

NCAA Baseball Rules Committee proposes moratorium on composite bats

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The NCAA News

The NCAA Baseball Rules Committee, responding to membership concerns and research conducted at the Division I Baseball Championship, has proposed an indefinite moratorium on the use of composite bats in NCAA competition, effective immediately.

The NCAA Playing Rules Oversight Panel must approve the committee's proposal before the moratorium can be implemented. The proposal will be sent to the membership for comment and PROP will review the responses. PROP's next conference-call meeting is scheduled for July 29.

During the 2009 Division I Baseball Championship, 25 composite bats were selected for ball exit speed ratio (BESR) certification tests. Of the 25 bats, 20 failed the official BESR test for current NCAA performance levels. Because all bat designs must pass that test before mass production, the results indicated that the performance of such bats changed thereafter, mostly likely due to repeated, normal use or intentional alteration (or both).

Batting averages and home runs increased significantly in Division I the past two seasons. In 2007, the per-game average for home runs was 0.68. That number increased to .84 in 2008 and .96 this spring. Batting averages also jumped, from .291 in 2007 to .296 in 2008 and .302 this season.

Bob Brontsema, chair of the committee and coach at the UC-Santa Barbara, said the committee was concerned about the integrity of the game and statistics and compliance tests indicating that bat standards have been exceeded. "The idea that a bat can somehow outperform what we set as a standard concerns us," Brontsema said.

In instituting a moratorium, the committee is requesting manufacturers and the baseball community to suggest ways that would allow composite bats to be used in play within NCAA guidelines and parameters.

The committee began looking at the issue during the regular season after being alerted to the possible alteration of bats through a technique known as "rolling." In the rolling process, the bat is placed in a machine, where it is compressed. The process makes the bat softer and enhances the spring-like factor of the ball exiting off the bat's surface.

"While the committee does not believe tampering or altering of bats is widespread, there is evidence that it has occurred," Brontsema said. "The larger issue here is that the performance of composite bats improves through repeated, normal use and these bats often exceed acceptable levels. By removing these bats from competition, we believe all bats used will be at or below acceptable levels."

The NCAA, now in its 10th season of restricting the performance level of non-wood bats, has specific standards delineated in the baseball rules book, including weight-to-length ratio, length, diameter and other specifics. All bats must also pass a laboratory test before a design is approved for production.

Starting January 1, 2011, the NCAA will use a new method for testing and reporting data, called the Bat-Ball Coefficient of Restitution (BBCOR). That decision was announced at the committee's July 2008 meeting. The committee believes the performance standard in the BBCOR will continue the Association's effort to allow only those non-wood bats that perform like their wood counterparts to be permitted for competition.

In another item on the agenda regarding pace of play, the committee will allow conferences to experiment with the use of a 20-second pitch clock. Conferences must submit a plan to the committee about how they will implement the pitch clock.

In 1990 and 1991, the Missouri Valley Conference used pitch clocks in its league games experimentally.

In that case, the 20-second clock started when the pitcher received the ball from the catcher and stopped when the pitcher began his windup. At that point, the clock shut off. The clock was used only when no runners were on base.

If a pitcher didn't deliver the ball to the plate in 20 seconds, a ball was added to the count. Also, a strike resulted if the batter was not in the box ready to take a pitch with at least five seconds remaining on the clock.

The Missouri Valley Conference also used a 90-second clock for teams to be ready to start play every half inning.

In 1990, Missouri Valley Conference seven-inning games were completed in an average time of two hours and nine-inning games in 2:37. That same year, nine-inning games in the regional round of Division I championship were completed in an average of 2:48.

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