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SOFTBALL GRADE DIVISIONS, Grade for school year 2024/25

GRADE DIVISIONS
1 st – 2 nd : Coach Pitch
3 rd – 5 th
6 th – 8 th

BASE RUNNING

Base distance shall be:

GRADE DIVISIONS	Base Distance
1 st – 2 nd : Coach Pitch	50 ft.
3 rd – 5 th	50 ft.
6 th – 8 th	60 ft.

- All base runners must wear a helmet. Base runner will be declared out if helmet is removed intentionally, while ball is in play.
- Infield-fly rule (runners on first and second, or bases loaded with less than two (2) outs) will only be enforced 6th – 8th Grade Division.
- Base runners **MAY NOT** score on a wild pitch or passed ball by the catcher in any division besides the 6th – 8th Grade Division. **PENALTY:** Runner will be called out for illegal advance.
- Home plate is only open in 6th – 8th Grade Division.
- In 3rd – 5th and 6th – 8th Grade Divisions, a base runner shall be called out if they lead off their base. **PENALTY:** “No pitch” will be called by the umpire and the runner will be called out.
- Base runners will be awarded one (1) base if a throw from the defensive player goes into the dead-ball territory. This territory will be discussed with both coaches by the umpire before each game (ground rules). **EXCEPTION:** If the throw becomes dead on the first play of an infielder, the award of two bases will be made from the position of runners at the time of the pitch. This rule only applies to 3rd – 5th and 6th – 8th Grade Divisions.
- In all divisions of play, base runners must slide **OR** attempt to avoid any fielder who has the ball in possession or who is attempting to field a batted or thrown ball. **PENALTY:** Runner will be declared out. If such illegal contact is intentionally used to break up a possible double play, two outs may be declared. If such contact was malicious (umpire's judgment) the runner shall be ejected.
- 3rd – 5th and 6th – 8th Grade Divisions: Any defensive obstruction (blocking of base or baseline) will result in the award of extra bases to the runners that will, in the umpire's judgment, nullify the act of obstruction. A defensive player who has the ball in his possession or is legally attempting to field a batted or thrown ball has the right of position and the responsibility of avoiding contact rests on the runner.

3rd – 5th Grade Division Only

- Batter can't advance on a dropped third strike.
- Base runners may attempt to steal only one base per play.

6th – 8th Grade Division Only

Circle Rule

A runner must move without hesitation either to the next base or return to the previous base when the pitcher receives the ball in the circle, which surrounds the pitching mound. If the runner hesitates to advance or return during this period, she shall be declared out.

- The circle around the Pitcher's mound should be 8' (eight feet) in diameter.
- If a pitcher makes any action to raise the arm to throw to any player or base, the runner shall be freed to advance or reverse direction at their own risk. If the pitcher brings the ball back down, the runner must not hesitate and must continue on their path to the base unless the pitcher once again threatens to throw.
- On a walk, a runner may turn the bag at first to find the ball and must then immediately proceed to the next base or return to first. Hesitation shall be grounds to rule the runner out.

Additional Information

Base runners may advance at their own risk on an overthrow, dropped ball by the pitcher, or if a return ball is delivered to any position other than the pitcher.

BASE STEALING

GRADE DIVISIONS	Rule
1 st – 2 nd : Coach Pitch	Not allowed
3 rd – 5 th	One (1) base per pitched ball, when the ball crosses the plate on a pitch, may not steal home
6 th – 8 th	One (1) base per pitched ball, when the ball leaves the pitcher's hand on a pitch, home plate is open

BATS

Bats may be aluminum or wood and must conform to the specific league requirements and shall have either the ASA Softball stamp or the USA Softball Certification stamp. Bats without the ASA Softball or USA Softball Certification stamp will not be eligible to be used during practice or league games.



GRADE DIVISIONS	Bat Length Information
1 st – 2 nd	Shall not exceed 28"
3 rd – 5 th	Shall not exceed 30"
6 th – 8 th	Shall not exceed 32"

BATTING ORDER

All divisions must use a continuous batting order. The first batter in each inning (after the first inning) shall be the player whose name follows that of the last player who legally **COMPLETED** their time at bat in the preceding inning. **EXAMPLE:** The batter who was at bat (regardless of ball and strike count) when a runner was caught stealing for the third (3rd) out, will lead off the next inning with a new count. All late arriving players must be placed at the bottom of the lineup. Late arriving players may not enter the game once the top of the third inning has started. All players listed on the lineup card must be present.

