



**MINUTES OF THE  
NATIONAL FASTPITCH COACHES ASSOCIATION  
DIVISION III HEAD COACHES COMMITTEE**

**Jan. 16, 2020**

The meeting was brought to order at 11 a.m. ET by NFCA Division III Board Rep Renae Hartl.

Participants were Hartl (Luther) and NFCA Division III liaison Dave Hines; Central Region representatives Erica Hanrahan (DePauw) and Josie Henry (Case Western Reserve); East Region representative Kim Wilson (Rowan); Great Lakes representatives Tiffany Prager (Illinois Wesleyan) and Meghan Roman (Illinois College); Midwest Region representatives George Wares (Central) and Jody Gabriel (Macalester); New England Region representatives Kate Bowen (Springfield) and Diana Pepin (Eastern Connecticut State); Northeast Region representatives Sara Curran-Headley (Oneonta) and Hannah Shalett-Quintana (Ithaca); West Region representative Jessica Hollen (George Fox); NCAA Associate Director of Championships and Alliances Jan Gentry, and NCAA Secretary-Rules Editor Vickie Van Kleeck.

1. Roll call
2. NCAA rules
  - a. Ms. Van Kleeck addressed the pitching position and taking the signal to help clarify things for the group.
  - b. Pitching position:
    - i. You only need one foot in contact with the pitcher's plate.
    - ii. Once the pitcher feels comfortable and sets her stride foot, that foot can't move sideways, forward, or backward.
    - iii. She can be up on the toe of the stride foot and drop her heel, and that is not considered increasing the distance from home plate.
    - iv. She can twist on that front toe, as long as she doesn't move that back.
    - v. She needs to be in that position, with her stride foot set, to be able to take the signal.
    - vi. The first movement of the stride foot is going to be when she starts her pitching motion.
    - vii. Pitcher can still have two feet on, and the pivot foot can still do what it normally did (rule 10.5.3). The pivot foot can still slide on the plate.
  - c. Taking the signal:
    - i. Pitcher can't take the signal from her armband or the catcher if she is standing behind the pitcher's plate, because she is not in the pitching position. If she does that, it will be an illegal pitch and the umpire is going to kill the play.

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- ii. As a coach, you can give a visual or verbal signal while the pitcher is not in the pitching position, but when she assumes the pitching position, she has to look at her signal armband or look at the catcher to take a signal.
      - iii. If she is not going to take a signal from an armband or the catcher, there must be timing consistent with taking the signal from an armband or the catcher. If the pitcher fails to do this, and steps on the plate it will be an illegal pitch.
    - d. Defensive signal:
      - i. If the pitcher wants to take a visual or verbal defensive signal from a coach or a catcher prior to stepping on the pitcher's plate, that's allowed, but she just cannot look at her signal armband to get that signal, because then you are leaving it up to the interpretation of the umpire of whether she was just taking a pitching signal or a defensive signal.
      - ii. To be fair, and not leave things up to the interpretation of the umpires, you are just taking everything from the pitching position, be it pitching or defensive.
    - e. The full clarification document will be posted to Arbiter and provided to the NFCA for electronic distribution to all coaches.
- 3. NCAA Championship Timing Resolution
  - a. Ms. Hartl has been asked to speak on behalf of Division III softball coaches and the NFCA (she is also her school's athletic director) on the floor on Jan. 25 prior to a vote about this resolution at the NCAA Convention.
  - b. She said hopefully coaches have talked to their athletic directors and conference commissioners since this was presented at the NFCA Division III Caucus in December to get an idea of the general consensus toward this idea.
  - c. Ms. Gentry said the only discussion at the NCAA office was how to handle championship bids for the next four-year cycle, with there being some uncertainty over what the date formula will be.
    - i. Regarding alignment between baseball and softball, Ms. Gentry said baseball's key is trying to get one week later, and they would love to have softball on the same weekend. They know that the two weeks for softball might be a push, but for baseball they are trying to get their games in, so one week later is ultimately their goal.
    - ii. Ms. Gentry noted that softball's issues were more complex, in that softball had options of either one or two weeks later, and not only considering the idea of fairness to spring sports overall, compared to fall and winter and their athletic experience, but also the Title IX factors.
  - d. Ms. Hartl spoke to Pittsburgh-Bradford's softball coach Tina Phillips and athletic director and former baseball coach Bret Butler (who together helped start the

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joint effort between baseball and softball), who provided her with seven suggested talking points for her presentation at the NCAA Convention.

