

Softball Points of Emphasis - 2025

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TEAMS' ROLE IN PACE OF PLAY

Coaches play a vital role in creating and maintaining pace-of-play standards for their individual players and teams. Every effort should be made to educate players on the rules involved and the timing protocols related to breaks between innings, as well as during gameplay.

Between innings, 60 seconds is provided for (a) the defense to take the field and throw warm-up pitches, and (b) the offense to prepare to bat. There are several ways that coaches can expedite this process with simple instructions to players. For example, if the catcher was batting when the third out was made, have another teammate or coach prepared to receive warm-up pitches while the catcher gets equipped. For the team coming to bat, coaches should encourage their lead-off batter to gather their batting equipment while the remainder of the team huddles in an appropriate area that doesn't pose a safety risk for the defense warming up.

There are prescribed penalties associated with excessive time between innings. Once the allowed 60 seconds has passed, the offensive team has 10 seconds for its batter to enter the batter's box (NFHS Rule 7-3-1). Similarly, once the allowed 60 seconds has passed, the pitcher has 20 seconds to legally deliver a pitch (NFHS Rule 6-2-3). The respective penalties for violations of these time constraints are either a strike or a ball on the batter, depending on the tardy party.

These same time constraints exist on each pitch thrown. Once the ball has been returned to the pitcher to prepare for the next pitch, the pitcher has 20 seconds to release the pitch. Coaches who delay in calling pitches risk a penalty for exceeding the allowed 20 seconds. The same applies to the offense when a batter fails to enter the batter's box within 10 seconds after the ball is returned to the pitcher.

SITUATIONAL AWARENESS

Participant well-being should be a priority for all those involved in game management. Coaches and umpires can help minimize risk and injury to players by understanding and enforcing existing bench and field conduct rules. NFHS rules stipulate that once the game has begun, only the batter, runner(s), on-deck batter, coaches in the coach's box, bat/ball shaggers or one of the nine players on defense are permitted to be outside the designated dugout/bench or designated warm-up areas (i.e. batting cage or bullpen). Additionally, during game play, hitting the ball to teammates on defense is prohibited. Between innings, bench personnel are permitted to engage in throwing and running activities.

Field structure and dugout protection vary from facility to facility. Team personnel should assess and be aware of potential hazards associated with foul balls and overthrows. For example, if a bullpen is in an area where a foul ball or overthrow could contact the pitcher or catcher, the team might assign bench personnel with a glove to stand nearby to shield those warming up.

On-deck batters should be mindful of potential foul balls and overthrows and be prepared to move as necessary to avoid contact. On-deck batters must use the on-deck circle closest to their own dugout. (NFHS Rule 7-5-1)