

National Federation Softball Rules 2024

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Pertinent Dates:

March 18: Pitcher/Catchers	March 25: First Full Team Practice	April 11: (after 3PM) First Countable Game
May 29: Last Countable Game	June 4: Regional Prelim	June 6: Regional Quarter Final
June 8: Regional Semifinal	June 11: Regional Finals	June 15: State Finals
Regional Finals: South: A & C @ St. Joe's, B & D @ USM / North: A @ CMCC, B & D @ Brewer HS, C @ UMO		
State Finals: A @ CMCC, C @ UMO/B & D @ St. Joe's		

Maine Principal's Association Web site at: <http://www.mpa.cc/>
This handout is available at: <http://www.wmbfsu.org/>

2024 MPA Umpire Fees:

Varsity: \$92.00

All Sub-Varsity: \$69.00

By State Association Adoption:

Many notes in the National Federation Rules Book start with: "By state association adoption. . ." They are listed throughout the rules books and summarized on page 87. The only rules from this list that have been adopted in Maine are 1-2-1 Note, 8-10, 4-2-3, and 4-2-6. Rule 4-2-3 refers to game-ending procedures, and 4-2-6 is the tie-breaker procedure (see below). Rule 1-2-1 Note and 8-10, are references allowing a double first base. In addition to adopting a double first base, the MPA has made the double first base **REQUIRED IN ALL HIGH SCHOOL SOFTBALL GAMES**. If a double first base is not available for any HIGH school game, then the game will NOT be played. This includes varsity, JV, and freshman. The game will be rescheduled at the discretion of the schools.

Adopted in 2020 and remaining in effect for 2024, rule 4-2-3 note 2. This allows for schools to schedule five-inning doubleheaders. These scheduled five-inning doubleheaders do not need to be approved by the MPA Softball Committee.

Other State Association Issues:

- NFHS rule 1-8 Art 4 allows defensive players to wear head/face protection in the field. The Maine Principals' Association softball committee strongly recommends the use of facemasks for all infielders, including the pitcher.
- Over the last couple of years, I have been asked on several occasions what umpires should do if the coach is ejected and no assistant coach or game administration is available. It is the school's responsibility to see that all coaches are certified. If a substitute coach is provided, then umpires are to assume that the coach is certified and allow the game to continue. If it is later determined that a non-certified coach was used, the committee will take disciplinary action with the school. This is not an umpire issue.
- The rules book states that the catcher's head, face, and throat protector must be commercially manufactured and may be one piece. **In 2023, the MPA requirement that all catcher's masks have a separate attached throat protector was removed from the MPA rules. Follow rule 1-7-1.** Important note: Occasionally, players will grab a batting helmet and come out to warm up the pitcher, using the batting helmet with a facemask as a replacement for a catcher's mask/helmet. Batting helmets do not provide the appropriate protection and should not be used in place of a catcher's helmet/mask.

- When lightning is observed, or thunder is heard in the vicinity of the field, play should be suspended immediately and not resumed for at least 30 minutes after the last flash of lightning or clap of thunder. After 30 minutes, when it appears that weather conditions are no longer a threat, the umpire(s) will meet with administration and coaches to determine if play will continue. If play is resumed, contestants will be given a minimum of a 15-minute warm-up period.

Game Ending Procedures:

As is stated in rule 4-2-3, note 1, a state may adopt game-ending procedures to determine how a game may end in specific situations. These situations include:

Tiebreaker Procedure (4-2-6): If, after the completion of **nine** innings of play, the score is tied, the following tiebreaker will be used in both regular season and all playoff games:
Starting with the top of the **tenth** inning and each half-inning to follow, the offensive team shall begin its turn at bat with the player scheduled to bat ninth in that half inning being placed on second base (e.g., if the No. 5 batter is the leadoff batter for that inning, the batter in batting position No. 4 will be placed on second base). The runner placed on second base may be either a legal substitute or a courtesy runner for the pitcher or catcher.

