



TECHNICAL BULLETIN 17-1

14 November 2017

Re: One Year Trial of WBSC Rules for Pitching and Strike Zone

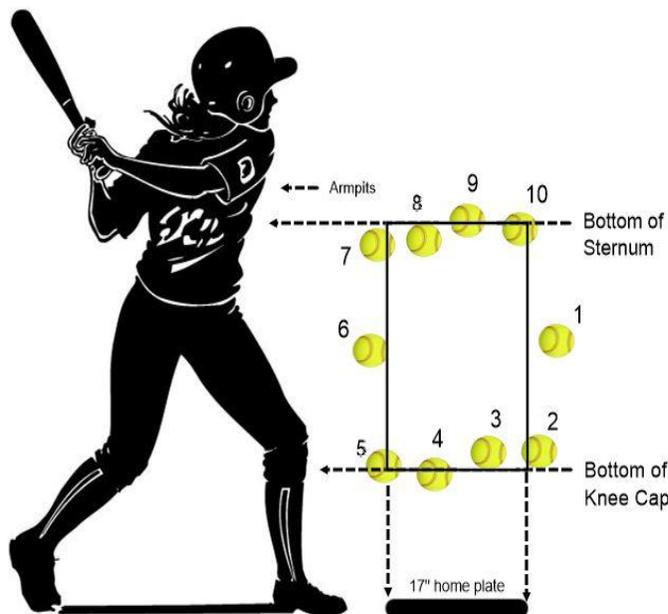
At the recent WBSC Congress, several rule changes were approved for inclusion in the 2018-2021 rule book. The majority of these changes were minor and simply served to clarify existing interpretations. However, two significant changes were adopted – one changed the definition of the strike zone and the second updated the pitching rule for both men and women.

At the recent Softball Canada Congress a proposal to implement a **one-year trial** of these two new rules was discussed at several workshops and unanimously approved at the Annual General Meeting. This trial will be **effective January 1, 2018**.

- **WBSC Strike Zone**

The WBSC rule (for Fast Pitch only) defines the Strike Zone as:

*The space over any part of home plate between the **bottom of the batter's sternum (chest plate)** and the **bottom of the batter's knee cap**, when they assume their natural batting stance. The natural batting stance is the stance the batter takes after the release of the pitch when deciding to swing or not swing at the pitch.*



Rulings: 1) ball, 2) strike, 3) strike, 4) ball, 5) ball, 6) strike, 7) strike, 8) strike, 9) ball, 10) ball

A further change to the WBSC code clearly delineates the expectations for passage of the pitch through the zone - for FP only – for a strike to be called:

*i. when any part of a pitched ball enters the strike zone before touching the ground and the batter does not swing, **provided the top of the ball is at or below the sternum or the bottom of the ball is at or above the bottom of the knee cap.***

It is not anticipated that this new definition will result in a change in the current strike zone as currently applied. Instead, this rule attempts to more closely match the current expectations and application of the rule and allows greater clarity of the strike zone at competitive levels. **As previous, umpires are expected to “adjust” the zone to match the level of play at lower skill levels.**

Note that the strike zone for Modified (Orthodox) and Slow Pitch remain unchanged as stated in the current Softball Canada rule book.



- **WBSC Pitching Rule**

The WBSC has a single pitching rule for both men and women. This rule will also be trialed by Softball Canada in the following categories - **Male U16 and above / Female U19 and above** – for one year, effective January 1, 2018. (Deviations from current SC rule are highlighted).

4.3 LEGAL PITCH REQUIREMENTS

4.3.1 PRELIMINARY ACTION BEFORE DELIVERING A PITCH

Before delivering a pitch, the following actions must occur.

