



**UNDER**  
**THE**  
**STRIPES**

# SOFTBALL

## RULES REFERENCE

HIGH SCHOOL OFFICIALS QUICK GUIDE  
2026 NFHS CURRENT REFERENCE

### CODE & GENDER APPLICATION

NFHS softball rules apply to the contest; state classifications and procedures may differ.

Study aid only. Always use the current official rulebook, interpretations, mechanics manual, state or conference adoptions, bulletins and assignment instructions.

### THE STORIES BEHIND THE CALLS

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UNDER THE STRIPES NETWORK | VERIFIED JULY 23, 2026

# Core Contest Framework

Start here before moving into situation-specific study.

| Topic          | Quick reference                                                                                                               |
|----------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Players / game | Nine defensive players; seven innings. State associations govern run rules and suspended/postseason games.                    |
| Field          | 60-foot bases; standard high-school fast-pitch pitching distance is 43 feet. Verify level and state requirements.             |
| Pitching       | Underhand delivery from the pitcher's plate; start, foot contact, step, leap/replant and release must meet NFHS requirements. |
| Substitution   | Know starters' re-entry, substitutes, courtesy runners and DP/FLEX rules; record every change.                                |
| Look-back rule | Applies when the pitcher has possession in the circle and the batter-runner has reached first, subject to stated exceptions.  |
| Obstruction    | A fielder without possession may not impede a runner unless fielding a batted ball; apply delayed-dead-ball protection.       |

## Pregame Crew Checklist

- Confirm jurisdiction, start time, contest level, crew assignments and state/local modifications.
- Inspect playing area, equipment, clocks, team/bench areas and required game personnel.
- Conduct the required coaches/captains meeting; address sportsmanship and unusual ground/facility conditions.
- Review timing, substitution, timeout, penalty and end-of-period/inning procedures.
- Establish crew communication, primary coverage, rotations, help situations and emergency procedures.

## Primary Coverage & Mechanics

Use the current NFHS officials manual and your state mechanics. Maintain a patient whistle/flag, officiate your primary, expand only when necessary, and communicate decisive information to the crew before enforcement.

# High-Priority Rules

| Area                       | What the official must know                                                                                                     |
|----------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Pitching legality          | See the whole delivery: hands, pivot foot, stride, leap/replant, release and any advantage gained.                              |
| One-way communication      | 2026 permits a coach to use one-way electronic communication from the dugout to pitcher and catcher under the rule's limits.    |
| DP/FLEX                    | The DP bats; FLEX plays defense for the DP by default. Track line-up positions, substitutions and re-entry precisely.           |
| Interference / obstruction | Identify which player had right of way, ball status and the appropriate award or out.                                           |
| Illegal bat / equipment    | Use current certification marks and bat-list procedures; distinguish discovered-before-use from discovered-after-use penalties. |
| Look-back enforcement      | Know when the rule turns on, when it turns off, and what constitutes a committed direction or permitted stop.                   |

## Gender & Competition Differences

| Area                | Application                                                                                                     |
|---------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| NFHS softball       | Same playing rules regardless of participant gender.                                                            |
| Typical sponsorship | Girls fast-pitch is the most common high-school offering; some states sponsor boys softball or other divisions. |
| Local differences   | Pitching distance, ball size and game format can vary at subvarsity/youth levels; confirm the assignment.       |
| Not baseball        | Do not import baseball balks, mound visits, leading rules or DH concepts into softball.                         |

### Important

A boys/girls distinction is included only where an actual equipment, dimension, adoption or competition difference exists. The absence of a separate section means the same NFHS playing rule applies.

# Situations to Review

| Situation                                  | Crew response / study point                                                                                                      |
|--------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Runner stops off base under look-back rule | Determine whether the pitcher has the ball in the circle and whether an exception applies; declare the proper out when violated. |
| Obstructed runner later put out            | Apply the delayed-dead-ball award and protection judged under the rule; obstruction does not grant unlimited immunity.           |
| Illegal pitch with play continuing         | Signal delayed dead ball, observe the result, then enforce the option/penalty required by rule.                                  |
| DP plays defense for FLEX                  | This removes FLEX from the game; track whether re-entry remains available.                                                       |

## Postgame Self-Review

- Which ruling required the strongest rules knowledge?
- Did the crew communicate ball status, clock status, penalty/foul details and restart correctly?
- Was any call made outside a primary without clear necessity?
- What rule, case play or mechanic should be verified before the next assignment?
- What one crew adjustment would improve consistency?

## Official References

NFHS Softball Rules  
<https://nfhs.org/sports/softball/rules>

2026 Rules Changes  
<https://nfhs.org/sports/softball/rules>

NFHS Softball Hub  
<https://nfhs.org/sports/softball/>

### RULES DISCLAIMER

This educational quick reference is not an official rules book and does not reproduce the complete NFHS code. Rules, interpretations and state adoptions change. Before every season and assignment, consult the current NFHS rules book, case book, officials manual, your state high school association and the contest administrator.