

Softball Memo – June 16, 2015

The softball season is in full swing, and unfortunately, the weather has wreaked havoc on schedules as of late! With the foul weather we have experienced in recent days, I want to start with a few reminders pertaining to weather.

Adverse Weather/Lightning Conditions

First, from the NFHS Softball Rules Book:

“Proactive Planning

1. Assign staff to monitor local weather conditions before and during events.
2. Develop an evacuation plan, including identification of appropriate nearby shelters.
3. Develop criteria for suspension and resumption of play:
 - a. When thunder is heard, or a cloud-to-ground lightning bolt is seen, the thunderstorm is close enough to strike your location with lightning. Suspend play and take shelter immediately.
 - b. Thirty-minute rule. Once play has been suspended, wait at least 30 minutes after the last thunder is heard or flash of lightning is witnessed prior to resuming play.
 - c. Any subsequent thunder or lightning after the beginning of the 30-minute count, reset the clock and another 30-minute count should begin.”

According to NOAA, lightning can strike as far as 10-15 miles away from the area where it’s actually raining. That’s about the distance you can hear thunder. If you can hear thunder, you are within striking distance, and the game needs to be suspended.

We had an instance last week where the baseball game suspended for an hour due to lightning and the softball game on the field next door proceeded uninterrupted until its conclusion nearly an hour later. It is quite disturbing that the umpires on this game chose not to suspend this game given the lightning in the area. It is equally as confounding that home management allowed action to be suspended on the baseball diamond but allowed play to continue on the softball diamond. **DO NOT TAKE CHANCES WITH LIGHTNING!** No player, coach, or umpire life is worth it – when it doubt, wait it out. Suspend the game until more favorable conditions prevail!

Additions to Roster in Suspended Games

Consider the situation when a varsity team is making up a game suspended from a month ago. Since the original game, two players from JV have moved up to varsity and were not on the original lineup card. Prior to the start of the suspended game, the coach notifies the umpires that there will be 2 names added to the original roster. Since these are late additions, they fall under the PENALTY for 3-1-3, “...team warning... further changes will result in the head coach being restricted to the dugout/bench area for the remainder of the game.”

Umpire Inspection of Playing Equipment

As was mentioned in the rules meeting and in the pre-season memo, the Softball Advisory Committee unanimously supported requiring coaches to ensure that their bats, batting helmets, and catcher’s helmets and masks are placed **OUTSIDE THE DUGOUT** for umpire inspection prior to the pregame

conference for each game. We have instructed the umpires to simply not have the pregame conference (or start the game) until this is done. We continue to hear reports of umpires not checking equipment at all or not checking it between games. Worse yet, I had a report from an umpire last week that was harassed by a coaching staff when he requested the equipment be set outside the dugout to be checked for game #2. It seems that the umpires that follow protocol are the ones taking the grief from teams and coaches that think these umpires are being overzealous. Umpires that do *not* follow the equipment check protocol are the ones who should be questioned, and teams and coaches should expect umpires to check equipment for the safety of their players. Umpires should not show up and hear, "Oh, we haven't had equipment checked all season," or, "The umpire last night said he checked it before the JV game, so we are good to go for the next two varsity games." This is a blatant disregard of protocol and disregard of safety for our student-athletes. Plan on taking a couple extra minutes in pregame for umpires to ensure that equipment is safe for use.

Lastly, when equipment is removed by the umpires due to it becoming unsafe, defective, broken, etc., we have some coaches choosing to make quite a scene about this. Umpires do not enjoy removing equipment, but please realize this is a player safety issue! Arguing or pouting about equipment removal appears to demonstrate a disregard for player safety. Everyone understands equipment removal is an inconvenience, but we must keep focus on the fact that player safety is paramount.

Legal Gloves/Mitts

Questions remain about the legality of gloves/mitts that have optic yellow markings. Rule 1-4-1 prohibits optic yellow lacing, an entirely optic yellow glove/mitt, an optic yellow marking on the inside or outside of the glove/mitt that gives the appearance of the ball, or a glove/mitt that is judged to be distracting by the umpire. Included below is a popular Mizuno glove that should be judged to be LEGAL. The optic yellow markings on this glove do not give the appearance of the ball and are not distracting. Coaches/players are not required to black out these markings.



Legal Bats

Please make note of IGHSAU Softball Adaptation #1: Rule 1-5 regarding bats will be followed with the following modification to 1-5-1d: Bats must meet the 2004 ASA Bat Performance Standard, bear the 2004 certification mark, and not be listed on the ASA non-approved bat list. Bats made entirely of wood are permitted and need not bear an ASA mark. Bats with the 2000 certification mark are ILLEGAL.

We have received reports that bats with the 2013 ASA certification mark are being used. These bats are SLOW PITCH bats and are ILLEGAL for use in the high school game. ONLY BATS WITH THE 2004 ASA MARK ARE LEGAL FOR USE IN IOWA.

Eye Black

Eye black is intended to reduce glare not to be used as face paint. When players use eye black extending down their cheeks in various patterns or with multiple stripes of it on each cheek, the product is not being used properly and should be considered unsporting. When discovered after the game has begun, a team warning should be issued, and that player or players should not be allowed to participate until it is used properly. Any subsequent offender(s) shall be ejected from the contest. Coaches, please monitor the use of this product by your players in order to avoid a potentially embarrassing situation for all involved.

Pre-game Warm-ups

When one team is on the field for their seven minutes of pre-game warm-up, the opposing team needs to be either in their dugout, or outside the confines of the field. We have a handful of teams that are outside of their dugout on the field while the other team is warming up. This is inappropriate, in some cases is being used as an intimidation tactic, and in every instance is posing a player safety risk to the players on the field.