- a) All players must be positioned in fair territory and the catcher must be in the catcher's box and in a position to receive the pitch.
- b) The pitcher must have possession of the ball and be on or near the pitching plate.
- c) The pitcher must have **the pivot foot** in contact with the pitcher's plate and both feet within the 61.0 cm (24 in) length of the pitcher's plate. The hips must be in line with first and third bases.
- d) The pitcher must take, or appear to take, a signal from the catcher while standing on the plate with the hands separated and the ball in either the glove or the pitching hand.
- e) The pitcher must, after taking the signal, bring their whole body to a full and complete stop with the ball in both hands in front of the body. **The non-pivot foot (the stepping foot) must be stationary at the start and during the pause. The non-pivot foot can only move forward with the start of the pitch. Any backward movement of the non-pivot foot during or after the pause is an illegal action.** This position must be held for **not less than two (2) seconds and not more than five (5) seconds** before releasing the ball. (Holding the ball in both hands to the side of the body is considered in front of the body.)

4.3.2 STARTING THE PITCH

- a) The pitch starts when one hand is taken off the ball or the pitcher makes any motion that is part of the pitcher's wind up). The pitcher may not use a pitching motion in which, after being in the pitching position with the ball in both hands, they take a backward and forward swing and return the ball to both hands in front of the body.
- b) **The pivot foot** must remain in contact with the pitcher's plate prior to the start of the pitch. Lifting the pivot foot off the pitcher's plate and returning it to the plate, creating a rocking motion is an illegal act.

4.3.3 LEGAL DELIVERY

FAST PITCH

All of the following must take place for a pitch to be a legal pitch.

- a) The pitcher must immediately deliver the ball to the batter upon making any motion to pitch.
- b) The pitcher must only make one revolution on the windmill pitch. However, the pitcher may drop the pitching arm to the side and rear before starting the windmill motion. This allows the arm to legally pass the hip twice.
- c) The delivery must be an underhand motion, with the hand below the hip, the wrist not further from the body than the elbow and with no stop or reversal of the forward motion.
- d) The release of the ball and follow through of the hand and wrist must be forward and past the straight line of the body.



- e) In the act of delivering the ball, the pitcher may take one step with the leading, non-pivot foot simultaneously with the release of the ball. The step must be forward toward the batter and within the 61.0 cm (24 in) length of the pitcher's plate. It is not a step if the pitcher slides either foot across the pitcher's plate, provided contact is maintained with the plate, and there is no movement backward off the plate.
- f) The pivot foot must remain in contact with the pitcher's plate or push off and drag away from the pitcher's plate or be airborne prior to the stepping (non-pivot) foot touching the ground. The pitcher may leap from the pitcher's plate, land and with a continuous motion deliver the ball to the batter. The pivot foot may follow through with the pitcher's continuous action.
- g) All movement of the pitching arm must be continuous as the pitcher steps or pushes or leaps from the pitcher's plate.
- h) The pitcher's push off to drag, leap or hop must start from the pitcher's plate. The pitcher must not crow hop or push off from any place other than the pitcher's plate.
- i) The pitcher's arm on the release of the ball may follow through, provided the wind-up does not continue.
- j) The pitcher must deliver the ball to the batter so as not to deliberately drop, roll or bounce the ball to prevent the batter from hitting it.
- k) The pitcher has 20 seconds to release the next pitch after receiving the ball or after the Umpire indicates "play".

The significant effect of this trial is that pitchers may elect to have only one foot in contact with the pitching slab prior to starting the pitch. If the pitcher chooses to place his / her stepping foot behind the slab they must pause after they place the stepping foot. All movement of the stepping foot after the pause must be forward. A rocking motion is not permitted.

Other effects of note:

- Women (U19 and above) are now permitted to leap, land and throw in a continuous motion. The pitcher's hands must be separated and the arm rotation started prior to landing.
- The pause must be between 2 and 5 seconds. Pitchers must come to a **complete** stop during the pause. A "moving" pause is not legal.
- Pitchers must continue to step directly towards home plate, with the stepping foot landing within the 24" length of the pitcher's plate.
- Fast Pitch pitching rules for male U14 and under and female U16 and under remain unchanged from the Softball Canada rulebook.
- Orthodox (Modified) or Slo-Pitch pitching rules remain unchanged from the Softball Canada rulebook.

Jeff Whipple
National Director of Umpiring