

2025-26 MHSAA SOFTBALL COMMITTEE MINUTES

Thursday, January 8, 2026, 9:30 a.m. – East Lansing

MEMBERS PRESENT

Brennan Davis, Parchment
Derek Delgado, Plymouth
Noah Dooley, Colon
Jeff Finney, Fowlerville
Emily Frikken, Warren
Robert Hull, Grand Rapids
Jason McIntyre, Mount Pleasant
Todd Miller, Troy
Martha Munsell, Fowlerville (MATS)
Jill Peterson, Centreville

Ron Poyer, Chesaning (MHSSCA)
Bryan Smith, Lansing
Steven Stodolak, Standish
Jennifer Thunberg, Freeland
Rick Troy, Rochester Hills
Travis VanBemmel, Grand Rapids
Betty Wroubel, Pontiac (MIAAA)

MHSAA STAFF

Andi Osters (Recorder)

The 2025-26 MHSAA Softball Committee met at the John E. “Jack” Roberts MHSAA Building in East Lansing to review topics related to the administration of high school softball and the MHSAA tournament series. The meeting opened with a review of the MHSAA decision-making process, committee responsibilities, and the advisory role of sport-specific committees to the Representative Council. Agenda items were developed from correspondence received throughout the year, staff observations, committee member feedback, and recommendations from the Michigan High School Softball Coaches Association.

DISCUSSION ITEMS

OBSTRUCTION RULE

The committee reviewed the NFHS obstruction rule considering current interpretations and points of emphasis at the NCAA and USA Softball levels. Bryan Smith, serving as a registered softball umpire, provided additional perspective on how the rule is currently being applied in game situations. Discussion centered on whether the existing language provides sufficient guidance for umpires when judging whether a runner’s progress has been hindered or impeded. Committee members agreed that the current NFHS standard, which places emphasis on umpire judgment rather than automatic awards, aligns well with the educational-based philosophy of high school athletics. The consensus was that no rule change or additional clarification is necessary at this time.

ELECTRONIC DEVICES

The committee discussed the rule change adopted in 2024-25 that permits coaches to use electronic communication devices with catchers while on defense. A majority of the coaches represented indicated they are currently using this technology or intend to implement it during the spring 2026 season. Members noted that the availability of this option has been helpful for pitch calling and game management, particularly in reducing sign confusion and improving pace of play. No concerns were raised regarding competitive balance or misuse, and the committee expressed general support for the continued use of this technology.

DOUBLE FIRST BASE

The committee reviewed field equipment standards with specific discussion on the use of a double first base. The group elected to take no action at this time. It was noted that proposed rule changes currently under consideration by the NFHS Baseball and Softball Committees could impact future discussion on this topic. The committee agreed to revisit the issue if national rule changes are adopted.

“FIFTH QUARTER” CONCEPT

A substantial portion of the meeting was devoted to discussion of competition limits and the restriction that currently prevents softball athletes from competing on more than one level on the same day. Two primary factors prompted this conversation. First, feedback from Question 15 of the 2025 MHSAA Update Meeting Survey, which specifically sought input on the effectiveness and practicality of the “fifth quarter rule.” Second, the upcoming expansion in baseball, which will allow athletes to compete on multiple levels on the same day beginning in the spring of 2026.

Committee members cited declining participation numbers in softball and the limited availability of subvarsity programs at many schools. In that context, allowing multi-level participation was viewed as a practical solution that could increase opportunities for student-athletes while helping schools sustain programs. The committee unanimously agreed that softball is well positioned for a similar allowance and advanced a proposal to permit student-athletes to compete on more than one level in the same day, while maintaining the existing 38-game season limitation.

SCHEDULING CHALLENGES FOR DUAL-SPORT ATHLETES

For the third consecutive year, the committee reviewed scheduling challenges faced by dual-sport athletes, particularly those participating in both softball or baseball and track & field. The conflict most often occurs on the first Saturday in June, when MHSAA Track & Field Finals are held concurrently with MHSAA District Softball and Baseball contests. Committee members discussed the difficult position athletes face when required to choose between competing for their team in a tournament setting and qualifying or scoring in another MHSAA Final event.

The group acknowledged the recent change to the softball district schedule that allows Semifinal and Final games to be played on Thursday or Friday when all participating schools agree. While this flexibility has generally been received positively, members noted that it has not fully resolved conflicts in all situations. The committee encouraged continued efforts at the local level to be flexible when possible and emphasized the importance of communication among schools and tournament managers.

TOURNAMENT STRUCTURE – SEEDING

The committee discussed tournament seeding, including the use of MPR and other potential ranking tools. After reviewing current practices, the consensus was that the existing MHSAA softball tournament structure remains appropriate for the sport. Members expressed confidence that the current format balances competitive equity with administrative simplicity. No changes were recommended.

SITE SELECTION COMMITTEE CRITERIA

Although baseball and softball tournaments are administered separately, the committee discussed the advantages of using common host sites for District rounds when schools are shared between the two sports. Members noted that securing common hosts can simplify logistics, reduce facility demands, and improve consistency for participating schools. While this practice is more common in larger divisions, the committee recognized that similar benefits can exist in smaller divisions where team composition overlaps. The committee recommended that MHSAA staff incorporate guidance encouraging common hosts into materials provided to both Baseball and Softball Site Selection Committees beginning in the 2026-27 school year.

EMERGENCY ACTION PLANS & AEDs

Martha Munsell reviewed Emergency Action Plan requirements for MHSAA member schools, with emphasis on sport-specific expectations for baseball and softball. She outlined best practices for diagramming field-specific EAPs and the importance of reviewing and practicing these plans with coaches and administrators. The committee was reminded that all MHSAA tournament hosts are required to have a working AED accessible within three minutes of the contest site. Members reaffirmed the importance of emergency preparedness as a critical component of tournament hosting.

Additional discussion occurred on scrimmage formats, approved game balls, results from the 2025 MHSAA Update Meeting Survey, transgender participation policies, and other general administrative topics.

RECOMMENDATION TO THE REPRESENTATIVE COUNCIL

1. Amend competition limits to permit student-athletes to compete on multiple levels of softball on the same day, while maintaining the 38-game season limitation. (15-0)