- i. Three of the seven deal with changing climate patterns. Should we be worried about various political feelings generated by the mere mention of changing climate patterns and losing some people simply based on use of those words, because we obviously want this resolution to go through?
  1. Ms. Gabriel suggested sticking to the data, and saying something more like “history has shown” and talk about what has already happened, which has been missed opportunities for games due to poor recent weather conditions ... rather than talk about what is going to happen with climate change.
  2. Mr. Wares concurred that there will be someone that hears “climate change” and then doesn’t consider the big picture.
  3. Based on that feedback, Ms. Hartl suggested taking out the first part of the provided talking point that addresses climate change and instead start with, “Many cold-climate schools have not been playing the full 40-game schedule.”
  4. Ms. Pepin suggested mentioning that six of the eight NCAA regions are heavily impacted by weather during the early part of the season (Atlantic and West have not been affected like the other six).
  5. Ms. Gentry echoed the previous comment to keep it simple, and say, “We all know that the past 3 or 4 years, springs have been very tough. There have been a lot of rainouts, it’s caused a lot of rescheduling, and has impacted our student-athletes in the classroom.”
  6. Mr. Wares said that is important, because you have that history. It is not just one bad year of weather. That is not climate change; that is just a fact. If you can state that, that is more sellable.
  7. Mr. Wares said it is not just rescheduling of games. It is also having to play games later in the season in a short amount of time (including important conference games in a one-to-two-week period that often intersects with final exams and graduations), or having to play in less-than-ideal conditions to get those games completed.
  8. It was suggested to Ms. Hartl that she check with Michelle Venturella (WashU) if she wants hard data based on conference weather rules, since Venturella has done some research in this

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- area. Also, Joanna Lane at the NFCA may be a resource for how the Division I level has dealt with weather issues/rules.
9. Ms. Roman mentioned that maybe they are able to play their 40 games, but how many times do they have to change their schedules and tell their student-athletes to switch (and re-switch) tests to accommodate their games, playing on that academic piece of how the weather affects their academics.
  10. Ms. Curran-Headley mentioned the idea of frozen ground and how people think as soon as the snow clears, they can play.
  11. Ms. Gentry noted that playing under these types of conditions — wet, snowy, frozen ground — can make student-athletes more susceptible to injury.
- ii. The first comment that was suggested to Ms. Hartl by Ms. Phillips/Mr. Butler was, “Softball is currently finishing the season one week prior to baseball. No other sport has their championships in different weeks, for example soccer, basketball, swimming and diving.”
    1. Ms. Gentry immediately suggested adding “support for treating like sports similarly,” because baseball and softball are not the same sports, whereas soccer, basketball, etc. are.
  - iii. They also said to say, “Softball, finishing one week sooner than baseball, has a lesser chance of getting in a full schedule.”
    1. Ms. Hartl noted the flaws in that statement, and said we can make that one better, too.
    2. Ms. Roman suggested framing that portion of the statement around easing athletic director’s concerns regarding support staffing due to keeping student-athletes on campus longer, and mention that the precedent is already set because baseball is going longer. We aren’t asking for any additional opportunities or experiences that baseball doesn’t already enjoy. She said she thinks some of the fear by administration in doing this is extending the season outside an academic calendar.
    3. Ms. Gabriel said when she talked to her conference office about this in the past, she didn’t focus on the fact that they can’t get their 40 games in, but in order to get the games in, which are conference games and have to be played due to conference rules, that her student-athletes are experiencing things like having to play six doubleheaders in eight days. It’s not that we can’t get our games in, it’s that in order to get our games in, the student-athlete experience becomes much more stressful and they are more susceptible to injury due to the quantity of games during

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that short amount of time. It's also a much bigger academic stressor.

