

West Madison Little League – Fall 2021

MAJOR LEAGUE SOFTBALL LOCAL RULES

Fall Ball is WMLL's version of Little League's Training & Development Program & focuses on the development of players (over competition). Coaches are encouraged to embrace this focus on player development & provide players with opportunities to improve their skills playing a variety of positions, including those of interest to the player.

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. *Note: Rules that differ from 2021 spring/summer rules are highlighted in red text & rules of emphasis in blue text.*

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

HOME TEAM RESPONSIBILITIES: The home team occupies the first base dugout & must:

- Provide two new regulation 12-inch (hard) softballs
- Arrange for a volunteer to help in the concession stand.
- Make sure that the field is safe, hazard-free & ready for play – tarps are removed, bases are in place & ready, the electrical power is on (if needed), & the field is.
- 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 occupies the third base dugout & must:

- 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:

- **Equipment Bag:** Coaches must retrieve the shared equipment bag designated for their league & home/away status from the equipment/mail room prior to the game (unless the bag is already in use at the field) & must return the shared equipment bag to the equipment/mail room after their game (unless the bag will be used by the next team & that team's coach is already at the field). Coaches must disinfect all shared catcher's masks used during the game (per instructions) prior to putting the mask in the equipment bag.
- **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).
- **Player Shortages/Replacement Players:** If a team expects to be short of players for a game, the head coach should obtain replacement players to add to the roster for that game, unless the team is short on players due to a scheduled school event. If this occurs, the head coach should contact the league coordinator so that the game can be rescheduled.
 - Replacement players should be players from WMLL MINOR LEAGUE teams whenever possible – otherwise WMLL Major Leagues players may be used (this is not preferred!). Coaches may contact potential replacement players directly or via the player's coach.
 - Replacement player(s) may not pitch and must bat last in the batting order, but otherwise must be treated the same as other players on the team (including playing time, positions, etc.) If a team is in dire need of pitching, a replacement player may pitch with the approval of the league coordinator or VP-softball.
 - If unanticipated roster player(s) show up bringing the total of regular roster players to ten or more, the replacement player(s) should still play, but may play defensively the league minimum number of innings.
 - A team using a replacement player must notify the opposing team coach and the League Coordinator of his/her use.
- **Attire:** Players must be in full 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. Umpires will be instructed to strictly enforce this rule.

- **Cleats:** It is recommended that players wear cleats. All cleats used must be plastic (steal cleats are only allowed in the Junior & Senior Leagues).
- **Dugout Management:** Only uniformed players, coaches, and a scorekeeper are permitted on the bench. Siblings, parents, friends, etc. are not permitted. The head coach must require all others to leave the dugout. Teams that do not adhere to this rule will receive one warning; subsequent violations will result in the team forfeiting the game. During a game, the only players allowed outside of the dugout are the defense team, the batter & base runners. Players must stay in the playing area or on the bench during the game unless the head coach permits them to leave.
- **Post-Game Cleanup:** After every game, both teams must clean up their respective dugout areas.

PREGAME WARMUPS

OFF-FIELD WARMUPS: Teams may warmup on the north side of the cages and in the grass area near the Major Field, but NOT in the grass area between the batting cages and the parking lot. 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 PRACTICE: Pregame batting practice and bat swinging can take place only in a batting cage or soft toss station as follows:

- **Batting Cages:** Teams can use a batting cage beginning thirty minutes prior to the game for twenty minutes (& must depart for the field 10 minutes before the scheduled start time). Each team can use only one of the cage lanes.
- **Soft Toss Stations:** Teams may use a soft toss station for pregame batting practice during the allotted Batting Cage time. Only whiffle balls, tennis balls, or other soft surface balls are permitted for soft toss.

ON-FIELD WARMUPS:

- **Infield practice:** Time permitting, the home team may conduct infield practice for eight 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.
- **Pitcher Warm-Up:** Pitchers warming up prior to or during the game must do so in each field's designated area. Pitchers must throw from the area closest to the dugout with catchers located farthest away from the dugout.

FORFEITS, GAME LIMITS & PACING

FORFEITS: Teams forfeit if they have fewer than seven players to participate in a game. 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. If a team forfeits a game, the game will not be replayed. Teams that start the game with seven players but lose one or more players during the game may continue.

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.

- 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 stop" 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.
- During weeks 1-3, the first weekday game on the Minor Field must end by 5:50 PM.

GAME START & END TIMES: 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, or the umpires are not present). 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 umpires will enforce the scheduled starting time and the time limits for each league.
- The umpires must record the official game start time & end time (when the last out in the last inning is made) on the umpire card.

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 and eight pitches when entering a game.

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. When delays occur, 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.

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 previous out in the inning. If the previous out was made by the scheduled pitcher the courtesy runner may be the out prior to that.

COACHING

LINE UP CARDS. Line up cards are to be exchanged between the head coaches 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.

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 during play.

COACH-PITCHER CONFERENCES/DEFENSIVE TIME OUTS: A coach is permitted two visits per pitcher during a game, and only one visit per inning prior to having to replace the pitcher. Any defense timeout is considered as a visit. During a visit with the pitcher, coaches may confer with any player(s), including the catcher. On the third visit to a pitcher in a game or the second visit in an inning, the pitcher must be removed from the mound.

OFFENSIVE TIME OUTS: Each team is limited to one offensive time out per inning, which includes a base coach coming down the line to have a conference with a batter.

COACH BEHAVIOR: See below for important rules related to INTERACTIONS WITH UMPIRES & MISCONDUCT.

