Regular Season Format

Each softball program participating in the Conference competes in a single round-robin, one-division, 27-game schedule, playing nine (9) Conference opponents. Each team will play opponents in a three-game weekend series.

Regular Season Services

1. The Conference staff produces the 27-game schedule. Conference games will be scheduled from March 6 through May 3; however, teams may mutually agree to play prior to March 6 as non-conference games if their schedules allow (i.e. Spring Break). Single games will be played on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday of each weekend.
    a. The host institution shall set the game times for weekend series; however, host institutions must utilize the following guidelines:
        i. The times for Friday and Saturday games are at the discretion of the institution, however it is recommended that Friday games should be scheduled later in the day (afternoon/evening) if possible.
        ii. Sunday game times shall be mutually agreed upon, but start no later than 1:00 p.m. local time
    b. Nine weekends are available for Conference series.
    c. Easter weekend games are scheduled Thursday-Saturday with Saturday's game time being no later than 1:00 p.m. local time.
    d. It is permissible to alter the weekend format to a Doubleheader/Single Game series within the Friday-Sunday timeframe (Thursday-Saturday games on Easter Weekend) in the event of pending inclement weather. Such changes must be communicated to the Conference office.
2. There shall be no make-up date for lost games of a weekend Conference series.
3. The Conference staff circulates a listing of on-site administrators that handle cancellation and rescheduling decisions.
4. A publicity release, naming a Player and Pitcher of the Week, a weekly Honorable Mention, as well as listing notes and statistics, is compiled and distributed by the Conference staff.
5. The Conference staff coordinates and publicizes a preseason coaches' poll that predicts the order of team finish.

Regular Season Policies & Regulations (NCAA rules and regulations are followed unless specified below)

1. Scouting:
   a. Scouting reports, videotapes, etc. regarding Conference schools shall NOT be provided to non-conference opponents.
   b. Coaches may not scout Conference opponents in Conference or non-conference games during the regular season. (Exception: Regular Season tournaments in which one or more Conference team is a participant; all postseason competition including the American Conference Championship regardless of participation.)
2. All softball members are mandated to meet the following minimum field specifications:
   a. Rules 2.3 and 2.15 relative to backstops and fences in the 2026 and 2027 NCAA Softball Rulebook must be adhered to.
   b. Must have a designated bullpen area (must have a backstop and must have a pitching rubber and plate for both teams). Bullpen areas should be comparable in composition (dirt preferred) and in their distance from the dugouts.
   c. Each institution is required to provide a tarp that is in good working condition for its field. If there is any possibility of inclement weather, tarps should be on the field the evening before.

   In addition, members are encouraged to meet the following minimum field specifications:

   a. Dugouts should be covered and enclosed from spectators (harm, weather, flying balls).
   b. Host institutions are encouraged to provide comparable dugout amenities and equipment to the visiting team.
3. All regular season Conference games will utilize one of the following pregame protocol options:
   a. If there is **one cage** – Home team utilizes the batting cage first; visiting team goes second.
   b. If there is more than one cage available, then both teams may utilize them simultaneously as long as an adequate number of balls are provided for each team.
   c. Once a game begins, cage use is not permissible for any extra hitting opportunities.
   d. If teams mutually agree to utilize the pregame protocol option allowing batting practice on the game field, then they must follow option #3 listed on page 4.
   e. Infield – Home team takes the field first, followed by the visiting team.
   f. Opposing teams may not warm up in the outfield while their opponent is taking infield unless there is only one cage.
   g. Any fungo or pregame work (precluding dynamic stretching or throwing) near the infield grass or outfield outside of a teams' allotted outfield time during protocol is not permissible.
   h. **First pitch for all games will be :05/:35 after the hour**.

Regular Season Policies & Regulations (continued)

i. Pregame timing options (one cage, two cages and on-field protocols) are detailed below (based on Noon start):

Option #1
One Cage:

TIME BEFORE FIRST PITCH	ACTION
9:45 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.	Home Team Bat Testing
10:30 a.m. – 10:45 a.m.	Away Team Bat Testing
10:04 a.m. – 10:44 a.m.	Home Team Batting Practice
10:49 a.m. – 11:29 a.m.	Away Team Batting Practice
11:34 a.m. – 11:41 a.m.	Home Team Infield
11:38 a.m. – 11:43 a.m.	Home Team Bat Check
11:42 a.m. – 11:49 a.m.	Away Team Infield
11:50 a.m. – 11:54 a.m.	Field Crew
11:46 a.m. – 11:51 a.m.	Away Team Bat Check
11:54 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.	Introductions/National Anthem/Ceremonial First Pitches
12:00 p.m. – 12:03 p.m.	Umpires Meeting at Home Plate
12:03 p.m.	Intro Video
12:04 p.m.	Home Team Takes the Field
12:05 p.m.	Game Begins

*During team batting practice, opposing team may use outfield for stretching, warm-ups and outfield.

