

MEN'S SHUL SOFTBALL LEAGUE RULES

MSSL Charter

The Men's Shul Softball League (MSSL) was formed in 2003 to offer participation among men from Boston Metro Synagogues (Shul) in a "recreational" - mostly social softball league. To that end, rules have been assembled and designed with the goals of promoting safe and fair play, built upon a foundation of good sportsmanship. This means exercising respect, fairness, civility, honesty, responsibility, and most importantly a positive behavior. While team records and standings are kept throughout the season, the league's mission is "To promote friendship among men of Jewish families through sport."

The following rules shall apply in all games of the Men's Shul Softball League (MSSL). It is the intention of these rules that for any situation in which there is no explicit rule, the applicable rule contained in the Official Rules of ASA Softball for high-arc, slow-pitch play shall apply, in the discretion of the umpire.

The Office of the Commissioner may determine to add, change or delete rules during the regular- and/or post-season if it determined that doing so will make play safer and more enjoyable for all teams.

I. THE ROSTER

1. In order to participate in league activities in a given year, each team must pay the designated per-team MSSL fee. In addition to covering an allocation of the league's operational and equipment expenses, the fee also includes liability insurance for each team's players.
2. To play for a team (i.e., be on its roster), a player must:
 - a. be a man,
 - b. be at least 25 years old during the calendar year of league play (except that each team is allowed one 24-year-old player),
 - c. be a member in good standing of the Shul the team represents, or the son, grandson or substantial caregiver of a member in good standing, and
 - d. register, pay the player fee then in effect for that team and accept the terms of the League's liability waiver on the msslonline.com website.

The intent behind this rule is that there be no "ringers" allowed.

3. Exception to Item (c) under Rule 1.2 above – On a team that represents a Shul in which there are no official members, each player on the roster shall be affiliated in a meaningful way with such Shul (e.g. attends services, participates in Shul events). In the case of any controversy, the Commissioner(s) may decide whether someone meets this definition.

4. Each team roster shall consist of at least 8 and no more than 25 players, and the coach is responsible for verifying and confirming that every person on the roster is in compliance with Rule I.2 above.
5. If immediately prior to or during the course of a game, a team coach believes that the opposing team is fielding a player not in compliance with Rule I.2, he may elect to play the game under protest, and he shall inform the umpire and the other team coach of his decision.
6. If it is determined by the Commissioner(s) that a team committed a roster violation, the team shall forfeit the game in which the violation occurred. In the case of three violations, the team shall be eliminated from the playoffs.
7. A player may only play for one team. Thus if a Shul has more than one team a player must commit and only play for one team and each Shul team shall have a fixed roster. This rule also would apply to a player who has multiple Shul memberships. The sole exception to this rule is a member of the clergy of a team with multiple MSSL teams. In this case a Rabbi or Cantor, with commissioner approval, is eligible to play for each of his Shul's teams during the regular season. However, prior to the beginning of the playoffs the clergy member must commit to a single team, and in order to be playoff eligible must have participated in 3 regular season games with that team. If such requirements are not met, the team can petition the Commissioner(s), who may override the requirement if the situation warrants.
8. In order to qualify for a team's post-season roster a player must have participated in at least 3 regular season games. If a player has not participated in 3 regular season games, that player will not be allowed to participate in any post-season games. The only exception to this rule is if a player on the roster is injured and at the time of the injury it is reported to the Commissioner(s). Such injured player can still qualify for the post-season without participating in the required 3 regular games.

II. EQUIPMENT

1. Every team must have a uniform consisting of at least a common team shirt.
2. Metal cleats are NOT permitted.
3. It is the responsibility of every coach to verify that his team's bats meet all of the requirements set forth below **before** they are used in an MSSL game.
 - a. The bat must bear either the ASA approved 2000 certification mark, the ASA 2004 certification mark, the certification mark for 2013 for SLOW PITCH, or the new USA Softball Certification Mark for the 2020 calendar year.



