

Rule Changes for 2014 and 2015

New text is underlined

The Rules

Regarding Non-championship Season Competition

The NCAA Softball Rules Committee has also designated several rules that may be set aside during contests with outside competition during the non-championship season. The intent of these rule exceptions is to provide a quality, educational experience for student-athletes and yet provide structure and competitive equity by abiding by all except the following rules: Rule 1.111 and 8 that restrict substitutions and limit reentry rights. In the non-championship season, free substitution and batting out of order shall be allowed and those changes need not be reported through umpires; and Rule 6.13 Eight-Run Rule may be set aside in order to allow for at least seven innings of play.

In addition to abiding by all the other playing rules published in the current edition of the Softball Rules and Interpretations, participating coaches may agree to the following additions:

- 1) Participate in experimental rules created by the NCAA Softball Rules Committee and therefore set aside any playing rules that would then be in conflict;
- 2) Begin agreed upon half innings with one or more runners on base;
- 3) Agree to replay a poorly executed play no more than once per team per inning; and
- 4) If the game is tied after seven innings, play will continue until the tie is broken or ten innings have been completed, whichever occurs first.

In all cases, if participating coaches wish to use one or more exceptions or additions listed above, they must be agreed upon no later than the pre-game meeting. In all other aspects, teams must abide by the current softball playing rules and NCAA bylaws.

Notes:

- 1) Institutional scrimmages are not subject to these rules of competition as long as they are limited to participation by appropriate institutional personnel and no outside competitors participate other than those allowed under the alumni exception of the bylaws.
- 2) Practices with outside competition are also exempt from playing rules when they only display skills of the sport rather than competition between participants.

RATIONALE- PROVIDES COACHES WITH MORE FLEXIBILITY FOR TEACHING OPPORTUNITIES IN THE NON- CHAMPIONSHIP SEASON WHILE MAINTAINING COMPETITIVE EQUITY AMONG TEAMS.

RULE 1

Subdividing Ejections into Administrative or Behavioral (current Rule 1.38; new Rule 1.20 and numerous references)
Definition-The exercise of an umpire's authority to remove a player and/or other team personnel from further participation in a game. Ejections are classified as either administrative ejections or behavioral ejections.

RATIONALE- SUBDIVIDE EJECTIONS INTO ADMINISTRATIVE ONES (FOR EXAMPLE, SECOND CONFERENCE IN AN INNING) AND BEHAVIORAL ONES (FOR EXAMPLE, USING PROFANITY) TO ASSIST INSTITUTIONS AND CONFERENCES IN DETERMINING WHEN SUBSEQUENT SUSPENSIONS ARE APPROPRIATE. PREVIOUSLY, CONFERENCE RULES THAT WERE MADE TO ADDRESS BEHAVIORAL MISCONDUCT HAVE ALSO RESULTED IN SUSPENSION FOR WHAT ARE NOW DEFINING AS ADMINISTRATIVE EJECTIONS.

Adding a new term: Runner (New Rule 1.51)

The offensive player who is in the process of running the bases whether as a batter-runner or a base runner.

RATIONALE- CREATES A NEW CATEGORY THAT INCLUDES BOTH BATTER-RUNNERS AND BASE RUNNERS FOR THE PURPOSE OF COMBINING RULES AND EFFECTS WHEN THEY APPLY TO BOTH TYPES OF RUNNERS.

RULE 2

Regarding School Branding on Bases (Rule 2.4)

Note: Only a sticker with an NCAA, team or conference logo, name, or abbreviation sticker or label may be used only on the middle third of the rise of the base. At no time is the branding sticker allowed on top of the base.

RATIONALE- ALLOWS A BRANDING OPPORTUNITY ON THE HEIGHT OF THE BASE WITHOUT AFFECTING PLAY OR THE UMPIRE'S ABILITY TO CLEARLY SEE THE WHITE OF THE BASE FOR TAGS AND FORCE PLAYS.

Regarding Enclosing Dugouts (Rule 2.9)

...It is recommended that each dugout be located on the sideline boundary at a point of equal distance from home plate to first base and home plate to third base, respectively. Consideration should be given to enclose the field side of dugouts with netting or fencing.

