



Welcome 2026 Softball Umpires!

Welcome everyone to the 2026 SDHSAA Softball Season! Thank you for your dedication to the sport of high school softball in South Dakota! We are looking forward to another season of high energy competition, which means as officials we must continue to learn and grow in our NFHS rules knowledge and umpiring mechanics. We are the third team on the diamond, and we want to be consistent and accurate together, across the entire state!

The vision and purpose of this newsletter is simple: to discuss fundamental NFHS rules and mechanics. NFHS softball is still new to many of us in SD, so this newsletter will focus exclusively on the desired plate umpire mechanics, base umpire mechanics, and rules/case plays we need to utilize for SD NFHS softball.

If you have a rules or mechanics topic you would like to discuss here, please let us know and it will be included!

Rules Topic of the Week **NEW RULES for 2026**

1-9-6: No player shall transmit or record audio or video from the playing surface. New language further clarifies the use of electronic devices and what is not permitted.

Rationale: This change clearly defines the types of electronic devices prohibited by the rule.

Rule 8: Rule 8 has been reformatted for clarity. Changes have separated longer articles, and organized exceptions, penalties, and effects into outline format for improved comprehension.

Rationale: Added article references to PENALTIES and EFFECTS, and Section 4 was separated into two sections addressing runners entitled to advance with and without liability to be put out to delineate differences.

2026 SD NFHS Softball Umpire Uniforms

2026 Uniform Update

Umpires have the option of wearing heather gray, charcoal gray, or navy blue slacks.

NFHS Note: In 2027, heather gray slacks will no longer be permitted since manufacturers are phasing out production of heather gray pants.

SDHSAA Note: Standard Uniforms include an electric blue uniform and a plain navy blue cap. Although we have an option on pant colors, **please do your best to match your partner(s) for each game.**



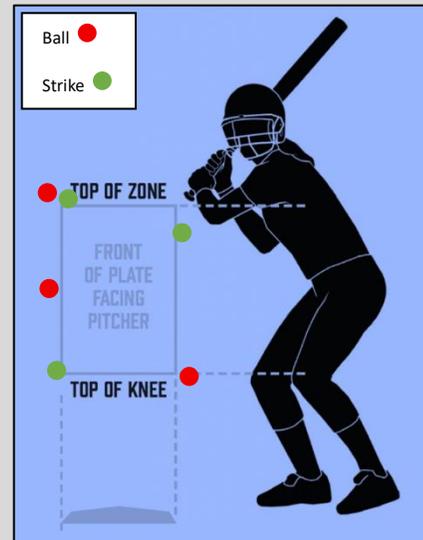
Umpiring the Plate – The NFHS Strike Zone

The strike zone is the space over home plate which is between the batter’s forward armpit and the top of the knees when the batter assumes a natural batting stance.

Any part of the ball passing through the strike zone in flight shall be considered a strike.

The umpire shall determine the batter’s strike zone according to the batter’s usual stance.

Remember the position in the batter’s box makes no difference. The controlling factors of the strike zone are the plate (sets the width) and the batter’s natural stance (sets the height).



Umpiring the Bases – Angles & Distances

In the 2-umpire system, the base umpire is responsible for many things around the diamond. The base umpire must be mobile to get into good calling position but also must be set for the play so their eyes are stationary to see a clear image of what happens. Work hard to keep all four elements (offense, defense, ball, and base) in view.

“STOP, SEE THE PLAY, MAKE THE CALL”

On a force play

- Recommended angle is 90° from the throw.
- Recommended distance is no closer than 18 feet.

On a tag play

- Recommended angle is 90° from the tag.
- Recommended distance is 10-12 feet.

It is not always possible to get both the recommended angle and the recommended distance. In these situations, focus on getting the correct angle first, then closing down the distance.





Crew Communication – It Starts Before the Game Begins!

3 Days Before the Game

- Contact your partner to confirm the date, time, uniform you plan to wear, and any other useful things to know ahead of time (parking, changing room, etc.).
- Decide which partner will contact the school POC to confirm the date, time, and other game-day logistics, especially if weather may be a factor!

On Game Day

- Arrive at least 45 minutes before start time.
- Notify host administration when you arrive and cover the SDHSAA Pre-Contest Medical Timeout.
- Never forget you are being watched from the time you arrive until the time you leave the site.
- Host administration should give a game ball to each team for warmups.
- With your partner, walk around the field to look for anything “weird” that is good to know ahead of time. Check the lines, fences, and any dead-ball areas. SDHSAA games must use the double first base! Discuss and resolve any issues with the home coach prior to the plate meeting.

Umpire Pre-Game Conversation

Umpires are a team; we work together and support each other on the field. A good pregame does not need to cover the entire manual but should answer any questions to help get everyone in a game-day mindset.

Good topics to review together in your pregame include:

- New rules and rule changes.
- Fair/foul and dead ball coverage.
- Illegal pitches and who has primary responsibilities.
- Tag up, missed bases, and appeal responsibilities.
- Check swing mechanics.
- Keeping the count and counting warm-up pitches.
- Umpire signals and communications; if you deviate, communicate!
- The ground rules and the pregame conference with coaches.
- Know if there will be an anthem, introductions, or other events/announcements.
- Arrive at the field in time for pregame conference.

Plate Meeting with Coaches

- The plate meeting should start five minutes before game time and should be led by the plate umpire.
- Introduce yourselves.
- The plate umpire must ask each head coach if their respective teams are “legally equipped and in compliance with all NFHS rules.”
- The plate umpire (not the home coach!) should then review the ground rules for the field, covering all obstacles, openings, and areas around the field in an orderly manner.
- SDHSAA run rules are 15 runs ahead after 3 innings, 10 runs ahead after 5 innings. In JV games only, 5 runs per inning may be used only if both coaches agree. The tie-breaker rule will be used if the game is tied after regulation play.
- Ask if there are any questions about the rules. It is not necessary to explain or describe rules unless asked.
- Review each team’s lineups, starting with the home team. After the plate umpire’s review, hand it back to the coach for a final inspection. Once handed back to the plate umpire, the lineup is official. After becoming official, ask each coach if they have any changes (this usually pertains to the DP/Flex players).
- Shake hands and “have a great game.”

Umpire Post-Game Conversation

- Take time to have a post-game. Find a quiet place away from everyone. This is a great way to improve and elevate your performance! NOTE: A post-game should focus on areas you would like to improve, not on things anyone did wrong in the game.
- Discuss any abnormal plays, situations, or rulings that occurred. Use the rules or casebook to look up these situations.
- Mention positive things about the game and the crew performance!
- Was there anything that could have gone differently that would have helped the crew?
- Be open and honest with yourself; that is how we all grow and improve as officials. No one is perfect!
- Complete any necessary post-game reports.