- b. The bat must be included on the ASA list of approved bats. To access this list, choose "bats" and click "GO" at http://www.asasoftball.com/about/certified_equipment.asp - and then choose a manufacturer (or "display all") and click "GO".
 - c. The bat must not appear on the ASA's partial lists of non-approved bats. You can find these lists by choosing "bats" at http://www.asasoftball.com/about/certified_equipment.asp and scrolling down.
 - d. If there is no indication on the bat that it is single-walled, then it must be designated as "single-walled", "wood", or "composite" on the ASA website in the matching entry you located under Rule II.3.b above. Bats with a "multi-wall" designation are not allowed.
 - e. If a team has a bat that fails to meet all of the above criteria and the coach believes its performance to be safe and reasonable, he may share his research and appeal to the Commissioners for a ruling. Until an affirmative ruling is made, the bat shall not be used in an MSSSL game.
 - f. If a team's bat is challenged at an MSSSL game and the coach declares that the bat does meet all of the above criteria, then he shall be given the benefit of the doubt and the team allowed to use the bat for the remainder of the game-- though subject after the fact to the full force of Rule II.6 below.
4. Balls: Only 12" Red dot restricted flight slow pitch balls are to be used. Such balls will be supplied in sufficient number by the league to each team prior to the start of the regular season. The home team must provide two (2) new balls to the umpire prior to the start of the game. The ball used at the beginning of each inning shall be used for at least that inning unless it is lost, damaged or otherwise becomes unplayable as determined by the umpire.
 5. The catcher must wear a mask.
 6. Safety is paramount. If it has been determined that a violation of these equipment rules has occurred, whether knowingly or unknowingly, the commissioners reserve the right to penalize the offending team, including but not limited to forfeiture of any and all games in which the violation occurred.

III. THE GAME

1. Only the team coaches may talk to an umpire about anything concerning the game (e.g. interpretation or application of rules, disputed calls etc.). It is required that the coaches and umpire confer before the game to review the league rules as well as any rules indigenous to the particular home field.
2. Each team shall have a minimum of eight players on its roster to be entitled to play a game. If 8 players have not arrived by the time that team must take the field (or 15 minutes after the scheduled start of the game, whichever is later), that team shall forfeit the game.
3. Each team coach shall create a legible batting order and make it available to the other team prior to the start of each game. All team's players who come to a game are to be placed in that team's continuous batting order. The batting order must not change during the game. There are only two exceptions. First, players who arrive after the start of the game must be placed at the end of the batting order. Second, players may exit the game before its conclusion and be removed from the batting order; however, they may not then reenter the game.
4. There shall be a maximum of 10 players in the field. Except for a pitcher and a catcher (who shall be required), the team is free to set its players in any configuration. Free substitutions in the field shall be permitted at the conclusion of an inning. Except for pitchers, there shall be no substitutions in the field during an inning except in the case of injury. Pitchers may be substituted during an inning, but in that case, the replacement pitcher shall only be entitled to 2 warm up pitches. When a pitcher is substituted mid-inning, the coach must select a new pitcher who is already on-field in another position (i.e., no substitute players from the bench) and the coach shall be allowed to make up to three other on-field substitutions. As an example, a pitcher may be moved to center field (first on-field substitution), the center fielder can be moved to short-stop (second on-field substitution), and the short stop can be moved to pitcher (third on-field substitution)
5. A team coach may protest a substitution or lineup violation at any time during the game while the person who allegedly was illegally substituted is still in the game, and the coach(es) of both teams may confer with the umpire. The decision of the umpire shall be final.
6. First and third base coaches are permitted for the batting team. The coaches cannot be on the field and shall not interfere in any way with the play. In the case of such interference, the closest runner to the base coach shall be out, as determined by the umpire.