4. Ms. Wilson said if we are the same as baseball, then baseball has the opportunity to have less schools competing for conference championships during their finals week. The longer we go, the less schools are in session during finals, so we are not having to ask them to miss finals, reschedule finals as often if we are a week later, again lessening stress and anxiety for the student-athletes.

iv. Title IX.

1. Ms. Hartl asked if she mentions Title IX does that separate softball from baseball versus being aligned with them?
  - a. Ms. Gentry said she thinks mentioning Title IX supports the effort, because 81 percent of the vote in the NFCA Division III Caucus straw poll supported having baseball and softball's dates aligned, whether that's one week or two weeks later for softball. It goes back to asking why these two like sports have traditionally been one week apart and noting that there is overwhelming support from the softball coaching community and also support from baseball to be on the same weekend.
  - b. Ms. Roman said if we are going to use the Title IX argument, we need to make it about the student-athlete experience, tying in the weather and talking about giving softball players that an equal experience to baseball.
  - c. Ms. Gabriel said it is super-important that we do what is right for our sport. If the impact is that some people in the baseball world don't love the way we get that, I don't think that's our No. 1 concern. "I understand massaging the language so it sounds like we are in this together, but I'm not going to sugarcoat the fact that my priority is doing what's right for my student-athletes, and as female student-athletes. This is not equitable for them."
- v. Ms. Hartl said she will type up and share with the HCC for review exactly what she thinks she is going to say — which she plans to read on the floor, because she wants to be sure to get the wording exactly correct.
- vi. Ms. Hartl would like to find a way to pose the question, in an appropriate way, "How do you combat the financial argument with fairness with the fall sports?" That was not one of the talking points she was given, but as an athletic director she can't vote against this and vote at the same time to extend the acclimation period for her soccer players. Just thinking

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about the people that are in the room who are voting on this. A lot of them are budget managers. How does she not question the fairness with fall sports, if they are going to vote on budget?

1. Ms. Gentry suggested that should be the lead point — the fairness to spring-sport athletes and offering them a similar experience to that of fall and winter athletes, and that in the closing Ms. Hartl should pull them back to this is based on principle and there are no specific recommendations listed in the resolution. “Passing the resolution is truly a vote in support of fairness for our spring athletes and treating like sports similarly.”
  2. Ms. Henry said her athletic director was concerned with student-athletes losing out on internships, summer classes, research opportunities and other things if we go longer (something baseball players may have to deal with now).
- vii. It is not known who might be speaking in opposition to the resolution.
- viii. Ms. Gentry asked if Ms. Hartl is asked point-blank what softball wants, how do we answer? Both one- and two-week moves would speak to the equity issue, but is there a preference for one or the other? We can say in the summary there is overwhelming support, regardless of what happens for baseball, for softball to move at least one week later.
1. 84 percent of the NFCA Division III Caucus straw vote was in favor of moving the season back at least one week (options B, C and D).
- ix. Please email or call Ms. Hartl with your thoughts on specific words to use or other opinions that would assist her, and think about touching base with your conference commissioners.
1. She said her conference is on the fence about this resolution because they would like put in bids to host baseball, and the facility they want to use has said they wouldn't be available if baseball pushes its dates back.
  2. The bid process may cause some to vote no, when based on fairness they should be voting yes.
    - a. Mr. Wares added that if that becomes an issue, then we need to fight that, because that is not looking at the big picture. Commissioners need to hear that it's what is best for the sport and not who hosts a national tournament.
    - b. Ms. Gabriel noted that this does not just affect the teams that go to the postseason. We are talking about the student-athlete experience, and the thousands of student-athletes who are playing softball collegiately.

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- x. Before ending the call, statements were made supporting and thanking Ms. Hartl for leading this effort on behalf of the NFCA and softball coaches.
4. New business
- a. No additional business was discussed.
5. Adjournment
- a. The meeting was adjourned at 11:47 a.m. ET.

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