

2025 MHSAA SOFTBALL COMMITTEE MINUTES
Thursday, January 9, 2025, 9:30 a.m. – East Lansing

MEMBERS PRESENT

Stephanie Caruso, Detroit
Brennan Davis, Parchment
Noah Dooley, Colon
Jeff Finney, Fowlerville
Robert Hull, Grand Rapids
Ashley Matha, Saline
Martha Munsell, Fowlerville (MATS)
Jami Neubecker, Grand Blanc
Ron Poyer, Chesaning (MHSSCA)
Bryan Smith, Lansing

Michael Thompson, Frankfort
Jennifer Thunberg, Freeland
Rick Troy, Rochester Hills
Travis VanBemmel, Grand Rapids
Tom Vrugink, Hudsonville
Betty Wroubel, Pontiac (MIAAA)
Jeff Yorke, Hale

MHSAA STAFF

Andi Osters (Recorder)

The 2024-25 MHSAA Softball Committee met in the John E. “Jack” Roberts MHSAA building to review softball topics and the tournament series. The meeting began with a review of the MHSAA decision-making process and the charge of the Softball Committee. Agenda items from correspondence, staff, committee members, and the softball coaches association were compiled.

DISCUSSION ITEMS

PITCHING MECHANICS

The committee received an overview of a new pitching rule change that has caused some confusion and misunderstanding among coaches and parents. A recent NFHS rules change to pitching delivery mechanics aims to make pitching more permissive for young players learning proper form. The group discussed the importance of educating coaches and umpires on the rules through clinics and rules meetings.

ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION & SOFTBALL GAMEBALL SPECIFICATIONS

Beginning this year, coaches will be permitted to use one-way electronic communication devices to communicate to a catcher while the team is on defense, mirroring a recent baseball rule change intended to speed up the game. In addition, NFHS softball specifications have been slightly altered for the upcoming season, and the committee assisted staff in developing messaging to educate coaches and schools about the change.

MAXIMUM COMPETITION LIMITS

Committee members discussed the maximum competition limits for softball and agreed that the current limit of 38 contests is sufficient. Several in the group raised concerns about the potential impact of adding an additional innings (“5th-quarter”) provision, which could lead to overuse of the best pitchers and players. Schools with multiple-level programs might consider having their players play on different levels on different days to manage the extra games, as this is permitted for individual athletes.

SCHEDULING CHALLENGES FOR DUAL-SPORT ATHLETES

The group reviewed the challenges faced by dual sport athletes, particularly those who qualify for the MHSAA Finals in track and field and are also members of a softball or baseball team scheduled to play MHSAA District contests on the same day (1st Saturday in June). The conversation highlighted the conflict faced by athletes who are forced to choose between participating in MHSAA tournament rounds for both sports on the same day. The recent change to the Softball District schedule, which allows districts to play Semifinal and Final softball games on Thursday or Friday (if all teams agree), has been received with mostly favorable results, but there

are instances where dual-sport athletes have not been accommodated. The committee agreed to continue exploring solutions to this issue.

TOURNAMENT STRUCTURE – ADDITIONAL DIVISIONS

For the second consecutive year, the committee entertained a discussion about the potential expansion of softball divisions from four to five or six. The group debated the pros and cons of such a change, including the impact on District and Regional schedules, the potential for smaller schools to advance further in the tournament, and the need for more study and examples to make an informed decision. They also discussed the possibility of creating a “super division” for schools with enrollments above 2,000, a “mini division” for schools with enrollments under 75, and the potential for a more contentious conversation around public versus private schools. The consensus was that further study and exploration of the potential changes are necessary before making any adjustments.

ARTIFICIAL NOISE MAKERS

The prevalence of artificial noisemakers and Bluetooth speakers at softball contests has become disruptive during some contests. The committee debated whether to mandate the prohibition of artificial noise makers, such as cowbells and drumsticks, and the use of Bluetooth speakers. It was decided that the MHSAA should provide guidance to tournament managers on the use of these items at MHSAA tournament sites, with a focus on prohibiting their use in dugouts and around the field of play. Ultimately, MHSAA tournament hosts will be solely responsible for music and public address announcements at tournament sites.

PROMOTING YOUTH IN SOFTBALL UMPIRING

Multiple committee members expressed the need for younger umpires in softball and expressed concern about the sport's future if the current demographic of working officials doesn't change. Bryan Smith, USA Softball Umpire Coordinator, encouraged committee members to create officiating classes within their existing physical education curriculum and informed the group that the MHSAA Officials Department can assist in organizing such initiatives.

EMERGENCY ACTION PLANS & AEDs

The committee reviewed the requirements for MHSAA tournament hosts, specifically that an AED be within three minutes of tournament sites. It was recommended that MHSAA Tournament Managers include this information in their draw meetings to ensure that at least one AED will be on-site for MHSAA Softball Tournament rounds in the spring of 2025.

Discussion also occurred on open gyms, rotations, preseason downtime allowances, the 2024 MHSAA Update Meeting Survey results, amateur status regulations, and NIL.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE REPRESENTATIVE COUNCIL

None.