7. Except as provided in Rule III.9 below, each game shall be 7 innings. In the event of a tie, extra innings shall be played until a winner is decided or until the bottom of the inning has ended two (2) hours after the start of the game (e.g., noon if the game starts at 10:00 AM), unless the coaches mutually agree inning by inning that the game shall continue.
8. Inclement Weather. The commencement or resumption of games due to inclement weather shall only be determined by mutual consent of both coaches. The umpire has no authority in determining if a game is played, cancelled, or restarted due to inclement weather. So for example, if the umpire declares the playing conditions to be unsafe, by mutual agreement of the coaches the game may continue, but the umpire may choose to exit the game and field and will still be considered to have fulfilled his/her obligation.
9. Any game cancelled pursuant to Rule III.8 above shall be considered a regulation game if four or more complete innings have been played, or if the team second at bat has scored more runs in three or more innings than the other team has scored in four or more innings. The umpire is empowered to declare conditions to be unsafe for a game to continue at any time because of darkness, rain, fire, panic or any other cause that places the patrons or players in peril. However, pursuant to the MSSL Rulebook, Rule III.8 shall apply (i.e., if by mutual consent, the coaches may choose to continue playing the game without an umpire). Games that are not considered regulation shall be resumed at the exact point where they were stopped. Umpires are due their full fee even if the game is not considered regulation due to being cancelled for unsafe conditions, and will also be due a full fee for officiating the rescheduled completion of the cancelled game.

IV. PITCHING AND BATTING

1. The pitcher shall pitch the ball with a totally open palm at the point of release (hand parallel to the ground, *palm facing the sky*). The pitch must be delivered in a definite underhanded motion with a fixed wrist position (i.e., no twisting of wrist). The pitcher may not attempt to put a sideways spin (or any other spin) on the ball so as to try to create a curving effect. There shall be no spinning or twisting of the ball whatsoever. Any pitch or attempted pitch that violates this rule shall be a ball. The pitcher must have at least one foot on the rubber when he releases the pitch. If a pitcher violates this rule more than 3 times in any game, he may be removed from the pitcher's position for the balance of the game, in the discretion of the umpire.
2. The pitcher shall pitch the ball in an arc. Any pitch that is not at least 6' from the ground or which is greater than 12' from the ground at the highest point in the arc shall automatically be called a ball by the umpire. The batter reserves the option to swing at this pitch at his discretion and the resulting call or play will depend on the disposition of the batter's swing.

3. The strike zone shall be any area over home plate between the batters back shoulder and front knee, at the discretion of the umpire.
4. A batter will be out when he fouls off a second pitch after there is a count with two strikes (i.e. the batter gets a single “grace” foul with 2 strikes before being called out on the next foul).
5. There shall be no bunts. If the umpire determines that a batter intentionally bunted to advance a runner, the batter shall be out and runners may not advance.
6. The batter shall be out if he hits the ball with his foot on the plate.

V. FIELD DIMENSIONS

The official MSSSL field dimensions shall be:

1. Pitcher’s mound – 50 feet from home plate
2. Bases 60-65 feet apart (Bases to be placed at distance between 60-65 feet to optimize safety of runners depending on field)
3. These distances shall be determined at the field prior to the start of the game by tape measure if available (all teams have been provided a tape measure by the league), or by the Umpire if not. All MSSSL fields must be able to safely adhere to these dimensions.

VI. ADVANCING AND RUNNING

1. Leading is not permitted. Runners shall not leave their base until the ball is hit. Any runner leaving his base early may be called out at the discretion of the umpire.
2. It is the intention of the league that maximum steps be taken to avoid injuries. Sliding is permitted. However, slides deemed by the umpire to be take out slides or slides intending to intimidate or distract a fielder are not allowed. Runners shall not intentionally run into fielders attempting to make a play at a base, or at home plate. In the event of a close play where contact between fielder and runner might occur, all runners must either perform a safe slide or give up their right to the base in the name of safety.
3. No base runner shall make contact with any fielder (period). The only allowable contact between base runner and fielder is when the fielder is attempting to tag the base runner with ball in glove or hand, in which case the fielder's glove or hand may touch the runner's body below the neck. If any contact is made between fielder and base runner other than that, the runner shall be called out and may be

