

Norfolk Softball League - Middle School Division - Playing Rules

We follow Massachusetts USA Softball rules with the following highlights and/or adjustments

COACHING:

All coaches must adhere to the Coaches Code of Conduct. The Norfolk League expects strict adherence to the Code and any violations will be treated very seriously and may include being asked to leave the position.

We are grateful for the many volunteer coaches who help each season. Please be advised that volunteering does not guarantee a position.

PLAYING THE GAME:

MINIMUM NUMBER OF PLAYERS: 8 to start, teams can finish a game with less than 7 players.

LENGTH OF GAME:

- 7 innings or 1:45 time limit (not a "drop dead" time limit)
- Umpire will determine the last inning based on the approaching curfew; last inning is unlimited runs.
- If the away team is batting after 7:45 PM or 1:45 after the start of the game, then that inning will be the last inning and will be allowed to score unlimited runs. Any game that starts later than the original start time will follow the above rule based on the original start time.

RAIN OR DARKNESS: When a game is called due to rain/darkness, the game will count as a completed game if the losing team has completed 4 innings of batting.

- The run ahead rule is 15 runs after 4 innings
- 4 run limit per inning. Any runs scored beyond 4 do not count. Unlimited runs allowed in the 7th inning (or the last inning as declared by the umpire)

PITCHING:

- The mound is 40 feet. However, pitchers may elect to throw from 43'.
- Pitchers must start with both feet on the rubber, and may only step towards Home Plate.
- Modified or Fast Pitch motion is acceptable.
- Pitchers can pitch unlimited innings in a game.
- Any pitcher can return to the game FREE SUBSTITUTION as with field positions.
- If a pitcher hits 3 players in one inning or 5 players during a game, she must be replaced with another pitcher immediately and cannot return to pitch.

BATTING:

- Continuous batting order
- Batting Out of Order: the batter is out, next batter in order is up
- Bunting IS allowed. A foul bunt on the third strike is an out.

- Slap hitting IS allowed.
- Slashing is NOT allowed. (i.e. fake a bunt then pull the bat back and swing at the pitch). A batter who swings is immediately out - no warning
- If a player misses her time at bat because she had to use the restroom, then she is skipped in the order and no out will be recorded. The next batter will bat.

RUNNING:

- Runners may steal any base (USA rules) with no maximum. Runners can take a lead after the ball leaves the pitcher's hand

DROPPED 3RD STRIKE: When 1st base is open or whenever there are 2 outs - the batter may run to first on a dropped third strike. Other runners may advance as well.

- **PINCH RUNNERS:** Pinch runners are encouraged for pitchers and catchers. The last recorded out will be the pinch runner (regardless of the inning). If one pinch runner is already on base, the next previous out becomes the 2nd pinch runner. If a pinch runner is needed in the first at-bat with no outs, the last batter in the batting order runs.
- The runner must SLIDE or AVOID contact with the fielder/catcher. The runner is not automatically out for not sliding. Umpires will use their discretion on runners avoiding contact.

DEFENSIVE POSITIONS: Players can play any position and there are no rules on rotating positions.

- **STOPPING PLAY:** The Defensive Team assumes the responsibility of stopping the runners by getting the ball to a base in front of the lead runner or to the pitcher in the circle (normal softball rules)
- **INFIELD FLY:** The Infield Fly Rule IS in effect.
- **COVERING A BASE:** Players covering a base are not allowed to stand on the base and impede the runner from reaching that base and continuing to the next base. If a player does impede the progress of a runner, the umpire will use their discretion to call obstruction and award a runner an additional base. If there is a play at a base, the player receiving the ball cannot block the base rather must straddle the base allowing the runner to reach the base whether there is a slide or not.
- **OUTFIELDERS** must start on the outfield grass (or 25') prior to each pitch.
- A team may field 10 defensive players (4 outfielders)

PLAYOFFS:

- Playoffs are a single elimination tournament and every team qualifies
- Seeds are determined by the final standings
- Tie-breakers are listed below the standings table
- A coin flip will be the final tie-breaker if needed

- Playoff games will have a time-limit, with the exception of the Semi-Finals and Championship Game (full 7 inning game)
- If a playoff game is called due to rain, the game will count as a completed game if the losing team has completed 4 innings batting.
- If a playoff game is called for darkness, the score will revert back to the last completed inning, UNLESS: If the home team took the lead in the bottom of the inning, they win the game.
- Only the starting pitcher can re-enter once substituted for.
- 9 defensive players per USA rules

SAFETY REGULATIONS:

- All helmets, whether league issued or personal helmets, MUST have cages. Batting helmets are required whenever a player has a bat - even during team practices. Chinstraps are no longer required by USA.
- Any player warming up a pitcher must be wearing a catcher's mask.
- USA/ASA approved bats only. Umpires will check bats prior to the game.
- All players on the batting team must be in the dugout (or bench area) except the batter and the player on deck. Those are the only two players who are allowed to have a bat. On-deck batter must stay behind fence (or similar).
- Coaches must take the responsibility to instruct and control parents/fans of their players.

UMPIRES:

The League uses USA Umpires. The Umpire controls the game. Coaches may not talk to the umpires while a game is in progress except to ask a question about the progress of the game. (i.e. "What is the count?" Or "How many outs are there?"). Please treat them with respect at all times. If you wish to discuss something with the umpire, please do so between innings.