

## **2026 SOFTBALL RULE BOOK SUMMARY**

### **IMPORTANT RULE CHANGES FOR 2026**

- **Pine Tar Allowed On Bats:** The use of pine tar or any other similar adhesive substance may be applied to the handle or grip of the bat at all levels of play but shall **not** be added to the surface of the barrel or taper of the bat and **shall not** cover the BPF specifications mark or other key identifying information or logos on the bat which, in this case, would render the bat improper and (1) the bat must be removed from the game, (2) the player is warned, and (3) if the infraction is repeated, both the offending player and the manager shall be ejected from the game (Rule 1.10, NOTE 2, page 91, 2026 Rule Book).
- **BAT MODIFICATIONS:** Pursuant to Rule 1.10, APPROVED RULING 2, no bat, in any level of Little League Baseball or Softball play, is permitted to be altered. Products such as, but not limited to, choke-knobs and choke-up assists ~~or thumb protectors~~ are considered alterations or modifications to the bat and are not permitted. **Thumb protectors are now allowed.**
- **RETURNING PITCHERS:** A pitcher once removed as pitcher may return to the position of pitcher even if they have no visits remaining. In such cases, a manager or coach may only come out to remove the player as pitcher and **is prohibited from conferring with any defensive player** (Rule 8.06(b), Approved Ruling, page 160, 2026 Rule Book).

**2026 SOFTBALL RULE BOOK SUMMARY**

**LOCAL RULES**

- **Courtesy Runner for Injured Player** If an offensive player is injured while at bat or running bases, a courtesy runner may be used to replace the injured runner. The courtesy runner will be the player who made the last out for the team at bat, whether in the current inning or in the previous inning. The injured player may re-enter the game once provided the player’s manager and the umpire-in-chief deem that player recovered and able to play. However, if that player becomes injured again during that game, that injured player will be removed from the line-up and will be considered permanently out of the game. The re-entry rule is to accommodate a player who, for example, may only have the wind knocked out of her but is physically able to re-enter the game in the following inning when she has recovered her breath.
- **The following pre-game schedule should be adhered to by both teams:**

<u>Weekdays</u>	<u>Saturdays</u>	
:35	:35 or :05	Visitor’s infield warm-up
:45	:45 or :15	Home infield warm-up
:55	:55 or :25	Meeting at home plate with umpires
:00	:00 or :30	Game begins

If the visiting team has not taken their infield warm-up within their designated time allotment, the home field may take their infield warm-up instead and the visiting team will then forfeit infield warm-up in order that the game starts on time.

- **Late Arrival of Players** If a player arrives late to a game and the manager chooses to allow that player to enter the game, she would be added to the end of the current lineup (Rule 4.01(d), NOTE 2, page 117, 2026 Rule Book).
- **Regulation Games:** instead of a required number of innings to establish a regulation game, there will be a minimum of 1 hour and 45 minutes time limit whereby no new inning will begin after the expiration of this time in order to establish a regulation game.

## 2026 SOFTBALL RULE BOOK SUMMARY

### LITTLE LEAGUE RULES – GENERAL

- **Bats for major league and below:** cannot be more than 33 inches in length nor more than 2 ¼ inches in diameter **with a 1.20 BPF** (Rule 1.10, pages 90 and 91, 2026 Rule Book).
- **Bats for JR/SR League:** cannot be more than 34 inches in length nor more than 2 ¼ inches in diameter **with a 1.20 BPF** (Rule 1.10, pages 90 and 91, 2026 Rule Book).
- **JR/SR League ONLY:** shoes with metal spikes or cleats **are permitted** (Rule 1.11(h), page 93, 2026 Rule Book).
- **DROPPED THIRD STRIKE (Major league and above):** the batter becomes a runner when the third strike called by the umpire is not caught, providing (1) first base is unoccupied or (2) first base is occupied with two outs. A batter forfeits her opportunity to advance to first base when she enters the dugout or any other dead ball area (Rule 6.09(b), page 140, 2026 Rule Book). **NOTE:** first base is occupied if, at the time of the pitch, a runner occupies first base even though that runner then attempts a steal of second base at the time of the pitch. In this situation, first base was not unoccupied.
- **LEAVING BASE EARLY (MAJOR league and above):** any runner is out when the runner fails to keep contact with the base until the ball has been released by the pitcher on delivery (Rule 7.08(a)(5)(a), page 145, 2026 Rule Book).
- **LEAVING BASE EARLY (MINOR league only):** any runner is out when the runner fails to keep contact with the base until the ball has been batted or reaches the batter (Rule 7.08(a)(5)(b), page 145, 2026 Rule Book).
- **Casts** may not be worn during the game, including umpires. **NOTE:** Persons wearing casts, including managers and coaches, must remain in the dugout during the game (Rule 1.11(k), pages 93 and 94, 2026 Rule Book).
- **Bunts:** holding the bat in the strike zone is considered an attempted bunt. In order to take a pitch, the batter must withdraw the bat backwards away from the ball (Rule 2.00, BUNT, pages 98 and 99, 2026 Rule Book).
- **NOTE: PENALTIES FOR EJECTIONS** – a manager, coach, or player ejected from a game must leave the game site **and** are not allowed to participate or be present at the team’s next physically played game (Rule 4.07, pages 119 and 120, 2026 Rule Book).

## **2026 SOFTBALL RULE BOOK SUMMARY**

### **LITTLE LEAGUE RULES – GENERAL**

- **LEAPING:** The act of leaping while delivering a pitch is a legal delivery. The pitcher may have both feet off the ground at the same time as long as both feet remain in the 24-foot width of the pitching plate and the pitcher does not replant the pivot foot. The replant of a pivot foot occurs when the pitcher pushes off the playing surface from anywhere other than the pitcher's plate in the act of delivering a pitch (Rules 2.00 (Leaping), page 105, 8.01(s), page 157, and 8.05(a), page 159, 2026 Rule Book).
- **Electronic Equipment in Dugouts:** the use of electronic devices in the dugout is allowed for players, coaches, or managers **as long as** the devices are **not used for communication**; the penalty for violation of this rule is **ejection from the game** **EXCEPTION:** a manager or coach is permitted to use one-way electronic devices from the dugout to the catcher while the team is on defense for the purpose of calling pitches. A manager or coach is prohibited from using the device to communicate with any other team member while on defense or any team member (including a manager or coach) while on offense, and a manager or coach shall not use the device outside the dugout/bench area. (Rule 3.17, page 116, 2026 Rule Book).
- **Penalties for use of illegal bats:** an illegal bat must be removed from the game. Additionally, if the batter enters the batter's box with one or both feet **entirely** on the ground with an illegal bat or is discovered having used an illegal bat during his turn at bat and prior to the next player entering the batter's box **and** the infraction is discovered before the next player enters the batter's box, **the batter is out**, and: (Rule 1.10, page 91, Rule 3.01(a), page 109, and Rule 6.06(d), page 136, 2026 Rule Book).
  - 1) the manager of the defense may advise the plate umpire of a decision to decline the penalty and accept the play (as long as this election is made at the end of the play),
  - 2) both the manager and the batter who violated the rule will be **ejected** from the game and the offensive team will lose one eligible adult base coach for the duration of the game.
- **Doubleheaders by Major and Minor League Teams:** a team may play two (2) doubleheaders in a seven (7) day period. No team shall play three games in a day. **JR/SR League only:** a team may play three (3) games in a day (Regulation VII(d), page 69 and Rule 4.13, page 125, 2026 Rule Book).
- **Pitching limits in Major and Minor Leagues:** a player may pitch in a maximum of twelve (12) innings in a day, but if seven (7) or more, that player requires one day of rest prior to pitching in the next game (Regulation VI(b), page 66, 2026 Rule Book).

## **2026 SOFTBALL RULE BOOK SUMMARY**

### **LITTLE LEAGUE RULES – GENERAL**

- **Pitching limits in JR/SR Leagues:** no pitching restrictions apply (Regulation VI(b), page 66, 2026 Rule Book).
- **Penalty for Illegal Pitches for ALL DIVISIONS:** If a pitcher pitches an illegal pitch, the pitch will be declared a ball to the batter (there is **no** advancement of any base runners without liability to be put out). If the catcher is not in position to receive the pitch and a pitch is made, the pitch will be declared a “NO PITCH” and the pitch shall be called a ball. A play may follow these calls and the manager of the offense may advise the plate umpire of a decision to decline the illegal pitch penalty and accept the play. (Rules 8.01 and 8.05, PENALTY, pages 155 through 159, 2026 Rule Book).
- Pursuant to Rule 1.11(a)(3), page 92 of the 2026 Rule Book, any part of the pitcher’s undershirt or T-shirt exposed to view shall be of a solid color, **provided it is not the same color as the ball being used in the game.**
- Pursuant to Rule 1.15(c), pages 94 and 95, 2026 Rule Book, pitchers shall not wear any item on the pitching hand, wrist, or arm; however, a pitcher may wear items on the glove hand, wrist, or arm (non-pitching arm) of a solid single color, provided it is not the same color as the ball being used in a game.
- **Play-calling bands** are permitted as long as **(1)** the equipment is worn on the wrist or forearm as the manufacturer intended, **(2)** the band is not attached to the belt or any other location on the person, and **(3)** for pitchers, the band may be worn on their non-pitching arm provided the band is a solid color that is **NOT** white, gray, or optic yellow. If the umpire considers the band distracting to the batter, the umpire may have the band removed (Rule 1.11(a)(3), page 92, 2026 Rule Book).
- **SPECIAL GAMES:** may be counted towards a team’s regular season schedule and a player’s Tournament participation eligibility. Approval is required from the District Administrator (Regulation IX(a), page 72, and Tournament Player Eligibility, pages 174, 175, and 176, 2026 Rule Book).
- A local league may establish a time limit per game to define a regulation game versus innings played. The minimum time limit is set at **1 hour and 45 minutes.** Any inning which has started prior to the time limit expiring will be completed but no new inning will begin once the time limit has expired. A new inning starts at the moment the third out is made, completing the preceding inning (Regulation VII(h), page 70, Regulation X(a) and (c), page 74, Rule 2.00, INNING, page 104, Rule 4.10(c)(2), page 121, and Rule 4.11(d), page 123, 2026 Rule Book).

