

I Am a New Softball Coach at my School....."What Can I Do"?



Ok, you're a school softball coach. You coached at a different school last year or maybe did not coach at all last year and you have been hired at a 'new' school taking over the softball program. You want to do everything possible to establish your program and improve your chances to compete – ESPECIALLY since you are new. You want to follow the rules but you just need to know what those rules are...so what is it you CAN do between now and next season? Everything you WANTED to know and probably some you DIDN'T want to know is explained below.

Comments

First, understand that OHSAA regulations are created and approved each year by the schools – the very schools where you and other coaches are employed. And, they are by design. Kids need a break – COACHES need a break. IF you are concerned about 'getting them college scholarships', stop and realize that all statistics point to the success at the 'next level' correlates to athletes that play multiple sports. And, nearly every sports psychologist agrees it is nearly impossible to maintain a 'hungry' student-athlete when they are asked to be under the gun for 12 months a year.

Separating the Myths from Facts

There is a strong focus on baseball **AND SOFTBALL** overuse injuries. The myth that a softball pitcher's motion is a 'natural one' and does not have an affect on her arm is just that – a myth that is scientifically studied and documented.

Just the Facts

- All Coaches, whether are PAID or VOLUNTEER are under the same regulations. There is no distinction between a paid coach or a volunteer coach with one exception – the volunteer coach receives no financial compensation.
- Out of Season Regulations are in place for Junior High/Middle School as well as High School teams
- All references to a coach or player are where that coach or player coached or played the previous season. In other words, any coach between the end of the season and next season is referenced as the coach at the school where he/she coached the previous season. The same for players.
- Schools, through their Principals, are self-policing. Seem strange? It is the very design of the OHSAA – member schools agree each year to become members that give them all the privileges of a member school – insurance, regulations, input in making regulations/rules, tournament participation among them. In return, the schools agree to abide and enforce these rules. And....all at no charge to the schools while also sharing in the profits generated from tournament income and reimbursement for tournament participation in many sports. We tend to refer to this as "*Respect the Game*". Without it – it does not work.

The No-Contact Period

The "No-Contact Period" is just that – a period of time in which school coaches are not permitted to have any softball related contact with players that played for their school teams the previous season. Softball's No-Contact period ends with Labor Day and counts back 28 days from that date. This "August" No-Contact Period is also designed to give fall sports an opportunity to 'start up' with no undue influences to not participate in a fall sport. **Want more detail on this No-Contact Regulation? I encourage you to read and print this:** <http://www.ohsaa.org/sports/bk/ReboundersReport/BasketballNo-ContactRule.pdf>

The Individual Instruction Regulation (OHSAA's General Sports Regulation 8.2)

Coaches wanted more time with players. Several 'Coaches Associations' continually requested school coaches be given the opportunity to provide individual skill instruction to players from their teams in the off-season. Prior to this, coaches had a 'hands off' policy which forced players to seek help from 'outside' individuals. Many of these "outside individuals" recognized this, charged high fees and often had far less training than the school coach. The OHSAA listened and developed a regulation giving coaches exactly what they asked for. For obvious reasons, there are restrictions that protect this permission so it does not turn into something that it was not designed to do. This was designed, as mentioned, to allow coaches to provide individual skill instruction – *pitching mechanics, fielding, hitting techniques, etc.* It was ABSOLUTELY **NOT** designed to increase any team practice time outside the season and the restrictions of the rule are written and designed to prevent it. Basically, this regulation permits a coach or coaches the opportunity to teach these skills:

- ANYTIME outside the season except during the No-Contact Periods – including during the summer months when coaches are provided 10 days of "team time".

- With a limit of 4 individuals present in all the combined facilities at any one time. Again, refer to the PURPOSE of this regulation.
- Not during an Open Field (or Gym) that is occurring simultaneously – obviously doing so would mean there would be more than “4 present in **all the combined facilities**” whether those in the Open Field (or Gym) would be receiving instruction or not.
- This regulation DOES permit you to have WEIGHT LIFTING at the same time. Weight lifting is weight lifting and is separate from this regulation. And of course, the assumption is that weight lifting takes place in a weight room (of course!) weight rooms are designed for strength training, not fielding, etc. So it has ‘built in’ limitations of its own.

Want more detail on this Individual Instruction Regulation? I encourage you to read and print this:

<http://www.ohsaa.org/sports/bk/ReboundersReport/GeneralSportsRegulation8.6Explanation.pdf>

Open Fields/Open Gyms

Any sport can conduct an “Open Gym/Facility” outside the season **AND** outside the No-Contact Period. But it must be remembered that the **ONLY THING THAT CAN BE DONE** in an Open Field/Open Gym is *unstructured free play of players playing the game of softball*. Think about that – that means no hitting ground balls to players, no hitting in the cage, etc. Just a pick up game of softball or simple throwing. Shocked by that? Many are but that is the definition of an Open Field – or an Open Gym (seems quite limiting in a gym) The Individual Instruction Regulation was created for the other things. And...it works perfectly for that. Occasionally I hear coaches wanting to invent their own rules about Open Gyms to make it fit their needs. But, it is pretty simple - Unstructured free play. Pretty simple.

Want more detail on this Open Gym Regulation? I encourage you to read and print this:

http://www.ohsaa.org/sports/bk/ReboundersReport/Basketball_Open_Gym_Regulations.pdf

The “10 Day Rule” in June and July

There was a time when the only team instruction permitted to school coaches was during the actual season of play. In the early 1990's, Coaches Associations lobbied for an opportunity to spend time with potential teams. Basically, school coaches (remember there is no difference between a Paid or a Volunteer coach) are permitted a total of 10 days of ‘team’ instruction/coaching (anything more than 4 players in team play) between June 1 and July 31. Once again, the regulation is strictly and clearly defined to eliminate all the scenarios that some might want to ‘invent’ to make the rule fit their needs. Each coach is not permitted 10 days individually – obviously. The 10 days are ‘per staff’ – all defined easily by those coaches that are Board of Education approved – paid or volunteer. There is a separation between 7-8 grade and 9-12 that provides even greater opportunity for team instruction during June and July. A day spent with a group of 8th graders at a ‘Team Camp’ does not count against the 10 days permitted for a freshmen, JV or Varsity team going to a “Team Camp”. A day spent coaching a group of JV players in a summer league DOES count toward the 10 permitted for all 9-12 teams. When any team has 4 or less players from the school's team on it (such as a summer ‘travel team’), those days do not count toward a coaching staff's 10 days.

Want more detail and specifics on the “10 Day Rule”? I encourage you to read and print this:

<http://www.ohsaa.org/sports/bk/2014-15BasketballQ&A.pdf>

Indoor Softball

OHSAA Regulations DO permit any number of players from the same school to play together on the same INDOOR SOFTBALL team only between the dates of November 1 and February 1. This does NOT give the coach the permission to coach players from his/her school teams but merely permits the *players* to play in excess of that 50% (4) player limitation.

Out of Season Coaching Permissions Timeline

The Season: From defined start date of practice until team's last contest

The No-Contact Period: Starting 28 days prior to Labor Day and ending at the end of Labor Day

The Individual Instruction Regulation: Anytime outside the season except during the No-Contact Period.

Open Gyms: Anytime outside the season except during the No-Contact Period.

Conditioning: Anytime outside the season except during the No-Contact Period

Weight Training: Anytime during the season or out of season. Now (effective Fall of 2015) permissible during No-Contact Periods

Indoor Softball: Permitted with an unlimited number of players from the same school between November 1 and February 1

The 10 Day Coaching Rule: Permitted between June 1 and July 31