



**REPORT OF THE  
NCAA SOFTBALL RULES COMMITTEE  
JUNE 15-17, 2020, ANNUAL MEETING VIDEOCONFERENCE**

**ACTION ITEMS.**

**1. Legislative items.**

- None.

**2. Nonlegislative items.** The NCAA Softball Rules Committee approved the following rules change proposal and experimental rule for the 2021 season. Although this is a non-rules change year for softball, the rules change proposal is being made for health and safety reasons. The committee requests approval from the NCAA Playing Rules Oversight Panel for the following items.

**a. Reentry (Rule 8.6).**

(1) Recommendation. To allow a player who exhibits signs, symptoms, or behaviors consistent with a concussion (See Appendix H) to be immediately removed and receive appropriate medical evaluation without being disqualified from the game. She may not return until cleared by the appropriate medical personnel. 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. 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may again participate in the game as a substitute in the same lineup spot only, and provided she was not already a withdrawn substitute or a reentered starter before becoming the temporary replacement player or otherwise becomes ineligible. If a team has no remaining eligible players, a starter or substitute who has previously participated in the game may replace the injured player.

(2) Effective date. Immediately.

(3) Rationale. 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 (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.

- (4) Estimated budget impact. None.
- (5) Student-athlete impact. Enhance student-athlete health and safety.

**b. Video Review Experimental Rule.**

- (1) Recommendation. To allow conferences to use 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 crew chief may initiate a review of designated plays at his/her discretion beginning with the 6<sup>th</sup> inning, and each head coach has two challenges to initiate a review for the entirety of the game. Conferences electing to experiment must collect specific data and provide that information to the rules committee for review during its June 2021 annual meeting. See Attachment for more information.
- (2) Effective date. Conference games and conference tournaments during the 2021 season.
- (3) Rationale. 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.
- (4) Estimated budget impact. Varies depending on technology/equipment used.
- (5) Student-athlete impact. None.

### **INFORMATIONAL ITEMS.**

- 1. Welcome, introductions and announcements.** The chair welcomed the committee members and invited guests and thanked them for their time and flexibility with conducting the annual meeting via videoconference instead of in-person.
- 2. Review schedule, agenda, committee operations manual and Playing Rules Oversight Panel (PROP) directives.** The meeting schedule and agenda were reviewed. The committee also reviewed the committee 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 committee was reminded of the directives of PROP from 2009 and 2014. These directives outline the two-year rules process and reasons a rules committee could propose a rules change in a non-rules change year, and encourage all rules committees to strongly consider providing at least a one-year delay for Divisions II and III institutions before implementing any rules changes that have financial or facility implications.
- 3. PROP report.** The committee reviewed the report from PROP's annual meeting in January, specifically highlighting the NCAA bylaw that requires the same playing rules for all three divisions. NCAA staff informed the committee that Ronda Seagraves, PROP liaison to the committee, would be participating in a portion of the meeting to hear the discussions.
- 4. NCAA Injury Surveillance Program data and report.** The committee heard a presentation on the softball injury data provided by the Datalys Center for Sports Injury Research and Prevention. It was noted membership participation had increased over the past year from 28 to 101 institutions reporting injury data. The shoulder and thigh are the most commonly injured body part, with strains and sprains being the most common injuries. Base running and throwing accounted for the most injuries, with most injuries occurring to outfielders. The committee heard a report from the NCAA Sport Science Institute staff regarding the rules change proposal from CSMAS.
- 5. National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) report.** The committee heard a report from the NFHS on the rules changes approved by the NFHS Softball Rules Committee. The committee only considered rules changes to mitigate risk of spread of COVID-19. Changes to the softball specifications are being considered by all three rules codes (NCAA, NFHS and USA Softball) to bring them in-line, however, NCAA and NFHS will not vote on changes until 2021. It was noted that ASTM is considering a standard for softball infielder head and face protection. The NFHS is considering return-to-play considerations due to COVID-19 (some states play high school softball in the fall). When those are completed, they will be sent to the NCAA staff liaison.