Option #2
Two Cages:

TIME BEFORE FIRST PITCH	ACTION
10:15 a.m. – 10:30 a.m.	Home Team Bat Testing
10:31 a.m. – 10:46 a.m.	Away Team Bat Testing
10:47 a.m. – 11:27 a.m.	Home Team Batting Practice Away Team Batting Practice
11:34 a.m. – 11:41 a.m.	Home Team Infield
11:38 a.m. – 11:43 a.m.	Home Team Bat Check
11:42 a.m. – 11:49 a.m.	Away Team Infield
11:50 a.m. – 11:54 a.m.	Field Crew
11:46 a.m. – 11:51 a.m.	Away Team Bat Check
11:54 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.	Introductions/National Anthem/Ceremonial First Pitches
12:00 p.m. – 12:03 p.m.	Umpires Meeting at Home Plate
12:03 p.m.	Intro Video
12:04 p.m.	Home Team Takes the Field
12:05 p.m.	Game Begins

Option #3
On Game Field:

TIME BEFORE FIRST PITCH	ACTION
9:25 a.m. – 9:40 a.m.	Home Team Bat Testing
9:45 a.m. – 10:25 a.m.	Home Team Hit On Field
10:10 a.m. – 10:25 a.m.	Away Team Bat Testing
10:30 a.m. – 11:10 a.m.	Away Team Hit On Field or Cage
11:12 a.m. – 11:32 a.m.	Grounds Crew
11:34 a.m. – 11:41 a.m.	Home Team Infield
11:38 a.m. – 11:43 a.m.	Home Team Bat Check
11:42 a.m. – 11:49 a.m.	Away Team Infield
11:50 a.m. – 11:54 a.m.	Field Crew
11:46 a.m. – 11:51 a.m.	Away Team Bat Check
11:54 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.	Introductions/National Anthem/Ceremonial First Pitches
12:00 p.m. – 12:03 p.m.	Umpires Meeting at Home Plate
12:03 p.m.	Intro Video
12:04 p.m.	Home Team Takes the Field
12:05 p.m.	Game Begins

4. Teams are not permitted to conduct a full infield during their 7-minute allotted time. Coaches may only facilitate their infield time from the foul lines and not home plate.
5. Teams must schedule flights as late as necessary on the last competition day to complete games.
6. All conference games must be played using the Rawlings NC12L-AAC softball. It is preferred, but not mandated, that this ball also be used in non-conference games.
7. The home team for each Conference series will wear light colored jerseys (tops) for Friday games, dark tops Saturday and light tops on Sunday. The visiting team is expected to wear contrasting tops on each of these days. Coaches are to communicate exact color designations ahead of each series.
8. During a Conference series, utilizing a declaration form provided by Conference staff, both the home and away teams must declare up to 22 student-athletes who will be eligible to play in the series. NO changes are permitted to the declaration form once submitted. Forms will be exchanged electronically 4 hours prior to the start of the series.
9. The travel party size is at the discretion of the institution. Though 22 student-athletes will be allowed to compete, schools may travel additional and those that travel are allowed to catch bullpen sessions.
10. In all Conference games (televised or not), Rule 6.7 in the 2026 and 2027 NCAA Softball Rulebook will be followed relative to the media format.
11. Host Responsibilities
    a. Those institutions that will be charging admission must continue to provide the visiting team with 40 complimentary tickets if the venue has 100% seating capacity. Any reduction of team complimentary tickets will be based off seating capacity (e.g. 50% = 20 tickets; 25% = 10 tickets, etc.).
    b. The host institution is required to provide three screens, six dozen balls, four tees and a pitching machine with balls (if available) for the visiting team. Best efforts should be made to provide equitable equipment for visiting team practice and warm-ups.