RATIONALE- THE PROXIMITY OF SOME DUGOUTS TO THE BATTER'S BOX RESULTS IN FOUL BATTED BALLS ENTERING THE DUGOUT AND CONTACTING ITS OCCUPANTS, EVEN WHEN THEY ARE ATTENTIVE TO THE GAME. IN THESE CASES, CONSIDERATION SHOULD BE GIVEN TO PROTECTING DUGOUT OCCUPANTS BY PROVIDING NETTING OR FENCING ON THE FIELD SIDE OF THE DUGOUT.

Regarding Fence Distances (Rule 2.10)

...For all new construction after 2016, it is required that the fence be 6 feet or higher and be a minimum of 190 feet in left and right fields and 220 feet in center field. By 2017, an institutional field with a 4-foot fence must be a minimum of 210 feet in left and right fields and 230 in center field and it is highly recommended that a municipal field with a 4-foot fence used by the institution be at those same distances.

RATIONALE- THE FIRST CHANGE ABOVE IS TO SPECIFY THAT THE HEIGHT OF THE HOME RUN FENCE BE AT LEAST 6 FEET FOR ALL NEW CONSTRUCTION AFTER 2016. THE SECOND CHANGE IS TAKING WHAT WAS A HIGHLY RECOMMENDED FENCE DISTANCE FOR A 4-FOOT FENCE AND MAKING IT A REQUIRED DISTANCE FOR AN INSTITUTIONALLY CONTROLLED, EXISTING FIELD WHILE LEAVING IT AS A RECOMMENDATION FOR EXISTING FIELDS USED BY (BUT NOT OWNED BY) AN INSTITUTION.

Regarding Grading on a New Field (Layout, Rule 2.14)

The infield shall be level, but to allow for natural surface drainage, it is recommended that the entire playing area be graded .5 percent from the edge of the pitcher's plate to the infield/outfield rim and one percent to the sideline boundaries of the field.

RATIONALE- NEWER INFIELD PRODUCTS PROVIDE BETTER DRAINAGE THAN IN THE PAST SO REDUCING THE PITCH OF THE INFIELD FROM ONE TO A HALF PERCENT STILL ACCOMPLISHES GOOD DRAINAGE AND YET IMPROVES PLAYABILITY OF ROLLING BALLS NEAR A FOUL LINE.

Regarding Correct Markings and Distances (Nonregulation Field, Rule 2.16)

The umpires have the responsibility to check the playing field to be sure it complies with these regulations. Every effort should be made to obtain the correct dimensions and markings. Any game started on a nonregulation field shall not be protested for this reason.

Note: Once a game has started, if it is discovered by or brought to the attention of the umpire that the chalked lines, or pitching or base distances, are incorrect, the error shall be corrected immediately, with no penalty, and the game shall continue from that point. If the pitching or base distances cannot be corrected or the game moved to a regulation field, "No Game" shall be declared (see Rule 6.18).

RATIONALE- ADDS MARKINGS TO CORRECTABLE ITEMS AND, IN THE INTEREST OF STUDENT-ATHLETE SAFETY, GIVES DIRECTION TO NOT PLAY IF PITCHING AND BASE DISTANCES CANNOT BE CORRECTED.

RULE 3

Decreasing Incident Report Filing Time (All Equipment, EFFECT Rule 3.1.1 and numerous other rule effects)

EFFECT—If there is a question regarding the availability of the equipment, the umpire shall determine whether the equipment will be allowed in the game. In all cases, the plate umpire is responsible for submitting an incident report (See Appendix E), in writing, to the NCAA softball secretary rules editor as soon as possible but

not later than 24 hours after the incident. The offending head coach may also file an incident report within the 24 hours.

RATIONALE- DECREASES THE TIME TO FILE AN INCIDENT REPORT FROM 72 HOURS TO 24 HOURS WHICH IS MADE POSSIBLE BY THE INCREASE IN INTERNET ACCESSIBILITY.

Allowing an Axe Handle Bat (Rule 3.3.1.8.2)

The bat shall have a knob of a minimum of 1/4 inch protruding at an angle of 90 or less from the handle.

RATIONALE- MAKES THE AXE HANDLE BAT, WHICH IS LEGAL IN EVERY OTHER CODE, LEGAL IN THE COLLEGE GAME.

