



NCAA Softball Rules Interpretations and Clarifications – 2023 Season
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Updated May 19, 2023 (see blue highlights)

Rules 8.3.3, 8.3.3.5.1 and 8.3.3.5.2 and Note 3 – Unreported/Misreported Players – Catchers

In regard to an unreported or misreported pitcher/catcher, Note 3 on page 71 of the rules book states, “3. If the player in violation is the pitcher or catcher, delivering or receiving a pitch is considered making a play.”

For clarity on when a catcher has made a play, “receiving a pitch” is interpreted as the act of being the catcher on a pitched ball, regardless of whether the ball was caught by the catcher, hit, fouled off, etc.

EFFECTS in Rule 8.3.3 and Appendix B outline applicable penalties in each unreported/misreported player situation.

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED INTERPRETATIONS
May 5, 2023

Rule 4.5 Medical Personnel – Substitute for Injured Player

Injured players, who can safely be moved from the field, must be replaced by a substitute as soon as this happens. Unless the injured player only needs a quick procedure (e.g., bandage for bleeding, cleaning a contact lens, etc.), a substitute must come in for that player. Injuries requiring more extensive treatment (e.g., taping an ankle) or evaluation will need to be replaced by a substitute.

Rule 5.7.3 Line Up Card Issue

Per Rule 5.7.3 Note 3, if a team has multiple players with the same last name, the team must list a first name or distinguishing first name initial if they are in the written lineup at the same time. If they are both in the written starting lineup, the first name/distinguishing first name initial should be verified at the pregame meeting.

Rule 7.2.5 Protest Procedure

Here is the process that needs to be followed to have a valid protest:

1. The coach immediately (before the next pitch) notifies the plate umpire of their intent to protest.
 - If the game ends in a situation that can be protested, the offended team must notify the umpires of their intent to protest before the umpires exit the field.
2. The protesting coach identifies the alleged failure to apply the correct rule, effect or misapplication of the rule.

3. The opposing coach may then provide input.
4. The umpire crew privately collaborates to attempt to settle the dispute using the NCAA Softball Rules Book if necessary.
 - If they cannot settle the dispute, the umpire crew will call the Secretary-Rules Editor, Vickie Van Kleeck, at 540-819-4655 to determine the on-field resolution.
5. The umpires bring both coaches together to explain their ruling.

There is no process for a coach to appeal the final decision of a protest.

Rule 8.5 Substitute Player

Per Rule 8.5.1 Note, it is the responsibility of both the reporting coach and the umpire to ensure the substitute is recorded correctly on the lineup card as stated by the coach. Both need to check that the lineup card is accurate. To avoid any misreported substitute issues, this should be followed for reentries as well.

Rule 8.5.2 Pitcher Substitutions

When a substitute pitcher enters the game during the middle of an inning, teams should use the time during her warmup to switch out the appropriate signal arm band card for that pitcher. Some teams do that after the pitcher has warmed up which is an unnecessary delay of game. If a team chooses to wait until the pitcher is warmed up to change out the signal cards, they could be charged with a defensive conference (Rule 6.12.7).

Appendix G Video Review – Flagrant Collision

Umpires may review collisions between a runner and a fielder to determine whether the contact was flagrant. As part of this review, if the umpires did not eject the runner at the time of the collision they can do it through the video review process.

Also, if the umpires did eject the runner at the time of the collision, they can use video review to rescind the ejection if there is indisputable video evidence confirming that the contact was not flagrant.

This ensures that all situations involving a significant penalty such as ejection can be evaluated by video review. Coaches will appreciate the extra confirmation that video review offers in this situation.

Related Rules Support:

12.13.1.5 The runner must be called out if they remain on their feet and deliberately, with great force, collides flagrantly with a fielder regardless if the fielder has possession of the ball.

Appendix G reviewable plays:

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.

Guidance for Umpires:

Umpires should err on the side of caution when ejecting players on the field initially when collisions occur; however, umpires should not be deterred from immediately ejecting a player when they are certain the contact is flagrant. In situations involving collisions, umpires are strongly encouraged to initiate a video review to determine/confirm it was flagrant and warrants an ejection. Note: In most cases, it is easier to impose an ejection after conducting a video review and determining flagrant contact occurred than to rescind an ejection.

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED INTERPRETATIONS March 14, 2023

Rule 5.9.3 Scouting, Electronic Equipment and Video Review

Taking photos and videotaping done by any team personnel may not be done from the team's dugout or bullpen; however, unattended video cameras may be positioned in these team areas.