- 6. Equipment consultant report.** The committee heard a report from the equipment consultant, which included additional information on the softball specifications. The committee voiced support for the changes to the specifications and will consider the changes during its June 2021 annual meeting since this is a non-rules change year. The committee also discussed renaming the bat incident report to non-compliant/inappropriate bat report.
- 7. Review NCAA Softball Bat Compliance and Testing Information and Easton information.** The committee spent a considerable amount of time discussing the NCAA Softball Bat Compliance and Testing Information and the Easton FP18GH10 bat information. The committee agreed upon the following changes/clarifications to the bat compliance/testing process: 1) When a bat model receives a strike, any bat that is affidavited should also receive a strike; 2) The NCAA Softball Rules Committee has the authority to make the final decision on whether a bat has been tampered with; 3) The NCAA Softball Rules Committee has the authority to conduct further investigation after a failure verification autopsy opportunity is completed (including additional testing); and 4) Only 90% of bats (11 of 12 bats) must pass the exception process testing in order to receive a barrel compression testing exception (currently 95% must pass, which results in 12 of 12 bats needing to pass). The committee also reviewed the NCAA Softball Regular-Season Barrel Compression Testing Guidelines, which will be required for all divisions beginning Jan. 1, 2022. The committee reviewed the letter dated May 29, 2020 from Easton, all previous FP18GH10 bat failure verification autopsy photos and information, and the letter dated Jan. 13, 2020 from the rules committee to Easton as part of its discussion on the most recently failed FP18GH10 bat. The committee agreed that if Easton requests a failure verification autopsy on this failed bat, a virtual autopsy is the only option due to COVID-19 and limitations on an in-person autopsy.
- 8. Secretary-rules editor and weight management liaison report.** The committee heard a report from the secretary-rules editor, which included a review of the ejection/incident reports from the shortened 2020 season and the need for emphasis on sportsmanship and bench decorum during the next season.
- 9. National coordinator of umpires report.** The committee heard a report from the national coordinator of officials, which included areas of focus for the next season – active strike zone, crew mentality/good field communication, use of Arbiter to educate umpires, obstruction, and promoting good and respectful conversations between umpires and coaches.
- 10. Active umpire report.** The committee heard a report from the active umpire, which focused on areas of the rules that the committee should consider reviewing during the next rules change cycle.
- 11. Review of 2019-20 rules survey results.** The committee reviewed the 2019-20 rules survey in conjunction with the rules proposals discussion.

- 12. Review rules proposals and discussion items.** The committee reviewed the 63 rules proposals and five discussion topics. The committee approved one major rules change for the 2021 season and one experimental rule, as noted above in the Action Items section. The one major rules change was made for health and safety reasons as a recommendation from CSMAS. As a part of its review, the committee identified those proposals that should be considered for the 2021 rules survey and discussion at the 2021 annual meeting.
- 13. 2020 and 2021 Softball Case Book.** The committee reviewed the 2020 and 2021 Softball Case Book and noted no new interpretations were issued during the 2020 season.
- 14. Future annual meeting and teleconference dates.** The committee scheduled its 2021 annual meeting for June 21-23 in Indianapolis. The committee scheduled a teleconference for July 16 at noon Eastern time to discuss the comment period results.
- 15. Selection of chair.** The committee reelected Lexie Vernon, Knox College, as chair for the 2020-21 academic year.
- 16. Other business.** The only outgoing committee member, Kelly Gatwood, was recognized and thanked for her service to the committee and the Association.
- 17. Adjournment.** The committee adjourned Wednesday, June 17, at 2 p.m. Eastern time.

*Committee Chair:* Lexie Vernon, Knox College, Midwest Conference  
*Staff Liaison:* Ashlee Follis, Championships and Alliances

<b>NCAA Softball Rules Committee June 15-17, 2020, Annual Meeting Videoconference</b>	
<b>Attendees:</b>	
Janelle Breneman, The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.	
Todd Buckingham, Saginaw Valley State University.	
David Deiros, Florida Gulf Coast University.	
Kelly Gatwood, Conference USA.	
Shena Hollar, Lenoir-Rhyne University.	
Deanna Tritinger, Chatham University.	
Vickie Van Kleeck, secretary-rules editor.	
Lexie Vernon, Knox College.	
Mike White, University of Texas at Austin.	
<b>Absentees:</b>	
None.	
<b>Guests in Attendance:</b>	
Dee Abrahamson, equipment consultant.	

Avinash Chandran, Datalys Center for Sports Injury Research and Prevention.
Bobby DeMayo, active umpire.
Craig Hyde, national coordinator of umpires.
Ronda Seagraves, Concordia UnExiversity Texas.
Sandy Searcy, National Federation of State High School Associations.
<b>NCAA Staff Liaison in Attendance:</b>
Ashlee Follis.
<b>Other NCAA Staff Members in Attendance:</b>
LaGwyn Durden and Greg Johnson.

### **Attachment – 2021 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.