

SECTION 13 – Umpires

Apparel and Equipment – SECTION 13.1.

The NAFA has adopted a mandatory umpire uniform for use throughout all regions of the U.S. and Canada. Heather grey slacks are mandatory for all age levels. Shorts are not acceptable! The NAFA has adopted two primary colors for umpires shirts ... black and grey. These shirts must have the NAFA logo present on the breast of the shirt. Black NAFA umpire caps are the only acceptable option. They should bear the NAFA logo, and American Flag, where possible. No other logo, or insignias are permissible. Numbers are not acceptable on shirts, or outerwear. Grey or black ball bags are acceptable for the home plate umpire. Black shoes without any lettering, markings, or insignia are required for all NAFA umpires (plate and base).

NOTE: All NAFA Umpire apparel must be purchased through an approved, and officially licensed NAFA supplier. Any reproduction of the NAFA logo, or official apparel is prohibited, unless approved the by the NAFA.

- a. The plate umpire shall wear a black mask, black or tan padding, and black throat protector (An extended wire protector may be worn in lieu of a throat protector on the mask).

Note: An attached throat protector must be commercially manufactured, properly attached and unaltered. A throat protector that is part of the mask shall extend far enough to adequately protect the throat.

- b. It is required that the umpiring crews have a current NAFA Softball Rules Book accessible during the competition.
- c. It is strongly recommended that all umpires wear appropriate protective equipment.

Duties – SECTION 13.2.

Any umpire has the authority to order a player, coach or team personnel to do or refrain from doing anything that affects the administering of these rules and to enforce prescribed penalties. Each umpire is an approved official and is authorized and required to enforce each section of these rules. Further, the umpires shall be obliged to conduct the game under conditions conducive to the highest standards of good sportsmanship. The plate umpire shall have the authority to make decisions on any situations not specifically covered in the rules. The following is general information for umpires:

- a. It is recommended that the umpire not be affiliated with a team.
- b. The umpires should confirm the date, time and place of the game and shall report to the playing field at least 20 minutes ahead of time, start the game at the designated time and leave the field when the game is over. The umpire's jurisdiction begins when he/she arrives on the field

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- and reports to the home coach, and it ends when he/she leaves the field after the game.
- c. The umpires should introduce themselves to the coaches and other appropriate game management personnel.
 - d. The umpires shall inspect the playing field and equipment.
 - e. At the pre-game meeting, the plate umpire shall clarify all ground rules for the representatives of each team.
 - f. Each umpire shall have the power to make decisions on violations committed during playing tie or during suspension of play.
 - g. No umpire has the authority to set aside decisions made by another umpire within the limits of his or her respective duties as outlined in these rules.
 - h. An umpire should consult his or her associate(s) upon the request of a head coach; however, the final decision will rest with the umpire whose exclusive authority it is to make the decision and who requests the opinion of the other umpire(s).
 - i. In order to define respective duties, the umpire whose primary responsibility is the judging of balls and strikes shall be designated as the plate umpire, while the umpire(s) whose primary responsibility is the rendering of base decisions shall be designated as the base umpire(s).
 - j. The plate umpire and base umpires shall have equal authority to: (1) call a runner out for leaving a base too soon; (2) call "Time/Timeout" for suspension of play; (3) eject or suspend a player, coach or other team personnel; and (4) call illegal pitches.
 - k. The umpire shall declare the batter or runner out, without waiting for an appeal for such decisions, in all cases where such player is retired in accordance with these rules. Unless appealed to, the umpire shall not call a player out for: (1) missing a base, (2) leaving a base on a caught fly ball before the ball is first touched, (3) attempting to advance to second base after making the turn at first base and (4) batting out of order.
 - l. The umpire shall not penalize a team for any infraction of a rule when imposing the penalty would be an advantage to the offending team.

Plate Umpire – SECTION 13.3.

The plate umpire shall:

- a. Have full charge of and be responsible for the proper conduct of the game.
- b. Take a position behind the catcher.
- c. Have the authority to make decisions on any situations not specifically covered in the rules.

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- d. Call and count all balls and strikes and give a clear visual and verbal indication of all balls and strikes.
- e. By agreement and in cooperation with the base umpire, make decisions on plays, fair or foul balls and legally or illegally caught balls. On plays that necessitate the base umpire leaving the infield in a two-umpire system, the plate umpire will assume the duties normally required of the base umpire.
- f. Determine and declare whether: (1) a batter bunts, (2) a batted ball touches the person or clothing of the batter and (3) a fly ball is an infield or an outfield fly.
- g. Call or indicate “Play/Play ball” to start the game or resume play, “Time/Timeout” to temporarily suspend play and “Game” to terminate play for a regulation game.
- h. Announce each substitution to the opposing coach, official scorer and public-address announcer, if applicable.
- i. Render base decisions as indicted in the AFA umpire’s manual.
- j. Have the lights turned on when necessary for safety reasons. Whenever possible, this should be done at the beginning of an inning.
- k. Be the sole judge as to the suspension, resumption or termination of play should bad weather or unfit conditions prevail during a game.
- l. Penalize rule infractions (such as illegal pitch, interference, delay of the game, unwarranted disputing of a decision, unsportsmanlike conduct or defacement of the ball by the pitcher).
- m. Conduct the pre-game meeting with the representatives of the opposing teams five minutes before the scheduled starting time.
- n. Assume all duties when circumstances warrant starting or finishing a game as a single umpire.

Base Umpire(s) – SECTION 13.4.

