



## 2022 and 2023 Major Softball Rules Changes

*The following rules changes were approved by the NCAA Softball Rules Committee and the Playing Rules Oversight Panel. All rules changes are effective with the 2022 season except Rule 3.2.1, which is effective with the 2024 season.*

<u>Rule(s)</u>	<u>Rules Change and Rationale</u>
2.15.2.1 Recommended Fence Distance	<p>For all new construction, it is required that the fence be 6 feet or higher and a minimum of 190 feet in left and right fields, <u>or the recommended distance of 200 feet</u>, and 220 feet in center field.</p> <p><b>Rationale:</b> To encourage institutions to extend their fence distances to acknowledge the continued offensive production in NCAA softball by implementing a recommended minimum distance of 200 feet in left and field fields.</p>
2.16.2 Recommended Foul Pole Height	<p>The pole shall extend a minimum of 10, or the recommended height of at least <del>20</del> <u>40</u>, feet from the ground and shall be immediately adjacent to or attached to the outside of the home run fence.</p> <p><b>Rationale:</b> To encourage institutions to raise their foul poles to better assist umpires in making one of the most important calls in NCAA softball – whether a home run is fair or foul – by extending the recommended height to 40 feet.</p>
3.2.1 Ball Specifications	<p>To standardize ball specifications with NFHS and USA Softball to a maximum compression of 275-375 pounds. Required implementation by January 1, 2024.</p> <p><b>Rationale:</b> To improve inventory availability and assist in cost containment by standardizing ball specifications with NFHS and USA Softball.</p>
New 5.9 Video Review	<p>To allow video review of designated plays as listed below. In games using video review, each head coach has two challenges to initiate a review of the plays designated below for the entirety of the game. The challenge 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. Additionally, the crew chief may initiate a review of these plays at his/her discretion beginning with the 6th inning in any game.</p> <p>The following are the plays that shall be subject to review:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Regarding batted balls (any ball higher than the top of the foul pole when it leaves the field cannot have that aspect reviewed):<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. Deciding if a batted ball called fair is fair or foul.</li><li>b. Deciding if a batted ball called foul should be a ground rule double, home run, or hit-by-pitch.</li><li>c. Deciding if a batted ball called fair and ruled not to have left the field of play did leave the field.</li></ol></li></ol>

2. Regarding pitched balls at the plate:
  - a. Deciding if a pitch ruled a dropped third strike was caught before the ball touched the ground.
  - b. Deciding whether a live or dead ball should be changed to a foul ball.
  - c. Deciding whether a foul ball should be changed to a foul tip only with no base runners, or if it would result in a 3<sup>rd</sup> out.
  - d. Deciding whether a batter is entitled to an award of first base per Hit Batter (by Pitch) Rule 11.13.
3. Spectator interference.
4. Obstruction and interference (including collisions).
5. Deciding if malicious/flagrant contact occurred. Umpires may initiate this review without requiring a coach's challenge at any point in the game to ensure student-athlete safety.
6. Timing plays (deciding whether the base runner scored ahead of a third out).
7. 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.
8. Blocked or dead ball/Placement of Runners: Deciding whether a ball not ruled blocked should be ruled blocked, and the proper placement of runners (per the rules/case book) after any blocked or dead ball call.
9. With no base runners, a no catch can be changed to a catch at any time. With runners on base, a no catch can be changed to a catch only if it results in a 3<sup>rd</sup> out.

The following criteria shall be used in games 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.