BATTING OUT OF ORDER

Coaches must report lineup changes to the scorekeeper when players enter or re-enter the game. In the event that an incorrect batter is sent up to bat, the opposing coach must bring it to the attention of the umpire after a pitch or pitches have been made to the incorrect batter. If it is found that the incorrect batter is at-bat, that batter is then declared out. The correct batter must then take their turn at-bat and assume the count of the incorrect batter. If no pitches are made to the incorrect batter, no penalty shall apply and the correct batter may then take their turn at bat.

CATCHER'S GEAR

- Catchers in all leagues must wear a catcher's helmet, mask, chest protector, and shin guards.
- Catchers warming up pitchers, on all levels of play, must wear a helmet with facemask (at practice or games).

COACHES RULES

- Teams are allowed a maximum of three (3) coaches: One (1) near first base and one near third base, and one in the dugout. They must not physically assist players in base running. The baserunner will be declared out if a base coach physically assists the runner.

- Only head coaches who have been assigned to a team may approach the umpire. In the event that official coaches are not able to attend the game, then a substitute coach will be designated to the umpire before the game, and this coach will be the only coach to approach the umpire with questions concerning rules. Other coaches will be allowed to coach bases, warm-up pitchers, etc., but will not be allowed to approach the umpire.
- Coaches may not protest balls or strikes called by the umpire. Immediate ejection will follow for protesting balls and strikes.
- Occupants of player's bench shall not demonstrate, by word or sign, violent disapproval of umpire's decisions. **PENALTY:** After the first (1st) warning, individual offenders shall be removed from the game. Repeated outbursts will result in forfeiture of the game.
- Coaches shall be responsible for their team's conduct on the field or as spectators. Coaches are also responsible for spectators who follow their team. The umpire shall have the authority to stop the game or call for forfeiture of the game if spectator action warrants.
- A coach shall abide by an umpire's decision. **PENALTY:** Removal from the game and possible forfeit.
- Profanity from a coach or player will result in their **IMMEDIATE** removal from the game.
- Youth Sports Coordinator shall have authority to suspend any manager, coach, or player for sufficient cause such as profanity or unsportsmanlike conduct, whether on the field or as a spectator. Players suspended a second time for such violations may not be allowed to further participate in league play.

DROPPED THIRD STRIKE RULE

With less than two (2) outs and without a runner on first base, the batter may attempt to reach first base if the pitched ball, that is ruled a strike, is not fielded cleanly by the catcher. The pitched ball is live and the baserunner may attempt to steal second base. If the baserunner attempts to steal and the third strike is not fielded cleanly with less than two outs, the batter will still be declared out because of the positioning of the baserunner when the pitch was made. If with two outs, regardless of a baserunner on first base or not, the defense must record the third out.

GRADE DIVISIONS	Rule
1 st – 2 nd : Coach Pitch	N/A
3 rd – 5 th	Not allowed
6 th – 8 th	Allowed

FIELDING GLOVES

- Players **MAY NOT** use a first baseman's type glove at any position other than 1st base. **PENALTY:** Glove removed from the game on appeal. No other penalty, except that if removed from game, its return will result in player's ejection for unsportsmanlike conduct.
- Pitchers must remove any wristbands, bracelets, or any other arm/hand equipment while pitching.
- Pitchers must remove all rings, earrings, and chains around the neck.

GAME BALLS

GRADE DIVISIONS	Ball Type
1 st – 2 nd : Coach Pitch	11 inch safety ball
3 rd – 5 th Grade	11 inch fastpitch ball
6 th – 8 th Grade	12 inch fastpitch ball

GROUND RULES FOR FREEMAN AND THORNBURG PARKS

FREEMAN PARK

- Fair balls hit through right field gate exit, and balls that lodge behind outfield trees: 6th – 8th Grade Division = **TRIPLE**.
- Dead-ball area (on throws): Both dugouts, and area outside the extension of left field and right-field fences.

THORNBURG PARK

- Batted fair balls that lodge behind right-field trees; fly balls that hit tree overhang in centerfield which could have been caught (Umpire's judgment) regardless of fielders position; and batted balls that bounce over fence: 6th – 8th Grade Division = **DOUBLE**.
- Fly balls hit over fence are home runs; fly balls that hit trees but would have gone over fence (Umpire's judgment) are home runs.
- Dead-ball area (on throws): Both dugouts, and area outside the extension of leftfield and right field fence.

HIT BY PITCH

The batter is awarded first base when hit by a pitch, (ball becomes dead), even if ball bounces before touching the batter. If a batter swings at a pitched ball and gets hit by the

pitch, the swing will supersede the result of the pitched ball.