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### **LITTLE LEAGUE RULES – GENERAL**

- **Pregame Equipment Inspection:** Pursuant to Rule 3.01(a), page 109, and Tournament Rule 3(b), page 186, 2026 Rule Book, umpires are no longer responsible for inspecting equipment, including bats, prior to the start of games. This responsibility is placed directly on the manager of each team. At each plate meeting, the umpire must confirm with the managers of both teams that all equipment is proper and legal for play according to Little League rules. If illegal equipment is used during the game, the manager of the offending team will be ejected from the game and the player who used the illegal equipment will also be ejected from the game. Both the manager and the player who used the illegal equipment will be suspended for their team's next physically played game and may not be in attendance at the game site. This includes pregame and postgame activities. The penalties noted in Rule 3.01(a) above have been updated in Rule 6.06(d) as well whereby a manager and player are ejected for the use of illegal equipment as well as the batter/player being out.

### **MINOR LEAGUE DIVISION**

- In Minor League and Tee Ball, managers and coaches may be on the field for instructional purposes, but shall not assist runners or touch a live ball. At least one adult manager or coach must be in the dugout at all times (Regulation XIV(d), Field Decorum, **EXCEPTION**, page 79, 2026 Rule Book).
- No one except eligible players in uniform, a manager, and not more than three coaches (in Minor League Instructional Division) shall occupy the bench or dugout (Rule 3.17, page 116, 2026 Rule Book).
  - ✚ Given the above two rules, this would mean that no more than three coaches could be out on the field for instructional purposes since there can only be up to four adults (one manager and three coaches) in the dugout and one of those four adults must remain in the dugout.
- Competitive Minor Leagues and above may use no more than nine players on defense unless the league allows to start with eight players (Rule 1.01, **NOTE**, page 85, and Rules 4.16 and 4.17, page 126, 2026 Rule Book).
- In Tee Ball and Instructional Minor Leagues, all players on the roster may be given a defensive position. Only one player may occupy the catcher's position (Rule 4.01(d), **NOTE 1**, page 117, 2026 Rule Book).

- ✚ Given the above two rules, if the minor league is “instructional”, then all players may occupy a defensive position but only one may occupy the position of catcher. If the minor league is “competitive”, then only nine players would be allowed to play defensive positions.
- Minor League Only – A five-run limit is to be imposed which would complete the half inning (Rule 2.00, DEFINITIONS – INNING, page 104, 2026 Rule Book). If the VP proposes and the Board of Directors approve and elect this option, the five-run rule may be suspended **in the last half inning for either team** (Rule 5.07, page 129, 2026 Rule Book). This goes hand-in-hand with the minimum play rule in the case where a player occupied a defensive position for a certain half-inning and five runs were earned by the opposing team before three defensive outs were made by the defense. In this case, the defensive player is considered to have played in the field for three defensive outs.
  - **In T-Ball ONLY:** the offensive side is retired when (1) three offensive players are legally put out, (2) three offensive players are called out by an umpire, or (3) when all players on the roster have batted one time in the half inning (Rule 5.07, page 129, 2026 Rule Book).

St. Augustine Little League, Inc.  
Minor, Major, and Junior/Senior **Softball** League Divisions – 2026  
**2026 SOFTBALL RULE BOOK SUMMARY**

**GAME RULES:**

1. A “new inning” is defined as one that **starts the moment that the third out is made**, completing the preceding inning (Regulation X – NIGHT GAMES (a), page 74, and Section 2.00 – DEFINITIONS, INNING, page 104, 2026 Rule Book).
2. **Continuous Batting Order:** A continuous batting order policy (**if proposed by the divisional VP and approved by the Board of Directors**), may be followed that will include all players on the team roster present for the start of the game. Players arriving after a game begins (ie, the home plate umpire puts the first pitch in play) may be added to the bottom of the batting order lineup if the manager so chooses. Otherwise, that player will be considered absent from that game. Pinch runner rule does not apply if leagues use a continuous batting order. **The continuous batting order is mandatory for all minor league divisions** (Rule 4.04, page 118, 2026 Rule Book).
3. Only one offensive time-out is permitted **each** inning (Rule 5.10(d) (NOTE), page 131, and Rule T-7, VISITS, NOTE, page 191, 2026 Rule Book).
4. **During games, there shall be only one (1) manager and two (2) coaches allowed in the dugout (minor league: only one (1) manager and three (3) coaches) with team players provided they have passed their background checks and are approved by the Board of Directors.** If any manager, coach, or assistant coach **has not** had a background check performed, that individual is **not allowed to be on the field at any time.** (Rule 1.01, page 85 and Rule 3.17, page 116, 2026 Rule Book).
5. **A manager or coach shall not leave the bench or dugout except to confer with a player or an umpire and only after receiving permission from an umpire.** (EXCEPTION: In Minor League and Tee Ball, managers and coaches may be on the field for instructional purposes, but shall not assist runners or touch a live ball. At least one adult manager or coach must be in the dugout at all times.)” (Regulation XIV(d), Field Decorum, page 79, 2026 Rule Book).
6. The offensive team shall station two base coaches on the field during its time at bat. These base coaches should not leave their respective dugouts until the pitcher has completed his/her preparatory pitches to the catcher. The base coaches are required to remain within the coach boxes during their offensive time at bat. The base coaches may be both manager and coach (provided an adult coach is in the dugout with the players), manager/coach and player, or both players. Once the game has started, **all coaches** should remain in the dugout as well as players except for bathroom breaks or other “emergencies” (NOTE: going to the concession stand for snacks is not an “emergency”). An adult manager/coach **must be** in the dugout with the players at all times during the game (Rule 3.09, pages 114 and 115, Rule 3.17, page 116, and Rule 4.05, pages 118 and 119, 2026 Rule Book).

## **2026 SOFTBALL RULE BOOK SUMMARY**

7. **SENIOR LEAGUE ONLY:** The Designated Hitter (DH) is now replaced with a “Designated Player and Flex Player” (DP). This rule is to provide more opportunity for players to play in Senior League Softball (Rules 2.00 (Designated Player and Flex), page 100, Rule 3.03, pages 111, 112, and 113, and Rule 714(a), page 152, 2026 Rule Book).
- Prior to the start of a game at the pregame conference, a manager may list on the lineup card a Designated Player (DP)/Flex to use throughout the game.
  - The DP’s name must be indicated on the lineup card as one of the nine batters in the batting order.
  - The name of the Flex player playing defense for the DP shall be placed in the tenth (10<sup>th</sup>) position on the lineup card in the batting order.
  - The DP shall remain in the same position in the batting order throughout the entire game.
  - The DP may be substituted for at any time throughout the game by a legal substitute or the FLEX player may play offense for the DP. In either case, the DP will leave the game. If replaced by a substitute, the DP position remains in the lineup. A starting DP may re-enter the game one time, provided the DP returns to the original position in the batting order.
  - **NOTE 1:** If the DP is replaced by the FLEX, this reduces the number of players from ten (10) to nine (9). The game may legally end with nine (9) players.
  - **NOTE 2:** If the DP re-enters or a substitute enters as the DP and the FLEX was batting in the DP’s spot on the lineup card, the FLEX can (a) return to the number ten (10) position and play defense for the DP or (b) leave the game if the DP plays defense for the FLEX.
  - The DP may play defense at any position. Should the DP play defense for a player other than the FLEX, that player will continue to bat but not play defense and is not considered to have left the game. The DP may play defense for the FLEX and the FLEX is considered to have left the game, reducing the number of players from ten (10) to nine (9).
  - The FLEX player may be substituted for at any time by a legal substitute or the DP may play defense for the FLEX. In either case, the FLEX will leave the game. If replaced by a substitute, the FLEX position remains in the lineup. The FLEX may re-enter the game one time provided the FLEX returns to the tenth (10<sup>th</sup>) position in the lineup.
  - **NOTE 1:** If replaced by the DP, this reduces the number of players from ten (10) to nine (9). The game may legally end with nine (9) players.
  - **NOTE 2:** If the FLEX re-enters or a substitute enters as the FLEX and the DP was playing defense in the FLEX player’s spot, the DP can return to batting only, play defense for another player, or leave the game if the FLEX plays offense for the DP.
  - Placing the FLEX into one of the first nine (9) positions for someone other than the DP’s position is considered an improper substitution.

## **2026 SOFTBALL RULE BOOK SUMMARY**

- If a team is using the DP/FLEX Option and there are no available substitutes when a runner advancing on an awarded base or after reaching base is unable to continue:
    - The previous batter not on base is allowed to replace that player as a temporary runner until the runner is put out, scores, or the half-inning ends.
    - When the player who could not continue is scheduled to bat, if a league permits teams to start and play games with eight (8) players, the Board of Directors will determine if an out is called for the ninth (9<sup>th</sup>) position in the batting lineup each turn at bat or if the team may skip over the ninth (9<sup>th</sup>) position without penalty.
    - When the half-inning ends and the team assumes a defensive position.
    - If a league permits teams to start and play games with eight (8) players and an eligible player becomes available, that player shall fill the empty space in the lineup without penalty upon arrival or availability.
  - The DP/FLEX Option cannot be used if a team is using the Continuous Batting Order.
8. **If a game cannot be played due to one or both teams failing to have nine players** to begin the game, the game will be referred to the League Vice-President for a decision on forfeiture. A game may not be started with less than nine (9) players on each team. Additionally, if an injury or ejection occurs during a game, the game may not continue without nine (9) players on the field. If a decision of forfeiture is decided, the score will be recorded as 6 – 0 (major league) or 7 – 0 (JR/SR league) with the losing team being the one that failed to field nine (9) players. If both teams fail to have sufficient players, both teams will forfeit with the score being recorded in the official team scorebooks as 0 – 6 or 0 – 7, depending upon major league or JR/SR league play **NOTE – LOCAL LEAGUE OPTION:** A local league may adopt a policy where a game may not be started or continued with less than eight (8) players on each team (Rules 4.16 and 4.17, page 126, and Rule 2.00 – DEFINITIONS, FORFEITED GAME, pages 101 and 102, 2026 Rule Book).
9. A pitcher shall be permitted to pitch no more than eight (8) preparatory pitches to the catcher **but no more** than one minute of preparatory pitches between half-innings (Rule 8.03(a), page 158, 2026 Rule Book).
10. Managers or coaches are permitted to warm up a pitcher at home plate or in the bullpen during pre-game and game warmup pitches; however, this rule is only applicable for **REGULAR SEASON!** (Rule 3.09, pages 114 and 115, 2026 Rule Book).