10 Run Rule: The MPA has adopted a run rule that terminates a game when a team, any time after five innings (4 1/2 if the home team is ahead; this can also happen in the 6th inning), is **ten** runs ahead. **In addition, the game may be terminated after three innings (or 2 1/2 if the home team is ahead) if one team is ahead by more than 15 runs.** These rules apply to all levels of high school play: varsity, JV, frosh, and first-team. **The schools may NOT waive these run rules. Both run rules are in effect for all regular and post-season competitions.**

Tie Game (4-2-5): If after five or more innings, a game is stopped due to inclement weather and a winner cannot be determined, it will be recorded as a tie game in each team's record and the Heal point standings. Note: If the teams have not had an equal number of completed turns at bat, the score will be the same as it was at the end of the last completed inning unless the home team scores a run or runs to equal or exceed the opponent's runs, in which case, the final score shall be as recorded when the game is called (see 4-2-2-b).

Suspended Games: Any game that is not official and is stopped, if replayed, will be replayed from the beginning. In the State of Maine, due to traveling distances, partial games will NOT be played. **The game may be terminated and declared final by mutual agreement of the administration of both schools involved.**

2024 NFHS Softball Rules Change

- **Electronic Information (1-8-6):** Permits electronic information to be transmitted to the dugout from anywhere outside of live ball territory.
Rationale: The rule change reflects current technology and still requires that electronic devices used for coaching purposes may only be used in the dugout but does not stipulate where the video is recorded or how it is transmitted.
Play 1: Team A's coach has an iPad in the dugout that is receiving a video from a camera (a) mounted on the backstop, (b) on a tripod beyond the center-field fence, (c) on a tripod on top of the dugout, (d) held by a parent in the stands, or (e) mounted on the catcher's helmet. **Ruling 1:** Legal in (a), (b), (c), and (d). All of these cameras are located outside live-ball area and it is legal to transmit the data to the iPad within the dugout. Illegal in (e) as the camera is in live-ball area.
Play 2: Team A's coach has an iPad in the coaching box. During play, the coach is using the iPad to (a) keep score, (b) take photos of the batter, or (c) record video of the game. **Ruling:** Legal in (a), illegal in (b) and (c). A coach in the coaching box is prohibited from having any devices, other than those used for scorekeeping. Recording or taking photos from live-ball territory is prohibited. The first offense is a team warning and the next offense results in the individual being restricted to the dugout for the remainder of the game or ejected (3-6-10).
- **Information Permitted on the Uniform (3-2-3):** Beginning January 1, 2027, uniforms may only bear a single manufacturer's logo, school name, school logo, mascot and/or the participant's name.
Rationale: Consistent language has been established for NFHS sports that describe what information is permitted on the uniform. A player's name, school name, school nickname, school mascot, and/or the school

logo may be placed on the uniform. Items such as advertisements, messages, team slogans, etc., will no longer be permitted. The change reflects consistent language for all NFHS sports.