LIVE BALL/DEAD BALL SITUATIONS

- Ball becomes dead when the umpire calls "time". For injured players, the ball remains live unless in the umpire's judgment, a safety factor is involved
- Ball becomes live (after dead ball) when umpire signals or calls "play". While ball is dead (for any reason), no player may be put out and no runner may advance or score (except on award by the umpire).
- Either team may ask for "timeout" provided such a request is not an attempt (umpire's judgment) to confuse a pitcher, base runner or batter and that no further play can, in the umpire's judgment, result while runners are on base.

MAXIMUM RUNS PER INNING

GRADE DIVISIONS	Maximum Runs Per Inning
1 st – 2 nd : Coach Pitch	N/A
3 rd – 5 th	4 runs
6 th – 8 th	6 runs

PITCHERS

A pitcher shall pitch no more than:

GRADE DIVISIONS	Innings
3 rd – 5 th Grade	3 innings per game
6 th – 8 th Grade	4 innings per game

Pitching Distance:

GRADE DIVISIONS	Pitching Distance
3 rd – 5 th Grade	35 ft.
6 th – 8 th Grade	40 ft.

New pitchers will be allowed three (3) warm-up pitches, and all others; two (2) warm up throws. If, in the umpire's judgment, a pitcher (or coach) has unnecessarily delayed the game, the number of warm-up throws allowed may be less (number to be determined by the umpire, keeping in mind the safety factor for prevention of injuries).

Pitching delivery:

- A legal delivery shall be a ball; which is delivered to the batter with an underhand motion.
- The presentation shall be in front of the body with both hands on the ball
- The release of the ball and the follow through of the hand and wrist must go forward

past the straight line of the body.

- The catcher must be within the lines of the catcher's box when the pitch is delivered.

PLAYER RULES

- Players shall not mingle with spectators during the game. Players shall remain on the bench or field of play. **PENALTY:** After warning, possible ejection from the game.
- Players shall not attempt to discuss umpire calls with the umpire. **PENALTY:** After warning, possible ejection from the game.
- Players (except pitcher or catcher) may be stationed anywhere inside the foul lines within fair territory.

PLAYER SELECTION

- Teams will be selected at random with the only exception being children of volunteer coaches will be placed on their team.
- Players signing up after teams are assembled will be placed on a waiting list and only allowed to register on a need basis; placement is not guaranteed.
- Siblings will be placed on the same team when playing in the same league and division unless parents desire otherwise before teams are assembled.
- Players will be placed in the selection pool regardless of past season team affiliation.

PLAYOFF RULES

- Each player present must play two (2) complete innings. **PENALTY:** Forfeit game.
- All regular season pitching rules shall apply.
- All playoff game times shall be as described in the regular season game times. The final inning of the game will be an open inning, meaning teams may score unlimited runs in that inning. The open inning will be called at the top of the inning before the game time limit expires. If tied after time limit, extra innings shall be played until a winner has been determined after the bottom half of the extra inning(s) has been completed, despite the time used to play the additional inning(s). Extra innings shall be played as open innings.
- Teams to receive a playoff "bye" shall be determined by final standings, if necessary.
- Playoff format will be decided by the Youth Sports Coordinator. In case of a tie in the final standings, head to head records shall be used. If still tied after head to head records, runs scored per team will follow. If still tied after runs scored, runs against will follow. If still tied after runs against, a coin toss will determine final standings.

PROTEST RULES

- Protests shall be considered only when based on the violation or interpretation of a playing rule or the use of an ineligible player. No protest shall be considered on a decision involving an umpire's judgment.
- Equipment deemed unsafe by an official and removed from the field of play shall not be the basis for a protest.
- Any protest for any reason whatsoever must be submitted by the head coach first to the umpire. The umpire shall confer with the coach of whom a rule violation is in question. Appropriate action will be taken to fix the violation. If an agreement can't be made recreation staff shall then be called to rule on the protest. The umpire shall also submit the protest information to the scorekeeper.
- Any coach who withdraws a team from the playing field under any circumstance prior to an official completion or suspension of play shall automatically forfeit such game and all rights to protest.

SCOREKEEPERS

- All players present and playing must be listed on the official lineup card. A copy of the lineup card must be given to scorekeeper and opposing coach. All players must appear in the official scorebook with a first and last name and a jersey number.
- Coaches must report lineup changes to the scorekeeper when players enter or re-enter the game. If an incorrect batter is sent up to bat, it is the responsibility of the opposing coach to bring it to the attention of the umpire and scorekeeper. If a batter is deemed batting out of order, that batter will be called out and the correct batter will then resume the at-bat and inherent the present count. Scorekeepers are not responsible for reporting when a team is batting out of order.
- Recreation Staff or an assigned scorekeeper will be present at all games. Home team may also be designated to keep score.
- The scorekeeper must remain **NEUTRAL** and report information only when an umpire or coach requests it. At that request a scorekeeper is obligated to give the information requested.

