

Softball Comments on the Rules - 2025

By NFHS on September 03, 2024

[softball](#)

1-8-6 EXCEPTION & PENALTY: A high school softball coach will be able to use electronic devices in the dugout for one-way communication to the catcher while the team is on defense beginning in 2025. This change is the result of analysis of current data, state association experimentation and a positive response from the membership. The committee has made these changes to support the use of emerging technology within the sport of softball. Being a permissive rule, the use of this one-way electronic communication will allow those who choose to embrace the technology an additional option to communicate with the catcher while on defense. It will also maintain the ability for those who prefer a more traditional approach to communicate using signals or a playbook/playcard to continue that approach. Accommodating one-way communication to the catcher brought new language to two different sections of the NFHS Softball Rules Book, starting with Rule 1-8-6. Devices such as earpieces, electronic bands and smartwatches are now permitted as an EXCEPTION within the rule provided the player does not utilize said device to return correspondence to the coaching staff. Since both rules were updated for this change, the penalty from Rule 3-6-11 was added to Rule 1-8-6 as well, with violators subject to ejection unless the offense is ruled to be of a minor nature. This penalty has been in place for Rule 3-6-11 allowing the umpire to issue a warning if the offense is minor and then eject if the offense is repeated.

3-6-11: This penalty has been in place for Rule 3-6-11 allowing the umpire to issue a warning if the offense is minor and then eject if the offense is repeated. In addition to permitting the one-way communication devices, the updated version of Rule 3-6-11 regarding Bench and Field Conduct specifies that coaches are prohibited from using the device to communicate with any other team member while on defense or any team member while on offense and the coach cannot use the device outside the dugout/bench area.

9-3-2b: For the purpose of official scorekeeping, if a baserunner is declared out for being hit by a fair batted ball the batter-runner is credited with a fielder's choice in the scorebook. A runner being hit with a batted ball is a form of interference and is covered in Rule 8-6-11 which specifies that the runner is out and it also lists that the batter-runner is credited with a fielder's choice. Previously, this play was scored as a base hit for the batter.



2025 NFHS Softball Points of Emphasis

TEAMS' ROLE IN PACE OF PLAY

Coaches play a vital role in creating and maintaining pace-of-play standards for their individual players and teams. Every effort should be made to educate players on the rules involved and the timing protocols related to breaks between innings, as well as during gameplay.

Between innings, 60 seconds is provided for (a) the defense to take the field and throw warm-up pitches, and (b) the offense to prepare to bat. There are several ways that coaches can expedite this process with simple instructions to players. For example, if the catcher was batting when the third out was made, have another teammate or coach prepared to receive warm-up pitches while the catcher gets equipped. For the team coming to bat, coaches should encourage their lead-off batter to gather their batting equipment while the remainder of the team huddles in an appropriate area that doesn't pose a safety risk for the defense warming up.

There are prescribed penalties associated with excessive time between innings. Once the allowed 60 seconds has passed, the offensive team has 10 seconds for its batter to enter the batter's box (NFHS Rule 7-3-1). Similarly, once the allowed 60 seconds has passed, the pitcher has 20 seconds to legally deliver a pitch (NFHS Rule 6-2-3). The respective penalties for violations of these time constraints are either a strike or a ball on the batter, depending on the tardy party.

These same time constraints exist on each pitch thrown. Once the ball has been returned to the pitcher to prepare for the next pitch, the pitcher has 20 seconds to release the pitch. Coaches who delay in calling pitches risk a penalty for exceeding the allowed 20 seconds. The same applies to the offense when a batter fails to enter the batter's box within 10 seconds after the ball is returned to the pitcher.

SITUATIONAL AWARENESS

Participant well-being should be a priority for all those involved in game management. Coaches and umpires can help minimize risk and injury to players by understanding and enforcing existing bench and field conduct rules. NFHS rules stipulate that once the game has begun, only the batter, runner(s), on-deck batter, coaches in the coach's box, bat/ball shaggers or one of the nine players on defense are permitted to be outside the designated dugout/bench or designated warm-up areas (i.e. batting cage or bullpen). Additionally, during game play, hitting the ball to teammates on defense is prohibited. Between innings, bench personnel are permitted to engage in throwing and running activities.

Field structure and dugout protection vary from facility to facility. Team personnel should assess and be aware of potential hazards associated with foul balls and overthrows. For example, if a bullpen is in an area where a foul ball or overthrow could contact the pitcher or catcher, the team might assign bench personnel with a glove to stand nearby to shield those warming up.

On-deck batters should be mindful of potential foul balls and overthrows and be prepared to move as necessary to avoid contact. On-deck batters must use the on-deck circle closest to their own dugout. (NFHS Rule 7-5-1)