

# SOFTBALL ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING

September 15, 2020

A Zoom meeting was called to order by Chairperson Tonya Moe with the following members present: Amber Doyle, Belinda Nelson, Maddison LeClere, Tia Stiles, Erica White, Heather Fortune and Karl Wooldridge. Jean Berger and Jason Eslinger represented the State Office. Also attending was Cathy Creighton, IGHS AU Supervisor of Officials.

Committee members were introduced and a review of advisory committee purpose was given.

**Motion by Wooldridge to approve the September 10, 2019 minutes, second by Nelson and unanimously approved.**

Committee reviewed the state tournament, and all felt the tournament was well run, especially with the new COVID guidelines. Committee recognized there were some seating issues, but felt spectators tried to distance themselves when possible. Moe felt the responsibilities of social distancing fell back on spectators.

Eslinger informed Committee the state softball schedule was set up so all semifinal teams would play at least one game on Kruger or Iowa Central Field and have a game streamed on the IGHS AU Digital Network. The IGHS AU continues to explore options for better internet service if more than two fields are utilized.

Committee also discussed allowing streaming at the regional level, especially if public health guidelines call for limited attendance numbers. Committee is in support of streaming at both regionals and state.

Management heard a few issues regarding housing during the state tournament. As ICCC was unable to host this year, many schools had to find hotel accommodations or travel back home.

All Committee members liked using a separate pass gate away from the main spectators' entrance and would like to continue entering at this gate.

Committee discussed increasing the number of qualifying teams per class to give more teams the opportunity of a state tournament experience. Moe felt the current number of 8 gives value to those that have qualified, and increasing that number would "water down" the competition. Committee agreed the current number of eight qualifying schools was sufficient.

Committee reviewed the COVID-related procedures implemented during the year for teams. Dugout usage was inconsistent from school to school. Coaches felt it was difficult to coach players when schools did not allow any usage of the dugout. The requirement by some schools for all players to wear masks while in the dugout was discussed. Doyle felt some coaches limited the number of team participants due to the tightness of dugouts, busses, etc. Both Doyle and White felt team numbers should be left to the discretionary of the coach/school and not by opposing schools or size of facility. The cleaning of the dugouts for visiting teams or having cleaning products available was also inconsistent across schools.

This year's guidelines on returning foul balls, umpires touching game balls, etc. was discussed. Several coaches and umpires favored keeping the procedure for the future. Fortune suggested the

return of the foul ball goes back in to the catcher for the umpire to review. "Game ready" balls should also be reiterated for coaches and umpires prior to the season.

Wooldridge asked Berger for a point of emphasis next year on proper usage of masks as some players have their mask hanging from their pockets when not in use.

Creighton informed Committee the NFHS rules committee met recently. A point of emphasis was the inspection of equipment and illegal bats. Creighton informed Committee her pre-season memorandum and rules meeting will emphasize the usage of the DP flex and obstruction/interference calls. Illegal pitches will continue to be emphasized and education produced for umpires.

Committee discussed the required marking of pitching chutes in order to help umpires determine if an illegal pitch occurred. Currently NFHS rules do not require the marking of a pitching chute. Nelson stated some umpires would like to see chutes marked as it would show where the pitcher's pivot foot lands. This would help both players and umpires. White feels overall pitching is difficult and marking a chute puts more restrictions on a pitcher. After lengthy discussion **motion by Wooldridge to implement an Iowa adaptation mandating a pitching chute be marked on the playing field. Doyle second and unanimously approved.** LeClere asked Management to provide a field diagram with required markings at the pre-season rules meeting and as a download for all schools.

Committee discussed the NFHS pitching rule regarding stepping back off the pitching rubber that was new to Iowa this season. Some coaches would like an Iowa adaptation to match the NCAA rule. The NCAA rule does not allow movement of the back foot once it is placed. Some coaches favor having the NFHS and NCAA rules line up so that pitchers are prepared for the next level. **Wooldridge motion to keep the current rule as is, White second and unanimously approved.**

Coaching attire was discussed, specifically flip flops and bucket hats, and the NFHS rule for coaches was reviewed. Management will make coaching attire and safety of attire a point of emphasis next year.

The use of softball crew cards vs. requiring umpires to sign the official scorebook was discussed. Nelson felt using crew cards was easier for coaches and helped in the evaluation process, but wondered if officials could use stickers/ink stamps as sometimes signed cards are illegible. Management will continue to encourage use of the cards and make them available on the IGSAU website and are at clinics.

White asked for clarification on how post-season brackets are established and the possibility of not having conference teams playing each other in regional play. Coaches' involvement in the rankings of regional teams and in the process similar to baseball was also discussed. Eslinger informed Committee there are many variables when establishing pairings, including geography, rankings, strength of schedules, site availability and previous year's match-ups. Committee is generally in favor of current pairings process. Management offered to attend conference coaches' meetings to present the process of bracketing so coaches have a better understanding of the process utilized and information reviewed.

Committee discussed the current contact regulations for softball coaches. Coaches felt that their ability to teach skills to their players this past June without other sports' having access to their athletes was very beneficial. A summer sport has less of an off-season opportunity to develop players since all sports can work with their own athletes in the summer period. All concur more coaching contact would help grow the sport of softball through skill development. White feels it would be beneficial to be able to develop catchers prior to the season since that skilled position requires

proper technique. **Motion by Nelson and second by White for unlimited contact with pitchers and catchers, commencing January 1 up to the first day of practice. Unanimously approved.**

**Motion to allow coaches to have contact with hitters for up to ten days from January 1 to the first day of practice by Stiles, second by LeClere and unanimously approved.**

The committee discussed playing softball during the fall or in a different season in order to avoid overlap with other programs and the summer period when all sports are working with athletes. Committee is unanimous in leaving softball as a summer sport.

Eslinger asked Committee for feedback on the new Varsity Bound website. Committee stated there were no issues, but asked for guidance on saving the starting line-up/syncing from the iPad. Eslinger will follow up.

Creighton asked for Committee's help in recruiting new officials. It is the hope coaches and umpires can help recruit new officials not only in softball but other sports as well.

Next year's meeting will be September 14, 2021 at 10:00 a.m.

Committee extended its appreciation to Karl Wooldridge for his years of service to the Softball Advisory Committee.

There being no further business, **motion by Wooldridge to adjourn, second by Nelson and unanimously approved.**

Heidi Reed  
Recorder