

MAJOR LEAGUE SOFTBALL: Local Rules for Fall Ball

(Note: Rules of emphasis & differences from 2018 spring/summer season Major League Local Rules are indicated with blue text)

Fall Ball is WMLL's version of Little League's Training and Development Program and focuses on providing players an opportunity to improve their skills playing a variety of positions. Game scores are the least important part of Fall Ball. Coaches are encouraged to "ratchet it down a notch" to adhere to the purpose of Fall Ball. Coaches not adhering to this philosophy will not be asked back in the future.

All national Little League rules for Minor League softball, as described in the current season rulebook, apply unless specifically changed in these local rules or by past WMLL custom. The WMLL Safety Plan contains further regulations which will be enforced as local rules.

BASICS

- **Ball:** A 12-inch hard softball will be used.
- **Pitching & Base Distances:** Pitching will be from 40 feet with the bases 60 feet apart.

TEAM RESPONSIBILITIES & PREGAME ACTIVITIES

- **Home Team Responsibilities:** The home team must (1) provide two new regulation balls, (2) arrange for a volunteer to help in the concession stand, (3) make sure that the field is ready for play – electrical power is on, tarps are removed, bases & pitching machine are in place & ready, & the field is safe & hazard-free. If playing in the last game of the day, the home team must also replace both tarps (placing all the black weights around the home plate tarp), remove the bases & store them in the dugouts, & insert the "base plugs".
- **Visiting Team Responsibilities:** The visiting team provide a volunteer to operate the scoreboard. If playing in the first game of the day, the visiting team must get the scoreboard controller from the concession stand & turn on the scoreboard. If playing in the last game of the day, they must return the scoreboard controller to the concession stand & turn off the scoreboard. The visiting team is encouraged to assist the home team with field prep / closing tasks.
- **Responsibilities Shared by Both Teams:**
 - **Volunteer Umpire:** WMLL will provide the home plate umpire. Between the two teams a minimum of one volunteer base umpire is needed (two is preferred).
 - **Dugout Entry & Nut Ban:** Only uniformed players, the manager, two coaches and one scorekeeper (maximum of four adults) are permitted on the bench. The manager should require all others to leave the dugout. For the safety of individuals with peanut allergies, peanuts are not allowed in the dugout or anywhere at the ballpark.
 - **Player Movement:** Players must stay in the playing area or on the bench during the game unless the manager permits them to leave.
 - **Post Game Cleanup:** After every game, both teams must clean up their respective dugout areas & if a shared equipment bag was used, return it to designated spot in the mailroom.
- **Pre-Game Warmups & Batting Practice:** Teams may warm-up prior to games in appropriately designated areas. Pregame batting practice can take place only in a batting cage or soft toss station. Players should be careful when warming-up so other individuals are not injured. Players are not permitted to enter Ch 15 property for any reason at any time. Coaches & other adults are allowed on Ch 15 property only to retrieve balls.
 - **Batting Cages:** Major, Junior & Senior League teams have priority in the cages. If a batting cage is occupied by a Rookie or Minor League team, you may politely ask them to vacate. The home team can use a batting cage for thirty minutes beginning seventy minutes prior to the game and the visiting team can use a batting cage for thirty minutes beginning forty minutes prior to the game.
 - **Soft Toss Stations:** Rookie & Minor League teams have priority in the soft toss stations. Major, Junior & Senior League teams may use a soft toss station if it is unoccupied. If a Rookie or Minor League team arrives,

please cooperate & quickly exit the station. Only whiffle balls, tennis balls, or other soft surface balls are permitted for soft toss.

- **Infield Practice:** Time permitting, the home team may conduct infield practice for six minutes or the time available until the official start time, whichever is less. Time permitting means that the infield practice cannot interfere with the game's official start time. All players present (not just the starting infielders) should participate in the infield practice.
- **Line up Cards.** Line up cards are to be exchanged between the managers at the beginning of the game to indicate the starting players, all eligible substitutes, absent and injured players and players who are being disciplined by not participating.