## **2026 SOFTBALL RULE BOOK SUMMARY**

11. **Intentional Walk:** a defensive team may intentionally walk a batter at any time during a player's at-bat **but only once per game per batter without throwing four pitches** that are called "ball" by the umpire. In that case, after calling for and receiving "time" from the plate umpire, the defensive manager will make the intentional walk request, the ball will be dead and no runners may advance unless forced by the batter's award (Rule 6.08(a)(2), pages 139 and 140, and Rule 8.03(c), page 158, 2026 Rule Book). Otherwise, pitches will be required to be thrown.
12. The pitcher shall not apply a foreign substance **of any kind** to the ball (this includes **dirt or clay**) or deface the ball in any manner. A pitcher may use a rosin bag for hands only. The pitcher may bring the hand in contact with the mouth or the lips provided she distinctly wipes off the pitching hand before contacting the ball. When a pitcher violates this rule, an umpire shall call the pitch a ball and warn the pitcher. If the violation is repeated during the game, the umpire shall remove the pitcher from the game (Rule 8.02 (a)(1) and (3), pages 157 and 158, 2026 Rule Book).
13. No **player** shall intentionally discolor or damage the ball by rubbing it with soil, rosin, etc. or any other foreign substance. The umpire shall demand the ball and remove the offender/player from the game. If the umpire cannot locate the offender/player and the pitcher delivers such discolored or damaged ball to the batter, the pitcher shall be removed from the game at once (Rule 3.02, pages 109 and 110, and Rule 8.02(a)(1) and (3), pages 157 and 158, 2026 Rule Book).
14. Pitchers shall not wear any item on the pitching hand, wrist, or arm. A pitcher may wear items on the glove hand, wrist, or arm (non-pitching arm) of a solid single color, provided it is not the same color as the ball being used in the game. (EXAMPLE: play-calling wrist band.) A pitcher shall not wear on his/her hands, wrists, or arms which the umpire may judge to be distracting. Players may wear jewelry unless it poses harm to injury regardless of the composition of such jewelry. Hard items to control the hair, such as beads, are permitted. **Medical alert jewelry that alerts medical personnel of a specific medical condition is permissible**. EXCEPTION: A pitcher may wear a compression sleeve on the pitching arm of a solid, single color, provided it is not the same color as the ball being used in the game (Rules 1.11(a)(3), Rule 1.11(j), pages 92 and 93, Rule 1.15(c), pages 94 and 95, and Rule 8.02(a)(2), page 158, 2026 Rule Book).
15. A player who is 12 years old **cannot** pitch in the Minor League and a local league may prohibit 15-year-olds from pitching within the Junior Division (Regulation VI – PITCHERS, section (e)(4), EXCEPTION, page 68, 2026 Rule Book).

## **2026 SOFTBALL RULE BOOK SUMMARY**

### **PITCHING AND PITCHERS:**

16. **Pitching Rules:** Pitching rules are as follows pursuant to Regulation VI – Pitchers, sections (a), (b), and (c), pages 66 and 67 in the 2026 Rule Book.

A pitcher who has attained a league age of twelve (12) is not eligible to pitch in the Minor League and a local league Board of Directors may prohibit a pitcher who has attained a league age of fifteen (15) from pitching in the Junior Division.

Delivery of a single pitch constitutes having pitched in an inning.

**Minor and Major League:** If a player pitches in more than seven (7) innings in a day, one calendar day of rest is mandatory prior to pitching in the next game and that player may pitch a maximum of twelve (12) innings in a day.

**Minor and Major League:** If a player pitched in seven (7) or more innings on (Column A) and is still eligible, that player can pitch again on (Column B):

#### **COLUMN A**

Sunday  
Monday  
Tuesday  
Wednesday  
Thursday  
Friday  
Saturday

#### **COLUMN B**

Tuesday  
Wednesday  
Thursday  
Friday  
Saturday  
Sunday  
Monday

**Junior/Senior Leagues:** No pitching restrictions apply.

**Minor and Major Leagues ONLY:** A pitcher removed from the circle or withdrawn from the game defensively can return as a pitcher anytime in the remainder of the game **but only once in the same inning as she was removed.**

**Junior/Senior Leagues:** a pitcher may be withdrawn from the game, offensively or defensively, can return as pitcher once per inning provided the return does not violate the substitution, visits per pitcher, or mandatory play rule(s). (Rule 3.03(c), pages 110 and 111, and Tournament Rules 4(c), 4(d), 9(a), and 10(c), pages 188, 190, 191, and 193, 2026 Rule Book.

**No Limit To Number of Pitchers Used Per Game:** There is no limit to the number of pitchers of a particular league age group on a team that can be used (Reg VI(e) **NOTES #4**, page 68, 2026 Rule Book).

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17. The pitcher's glove shall be of one solid color or multi-colored **as long as the color(s) are not the color of the ball being used in the game.** Umpires can remove a pitcher's glove if that umpire determines it to be a distraction to the batter (Rule 1.15(a) and APPROVED RULING, page 94, 2026 Rule Book).
18. A player removed from the pitcher's plate and returning as the pitcher of record shall retain the number of visits from their previous appearance as pitcher. To calculate the number of visits for a pitcher, all visits, regardless of the pitcher being removed and returned to the pitcher's position, shall be applied. A pitcher removed as pitcher may return as pitcher even if they have no visits remaining; in such cases, a manager or coach may only come out to remove the player as pitcher and is prohibited from conferring with any defensive player. (Rule 8.06(b) **NOTE 2**, and Approved Ruling, page 160, 2026 Rule Book).
19. **VISITS:** For major league and above, a manager or coach may come out once (**Minor League – twice**) in one inning to visit the pitcher but the second time (**Minor League – third time**) out, the player must be removed as a pitcher. A manager or coach may come out twice (**Minor League – three times**) in one game to visit the pitcher, but the third time (**Minor League – fourth time**) out, the player must be removed as a pitcher. (Rules 8.06 (a) and (b), pages 159 and 160, 2026 Rule Book). When a manager requests timeout to make a pitching change, it shall **not** be counted as a visit to the pitcher provided the manager makes the pitching substitution prior to speaking to any defensive player (Rule 8.06(c), APPROVED RULING 1, PAGE 160, and Rule T-7, page 190 and 191, 2026 Rule Book).
20. The release of the ball and follow through of the hand and wrist by the pitcher **must be** forward and pass the straight, **vertical** line of the body (Rule 8.01(q), page 157, 2026 Rule Book).
21. **DROPPED BALL:** If the ball slips from the pitcher's hand before, during, or up to the delivery of a pitch and the pitcher has taken a position on the pitcher's plate, a "ball" is declared on the batter, the ball **remains live and in play**, and any runner(s) may advance at their own risk (Rule 2.00, DROPPED BALL, page 100, and Rule 8.07(a), page 161, 2026 Rule Book).
22. For the pitcher to remove herself from the pitching position (1) **before** the hands have been brought together as noted in Rule 8.01(f), the pitcher may legally step back from the pitcher's plate with either foot; (2) **after** the hands have been brought together but prior to the start of the pitch as noted in Rule 8.01(k), the pitcher must legally step back from the pitcher's plate with the pivot foot first (Rule 8.01(g), APPROVED RULING 2, page 155, 2026 Rule Book).

## **2026 SOFTBALL RULE BOOK SUMMARY**

23. Pitchers must pitch in an underhand motion with both feet on the ground within the 24-inch length from the pitcher's plate. The shoulders shall be in line with first and third bases. The pitcher shall take a position with her **pivot foot** in contact with the pitcher's plate by having the foot entirely or partially on the top surface of the pitcher's plate and the **non-pivot foot** either on or behind the pitcher's plate. A pitching motion that is a rocking motion by raising the pivot foot off the pitching plate and returning it to the plate is an illegal act. The pitcher may not take the pitching position on the pitcher's plate without having the ball in her possession. The pitcher must not make any motion to pitch without immediately delivering the ball to the batter. The pitcher must not make a stop or reversal of the forward motion after separating the hands. The pitcher must not make two revolutions of the arm in the windmill motion. Pushing off with the pivot foot from a place other than the pitcher's plate is illegal, including a crow hop (defined as the act of a pitcher who steps, drags, or hops off the front of the pitcher's plate, replants the pivot foot, establishing a second starting point, pushes off from the newly established starting point and completes the delivery of the pitch). The pivot foot must remain in contact with or push off and drag away from the pitcher's plate prior to the front foot touching the ground, as long as the pivot foot remains in contact with the ground. When the pivot foot leaves the ground, it is considered a "leap" (an act by the pitcher when both feet become airborne on the initial move and push from the pitcher's plate) and is **a legal pitch** (Rules 2.00 (Leaping), page 105, 8.01(s), page 157, and 8.05(a), page 159, 2026 Rule Book). The pitcher must not make another revolution after releasing the ball. The pitcher shall not deliberately drop, roll, or bounce the ball in order to prevent the batter from hitting it. The pitcher shall hold the ball in one or both hands in front of the body for not less than 1 second and not more than 10 seconds before starting the delivery. The pitcher has 20 seconds to release the next pitch after receiving the ball or after the umpire indicates "play ball". If the hands are together while in the pitching position, the pitcher may not step back with the non-pivot foot. For the pitcher to remove herself from the pitching position after the hands have been brought together but prior to the start of the pitch, the pitcher must legally step back from the pitcher's plate with the pivot foot first (Rule 8.01(g), APPROVED RULING 1, page 155, 2026 Rule Book). (Rule 8.01(a) through (d), (f), (g) APPROVED RULINGS, (h), (j), (l), (n), (o), and (r) through (v) pages 155, 156, and 157, 2026 Rule Book; also, see Rule 8.01 in its entirety, pages 155, 156, and 157, 2026 Rule Book). The penalty for violation of these pitching rules shall be an illegal pitch and the pitch will be called a ball. See the following item on the next page for descriptions of illegal pitches.

## **2026 SOFTBALL RULE BOOK SUMMARY**

24. **AN ILLEGAL PITCH** requires the umpire (plate or field) to call “ball”. An illegal pitch is a delayed dead ball. If a play follows the illegal pitch and the manager of the offense advises the plate umpire at the end of the play of a decision to decline the illegal pitch penalty and accept the play, then the play would stand and there would be no reference to a “illegal pitch”. If the batter reaches first base safely on a hit, a fielding error, a base on balls, a hit batter, a fielder’s choice or otherwise, and if all runners advance at least one base, the play proceeds without reference to the illegal pitch. (Rule 8.05, page 159, 2026 Rule Book). There are no balks in softball; see “PENALTY” below.

