

IGHSAU Softball Rules Changes Effective Summer 2010

Effective with the summer 2010 softball season, the pitching distance for junior high and high school softball in Iowa will be increased from 40 feet to 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 and has steadily gained support. Last week the IGHSAU Softball Advisory Committee, made up of coaches from around the state, voted to support the change, and the IGHSAU Board of Directors voted unanimously in favor of the change at their October 6th meeting. States experimenting with the 43-foot distance found more pitched balls were batted into play creating a better balance between offense and defense as well as involving more girls in playing action. Although there will be a learning curve for pitchers and batters, we believe this is a long-term positive change for Iowa softball.

Bat safety is an ongoing concern of the IGHSAU and our Advisory Committee. NFHS rules allow for bats with the 2000 or 2004 ASA certification mark, as long as the bats are not on the ASA non-approved list. In the past, Iowa has allowed any bat to be used that bore the 2004 or newer ASA certification mark. As players continue to improve their hitting skills through weightlifting, off-season workouts, etc., how bats are also being improved is an area of concern. Beginning in the 2010 season, Iowa will only allow bats with the 2004 or newer ASA certification mark that are NOT on the ASA non-approved list. This change will keep additional "hot" bats out of the game and improve player safety.

For the past three seasons, Iowa has not required umpires to check player equipment as part of pregame protocol. Beginning next season, umpires will again be required to check the legality of bats and helmets. Coaches will still be required to verify that their players are legally equipped. We believe this equipment inspection, as required by NFHS rules, will help keep illegal and unsafe equipment out of the game and will improve player safety.

A new exception to the NFHS hair device rule was added to permit unadorned devices, such as bobby pins, barrettes or hair clips, no longer than two inches, to be worn to control a player's hair. The IGHSAU will also have an adaptation to allow players to wear any color or multicolored headbands and hair control devices, and teammates will not have to match. This rule permits players a practical means of dealing with hair control and should make enforcement of and compliance with the rule much easier.

Previously, per IGHSAU adaptation, three defensive and three offensive conferences were allowed per regulation game, with one additional offensive and defensive conference allowed in extra innings. Beginning this summer, we will follow the NFHS rule, which allows for three defensive conferences per regulation game, one offensive conference per inning, and one offensive and defensive conference per extra inning.

The safe base rule for 2010 will be that the batter may only use the orange on her first attempt at 1st base. Once she passes first base, she may only use the white. If she does not use the orange base, and contact occurs with the 1st baseman, the runner is primarily responsible for the contact. The defense may only use the orange base on a dropped third strike.

Beginning next season, Iowa will now follow the NFHS Designated Player/Flex Rule (Rule 3-3-6). This rule change provides for more participation opportunities for our student-athletes as well as providing our coaches more coaching options. This significant change will be discussed at length through our website, clinics, and rules meetings. It will also be a topic at our first ever IGCA/IGHSAU joint umpire/coaches clinic to be held sometime in late March or early April.

Beginning this summer, Iowa will follow the NFHS rule regarding media area. Media will be allowed in designated lined areas in foul territory. These lined areas are live ball areas unless occupied. If occupied by the media, they become dead ball areas. The home team or game management shall designate a lined area for the media or may allow media in the dugout. This is virtually identical to the NFHS baseball media area rule.

Eighth graders have long been able to practice with the high school squad on the first legal practice date but were not allowed to scrimmage against other high school teams until the first legal playing date. We will now allow eighth graders to participate in scrimmages with the high school team prior to the first legal playing date.

Finally, a number of instances have arisen over the past few seasons when, at the last minute, a team drops out of a varsity tournament, leaving the athletic director and/or coach scrambling to find a replacement, redoing brackets, or canceling a tournament altogether. Beginning in 2010, the IGHSAU may grant written permission on an EMERGENCY basis for a JV team to play in a varsity tournament to fill a last-minute slot due to cancellation.

We feel all the above changes are positive changes for our athletes and good for the game of softball in Iowa. Thank you for your support!

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