

2024

MIDDLESEX 70+ SOFTBALL LEAGUE ARTICLE V (RULES OF PLAY)

The League shall adhere to the current *SSUSA rules* and regulations for all playing matters, except as provided in the League rules of play. League rules take precedence over all other rules.

Before the start of each softball season, the League Board will review and decide on playing rules that shall be in the best interest of the League. The Board shall also adopt a schedule for the regular season. Subsequent suggested revisions to individual regular season game dates, times, and fields may be made with the approval of the Executive Board.

The Executive Board shall consist of the President, and the manager of each team.

Each member will have one vote. In the case of an individual serving in two capacities, they will only have one vote.

Majority rules with ties broken by the President.

The Executive Board will authorize any rule changes and any roster additions during the season.

The current League rules of play are as follows:

1. Rosters and Team Field Strength:

A. Team Rosters shall be a **minimum of 16 and a maximum of 18 eligible** players. Players must be at least age 69 by the end of the current calendar year to be eligible to play during the season.

B. Players may be replaced on a team's roster during the season only in the event that the absence is due to injury, illness, extenuating circumstances, family emergency, and if the competitive strength of the team is severely compromised and the absence is expected to exceed at least 2 weeks of scheduled games (i.e., more than 4 games), excluding rainouts.

- 1) If a replacement is temporary, i.e., not for the entire season, when the replaced player returns, his replacement is no longer eligible to play.
- 2) Replacements must meet the same age requirements as prescribed by the League.
- 3) A majority vote of the Board on all requests to replace players during the season is required for a replacement player to be approved.
- 4) Requests to replace a player should provide the following information:
 - a) reason why a replacement is needed
 - b) the length of time needed
 - c) whether it's permanent or temporary
 - d) names of both the replacement and the player being replaced and their skill level (A, B, C etc.)

C. Team Field strength will be a **maximum of eleven (11) players and a minimum of nine (9)**. If during the game a player is injured the team may continue with less than 9 players. A team may use 11 defensive players even if the opposing team has less than 11 players. With only 10 players, one (1) player *must* be "borrowed" from the opposing team for defensive purposes only without a forfeit called. A maximum of one (1) player may be borrowed and this borrowed player must be placed in and execute the catching position only.

2. Before the start of or during a game, an opposing manager may require a player to provide proper identification to confirm his roster eligibility. If a manager has reason to believe that an opponent's team includes (an) ineligible player(s), he may play the game under protest, with a subsequent investigation and ruling to be made by the League Executive Board.
3. A game will be **forfeited if a team cannot field a minimum of nine (9) players, fifteen (15) minutes** after the scheduled starting time or during play. If both teams cannot field nine men, then both teams forfeit the game.
4. **There will be round robin batting** (i.e., everyone bats, whether or not playing in the field). There is no penalty if an injured player is unable to bat. All runners must run to 1st base before using a pinch runner.
5. **There shall be no designated runner from home plate. A player may not be thrown out at first base from the outfield on a clean hit UNLESS the player (now a runner) makes a turn towards second base.**
 - A. **If a ball is hit cleanly through or over the infield UNTOUCHED and is not caught in the air, the batter is awarded first base. If there are runners on base, they may be forced out at any other base or home plate. However the original batter cannot be put out at first base. (This rule is designed to let slower runners reach base on a clean hit and eliminated the designated runner (the rabbit) from home plate. Runners on base but not forced, may advance at their own risk.**
 - B. **If an infielder touches a batted ball in fair territory, that infielder or any other defensive player may complete the defensive play including throwing the batter out at first base.**
 - C. **The mid-fielder or rover can play as an infielder or outfielder as long as the 4 other infielders are on the dirt of the infield and the 4 outfielders are on the outfield grass. The mid-fielder is subject to the rules stated above.**
6. There are no rules governing individual playing time in the field; however, team Managers should make every effort to give sufficient playing time to all players who desire it. Player complaints about inadequate playing time in the field will be addressed to and ruled on by the League Board.
7. There is **free substitution in the field:** i.e. a player may be removed from the field of play and reinstated at any time thereafter without liability, including pitchers.
8. **Base runners may not leave a base until the pitched ball crosses home plate.**
9. There is **no limit on pinch runners** except that the **same pinch runner may run only once during the same inning.** A pinch runner must be inserted immediately when the batter reaches his base. **A pinch runner (PR) can't be replaced on the base paths. If PR is, that PR must be removed for the remainder of the game (i.e., as an injury). A PR whose turn at bat occurs, shall be called out and not replaced. He/she will then take the proper turn at bat.**
10. If a player is removed from the game, an automatic out will be recorded (only) for the removed player's next scheduled turn at bat. (No additional outs will be recorded for subsequent scheduled turns at bat).
11. Before the start of the game, players planning to leave a game before its conclusion must inform the umpire and opposing manager of their intended departure time; no penalty will then be imposed. Note that the team is still subject to (non-monetary) forfeiture of the game if it is unable to field nine (9) players as a result of (a) player(s) leaving or having been removed from the game (except if due to injury).
12. Players arriving at any time subsequent to the start of the game will be inserted at the bottom of the lineup.

