



2018 and 2019 Major Rules Changes for Softball

The following rules changes were approved by the NCAA Softball Rules Committee and the Playing Rules Oversight Panel. They will be incorporated into the rules book for the 2018 and 2019 seasons.

*Note – rule references are associated with the new rules book.

| Rule | Rule Change and Rationale |
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| New 2.28, 12.5.5 and new 12.17.1.5.2 | <p>Require the runner's lane be drawn on the field and all associated rules apply.</p> <p><u>New Rule 2.28</u> <u>The runner's lane is the area that is the last half of the distance between home plate and first base where a batter-runner must run to avoid interfering with a fielder's attempt to receive a thrown ball. It is bounded by a 30-foot line drawn in foul territory parallel to and 3 feet from the first-base line, starting at a point halfway between home plate and the back edge of first base. (See diagram at end of rule.) If the infield is skinned, it is recommended the runner's lane be skinned.</u></p> <p><u>New Rule 12.5.5</u> <u>When either of her feet is completely outside the runner's lane, in contact with the ground, and, in the judgment of the umpire, she interferes with the fielder taking the throw at first base. Exception: She may run outside the runner's lane: (1) if she has not yet reached the start of the runner's lane; (2) to avoid a fielder attempting to field a batted ball; (3) or if she leaves the lane on her last stride in order to touch first base.</u> <u>EFFECT—See Rule 12.17.1.5.2.</u></p> <p><u>New Rule 12.17.1.5.2</u> <u>The batter-runner may not run outside the runner's lane and, in the umpire's judgment, interfere with the fielder taking the throw at first base. Exception: The batter-runner may run outside the runner's lane: (1) if she has not yet reached the start of the runner's lane; (2) to avoid a fielder attempting to field a batted ball; (3) or if she leaves the lane on her last stride in order to touch first base.</u></p> <p><u>New Note 2</u> <u>The batter-runner is considered outside the runner's lane if either foot is completely outside either line and in contact with the ground.</u></p> |

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| | <p><u>EFFECT—The ball is dead, the batter-runner is out, and each base runner must return to the last base occupied at the time of the pitch. If the interference, in the umpire’s judgment, is an obvious attempt to prevent a double play, the base runner closest to home plate shall also be called out.</u></p> <p>Rationale: In removing the requirement to draw the runner’s lane on the field and the language referencing the lane, the rule was inadvertently and fundamentally changed. Runners no longer had a protected area to run from home to first. The intent of that rule was to prevent the runner from interfering with the defensive player receiving the ball at first base and could not be applied correctly without the runner’s lane.</p> |
| <p>3.3.1.1 and 3.3.1.1.2</p> | <p>The bat barrel, taper and handle shall be of one piece or multi-piece permanently assembled or two-piece interchangeable barrel construction.</p> <p>Delete 3.3.1.1.2.</p> <p>Rationale: The interchangeable barrel bat design was abandoned by the manufacturer.</p> |
| <p>3.3.1.7.2</p> | <p>The bat shall have a knob of a minimum of ¼ inch protruding at a degree angle of 90 or less from the handle. It may be molded, lathed, welded <u>or adjustable</u>, but must be permanently fastened. A “flare” or “cone” grip attached to the bat will be considered altered. The knob may be taped or marked for identification as long as there is no violation of this section. <u>The knob may be solid or hollowed out to house an embedded metric sensor. If a sensor is used it shall (1) not affect performance; (2) be secured by a locking mechanism and a back-up mechanism to keep it in place; and (3) have a distinguishing "off line" mode to prevent data from being accessed during a game.</u></p> <p>Rationale: Bats with adjustable knobs allow hitters to use one bat and have the benefit of adjusting the knob to different lengths to provide hand stability that a traditional knob provides, but do not provide any type of unfair advantage. The metric sensor allows for the increased advances in technology of bat construction and will offer hitters feedback on their swing after the game.</p> |
| <p>3.7.2 and 3.8.3.1</p> | <p>A defensive player may wear a helmet. If more than one player wears a helmet, the helmets must be the same color. <u>Highly reflective, mirror-like chrome-finish helmets of any color are prohibited.</u> Helmets shall have a nonglossy finish.</p> <p>Rationale: The highly reflective, mirror-like chrome-finish helmets are prohibited to be worn by offensive players, and the same prohibition should be on defensive players, too.</p> |