- ejected from the game if the umpire determines the contact to have been excessive, intentional, intimidating, unsafe or avoidable. Further disciplinary action against the runner and/or his team may follow at the discretion of the League.
4. Fielders at any base shall not block the base, home plate or the path of the runner (i.e. prevent the runner from touching or attempting to reach the base or plate). Fielders shall not engage in fake tags or deceptive fielding plays. If the umpire determines that a fielder is in violation of this rule, then the runner shall be called safe and shall arrive at the base/plate he was attempting to reach, and the fielder may be ejected from the game if the umpire determines that contact was excessive, intentional, intimidating, unsafe or avoidable.. Further disciplinary action against the fielder and/or his team may follow at the discretion of the League.
 5. If a player is ejected from a game he must leave the venue immediately. If he refuses, he will be not be allowed to play in the League. If a player is ejected from two games in a single season he will be suspended for the remainder of the season (including playoffs). If a player is ejected from three games during his tenure in the MSSSL he will no longer be allowed to play in the league.
 6. A runner who, in the umpire's judgment, has interfered with (a) a batted ball, or (b) a fielder who is attempting to field or throw a ball, or (c) a thrown ball, shall be out. If in the umpire's judgment, such interference was an attempt to prevent an obvious double play, the immediately succeeding runner shall also be called out.
 7. Tagging to advance on fly balls and sacrifice flies are permitted in accordance with the usual rules (i.e. runner must tag up; if the runner leaves the base before the ball is caught, he will be called out). If a team wishes to appeal a tagging up play the coach of the team must approach the umpire and appeal the tag up play before the next pitch.
 8. The infield fly rule shall apply in accordance with the usual rules: When there is a fair pop fly that can be caught by an infielder with ordinary effort with runners on first and second or first, second and third and less than two outs, the umpire shall call "infield fly". The result is the batter shall be automatically out, the ball is alive and runners may advance at their own risk of the ball being caught and their being doubled off (or the runners may tag to advance as with any fly ball).
 9. If a ball is thrown away by a fielder out of the field of play, the batter and all other runners shall be limited to a single extra base, as determined by the umpire. If the ball is thrown away by a fielder in the field of play, there shall be no limit on all runners' ability to advance.

10. If a runner runs more than 3' outside of the baseline to avoid being tagged, he shall be out.
11. Any runner who passes the runner in front of him shall be out.
12. If all runners have ceased actively advancing to the next base (as determined by the umpire in the event of a dispute) and the ball is returned to the pitcher who is standing on the rubber of the pitcher's mound, runners may no longer advance to the next base.
13. Each batter shall be required to run to first base once he has batted the ball (i.e., no substitute runners from home plate*). In the event a player is injured, he may remain in the game and in the batting lineup so long as he is able to run to first base (or his final base) after hitting the ball, at which point a substitute runner may be used. Such substitute runner must be the batter who caused the team's last out. The injured batter may call for a substitute runner (or not) at any time that the ball is NOT in play by signaling to the umpire that he would like time out. If a runner has been injured earlier in the game and has previously called for a substitute runner, there is no obligation on the batter that he must call for a substitute runner on any future times at bat.

* The only exception to this rule is if a batter has a permanent or long-term physical disability that severely limits his mobility, in which case a substitute runner may start at home plate. However, such substitute runner must be the batter who caused the team's last out, must start running from a point at or near home plate as designated by the umpire, and must not begin running until the ball has been struck by the batter.
14. The league has implemented a safety-base at first base (i.e., a double-base). The home team shall provide this additional safety-base outside the baseline at first base that the runner must run toward. The first baseman will use the inside base.
15. The following is widely known as the "First Touch" rule. When a runner dislodges a base from its proper position, that runner and all trailing runners are not required to follow a base out of position. The ball remains live, and runners may stop at the dislodged base, advance or return with liability to be put out. "Not required to follow" means the location of the base is treated as if it remains where it should be, where it was before it was dislodged. It is the umpire's judgment if the runners touched the right place. Umpires are liberal in calling the runner safe, and shall "never guess an out". So, if the runner makes a reasonable effort to touch where the base was at the beginning of the play, or stand there at the end of the play, they should not be called out.
16. The following is widely known as the "Ball Beats Runner Home" rule. There shall be no tag plays at home plate. In order to record an "OUT" at home plate, a defensive player must be in possession of the ball and must touch home plate with

any part of his foot, body, ball or glove before the base runner touches Home Plate. No defensive player (including the catcher) may tag the base runner once the base runner has crossed the Commitment Line (one-half (1/2) the distance from third base to home plate). Unless unintentional and incidental by the fielder, if the runner is tagged after crossing the Commitment Line, the base runner shall be declared "SAFE".