	<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 has not delved into video review, but is a sport that has seen increased coverage, fan interest and technological advancements. Video review should be an option for institutions, conferences, tournaments and/or championships to utilize. Video review was successfully experimented with during the 2019 and 2021 seasons.</p>
<p>6.5 and 6.6 Positions of the Offensive and Defensive Teams</p>	<p>To prohibit teams from coming out of the dugout during stoppages of play, including during conferences, pitching changes, substitutions, and injuries, except for those players directly involved in the situation.</p> <p><b>Rationale:</b> Teams are increasingly leaving their dugouts during these situations. Rules 6.5 and 6.6 clearly define the times when teams are permitted to be out of the dugout. All other instances will not be tolerated.</p>
<p>6.6 and 6.7 Time Between Innings</p>	<p>6.7.1 <del>For all games (media or non-media),</del> teams are allowed a maximum of <del>two (2) minutes</del> <u>90 seconds</u> between innings and at the start of the game for warmups. During this time, the pitcher is allowed to throw any number of warmup pitches; the pitcher may only throw to first base once.</p> <p>6.7.1.1 The time limit may be shortened by mutual agreement between the two teams or by conference or tournament policy.</p> <p>6.7.1.2 If a media agreement requires a longer time between innings and at the start of the game, that time will become the maximum allowable time.</p> <p>EFFECT – At the end of the time limit, if the defensive team is not ready to play, a ball will be awarded to the batter, and if the offensive team is not ready to play, a strike will be assessed to the batter.</p> <p><b>Rationale:</b> To improve the pace and flow of the game by standardizing the time between innings to 90 seconds for all games (media or non-media) and allowing pitchers to throw any number of warmup pitches during this time between innings. Currently, media games are allowed a maximum of two minutes and non-media games have no set time limit.</p>
<p>6.7.2 and 6.12 Conferences</p>	<p>For all games (media or non-media):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To allow each team 7 charged team representative-to-player conferences per regulation game with a maximum of 1 per half inning and an additional defensive conference allowed for each pitching change if that pitcher has not already pitched in the half inning (which counts toward 1 of the 7 allowable conferences).</li> <li>2. To allow each team 7 charged player-to-player conferences per regulation game with a maximum of 2 per half inning.</li> </ol>

	<p>Each team is allowed 1 charged team representative-to-player conference and 1 charged player-to-player conference per half inning for each extra inning. Any remaining conferences from regulation do not carry over into extra innings.</p> <p>EFFECT – The team representative(s) or player(s) who initiates an unallowed conference shall be immediately ejected. (Administration ejection; see Rule 13.2.1.)</p> <p><b>Rationale:</b> To improve the pace and flow of the game by limiting the number of conferences (player-to-player and team representative-to-player). Excessive player-to-player timeouts are causing delays in games and disrupting the flow of the game. Note: Current rules outlining when the offense and defense will not be charged for a conference, including Rule 6.12.2 regarding uncharged conferences while tending to an injury, will remain in place and will be clarified to include an injury to any game participant.</p>
<p>New 8.5.2.2.1 Pitcher Substitution</p>	<p>If media goes to break during a pitching change, to allow a relief pitcher to throw any number of warmup pitches.</p> <p><b>Rationale:</b> To acknowledge pitchers are oftentimes waiting for media to come back from commercial and should be able to continue to warm up during this time if they choose.</p>
<p>10.1.1 Pitching Position</p>	<p>To allow the stride foot to be on the pitcher’s lane line/pitcher’s plate (rather than within the 24-inch length of the pitcher’s plate).</p> <p><b>Rationale:</b> To create consistency with pitcher’s lane line rules and acknowledge common practice.</p>
<p>10.14.1 EFFECT Intentionally Pitching at a Batter</p>	<p>The pitcher shall not intentionally attempt to hit the batter with a pitch.</p> <p>EFFECT – ...If in the umpire’s judgment, the situation warrants drastic action to diffuse a potentially volatile situation, the umpire may eject the pitcher <del>and catcher</del> without warning. The head coach <u>and/or catcher</u> of the offending team also may be ejected at this time if the umpire believes it is appropriate.</p> <p><b>Rationale:</b> The catcher should not always be ejected if the pitcher is ejected. Umpires should have the option also to eject the head coach and/or catcher without it being a requirement.</p>
<p>11.2.5 EFFECT Legal Position in the Batter’s Box</p>	<p>At the moment of bat-ball contact, the batter may not contact the pitch when any part of her body is touching the ground outside the lines of the batter’s box.</p> <p>EFFECT – <u>Delayed dead ball is signaled. The coach of the defensive team shall choose either the result of the play or the standard effect for illegal contact, which is a strike on the batter and all base runners must return to the</u></p>

