



2023 Softball Major Rules Change and Experimental Rule

**Note – This rules change will not be reflected in the hardcopy rules book until the 2024/2025 version.*

Rule	Rules Language and Rationale
2.15 Sideline and Home Run Fences	<p>By January 1, 2027, to require sideline and home run fences constructed of a hard material (e.g., wood, concrete or brick) to be padded. Padding must begin not higher than 1 foot off the ground and extend to the top of the wood, concrete or brick or 6 feet from the ground, whichever is shorter. This is required for any field hosting NCAA softball competition.</p> <p>Rationale: Currently, padding is strongly recommended for fences constructed of a hard material (e.g., wood, concrete and brick). This is a requirement for backstops constructed of these materials. This change would align sideline and home run fences with backstops. Although this is a non-rules change year for softball, this rules change is being made for financial and student-athlete safety reasons. The estimated budget impact varies depending on the amount of areas that require padding.</p>
Experimental Rule Double First Base	<p>By mutual agreement by the competing institutions, to allow teams to experiment with a double first base during the 2022 fall (non-traditional) and/or 2023 spring (traditional) season. The experimental rule is on the next page. Any institution interested in experimenting with the double first base must submit the request in writing to Vickie Van Kleeck (ncaasbsre@gmail.com). Institutions granted permission to experiment are required to collect data and submit it to the rules committee at the end of the season(s).</p> <p>Rationale: Since this is a non-rules change year for softball, the Softball Rules Committee is interested in allowing institutions to experiment and provide data and feedback as it considers a potential rules change in the future. Data collection will include the number of runner interference and obstruction calls, number of collisions and any injuries occurring while using the double first base. The double first base is required for USA Softball competition and permitted for high school and NCAA baseball competition.</p>

2023 Softball Experimental Rule

Specifications

The base shall be a one- or two-piece unit, 15 inches by 30 inches and manufactured to be of equal height between 1½ to 3½ inches thick. The base is bisected by the first base foul line, with half in fair territory and the other half in foul territory. The fair portion shall be white and the foul portion shall be a contrasting color, typically orange. The fair portion of the base shall be located in accordance with Rule 2.7 (first base). The foul portion shall be installed with no space between the two portions as shown in Figure 1 below.

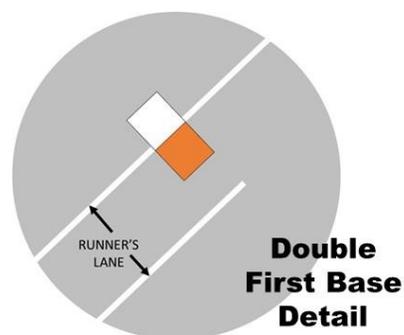


Figure 1. Double First Base Installation

Playing Rules

1. A batted ball hitting or bounding over any portion of the white base is fair. A batted ball hitting or bounding over the contrasting color portion **ONLY** is foul.
2. Runners tagging up on fly balls, leading off on a pitch, or returning to base on an attempted pick-off can only use the fair portion of the base. A defensive player must use only the fair portion of the base when a play is being made on the batter-runner on any live ball from within the foul lines or from third base foul territory.

EFFECT (1 and 2):

1. The batter-runner is out when there is a play being made at first base and the batter-runner touches only the white portion provided the defense appeals prior to the batter-runner returning to touch the white or colored base.
2. The batter-runner is out for interference when there is a force play and the batter-runner touches only the white portion and collides with the fielder about to catch a thrown ball while on the white.
3. Obstruction is called on the defense when there is a force play on the batter-runner, who touches only the colored portion and collides with the fielder about to catch a thrown ball, while also on the colored portion.

EXCEPTION:

When the defense fields or throws from first base foul territory to make a play on the batter-runner, or when an errant throw pulls the defense off the white portion of the base into foul ground: the batter-runner and the defensive player may use either portion of the double base and the batter-runner can run in fair territory. In this situation, normal running lane violation rules do not apply; however, if intentional interference is ruled, the batter runner would be out. If the intentional interference is deemed to be flagrant, the runner will also be ejected.

NOTE:

Incidental contact (i.e., no interference or obstruction) should be ruled if a fielder moves onto the foul portion of the base to receive a throw from first base foul territory on any live ball, and such movement was so late that the batter-runner could not avoid contact. However, if the fielder sets up on the foul portion of the base on this type of play in ample time, then the batter-runner would be expected to change direction and touch the fair portion of the base although there is no penalty for not doing so.

3. In general, the foul portion of the base is only available when a play is being made on a batter-runner advancing from home to first. Once the batter-runner passes the base, the foul portion is no longer available to the offense or defense.
4. On games played with the double first base, the “last stride” provision of Rules 12.5.5 and 12.17.1.5.2 does not apply. Runners are not entitled to leave the runner’s lane on their last stride in order to touch first base.
5. On a ball hit to the outfield when there is no play being made at the double base, the batter-runner may touch either portion of the base.
6. On a base on balls, the offense or defense may touch the white or colored base.
7. After overrunning the base or returning to the base, the offensive player must return to the fair portion. Should they stand on the foul portion only, it is considered not in contact with the base and they will be called out if:
 - a. they are tagged with the ball; or
 - b. they stand on the foul portion of the base while the pitcher has possession of the ball within the pitcher's circle.

Data Collection

If this experimental rule is used, the following data must be collected and reported to the NCAA Softball Rules Committee:

1. Base specifications – single plug or double plug base.
2. Cost of double base and installation.
3. Institutional or municipal field.
4. Home games using double base: ___conference ___nonconference
5. Away games using double base: ___conference ___nonconference
6. Home games using **single** base: ___conference ___nonconference
7. Away games using **single** base: ___conference ___nonconference
8. Number of runner interference calls at first base: ___double base ___single base
9. Number of obstruction calls at first base: ___double base ___single base
10. Number of runner and defensive player collisions at first base. ___double base ___single base
11. Any injuries to a batter-runner, base runner or defensive player at first base. Please provide a detailed explanation of the injury(ies), including which base (single or double base) was being used at the time of injury.
12. Which first base do you prefer? ___double base ___single base