Combining Types of Inappropriate Bats (new Rule 3.3.2 and 11.23.2.3)

Inappropriate bats, that is, non-approved bats which are not on the current NCAA Approved Softball bat List, illegal bats which do not meet the bat specifications, and bats whose performance characteristics have been altered shall not be in team areas, on the field nor used in the game.

EFFECT-- See Appendix C. If a batter enters the batter's box with an inappropriate bat, or has completed her turn at bat using that bat and before the first pitch to the next batter, the bat shall be removed from the game (not returned to the dugout), the batter shall be declared out and ejected from the game, and base runners shall not advance.

Exception: In all cases, advance is legal on a non-contacted pitch or ball four.

If an inappropriate bat is detected at any other time either on the field or in a team area, the bat shall be surrendered to the plate umpire with no other consequence.

Any bat discovered through NCAA bat compliance testing to exceed the ASA bat performance standard shall be excluded from use, and the player/team may be subject to post game penalties imposed by the NCAA (not umpire).

In all cases regarding possession or use of an inappropriate or damaged bat (for example, a bat with a crack, dent, rattle or wobble), the plate umpire shall remove the bat from the game or doubleheader, return it to the coach at the conclusion of play and file an incident report (See Appendix E), with the NCAA softball secretary-rules editor.

RATIONALE- SIMPLIFIES THE PENALTY FOR ALL INAPPROPRIATE BATS (PREVIOUSLY AN ILLEGAL BAT RESULTED IN OUT BUT NOT EJECTION BUT THE OTHERS WERE OUT AND EJECTED) WHETHER ALTERED, ILLEGAL OR NONAPPROVED.

Changing the Earliest Date for the Bat List (Bat, Rule 3.3.5.1)

All bats for competition must be on the NCAA Approved Softball Bat List which shall be published, at a minimum, at midnight on the second Monday of December, March, April and July. In addition, new lists will be published when negative lab results dictate or to delete a model at the request of the manufacturer.

RATIONALE- 1) SPECIFIES DATES IN THE RULE BOOK FOR THE PLANNED PUBLICATION OF THE NCAA APPROVED SOFTBALL BAT LIST AND 2) CHANGES THE PREVIOUS EARLIEST DATE IN JANUARY TO DECEMBER TO ALLOW MORE TIME FOR COACHES TO ADJUST THEIR BAT INVENTORY.

Simplifying Bat List Verification When BCT Occurs (Bat, current rule 3.3.2; new Rule 3.3.5.2.1)

Following the first game of a doubleheader, series or tournament where barrel compression testing (BCT) occurs, the umpire crew need only confirm the suitability of each bat (that is, check for damage such as cracks, dents, rattles, and wobble) and verify the total number of available bats with destructible stickers rather than reconcile each individual model of bat with the team's highlighted bat list. *Exception: If a new bat list is published when a series or tournament is in progress, 3.3.5.2.1 shall not apply and each bat model shall be individually reconciled with the new NCAA Approved Softball Bat List.*

RATIONALE- BECAUSE BCT ALREADY VERIFIES EACH BAT HAS THE ASA 2004 SEAL AND IS ON THE CURRENT NCAA APPROVED SOFTBALL BAT LIST, THESE TWO STEPS MAY BE REPLACED BY SIMPLY RE-VERIFYING THE TOTAL NUMBER OF BATS INSPECTED FOR THE FIRST GAME.

Regarding Uninspected Bats (Bat, new Rule 3.3.5.4)

EFFECT-Failure to present a bat for pregame inspection which is later discovered in the team's possession or dugout shall be considered an unsporting act and subject to the effect in Rule 13.2. If no specific player is in possession of the bat at the time it is brought to the umpire's attention, the head coach shall be the person ejected.

RATIONALE- PUTS LAST YEAR'S INTERPRETATION INTO TEXT TO COVER UNINSPECTED BATS.

Allowing Fungo Bats (Warm-up Bat, Rule 3.4)

3.4 In addition to softball bats on the current NCAA Approved Bat List, fungo bats, and nonaltered, one piece, wooden baseball or softball bats, may be used in pregame warm-ups. Only legal softball bats highlighted on the team's bat list may be in the on-deck circle during the game.