Illegal pitches are when:

- the pitcher delivers a pitch to the batter when the pitcher **does not** have her pivot foot in contact with the pitcher’s plate,
- the pitcher delivers the pitch with a foreign substance applied to the ball,
- the pitcher makes a “quick pitch” (a pitch delivered before the batter is reasonably set in the batter’s box),
- the pitcher, while touching the plate, makes any motion naturally associated with the pitch and fails to make the delivery,
- the pitcher throws to a base while the pivot foot is in contact with the pitcher’s plate
- the pitcher violates any of the pitching rules indicated on the previous page (ie, Rule 8.01, pages 155, 156, and 157, 2026 Rule Book),

**Penalty for Illegal Pitches for ALL DIVISIONS:** If a pitcher pitches an illegal pitch, the pitch will be declared a ball to the batter. If the catcher is not in position to receive the pitch and a pitch is made, the pitch will be declared a “NO PITCH” and the pitch shall be called a ball. A play may follow these calls and the manager of the offense may **immediately** advise the plate umpire of a decision to decline the illegal pitch penalty and accept the play. (Rules 8.01 and 8.05, PENALTY, pages 155 through 159, 2026 Rule Book)

25. **FIFTEEN-RUN AND TEN-RUN RULES:** If after three (3) innings (**Junior/Senior League:** four (4) innings), two and one-half innings (**Junior/Senior League:** three and one-half innings) if the home team is ahead, one team has a lead of fifteen (15) runs or more, the manager of the team with the least runs shall concede the victory to the opponent. If after four (4) innings (**Junior/Senior League:** five (5) innings), three and one-half innings (**Junior/Senior League:** four and one-half innings) if the home team is ahead, one team has a lead of ten (10) runs or more, the manager of the team with the least runs shall concede victory to the opponent. During regular season, the local Little League may adopt the option of not utilizing this rule. However, this rule will apply during Tournament Play at all levels. **There is no 8-run rule in Tournament Play** (Rule 4.10(e), page 121, and Rule T-12, page 194, 2026 Rule Book).

## **2026 SOFTBALL RULE BOOK SUMMARY**

26. If a player who is not the pitcher delivers **one warm-up pitch to the catcher**, that player now becomes the pitcher of record (assuming eligibility) and must pitch to at least one batter (Rule 3.08(a)(1), page 114, 2026 Rule Book).

27. **LOCAL LEAGUE OPTION:** During regular season play (if proposed by the divisional VP and approved by the Board of Directors), after entering the batter's box, the batter must remain in the box with at least one foot throughout the at bat.

### **Exceptions:**

1. On a swing, slap, or check swing.
2. When forced out of the box by a pitch.
3. When the batter attempts a "slap" or "slap bunt".
4. When the catcher does not catch the pitched ball.
5. When a play has been attempted.
6. When time has been called.
7. When the pitcher leaves the eight-foot circle or the catcher leaves the catcher box.
8. On a three ball count pitch that is a strike that the batter thinks is a ball.

**PENALTY:** If the batter leaves the batter box or delays play and none of the exceptions apply, the umpire shall warn the batter. After one warning on a batter, the umpire shall call a strike. Any number of strikes can be called on each batter. No pitch has to be thrown, the ball is dead, and no runners may advance.

**NOTE:** The batter may return to their position in the batter's box and assume the new count at any time during the at-bat, unless such enforced penalty is the third strike. (Rules 6.02(c), pages 132 and 133 and T-3(a), pages 185 and 186 Tournament Rules, 2026 Rule Book). **This rule will be in effect during Tournament Play.**

28. Other than the normal plays getting a **BATTER** out, a batter is also out when (Rules 6.05(c) and (e) and 6.06(a) and (b), pages 134 and 135, 2026 Rule Book):

- bunting foul on a third strike,
- the batter attempts to hit a third strike and is touched by the ball,
- the batter hits the ball, **fair or foul**, with **one or both feet** on the ground **entirely** outside the batter's box
- stepping from one batter's box to the other while the pitcher is in position ready to pitch

## **2026 SOFTBALL RULE BOOK SUMMARY**

29. **Major/JR/SR League only:** a batter may attempt to run to first base when a third strike pitch is not caught by the catcher **and** either first base is unoccupied with less than two outs **or** first base is occupied but **with** two outs. A batter will forfeit the opportunity to advance to first base when he/she enters the dugout. Until the batter enters the dugout or other dead ball area, he/she may attempt to advance to first base under this rule (Rule 6.09(b), page 140, 2026 Rule Book). **NOTE:** first base is occupied if, at the time of the pitch, a runner occupies first base even though that runner then attempts a steal of second base at the time of the pitch. In this situation, first base was **not** unoccupied.
30. If the ball is in the strike zone when it touches the batter (including hands on the bat when swinging at, or attempting to bunt, a strike), it shall be called a strike, **whether or not the batter tries to avoid the ball.** If the ball is outside the strike zone when it touches the batter, it shall be called a ball **if that batter makes no attempt to avoid** being touched. The ball is dead and no runner may advance (Rule 6.08(b), **NOTE** and **APPROVED RULING**, page 140, 2026 Rule Book).
31. A batter becomes a runner at first base without liability to be put out when there is catcher's interference (when a batter's bat hits the catcher's glove when the batter is swinging at a pitch is the most common example of catcher's interference). If a play follows the catcher interference, the manager of the offense may advise the plate umpire of a decision to decline the interference penalty and accept the play provided the election is made immediately at the end of the play. If the batter reaches first base on a hit, error, base on balls, etc. and all other runners advance at least one base, the play proceeds **without** reference to the interference (Rule 6.08(c), page 140, 2026 Rule Book).
32. A **batter** becomes a runner at first base without liability to be put out when a **fair ball touches an umpire** or a runner in fair territory **before** touching a fielder; ball is dead and if a runner is touched by the fair ball, that runner is out. If a fair ball touches an umpire **after** having **passed** a fielder (other than the pitcher) or having **touched** a fielder (including the pitcher), the ball is live and in play (Rules 6.08(d), pages 140, and 708(f), page 147, 2026 Rule Book).
33. **BATTING OUT OF TURN:** A batter (proper batter) shall be called out, on appeal by the defensive team's manager, when failing to bat in his/her proper turn and another batter (improper batter) **completes** a time at bat in place of the proper batter. The proper batter may take a position in the batter's box any time before the improper batter becomes a runner or is put out, and the improper batter's strike and ball count becomes the proper batter's count (Rule 6.07 and **APPROVED RULINGS**, pages 136 through 139, 2026 Rule Book).

## **2026 SOFTBALL RULE BOOK SUMMARY**

When an improper batter becomes a runner or is put out and the defensive team appeals to the umpire **before the first pitch to the next batter**, or before any play or attempted play, the umpire shall (1) declare the proper batter out and (2) nullify any advance or score made because of a ball batted by the improper batter or because of the improper batter's advance to first base on a hit, an error, a base on balls, a hit batter or otherwise. When an improper batter becomes a runner or is put out and a pitch is made to the next batter before an appeal is made, the improper batter becomes the proper batter and the results of such time at bat becomes legal (Rules 6.07(b) and (c), page 137, 2026 Rule Book). While the improper batter is at bat and a runner advances on a stolen base, wild pitch, or passed ball by the catcher, such advance is legal (Rule 6.07(b)(2) NOTE, page 137, 2026 Rule Book).

If a proper appeal is made by the defensive team after the improper batter becomes a runner or is put out, when the proper batter is called out by the umpire, the next batter in order **immediately after** the original proper batter who was just called out now becomes the proper batter, even if that batter was the improper batter. For example, assume Amy was supposed to bat and Brittany came out to bat instead. Brittany hit the ball between third and short-stop and was awarded first base on a hit. The defensive team appealed the batting order before the next pitch to Catherine. Amy is now called out and Brittany, because she is the batter immediately following Amy, is now at bat again, but this time as the proper batter, not the improper batter (See Approved Ruling Examples listed under Rule 6.07, pages 136, 137, 138, and 139, 2026 Rule Book).

34. **Runners Leaving Early:** Any runner is out when failing to keep contact with the base to which that runner is entitled (**Minor League**) until the ball has been batted or reaches the batter or (**Major/JR/SR League**) until the ball has been released by the pitcher (Rule 708(a)(5)(a) and (b), page 145, 2026 Rule Book).
35. If a thrown ball **accidentally** touches a base coach, or a pitched or thrown ball touches an umpire, the ball is alive and in play. **However**, if the base coach interferes with a thrown ball, the runner is out and the play remains live (Rule 5.08, page 129, 2026 Rule Book).
36. The ball becomes dead when the plate umpire interferes with the catcher's act of throwing in an attempt to retire a runner. The runner(s) return to their original bases. **However**, if the catcher's throw gets the runner out, the out stands and there is no umpire interference (Rule 5.09(b), page 130, 2026 Rule Book).
37. The ball becomes dead when a pitched ball lodges in the catcher's or umpire's mask or paraphernalia. Runner(s) advance one base and the ball is dead. **For Majors and above:** On a third strike or fourth ball, then the batter is entitled to first base and all runners advance one base. (Rule 5.09(g) and Approved Ruling, page 130, 2026 Rule Book).

## **2026 SOFTBALL RULE BOOK SUMMARY**

38. **BUNTS and ATTEMPTS AT BUNTS:** holding the bat in the strike zone is considered an attempted bunt. In order to take a pitch, the batter must withdraw the bat backwards away from the ball (Rule 2.00, BUNT, pages 98 and 99, 2026 Rule Book).
39. There is **no On-deck Circle** for warm-up swings by batters **for Major League Division and below** (Rule 1.08, **NOTE 1**, page 90, 2026 Rule Book). Batters and player/base coaches **must always** have a batting helmet on when outside the dugout and in a position of either the base coach's box or, in the case of JR/SR League, the on-deck circle; the on-deck batter shall be positioned in the on-deck circle closest to their dugout (Regulation XIV(b) and Approved Ruling, Field Decorum, page 79, 2026 Rule Book). Batters are **never permitted** to swing bats in the fenced-in areas of the dugouts. Both of these rules are related to safety issues and must be adhered to.
40. **The traditional batting donut is not permissible** (Rule 1.10 **NOTE 1**, page 91, 2026 Rule Book).
41. **INFIELD FLY RULE:** a batter will be called out and runners, if any, may advance at their own risk if an infield fly ball is hit (**not bunted**) by the batter. An infield fly is a fair fly ball that can be caught by an infielder **with ordinary effort** but only when first and second, or first, second, and third bases are occupied **and** there are less than two outs. The fly ball does not necessarily have to be judged by the umpire to be falling within the infield. If, in the umpire's judgment, the fly ball is high enough and gives the infielder enough time to go to the short outfield area and catch the ball with ordinary effort, this shall be deemed an infield fly. The umpire shall **immediately** declare "Infield Fly-Batter's Out" for the benefit of the runners. If the ball is near either foul line, the umpire shall declare "Infield Fly If Fair". The ball is alive on an infield fly and runners may retouch their respective bases after the ball is touched by a defensive player in order for the runner to advance at the runner's own risk, the same as any fly ball. If the hit becomes a foul ball, it is treated as any foul ball. If an Infield Fly falls untouched to the ground and bounces foul before passing first or third base, it is a foul ball. If an Infield Fly falls untouched to the ground in foul territory and bounces into fair territory before passing first or third base, it is an Infield Fly (Rule 2.00 – DEFINITIONS – Infield Fly and Approved Ruling, page 104, 2026 Rule Book).

