

# SOFTBALL MAJOR LEAGUE RULES



*The GBSA Softball Rules are based on the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) Softball Rules. Events requiring rulings not covered here will revert to the High School rules. Many rules already covered in the High School rulebook are repeated here for convenience.*

## **FIELD DIMENSIONS:**

1. The distance between bases is 60 feet.
2. A double base should be used at first base.
3. The distance from the rear tip of home plate to the front edge of the pitching rubber is 37 feet.
4. A 16-foot circle must be drawn centered around the pitching rubber.
5. The head umpire is responsible for ensuring that these dimensions are accurate before the beginning of a game. Both coaches are permitted (and encouraged) to check these distances prior to the beginning of a game. If necessary, the bases and/or pitching rubber must be adjusted to the proper dimensions before a game begins.

## **REGULATION GAME:**

1. A regulation game is 6 innings.
2. A game called because of rain or curfew is a regulation game if four innings, or 3½ innings with the home team leading, have been played.
3. A regulation game called with a tie score is counted as ½ game won and ½ game lost for each team.

## **GAME TIME LIMIT:**

### Regular Season

1. No new inning may begin more than 1 hour and 45 minutes from the actual start time of the game.
2. The game ends at 2 hours, 15 minutes from the actual start time of the game, and the final score will be that of the last fully completed inning, unless the game ended halfway through the inning because the home team was leading.
3. **A game's start time MUST be noted by the umpire prior to the beginning of a game.** Each team should record the start time in its scorebook.

### Tournament

1. There is no time limit for games in the tournament. All games will go 6 innings.
2. Tournament Run Rule: A game will be ended if a team is leading by more than 10 runs after four innings.

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3. The rule stating a player must play more than one position in the first four innings is waived for the tournament since all 6 innings will be played. A player must play more than one position in the game, and the various outfield positions are not distinguishable from each other for purposes of this rule. (In other words, a player may not play in the outfield the entire game).
4. **NEW/Updated for 2025:** The 4 run/3 out rule applies to the first five innings of all tournament games but is lifted during the final (6th) inning.

## EQUIPMENT:

1. Bats should be marked as softball bats with either a USSSA or ASA official stamp.
2. Steel-spiked shoes are not permitted.
3. 12-inch softballs must be used.
4. For GBSA players, face masks must be on all batters' helmets and protective face masks are required for all fielders.

## PLAYERS and COACHES:

1. Each team consists of at least nine players who are registered to play softball in GBSA, a head coach and no more than two assistant coaches or an adult designated by the head coach. Teams can play ten players with four outfielders if agreed by each head coach at the beginning of the game.
2. A team must field at least 7 players from their team roster ten minutes after the scheduled game start time, or the declared start time by the umpire, or forfeit the game. (A team may play a game with just 7 or 8 players, as long as at least 7 are from its own roster).
3. Players are only eligible for the tournament if they play in  $\frac{2}{3}$  of the team's regular season games. This rule will be waived if the player misses games due to injuries, illness, or vacation.
4. Coaches should instruct their players from the dugout or the coach's box at first or third base. Coaches should not be on the field during the game except in the event of an injury.
5. NON-PLAYERS: Non-players are not permitted on the playing field. Aside from coaches, non-players are not permitted to be in the dugout or on the bench.

## Playing Time:

1. Each player must play four complete innings in the field (per six inning game). No player may sit out more than two innings no matter the length of the game.
2. Players' positions in the field may be switched or substituted at any time.
3. Each player must play more than one position in the field during the first 4 innings of the game, and the various outfield positions are not distinguishable from each other for purposes of this rule. (In other words, a player may not play in the outfield the entire first four innings). "Bench" does not count as a position for purposes of this rule!

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## Substitute Players:

1. If the team is unable to field 9 of their own players, they may use 1 or 2 substitute players to bring their total to 9 players. Subs must come from other teams in GBSA and no more than two subs may be used to fill out a starting line-up.
2. Subs must be grade level or lower than the absent players and must be agreed upon by both head coaches and the league representative prior to the game.
3. Substitutes may play only one inning as an infielder.
4. Substitutes may not pitch or play catcher.
5. Subs bat at the bottom of the order.
6. Players can sub multiple times per team per season.
7. NO SUBS ARE PERMITTED IN TOURNAMENT GAMES
8. Coaches must exchange their team lineups before each game. Coaches must note borrowed players in their lineup.