FORFEITS, GAME LIMITS & PACING

- **Forfeits:** Teams forfeit the game if they have fewer than seven players to start. A team has fifteen minutes from the schedule starting time to obtain seven players before a forfeit is declared. When both teams have less than seven players, a double forfeit occurs. Teams that start the game with seven players but lose one or more players during the game may continue. If the number of players drops below seven, an out is recorded each time a missing player's turn to bat occurs.
- **Replacement players:** Teams that expect to have fewer than ten players available for a regular-season game may use replacement player(s) from other WMLL Major or Minor League teams. Replacement player(s) may not pitch and must bat at the end of the order. If unanticipated roster players show up bringing the total of regular roster players to 10 or more, the replacement player(s) may still play, but may play defensively a maximum of 3 innings.
- **Attire.** Players must be in uniform to be eligible to play in a game. Except for medical identification purposes, players may not wear jewelry regardless of the composition of that jewelry.
- **On-Field Coaches:** The offensive team may have adults as base coaches. A coach from the offensive team may also be on the field for "spot relief" pitching as needed when their own team is batting. All other coaches must stay within three feet of the dugout entrance.
- **Inning & Time Limits:** All Fall Ball games are limited to 6-innings with two types of time limits. There also is a 9 PM curfew Sunday thru Thursday that supersedes both time limits. Time-limited games can end in a tie & will be considered a complete game regardless of the number of innings played. The umpires will enforce the scheduled starting time and the time limits for each league.
 - No new inning may begin after the "**no new inning" time limit** of 1 hour, 40 minutes is reached. An inning starts when the last out of the prior inning is made. If an inning starts prior to the "no new inning" time limit expiring, that inning may be completed unless the game ends because the home team takes the lead or the "hard" time limit is reached.
 - When the "**hard" time limit** is reached (10 minutes after the "No New Inning" Time Limit), the game ends immediately after the current batter finishes their at bat. When this occurs, the outcome is determined by the score at the end of the last complete inning, unless the home team is at bat & has tied the game during their at-bat (after being behind at the end of the last complete inning). In this case the game ends in a tie.
 - During weeks 1-3, the **first weekday game on the Minor Field** must end by 5:50 PM.
- **Game Start & Ending Times:** For the purposes of the "no new inning" time limit, the official start time of the initial game of the day will be the scheduled start time regardless of the time of the first pitch (unless the delay is weather-related). Games after the initial game of the day must start ten minutes after the final out of the previous game or the scheduled start time, whichever is later. The official game starting time and ending time (when the last out in the last inning is made) should be recorded on the scorecard.
- **Run Limit:** A maximum of five runs can be scored per half inning.
- **Inning Switch:** Players must hustle on and off the field between offense and defense so that the game proceeds quickly.
- **Warm-Up Pitches:** Pitchers are limited to a maximum of four warm-up pitches prior to each half inning.

- **Courtesy Runner for Catcher:** To allow the catcher to be in gear and ready to play without delay, a courtesy runner may be used for the catcher at any time, but is mandatory when there are two outs. This runner will be the individual who made the last out in the inning.
- **Delay of Game Penalty:** The first pitch of a half inning must be delivered not longer than 90 seconds after the third out of the previous half inning. The umpire may call a strike on the batter if the violation is by the offensive team, or a ball on the batter if the violation is by the defensive team. The umpire may continue to call strikes or balls each 20 seconds until the first pitch is delivered.

DEFENSE

- **Defensive Players:** Teams can play with up to ten players on defense of which a maximum of six can play in the infield (including the pitcher and catcher). All outfield players must position themselves on the outfield grass. Free defensive substitution of all players is allowed. *As Fall Ball's focus is developmental in nature, players should be given the opportunity to improve their skills playing a variety of infield & outfield positions.*
- **Defensive Playing Time.** In Fall Ball, each player on a team with 12 or fewer active players must be scheduled to play at least four full defensive half innings within the first five innings of the game (or the first six innings of the game for teams with more than 12 active players). During that time no player may be kept off the field defensively for two innings, before all players have been kept off for at least one inning.
- **Infield Playing Time:** Each player must be scheduled to play at least two defensive half innings at an infield (including the pitcher and catcher) position within the first five innings of the game.
- **Outfield Playing Time:** Each player on a team with eight or more active players must be scheduled to play at least one defensive half inning in the outfield within the first five innings of the game.