**The infield dirt and the outfield grass do not form a boundary line for infield fly purposes.** In other words, an infielder may station himself under the ball while standing in the outfield grass just beyond the infield clay. It is the umpire's duty to determine the position of the infielder and the trajectory of the ball to determine if "Infield Fly" should be called (2.00 – DEFINITIONS, Infield Fly, Approved Ruling, page 104, 2026 Rule Book).

## **2026 SOFTBALL RULE BOOK SUMMARY**

A batter is out when an infielder **intentionally** drops a fair fly ball **or line drive** with first, first and second, first and third, or first, second, and third bases occupied with less than two outs. The ball is dead and any runner shall return to their original base or bases (Rule 6.05(k), page 135, 2026 Rule Book).

42. A catcher must wear a mitt of any shape, size, or weight consistent with protecting the hand, including a first baseman's mitt or fielder's glove. All catchers **must wear** a mask with a **“dangling” throat protector** during practices, pitcher warm up, and games; “hockey-style” catcher helmets must also contain a “dangling” throat protector (Rules 1.12 and 1.17 and Approved Rule, pages 94, and 96, 2026 Rule Book).
43. **Major League and below Only:** When a runner is **advancing** or stealing a base, there is **no head-first sliding**. If a runner does slide head-first while advancing, that runner shall be called “Out” (Rule 7.08(a)(4), page 145, 2026 Rule Book).

**JR/SR League:** A runner may slide head-first on an advance to any base.

Head-first sliding **is allowed** for all runners in any league if they are **attempting to return to a base** they occupied.

44. **NO SLIDE TO AVOID RULE:** Any runner is out when the runner does not slide or attempt to avoid contact with a fielder who has the ball and is waiting to make the tag (in other words, the runner “trucks” the fielder as in football or rugby) (Rule 7.08(a)(3), page 144, 2025 Rule Book). **There is no “must slide rule”, only the “no slide to avoid contact” rule** (Rule 7.08(a)(3), Approved Ruling, page 145, 2026 Rule Book).
45. **RUNNING THROUGH FIRST BASE RULE:** Any runner is out when **failing** to return **at once** to first base and overrunning or over-sliding that base. If attempting to run to second base, the runner is out when tagged (Rule 7.08(j), page 148, 2026 Rule Book). Please note that **there is no requirement for the runner to “turn out” into foul territory** in order to be declared safe without liability to be put out. The runner simply must immediately return to first base without making any move to run toward second base, regardless of whether that runner turns out into foul territory or turns into fair territory prior to immediately returning to first base.
46. Any **fair ball** after touching the ground passes through, over, or under a fence or through or under a scoreboard or passes through or under a fence or scoreboard without necessarily touching the ground, or is deflected by a fielder over or under a fence or into foul territory entitles the batter and any runner to **advance two bases** (Rule 6.09(e), (f), and (g), page 141, 2026 Rule Book).

## **2026 SOFTBALL RULE BOOK SUMMARY**

47. Any runner is out when that runner passes a preceding runner before that preceding runner is put out (Rule 7.08(h), page 147, 2026 Rule Book).
48. Any runner shall be called out on appeal if the runner fails to touch home plate and makes no attempt to return to that base and home base is tagged. The appeal **must** occur prior to the next pitch, any play, or attempted play. **NOTE:** A runner forfeits her opportunity to return to home plate when she enters the dugout or any other dead ball area. **No appeal can be made if the ball is dead.** (Rule 7.10(d), pages 150 and 151, 2026 Rule Book). **NOTE:** To put the batter out, the defense must tag the batter or first base before the batter touches first base (Rule 6.05(b), Approved Ruling, pages 133 and 134, 2026 Rule Book). On the way to the dugout but before entering that dugout, a batter will create a new base path for himself/herself by the batter running from his position in the field (live-ball territory) to first base.
49. **If the pitcher has possession of the ball within the pitcher’s 8-foot radius circle** and is not making a play (a fake throw is considered a play), **runners** not in contact with their bases **must immediately attempt to advance or return to their base.** If no such immediate attempt is made, “No Pitch” is declared, the ball is dead, and the runner is out (Rule 7.08(a)(5) **NOTE 2**, page 146, 2026 Rule Book).
50. All fielders, except the catcher, must be positioned in fair territory when play begins (including first- or third-basemen attempting to hold on runners). **NOTE:** There is no penalty for this infraction; the umpire should just have the player move into fair territory (Rule 4.03, pages 117 and 118, 2026 Rule Book).
51. **FAIR VS FOUL BALLS:** If a batter hits a fair ball close to the baseline and the umpire judges the hit to be fair, **the umpire should remain silent** and point to fair territory indicating the hit is a fair ball. If a batter hits a foul ball, the umpire should hold up both hands and declare “Foul Ball”. A foul ball is a dead ball, runners do not advance, and the game does not continue until the plate umpire puts the game back into play by pointing to the pitcher. A game should not be put back into play until the pitcher has the ball in his/her possession and is on the pitcher’s plate and the batter is in the batter’s box.

A fielder who is in fair territory but reaches out into foul territory and touches the ball requires the umpire to declare “Foul Ball”. An example is when a third baseman has his feet in fair territory but reaches into foul territory to attempt to catch a ball hit on the outside of third base; the ball is foul and play is dead until the umpire puts the game back into play. Any overthrown balls after a foul ball hit (dead ball) with runners on base **does not** allow those runners to advance. If the runners do advance in error, those runners must return to the bases they originally occupied at the time of the foul ball hit prior to the plate umpire putting the game back into play.

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A foul tip **is not** a foul ball. For one thing, a foul tip is a **live ball** instead of a dead ball like a foul ball. A foul tip is defined as “a batted ball that goes sharp and direct from the bat to the catcher’s hands and is legally caught. It is not a foul tip unless caught and any foul tip that is caught is a strike”. An umpire should never declare “Fair Ball” **or** “Foul Tip” as this could cause confusion to any base runner who chose to run on the foul tip ball. If the runner successfully advanced to the next base, that stolen base stands and the runner is not to be returned to the prior base. The umpire should make a “brushing” sign with his hands raised to indicate a foul tip (Rule 2.00 – DEFINITIONS, FAIR BALL, FOUL BALL, and FOUL TIP, pages 100 and 102, 2026 Rule Book).

52. **OBSTRUCTION:** is the act of a fielder (defensive team) who, while not in the possession of the ball, impedes the progress of any runner (this includes “fake tags” and blocking of bases or home plate while not in possession of the ball). As with most calls, this is one of judgment by either the plate umpire or the field umpire(s). The ball is either called “Dead ball-Obstruction” **or** play is allowed to continue at which time the umpire will call “Time” and impose any obstruction penalties (Rule 2.00, DEFINITIONS, page 105, and Rule 7.06, pages 144 and 145, 2026 Rule Book).

The dead-ball call is when **a play is being made on the obstructed runner**. The ball is dead and all play ceases. The obstructed runner is then awarded to advance to the base which, in the umpire’s judgment, that runner would have advanced had no obstruction occurred. The runner shall be awarded **at least one base** and any preceding runners forced to advance because of the obstruction call shall advance without liability to be put out. If Runner 1 is on 2<sup>nd</sup> Base and advances to 3<sup>rd</sup> Base when Runner 2 hits the ball and Runner 2 is obstructed with by a play to 1<sup>st</sup> Base, the ball would be called dead for obstruction and Runner 2 is awarded 2<sup>nd</sup> Base with Runner 1 remaining on 3<sup>rd</sup> Base because there was no force of advance. If Runner 1 was on 1<sup>st</sup> Base when the ball was hit and safely advanced to 2<sup>nd</sup> Base, Runner 2 would be awarded 2<sup>nd</sup> Base because of the obstruction and Runner 1 would be awarded 3<sup>rd</sup> Base because there was a forced advance when the obstruction call was made.

If **no play is being made on the obstructed runner**, the play shall proceed until no further action is possible. The umpire will then call “Time” and determine what bases, if any, should be awarded to runners due to the obstruction. Assume Jessica hits the ball to the outfield, tags 1<sup>st</sup> Base safely then immediately proceeds to go to 2<sup>nd</sup> Base. When rounding first, Jessica collides with the 1<sup>st</sup> Baseman because the 1<sup>st</sup> Baseman was standing within Jessica’s established basepath to 2<sup>nd</sup> Base. Jessica continues on to 2<sup>nd</sup> Base where the outfielder throws the ball. If Jessica is safe at 2<sup>nd</sup> Base, the umpire should not call obstruction because Jessica is where she would be had no obstruction occurred. If Jessica is thrown out at 2<sup>nd</sup> Base, the umpire should call “Time” and obstruction and award Jessica 2<sup>nd</sup> Base,

## **2026 SOFTBALL RULE BOOK SUMMARY**

if in the umpire’s judgment, Jessica would have been safe at 2<sup>nd</sup> Base had the obstruction not occurred.

Please note that **actual contact with a runner does not have to occur** in order to have obstruction. In the example above with Jessica hitting the ball and colliding with the 1<sup>st</sup> Baseman before going to 2<sup>nd</sup> Base, if Jessica had not collided but was instead forced to run around the 1<sup>st</sup> Baseman thereby running outside of her otherwise normal basepath toward 2<sup>nd</sup> Base, there is still obstruction.

Also, please note that **if a defensive player blocks** the base, **home plate**, or baseline **clearly without possession of the ball**, a delayed “dead ball” obstruction shall be called and the runner is safe (Rule 7.06(b), **NOTE 2**, page 146, 2026 Rule Book).

53. **INTERFERENCE:** There are three main types of interference, all of which are dead ball offenses and strictly judgment calls by either the plate umpire or the field umpire(s):

- offensive interference which is an act by a member of the team at bat that interferes with, obstructs, impedes, hinders, or confuses any fielder attempting to make a play,
- catcher’s interference which is an act by the catcher that hinders or prevents a batter from hitting a pitch (most common occurrence is when a batter swings at a pitch and in the process hits the catcher’s glove first), and
- umpire interference that occurs when an umpire hinders, impedes, or prevents a catcher’s throw attempting to prevent a stolen base or when a fair ball touches an umpire in fair territory prior to passing a fielder.

