



Cascade Officials Association 2025 Softball Rules Interpretations

Softball Rules Interpretation 2025-01, Revision 1, Grinding the Ball in the Dirt

Rule: Rule 6, "Pitching," SECTION 2, "INFRACTIONS BY PITCHER (F.P.),"

ART. 2...The pitcher shall:

a. Not be allowed to...apply foreign substances on the ball.

Question: If a pitcher grinds the ball in the dirt while it is a dead ball is that an illegal pitch or unsportsmanlike conduct? What if a coach does it?

Application: Generic (All levels of softball)

Interpretation: This interpretation is both the Cascade Officials Association (CASO) position and that of the Maryland State Rules Interpreter for the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS). If a pitcher, or any other player, grinds the ball in the dirt at any time, live or dead ball, an illegal pitch should be called.

If a coach grinds the ball at any time, it should be considered unsportsmanlike conduct. A team warning should be given for the first event and a restriction to the bench for the second event.

Softball Rules Interpretation 2025-02, Unmatched Undergarments

Rule: Rules 3, "Players, Substitutes and Coaches," SECTION 2, "UNIFORMS, PLAYER EQUIPMENT," Article 7 requires that all undergarments, if worn, be the same color. The permitted colors are specified in Article 7.

Question: At times, high school teams will have different color undergarments. Should an umpire require that all undergarments worn in a game be the same color and unmatching colors be removed before a player can remain in the game?

Application: High School

Answer: The NFHS Maryland State Rules Interpreter has taken the position that umpires should follow the rule as written. Our focus should be on ensuring the game is played so players who do not match undergarments should still be allowed to play.

NFHS 3-10-Penalty says in part..."if the violation cannot be corrected, the player may participate and the umpire shall notify the head coach of the infraction upon discovery and refer the infraction to the state association".

The NFHS Maryland State Rules Interpreter has taken the position that asking a player to change undergarments in the middle of the game will not be looked upon favorably by the school administrators, coaches, players, and parents attending the game.

Under the interpretation given by the Maryland State Rules Interpreter, the game should continue, and the violation reported to the CASO Rule Interpreter who will then report it to the Maryland State Rules Interpreter.

The Maryland State Rules Interpreter has stated that this is sufficient to meet the rules, and no other action is needed or will be taken. His view is that the NFHS has guidelines, and this approach complies with the NFHS rules.

Softball Rules Interpretation 2025-03, Forfeiting the Game After One Minute

Rule: Rule 4, "Starting and Ending Game," Section 3, "FORFEITING GAME," Article 1, Item c states a game shall be forfeited if a team delays more than one minute in resuming play after the umpire call "Play Ball," or in obeying the umpire's order to remove a player or coach for violation of the rules.

Question: How should this be implemented?

Application: High School

Interpretation: This interpretation is from the NFHS Maryland State Rules Interpreter

This rule should be applied when a coach or player is removed from the game and does not obey the umpire's direction to leave the field. Item b. of Section 3, Article 1 addresses if a team refuses to continue play after the game has started. Item b. of Section 3, Article 1 should be applied if a team does not take the field to continue a game. Item c. is applied when somebody is ordered from the field and does not leave.

Softball Rules Interpretation 2025-04, Coach Attire

Rule: Rule 3, "Players, Substitutes, Coaches," SECTION 5, "COACHING," Article 5 does not allow coaches to wear any type of jean on the field except at the pregame conference.

Question: If a coach is wearing jeans, should the coach be removed from the field?

Application: High School

Interpretation: This interpretation is both the CASO position and that of the NFHS Maryland State Rules Interpreter.

Coaches should be in the appropriate attire when on the field. If a coach is in jeans, they may attend the pregame conference but after that they are not permitted on the field to coach. If a student base coach is then used, that student must be on the team playing and must wear a helmet.

Softball Rules Interpretation 2025-05, Illegal Pitches

Rule: Rule 6, "Pitching"

Question: The NFHS Maryland State Rules Interpreter issued guidance on February 27, 2025. The guidance covered the need for consistency across the state and the fact that illegal pitches should be called. In response to this guidance a question was raised about the CASO policy of calling illegal pitches at the Junior Varsity (JV) level once then not calling them for the remainder of the game.