RATIONALE- ALLOWS FUNGO BATS TO BE USED IN PREGAME WARM-UPS BECAUSE THEY ARE EASILY DISTINGUISHED FROM LEGAL BATS AND WOULD NOT ACCIDENTALLY BE USED IN A GAME.

RULE 5

Adding Post Game Use of Video (Electronics, new Rule 5.9.6 and add to new Rules 13.2 and 13.3)

If available, television monitoring or institutional replay equipment may be used following a game in only the following situations:

.1 by the umpires to verify personnel involved in a fight;

.2 by the umpires to verify personnel who left a team area to join a brawl;

.3 by the SRE to confirm the accuracy of a softball incident report involving a protest or potential suspension.

RATIONALE- IMPROVES THE ACCURACY OF REPORTS WHICH HAVE A SUBSEQUENT CONSEQUENCE YET LIMITS THE USE OF REPLAY TO ONLY THESE THREE SPECIFIC CIRCUMSTANCES

RULE 7

Regarding the Timeliness of a Protest (Rule 7.2.5)

During regular-season play, the coach shall immediately notify the plate umpire of his or her intent to protest before the next pitch. If the game ends (legal contest) in a situation that can be protested, the offended team must voice its protest intentions before the umpires exit the playing field.

RATIONALE- ADDS "IMMEDIATELY" TO MATCH 7.2.6 AND DISALLOWS AFTER A HALF INNING BREAK IN THE ACTION. ALSO CHANGES THE END OF THE GAME "ONE MINUTE" TO "BEFORE THE UMPIRES EXIT BECAUSE THE UMPIRES MUST BE PRESENT TO HEAR THE PROTEST.

RULE 8

Regarding Insufficient Number of Players to Continue (Players, Rule 8.1.1)

EFFECT A forfeit shall be declared in favor of the team with sufficient players in the event one team is no longer able to field a team of at least nine players. In the event neither team can field a team, the game is declared "No Contest" (See Rule 6.20) unless the failure to field a team is as a result of misconduct suspensions (See Rule 13.3.3).

RATIONALE- CLARIFIES THE RESULT OF THE GAME IF BOTH TEAMS ARE UNABLE TO FIELD A TEAM.

Adding New Term: Offense Player (OP) (new Rule 8.1.2.5 and chart)

Offense Player (OP) The player in the batting order who is not playing defense because the DP has entered to play defense for her.

RATIONALE- PREVIOUSLY THIS PLAYER WAS MISTAKENLY REFERRED TO AS THE TEMPORARY DP ALTHOUGH SHE NEVER HAD ANY OF THE RIGHTS OF A DP. THIS ADDITION IS TO STOP THAT MISREPRESENTATION.

RULE 9

Regarding Restricting Home Run Celebrations by Teammates (Interference, Rule 9.5.3)

Offensive team personnel, other than base coaches and base runner(s), shall not touch a runner(s) who is legally running the bases on a dead-ball award until the player(s) contacts home plate. Offensive team personnel congregating near home plate to congratulate the runner(s) are restricted to foul territory only.

RATIONALE- IT HAS BECOME INCREASINGLY DIFFICULT FOR THE UMPIRE TO ENSURE A RUNNER(S) HAS TOUCHED HOME PLATE AND THAT OFFENSIVE TEAM PERSONNEL HAVE NOT CONTACTED THE RUNNER(S) BEFORE SCORING AS TEAMMATES SURROUND HOME PLATE TO CELEBRATE A HOME RUN. THIS ADDITION IS INTENDED TO ELIMINATE THOSE TWO POSSIBLE VIOLATIONS AND GIVE THE UMPIRE FULL VIEW FROM FAIR TERRITORY WITHOUT ELIMINATING THE EXCITEMENT OF THE MOMENT.

RULE 10

Regarding Foreign Substances (Rule 10.13.1 and 10.13.2)

Under the supervision and within view of the umpire, a resin (i.e. a drying agent) may be used on the pitcher's hand/fingers. Any substance (including resin, dirt or saliva) applied to the pitcher's hands and fingers must be wiped off if it would transfer to the ball.

10.13.2 No player or other team personnel may apply moisture or any substance to the ball or into a glove which will then contact the ball or do anything else to deface the ball.