Regular Season Policies & Regulations (continued)

c. The host institution shall make best efforts to provide a maximum of 90-minutes of practice time on the actual playing field on the day prior (Wednesday/Thursday) to the first game for the visiting team. These practices may begin no later than 7:00 p.m. The visiting team must work with the host institution and schedule the practice no later than the Monday prior to the weekend series. In case of inclement weather/field conditions, batting cages or other indoor space should be made available to accommodate the visiting team.

d. The host institution must provide a digital or DVD copy after each intra-Conference game to the umpire-in-chief for evaluation purposes.

e. UPDATED: Each institution must have a laminated picture of their replay camera angles posted in the dugouts.

f. The host institution must designate one area for both teams to have the ability to film games.

g. The host must provide 2 seats assigned to visiting team scouting at each contest.

h. All cameras at the designated team filming position(s) may not be staffed at any point during play. It is permissible for a coaching staff member or designee to adjust the camera between innings, but that individual must leave the position once the game has resumed play.

g. A maximum of 60 minutes of practice on the game field must also be afforded to the visiting team on the first day of the weekend series only. Practice may not **end any later than 12:00pm local time** and visiting teams must communicate with host institutions on the Monday prior to their weekend series and inform them of their intent to utilize this practice opportunity. If there is expected inclement weather on the first day of the weekend series and game time needs to be adjusted, it is at the discretion of the host institution and its ground crew to cancel the visiting teams' practice.

h. An administrator from the host institution must be on site during all Conference regular season games. The on-site administrator may NOT have other primary game functions (i.e. PA announcer, scorekeeper, field preparation, etc.)

i. The on-site administrator is responsible for managing and facilitating pregame protocol prior to each Conference game and shall effectively communicate deadlines to both teams. Host institutions must disseminate pregame timing sheets in advance of the visiting teams' travel to campus.

j. Regular Season bat testing shall be conducted by the host institution as follows:

1. Teams will conduct their own bat testing in the presence of the crew chief and a representative from the home team at the testing site.
2. Bats will be tested before each game of the series. Testing will be conducted no earlier than two and a half hours before the game.
3. Maximum of 30 bats may be tested.
4. If a bat fails, that bat must be placed in a secure location within the facility (or a designated area) for the remainder of the series and will be retrieved/returned prior to a team departing.
5. Umpires will still check equipment before a game. Bats must be outside of the dugout. Single use gloves should be used by umpires when handling team equipment.
6. If a bat is damaged or loses certification during play, testing for a new bat would occur before the next game.
7. Teams may use any bat that is tested and approved.
8. The Conference office will provide three versions of bat testing stickers for all teams, and a teams sticker should be placed on each of the opponents bats that pass the testing.

k. If the host administrator has difficulty making a rescheduling decision during a weekend period, an administrator from the visiting institution may be contacted to assist with the decision. The Conference staff members may also be contacted, if necessary.

12. NCAA Bylaws 5.11 and 5.13 shall be followed relative to artificial noisemakers and bands.

Regular Season Policies & Regulations (continued)

13. Institutionally sponsored bands, cheerleaders and mascots are prohibited from traveling to away contests.
14. Fans may not display signs or banners deemed as being offensive or inappropriate to institutions, players or coaches in the facility. These banners should be identified and removed by security personnel.
15. A pregame meeting will be held for all Conference regular season games with each head coach and the officials to determine a drop-dead time. It is not mandated that the home game administrator be present.
16. Due to the conference utilizing a 3-game series, there will be NO tiebreaker in place.
17. The NCAA halted-game rule is in effect for the first three games of a weekend series only. However, it is not permissible for teams to utilize an additional date to play lost games of a three-game series (i.e. stay overnight to play Monday for lost games of a series). Any changes to scheduled games must be made prior to the visiting team leaving campus and by approval of Conference staff.
18. There shall not be more than two game finishes per day of a weekend series (e.g. it is not permissible to resume a halted game, finish the game and play a doubleheader if it is the last day of a weekend series or there is expected inclement weather).
19. When the site of a series is switched because of field conditions, the originally scheduled home team retains that status as does the originally scheduled visiting team. The schedule relative to home team designation does not change the following year. Financial travel compensation is determined between the involved institutions.
20. Games shall not be played if the "RealFeel" temperature for the facility on AccuWeather.com is 30 degrees or below. If the temperature at one hour prior to the game is 30 degrees or below, but the forecast indicates the temperature will be greater than 30 degrees by the start of the game, teams may begin pre-game warm-ups. If the temperature at the start of the game is not greater than 30 degrees, the game shall not be played at the scheduled time. The game may be delayed if the forecast indicates the temperature will be greater than 30 degrees at a later point in time.