STARTING AND ENDING GAMES

All teams shall start the game if a minimum of seven (7) players are present. If a team is unable to field at least seven (7) players, the game is forfeited at the scheduled game time.

SUBSTITUTION RULES

All leagues and divisions must use a continuous batting order of all players present. Such batting order **MUST** be used for that entire game. After the 12 consecutive outs playing criteria has been met, a player may be substituted freely in and out of the game defensively.

For All Leagues:

- a. All players present must play a minimum of two (2) complete innings (total of 12 consecutive outs) in all games that proceed past four innings of play. **PENALTY:** Forfeited game if substitute players do not meet this play criteria.
- b. All players who do not start the game defensively, must be entered into the line-up defensively, in the top of the third inning, before the inning begins. Game staff will remind both coaches to enter all substitutes before the top of the third inning. Substitutes must then play 12 consecutive outs. Players who start the game must play the first 12 consecutive outs. **PENALTY:** Forfeited game.
- c. All players who are in attendance at the game, but who are not going to play in the game for whatever reason should be reported to the umpire, the scorekeeper and the opposing coach before the game starts, or as soon as player arrives if game is underway. **NOTE:** Twelve (12) consecutive outs means six (6) outs on offense and six (6) outs on defense.

Pitching substitution:

The pitcher shall be removed from pitching upon the 2nd visit to the mound, in the same inning, by a coach. Coaches shall not send messages to the mound through players on the field. This will be considered a visit to the mound by a coach (umpire's discretion). Umpires should also use discretion and warn players and coaches about stalling if players continually visit the mound. **PENALTY:** Umpire **MAY** start calling automatic balls until pitcher begins to pitch. A pitcher will be removed from pitching duties for the remainder of the game, the second time he is replaced on the mound, during the game, by another pitcher of record.

TIME AND LENGTH OF GAMES

GRADE DIVISIONS	Game Time
1 st – 2 nd : Coach Pitch	Two (2) complete turns at-bat per team
3 rd – 5 th	1 hour 20 minutes, or six (6) innings
6 th – 8 th	1 hour 20 minutes, or six (6) innings

For all divisions: If time criteria has been met and the score is mathematically out of reach based on the runs per inning rule, the inning being played will not be completed and the game will be finished.

Rule clarification: A new inning begins when the third out of the previous inning is recorded. Time limits, in consideration of starting a new inning will not be marked by when a pitcher is ready to pitch to the batter in the top half of the inning but rather by when the third out is recorded in the bottom half of the inning.

Extra innings: In a regular season game, if the score is tied at the end of each divisions' game time, additional innings will not be played.

UMPIRES

- Umpire shall be in full charge of the ball game after "play ball" has been announced and shall keep the official game time.
- Umpires shall establish and discuss ground rules with both coaches prior to each game. Ground rules will affect that game only.

UNIFORMS AND EQUIPMENT

- All team players shall wear City-issued softball jerseys identical in color, with numbers appearing on their backs.
- All divisions of play must use complete uniforms (softball jersey, pants, visors and socks). Parents are required to purchase softball pants for their child and must be the same color as their teammates. The pant color will be determined by team at the first team meeting, prior to the beginning of the season. Players wearing altered uniforms without approval from the Youth Sports Coordinator will be declared ineligible to play in the said game. Each player will have the option to wear or not wear the visor. Players may wear their own socks different from the city-issued socks. Wearing the city-issued softball jersey is mandatory.
- Players must wear athletic shoes such as molded rubber cleats or tennis type shoes. Metal cleats and bare feet are not allowed.
- All batters and base runners must wear protective headgear. **PENALTY:** Batter or base runner is out if helmet is removed intentionally, while ball is in play.

COACH PITCH DIVISION INFORMATION

- Game score and standing will not be kept.
- Rosters shall not exceed 12 players per team.
- A safety-rated 11 inch ball shall be used during all games and practices.
- Game umpire will be in charge at all games.
- Each batter will receive a maximum of five (5) pitches to hit the ball fair and past the “fair arch”. The fair arch is drawn 15 feet in front of home plate. If after the fifth pitch the ball isn’t put in play, the batter will be awarded first base.
- All batters must not run past second base if they hit the ball off the coach pitch (first half of the season). Batters must not run past third base (second half of the season) if they hit the ball off the pitcher. Batters that hit the ball fair off the batting tee must stop at first base.
- Outs will be recorded. Teams will not switch sides after three outs, but rather after all batters have batted during their team’s turn at-bat.
- Each game will consist of two (2) complete innings, with each team batting their entire lineup during their team’s turn at-bat.
- Players may not play catcher.
- All players shall be put on the field during their team’s defensive half of an inning.