RATIONALE- RESOLVES THE CONTROVERSY REGARDING DIRT AS A FOREIGN SUBSTANCE AND CLARIFIES THAT DURING THE GAME, ALL SUBSTANCES THAT TRANSFER TO THE BALL MUST BE WIPED OFF.

Regarding the Strike Zone Diagram (end of Rule 11)

Although the actual words of the strike zone have not changed, two new diagrams will replace the existing picture. In one, there will be a diagram of the vertical strike zone and in the other, a diagram of the horizontal strike zone with home plate and batter's boxes drawn in with a ball in the river (that is, between the side of the plate and the inner line of the batter's boxes) depicting the 3 7/8 inches of each river covered by a ball and 2 1/8 inches of each river remaining outside the strike zone.

RATIONALE- IMPROVED DEPICTION OF THE STRIKE ZONE IN TWO PLANES TO BETTER ILLUSTRATE THE CORRECT ZONE FOR PLAYERS AND COACHES AND INCREASE THE ACCURATE CALLING OF STRIKES BY UMPIRES. THE NOTION THAT IF THE PITCH IS IN THE RIVER, IT MUST BE A STRIKE IS NOT TRUE AS NOW ILLUSTRATED IN THE DIAGRAM OF THE HORIZONTAL STRIKE ZONE.

RULE 13

Adding a New Term Regarding Misconduct: Warning (new Rule 13.1)

13.1 Inappropriate conduct by participants may result in either informal or formal warnings at the discretion of an umpire. Umpires are not required to warn participants for inappropriate behavior before assessing a penalty except as noted specifically in the rules.

13.1.1 An informal warning may be given for circumstances where preventative umpiring is used to prevent a situation from escalating to a degree when the umpire will be compelled to act. They are advisory in nature and carry no consequences if the undesirable behavior ceases.

A.R. 13.1.1 The pitching coach asks the plate umpire about the location of at least one pitch for two successive batters. RULING: The plate umpire may advise the coach that discussions regarding the strike zone are inappropriate and will not be tolerated.

13.1.2 A formal warning is issued for circumstances when the umpire needs to intervene and prevent inappropriate behavior from occurring or reoccurring. When given, they are to be clearly articulated as warnings and noted on the plate umpire's line-up card.

A.R.13.1.2 On the way to the coaches' box between innings, the base coach comments to the plate umpire that his batters are being forced to swing at pitches well out of the strike zone which is hampering their offense. RULING: The plate umpire issues a warning for arguing balls and strikes and notes it on the team's lineup card.

RATIONALE- ADDS A WARNING IN THE TEXT AS THE LEAST PUNITIVE EFFECT FOR INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIOR.

Regarding Ejections (current Rule 13.1; new Rule 13.2.1 and 13.14)

Whether a warning is issued or not, umpires have the authority to remove a player and/or other team personnel from further participation in a game for unsporting behavior or verbal misconduct. The on-site administrator shall make him/herself available to assist the umpire crew in removing the violator from the field.

RATIONALE- CLARIFIES WARNINGS NEED NOT ALWAYS BE ISSUED AND REITERATES THE ROLE OF THE OSA IN ASSISTING WITH THE REMOVAL OF VIOLATORS FROM THE FIELD AS STATED IN RULE 4.7.1.6.

13.2.1 EFFECT- An ejected player may remain in the dugout but shall not remain on the playing field or communicate with opponents or umpires. Ejected nonplaying personnel must leave the playing field, dugout, and all other team areas. They may occupy the space near or behind the home-run fence or may leave the complex and be out of sight and sound. Out of sight and sound means unable to view the remainder of the contest and the umpires cannot hear any additional comments. In either case, they shall not communicate (visually, electronically or verbally) further with the teams or umpires. [Continue with the rest of the effect in current 13.1]

RATIONALE- THIS CHANGE MIRRORS THE NCAA BASEBALL RULE REGARDING BEING OUT OF SIGHT AND SOUND IF THE EJECTED NON-PLAYER CHOOSES NOT TO GO BEYOND THE HOME RUN FENCE TO WATCH THE REMAINDER OF THE GAME. PREVIOUSLY, SOME EJECTED COACHES WERE LEAVING THE FACILITY AS MARKED BY AN EXTERIOR FENCE BUT WERE ABLE TO STAND ALONG A BULLPEN OR CONCESSION AREA.