    If the "RealFeel" temperature is greater than 30 degrees, the home and away team administrators shall mutually agree on whether to play the game. Coaches, administrators, and host event management staff shall communicate regarding logistics and other factors influencing the decision to play or delay the game. If a mutual agreement cannot be reached, the home team administrator shall make the final decision on whether to play the game based on field conditions and the health and safety of all participants.
21. The Conference-wide Lightning Policy must be adhered to for all Conference games (Attached separately).
22. The American Conference Softball Coaches Association holds its official annual meeting each August. In extreme situations where the head coach cannot attend, the institution's Sport Administrator or Director will determine the substitution.
23. Video review (use of replay)
    a. Mandatory for all conference games and recommended for non-conference games if the host institution has the ability to provide it.
    b. The replay system used is an institutional decision, with the following requirements:
        a. Minimum of 3 camera angles.
        b. Full sized monitor (Tablets not allowable) and headset available for the umpire to communicate with the production crew or replay technician.
        c. Review area must be located near the field, but may not be located inside of a dugout
    c. NCAA rules for video replay challenges are available in Appendix G of the 2026/27 NCAA Rulebook.
24. All technology being used at a competition site must be shared with the visiting team (ie: Trackman).

Regular Season Awards

1. Regular Season Team Champion (trophy and mini trophies)
2. First Team All-Conference (13 spots = 3P, C, 1B, 2B, 3B, SS, 3 OF, U/P, DP/U/NP) *
3. Second Team All-Conference (11 spots = 2P, C, 1B, 2B, 3B, SS, 3 OF, DP/U/NP) *
4. All-Freshman team (6 at-large spots)
5. Player of the Year *
6. Defensive Player of the Year *
7. Pitcher of the Year *
8. Freshman of the Year *
9. Coaching Staff of the Year *

Selection Process

- Coaches nominate their own players by position.
- Nominees are forwarded to each coach on a ballot with supporting information.
- Point system that is used for All-Regional and All-American voting is utilized for the All Conference and 'of the Year' awards voting. The top vote getter will be 1st team, the 2nd place vote getter being named 2nd team.
- Selections are based on Conference statistics only.
- Coaches submit choices (via the Conference's web site) from the nominee list, but cannot select their own players.
- Conference staff approves final selections.

VOTING – ALL-CONFERENCE (voting for 12 of 13 members)

- Coaches vote for the **All-Conference only** based on the timeline currently followed:
    - Ballot sent out on the last day of the regular season (Sunday, May 5) with updated stats/supporting information
    - Voting due by 10 a.m. ET on Monday, May 4

Championship Format

1. Ten-team, single-elimination. The event is conducted in four days and may be extended one day if severe inclement weather impedes the completion of the tournament.

   The game schedule is listed below. Please note that game times are relative to the time zone (ET) of the Championship site (East Carolina):

DAY 1	10:00 a.m.	Game 1	#9 Seed vs. #8 Seed ^ (ESPN+)
	1:00 p.m.	Game 2	#10 Seed vs. #7 Seed ^ (ESPN+)
	4:00 p.m.	Game 3	Winner Game 1 vs. #5 Seed ^ (ESPN+)
	7:00 p.m	Game 4	Winner Game 2 vs. #6 Seed ^ (ESPN+)
DAY 2	12:00 p.m.	Game 5	Winner Game 3 vs. #4 Seed ^ (ESPN+)
	2:30 p.m.	Game 6	Winner Game 4 vs. #3 Seed ^ (ESPN+)
DAY 3	1:00 p.m.	Game 7	Winner Game 5 vs. #1 Seed ^ (ESPNU)
	3:30 p.m.	Game 8	Winner Game 6 vs. #2 Seed ^ (ESPN+)
DAY 4	12 p.m.	Game 9	Championship Game (ESPN2) Winner Game 7 vs. Winner Game 8
Day 5	Rain Date – Games played as necessary		

