NCAA Softball
Statistical Information and
Electronic Equipment
Experimental Rule
Fall 2015

Questions and Answers

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August, 2015
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This supplement to the 2015 experimental rule memo regarding electronic equipment is designed to address the specific concerns brought to the attention of the NCAA Softball Rules Committee (NSRC) following the rule’s adoption and endorsement by the Playing Rules Oversight Panel.

If you have a concern not addressed herein, please contact the Secretary-Rules Editor. We encourage use of the rule during the fall season and will also solicit your feedback through a survey shortly thereafter.
Rule Change Rationale

1) What does the NSRC hope to accomplish through the experimental rule?

The NSRC believes it is important to stay relevant and adjust the playing rules as the game and its players advance. Advancements in technology allow coaches to improve student-athlete performance through immediate feedback. The expanded use of electronic equipment is thought to be worthy of inclusion in the playing rules or, at the very least, of consideration.
Competitive Equity

2) Has the NSRC considered that the changes to the use of technology will widen the gap of competitive inequity between the “haves” and “have-nots”? 

On the contrary, members expect the effect will level the playing field as coaches with limited resources can more efficiently develop their players and devise their strategies than in the past. For example, a player being able to view (whether on a smartphone, tablet or 50-inch HD TV) her previous at-bats allows her to make adjustments without having to wait for another day of competition or practice.
Home Team Advantage

3) Similarly, these rules seem to advantage the home teams over the visiting teams because they will have so many more resources.

Home teams already have numerous advantages over their guests, like last at-bat and knowledge of how the field plays. More significantly, some home teams have taken advantage of facilities to review video/data during competition or game delays, but out of sight of the umpires who are charged with enforcing the rule. Allowing visitors the same access to review video/data levels the playing field.
Length of Game

4) The ability to review video or electronically entered data during the game will lengthen the time coaches will use before relaying pitching and offensive signals. This could significantly lengthen the game.

The time between pitches is already governed by rule and remains unchanged. The time between half innings is managed by umpires or dictated by TV so should also be unaffected. In fact, NSRC members believe it may even be faster for a coach to retrieve information/data electronically than from paper reports and charts before calling a play.
Collegial Environment

5) This group of changes will create a contentious environment by coaches constantly criticizing umpires based on video evidence of umpire’s mistakes.

Although video may confirm an umpire’s mistake, it could also confirm that the umpire’s judgment was correct. Video confirmation on the accuracy of calls has always been available postgame. Now it will be available in a more timely manner. The NSRC anticipates that the coach-umpire relationship will be no less collegial because you cannot use this to challenge or criticize an umpire’s judgement.
6) The use of video will allow coaches to pick pitches and steal signs from opponents.

It is true that a coach could be in the dugout and watch video of the opposing team’s signals and pitcher’s mannerisms rather than coach his/her players during the competition. However, it is more likely they will have done so prior to the start of a game. Coaches will have to balance real time interaction with their players during a game, using video/data to improve their own players and/or focusing on their opponents.
Relaying Signs

7) Similarly, these rules allow a videographer in the outfield to steal a sign, relay it to the dugout which then can be relayed to the base coach and then to the batter further advantaging the batters over pitchers.

While the above circumstance could happen, there can be no more than ten seconds between the sign (or simulated sign) and the beginning of the pitch. That makes this scenario highly unlikely. Should someone be adept at this, however, defensive signals can be further encrypted.
8) Can you address the perceived recruiting advantage of those schools which will publicize that it has televisions and computer monitors mounted in their dugout?

The NSRC does not deny that coaches may use these changes to influence prospective student-athletes in the recruiting process. We do not believe they will be the deciding factor in a prospect’s final selection of a school. Visiting teams will be able to use data/video on their portable devices just like home teams can on permanent equipment.
Opposing Dugout

9) Is the NSRC concerned about the coaches who say they will focus a camera just on the opposing dugout to watch what goes on in their dugout?

By rule, coaches can currently film the opposing dugout to view later but, to our knowledge, have not chosen to do so. Even though the rule change will allow them to now watch this video in real time, it will have to be at the expense of their focus on the game.
10) The opportunity to use in-game video/data creates a need to redesign current dugouts which has a financial impact.

Mobile and wireless technologies have advanced to the point that the committee does not agree that this creates a compelling need to redesign facilities.
11) The addition of accessing information from electronic equipment will require programs to buy expensive equipment and add staffing.

Coaches will have to determine the best expenditures to enhance the collection and review of this type of data. Many teams currently use iPads, tablets, etc. to input data. Their primary goal is the student-athlete’s fair chance to be successful between the chalk lines.
Unenforceable Rule

12) The inability to enforce the current rule is no reason to change it.

Enforceability is always a factor in rule writing but rarely the only reason a rule is adopted or rejected. In this case, umpires cannot be expected to monitor compliance with the current rule. Umpires need to focus on the playing field and not in team areas.
Ethics

13) Changes will not stop coaches who choose to cheat.

Rules books are comprised of rules with consequences, but they cannot account for those who continually find a way around the rules. The NSRC also wants to minimize unintended violations (i.e., a coach referring to electronic data entered earlier instead of using paper/charts) and eliminate any appearance of impropriety or suspicions of others.