



TECHNICAL BULLETIN

Issue Date: November 2003

TO: STATE DIRECTORS OF UMPIRING
STATE DIRECTORS OF COACHING

COPY: STATE ASSOCIATIONS

SUBJECT: LENGTH OF GAMES

For some time now administrators of the game have been concerned at the length of time being taken to complete a standard 7-inning game of softball. Games that once took 1½ hours to play are now taking up to 2 hours and, in some extreme cases, 2½ to 3 hours. This is not acceptable.

There are several reasons for this, not the least being a perceived reluctance by umpires, for whatever reason, to enforce existing rules limiting the time taken between innings and between pitches. However, the reasons do not rest solely with umpires.

Over the past few years we have seen teams develop habits that have contributed to the length of games, some of which have been

- At the change of innings, the team taking the field gathering in front of the dugout waiting for ALL players before running onto the diamond as a group ~ sometimes up to 45 seconds while waiting for a player who has been a batter or runner to enter the dugout, have a drink, collect his glove and then join his fellow players for a last second 'hurrah'.
- Teams taking the field without the pitcher, who waits for the catcher to 'suit up'; both players then taking the field and using in excess of 1 minute to complete warm-up pitches.
- Teams taking a full minute or more for warm-up pitches and then gathering at the pitcher's plate after the throw around, thereby using up more precious time, before the catcher returns to the catcher's box in readiness to begin receiving pitches.
- Batters stepping out of the batter's box between pitches and taking several practice swings before returning to the box for the next pitch, or spending an inordinate amount of time taking signals from the coach.

The amount of 'down time', i.e. time lost for some of the above reasons, in a game has so concerned the International Softball Federation that they have seen fit to introduce a time clock (similar to the shot clock in basketball) for World Championships and Olympic Games, in an endeavour to have games completed within an appropriate time frame.

IT IS NOT DESIRABLE FOR SOFTBALL IN THIS COUNTRY TO HAVE TO ADOPT THIS MEASURE FOR CLUB MATCHES OR NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIPS.

As such, umpires, coaches and players must now accept some responsibility and become more pro-active in ensuring this does not occur.

Some of the measures that can and should be taken by umpires to minimise the loss of actual playing time are

- ⇒ At the pre-game meeting with coaches, encourage the coaches to support all efforts to 'keep the game moving'.
- ⇒ Enforce Rule 6 Sec 9a by not permitting warm-up pitches that will extend the change of innings time by more than the permitted 1 minute, unless a new pitcher is taking the pitching position. (If the catcher was on base or last batter out, and the pitcher wants warm-up pitches, they must be taken by another team member ~ DO NOT allow the pitcher to wait for the catcher and then permit warm-up pitches that will exceed the time).
- ⇒ Encourage teams to 'hustle' on and off the diamond between innings, and in particular, discourage teams entering defence from gathering in front of the dugout before taking the field.
- ⇒ Request the catcher to remain at the plate after throwing the last warm-up pitch across the diamond.
- ⇒ Permit a quick 'throw around' by the defence after an out but discourage any gathering of players at the pitcher's plate after the throw around.
- ⇒ Limit the number of times the catcher goes to the pitcher to discuss pitch options or for any other reason.
- ⇒ Discourage batters from leaving the batter's box and taking several steps toward the coach to receive signals (if this continues, charge an Offensive Conference).
- ⇒ Use and enforce Rule 7 Sec 3a by requesting the batter to return to the box upon leaving to take practice swings, especially if the pitcher has the ball and is waiting for the batter to return.

There is no limit to the initiatives that umpires can utilise in maximising playing time; however, common sense must always prevail when game situations or weather conditions may require a more refined approach in enforcing these measures.

It is of particular interest to note that the above measures were utilised, and adopted by the respective Squad Teams, at the 2003 ASF U16 Development Squad Program games played in Sydney. After their introduction the results were outstanding, with the average game time being reduced from 2 hours to 1½ hours.

Remember, in the main the players are paying good money for the privilege of playing softball, so let's make every effort in our part of ensuring they have *quality* time, rather than quantity time, to do just that ~ Play softball!

All coaches, players and umpires should be cognizant of the fact that these measures are to be implemented for the 2004 National Championships.

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November 4 2003