- **Color Restrictions for headbands and ribbons (3-2-5):** Removes the color restrictions for headbands and ribbons. In the past, headbands and ribbons were governed by the same color restrictions as other headwear, such as caps and non-plastic visors.
Rationale: Adds consistency amongst headwear requirements for other NFHS sports.
Play: Some players from team A are wearing pink ribbons and headbands while other players are wearing a mixture of black and white caps and non-plastic visors. **Ruling:** Legal. The color restriction now only applies to caps and non-plastic visors, which must be white, black, beige or school colors. Those colors are not required to be the same for all team members.
- **Defines where a Playcard may be worn (3-2-7):** The rule clarifies it may only be worn on the wrist or arm and not worn on the belt. If worn by the pitcher, the wristband with a playbook/playcard must be worn on the non-pitching wrist or arm.
Rationale: Clarifies where this equipment can be worn. This change will prohibit wristbands from being worn on the belt. It remains legal for players to keep the wristband with a playbook/playcard in their back pocket.
- **Ending a Game (4-2-7, 10-2-3e):** This new section allows umpire may call (end) a game if playing conditions in or around the facility become unacceptable to safely continue the game. Previously, 4-2-2 allowed for ending a game for weather and darkness.
Rationale: Provides rule justification when an umpire ends a contest due to unacceptable playing conditions. Some examples include wildfires or police activity in the area or a medical emergency.
- **Leaping (6-1-2c, 2-47):** Removes the requirement that the pitcher must maintain contact with the ground prior to the front foot touching while delivering the pitch. The new rule allows pitchers to have both feet off the ground at the same time, as long as both feet remain within or partially within the 24-inch width of the pitching plate and the pitcher does not replant the pivot foot.
Rationale: The rule change permits both feet to disengage from the playing surface while delivering a pitch. The addition of Rule 2-47 defines that a replant of the pivot foot occurs when the pitcher pushes off the playing surface from anywhere other than the pitcher's plate prior to the act of delivering the pitch. Guidance for umpires in determining the legality of the pitch can be summarized this way: If a pitcher has separated the hands and the throwing motion continues uninterrupted prior to the pivot foot landing, the pitcher has not violated the rule. If a pitcher keeps the hands together until the pivot foot has landed or separates the hands and stops the forward motion of the pitcher arm prior to the pivot foot landing, it is an illegal pitch.
Play 1: F1 takes a position on the pitcher's plate with the pivot foot in contact with the pitcher's plate and the non-pivot foot behind it, both within the 24-inch width of the pitcher's plate. F1 takes a sign from the catcher, brings the hands together, then separates the hands while striding forward with the non-pivot foot. F1 then pushes off the pitcher's plate with the pivot foot, loses contact with the ground with both feet as the arm passes through the hip to release the pitch.
Ruling: Legal, provided the forward motion of the pitching arm did not stop once the hands separated and the feet remain within or partially within the 24-inch width of the pitcher's plate.
Play 2: F1 takes a position on the pitcher's plate with both feet in contact with the pitcher's plate and both feet partially within the 24-inch width of the pitcher's plate. F1 takes the signal, steps back with the non-pivot foot while bringing the hands together, then takes a step forward with the non-pivot foot. F1, while the hands are still together, pushes off the pitcher's plate with the pivot foot and disengages both feet from the ground. F1 then lands on the pivot foot, separates the hands and delivers the pitch. **Ruling:** Illegal. The pitcher may not replant the pivot foot before delivering the ball. In this situation, the pivot lands before the hands separate, which begins the pitch, and therefore is illegal. The umpire should verbalize illegal pitch and give the delayed dead ball signal.
- **Substances used on the Pitching Hand (6-2-2):** The change clarifies what a pitcher is allowed to use on their pitching hand. Pitchers can only use dirt, powdered rosin or comparable drying agents that are listed on the USA Softball's certified equipment webpage to dry the hand.
Rationale: The rule clarification allows pitcher to use dirt, powdered rosin or an approved drying agent – such as the Gorilla Gold – and does not require the pitcher to wipe off before contacting the ball. Note: There are

two Gorilla Gold products on the market, the original product and one designed for golf. The one designed for golf will likely leave a residue on the ball and is illegal to use in softball.

Play 1: The pitcher receives the ball from the catcher and (a) picks up some dirt from the ground and then drops it, (b) picks up a rosin bag and squeezes it, (c) touches the towel in her back pocket that has Gorilla Gold on it, or (d) licks her fingers. The pitcher then immediately touches the ball. **Ruling:** Legal in (a), (b), and (c). However, in (c), if the Gorilla Gold leaves a residue on the ball or the umpire suspects the towel has something other than the softball approved Gorilla Gold, it would be illegal, the towel would need to be removed and an illegal pitch would be enforced. In (d), it would be an illegal pitch. Pitchers must still wipe off after licking their fingers before going to the ball.

Play 2: After a foul ball out of play, the pitcher receives a different ball from the umpire. The pitcher feels the ball is too slick, touches the ball to the ground and rubs it in the dirt. **Ruling:** While it is legal for a pitcher to touch the dirt and then go directly to the ball, this act by the pitcher has the ability to deface the ball. The umpire should inspect the ball and if the umpire feels it necessary, require the pitcher to exchange softballs with the umpire.

POINTS OF EMPHASIS

GAME MANAGEMENT

Coach and umpire communication should be conversational, not confrontational. Passion for their team is often the root of fiery responses from coaches about plays or rulings that they felt went against their team. As an umpire, it is important to balance an understanding of the passion coaches hold for their teams and the sporting expectations of education-based athletics. There has to be a mutual respect for each other and a professionalism that is followed by both coaches and umpires to maintain the working relationship that is imperative to have a successful game. Listening to understand a coach's issue so you can properly respond to their concerns is a huge part of defusing the situation. Maintaining a calm demeanor when speaking to the coach also often helps to lower the temperature of the conversation and assists in having a more meaningful discussion. Another helpful tool for the umpire is utilizing rules book terminology to help keep discussions on topic and achieve resolution more quickly.