	<p>base legally occupied at the time of the pitch. If it is the third strike, the batter is declared out. <del>The ball is dead. The batter shall be declared out immediately, whether the ball is fair or foul.</del></p> <p><b>Rationale:</b> To create consistency with the penalty for an illegal pitch by the pitcher. The current effect for illegal contact of the pitch by the batter is too harsh.</p>
<p>11.13.3.2 Hit Batter (by Pitch)</p>	<p>The batter shall not be awarded first base under the following circumstances: The batter is hit by a pitch in the strike zone <u>or by a pitch that does not reach the plate but would have been in the strike zone had it not hit the batter.</u></p> <p><b>Rationale:</b> To eliminate a batter trying to get hit by a pitch before it reaches the plate that otherwise would have been a strike.</p>
<p>11.20.4 Note Interference by Batter</p>	<p>Note: If the batter swings and misses the pitch but accidentally hits the ball <u>or the catcher</u> on the follow-through, it is a <u>delayed dead ball and the defensive team may choose either the result of the play or it is a dead-ball strike</u> and all base runners must return to the base legally occupied at the time of the pitch.</p> <p><b>Rationale:</b> To allow the defensive team to choose the result of the play or return base runners to base legally occupied at time of pitch.</p>
<p>12.13 and 9.5.3 EFFECT Collisions</p>	<p>To add that a runner will be called out and ejected on a deliberate collision with a fielder regardless if the fielder has possession of the ball.</p> <p>9.5.3.1 to 9.5.3.6 EFFECT – ...If the runner collides flagrantly, the ball is dead, <del>and although the runner is declared safe on the obstruction call,</del> and the runner is declared out and ejected.</p> <p><b>Rationale:</b> Runners are currently not penalized with an out for collisions (remaining on her feet and deliberately with great force colliding into a defensive player) with defensive players not in possession of the ball. This change would always have an effect of a dead ball, out, and other runners return to the base at the time of the collision, even if the fielder is obstructing. The current penalty is ejection, however, the runner committing the act can be replaced and the replacement would be awarded the base. These acts will now result in ejection and an out.</p>
<p>12.13.5 Collisions</p>	<p>To clarify the definition of “out of the baseline” to mean “can’t reach the base” and to treat this violation as interference. Also, to allow the option to issue a team warning when this behavior is not egregious enough to warrant an immediate ejection.</p>

	<p><b>Rationale:</b> Currently, the EFFECT for sliding out of the baseline in order to slide directly at a fielder is an out and immediate ejection. In certain instances, this action does not rise to the level of an ejection, but should be penalized with a team warning. It will also now be treated as interference, so if the act prevents the fielder from making a play, interference will be ruled.</p>
<p>12.17.2.1.5.2 Interference</p>	<p>To add that a runner may not intentionally distract or run at any fielder in an effort to distract her while not making an attempt to run directly to the base. The effect would be a warning to the player. This pertains to any defensive player regardless if the defensive player is the one making a play on the ball. If the defensive player is making a play on the ball, interference will also be called.</p> <p><b>Rationale:</b> Currently, there is no recourse to penalize a batter-runner or runner for intentionally distracting a defensive player not making a play on the ball. These non-softball plays have no place in our game.</p>
<p>13.2.3 Pregame and Postgame Ejections</p>	<p>The umpires have the authority to issue a <u>pregame or postgame</u> ejection for unsporting behavior that occurs <del>after the last out of the game, before the umpires have left the confines of the field,</del> <u>from the time the umpires arrive at the competition site until the umpires leave the competition site</u>, if the conduct would have resulted in an ejection had it occurred during the game.</p> <p><b>Rationale:</b> The umpires’ jurisdiction doesn’t begin until they arrive on the field and ends when they leave the field. Unfortunately, instances of misconduct toward the umpire have occurred before or after these time periods. It is imperative umpires have the ability to appropriately penalize actions occurring in pregame and postgame periods that would otherwise be punishable during the game.</p>