This includes designated team social media personnel who take pictures or video for the purpose of updating team social media sites. Teams may have unattended video cameras in the dugout to capture those moments, but not attended cameras or video cameras.

Rule 6.20 Forfeited Games

A game is declared a forfeit in the following cases: 1) A team is on site but refuses to play a scheduled game within five minutes after the umpire calls "Play Ball." 2) A team refuses to continue to play (the exception to this is when a "drop dead" time was determined at the pregame meeting for air travel). 3) If the umpire suspends play (e.g., weather) and one team fails to resume play within two minutes after the umpire calls "Play Ball."

The penalty for any of these three situations is the ejection of the head coach and a suspension from the institution's next two previously scheduled and played contests in the spring season.

See Rule 6.20 for additional forfeit situations.

Rule 6.21 No Contest

A "no contest" is declared when a team does not appear for its scheduled game. A forfeit cannot be declared for the nonfulfillment of a contract.

A forfeit cannot be declared until both participating teams are present and the umpires have assumed jurisdiction of the contest in accordance with the playing rules.

Rule 10.13 Substances on the Ball

Substances on the pitcher's hand that do not transfer to the ball do not have to be wiped off. Per A.R. 10-17 the original Gorilla Gold All Sport towel may be used, however, the Gorilla Gold Golf Grip Enhancer is not allowed because it transfers a tacky substance to the ball. Regardless of what product is used, umpires still have the discretion not to allow the pitcher to use any product that transfers a tackiness to the ball.

Rule 13.3.4 Misconduct

Any team personnel who questions the strike zone or any call based purely on umpire judgment will be issued a team warning for the first offense in a game. The next warning results in the behavioral ejection of the violator. A warning applies to the team, not the individual.

Appendix G Video Review

2.d. Deciding whether a batter is entitled to an award of first base per Hit Batter (by Pitch) (Rule 11.13).

This allows us to review whether a batter is entitled to first base per the Hit Batter rule. As such, a dead-ball strike would not entitle the batter to first base when hit by the pitch. Therefore, video review may be used to distinguish an obvious hit by pitch from a dead-ball strike.

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED INTERPRETATIONS February 22, 2023

Rule 12.5.5 Runner's Lane

At the moment of interference, if any part of either foot is on the foul line they are considered in the runner's lane. It is not an "either or" situation. It is an "and" situation. If they're outside the runner's lane (i.e., no the foot on the line) and they interfere with the defensive player receiving the ball, this is batter-runner interference for not being in the runner's lane.

The batter-runner is considered in the lane if any part of either foot is in contact with the ground and is in the lane inclusive of the lines.

A foot in contact with the foul line is considered in the runner's lane as long as the other foot is not completely outside the line in contact with the ground. A foot in the air retains the status it last had when it was on the ground.

Appendix G Video Review

For games using the double first base, video review can be used to determine if the batter-runner and/or the defensive player touched the correct base. This would fall under Appendix G 7 – Force/Tag Plays.

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED INTERPRETATIONS March 31, 2022

COVID-19 Home Run Waiver

The COVID-19 home run waiver has been rescinded. Therefore, teams may congregate in foul territory around home plate to congratulate the runner(s) on an out of the park home run as per Rule 12.17.3.4.2.

Rule 12.17.3.4.2 Offensive team personnel shall congregate only in foul territory around home plate to congratulate the runner(s).

EFFECT—For the first offense of Rule 12.17.3.4, the umpire shall issue a warning to the offending team.

If a subsequent offense of Rule 12.17.3.4 occurs that violates Rule 12.17.3.4.1, the ball is dead and the player touched is immediately declared out and credited with the last base legally touched at the time of the interference. If a subsequent offense of Rule 12.17.3.4 occurs that violates Rule 12.17.3.4.2, the ball is dead and the batter-runner is declared out and credited with the last base legally touched at the time team personnel entered fair territory. In all cases, each other base runner must return to the last base legally touched at the time of the violation.

The other two COVID-19 [waivers](#) remain in effect for the 2022 season:

Rules 2.13, 5.9 and 6.5.3 – To permit teams to utilize an area designated by the host team in the bleachers/stands to space uniformed team personnel. Rules related to electronic equipment use and positioning on a live ball must be adhered to in these designated areas.

