



COMMENTS ON THE 2010 SOFTBALL RULES REVISIONS

PITCHING DISTANCE INCREASED TO 43 FEET EFFECTIVE 2010-11 (1-1-2b): Effective August 1, 2010, the pitching distance for fast-pitch female softball players will be 43 feet from the tip of home plate to the pitcher's plate. This rules change has been considered by the NFHS Softball Rules Committee for the past 10 years. Questionnaire results over the past several years indicated an increased interest in adopting the rules change, especially among the group most affected by it – coaches.

The change was approved by the rules committee this year after two member state associations – Florida over a four-year period and Oregon for one year – experimented and obtained very positive results. Coaches surveyed within the experimenting states, and those visiting from other states playing at 43 feet for the first time, were overwhelmingly supportive of the change.

Game statistics gathered from experimentation show that nearly every offensive statistic had a slight increase. Based on these statistics, the new pitching distance appears to create better balance between the offense and defense providing more pitched balls hit into play. When more balls are hit into play, the defense becomes more involved in the game, thus enhancing skill development.

BAT SPECIFICATIONS DEFINED (1-5): The entire bat rule was reorganized and clarified. A diagram and definitions were added to describe each portion of the bat and its specifications. As bat technology evolves, more clarity is necessary for consumers and manufacturers.

HAIR DEVICES (3-2-12): An exception was added to permit unadorned devices, such as bobby pins, barrettes or hair clips, no longer than 2 inches, to be worn to control a player's hair. The rule permits players a practical means of dealing with hair control, and is consistent with NFHS volleyball rules.

INNINGS REQUIRED FOR WINNING PITCHER (9-6-6): The required number of innings pitched for a starting pitcher to be credited with a win has been changed to half of the total number of innings played in the game. The rules change gives greater clarity in determining the winning pitcher. A starting pitcher now has the ability to earn a win if she re-enters the game as pitcher, was moved to a different defensive position and subsequently returns to pitch or the game is terminated due to the run-rule; all are common occurrences in softball.

2010 SOFTBALL POINTS OF EMPHASIS

ILLEGAL PITCH ENFORCEMENT

When the pitcher completes the delivery of an illegal pitch, and the batter hits the ball fair or foul, or becomes a base runner, the coach of the team at bat has the option of the result of the

play or the penalty for an illegal pitch. The penalty is a ball awarded to the batter and all base runners are awarded one base without liability to be put out. A delayed-dead ball is signaled by the umpire by extending the left arm horizontally. If the illegal pitch is called by the plate umpire, it should be called in a voice loud enough for the batter and catcher to hear it. If the illegal pitch is called by the base umpire, it should be called in a voice loud enough for the nearest fielder to hear it. The failure of players to hear the call does not void the call. Batters should be coached to know they can swing at illegal pitches, which results in options for their team/coach.

THREE-FOOT RUNNING LANE

The three-foot running lane is a space defined by a line drawn 3 feet from and parallel to the first-base foul line starting halfway between home and first base and extending to first base in foul territory. In all situations when the batter-runner is entitled to run (i.e., a batted ball, a base on balls or a dropped third strike), she must use the three-foot running lane. An award of first base on a base on balls does not negate the requirement to use the three-foot running lane. The batter-runner is out if she runs outside the three-foot lane and, in the judgment of the umpire, interferes with the fielder taking the throw at first base (there must be a throw); however, the batter-runner may run outside the three-foot lane to avoid a fielder attempting to field a batted ball. A runner is considered outside the running lane if either foot is completely outside the lane and in contact with the ground. Players must understand that once they reach the running lane they should run completely inside it.

NON-TRADITIONAL EQUIPMENT

Many new equipment products continue to be introduced into interscholastic softball. Rule 1-8-1 states that, "non-traditional game equipment must be reviewed by the NFHS Softball Rules Committee before it will be permitted." NFHS staff and the committee continue to consider non-traditional equipment as it is introduced to the game. However, many new products seem to appear in competition without the committee being given an opportunity to review the items. Coaches and administrators should contact their state high school association to have non-traditional game equipment reviewed. Manufacturers are encouraged to contact the NFHS prior to introducing, distributing or selling non-traditional equipment to interscholastic programs.