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| <p>4.10</p> | <p>Game officials who are hired <u>contracted</u> to rule on the plays of the game shall be the plate umpire and a <u>base umpire(s)</u> one or two base umpires.</p> <p>Rationale: Allows for additional base umpires to be used.</p> |
| <p>5.3.4</p> | <p>Maintenance of the field before and during games shall be the responsibility of the home-team management. <u>The home team may hand drag/rake the field after a complete inning, provided it does not delay the start of the next inning. Additional in-game field maintenance may</u> shall only be at the direction of <u>be requested by</u> the umpire(s).</p> <p>Rationale: Improves the playing surface for the safety and well-being of the student-athletes and does not delay playing time.</p> |
| <p>5.5</p> | <p>The umpires should report to the field and notify the on-site administrator and home-team coaches of their arrival at least <u>one hour</u> 45 minutes before the start of the game.</p> <p>Rationale: Common practice update. Some of the umpires’ duties already suggest they should be arriving an hour before the start of the game.</p> |
| <p>5.9.8</p> | <p><u>Team personnel, including players, are prohibited from wearing any device capable of transmitting information while on the field (e.g., cell phone, smart watch, etc.).</u></p> <p>Rationale: Personnel is prohibited from accessing or retrieving data during the game. This will ensure these devices are not being used inappropriately.</p> |
| <p>New 6.7 and 6.12</p> | <p><u>6.7 Media Format</u> <u>The following media format shall be used in televised games, or may be used by mutual agreement between the two teams or by conference or tournament policy.</u> <u>6.7.1 Teams are allowed a maximum of 2 minutes between innings and at the start of the game for warm-ups. Rules 6.5.4.1 through 6.5.4.3 and 6.6.6.1 through 6.6.6.4 still apply, except that during this time, the pitcher is allowed to throw any number of warm-up pitches. She may still only throw to first base once.</u> <u>6.7.1.1 The time limit may be shortened by mutual agreement between the two teams or by conference or tournament policy.</u> <u>6.7.1.2 If a television agreement requires a longer time limit between innings and at the start of the game, that time will become the maximum allowable time.</u></p> |

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| | <p><u>EFFECT – (6.7.1) – 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.</u></p> <p><u>6.7.2 Each team is allowed 7 charged conferences per regulation game. Each team is allowed 1 charged conference per half inning for each extra inning. Any remaining conferences from regulation do not carry over into extra innings. Rule 6.12 will still apply in all innings, except that in 6.12.4.1 each additional conference will count against the total of 7 charged conferences during regulation.</u></p> <p><u>EFFECT – The team representative(s) or player(s) who initiates an un-allowed charged conference shall be immediately ejected. (Administrative ejection; see Rule 13.2.1.)</u></p> <p>Rationale: Variations on these changes were utilized as experimental rules during the 2017 season. Improve the flow of the game and pace of play in televised softball games.</p> |
| 7.1.2.2.3 | <p><u>When the ball goes out of play, the dead-ball appeal cannot be made until the umpire places a new ball into the game all runners must be given an opportunity to complete their base running responsibilities (advancing or returning), as determined by the umpire. Once a runner has been given sufficient time to advance or return and shows no immediate intention of doing so, a dead-ball appeal can be made. See also Rule 7.1.4.</u></p> <p>Rationale: To provide the defense an opportunity to make a dead-ball appeal, especially on an out-of-the-park walk-off home run, when a runner(s) or the batter-runner misses home plate.</p> |
| 8.5.1.1 and 8.5.1.3 | <p><u>8.5.1.1 Any player may be substituted for at any time when the ball is dead as long as she immediately participates in the game.</u></p> <p><u>8.5.1.3 A coach of the team making the substitution shall immediately notify the plate umpire at the time a substitute enters the game. A coach may make substitutes by notifying the plate umpire of the forthcoming changes. Substitutes are not required to enter the game at the time the substitution is reported to the plate umpire. Projected substitutions and re-entries are not allowed.</u></p> <p>Rationale: Improves the flow of the game by allowing a coach to make projected substitutions. Substitutes will now be reported to the umpire without being required to immediately participate in the game, e.g., allowing a coach to report more than one change in the batting order at the beginning of the inning or re-entering the DP before her next at bat. Projected re-entries, i.e., re-entries reported while the substitute is participating (running, batting, playing defense), will continue not to be allowed.</p> |

