

Dear Commissioner Tackett & Mr. Wyman,

I am sending this letter on behalf of myself as well as many coaches across the state of Kentucky that have recently learned of a change to the format for post season softball games. While watching the required rules clinic video this past week, I first learned of the newly adopted rule to use the International Tie-Breaker (ITB) format beginning in the 10<sup>th</sup> inning of any contest played during the regular or post season.

My hope is that after reading this letter, you will consider reviewing this rule change at your next Board of Control meeting and reversing this change. My hope is that I can provide some data and additional information that may provide an alternate option as well as a way to provide the young ladies playing softball a way to decide all post season games on the field without any “gimmick” formats. I thank you in advance for reading this and hopefully sharing with the other members of the Board of Control.

### **How we got here**

As I've spoken to dozens of coaches across the state this last few days, one of the biggest discoveries has been the lack of communication between the softball coaches and their voting administrator, typically the Athletic Director. I've communicated directly with 20 coaches that were opposed to this rule being used and were then surprised to learn that their administrator voted in favor of the rule. All of these coaches expressed that they were never contacted about this being up for a vote. There were then another 5 schools that were opposed to the rule, and their administrator voted “no preference” in the vote. Again, all five of these coaches said they were never asked to give their opinion and weren't aware this was up for a vote. I also received a response from a Board of Control member that stated Head Coaches and Assistant Coaches in softball were all sent an email regarding this issue prior to the vote. During my conversation with Commissioner Tackett, this is something I had expressed frustration with as that *was not* taking place! One of the biggest frustrations from the coaches is that we were not aware of this and felt as though an email to us could have helped communication with our administrators. The fact that Board of Control members that voted on this issue may have felt as though the results of the vote were a direct reflection of the coaches because they were notified, is concerning. I can understand approving the rule if I was under the impression all parties involved in the process were actively made aware.

If the goal of the survey was to gauge the opinion of the coaches across the state, the results used during the final voting by the Board of Control were obviously accurate, but they lacked validity to the true feelings of the softball coaches. I recognize that issue isn't one that the KHSAA or the Board of Control has control over, but I'm hoping this situation has allowed coaches to express to their athletic directors the desire to be made aware of potential issues that are being voted on. Additionally, if the ultimate goal is to get a true sense of what the coaches across the state feel, it's worth looking at how these changes would have changed the original results. The original vote had an approval of 53%. Had the 20 schools that voted against the wishes of their softball coach as well as the schools that voted “no preference” when the coach did have a preference, voted in line with their coach's wishes, the results would have been very different. In that scenario, the vote for using ITB would have fallen to 43.8%, the vote against using the ITB would have grown to 45.2%, and the vote for no preference would have become 11%.

The 20 schools I mentioned in the previous paragraph are only the ones that I have personally had contact with. While I am not certain there are more, I would not be surprised if there aren't additional schools that didn't have the opinion of their coach represented in their vote.

### **Post Season Data**

One of the biggest questions the coaches I have spoken with and I don't understand is the reasoning behind this rule even being considered. An attempt to implement this rule was made a year or two ago right before the post season began. When word of that decision was learned, a large contingent of coaches immediately contacted the KHSAA about their displeasure in the rule. The KHSAA changed their decision and removed the rule before post season play began. The coaches felt like they had made their voices heard and had no idea the rule was going to come up again for consideration or a vote. I would assume if a rule like this was going to be put into play, it would be because of a large number of games going more than 10+ innings in the regional and state tournament. If that were to be true, an argument could be made for using the ITB as a way to potentially decrease the number of innings a pitcher is throwing in a day or weekend. The data simply doesn't support that idea. Over the last 6 years, there have been a total of 672 regional tournament games. There have been a total of 7 games that have gone 10+ innings. That is 1% of all regional tournament games over the last 6 years. During that same 6 year span, there have been a total of 183 games played at the State Softball Tournament. A total of 8 games, 4%, have gone 10 innings or more. Combined, we're talking about 15 out of 855 games, 1.8%. It would be a shame for a game deciding who got to move on to the State Tournament or even who was crown our State Champion, was decided by using the ITB. Our young ladies have put countless hours into working towards competing for a District, Regional, and State Championship. The despair and heartache a team would feel from losing a game due to the ITB can't be properly expressed.

Additionally, if one of the goals of this rule is to decrease the number of pitches being thrown by a pitcher in a day, putting this rule in play doesn't guarantee a game doesn't still go 14-15 innings. Another concern is that if this rule is put into play, we aren't truly addressing the issue of pitch count, inning count, or games thrown in a day. A team in the winner's bracket at the State Tournament will never play more than 2 games a day if they continue to win. If they play two 10 inning games, they will have thrown 20 innings and both games will have been decided by ITB. However, a team in the loser's bracket could play up to 4 games on Friday and another 4 games on Saturday. If two of those games on Friday go 9 innings, you have a pitcher that's thrown 32 innings and never used the ITB. It would seem to me the 2<sup>nd</sup> situation is the bigger issue. Since the data suggests the number of 10+ inning games are very limited, a change in the rules won't have a real effect on concerns with pitch counts and innings thrown. Games that reach that point are highly intense and often have some of the most amazing finishes. To get to that point and then have to use ITB would be a shame.

### **Different Option, Better Option**

I know that one of the items being discussed by the Board of Control has been the structure of the softball State Tournament. If the ultimate goal is to try and limit the number of innings a player pitches in a day, there's an option that a very large population of the softball coaches would support. Changing the structure of the State Tournament to single elimination, with teams only playing a single game each day, would be a change that would directly impact the number of pitches a player is throwing in the tournament and it would also allow pitchers to get proper rest and rehab from one start to the next. In a single elimination format, if you chose to keep the State Tournament at 16 teams, no pitcher would ever throw more than 4 games in a 4 day period. There's currently the potential for a player to throw that

many games in a single day. The move from the current double elimination format to the single elimination format, would provide the opportunity for the event to be moved to a much nicer location that would be greatly supported by coaches across the state. I have spoken to dozens of coaches across the state that coach teams that regularly are competing at the State Tournament and every one of them stated that they would be fully supportive of changing to state tournament format to single elimination. There's a current perception across the state that softball players aren't getting the same experience as their baseball counterparts when competing at the state tournament. Whether that's a real or perceived issue, a change to single elimination would go a long way towards changing that view.

An additional idea I presented to coaches was the idea of having all regular season games immediately use ITB beginning in the 8<sup>th</sup> inning. I asked if they would be willing to go to ITB in the 8<sup>th</sup> inning to potentially limit the number of innings/pitches thrown. There was 100% agreement that they would be willing to make that a requirement as long as it wasn't forced in post season play. The coaches understand the potential issue of pitchers being used too much over the course of the season. We are willing to make accommodations during the regular season to help improve the issue. But when it comes to the post season, we simply would like the games to be played out without the use of the ITB.

In closing, I appreciate you taking the time to read and consider my thoughts. As a softball coach of 22 years that has been fortunate to be a part of some great experiences at the regional and state level, I want to do anything possible to make sure the young women that play this sport have the opportunity to experience those same feelings and don't leave the field at the end of a year feeling resentful that their season ended due to a rule that wasn't completely in the best interest of the game. Thank you again for your time.

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