13. This is a lob pitch league with a minimum arc of six (6) feet and a maximum arc of twelve (12) feet above the ground for all pitched balls. Any pitch made outside these dimensions shall be called an illegal pitch. The batter has the option of swinging.

14. [DELETED].

15. A strike zone mat will be used in all League games. The plate and the mat shall constitute the strike zone.

16. If the umpire calls a pitch illegal and the batter swings, the ball is in play. If the pitch is taken, it is an automatic called ball.

17. A third strike foul (i.e. a foul hit when the count is already strike two) is an automatic out. If such a third strike foul out is **caught by a fielder, the ball is dead, and runners may not attempt to advance. All** foul balls caught by the catcher are an **out**.

18. All base paths are **sixty-five (65) feet between bases and the pitching rubber is fifty (50) feet** from home plate except where otherwise agreed due to field limitations.

19. A batter running to 1st base *must use the secondary base located a minimum of 12 inches outside the 1st base foul line whenever a play is being made, even from the outfield.* If there is no play at 1st base, the runner may make the turn rounding 1st base using the inside base. **A runner will be called out if touching the wrong base.**

20. No base stealing, bunting or slap hitting is allowed.

21. All games will be seven (7) innings. Five innings must be completed (4-1/2 if the home team is winning) for a game to be official.

22. When **tie** games **require extra innings**, each extra inning will require the last official batter from the previous inning to start as a base runner on 2nd base (**International tie breaker**). **No substitute runner will be allowed until the base runner reaches 3rd base.**

23. Catch-up plus five (5) run rule will be in effect, with no restrictions in the last inning or extra innings (i.e., open innings). Note FIRST INNING ONLY: FIVE RUNS ALLOWED PER TEAM.

24. Game Shortening Rules:

A. Mercy Rule: a game is officially over if one team leads the other by **fifteen (15) runs after five innings** of play have been completed (or 4-1/2 innings if the home team is in the lead). 5 Inning games must complete either 5 innings, or 4 ½ innings, if home team is ahead.

B. The flip-flop rule will be invoked in any game when there is a 10-run differential in favor of the visiting team at the start of the "open inning." If the visiting team is ahead by ten or more runs, the home team will remain at bat and start new at-bats (beginning their seventh or last inning at-bats), meaning all runners then on base will return to the dugout. It will be an open inning. If the home team fails to tie or go ahead of the visiting team, the game ends and the visiting team wins. If the home team ties or goes ahead, the visiting team takes its turn at bat."

25. All bats must be slow-pitch officially approved by ASA for the current year with the exception of all Miken Freak bats. Bats with altered (original manufacturer] markings are prohibited. **A batter using a bat prohibited by these rules will be declared out and ejected from the day's games. (Banned bat list attached)**

26. Metal spikes are not allowed (Player will be ejected).

27. Overrunning of bases other than first is not allowed.

28. Sliding is allowed at 2nd or 3rd base only. When a runner is advancing to 2nd base and there will be a throw from 2nd to 1st base (double-play), the runner **must either (1) slide or (2) veer off the base path to allow the throw without hitting the base runner.** The umpire will declare (an) out(s) as appropriate if this rule is violated. If the runner runs into the fielder and, in the umpire's judgment, it was a dangerous play: the runner will be ejected from the game and may face suspension. The player's action will be reviewed by the League Board to determine if further disciplinary action should be taken. Any decision made by the Committee will be strictly enforced. We are a "fun" League.

29. On a play at home plate, the catcher can record an out only by touching any part of the home plate mat. This means that the catcher **cannot tag out a runner** coming home or block him from crossing the scoring plate, even if the incoming throw draws him toward the runner and/or scoring plate. Correspondingly, the **runner who touches home plate** or interferes with the incoming throw at home plate shall be **automatically called out.**

30. A line will be designated one-half the distance (32.5 feet) between 3rd base and home. Whenever a runner crosses this commitment line, he must proceed to home and cannot return to 3rd base. Runner must touch the alternative home plate before the ball reaches the catcher standing on ANY section of the home plate mat.

31. Home team for each game will provide 1 new and 1 backup ball.

32. Judgment calls cannot be protested. Except for player-eligibility protests, a protest, when allowed, must be made before the next pitch and submitted in writing within two (2) days to the Board. The protest must be important to the outcome of the game and the League Executive Board will render a decision.

33. During play, **only team managers can discuss calls with the umpire,** or other items pertaining to the nature of play. Managers must make this clear to their players.

34. An umpire may remove a player for verbal abuse or physical abuse. Physical abuse will result in being removed from the League for the remainder of the year. **SEE CODE OF CONDUCT**

35. A player removed from the League for physical abuse will be subject to review by the League Board regarding possible future reinstatement the following year. **SEE CODE OF CONDUCT**

36. A player removed from the game by an umpire must leave the vicinity of the ballpark, or sit in his car for the remainder of that game. Failure to do so will result in his team's (non-monetary) forfeiture of the game. A player removed from game one can return for game two of the doubleheader UNLESS THE PLAYER HAS BEEN REMOVED BECAUSE OF AN ILLEGAL BAT VIOLATION. WHICH RESULTS IN A FULL DAY BAN.