Playing Time Rule Exceptions. *The only exceptions to the playing time rule will be:*

- *If a player misses practices and/or games without a valid reason, the coach may decide to reduce the number of innings played in the field for the next game by a maximum of one inning. Absences due to family vacations should not affect playing time.*
 - *If a player arrives late for a game, the manager can decide to reduce the number of innings at his/her discretion.*
 - *If a player is being disciplined, a manager must inform the opposing manager prior to the game or immediately after an incident which requires removal, for the participation rule to be satisfied. The player who is being disciplined should be advised of why he/she is not participating. If the discipline results in the player being "docked" more than one inning below the league minimum, the coach must inform the League Coordinator in writing of the discipline and the cause. This method of disciplining should be used with reasonable discretion.*
 - *If a game is shortened because of the time limit, inclement weather or run limit, all players will not be required to satisfy the playing rule.*
 - *If an eligible player does not fulfill the participation rule, that player must be a starter in the team's next game and play the whole game. Any manager who violates this rule will be subject to dismissal by the league's Softball Operation Committee.*
- **Infield Fly Rule:** There is no infield fly rule.
 - **Defensive Obstruction:** When a defensive player without the ball and not in the act of fielding a batted ball, impedes the progress of a runner or fakes a tag, all runners will be awarded the bases that the umpire judges they would have reached had there been no obstruction. This includes a defensive player who blocks off a base, base line or home plate from a runner while not in possession of the ball.
 - *Additional Guidance: When a defensive player is waiting for the ball, they must give the base runner a straight path to the base or home plate. The defensive player may not block any portion of the base or home plate unless they are holding the ball. If the defensive player blocks the base without the ball, it is defensive obstruction & the runner will be declared safe.*

PITCHING

- **Walks:** There are a maximum of two walks per inning. To create more opportunities for hitting & fielding, coach pitch is used anytime a player pitcher throws four balls to a batter in an inning in which there have already been two walks / hit by pitches (with any strikes carrying over from the original count.)

- **Intentional Walks:** No intentional walks are allowed in this league. A coach, who directs his pitcher to deliberately walk any batter, will be subject to disciplinary action by the Softball Operations Committee.
 - **Hit Batters:** During player pitch, a batter will be awarded first base when hit by a pitch unless the ball is called a strike or the umpire decides that the batter should have been able to avoid being hit. Hit batters are not awarded first base during coach pitch. In either case, the ball is dead immediately on hitting the batter.
 - **Dropped Third Strike:** Batters are out after being thrown three strikes & may not attempt to advance to first base on a dropped third strike (both during player & coach pitch).
 - **Player Pitch:** All pitching will be done by a player-pitcher using any underhand style pitching motion until that pitcher has walked / hit two batters in any one inning. After two walks / hit by pitches in an inning, a player pitcher will continue to pitch until she has thrown [four](#) balls to any batter. If this happens, a coach from the batting team will take over pitching to that batter with any strikes carrying over from the original count.
 - **Player Pitch Limits:** A player-pitcher may pitch a maximum of three innings in a game. One pitch in an inning will count as a full inning pitched. Pitchers' innings need not be consecutive. Should a pitcher be removed from pitching, she may return as a pitcher in that game one time, but a pitcher cannot be removed and then re-entered as a pitcher in the same inning or removed and re-entered twice in the same game.
 - *To protect both pitcher & hitter confidence, it is recommended that a coach remove a player-pitcher from the game if that pitcher has hit two consecutive or three total batters.*
 - **Coach Pitch:** After there have been two walks or hit by pitches in an inning, a coach from the batting team should be ready to take the mound as soon as a player pitcher throws a fourth ball to a batter. The coach pitcher will take over pitching for the remainder of that batter's at-bat with any strikes carrying over from the original count. When pitching, coaches may use any underhand style pitching motion & must wear a mitt for safety reasons. A ball that hits the coach inadvertently remains in play. If a coach intentionally touches a ball in play, the batter is out and runners are returned to their bases.
 - *For consistency, it is recommended that coaches pitch from 35' just like player pitchers (moving in a step or two is permissible, but not encouraged) with a velocity & trajectory similar to that of a good player pitcher. Lobbing the ball in a soft toss fashion is NOT beneficial for hitter development & is strongly discouraged.*
 - **Rule Modifications During Coach "Spot Relief" Pitching:** During coach pitch, there are no walks, bunting or stealing and first base is not awarded if the batter is hit by a pitch.
 - **Player Pitcher Positioning During Coach Pitch:** The defensive player fielding the pitching position must have at least one foot on the artificial turf area around the pitcher's mound & must position themselves even with the pitching rubber.
- Coaches Visits to Pitchers:** A coach is permitted two visits per pitcher during a game with any defense timeout being considered as a visit. On the third visit to a pitcher, the pitcher must be removed from the mound.