   ^ *Conference staff has the discretion to change the order of Day 1 First Round Games and the corresponding Day 2 Semifinal games based on the host/local institution playing in the tournament which will create a positive Championship environment and facilitate attendance.*

   ^^ *Conference staff will determine start time based on availability of television coverage and other marketing/promotional opportunities. Recommended semifinal start times (Friday) based on the proposed Championship game times (Saturday):*

2. A tournament practice day is scheduled on the Tuesday preceding the Championship. Participating teams will be provided a 90-minute (depending on host facilities) practice based on tournament seed and time they play on Day One. Team travel schedules will be taken into consideration prior to finalizing the practice schedule.
3. Mandatory bat testing will be conducted each day of competition. Conference staff will develop a testing schedule based on each team's practice time. Testing will occur 30 minutes prior to each team's scheduled practice. Teams must bring all bats (maximum of 30) that will be utilized during the tournament.
4. A Pre-Championship virtual meeting will be held on the Monday preceding the start of the Championship. All ten (10) head coaches, administrators and media contacts must be on the call.
5. The tournament champion earns the Conference's automatic bid to the NCAA Tournament. The highest remaining seed in the Conference Championship will be declared the automatic bid representative should the tournament not be completed. In the event the Championship is not completed, no champion will be declared.

Championship Seeding Requirements/Procedures

All ten (10) teams are seeded according to Conference winning percentage at the conclusion of the season. The Softball Seeding Committee has the authority to revisit final Championship seeding if teams have played a significantly lower number of games than other teams and may use Conference/NCAA criteria as a guiding tool.

Tie-Breaking Policies

The following policies are set up to break ties at the end of the regular season for selection/seeding purposes. Follow the appropriate steps in order. Once one or more teams gain an advantage in the case of a multiple-team tie, revert to the beginning of the tie-breaking policies with the remaining teams. If the ties cannot be broken, the Commissioner or his designee will conduct a coin toss.

1. Regular season head-to-head results. If three or more teams are tied, they are viewed as a "mini-conference" when comparing head-to-head results. The team or teams with the best combined record versus the other teams in the mini conference gains the advantage.
2. Each team's record versus the team occupying the highest position in the standings, continuing down through the standings until one team gains an advantage.

   NOTE: When arriving at another pair of tied teams while comparing records, use each team's record against the tied teams as a group rather than the performance against the individual tied teams.
3. Runs given up against each other.

Championship Policies & Regulations (NCAA rules and guidelines are followed unless otherwise noted; regular season game management policies, where applicable, apply to the Championship)

1. All tournament games will be played with the official league ball, the Rawlings NC12L-AAC.
2. The Conference staff contracts umpires based upon the recommendations of the Conference's independent assignor.
3. Dugouts are limited to 22 players in uniform and a total of 29 persons. Players must be designated prior to competition and no replacements will be permitted. If the host institution provides bat handlers, 30 individuals shall be permitted.
4. The higher-seeded team in each game will be recognized as the home team and have the choice of uniform color. The lower-seeded team will be recognized as the away team and must wear a uniform of contrasting color.
5. All games shall be seven innings, except that a five-inning, eight-run rule will be used. If play is stopped before a seven-inning game is completed and the eight-run rule is not in effect, it shall resume at the point of interruption.
6. A tarp must be available to cover the Championship field in case of inclement weather during the tournament.
7. In the event of rain, precluding further competition, the Protest Committee, which is comprised of the crew chief, key host staff members and the Conference office administrator as chair, determines rescheduling.
8. A representative from field operations, along with the Protest Committee, as described above, determines if field conditions are playable prior to the start of a game. Once play begins, the decision is that of the home plate umpire.

Championship Awards, Gifts & Services

1. The Championship team receives a trophy, and each member of the travel party will receive an individual trophy, commemorative hat and t-shirt.

2. A Most Outstanding Player receives an award and is selected by a vote of qualified persons as determined by the Conference staff.

3. An All-Tournament Team will be selected from among the ten (10) participating institutions at the site of the Championship. Twelve (12) players will be selected with no specific regard to position (i.e., a certain number of outfielders, infielders, etc.). One of the 12 will be designated Most Outstanding Player. A selection committee shall be comprised of the Conference Staff with input from the sports information representatives of the ten participating institutions.

4. Each student-athlete competing at the Championship will have the opportunity to select a gift from an online suite. Appropriate information about gift selection will be forwarded to each head coach.