Rules 5.9.9 and Appendix G – To permit that if the assigned umpire crew is reduced to only one available umpire due to illness, injury or other unforeseen circumstances and video review is being utilized, the umpire working alone is allowed to review any of the nine (9) types of reviewable plays at any time during the game at their discretion. Each coach is still only allowed two (2) challenges per game.

Appendix G – Video Review

In this inaugural season of using video review in NCAA Softball games, the rules and protocol are continuing to evolve with more experience.

Positions of Defensive and Offensive Teams During a Review:

The initial guidelines in Appendix G in the 2022 and 2023 Softball Rules Book offered criteria for what both offensive and defensive teams could do during a review:

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. (Appendix G)

This interpretation was posted on January 24, 2022:

Video review protocol requires the defensive team to maintain their position on the field but the reality is that there will be some degree of communication between fielders at close range.

This interpretation is being expanded to allow defensive players to have some flexibility in what they can do during reviews. The purpose for requiring players to maintain their positions is to enable play to start as soon as the review is complete. For example, if the players playing first and second base, or pitcher and catcher, or outfield are standing next to each other between their normal positions and speaking briefly, this is allowed.

However, if all infielders are standing together behind the pitcher's plate, that is not maintaining their positions. Outfielders coming into the infield area is also not maintaining their positions. Either of these situations could cause a delay in resuming play while waiting for them to return to their positions. Players may get together, but may not huddle in the traditional sense.

The defense must be aware when the review is over and umpires return to the field, they need to return to their positions to allow the game to resume without any additional delay.

Base runners are still restricted to the base they are on and the on-deck batter is to remain in that area. Coaches of either team may use a team representative-to-player conference if additional communication is needed between them and their players.

Video review is new territory for all of us. We are trying to allow the review time to be as normal as other stoppages of play for players with the framework of the rule as it is written.

Guidelines for Third Out of Inning Situation:

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.

If a play results in the third out of the inning, a coach still has 30 seconds to decide to challenge even if the defense quickly runs off the field trying to prevent this challenge. Some teams are using this tactic assuming that once they are off the field the final play cannot be

challenged. The 30 seconds supersedes the defense leaving the field of play. However, if the coach who may potentially challenge the play, goes into the dugout after the third out they have forfeited their right to challenge this play.

Coaches Arguing After the Video Review:

The final decision may not be argued by either coach. A coach who argues the final decision shall be immediately ejected.

Coaches who argue the final decision of a video review shall be immediately ejected. Coaches cannot manipulate this situation and argue a different play/situation either after the video review. This is not an opportunity to question another call or express your opinion on any other aspect of the officiating in this game.

**PREVIOUSLY ISSUED INTERPRETATIONS
January 22, 2022**

Rule 4.4.1.5 – Communication with Umpires

The head coach is accountable for all communication with the umpires whether initiated by assistants or other team personnel. Violations of inappropriate behavior by assistant coaches will not be tolerated.

Rule 6.6.5 – Positions of the Defensive Team

Defensive players, except for the nine on the field, must remain in the dugout, bullpen, or team area (like the offense) while the ball is in play, including during stoppages of play, including conferences, pitching changes, substitutions and injuries. **Rule 6.6.6** regulates the location of defensive players between innings and indicates which defensive players are allowed out of the dugout during warmup situations.

Rule 6.12 – Conferences

Review the previously issued interpretations at the end of this document, which were issued on December 14, 2021, giving guidance on what does and does not constitute a player-to-player conference.

Rule 12.17.2.1.5.2 – Interference

If a runner intentionally runs at any fielder in an effort to distract them while not making an attempt to run directly to the base, this player will be issued a warning. If this same runner does the same action again after having been warned, they will be ejected. If the fielder is fielding the ball, the runner's action is interference, and they will be ruled out.

Appendix G – Video Review

What constitutes a conference during a video review?

Video review protocol requires the defensive team to maintain their position on the field, but the reality is that there will be some degree of communication between fielders at close range and between base coaches and runners closest to their coaching box. Coaches will be charged a

conference if they otherwise meet with defensive or offensive players. Defensive players can warmup close to their positions on the field. Base runners and the on-deck hitter shall remain in the vicinity of their base or position.

CCA Manual – Multiple Violations by the Same Team

If we have multiple violations of the same type, we can enforce penalties for all of them.

Example: Two runners leave early on same pitch. The penalty is the same for both violations so both runners are out, and the batter remains at bat with the same count they had prior to the pitch.