Notifying Coach of Ejection for Inappropriate Physical Contact (current Rule 13.2; new Rule 13.3.1)

Any threat of physical intimidation or harm, including pushing, shoving, spitting, kicking, throwing at or attempting to make aggressive physical contact, or use of equipment in a combative manner shall not be tolerated and is grounds for ejection combined with suspension.

EFFECT—The ejecting umpire shall notify the head coach and the on-site administrator that the reason for the ejection is violation of Rule 13.3. Notice shall take place no later than at the conclusion of the game if video review is not requested or available or after video review following the game. [Continue with the rest of the effect in current 13.2]

... Note: Suspended personnel shall not be in uniform, shall not be allowed in any team area from the time umpires enter the field until after they leave the field and shall not perform any team duty while serving a suspension.

RATIONALE- REQUIRES THE UMPIRE TO CLEARLY INFORM THE COACH WHEN AN EJECTION THAT CARRIES A SUSPENSION HAS OCCURRED. AT TIMES, COACHES WERE UNAWARE OF WHETHER THEIR PLAYER WAS EJECTED UNDER THE PHYSICAL ABUSE CATEGORY OR UNSPORTING BEHAVIOR UNTIL THE PAPERWORK WAS FILED. THE INTENT OF THIS CHANGE IS TO REQUIRE NOTIFICATION FROM THE UMPIRE TO THE COACH IN A TIMELY MANNER. IN ADDITION, THE NOTE CLARIFIES THE TIME FRAME WHEN SUSPENDED PERSONNEL ARE RESTRICTED FROM PARTICIPATION.

Regarding Multiple Suspensions (new Rule 13.3.3)

If the subsequent suspension of multiple players renders a team unable to field a team of eligible players, the head coach may request the staggering of the suspensions. Requests shall be made to the team's conference commissioner or, in the event the team is an independent, to the NCAA secretary rules editor.

RATIONALE- TO NOT PENALIZE THE NEXT OPPONENT FOR A TEAM THAT IS UNABLE TO FIELD A FULL TEAM DUE TO SUSPENSIONS BY ALLOWING THE STAGGERING OF THE SUSPENSIONS.

Notifying Coach of Ejection for Joining a Brawl (Effect current Rule 13.3; new Rule 13.4)

EFFECT—The ejecting umpire shall notify the head coach and the on-site administrator that the reason for the ejection is violation of Rule 13.4. Notice shall take place no later than at the conclusion of the game if video review is not requested or available or after video review following the game. [Continue with the rest of the effect in current 13.3]

... Note: Suspended personnel shall not be in uniform, shall not be allowed in any team area from the time umpires enter the field until after they leave the field and shall not perform any team duty while serving a suspension.

RATIONALE- REQUIRES THE UMPIRE TO CLEARLY INFORM THE COACH WHEN AN EJECTION THAT CARRIES A SUSPENSION HAS OCCURRED. THE INTENT OF THIS CHANGE IS TO REQUIRE NOTIFICATION FROM THE UMPIRE TO THE COACH IN A TIMELY MANNER. IN ADDITION, THE NOTE CLARIFIES THE TIME FRAME WHEN SUSPENDED PERSONNEL ARE RESTRICTED FROM PARTICIPATION.

RULE 15

Regarding Umpire Attire (Rule 15.1.1.2 and 15.1.2)

The umpire crew may wear any of the approved alternate uniforms listed below as designated by conferences or associations. The approved alternate uniforms may include the following: heather gray pants with a heather gray ball bag. [continue with text in 15.1.1.2]

15.1.2 The plate umpire shall wear a black mask with natural or black padding.

RATIONALE- ADDS A GRAY BALL BAG TO THE LIST OF APPROVED ALTERNATE UMPIRE ATTIRE AND DELETES THE NICKEL COLORED MASK BY ALLOWING ONLY A BLACK MASK.

Complying with CCA Umpire Manual (Rule 15.2.1)

All umpires shall adhere to the policies, procedures and umpire mechanics as outlined in the current Collegiate Commissioners Association Softball Umpire Manual.

RATIONALE- REPLACES THE GENERAL STATEMENTS REGARDING SOFTBALL UMPIRES MANUAL WITH THE SPECIFIC CCA MANUAL.