(Rule 2.00-DEFINITIONS, page 104, 2026 Rule Book)

It is interference by a batter or runner when, with less than two outs and a runner is on 3<sup>rd</sup> Base, the batter hinders a fielder in making a play at home base. The runner will be called out. If there are two outs in this circumstance, the batter will be called out for the third out and no run scores (Rule 7.08(g) and Rule 7.09(c), pages 147 and 148, 2026 Rule Book).

It is interference by a base runner when, in the judgment of the umpire, **the base runner** willfully and deliberately interferes with a batted ball or a fielder in the act of fielding the batted ball with the obvious intent of **breaking up a double play**. The ball is dead and the base runner is out for interference as well as the batter-runner because of the action of the runner and **no bases may be run and no runs scored** because of the interference (Rule 7.09(f), page 148, 2026 Rule Book). If there is no double play, only the runner who made contact with a fair ball in fair territory before the ball was touched or passed by an infielder shall be called out (Rule 7.08(f), page 147, 2026 Rule Book).

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It is interference by a batter-runner when, in the judgment of the umpire, **the batter-runner** willfully and deliberately interferes with a batted ball or a fielder in the act of fielding the batted ball with the obvious intent of breaking up a double play. The ball is dead and the batter-runner is out for interference as well as the runner who advanced closest to home plate regardless of where the double play might have been possible; **no bases may be run and no runs scored** because of the interference (Rule 7.09(g), page 149, 2026 Rule Book).

It is interference by a runner when the runner fails to avoid a fielder who is attempting to field a batted ball or intentionally interferes with a thrown ball (Rule 7.09(j), page 149, 2026 Rule Book).

It is interference by a batter or runner when a fair ball touches the batter or runner in fair territory **before** touching a fielder or passing by an infielder. The umpire will declare “interference on the batter or runner” and the batter or runner is out. Additionally, if in the judgment of the umpire, the batter or runner deliberately and intentionally kicks such a batted ball on which the infielder had missed a play, then the batter or runner shall be called out for interference (Rule 7.09(k), page 149, 2026 Rule Book).

54. Each batter-runner and/or runner may advance without being put out and **the ball remains in play** (ie, live ball) (Rule 7.05(b), (c), (d), (e), page 143, 2026 Rule Book):
- **three bases** if a **fielder touches a fair ball** with a cap, mask, or other part of the uniform detached from its proper place on the fielder, other than a glove remaining on the fielder’s hand, and the batter, after being awarded 3<sup>rd</sup> Base, may advance to home plate at his own peril,
  - **three bases** if a **fielder deliberately throws a glove and touches a fair ball**, and the batter, after being awarded 3<sup>rd</sup> Base, may advance to home plate at his own peril,
  - **two bases** if a **fielder deliberately touches a thrown ball** with a cap, mask, or other part of the uniform detached from its proper place on the fielder, other than a glove remaining on the fielder’s hand,
  - **two bases** if a **fielder deliberately throws a glove at and touches a thrown ball**.
55. Each batter-runner and/or runner may advance without being put out and **the ball becomes a dead ball** (ie, live ball) (Rule 7.05(g) and (h), pages 143 and 144, 2026 Rule Book):

## **2026 SOFTBALL RULE BOOK SUMMARY**

- **two bases** when a **thrown ball** goes into a dugout (even if the ball bounces back out into fair territory), over or under a fence, or becomes stuck in the fence. When such a wild throw is the **first play by an infielder**, the umpire, in awarding such bases, shall be governed by the position of the runners **at the time the ball was pitched**. In **all other cases**, the umpire shall be governed by the position of the runners **at the time the wild throw was made**. If all runners, including the batter-runner, have advanced at least one base when an infielder makes a wild throw on the first play after the pitch, the award shall be governed by the position of the runners when the wild throw was made.

Examples: Amanda is on second when Catherine hits the ball to short-stop who overthrows first and the ball goes into the dugout; Catherine is awarded 2<sup>nd</sup> Base and Amanda is awarded home and the ball is dead.

Amanda is on first when Cindy hits the ball to right field. Amanda runs to second and Cindy runs through first but the right fielder, after Cindy has run through first, attempts a throw to first but the ball goes into the dugout. Since Cindy had established occupancy of first base safely and Amanda had established occupancy of second base safely, the two-base award begins at the position of the runners when the throw was made. Therefore, Amanda will be awarded home and Cindy will be awarded third base.

- **one base** if a **ball is pitched** or **thrown by the pitcher to a base** in an attempt to catch a runner and that **ball goes into the dugout or over or through a fence**. If the pitch or throw remains within the field, the ball is live and runners advance at their own peril.
56. **REMOVING A BATTING HELMET DURING PLAY:** If a player, during play, removes his/her helmet or causes his/her helmet to come off, he/she shall **NOT** be called out, but shall be warned not to intentionally remove his/her helmet and, if it continues, the player may be removed (ejected) from the game for unsportsmanlike conduct, as this can cause an unsafe condition (Rule 1.16, Approved Ruling, page 95, 2026 Rule Book).
57. Players, managers, and coaches of the participating teams **shall not** address or mingle with spectators, nor sit in the stands during a game in which they are engaged. Once the game has started, **all coaches must remain in the dugout as well as players** except for bathroom breaks or other “emergencies” (NOTE: going to the concession stand for snacks is not an “emergency”). (Regulation XIV(d), Field Decorum, page 79, Rule 3.09, pages 114 and 115, Rule 3.17, page 116, and Rule 4.05(b), page 119, 2026 Rule Book).

## **2026 SOFTBALL RULE BOOK SUMMARY**

58. **Mandatory Play – REGULAR SEASON ONLY:** Every player on a team roster is required to play at least six (6) defensive outs and one time at bat per game. The “at-bat” is defined as a player who comes to bat and is either (1) retired, (2) retired as a batter-runner or runner, (3) scores, or (4) after reaching base, the inning or game ends. Pinch runners or substitutes cannot be utilized on any runner who has not completed the “at-bat” requirement as that will constitute an illegal substitution (Regulation IV(i), pages 61 and 62, and Rule 2.00, AT-BAT, page 97, 2026 Rule Book). If this mandatory play is not met in a certain game, that player **must** start in the next game to make up his/her deficiency **plus** remain in that game until his/her mandatory play time for that game is met. Additional penalties: (a) first offense, the manager shall receive a written warning, (b) second offense, the manager shall receive a suspension for the next scheduled game, and (c) third offense, the manager shall receive a suspension for the remainder of the season **Does not apply to Senior League.** (Regulation IV – THE PLAYERS, section (i), pages 61 and 62, 2026 Rule Book).

**NOTE ON MANDATORY PLAY PENALTY:** There is no exception to this rule unless the game is shortened for any reason, at which time the local league may elect not to impose a penalty on the manager/coach. **HOWEVER, the penalty of this regulation regarding the player who did not meet mandatory play cannot be reduced or waived in a shortened game** (Regulation IV- THE PLAYERS, section (i), **Note 2**, pages 61 and 62, 2026 Rule Book).

59. When the winning run is scored in the last half-inning of a regulation game, the umpire shall not declare the game ended **until** the runner forced to advance from third has touched home plate **and** the batter-runner has touched first base (Rule 4.09(b), page 120, 2026 Rule Book).
60. Tie game in the bottom of the sixth inning, two outs. Batter receives ball four and all runners begin to advance. The runner from third base touches home plate. The batter rushes to join in the endgame celebration without having first touched first base. The batter then enters the dugout with the rest of the team. **RULING:** Umpire will call the batter out for abandoning his/her effort to advance. In this instance, the third out is a result of the batter being called out before touching first base, therefore it is a force out. No run scores and the game continues with the score still tied. (**NOTE:** the player must enter dead ball territory before he/she can be called out for abandonment.) (Rule 4.09(b) Situation, page 19, 2025 Make The Right Call Manual).
61. With a runner on third base, the umpire begins to clean the plate without calling “Time”, the runner on third base breaks for home and slides under the catcher’s tag. The play stands even though the umpire may “believe” there was an implied time-out. There is no such thing as an implied time-out. The ball is alive until the umpire calls “Time”. Umpires should get in the habit of clearly calling and signaling a time-out when necessary (Rule 5.02, page 129, 2026 Rule Book).

## **2026 SOFTBALL RULE BOOK SUMMARY**

62. Any appeal under Rule 7.10 (tag-ups on fly balls, runners advancing or returning to a base and failing to touch each base, or a runner failing to touch home plate and making no attempt to return to touch home plate, and home plate is tagged) must be made before the next pitch, or any play or attempted play. **No appeal can be made if the ball is dead.** If the violation occurs during a play which ends a half inning, the appeal must be made before all the defensive players have left fair territory.

In making an appeal, the pitcher shall not throw to a base while the foot is in contact with the pitcher's plate. In putting the ball back into play, after taking the pitching position, the pitcher shall step backwards off the pitcher's plate (with the pivot foot first) to begin the appeal. **Successive appeals may not be made on a runner at the same base.** If the defensive team on its first appeal errs, a request for a second appeal on the same runner at the same base shall not be allowed by the umpire (Rule 7.10, pages 150 and 151, 2026 Rule Book).

63. The game is under the jurisdiction of one or more umpires (Rule 1.01, page 85, 2026 Rule Book).
64. **Judgment calls** by umpires can **never** be questioned. These include fair/foul balls, strikes/balls, and safe/out calls. This rule applies to all managers, coaches, players, and spectators. Violators should be reported to the respective divisional League Vice-president or members of the Board of Directors. (Rule 9.02(a), page 163, 2026 Rule Book).
65. **UNSPORTSMANLIKE CONDUCT:** The actions, on or off the field, of players, managers, coaches, umpires, and league officials must be above reproach. Any player, manager, coach, umpire, or league representative who is involved in a verbal or physical altercation, or an incident of unsportsmanlike conduct, at the game site or any other Little League activity including through online or social media, is subject to disciplinary action by the local league Board of Directors (Regulation XIV(a), page 79, 2026 Rule Book).
66. **COURTESY RUNNER-REGULAR SEASON ONLY:** a local league may implement a courtesy runner for the pitcher and/or the catcher when there are two (2) outs. If using a traditional batting order, the same courtesy runner, who must be a substitute at the time, may not run for both the pitcher and the catcher at any time during the game. If a continuous batting order is used, the courtesy runner must be the player in the batting order who made the last out. Pitchers and catchers can have courtesy runners for both if both are on base at the same time with the player who made the last out running for the most forward runner (pitcher or catcher) and the player who made the second-to-last out running for the preceding runner (pitcher or catcher). If a pitcher or catcher made the last out, they **must be** the courtesy runner (Rule 2.00, COURTESY RUNNER, Page 99, Rule 3.04, pages 113 and 114, and Rule 7.14(b), page 152, 2026 Rule Book).

