



NEWS RELEASE

NATIONAL FEDERATION OF STATE HIGH SCHOOL ASSOCIATIONS

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Facemask rules to be implemented in high school softball

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Mary Struckhoff

INDIANAPOLIS, IN (July 22, 2004) — The National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) Softball Rules Committee approved a facemask/guard standard at its annual meeting June 6-7 in Indianapolis, Indiana. The rule subsequently was approved by the NFHS Board of Directors earlier this month at its meeting in San Diego.

Rule 1-6-6 will require all high school fast pitch softball players to wear batting helmets equipped with NOCSAE-approved facemasks/guards. The new standard will take effect on January 1, 2006, providing all state association-member schools with adequate time to budget and purchase new helmets that include guards, or to obtain facemasks to attach to current helmets. All masks must have the phrase “Meets NOCSAE standards” printed directly on them. Many manufacturers are already producing these facemasks.

“We encourage anyone purchasing these masks now to ensure they are NOCSAE-approved,” said Mary Struckhoff, NFHS assistant director and liaison to the NFHS Softball Rules Committee.

In other action, the committee modified Rules 2-25-1g and 2-25-2 to eliminate the wording “not higher than the batter’s head” in both the definition of a foul ball and the definition of a foul tip.

“When determining a foul ball or foul tip, the height of the batted ball as it relates to the batter’s head is irrelevant,” Struckhoff said. “The ball is already described as moving directly to the catcher’s equipment or glove.”

Rule 2-36, which pertains to the definition of obstruction, was also changed. The rule previously stated that a defensive team member could impede the progress of a runner or batter-runner who is legally running the bases if the defender was about to receive a thrown ball. The rule has now been relieved of that wording, and will only allow a defensive team member to impede a runner if she has the ball in her possession.

“Current language leaves considerable discretion to the umpire to interpret the rule,” said NFHS Softball Rules Committee Chairman Ralph Swearngin. “Too many defensive players are blocking the bases, especially first and home, without the ball.”

The change to the obstruction rule is also designed to help reduce the number of unnecessary collisions between players. Swearngin said that enforcement of the rule should be more consistent, and coaches should realize they will be penalized if they teach their players to block bases without the ball.

Also, the appeal procedure for Rule 8-6 PEN 3 was altered so that the coach or any defensive player is allowed to make a defensive dead-ball appeal. Because the ball is already dead, the committee concurred that it is irrelevant whether the appeal comes from dugout personnel or a player on the field.

Softball is the fourth-most popular sport for girls at the high school level with 357,912 participants during the 2002-03 season, according to the High School Athletics Participation Survey conducted by the NFHS. It also ranks fourth in school sponsorship for girls, with 14,007 schools offering the sport.

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