2026 and 2027 Softball Rules Changes

The following rules changes were approved by the NCAA Softball Rules Committee and the NCAA Playing Rules Oversight Panel. All rules changes are effective with the 2026 season, with the exception of Rule 2.7 (double first base) for Divisions II and III, and will be incorporated into the 2026 and 2027 Softball Rules Book.

NAIA will follow the Divisions II and III implementation timeline and be effect for the 2027 season.

Rule	Rules Change and Rationale
2.7	To require the use of the double base at first base beginning with the 2026 season for Division I and the 2027 season for Divisions II and III. It shall be a one- or two-piece unit, 15 inches by 30 inches, and manufactured to be of equal height between 1½ to 3½ inches thick. The fair portion shall be white and the foul portion shall be a contrasting color (e.g., orange). **Rationale:** To provide equal opportunity for both the offensive and defensive players to function in the same approximate area, potentially limit contact at first base between offensive and defensive players and emphasize batter-runners are to use the runner's lane.
3.10.8	To allow players to wear their signal arm band/device on their arm, belt, in their pocket, etc. Note: Pitchers may not wear it on their pitching arm. **Rationale:** To allow players the latitude to wear signal arm bands/devices in whatever manner they choose.
5.9.9	To amend the use of one-way communication (digital signal) devices to be used on offense as well as defense and allow signals to be transmitted from the dugout or coaches' boxes on the field. In-ear/hat/helmet audio communication devices remain limited to catchers while on defense. **Rationale:** To improve the pace and flow of the game and to maintain the integrity of a team's signals.
5.9.10 Appendix G	To allow coaches to retain their video review challenge if ruling is changed. **Rationale:** To follow the procedure used in other collegiate sports. Coaches may have a challenge to use later in the game when it is most needed. The ultimate goal is to get the call right and this aids in that effort.
5.9.10 Appendix G	To revise video review to include: 1. Batter-runner, after overrunning first base, feints or makes an attempt to go to second base. 2. Runner passes another runner. 3. Interference is reviewable if it is NOT called on the field. Exceptions (reviewable at all times): spectator or batter interference.

	4. Catch or no catch: in the infield call of "no catch" can be changed to "catch" only if it results in the third out with any runners on base, or any time with a batter-runner only. A called "catch" on a fair ball in the infield is not reviewable at any time. For the purpose of video review, a fly ball is considered in the infield when it is not beyond the nearest infielder. 5. Umpires may utilize video review for record keeping items such as the count, what player was at bat, substitutions, etc. **Rationale:** To provide clarity on reviewable plays and ensure video review is assisting in getting the call right.
5.9.10 Appendix G	To allow teams to congregate during a video review and talk with teammates/coaches/team personnel without being charged with a conference. Teams must be ready to play when the umpires return from the review. **Rationale:** To follow the procedure used in other collegiate sports to congregate and confer with teammates/coaches/team personnel during the video review. Players must remain on the field.
7.2	To require all protests to be resolved during the game. Games could no longer be played "under protest" to be resolved by the Secretary-Rules Editor. **Rationale:** The final results of a game are best decided during the game, not at a later date. To eliminate the potential to replay a game from the point of interruption, alleviating additional travel costs, missed classes and administrative coordination.
8.6	To expand the current concussion reentry rules to include any medical condition with the potential to cause catastrophic injury or illness (including, but not limited to, diabetes, sickle cell trait, asthma, etc.), as determined by a primary athletics health care provider. **Rationale:** NCAA Committee on Competitive Safeguards and Medical Aspects of Sports Prevention and Performance Subcommittee noted that in sports with playing rules that limit substitutions and/or reentry during competition, student-athletes may be disincentivized from seeking medical evaluation or treatment if doing so could render them ineligible to return to participation. CSMAS Prevention and Performance Subcommittee recommended amending playing rules that limit substitutions and/or reentry to allow exceptions for a student-athlete seeking timely medical evaluation and/or treatment of any condition with the potential to cause catastrophic injury or illness and, consistent with independent medical care legislation, to eliminate any rule that may impede the unchallengeable autonomous

	authority of primary athletics health care providers to determine medical management and return-to-play decisions related to student-athletes.
9.5.2	The defensive player is not considered obstructing if they are in possession of the ball or if the movement or position of the defensive player did not impede or alter the base runner's path to a base or home plate. Delete current Note 3 and replace with: Blocking the leading edge of the base constitutes obstruction unless the runner's ability to reach the base is not hindered. If the base runner would have been out, regardless of the defensive player's movement or positioning, which had no effect on the play, the runner would remain out and the obstruction would be ignored. **Rationale:** To clarify obstruction and not penalize a defensive player's movement or positioning if the base runner's path was not impeded or altered or the runner would have been out.
10.18	To require the batter to be in the batter's box and the catcher in the catcher's box within 12 seconds after the pitcher receives the ball in preparation for the pitch or after the umpire calls, "Play ball" (i.e., 8 seconds remaining). **Rationale:** Currently, the batter and catcher must be ready within 10 seconds. This will afford the batter ample time to receive the signal and be positioned in the batter's box ready to hit.
Appendix F	To allow an unlimited number of replays on the in-venue scoreboard/videoboard, at any speed, while a play is under video review by the umpires. Once a decision has been made by the umpires and/or review officials, no further replays shall be shown. The scoreboard/videoboard may not show any feed or footage of the play that was not available to the umpires and/or video review officials. On plays that are not under video review, the current policy of allowing one replay at full speed applies. **Rationale:** Currently, any instance in which an umpire has made a judgement call may be replayed only one time at regular speed even once a play is under video review. This rules change is consistent with NCAA baseball and would allow institutions to manage both baseball and softball videoboard operations in a consistent manner. Additionally, the in-venue audience will have the opportunity to experience the same feeds and footage provided to broadcast for television and streaming audiences. This was an experimental rule during the 2025 season.

Previously Approved Rules Change Effective with the 2027 Season

Rule	Rules Change and Rationale
2.15 Sideline and Home Run Fences	By January 1, 2027, to require sideline and home run fences constructed of a hard material (e.g., wood, concrete or brick) to be padded. Padding must begin not higher than 1 foot off the ground and extend to the top of the wood, concrete or brick or 6 feet from the ground, whichever is shorter. This is required for any field hosting NCAA softball competition. **Rationale:** Currently, padding is strongly recommended for fences constructed of a hard material (e.g., wood, concrete and brick). This is a requirement for backstops constructed of these materials. This change would align sideline and home run fences with backstops. Although this is a non-rules change year for softball, this rules change is being made for financial and student-athlete safety reasons. The estimated budget impact varies depending on the amount of areas that require padding.