## **2026 SOFTBALL RULE BOOK SUMMARY**

67. **EJECTIONS OF MANAGERS, COACHES, PLAYERS, PARENTS:** When the manager, coach, or a player is ejected from a game, they shall leave the field immediately and take no further part in that game. They may not sit in the stands and may not be recalled. **A manager or coach ejected from a game must not be present at the game site for the remainder of that game.** Any manager, coach, or player ejected from a game is suspended for his or her team's next physically played game and may not be in attendance at the game site. This includes pregame and postgame activities. For the purpose of this rule, the game is in the hands of the umpires 10 minutes prior to the first pitch and continues until 10 minutes after the final out of the game. If that player, manager, or coach is ejected again during the season, the second ejection will automatically disqualify such player, manager, or coach for the rest of the season unless waived specifically by the Board of Directors with the League Vice-president's recommendation. Ejections will not be treated lightly by St. Augustine Little League, Inc. (see Rules 9.01, 9.02, and 9.05, pages 162, 163, and 166, 2026 Rule Book). If the manager, coach, or player is in attendance at the next physically played game, the umpire should refuse to start the game until the ejected manager, coach, or player leaves the premises. (Rule 4.07, pages 119 and 120, 2026 Rule Book). All umpires have authority at their discretion to eject from the playing field (1) any person whose duties permit that person's presence on the field, such as ground crew members, photographers, newsmen, broadcasting crew members, etc. and (2) any spectator or other person not authorized to be on the playing field (Rule 9.01(f), page 163, 2026 Rule Book).
68. All ejections of managers, coaches, players, or parents **must be** reported within 24 hours to the League President or Vice-president by the home plate umpire Rule 9.05(a), page 166, 2026 Rule Book).
69. The possession and/or use of firearms, tobacco products, cigarettes (including e-cigarettes and vapors), controlled substances, and alcoholic beverages in any form is **prohibited on the playing field, benches, or dugouts.** **Alcohol is prohibited at the game site** (Regulation XIV(e), Field Decorum, page 79, 2026 Rule Book).
70. Leagues are **required to ensure** that first, second, and third **bases will disengage** from their anchors (Rule 1.06, page 87, 2026 Rule Book).
71. **Regulation Game:** A game is a regulation game if four innings (five innings for Junior and Senior Divisions) have been completed. A local league may establish a time limit per game to define a regulation game versus innings played. The minimum time limit is set at 1 hour and 45 minutes. Any inning which has started prior to the time limit expiring will be completed but no new inning will begin once the time limit has expired. A new inning starts at the moment the third out is made, completing the preceding inning (Regulation VII(h), page 70, Regulation X(a) and (c), page 74, Rule 2.00, INNING, page 104, Rule 4.10(c)(1) and (2), page 121, and Rule 4.11(d), **Local League Option**, page 123, 2026 Rule Book).

## **2026 SOFTBALL RULE BOOK SUMMARY**

### **TOURNAMENT RULES:**

72. **Pregame Equipment Inspection:** Pursuant to Rule 3.01(a), page 109, 2026 Rule Book and Tournament Rule 3(b), page 186, 2026 Rule Book, umpires are no longer responsible for inspecting equipment, including bats, prior to the start of games. This responsibility is placed directly on the manager of each team. At each plate meeting, the umpire must confirm with the managers of both teams that all equipment is proper and legal for play according to Little League rules. If illegal equipment is used during the game, the manager of the offending team will be ejected from the game and the player who used the illegal equipment will also be ejected from the game. Both the manager and the player who used the illegal equipment will be suspended for their team's next physically played game and may not be in attendance at the game site. This includes pregame and postgame activities. The penalties noted in Rule 3.01(a) above have been updated in Rule 6.06(d) as well whereby a manager and player are ejected for the use of illegal equipment as well as the batter/player being out.
73. **RULE 8.01(g) Approved Rulings, PITCHER STEPPING OFF PITCHER'S PLATE:** If the hands are together while in the pitching position, the pitcher may not step back with the non-pivot foot. For the pitcher to remove herself from the pitching position after the hands have been brought together but prior to the start of the pitch, the pitcher must legally step back from the pitcher's plate with the pivot foot first. For the pitcher to remove herself from the pitching position (1) before the hands have been brought together as noted in Rule 8.01(f), the pitcher may legally step back from the pitcher's plate with either foot; (2) after the hands have been brought together but prior to the start of the pitch as noted in Rule 8.01(k), the pitcher must legally step back from the pitcher's plate with the pivot foot first (Rule 8.01(g), Approved Rulings 1 and 2, page 155, 2026 Rule Book).
74. **RULE 8.02(a)(1), PITCHER BRINGING HANDS TO MOUTH:** the pitcher may bring the hand in contact with the mouth or the lips provided she distinctly wipes off the pitching hand before contacting the ball. Pitchers may only use dirt, powdered rosin, or comparable drying agents that are listed on the USA Softball's certified equipment webpage to dry the hand. Rosin bags are to be used only for the hands, not ball, uniform or glove (Rule 8.02(a)(1), pages 157 and 158, 2026 Rule Book).

## **2026 SOFTBALL RULE BOOK SUMMARY**

### **TOURNAMENT RULES:**

75. **PITCHER VISIT LIMITS:** For **9- to 11-Year-Old Division and above**, a manager or coach may come out once in one inning to visit the pitcher but the second time out, the player must be removed as a pitcher. A manager or coach may come out twice in one game to visit the pitcher, but the third time out, the player must be removed as a pitcher. (Rule T-7, page 190 and 191, 2026 Rule Book). For **8- to 10-Year-Old Division**, a manager or coach may come out twice in one inning to visit the pitcher but the third time out, the player must be removed as a pitcher. A manager or coach may come out three times in one game to visit the pitcher, but the fourth time out, the player must be removed as a pitcher. (Rule T-7, pages 190 and 191, 2026 Rule Book). A manager or coach who is granted time out to talk to any defensive player will be charged with a visit to the pitcher. When a manager requests timeout to make a pitching change, it shall not be considered a visit to the pitcher provided the manager makes the pitching substitution prior to speaking to any defensive player (Rule 8.06(c), APPROVED RULING 1, page 160, and Rule T-7, page 190, 2026 Rule Book).
76. **PITCHER REMOVAL FROM GAME AND RETURN ONCE PER INNING**  
A pitcher may be removed from the circle or withdrawn from the game defensively and return as pitcher anytime during the game but only once in the same inning as she was removed. **Senior League:** pitchers can be withdrawn, offensively or defensively, and return as pitcher once per inning provided the return does not violate either the substitution, visits per pitcher, or mandatory play rule(s) in their applicable division (Rule T-10(c), page 193, 2026 Rule Book).
77. **SENIOR LEAGUE ONLY:** The Designated Hitter (DH) is now replaced with a “Designated Player and Flex Player” (DP). This rule is to provide more opportunity for players to play in Senior League Softball (Rules 2.00 (Designated Player and Flex), page 100, 3.03, pages 111, 112, and 113, 714(a), **NOTE 2**, page 152, and T-10(h), page 194, 2026 Rule Book).
- Prior to the start of a game at the pregame conference, a manager may list on the lineup card a Designated Player (DP)/Flex to use throughout the game.
  - The DP’s name must be indicated on the lineup card as one of the nine batters in the batting order.
  - The name of the Flex player playing defense for the DP shall be placed in the tenth (10<sup>th</sup>) position on the lineup card in the batting order.
  - The DP shall remain in the same position in the batting order throughout the entire game.

## **2026 SOFTBALL RULE BOOK SUMMARY**

### **TOURNAMENT RULES:**

- The DP may be substituted for at any time throughout the game by a legal substitute or the FLEX player may play offense for the DP. In either case, the DP will leave the game. If replaced by a substitute, the DP position remains in the lineup. A starting DP may re-enter the game one time, provided the DP returns to the original position in the batting order.
- **NOTE 1:** If the DP is replaced by the FLEX, this reduces the number of players from ten (10) to nine (9). The game may legally end with nine (9) players.
- **NOTE 2:** If the DP re-enters or a substitute enters as the DP and the FLEX was batting in the DP's spot on the lineup card, the FLEX can (a) return to the number ten (10) position and play defense for the DP or (b) leave the game if the DP plays defense for the FLEX.
- The DP may play defense at any position. Should the DP play defense for a player other than the FLEX, that player will continue to bat but not play defense and is not considered to have left the game. The DP may play defense for the FLEX and the FLEX is considered to have left the game, reducing the number of players from ten (10) to nine (9).
- The FLEX player may be substituted for at any time by a legal substitute or the DP may play defense for the FLEX. In either case, the FLEX will leave the game. If replaced by a substitute, the FLEX position remains in the lineup. The FLEX may re-enter the game one time provided the FLEX returns to the tenth (10<sup>th</sup>) position in the lineup.
- **NOTE 1:** If replaced by the DP, this reduces the number of players from ten (10) to nine (9). The game may legally end with nine (9) players.
- **NOTE 2:** If the FLEX re-enters or a substitute enters as the FLEX and the DP was playing defense in the FLEX player's spot, the DP can return to batting only, play defense for another player, or leave the game if the FLEX plays offense for the DP.
- Placing the FLEX into one of the first nine (9) positions for someone other than the DP's position is considered an improper substitution.
- If a team is using the DP/FLEX Option and there are no available substitutes when a runner advancing on an awarded base or after reaching base is unable to continue:
  - The previous batter not on base is allowed to replace that player as a temporary runner until the runner is put out, scores, or the half-inning ends.
  - When the player who could not continue is scheduled to bat, if a league permits teams to start and play games with eight (8) players, the Board of Directors will determine if an out is called for the ninth (9<sup>th</sup>) position in the batting lineup each turn at bat or if the team may skip over the ninth (9<sup>th</sup>) position without penalty.
  - When the half-inning ends and the team assumes a defensive position.