If we have multiple violations with different penalties, the defensive coach must select which penalty they want enforced. Address each infraction in the order they occurred. The defensive coach will choose the result of the play or the penalty of that infraction.

Example: Two runners leave early, and the batter has an illegally batted ball (out of the box at moment of bat ball contact).

- If the defensive coach chooses leaving early, it is “No Pitch” and both runners are out for leaving early and the batter is still at bat with the count they had before that pitch. No Pitch negates the illegally batted ball.
- If the defensive coach chooses the illegally batted ball, it is a delayed deal ball, a strike on the batter and runners return to bases they occupied at the time of the pitch.
- Do not assess penalties for both leaving early and illegally batted ball.

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED INTERPRETATIONS December 14, 2021

Rule 6.12 – Conferences

Possible Charged Conference Situations:

SITUATION 1: A foul ball down the line. While the outfielder is retrieving it, can the catcher (or any infielder) go to the pitcher?

RULING: This is not a delay of game situation. Once the ball is back to the pitcher, they need to break up.

SITUATION 2: A foul ball off the umpire or player, which is a situation in which typically the catcher will go out to the pitcher to allow some time for the umpire to recover.

RULING: In any injury situation, players are allowed to gather without being charged with a conference. The issue is that everyone is ready to go when play is resumed.

SITUATION 3: After warmup pitches, can they gather on the mound if they are back before 90 seconds has expired?

RULING: Yes, the issue here is a delay of the game.

SITUATION 4: Following a home run the players gather at the mound.

RULING: This does not constitute a delay of game. When the runner crosses home, the defense needs to be ready to play.

SITUATION 5: The pitcher throws the first two (2) pitches to a batter that are called balls. As the ball is returned to the pitcher, an infielder quickly runs to the circle, quickly slaps gloves with the pitcher giving her brief words of encouragement and then immediately returns to her position.

RULING: This is not a charged player-to-player conference. The plate umpire should use good judgment in enforcing the time allowed between pitches.

SITUATION 6: The pitcher throws the first two (2) pitches to a batter that are called balls. The catcher or any infielder requests “time” to speak with the pitcher.

RULING: Once “time” is granted by any umpire, this is a charged player-to-player conference.

SITUATION 7: The pitcher throws several bad pitches in a row and a fielder approaches to calm them down without violating time between pitches.

RULING: This is not a charged player-to-player conference.

SITUATION 8: A foul ball leaves the field. A coach(es) intentionally delays getting new balls into the umpire to allow defensive players time to get together.

RULING: This is a game management situation. Umpires need to have an awareness of what the intent is here. It can be handled by a simple conversation with the coach, including a warning that a conference will be charged if they do it again.

SITUATION 9: The pitcher and catcher are struggling with getting on the same page with signals.

RULING: If the catcher needs to go out to talk with the pitcher this will be a charged player-to-player conference.

SITUATION 10: The shortstop requests and receives time to gather the infield to talk. Are baserunners allowed to leave the vicinity of their bases since the defense is being charged a player-to-player conference?

RULING: No. Baserunners must remain in the vicinity of their bases unless the offense or defense is granted a team representative conference.

NOTE: These limited examples are not all inclusive of what may constitute a conference. These are a few examples designed to reflect the spirit and intent of Rule 6.12.

Player-to-Player Conference and Coach Joins Conference:

If two or more defensive players meet to have a conference and a coach joins this conference here are the parameters to determine the situation:

- When the players get together and you see that a coach is getting ready to exit the dugout and come out to join the players this will be a team representative-to-player conference.
- If the players get together and there is no movement by a coach out of the dugout, this is a player-to-player conference. However, if the players have been meeting and eventually a

coach joins the conference (there was no initial movement by a coach to come out of the dugout) **both** a player-to-player **and** a team representative-to-player conference will be charged.

Examples Which Should **Not** Be Considered a Conference:

- All of the current no huddle allowances (fielder gives ball to pitcher after an out and they slap gloves, spontaneous celebration of good play etc.).
- Batter is put out and on the way back to dugout stops to talk briefly with next batter about pitcher and there is no hold up.
- Pitcher throws several bad pitches in a row and fielder approaches to calm them down without violating time between pitches.
- Video review protocol requires the defensive team to maintain their position on the field but the reality is that there will be some degree of communication between fielders at close range.

Umpires should ask themselves is this meeting the reason why we are stopping the game. If the answer is yes, we have a charged conference. For an excessive player-to-player or team representative-to-player conference, the player or coach who initiated the conference is ejected.