BATTING

- **Batting Order:** Every player in attendance must be in the batting order. If a player is unable to continue play, there will be no penalty to the offensive team when that individual is scheduled to bat. If able, the player can reenter the batting order without penalty. Players not present for the game's first pitch, even if their arrival is anticipated, must be listed at the bottom of the batting order. If an absent player's batting order spot is reached before they arrive, there is no penalty and they remain in the same position in the batting order.
- **Helmets:** For league games, helmets with face masks will be used by batters and runners.
- **On Deck Warmups:** For safety reasons, on deck warmup swings are prohibited.
- **Strike Zone:** To encourage more aggressive hitting and speed the game along, the strike zone used is larger than the standard. The width shall be 23 inches (the width of the plate plus 3-inches on both the inside and outside corners) and the height shall be from the armpits to the bottom of the batter's knees.
- **Bunting:** Bunting is allowed except during coach pitching. WMLL believes the act of squaring to draw infielders in and then swinging away is dangerous to charging infielders. Coaches should not permit their batters to engage in this action.

- **Bat Throwing:** A player will receive one warning each game for inappropriately throwing the bat. For any subsequent instance of throwing the bat in that same game the player will be called out. The warning and out can be on the same at bat. If a hitter is called out for throwing the bat the ball will be dead and any runners must return the base, which he/she occupied prior to the pitch. *Note: this rule applies to accidental bat throwing, not to bat throwing in anger or protest.*

BASERUNNING

- **Double First Base:** A double first base is used. The runner must touch the orange portion of the base while the fielder must touch the white portion on the initial play at first base. If there is no play the runner may touch the white base.
- **Leaving Base:** Runners may leave the base when the ball crosses the plate. Players detected leaving early will be called out.
- **Sliding:** Players should be taught to slide properly & encouraged to slide on ANY close play (even if the defensive player is not yet in possession of the ball). Headfirst sliding when advancing is prohibited with the penalty of the offender being called out.
- **Stealing:** Stealing of all bases is allowed except during coach pitch.
- **Offensive Interference by Runner:** When a runner interferes with a defensive player in the act of fielding a batted ball or is hit by a fair ball in fair territory, the runner will be called out & the ball dead. If a runner initiates malicious contact with any fielder, with or without the ball, in or out of the baseline, the umpire will eject the runner for the game.
- **Collision Avoidance Rule:** On a close play at second base, third base or home plate, the runner is required to either slide or avoid contact with a defensive player in possession of the ball waiting to make a tag. If contact is made in this situation & the runner did not slide, the runner will be called out & the ball dead.

Additional guidance:

- *If a defensive player is blocking the base/plate without the ball, it is defensive obstruction (regardless if contact was made or not) & the runner is safe.*
- *If a defensive player is blocking the base/plate with the ball and the runner either slides or doesn't slide but avoids contact with the defensive player, it is neither defensive obstruction nor an automatic out & the umpire must decide if the runner was safe or out.*
- *For a runner to be called out due to the collision avoidance rule, all three of the following must be true:*
 - 1) *There was contact between the non-sliding runner and the defensive player.*
 - 2) *At the time of contact the defensive player had possession of the ball.*
 - 3) *At the time of contact the defensive player was within the vicinity of a base or home plate.*
 - 4) *the defensive player was within the batter's box area or within the vicinity of another base.*
- *Coaches are encouraged to teach their players to slide on ANY close play (even if the defensive player is not yet in possession of the ball).*

Play Stoppage: Once the pitcher has the ball within the pitching circle, runners must immediately return to the last base touched or break to the next base. Failure of a runner to immediately return to the base or break to the next base will result in the umpire calling the runner out.