Once the base runner crosses the Commitment Line, the base runner may not return to third base and must proceed directly to Home Plate. If the base runner begins to return to third base, the base runner shall be declared "OUT." Whether the base runner crossed the Commitment Line or not will be in the sole judgement of the Umpire. The Commitment Line may be measured and marked in foul territory before the game and must not interfere with fielding and running. If not marked before the game, the umpire shall rule during the play where the Commitment Line exists.

VII. APPEALS AND PROTESTS

1. Before the next pitch, a team's coach(es) may appeal a rules interpretation made by the umpire, and the coaches of both teams may confer with the umpire. The decision of the umpire shall be final.
2. No judgment call by the umpire can be protested. The umpire's decision is final.
3. In the event of an infraction of the rules that is not addressed herein, a team's coach(es) shall notify the other team's coach(es) and the umpire during the game that the game is being played under protest. As soon as possible after the game, the protesting-team's coach(es) shall notify the Commissioner(s) in writing of the protest with reasonable detail as to facts and circumstances of such protest. Protests shall be decided by the Commissioner(s) after due inquiry and such decision shall be final.

VIII. STANDINGS AND PLAYOFFS

1. League standings will be based on a point system
2. Points accumulated during the regular season divided by regular season games played will be used in determining the final standings and post-season schedule for both games and home fields. For the purpose of this point system and establishing seeding, forfeited games will be considered to have been played.
3. Points will be awarded as follows:
 - a. Win and/or Win by Forfeit = Plus One Point (+1)
 - b. Loss = Zero Points (0)
 - c. Tie = Zero Points (0)
 - d. Forfeit = Minus One Point (-1)
4. Tiebreaker #1: Regular season head-to-head competition. In the event of a two-way tie, if the two-tied teams have played one another once during the regular season, then the team who won during the regular season wins the tiebreaker. In the event of a tie among more than two teams, if all tied-teams have played one another once during the regular season, then if one of the tied-teams has beaten all the others tied-teams during the regular season, that team wins the tiebreaker. Otherwise, if still tied, then;
5. Tiebreaker #2: Regular season least amount of runs scored against per game played (runs assigned for forfeited games will not be considered in this metric, nor will the game be considered to have been played). If still tied, then;
6. Tiebreaker #3: Least regular season run differential (runs assigned for forfeited games will not be considered in this metric, nor will the game be considered to have been played).
7. Tiebreaker #4: Coin toss. The Commissioner will place the name of each team on three separate pieces of paper (6 in total) and place the pieces of paper in a container so the names cannot be seen. The Commissioner will select one piece of paper from the container. The name of the team selected will choose heads or tails in the coin toss. The Commissioner will then conduct a single toss of the coin to determine the winner of this final tiebreaker.
8. There will be separate playoffs and Champions for each of the divisions. The top 4 seeded teams in each division will qualify to participate in the playoffs for their division. The number of teams that are eligible for the playoffs in any given division can be modified by the Commissioner(s) before the conclusion of the regular season.
9. Each team in the playoffs will be seeded as a result of their regular season point performance and that will remain their seed through the playoffs.

10. The playoff format in each will be:
 - a. Round #1 – Semi-final (Higher seeded regular season team will be designated the home team.)
 - i. Game #1: Game #4 Winner vs. Game #1 Winner
 - ii. Game #2: Game #3 Winner vs. Game #2 Winner
 - b. Round #2 – Kiddush Cup Championship (Higher seeded regular season team will be designated the home team.)
 - i. Game #3: Game #5 Winner vs. Game #6 Winner
11. The Kiddush Cup Championship Round (the Finals) shall be played at a neutral site field (not the home field team of either team, unless the field is home to both teams in the final Kiddush Cup Championship games, or unless both teams mutually agree to play at one of the team's home field).
12. The Semifinal games will be played the Sunday immediately following the conclusion of the regular season.
13. The Kiddush Cup Championship game will be scheduled by the participating teams at a mutually agreed upon date and time, but no later than the final week in July, unless both teams petition the Commissioner for an extension.

IX. TEAM MOVEMENT

1. The Commissioners, in their sole judgment, may reorganize the divisions and the teams therein at the conclusion of the post-season, but before the start of the next regular season to maximize the safety of the players and the enjoyment of all teams in the league.
2. The Commissioners reserve the right to suspend or terminate a team's participation in one or more upcoming MSSSL seasons if a team forfeits three or more games in the most recently completed season.