Another key aspect of game management is managing the flow of the game. Last year, the NFHS had a point of emphasis about the 60 seconds between innings. Although umpires are not there to "rush" players, one of the responsibilities of an umpire is to help maintain a good flow of the game. This can be done without being overly aggressive, often just a simple "here we go" or "let's get ready to play red" is all the encouragement that a team needs to know that it is time to get back to playing. Utilizing these simple reminders during each half-inning as well as during charged conferences can help make sure a good game flow is maintained.

UNACCEPTABLE CONDITIONS

Umpire jurisdiction is limited to the confines of the field of play. Items outside of the field of play, like spectator behavior, is monitored and controlled by event management. Absent a designated event manager, the home team's head coach assumes this responsibility. Most spectator behavior never reaches a level that would be considered dangerous or severe enough to cause a concern for participant safety. However, if conditions become unacceptable for play due to spectator conduct, umpires have the authority to call (end) the contest. Again, this is a very rare occurrence and all attempts should be made to have event management control the situation prior to ending a contest.

In addition to spectator behavior, other external conditions could result in the umpire having to call (end) the contest. For example, at the start of a game, a wildfire might be a safe distance with winds carrying the smoke away from the field. If these conditions change and result in conditions becoming unacceptable for play, it may result in an umpire having to call (end) the game.

UNREPORTED VS. ILLEGAL SUBSTITUTION

An illegal substitute is a player who is ineligible to occupy a position in the lineup. This can occur when a player:

1. Enters or re-enters the game without eligibility to do so (illegal re-entry).
2. Re-enters the game in the wrong position in the batting order.
3. Is the (F.P.) FLEX and enters the game as a batter or runner in a different position in the batting order than the DP.
4. Violates the courtesy runner rule.

All of these violations result in an illegal substitution and the penalties for offensive violations are defined in Rule 3-4-2 and penalties for defensive violations are detailed in Rule 3-4-3. Along with additional penalties, one consistent penalty for all possible violations is the illegal substitute is restricted to the dugout for the remainder of the game on the first offense.

In contrast to an illegal substitute, an unreported substitute is a player that could legally occupy the position they are in the lineup but has simply failed to report that they are entering the game. All substitutions and courtesy runners are required to be reported to the plate umpire upon entering the game. When a player enters the game unreported, a warning is issued to the head coach. Any subsequent violation results in both the head coach and player being restricted to the dugout for the remainder of the game.

PITCHING MECHANICS: REPLANT

The allowance for both feet to disengage from the playing surface while delivering a pitch has increased the concern about pitching mechanics involving a replant of the pivot foot. A replant during the delivery would result in an illegal pitch. To help assist in enforcement of this rule, a new definition of replant was created. Rule 2-47 now defines that a replant of the pivot foot occurs when the pitcher pushes off the playing surface from anywhere other than the pitcher's plate prior to the act of delivering the pitch. With this definition in mind, it is an illegal action if the pitcher slides the foot forward past the pitching plate pushing off to start their movement from a position in front of the pitching plate (no part of their foot is still in contact with or over the pitching plate). Another common action, often referred to as "closing the hip," is pushing with the pivot foot while delivering the pitch. Depending on the pitching style, the pitcher will either bring the pivot foot forward to square up toward the batter or the pitcher will tuck the pivot foot behind the non-pivot foot. This push is during the act of delivering the pitch and is legal.

Refresher: 2023 NFHS Softball Rules Changes

- **Color Restrictions on Gloves (1-4-1):** Removes the number of color restrictions on a glove, including laces and seams, and does not allow any panels of the glove to match the color of the ball.
Rationale: Gloves and mitts are manufactured in a variety of designs and multiple colors. As long as the color of the ball is not one of the colors used, does not have markings that give the appearance of the ball, or are made in a manner that is judged distracting by the umpire, it is permitted for use in NFHS.
- **Added Definition of a Fair Ball (2-20-1g):** A fair ball is a batted ball that while over fair territory, an offensive player interferes with a defensive player attempting to field a batted ball.
Rationale: The ball's status is determined at the point of interference. If an offensive player interferes with the defensive player while the ball is in fair territory, the ball is dead. Adding this language to the definition section mirrors the foul ball definition in Rule 2-25-1e.
- **No Jewelry Rule (3-2-12):** Removes language prohibiting the wearing of jewelry.
Rationale: Removing the language prohibiting jewelry places the softball rules in line with other NFHS sports that have removed the restriction. Umpires still have the authority to rule on anything that is considered a distraction or increases risk to any player (1-8-5).