“Are we now going to not ignore illegal pitching like we have in the past after we see that the pitcher is not on the NFHS wavelength for proper pitching OR

is it time to no longer ignore illegal pitching at the JV level even if that requires a game to be stopped or forfeited due to a team's inability to have a legal pitcher?”

Application: High School

Interpretation: The guidance on consistency was issued to avoid a situation where teams playing in the semifinal or championship game have a crew from a different county calling illegal pitches for the first time. The NFHS Maryland State Rules Interpreter wants to emphasize that illegal pitches should be called when they occur and not called for the first time in these important games.

In response to a question I got from a CASO umpire, I discussed the CASO policy of only calling an illegal pitch once in a JV game. The Maryland State Rules Interpreter wants us to call illegal pitches at the JV level when they occur. The basis for his position is, once the player moves to varsity, the pitches will be called. If we call them only once in JV then she may not correct the illegal pitch before she moves to varsity.

Based on the guidance issued on consistency and the need to call illegal pitches and my discussions with the Maryland State Rules Interpreter, CASO is changing its policy for JV games. Illegal pitches should be called every time they occur. If at some point, the pitcher has made corrections that are better aligning with a legal pitch, the umpire may find that is sufficient for the game. A change must be evident that shows a correction to the illegal pitch.

The primary position of the NFHS Maryland State Rules Interpreter is that he wants the games to continue and the girls to play. CASO fully agrees with and supports this position. Therefore, we should not stop or forfeit a game because of illegal pitches.

Let the game continue but if the coaches decide to stop the game, honor that decision. There is no provision in Rule 4, “Starting and Ending Game,” to end or forfeit a game because of excessive penalties, whether illegal pitches, obstruction, interference, etc.

Softball Rules Interpretation 2025-06, Time Between Innings

Rule: Rule 6, “Pitching,” Section 2, “Infractions by Pitcher (F.P.), Article 5 allows one minute or five pitches between innings. Once the minute or warm-up pitches are complete, Rule 7, “Batting,” Section 3, “Batting Infractions,” Article 1 requires the batter to be ready in 10 seconds. Rule 6, Section 2, Article 3 requires the pitcher to deliver the pitch within 20 seconds.

Question: When should the timing violation be called and how aggressive in calling it should CASO umpires be?

Application: High School

Interpretation: CASO umpires should understand that once one minute has passed, it is not a rules violation. The only penalty in 6-2-5 is a ball for each excessive pitch. There is nothing in the penalty if the umpire allows the team to take longer than one minute. A timing violation occurs when, after one minute or five pitches, either the batter is not ready in 10 seconds, or the pitch is not delivered in 20 seconds.

After one minute, the umpires should declare “batter up” and wait the appropriate time, 10 and 20 seconds respectively. While adhering to these time requirements, be lenient on the duration. If a batter is taking 11 or 12 seconds but is focused and moving, give her the benefit of the doubt. Similarly, if the pitcher is not unnecessarily delaying the game but is taking one or two seconds beyond the 20, give her the benefit of the doubt.

The NFHS 2025 Points of Emphasis are clear that there is no penalty for going beyond one minute. It states:

“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.”

First and foremost, rather than looking to call a timing violation, strike or ball, work to avoid it with preemptive umpiring. If the defensive team is not on the field in a reasonable time, encourage them by announcing, “let’s go ladies, you only get a minute.” If in the umpire's judgement the one minute is coming to an end, say something to the catcher to the effect of “this is your last one”, even if the pitcher is only getting two or even one warm-up pitch.

Once the warm-up pitches have been delivered and the catcher throws down, the umpire should sweep the plate, turn around, and if the players are huddling in the circle, say “let's play”. Similarly, before declaring a strike on the batter, tell her, “Batter in the box,” maybe twice before you declare a timing strike and after you declare “Batter up.”

Our goal is to not dictatorially adhere to the rules in such a manner that it creates undue and unnecessary consternation for the players, coaches, and parents. Use preemptive umpiring where you can, and work to avoid calling timing violations, either strikes or balls. Having a game with none because you worked with the teams to make sure the game was played and ran smoothly is much better than calling eight, or nine, or ten because that’s what the rule says.