BEHAVIOR

- **Sportsmanship:** Coaches, parents, players, and all spectators should adhere to a high level of sportsmanship. The league will not tolerate harassment of umpires; verbal or physical altercations involving coaches, players, or spectators; hazing; or negative interactions between or among coaches, spectators, and players, including organized chanting or "cheering" directed at opposing teams or players. Instances of unsportsmanlike behavior reported to the Board of Directors will be investigated by the President and may result in discipline, including suspensions.

- **Treatment of Umpires:** Coaches, players, and spectators must accept and respect umpire decisions. They should refrain from questioning judgment calls and must avoid actions which tend to undermine umpire authority.
- **Coach Interactions with Umpires:** The coach should provide the players and fans with an exemplary model of sportsmanship.
 - To question an umpire's ruling, a coach may not run out of the dugout or yell objections. One coach from the team must request a time out and then meet with the umpire who made the call & one coach from the opposing team in foul territory to calmly discuss the matter.
 - To check on an injured player's status, the coach may be on the playing field after an umpire requests their assistance.
 - Coaches who feel an individual umpire is lacking in skills or knowledge should not offer instruction or advice, but should report their concern to the League Coordinator or Umpire Coordinator.
- **Warnings & Ejections by Umpires:** Umpires will not tolerate any abusive language, equipment throwing or other violent or unsportsmanlike behavior by coaches, players or fans. Any person guilty of participating in these actions will be warned once by the umpires. A second violation will result in ejection from the game and removal from the WMLL field areas. In severe instances the offending party will be immediately ejected. Unsportsmanlike behavior which results in a game ejection carries with it another one game suspension.
 - The umpire will report such ejections to the umpire coordinator who will notify the Softball Operations Committee Chairperson.
 - For a second game ejection, there will be an automatic three game suspension. For a third game ejection, the individual will receive a season ending suspension.

WEATHER (& LIGHTING FAILURE)

- **Lightning:** When lightning is visible, the game will be suspended for thirty minutes and all coaches, players, spectators and umpires must take immediate shelter in the dugouts, near the concession stand or in private vehicles to ensure their safety.
- **Delaying Games due to Rain, Lightning or Lighting Failure:** If a field is not playable at game time, but might be playable in a short period of time, the game will be delayed no more than fifteen minutes. The conditions will be checked after fifteen minutes and, if the field is still unplayable, the game will be canceled and rescheduled by the coordinator. If a delay occurs after a game has begun, the first fifteen minutes of the total delay time do not count as part of the game time limit.
- **Calling Games due to Rain, Lightning or Lighting Failure:** When a game has been delayed for forty-five minutes, the game will be called. Prior to leaving the field of play, the coaches will verify the line ups, score and exact point at which play has been stopped (i.e. outs, balls and strikes batter, runners score, etc.) Any dispute should be referred to the league coordinator and/or Softball Operations Committee for resolution.
 - A game called before the completion of one inning will be rescheduled as a new game.
 - A game called after the completion of one inning and before it is an official completed contest will be considered a suspended game. A suspended game shall be resumed at the exact point of suspension.

Resuming a Suspended Game:

- *The league coordinator shall attempt to reschedule the suspended game at the time when the two teams will be playing each other again. The suspended game will be played prior to the regulation game or another suspended game.*
- *The line ups and batting order of the teams shall be the same as the moment of suspension. If player(s) present originally are absent when the suspended game is resumed their spots in the batting order will be skipped over with no penalty. Players absent originally, but present when the game is resumed will be added to the end of the batting order.*
- *All pitching regulations will be determined by the week during which the suspended game is being resumed.*
- **Immediate Cancellations:** These rules will not restrict the Board of Director(s) present at the field from immediately canceling play in order to ensure the safety of coaches, players, spectators, umpires and concession workers.