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| <p>New 9.1</p> | <p><u>9.1 No Huddle Defense</u> <u>After an out, the defense is allowed to throw the ball around the infield, but then must throw the ball directly to the pitcher. A team cannot huddle at the pitcher’s circle or elsewhere.</u> <u>EFFECT – The umpire shall warn the violator and her coach for the first offense in the game. For any subsequent offense by any member of the warned team in the same game, a ball is awarded to the batter.</u></p> <p>Rationale: Utilized as an experimental rule during the 2017 season. Improve the flow of the game and pace of play.</p> |
| <p>9.5</p> | <p><u>9.5.1 Obstruction occurs when a defensive player, not in possession of the ball or 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. It is obstruction if a defensive player is blocking the whole base/plate or base path without the ball and/or the runner does not have a clear path to the base/plate. (See also Rule 12.13.)</u> <u>Notes:</u> <u>1. Once in possession of the ball, the defensive player can be positioned between the runner and the base/plate.</u> <u>2. Obstruction may be ruled even though there is no physical contact.</u> <u>3. The runner may still be called out if she was clearly beaten by the throw.</u> <u>4. In past years, coaches taught their players to block the base, catch the ball and make the tag. Now defensive players must catch the ball, block the base and make the tag.</u> <u>5. Obstruction can occur on a force or tag play.</u></p> <p>Delete all references to “in the act of catching”.</p> <p>Rationale: To allow a base runner a clear path to the base if the defensive player is receiving a throw and does not have possession of the ball in her glove or hand. Defensive players can no longer cause the runner to alter her path to the base by blocking the base/plate or base path without the ball. Removes the vagueness of “in the act of catching” the ball.</p> |
| <p>10.2.1.1</p> | <p>Both feet must be on the ground in contact with the pitcher’s plate and a portion of the pivot foot must be on the top surface of the pitcher’s plate. Any part of each foot in contact with the ground or pitcher’s plate must be completely within the 24-inch length of the pitcher’s plate.</p> |

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| | <p>Rationale: This rule as currently written is difficult to enforce, but would still require both feet to be on the ground and in contact with the pitcher’s plate.</p> |
| 10.2.2 | <p>While in this position, the pitcher shall pause <u>for a noticeable stop of at least two seconds</u> to take or simulate taking a signal from the catcher.</p> <p>Rationale: Issued as an interpretation on November 30, 2015. Ensures the pitcher has a noticeable stop/pause to allow both the batter and umpire to be ready for the pitch.</p> |
| 10.8 EFFECT | <p>EFFECT - ...(2) If the batter does not reach first base safely or if any runner fails to advance at least one base, the coach of the offensive team may choose the result of the play or the standard effect for an illegal pitch, which is that a ball is awarded to the batter, and each base runner advances one base.</p> <p>(3) If the batter is hit by an illegal pitch not swung at, the batter is awarded first base, and each <u>other</u> base runners advance one base, <u>only if forced</u>.</p> <p>(4) If ball four is an illegal pitch, the batter is awarded first base, and each <u>other</u> base runners advance one base, <u>only if forced</u>.</p> <p>Rationale: An illegal pitch has no effect on a base runner in softball since they cannot leave the base until the pitch is released. The committee felt that awarding a ball on the batter and a one-base advance for any runner was an excessive penalty on the pitcher’s illegal action.</p> |
| 11.2.5, 11.15.1 and 11.21.4 | <p>At the moment of bat-ball contact, the batter may not contact the pitch when any part of her foot is touching home plate, even though she may be touching the lines of the batter’s box. In addition, the batter may not contact the pitch when her entire foot is touching the ground completely outside the lines of the batter’s box.</p> <p>Rationale: It is increasingly difficult for plate umpires to assure the delivery of the pitch is legal, track the pitch, be aware of the position of the batter in the batter’s box on a hit by pitch and see if the batter has stepped completely outside the box at the point of contact. Also, ensures slappers do not gain an unfair advantage that other batters do not have by being allowed to contact the ball while outside of the batter’s box.</p> |
| 11.5.2 | <p><u>11.5.11</u> Note: A legally batted ball that is declared foul cannot be changed to fair regardless of additional information that might be made available to the calling umpire. Exception: Dead ball awards (i.e., out-of-the-park home run, ground rule double, and hit-by-pitch).</p> |