The base umpire(s) shall:

- a. Take such positions on the playing field as outlined in the NAFA umpire’s manual.
- b. Assist the plate umpire in administering the rules of the game.
- c. Render base decisions as indicated in the NAFA umpire’s manual.
- d. Call base runners out for leaving before the pitch has been released.

Change of Umpires – SECTION 13.5.

Teams may not request a change of umpires during a game unless an umpire is incapacitated by injury or illness.

Pre-game Responsibilities – SECTION 13.6.

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Before the start of the game, the plate umpire shall:

- a. For legality and safety, inspect the equipment, particularly the bats, catcher's helmets, batting helmets, and cleats. Umpires should make certain that dented bent or illegal bats or broken helmets are not available for use during the game (i.e., not allowed in the dugout).

PENALTY – If, after one warning, a player continues to use illegal equipment, the individual shall be ejected from the game.

- b. Check the condition of the field and inspect all playing lines and markers for proper location and adequate visibility and direct the host institution to correct problems if possible or be prepared to make a ground rule to address the situation.

Note: Once a game has started, and the pitching distance, or base distance, is discovered to be in error, the error shall be corrected at the time of discovery, with no penalty, and the game shall continue from that point.

- c. Have two balls to replenish the supply of game balls as needed. Such balls shall be put in play when:
 - 1) A ball has been hit out of the playing field.
 - 2) A ball has been rejected because it is discolored, scuffed or otherwise unsuitable for play.
 - 3) The game should not be delayed to retrieve a particular ball that may have been fouled away from the playing area.

Pre-game Meeting – SECTION 13.7.

Five minutes before the scheduled starting time, the plate umpire shall conduct the pre-game meeting with the representatives of the opposing teams. During this meeting, the plate umpire shall:

- a. Receive from the home team and visiting team their respective batting orders on a lineup card. The umpire shall review each team's lineup card with its coach to be sure it is complete and shall provide one last opportunity for changes without the changes being charged as substitutions. Once returned to the umpire, each team's lineup is official. In the event of a subsequent change, the plate umpire shall report the substitution to the opposing team, official scorer and public-address announcer.

Note: Players not listed on the official lineup card are not eligible to play.

- b. Review ground rules with both teams. A local ground rule may be adopted where unusual conditions prevail if agreeable with the visiting team. Where the teams do not agree the umpires shall determine ground rules.
- c. Review special game rules (e.g., tiebreaker, conference or tournament

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- rules).
- d. Review certain areas of the playing rules that may cause confusion.

Procedures at End of Game — SECTION 13.8.

At the completion of the game, the plate umpire shall return the game balls to the appropriate games management staff or coach and report any flagrant conduct or irregularity associated with the game. The umpires shall give the teams reasonable time for a possible appeal play or protest. The umpires shall leave the field together in as polite, businesslike and inconspicuous a manner as possible.

Umpire's Judgment — SECTION 13.9.

- a. Any umpire's decision that involves judgment may, under certain circumstances, be reviewed but is never subject to protest. There will be no protest on such judgments as whether a batted ball was fair or foul, a runner was safe or out, a pitched ball was a ball or strike; or on any play involving accuracy of judgment. Decisions rendered by any umpire should be reversed when the umpire is convinced the decision is in violation of one of these rules. In case the head coach or captain of either team does seek reversal of a decision based solely on a point of rules, the umpire whose decision is in question will, if in doubt, confer with his or her associate(s) before taking any action but under no circumstances will any player or person other than the coach of either team, have any grounds to protest any decision and seek its reversal on a claim that it is in conflict with these rules. **Exception:** On a decision regarding a checked swing, when asked by the catcher, the plate umpire may seek a decision from the appropriate base umpire. Such a request may be made only when the plate umpire has called the pitch a ball.
- b. Under no circumstances will any umpire seek to reverse a judgment decision made by an associate(s), unless asked to do so.
- c. The umpires may rectify any situation in which the reversal of an umpire's decision or a delayed call by an umpire places a batter-runner, a runner or the defensive team in jeopardy. This correction is not possible after one legal or illegal pitch has been thrown or after the pitcher and all infielders have clearly vacated their normal fielding positions and have left fair territory.

Suspension of Play — SECTION 13.10.

- a. An umpire may temporarily suspend play in the following situations:
- 1) When, in his/her judgment, conditions justify such action.

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- 2) When he/she leaves his/her position to brush the plate or to perform other duties not directly connected with the calling of plays.
- 3) When a batter or pitcher steps out of position for a legitimate reason.
- 4) If a fair batted ball hits the umpire before passing an infielder (See Rule 9-16).
 - b. An umpire shall not temporarily suspend play in the following situations:
 - 1) While any play is in progress, including when a thrown ball hits an umpire.
 - 2) After the pitcher has started delivery.
 - 3) In case of injury until all plays in progress have been completed or each runner has been held at their base. **Exception:** When necessary to protect an injured player, the umpire may suspend play immediately.
 - 4) At the request of players or coaches until all action in progress has been completed.

Umpire's Responsibility for a Protest – SECTION 13.11.

All protests must be made to the plate umpire. When a coach claims that an umpire's decision violates NAFA rules, the plate umpire must: (a) allow the coach the right to file a protest; (b) announce to each coach, to the official scorer that the game is being played under protest; and (c) note and record the game situation at the time of protest.

Umpire's Responsibility for an Appeal – SECTION 13.12.

Only the defensive team may make an appeal to the umpires. Once the appeal is made to the umpire whose responsibility it was to watch the base and base runner, that umpire will step forward and make the proper call.

Umpire's Responsibility for Ejections and/or Suspensions – SECTION 13.13.

The umpire has the authority to remove a player and/or other team personnel from further participation in a game (which is ejection) for just cause.