37. End of season ties in the standings will be decided by the record of each team against all teams with which it is tied. If ties still exist, the tiebreaker is the fewest runs surrendered against the teams tied and then all teams. In case of a tie existing, a coin toss in the presence of representatives of all affected teams shall decide. Won/lost percentage, rather than games ahead/behind, will be the criterion for comparing records. A 0-1 record is better than 0-2 where neither team has at least one victory.

38. Executive Board will determine playoff format during the season and publish the format prior to 75% of the season elapsing. Playoff positions will be determined by team performance during the season.

39. Only in the absence of a paid umpire will the following rules apply: Catcher will call balls/strikes and fouls. For all other calls, either a non-player in the game will make all other calls (safe/out), etc. or a player from the batting team will volunteer to umpire. Managers should insure an umpire is promptly in place to avoid delays in the game. Lack of an umpire by the batting team will allow the defense to make the calls preferably the pitcher. The designated umpire will

be responsible for calling illegal pitches (too high/low/fiat). Once the game begins: it cannot be terminated over dissatisfaction with the umpiring.

40. While it is preferred that all players wear uniforms, this provision shall not be mandatory.

41. Safety:

A. Protective Masks: Pitchers (defined as anyone throwing pitches to a batter) are required to wear a protective mask during games. No Exceptions. Shin guards are recommended.

B. Bats: Only ASA approved bats can be used for Middlesex 70+ League games. No Ultra's or Senior Bats may be used. Only Bats rated 1.20 BPF or less may be used.

C. Exception for the ULTRA bat. Any player age 80 this calendar year may use the ULTRA or ULTRA II bat this season. Rule is subject to change if the Ultra or ULTRA II bat is deemed a risk to other players.

D. Zero Tolerance: Use of an illegal bat will result in ejection from that day's games. A second violation will result in suspension from the league for the current season.

42. The league has adopted a "Code of Conduct" **See separate attachment.**

43. Ten second rule: batter on deck must enter the batter's box within 10 seconds of his time of bat. **Umpire** will CALL a strike until the batter enters the box OR is called OUT after three called strikes.

44. PITCHING SCREEN RULES

All pitchers must pitch behind the screen. Batted balls hitting the screen will be declared a strike. A batter hitting the ball into the screen with two (2) strikes will be declared a dead ball third strike (3rd) out. All other balls that hit the screen remain in play and are considered live balls. In the event a thrown ball becomes lodged into the screen, it will be declared a 'dead ball' and (2) bases awarded to all runners.

A. The pitching screen shall be placed forty-eight feet (48') from home plate and centered in front of the pitching rubber. The pitching screen once properly placed will not be moved. The home team will provide the pitching screen, but it is strongly encouraged that both teams bring pitching screens in the event one becomes damaged or unsafe to use. Once properly set in place, only the umpire has the authority to move the screen. A warning will be given by the umpire to any player attempting to move the pitching screen. Any further attempts will result in an immediate ejection by the offending player.

B. The pitcher's box shall be three (3) wide to match the width of the pitching screen and five (5) deep, starting from the pitching rubber. The pitcher can pitch from any position in the pitching box provided his pivot foot always remains in the box until the ball reaches home plate. A pitcher must pause at least one second before the start of his delivery and the time he delivers his next pitch. Any violation of either rule will result in an illegal pitch called a ball and a dead ball with a warning given by the umpire to refrain from any further violation or be subject to ejection from the game of play.

C. After releasing the ball, the pitcher must step behind the screen. Failure to do so will be called a ball.

D. Only upon a batter's contact with a pitch, shall the pitcher step from behind the screen to field a batted ball.

E. If a batted ball strikes the pitcher outside of the pitcher's box without the pitcher having had an opportunity to field the ball, it shall be ruled a fair ball with all baserunners allowed to advance at their own risk.

F. All pitchers must wear a face mask. No exceptions

45. 2-BASE RULE:

- A. A batter may advance, at their own risk of being put out, no further than 2nd base on any fair-batted ball that stays within the playing field. Any runner(s) on base at the time a fair ball is batted may advance in proper sequence without restriction at their own risk of being put out.
- B. In the event the batter-runner, who is restricted by the two-base rule, attempts to advance beyond 2nd base, they must return safely to 2nd base before being forced out by a fielder touching 2nd base while securing the ball.
- C. If the batter-runner over runs or over slides 2nd base without attempting to advance, they must return safely to 2nd base before being tagged out by a fielder.
- D. *Exception – Overthrows:* If the ball is overthrown by any defensive fielder into a dead-ball area, the umpire will grant the batter-runner one additional base placing the batter-runner, on 3rd base, provided that the batter-runner reached 2nd base safely.
- E. Nothing herein shall be misconstrued to limit a batter who hits a fly ball over the fence in fair territory and out of the playing field from being granted a home run. Any batted fair ball bouncing over the fence is a double.