DP/FLEX RULE

It is believed that many coaches and umpires still may not completely understand the DP/FLEX rule (3-3-6) since it was passed in 2004. The committee felt another "refresher" would be appropriate to more fully understand and utilize all the options available with the rule. The DP/FLEX rule was originally adopted because it provides more participation opportunities for student-athletes and more flexibility to coaches.

A. For Coaches – Basic Rules to Remember. Keep these basic rules in mind:

1. Decide the 10 players you want to be designated as starters: 1) list the nine players you want to have in the batting order on lines 1 through 9; 2) list the name of the remaining player (FLEX) on the 10th line.
2. Fill in the defensive positions and list the player not initially playing defense as the DP.
3. When making lineup changes:
 - a. The DP cannot play defense only and the FLEX cannot play offense only.
 - b. When the DP spot in the batting order comes up, either the DP, FLEX or their legal substitutes must bat or run the bases. It is the only offensive spot the DP or FLEX player may hold.

- c. The DP can replace anyone on defense any time, any number of times while the FLEX player may replace the DP any time, any number of times.
- d. When any of the first nine players listed on the card leaves the batting order, she has left the game and when the FLEX player leaves the game on defense, she has left the game.

B. For Coaches – Basic Utilization Strategies. The following are two basic strategies a coach might utilize to match the skills of the DP and FLEX players to complement one another. Further examples can be found on the NFHS Web site (www.nfhs.org).

1. Objective: to utilize a fast runner who is a weak hitter (FLEX) to run for the solid hitting DP.
 - a. Matchup: assuming your pitcher can hit for herself, pair up an solid hitter (DP) with a player of exceptional speed but who is a weak hitter (FLEX).
 - b. Typical sequence: DP hits safely; FLEX enters to run for her; DP re-enters and hits safely; FLEX enters to run for her; sub #1 hits for DP (since the DP already used her one re-entry), FLEX enters to run for sub #1; sub #1 re-enters and hits safely; FLEX enters to run for sub #1; sub #2 hits safely; FLEX enters to run for her; and so on.
2. Objective: list a power hitter as the FLEX player when you have a platoon of players who will be the DP's.
 - a. Matchup: assuming your pitcher can hit for herself, pair up an average player (DP) with a good hitting, but slow runner (FLEX) who also plays defense. Also used for a good hitting pitcher (FLEX) who you do not want running the bases unnecessarily.
 - b. Typical sequence: as the spot in the batting order comes up, enter the FLEX who hits safely; re-enter the DP to run; enter the FLEX who hits safely; sub #1 enters to run (since the DP already used her one re-entry); enter the FLEX who hits safely; sub #1 re-enters to run; FLEX hits safely; sub #2 enters to run; and so on.

C. For Umpires. The following are helpful hints in properly maintaining your lineup card:

1. A team may use the DP/FLEX option provided it is made known prior to the start of the game.
2. The DP's name is indicated on the lineup as one of the nine hitters in the batting order.
3. The name of the player for whom the DP is batting (FLEX) is placed in the 10th position in the lineup.
4. The DP may be substituted for at any time by a legal substitute or the FLEX may play offense for the DP. In either case, the DP has left the game.
5. The DP may play defense at any position.
6. The FLEX may be substituted for at any time by a legal substitute or the DP may play defense for the FLEX. In either case, the FLEX has left the game.
7. Placing the FLEX into one of the first nine positions for someone other than the DP's position is considered an illegal substitution.
8. A team may go from 10 to nine players and back to 10 any number of times during the game; the game may also end with 10 or nine players.
9. The DP and FLEX may never be on offense at the same time; however, they may play defense at the same time.