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| | <p>Rationale: A foul ball cannot be changed to a fair ball because the umpires would have to make a judgment as to where the base runner(s) would have advanced. These three exceptions have definitive base awards and therefore do not require the umpire(s) to judge where to place the runner(s). In these three instances, incorrect foul ball calls can be changed to fair/dead ball awards when additional information is made available.</p> |
| <p>12.5.9 and 12.10.3</p> | <p>12.5.9 The batter-runner is out when she runs the bases in reverse order, <u>runs intentionally into the outfield between bases or runs through first base unnecessarily into the outfield on a walk, dropped third strike or any batted ball</u> either to confuse opponents or to make a travesty of the game.</p> <p>12.10.3 A runner shall not run bases in reverse order <u>or intentionally run into the outfield between bases</u> either to confuse the fielders or to make a travesty of the game.</p> <p>Rationale: The committee believes this tactic, which involves running out of the traditional base path in order to confuse the defense, does not support the spirit and intent of the rule on the runner’s base path and makes a travesty of the game.</p> |
| <p>12.10.12 and 7.1.1.2.5.a</p> | <p>If a runner misses home plate and the fielder misses or makes no attempt to tag the runner, the umpire should make a safe signal and declare “No tag.” <u>no signal, verbal or nonverbal.</u></p> <p>Rationale: By requiring the umpire to make the safe signal, it could be confusing to the offense and they would have no reason to think they missed home plate. By the umpire making no signal, it notifies both the offense and defense that something more needs to occur before a ruling can be made.</p> |
| <p>12.13</p> | <p><u>12.13.1 When there is a collision between a runner and a fielder who is in clear possession of the ball:</u></p> <p><u>12.13.1.1 If the defensive player blocks the base (plate) or baseline, the runner may slide into the base and make contact with the fielder as long as the runner is making a legitimate attempt to reach the base (plate). A legitimate attempt is making contact with the ground before reaching the base or fielder.</u></p> <p><u>12.13.1.2 The runner must make an actual attempt to reach the base (plate).</u></p> <p><u>12.13.1.3 The runner may not attempt to dislodge the ball from the fielder. Contact above the waist shall be judged by the umpire as an attempt by the runner to dislodge the ball.</u></p> <p><u>12.13.1.4 The runner must attempt to avoid a collision if she can reach the base without colliding.</u></p> |

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| | <p><u>12.13.1.5</u> The runner must be called out if she remains on her feet and deliberately, with great force, crashes into a defensive player holding the ball and waiting to apply a tag.</p> <p>EFFECT – (12.13.1.1 to 12.13.1.5) – The ball is dead. The runner is called out for deliberately crashing into a fielder, even if the ball is dislodged. If the runner deliberately crashed into a fielder holding the ball before she was put out and, in the umpire’s judgment, it was an attempt to break up an obvious double play, the offender and player being played on shall both be declared out. If the deliberate crash occurs after the runner was called out, the runner closest to home plate will also be declared out. If an obstructed runner deliberately crashes into a fielder holding the ball, the obstruction call will be ignored, and the runner will be called out. Note: If the act is determined to be flagrant, the offender will be ejected for misconduct under Rule 13 (Behavioral ejection).</p> <p>12.13.2 To prevent injury and protect the defensive player attempting to make a play on a runner, the runner must be called out if she remains on her feet and deliberately, with great force, crashes into a defensive player holding the ball and waiting to apply a tag. To prevent a deliberate crash ruling, the runner can slide, jump over the top of the defender holding the ball, go around the defender or return to the previous base touched.</p> <p>Rationale: The committee continues to have concerns about collisions and is now more in line with NCAA baseball and Major League Baseball. This will ensure the health and safety of our student-athletes and provide clarity for umpires when making difficult obstruction calls.</p> |
| <p>13.2.1 EFFECT and 13.13</p> | <p>13.2.1 EFFECT – Ejected nonplaying personnel must leave the playing field, dugout and other team areas and be out of sight and sound. 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 cases, They shall not communicate (visually, electronically or verbally) further with the teams or umpires.</p> <p><u>13.13 Suspended Personnel and Subsequent Violations</u></p> <p><u>13.13.1 Suspended student-athletes 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. <i>Exception:</i> Suspended student-athletes may be restricted to the dugout if the suspension is to be served while the team is on the road and no other suitable supervisory options are available.</u></p> |

13.13.2 Suspended coaches and other nonplaying personnel shall not communicate with any umpire or be in the playing facility once pregame activities have started until the umpires leave the field of play at the conclusion of the game(s).

EFFECT – (13.13.1 and 13.13.2) – Any violation of the conditions for the suspended person shall result in the game being forfeited.

Rationale: Clarified that ejected nonplaying team personnel cannot occupy the space near or behind the home run fence. They must leave the field or complex and be out of sight and sound. Additionally, suspended nonplaying team personnel cannot be in attendance at the site of play once pregame activities have started until the umpires leave the field of play.