Hit by Pitch

When a pitched ball that is entirely within the batter's box strikes the batter or her clothing, no attempt to avoid being hit by the pitch is required. However, the batter may not obviously try to get hit by the pitch.

When a pitch is *not* entirely within the batter's box and the batter makes no attempt to avoid the pitch or obviously tries to get hit by the pitch, the ball is dead. The pitch is a ball or strike depending on its location, and the batter remains at bat unless it is strike three or ball four. Base runners advance only if forced.

If the batter is hit while she is swinging, the ball is dead and a strike is charged to the batter.

Remember that the hands are part of the body, not part of the bat.

Coaching Box

Over the past few years, the dimensions of the coaching box and who can occupy it have come into question on multiple occasions. I have witnessed occasions and had reports of a coach standing near or in the outfield grass and appearing to be stealing signs or viewing the pitcher's grip and then tipping off the batter as to what pitch was coming. Rule 2-13 says the coach is restricted to the coaching box prior to the release of the pitch. Figure 1 on page 7 of the Rules Book defines the coaching box with three lines that restrict the coach from getting too close to home, too close to fair/foul line and too far past third. For coach safety reasons, we should not enforce the line that restricts coach from standing further away from the plate than third base, provided he/she is not closer to fair/foul line than 8 feet. If a coach is playing games by stealing signs or otherwise abusing the privilege, he/she should be warned, and any further violation would result in restriction to bench.

The question of players occupying the coaching box has also arisen. While this is technically permitted by NFHS rule, Iowa Code does not permit it, unless that player has her coaching license.

"Coaching" from the Stands

A handful of situations arise every season when a fan or parent is calling pitches or plays from the bleachers or a lawn chair outside the confines of the field. Distinguish this situation from one where the same parent or fan is yelling, "Tag her! Tag her!" or "She missed second! Throw it to second!" This can be quite a complex issue. In judging these types of situations and how coaches, umpires, and administrators should respond, first, one must ascertain if the individual is actually "coaching" (calling pitches and/or plays). If the person is indeed doing this, and the players are following his/her directions, then the individual could be considered a coach. If none of the players are paying any attention to the person, it probably isn't worth addressing. Rule 2-59 defines "Team Personnel" who must be located in the team dugout. Having someone actually involved in coaching and not in the dugout is not permitted by rule and also raises the question of whether this individual has had contact with the players outside of the season during the school year, which is not allowed. Local school administration should be apprised of these types of situations and those administrators should discuss the roles of fans, parents, and coaches with individuals that may be blurring the lines.

Unreported Substitutes

Consider the following situation. A batter is at the plate with a 2-1 count when it is brought to the attention of the umpire that legal substitute Smith is batting for Johnson in the 4 spot in the batting order. Smith is an unreported substitute – not an *illegal* substitute. All action that has occurred during Smith's at-bat stands, as does her pitch count. Smith continues her at-bat after a team warning. Rule 3-6-7 states that the umpire shall issue a team warning to the coach of the team involved and the next offender on that team and her head coach shall be restricted to the dugout/bench for the remainder of the game.

Run Scores

Consider the following situation. With R1 on second, B2 hits a line drive to left center field. R1 touches third, then touches home and scores. However, the third base coach believes R1 did not touch third and yells for her to return. The ball is thrown to the third baseman who tags R1 prior to her returning to touch third base. Because R1 has already legally scored, she cannot be called out on this

play. If the umpire judges that R1 prevented the defense from making a play on B2, the umpire can call interference and declare B2 out. In either case, R1's run counts.

Umpire Apparel/Equipment

Umpires, please remember that the powder blue shirt is required for all varsity contests this year. The white shirts may still be worn for sub-varsity. Heather gray slacks (not charcoal) are the correct pants. Navy blue ball bags are recommended, as are navy blue caps. It is not appropriate to wear ASA, USSSA, or any other organization's logoed apparel other than the IGHSAU when umpiring junior high and high school softball. Either wear a plain shirt/cap or the IGHSAU logoed apparel.

The issue of umpires wearing chest protectors arises every year. I believe it is extremely poor judgment by any umpire who chooses not to wear a chest protector at the varsity level. Although technically not "required" equipment, you are risking serious injury when choosing not to wear one. Umpires selected for the state tournament this year will be expected to wear a chest protector when working the plate. Please plan accordingly.

Site Administration

As was mentioned in the pre-season memo, often coaches serve as site administrators during home games. The Softball Advisory Committee expressed concern about this practice, as much goes unnoticed and unaddressed before, during and after a game when the coach also serves as the site administrator. The Committee strongly recommends schools have an administrator in place at the home site. Host management should identify themselves to the umpires, and should be available to escort umpires to and from the field, in addition to being a visible presence during game.

I bring this up again because we are still having reports of no game administration present during softball games. The head coach has a job to do and that's on the field. Schools need to have an on-site administrator present to deal with spectator issues, assist in weather decisions, etc. We need to do better in this regard through the remainder of the season.

Use of IGHSAU-Licensed Umpires

Please remember that for any level of *high school* softball, **TWO IGHSAU-LICENSED UMPIRES ARE REQUIRED!** Junior high requires only one licensed umpire (who should work behind the plate), and the other umpire need not be licensed.

Regional Pairings/Umpire Assignments

Regional tournament pairings will be released during the afternoon of Monday, June 22. Regional umpire assignments will be released during the afternoon of Monday, June 29. Regional tournament dates are July 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, and 14.

As always, feel free to contact me with any questions, and all the best throughout the remainder of the season!

Joel Oswald
Assistant Director