## **2026 SOFTBALL RULE BOOK SUMMARY**

### **TOURNAMENT RULES:**

- If a league permits teams to start and play games with eight (8) players and an eligible player becomes available, that player shall fill the empty space in the lineup without penalty upon arrival or availability.
  - The DP/FLEX Option cannot be used if a team is using the Continuous Batting Order.
78. **MANAGERS/COACHES IN THE DUGOUT:** A maximum of three (3) adults who are named on the affidavit will be permitted to act as manager/coaches for that game and in the team dugout (Tournament Rules, page 172, 2026 Rule Book). **NOTE:** Pursuant to Rule 4.05(b), page 119, of the 2026 Rule Book, base coaches may be adults and/or players provided at least one adult manager or coach remains in the dugout.
79. **DIAMOND-LEADER PROGRAM:** All managers and coaches will be required to complete the Little League Diamond Leader Training Program by obtaining a certificate of completion at [LittleLeague.org/DiamondLeader](http://LittleLeague.org/DiamondLeader). The completed certificate will be required to be available for inspection at all tournament sites (Tournament Rules, page 171, 2026 Rule Book).
80. **15-RUN RULE/10-RUN RULE:** If after three (3) innings (**Junior/Senior League:** four (4) innings), two and one-half innings (**Junior/Senior League:** three and one-half innings) if the home team is ahead, one team has a lead of fifteen (15) runs or more, the manager of the team with the least runs shall concede the victory to the opponent. If after four (4) innings (**Junior/Senior League:** five (5) innings), three and one-half innings (**Junior/Senior League:** four and one-half innings) if the home team is ahead, one team has a lead of ten (10) runs or more, the manager of the team with the least runs shall concede victory to the opponent. During regular season, the local Little League may adopt the option of not utilizing this rule. However, this rule will apply during Tournament Play at all levels. (Rule T-12, pages 194, 2026 Rule Book).
81. **REGULATION GAME:** A game is a regulation game if four innings (five innings for **Junior and Senior Divisions**) in which one team has scored more runs than the other [three and one-half (3 ½) if the home team is ahead or four and one-half (4 ½) if the home team is ahead in **Junior and Senior Divisions**] (Tournament Rule 13(a), pages 194 and 195, 2026 Rule Book).
82. **NO TIME LIMITS:** There are no time limits on games; there are curfews on games: no inning shall start after midnight (12:30 AM for **Junior League**; 1:00 AM for **Senior League**) (Curfew, page 180 and Tournament Rule 13(c), page 195, 2026 Rule Book).

## **2026 SOFTBALL RULE BOOK SUMMARY**

### **TOURNAMENT RULES:**

83. **MANDATORY PLAY – (Minor Division through Junior Division):** Tournament teams will adopt a continuous batting order during tournament play to include **all players** on the team affidavit who are present at the start of the game. This will allow defensive players to play when and how much a manager decides. If a player arrives late to a game and the manager chooses to enter her in the lineup, that player would be placed at the bottom of the lineup. Managers are solely responsible for ensuring that all players fulfill this mandatory play requirement. **This rule does not apply to Senior Division.** (Rule T-9, pages 191 and 192, 2026 Rule Book).

**MANAGER RESPONSIBILITY-MANDATORY PLAY:** Managers are responsible for fulfilling the mandatory play requirements, even if notification is not made by umpires or tournament directors. **Failure to meet the mandatory play requirements in this rule is a basis for protest and, if protested or brought to the Tournament Committee’s attention, it may result (by action of the Tournament Committee) in the removal of the team’s manager, without replacement, for the remainder of the International Tournament.** (Rule T-9(h), page 192 2026 Rule Book).

84. **SPECIAL PINCH RUNNER USAGE – SENIOR DIVISION ONLY:** Twice a game but not more than one time per inning, a team may utilize a player who is not in the batting order as a special pinch-runner for any offensive player. A player may only be removed for a special pinch-runner one time during a game. The player for whom the pinch-runner runs is not subject to removal from the lineup. If the pinch-runner remains in the game as a substitute defensive or offensive player, the player may not be used again as a pinch-runner while in the batting order. However, if removed for another substitute that player or any player not in the lineup, is again eligible to be used as a pinch-runner (Rule T-3(e), page 187, 2026 Rule Book). NOTE: Both the DP/Flex are considered to be in the batting order and therefore not eligible to be used as a Special Pinch Runner – see Designated Player/Flex Player above (Rule T-3(e), **NOTE**, page 187, 2026 Rule Book).

## **2026 SOFTBALL RULE BOOK SUMMARY**

### **TOURNAMENT RULES:**

85. **COURTESY RUNNER (Minor Division through JR Division):** A tournament team may permit a “courtesy runner” for the catcher and/or pitcher of record when there are two (2) outs. Utilizing a continuous batting order, the courtesy runner may be in the team’s batting order and must be the player in the batting order who made the last out (Rule T-3(e), page 187, 2026 Rule Book). This rule does not limit the number of times a catcher and/or pitcher can utilize a courtesy runner during a tournament game. **Pitchers and catchers can have courtesy runners for both if both are on base at the same time** (Rule 2.00, COURTESY RUNNER, Page 99, Rule 3.04, pages 113 and 114, and Rule 7.14(b), pages 152 and 153, 2026 Rule Book).
86. **MANAGERS/COACHES NOT PERMITTED TO WARM UP PITCHERS:** managers or coaches are **not** permitted to warm up a pitcher at home plate or in the bullpen or elsewhere at any time; they may stand by to observe a pitcher during warm-up in the bullpen (Rule T-3(g), page 188, 2026 Rule Book).
87. **BATTERS TO REMAIN IN BATTER’S BOX:** **During tournament play,** after entering the batter’s box, the batter must remain in the box with at least one foot throughout the at bat. **Exceptions:**
1. On a swing, slap, or check swing.
  2. When forced out of the box by a pitch.
  3. When the batter attempts a “slap” or “slap bunt”.
  4. When the catcher does not catch the pitched ball.
  5. When a play has been attempted.
  6. When time has been called.
  7. When the pitcher leaves the eight-foot circle or the catcher leaves the catcher box.
  8. On a three ball count pitch that is a strike that the batter thinks is a ball.

**PENALTY:** If the batter leaves the batter box or delays play and none of the exceptions apply, the umpire shall warn the batter. After one warning on a batter, the umpire shall call a strike. Any number of strikes can be called on each batter. No pitch has to be thrown, the ball is dead, and no runners may advance.

**NOTE:** The batter may return to their position in the batter’s box and assume the new count at any time during the at-bat, unless such enforced penalty is the third strike. (Rule T-3(a), pages 185 and 186, 2026 Rule Book).

## **2026 SOFTBALL RULE BOOK SUMMARY**

### **TOURNAMENT RULES:**

88. **SUBSTITUTION AND RE-ENTRY – SENIOR DIVISION:** Any player who has been removed for a substitute may re-enter the game in the **SAME** position in the batting order. Defensive substitutions must be made while the team is on defense. Offensive substitutions must be made at the time the offensive player has her turn at bat or is on base. Designated Player/Flex (DP) **WILL** apply and will both be considered to be in the batting order and therefore not eligible to be used as a Special Pinch Runner – see Designated Player/Flex Player above. Any player in the starting lineup, including the DP/FLEX, who has been removed for a substitute may re-enter the game **ONCE**, provided such player occupies the same batting position as she did in the starting lineup. A substitute (non-starter) may **not** re-enter the game in any position once they are removed from the lineup. (Rule T-10(b), (d), (h), and (i), pages 193 and 194, 2026 Rule Book).
89. **TIE GAMES:** During tournament play, at the completion of six innings (**Junior/Senior League:** seven innings) and the score is tied, the following tie-breaker will be played to determine a winning team (Rule T-14, page 195, 2026 Rule Book):
- a. starting in the top of the seventh inning (**Junior/Senior League:** eighth inning) and each half inning thereafter, the offensive team shall begin its turn at bat with the player who is scheduled to bat last in that respective half inning being placed on second base. **EXAMPLE:** If the number five batter is the lead-off batter, the number four batter in the batting order will be placed on second base. An eligible substitute or special pinch runner may be inserted for that runner.
90. There is no 8-run rule in Tournament Play (Rule T-12, NOTE 3, page 194, 2026 Rule Book).

### **UMPIRE PRELIMINARY PRE-GAME DUTIES:**

- Inspect field for playing conditions, including filling of any holes in outfield, as well as provision of break-away bases on first, second, and third as required by Rule 1.06, page 87, 2026 Rule Book
- Note that the plate umpire should inquire of both managers at the plate meeting prior to the start of the game whether or not all their players are properly equipped per Little League rules. The game cannot start until the plate umpire receives an affirmative answer from each manager. Any **illegal equipment** that is used during the game will result in immediate ejection of both the manager and the player who used the illegal equipment. This is generally **bats**, including those with **choke-knobs or choke-assists**. **Improper equipment** would be considered a catcher's mask without a required throat guard. Penalties are assessed for illegal equipment but not improper equipment. Umpires should instruct players to take improper equipment off the field or correct such equipment.
- Discuss signs to be used during game with partner(s) (lost count, infield fly, etc.), who will call fair/foul balls and up to what point on the field, etc. as well as rotations if an umpire goes out on a "trouble ball"

### **OTHER UMPIRE RULES**

- At plate meeting, always ask managers "are all your players properly equipped to play per Little League Rules?"
- Umpire from behind the plate, **not** behind the pitcher's mound
- Umpires must remain on **both feet**; umpires should not kneel on one knee or two knees behind the plate or in the field
- Maintain a consistent strike zone throughout the game
- Do not "rush the call"; if needed, take a second or two in order to make sure of the call and that the fielder did not drop a throw or the runner touched the plate or base prior to the throw arriving
- Field umpires, maintain your "A", "B", and "C" positions
- **Never** vocalize "fair balls" or "foul tips" (these are live balls and vocalization of these balls would only serve to confuse the players); only foul balls should be vocalized because this kills any play and becomes a dead ball
- Plate umpires, try to remember to always "put the game back into play" after a dead ball incident by pointing to the pitcher and vocalize "PLAY"
- Umpires are in charge of the field 10 minutes before and 10 minutes after a game; this includes the dugouts
- Try to make sure no batters are swinging bats in dugouts
- Try to ascertain that an adult coach remains in the dugout at all times throughout the game
- No manager or coach is allowed on the field during play without receiving time-out from the umpire; violators should be warned and, if the manager or coach continues to disregard the umpire's warning, that violator should be removed from the game
- Harassment of umpires should **never** be tolerated and if it becomes a detriment to your decision-making on calls, any violator (manager, coach, player, parent, or fan) should be removed

St. Augustine Little League, Inc.  
Minor, Major, and Junior/Senior **Softball** League Divisions – 2026

Thank you all for volunteering as managers, coaches, and umpires in our league. Without you, there would be no league and our children could not benefit from the opportunities our league provides.

Any comments, concerns, suggestions, or questions regarding rules should be directed to:

Richard L. Waler, Jr, Umpire-In-Chief  
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