X. CANCELLATION & RESCHEDULING POLICY & PROCEDURES

1. Games can only be cancelled by:
 - a. The home team coach in the event of inclement weather or poor field conditions resulting from inclement weather.
 - b. Any team's coach in the event of circumstances or team emergencies that were unforeseen and unscheduled when the season schedule was distributed, and which affects the team's ability to play that game (e.g., a funeral, a Bar- or Bat-Mitzvah, a wedding, etc., to which many of that team's players will attend).

2. All teams must display best efforts to reschedule cancelled games.
3. When a game is cancelled the following procedures must be followed by the home team coach. If the following procedures are not followed and/or there is no evidence to support that the procedures were followed, and the assigned umpire arrives at the field, then the umpire is due his/her fee, and such fee will be subtracted from the team who is deemed liable for not following proper procedures.
 - a. The MSSL website must be updated immediately upon the determination that the game is cancelled, but not before 12:01 AM Sunday, and not later than 2 hours prior to the start of the scheduled game. The only exception to this notice window for games cancelled due to inclement weather or field conditions due to inclement weather are:
 - i. Upon mutual agreement of the coaches
 - ii. Upon official cancellation of the field by the field owner. A game is not officially canceled until the MSSL website is updated.
 - b. Notify MSSL umpire liaison and coordinators immediately via email (i.e., Andrew Gruskay, Rich Sweeting, Kristen Dukes & Jack Moore; mountain_hiker@verizon.net, rich@sweeting.us, kdukes15@aim.com, jmkbi2407@gmail.com).
 - c. Any contact with MSSL umpire liaison and coordinators MUST contain the GAME ID number found on the schedule.
 - d. If a game has been cancelled, DO NOT post the rescheduled game on the website if you are doing so 7 days or less before the date of the originally scheduled game. Example: If cancelling a game originally scheduled on April 22nd, and it is rescheduled to be played on June 13th, do NOT post the rescheduled game if you are doing so between April 16th and April 22nd. Doing so cause great confusion among the umpires and umpire coordinators. Post the rescheduled game AFTER April 22nd, but before June 7th (7 days prior to the rescheduled game date)
4. Teams that need to cancel or reschedule games for reasons other than inclement weather or poor field conditions resulting from inclement weather, or unforeseen and unscheduled circumstances or team-emergencies, must do so by the Friday preceding the game by 5 PM.
5. A team whose coach cancels a game due to reasons other than those listed in this section (i.e., inclement weather, poor field conditions, official field closure or unforeseen/team emergency circumstances) will be eligible to be considered by the commissioner as a forfeit.
6. In the event of a make-up game, teams must make “best effort” to reschedule the game. Best effort shall consist of, as a minimum, (suggestions):
 - a. Responsive to team and league communications (The Commissioner(s) shall be copied on all email cancellations and attempts to reschedule.)

- b. Show best effort in trying to contact his team to arrange alternative times of games.
 - c. Show best effort in trying to agree to a time and place for rescheduled games.
7. If a team postpones a game (other than for reasons of valid inclement weather or an unforeseen team emergency), and that team has also been responsible for postponing a previous game that has not yet been made-up, then the instance of the previous postponement will be considered a forfeit.
 8. Commissioner(s) reserve the right to penalize teams that are deemed as not showing best effort in rescheduling games by deeming such team to have forfeited the game, or any other penalty deemed appropriate in the sole discretion of the Commissioner(s).
 9. Home teams who do not adhere to game cancellation policies, or in the event of a visiting teams who forfeits the game and does not announce the forfeit to the home team coach between Sunday midnight and three hours prior to start time, to give home team coach sufficient time to cancel the game on the website and notify MSSL umpire liaison and umpire coordinators, shall be responsible for any the umpire fee.

XI. NO UMPIRE

1. In the event that an umpire does not show up to a game as scheduled, the game should still be played. The pitching team will supply a home plate umpire to call balls and strikes as per the standard league rules. All pitching and batting rules stated herein shall apply.
2. The first base coach will be responsible for base running calls at first and second base. The third base coach will be responsible for base running calls at third base and home plate. The coaches should handle any and all disputes.