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. Each player must play at least four innings defensively. The minimum defensive innings in this rule must be full half innings. 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 five innings of the game.

OUTFIELD PLAYING TIME: No player should play more than two innings in the outfield until all players have played at least one inning in the outfield.

Playing Time Rule Exceptions. The only exceptions to playing time rules are for players that get injured during the course of the game, players who arrive to a game late or depart early, & games shortened because of a time limit or inclement weather

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

PLAYER PITCH: All pitching will be done by a player-pitcher using an appropriate 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.*

WALKS & INTENTIONAL WALKS: There are a maximum of two walks per inning. 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 (even after there have been two walks / hit by pitches in an inning), 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).

COACH "SPOT RELIEF" PITCHING: 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 40' 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.

BATTING

GAME DAY BATTING ORDER: Every player in attendance must be in the batting order.

- **Late Arrivals:** 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.
- **Changes in Player Availability:** 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.

BATS: Any bat designated as a softball bat may be used.

HELMETS: All offensive players outside the dugout must wear batting helmets with face mask.

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 the width of the plate plus the width of a baseball on both the inside and outside corners (for a total width of 23-inches) and the height shall be from the batter's armpits to the bottom of their 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 inadvertently throwing the bat. For any subsequent instance of throwing the bat in that same game, a player that has been warned 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 during player pitch, but not during coach pitch. Stealing during player pitch includes the fourth ball thrown to a batter after there have been two walks in an inning.

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 artificial turf / mound area, 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.

WEATHER, LIGHT & OTHER SAFETY CONDITIONS

All determinations of field, light, weather & other conditions that could affect player, spectator, umpire, coach or concession worker safety should be made together by the head coaches & umpires at each playing field unless a Board member is present and has instructed the head coaches & umpires otherwise. These determinations should always be made erring on the side of safety.

DELAYING GAMES DUE TO RAIN, LIGHTNING OR DARKNESS/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.

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.

CALLING GAMES DUE TO RAIN, LIGHTNING OR DARKNESS/LIGHTING FAILURE: When a game has been delayed for forty-five minutes, the game will be called.

- A game called before the completion of one inning will be rescheduled as a new game.
- A game called after 4 innings have been completed (3 ½ innings if home team is leading) is an official completed contest.
- 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.
 - o 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.

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 head coaches, umpires, and/or any Board member present at the field from immediately canceling play in order to ensure the safety of players, spectators, umpires, coaches and concession workers.

BEHAVIOR

SPORTSMANSHIP: Coaches, players, parents and spectators should adhere to a high level of sportsmanship. The league will not tolerate negative interactions between or among coaches, spectators & players; harassment of umpires; verbal or physical altercations involving coaches, players, or spectators; hazing or 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, parents and spectators must accept and respect umpire decisions. They should refrain from questioning “judgment” calls and must parents avoid actions which tend to undermine umpire authority. Umpires will not tolerate any abusive language, equipment throwing or other violent or unsportsmanlike behavior by coaches, players or fans.

- **Warning:** Any person guilty of participating in these actions will be warned once by the umpires.
- **Ejection:** 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. *Note: The umpire will report such ejections to the Umpire Coordinator who will notify the VP-Baseball / Softball.*
- **Suspension:** Unsportsmanlike behavior which results in a game ejection carries with it another one game suspension. For a second game ejection there will be at a minimum an automatic three game suspension and for a third game suspension, the individual will receive a season ending suspension.

COACH BEHAVIOR: Coaches and coaching staff should provide the players and fans with an exemplary model of sportsmanship & are expected to conduct themselves in an appropriate manner at all times. Coaches are to follow all WMLL rules – in general & specific to their individual league.

Interactions with Umpires:

- **To question an umpire’s ruling,** coaches may not run out of the dugout or yell objections. Instead, 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. The second umpire is encouraged to join in discussions as needed.
 - o *If the umpires ruling was a judgment call based on the correct understanding & application of the rules, the coach may request an appeal. In any case, the umpire’s final call must be respected & the coach should not argue or complain to the umpire or publicly.*
 - o *If the umpires ruling was based on an incorrect understanding or application of the rules, the umpire(s) & coaches should work together to determine the correct response. If a ruling change is in order, the change must be announced by the umpire that made the original call.*
- **To check on an injured player,** a coach may move onto the playing field after requesting a time out from the umpire to assist the injured player.
- **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.

Misconduct: Any coach that is reported to the League for issues of misconduct may be investigated by the Board and may result in discipline, including being suspended from games, practices, and other volunteer positions. *Examples of misconduct are as follows, but not limited to openly disputing or arguing any decision by an umpire; using obscene or vulgar language; visually displaying any sign of dissatisfaction with an umpire’s decision including staying on the field or standing in the dugout with the intent of inciting the officials, players or spectators; & berating players, umpires, coaches, families, and/or spectators in a manner unbecoming WMLL.*

- **Warning:** First warning may be a discussion between the coach(es) and the League Coordinator and/or Board President. In severe instances, the offending party may be immediately suspended. *A written summary of the discussion will be provided*

to all parties and kept on file.

- **Suspension:** A second infraction that occurs in the current year may be an automatic suspension from coaching. The period of suspension will be no less than two (2) weeks and may be up to the remaining season based on the severity. *A written summary of the discussion will be provided to all parties and kept on file.*

ADDITIONAL CONSEQUENCES: Any member of the WMLL Organization or Community is subject to further consequence should they be found to flagrantly disregard the Organization's rules and expectations. Examples of possible consequences are as follows, but not limited to inability to serve as a WMLL volunteer and/or inability to participate on WMLL committees.