## BATTING:

1. The batting order for each team includes all players present.
2. Players arriving after the start of the game are placed at the bottom of the order.
3. If a player is injured, they cannot play offense or defense. A player who plays in the field must also bat when it is their turn. A player who plays in the field cannot be skipped in the batting order. If a fielder is skipped in the batting order then it is counted as an out. If a player is injured, and not able to take their turn at bat, they will be replaced, that at-bat, by the last batter that was unsuccessful in reaching 1<sup>st</sup> base.
4. **NEW/Updated for 2025:** A half inning consists of **4 runs or 3 outs**, whichever comes first. A batter does not have the option of coach pitch. A batter must hit, walk or strike out. **[Note: the 8 batter limit from previous seasons has been removed to prevent intentional walks on the 8th batter with first base open to end an inning.]**
5. Bunting is permitted, however, no "slug-bunting" is allowed, e.g., batters are not permitted to "show bunt" and then swing away. Teams should be reminded of this by the umpire before each game. Penalty: batter is called out.
6. Throwing the bat so that it strikes or comes close to striking the catcher or umpire on a batted ball is not allowed. Upon the first offense, an offending player will receive a warning. Upon a second offense after a previous warning in the same game, the player will be called out. This is in the umpire's judgment.
7. A batter is out on a third strike, regardless of whether the third strike pitch is caught by the catcher.
8. A batter must attempt to avoid being hit by a pitch or protect themselves. If they do not attempt to avoid being hit then the ball is dead once it hits the batter, it shall be called a ball or strike depending on if it was in the strike zone when it hit the batter, and the batter is NOT awarded first base. [The intent of this rule is a batter may not willfully take a HBP]
9. A batter must put the ball in play, strike out, advance to first on a walk, or advance to first after being hit by a pitched ball. There is no coach pitch after 2 walks by the pitcher in Major League Girls Softball.

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## FIELDING:

1. There is no infield fly rule.
2. An overthrow in fair territory or within the boundaries of the field entitles the runner to as many bases as the runner can safely make.
3. A ball thrown out of bounds is a dead ball and one base is awarded to each runner.
4. Outfielders must be on the grass at Pierce and McKinley before a pitch is made. Buck Park outfielders may take 5 steps in from the grass.
5. *Obstruction (fielders)*: If a fielder is blocking the base and the ball is not being thrown to the fielder or the fielder is not fielding a batted ball then the umpire may rule obstruction and award the runner a position on the bases based on the umpire's judgment as to the bases that the runner would have safely attained had the obstruction not occurred.
6. Fielders may not stand in the base path without the ball. Penalty is the same as obstruction above. Catchers may not move to block home plate without the ball.
7. All Players must be in fair territory (catcher excluded).

## PITCHING:

1. **NEW/Updated for 2025:** A pitcher may pitch in no more than 2 innings per game (both regular season and playoffs). If a pitcher leaves an inning they cannot re-enter as a pitcher in that same inning. For purposes of this rule only, 1 pitch constitutes pitching in 1 inning.
2. Each team must have a 5<sup>th</sup> grader pitch at least one full inning (as defined by the 4-3 rule) during a regular season game. If a suitable, game ready 5<sup>th</sup> grade pitcher is not available and if agreed by each head coach at the beginning of the game, this rule is waived. This rule does not apply during a tournament game; you may pitch any combination of all 6<sup>th</sup> graders or 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> graders.
3. Coach pitch does not exist in Major league (see batting #4).
4. A new pitcher is limited to 8 warm-up pitches for the first inning pitched and 5 warm-up pitches for subsequent innings pitched.
5. Balks are not permitted, and if the umpire deems that the pitcher is balking intentionally, he or she shall have discretion, after warning, to allow all runners to advance one base.
6. Intentional walks are not permitted.
7. A facemask and helmet must be worn by a player catcher warming-up the pitcher.
8. Pitchers must use fast pitch – underhanded delivery with minimum or no arc.
9. If a pitcher hits **TWO** batters in one inning the pitcher must be removed from that position for the remainder of the inning and may return in a later inning. If the same pitcher hits another batter (**TOTAL OF THREE IN THE GAME**), the pitcher must be removed and may not pitch again in the game. (see batting rule #8)
10. Prior to starting delivery, the pitcher must take a position with the shoulders square to the plate.
11. The push-off foot (same foot as the throwing arm) must be on or partially on top of the pitching rubber and the stride foot (foot opposite the throwing arm) must be in contact with or behind the pitching rubber.
12. A "Crow Hop" is a hop off the pitching rubber by the push-off foot, typically moving it forward a foot or more to replant it and use it for a second push-off point. In other words, a crow hop is the

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replanting of the pivot foot prior to delivery of the pitch. This is an illegal act. Rule: The sole of the pitcher's push-off foot cannot be replanted before the pitch is delivered.