Pitching Rules Comparison: NFHS – USA – NCAA

Taking the Signal

NFHS & USA: Do NOT require the signal to be taken from the rubber, the pitcher may "simulate" taking the signal on the rubber NFHS: 6-1-1b, USA: 6-1-D
NCAA: If signal is taken, it must be from the rubber, this includes looking at a sleeve on the arm 10.2.2

Rocker Step

NFHS & USA allow a step backwards
NFHS: Step backward must begin before the hands are separated 6-1-2b
USA: The step backward may be before, simultaneous with, or after the hands are brought together 6-1-E
NCAA does not allow a step backward; the stride foot must be in position before starting the pitch 10.2.1.2

Background Checks

Starting in the 2020 season, all high school and middle school softball umpires must complete the Maine Department of Education Criminal History Record Check (CHRC) AND complete the USA background check (**changed for 2022**). The reason for TWO background checks is simple; two different organizations are requiring background checks using different criteria/processes. National USA require the form every year, at the cost of \$10 to you. The Maine Principals' Association is requiring the Department of Education process that includes fingerprinting and costs \$85 the first year and is good for five years. Note: If you officiate another MPA sport, then you do NOT have to go through the process again.

CHRC Process

Starting in the 2019-2020 school year, all Maine high school sports officials must complete the Department of Education Criminal History Record Check (CHRC). This is often referred to as getting fingerprinted. If you currently work in a school or officiate another sport, you only need to send proof of a valid CHRC or the last four digits of your social security number to your local secretary or UIC. If you have not gone through the process yet, there are two steps to get started (**the order is not important, but BOTH must be done**);

To start the process, Google 'Maine doe fingerprinting' or go to:

<https://www.maine.gov/doe/cert/fingerprinting>

- 1a) On this page, in the third column, there is a link to 'How to create an MEIS Account.' This is the best and fastest way to get your information processed in the certification office for the Department of Education. Every person creating an account in the MEIS system for the purpose of applying for a credential will need to select to Be a Maine Educator in order to access the proper screens. Any individual having issues with creating an account can call 207-624-6603 Monday-Friday 9-3:30 or email Cert.DOE@maine.gov
- 1b) After you create your MEIS account, you will want to go to the link that says 'How to Apply for a Background Check (CHRC) Only.' Complete that process which will include providing a credit card to pay the \$15 fee associated with this step.
- 1 Alternate) If you absolutely cannot get through 1a & 1b above, you can download a form, complete it, and send it in with a \$15 check, made out to the Department of Education. The form can be downloaded at the link below. Important note: Using this form WILL take significantly more time, more time that will be measured in weeks! It is in your best interest to complete steps 1a & 1b above.

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1sl3R0q4kkvXdVgrtRveN5MGvAbliZzd5/view?usp=sharing>

- 2) Get an appointment with IndentoGO to get your fingerprints done.

<https://me.ibtfingerprint.com/>

When setting up your appointment, you will be asked for the agency name. It is the Department of Education.

**REMEMBER, THERE ARE TWO STEPS TO GET OR UPDATE YOUR CHRC.
YOU MUST COMPLETE BOTH STEPS TO COMPLETE THE PROCESS.**

- 3) Finally, once you have completed the above, you can check your progress at:

<https://www.maine.gov/doe/cert/status>

Click 'I DO NOT have a MEIS account'

Enter your last name and last 4 of your SSN and hit submit.

Once complete, you can print the screen and email it to your local secretary or UIC, or simply email the last four digits of your social security number to your local secretary or UIC.

If you have questions or issues, call:

The Department of Education, certification office at 207-624-6603

Note: It is YOUR responsibility to provide the appropriate information to the local authorities. The DOE is NOT going to reach out to anyone, including you, that you have completed the process and are cleared to officiate.