** The national coordinator of umpires provided a report to the Softball Rules Committee, which included a review of the Home Plate website on RQ+ and the number of registered umpires for the 2022-23 year – 1,800.
 7. **Active umpire report.** The active umpire provided a report to the Softball Rules Committee, which included difficult playing rules for umpires and suggested clarifications.
 8. **Trends.** The Softball Rules Committee reviewed statistical trends from all three divisions and noted while it feels as if there's been more offense the statistics have remained relatively flat.
 9. **Review 2023 rules survey results.** The Softball Rules Committee reviewed the 2023 rules survey results in conjunction with discussion on the corresponding rules change proposals.
 10. **National Federation of State High School Associations report.** The NFHS provided a report to the Softball Rules Committee, which included an update on the seven rules proposals that were approved by the NFHS Softball Rules Committee and are going through their rules review

process. This includes allowing pitchers to disengage from the playing surface during the delivery, which also was approved by the NCAA Softball Rules Committee.

- 11. NCAA Injury Surveillance Program report.** The Softball Rules Committee heard a report on the softball injury data report from the Datalys Center for Sports Injury Research and Prevention. This report included information on hand and wrist injuries while batting, injuries as a result of contact with a fence and injuries at first base.
- 12. Equipment consultant report.** The equipment consultant provided a report to the Softball Rules Committee, which included a reminder on the ball specifications requirement for 2024 and a recap of the number of bats that failed barrel compression testing or were removed because of damage this season (an all-time high).
- 13. Director of video services and video review report.** The director of video services and video report provided a report to the Softball Rules Committee, which included an overview of regular season and postseason video review and types of plays for future consideration. More information on video review. Safe/out was the most reviewed play type during regular season and postseason for the second year in a row. During the regular season, 14 DI conferences (three more than last year) used video review with three different models being used (onsite, on field, centralized). The number of reviews and average review time increased from last year. For NCAA postseason, video review was used during all games of the DI regionals (centralized), super regionals (centralized) and Women's College World Series (onsite) and at the DII and DIII Softball Championships final site (centralized). The average review time decreased in all rounds from last year.
- 14. Review 2024 and 2025 rules proposals and feedback, and experimental rule data.** The Softball Rules Committee reviewed and considered 69 rules proposals and recommended 13 major rules changes for the 2024 and 2025 softball seasons, as noted above in the Action Items section of this report. The recommended rules changes include allowing the use of a double base at first base, allowing the use of an exclusively one-way communication device from the dugout to the field, allowing a postgame review of ejections that include a suspension, changing obstruction to more clearly define the basic tenets of the rule, allowing pitchers to disengage from the playing surface during the delivery, changing the time allowed between pitches from 25 seconds (10/10/5) to 20 seconds and allowing a visible action clock(s).
- 15. Review 2022 and 2023 Softball Case Book and rules interpretations/clarifications.** The Softball Rules Committee reviewed and approved all approved rulings in the case book. The rules interpretations/clarifications document will be reviewed during an upcoming videoconference.
- 16. Future annual meeting and videoconference schedule.** The Softball Rules Committee scheduled a videoconference for 2 p.m. Eastern time on Wednesday, July 19, to review the comment period results. The 2024 annual meeting videoconference dates are to be determined.

17. Selection of chair. The Softball Rules Committee elected Trisha Senyo, head softball coach at Whittier College, as chair for the 2023-24 academic year.

18. Other business. The outgoing committee members were recognized and thanked for their service to the committee and Association.

19. Adjournment. The Wrestling Rules Committee adjourned at noon Eastern time on Thursday, June 15.

Committee Chair: Shena Hollar, Lenoir-Rhyne University, South Atlantic Conference
Staff Liaison(s): Ashlee Follis, Championships and Alliances, Playing Rules and Officiating

NCAA Softball Rules Committee June 13-15, 2023, Annual Meeting	
Attendees:	
Tracie Adix-Zins, DePaul University.	
Janelle Breneman, The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.	
Shena Hollar, Lenoir-Rhyne University.	
Bridget Martin, McNeese State University.	
Tina Phillips, University of Pittsburgh, Bradford.	
Trisha Senyo, Whittier College.	
Vickie Van Kleeck, secretary-rules editor.	
Kate Whalen, Regis University (Colorado).	
Mike White, University of Texas at Austin.	
Absentees:	
None.	
Guests in Attendance:	
Marty Abezetian, director of video services and video review.	
Dee Abrahamson, equipment consultant.	
Avinash Chandran, Datalys Center for Sports Injury Research and Prevention.	
Robbie Guest, active umpire.	
Steve McCown, national coordinator of umpires.	
Emily Parkins, Patriot League.	
Sandy Searcy, National Federation of State High School Associations.	
NCAA Staff Liaison in Attendance:	
Ashlee Follis.	
Other NCAA Staff Members in Attendance:	
LaGwyn Durden and Greg Johnson.	