13. "Leaping" is the act of having both feet off the ground at the same time during the windup or delivery of the pitch. Rule: The pivot foot must remain in contact with or push off and drag away from the pitching plate until the stride foot touches the ground. The push-off foot is allowed to leave the ground/pitching rubber after the stride foot has been planted. However, it may not be replanted before the delivery of the pitch (see Crow Hop above).
14. Penalty for Crow Hop and Leaping: A warning will be issued by the umpire. For repeated offenses, especially if the pitcher is gaining an unfair advantage, the umpire may rule an illegal pitch and award balls to the batter.

## **BASE RUNNING:**

1. The base runner cannot leave the base until the pitcher releases the ball.
2. A runner leaving before the pitcher releases the ball will be given a warning if the ball is not hit by the batter. If the ball is hit by the batter a runner leaving early will be called out.
3. If a play is made on a runner attempting a stolen base, the runner is NOT allowed to continue to advance on an overthrow (1 base per steal, this is intended to encourage kids to attempt to make a play).
4. Stealing home is not allowed unless a play is made on another baserunner (for example, when runners are at 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>, the runner at 1<sup>st</sup> attempts to steal second, and the catcher tries to make a play on the runner at 2<sup>nd</sup>, then the runner at 3<sup>rd</sup> is allowed to run home).
5. A runner who is struck by a batted ball while in contact with a base is not out. (Note: This rule is not the case in baseball).
6. A batter-runner who steps back towards home plate before reaching first base to avoid or delay a tag by a fielder is out. The ball is dead and runners must return to the last base legally touched before the ruling.
7. Interference (runner/batter-runners):
  - a. A runner must slide or avoid collision at any base, other than first, when the defensive player has the ball or is in the process of fielding a batted or thrown ball. If, under the above circumstances, the runner causes a collision, the ruling is interference and the runner is out.
  - b. The base path belongs to the runner except when a fielder is in the path attempting to field a batted ball or when a fielder is in the path and in possession of the ball. In this case the runner must avoid the fielder.
  - c. Double first base: when a double first base is used the batter-runner should use the base half that extends into foul territory. If the runner fails to step on the proper base half the umpire will notify the coach and the coach will instruct the player on the proper use of the base.

## **Circle Rule:**

1. When the pitcher and the ball are within the circle (possession of the ball is required):
  - a. If a runner is off base after a pitch or batted ball the runner may stop once, but then must either immediately return to base or attempt to advance to the next base.

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- b. Runners are allowed to advance to the base they are heading to; they may not leave that base when the pitcher is in the circle with the ball. In effect this stops all runners advancing.
2. A batter-runner who overruns 1st base towards right field must return non-stop to first base.
3. Penalty for violation of the circle rule:
  - a. First offense: a warning to the coaches will be issued by the umpire. The umpire may require runner(s) to return to previous base(s).
  - b. For repeated offenses by a team, especially if the runner is obviously baiting the pitcher, the runner will be called out.
4. A batter after a walk or hit by a pitch is entitled to first base only and must remain there unless the pitcher attempts to make a play against another baserunner while in the circle. All other runners may advance beyond their entitled bases at their own risk.

## **PREGAME MEETING:**

1. Coaches and umpires shall meet before the game to review these rules and any ground rules.

## **UMPIRE'S DECISIONS:**

1. Judgment calls by an umpire (such as whether a pitch is a strike or a ball, a hit is fair or foul, or a runner is safe or out) are final.
2. If there is reasonable doubt about a decision being consistent with the rules, the coach may ask that the ruling be reviewed. The umpire making the decision may ask the other umpire, or league commissioner, if present, for more information before making a final decision.
3. A coach in disagreement with the final decision may continue the game under protest, but must notify a GBSA officer in writing, within 24 hours of the protest. After 24 hours all game results are final.
4. If a protest is upheld, the game will be resumed from the point of protest.
5. Once a game has started, the umpire will be responsible for stopping play in the event of curfew, rain, or lightning.
6. If lightning can be seen and heard there will be a 20 minute wait period from the time of the last visible lightning strike. Only the umpire can allow a game to continue after the wait period.
7. If a tornado siren is sounded play will be halted immediately, and all persons must leave the field and seek shelter. Play will not be resumed after a tornado warning.
8. If a coach removes his/her team from the field of play, and no stoppage of play has been called by the umpire, league rep, or commissioner, that team will forfeit the game.

## **TOURNAMENT:**

1. If 2 teams are tied in the standings at the end of the regular season, the following tiebreaking criteria will be used.
  - 1- "Head-to-head". Whichever team has won more games between the 2 teams will advance.
  - 2- "Coin Toss". In the event that the above criteria is even, a coin toss will be the ultimate tie-breaker. The coach with the first initial of their last name that is earliest in the alphabet calls the toss.