

# **UNITED STATES SENATE SOFTBALL LEAGUE**

**OFFICIAL RULES**

**2026**



**[www.senatesoftball.org](http://www.senatesoftball.org)**



**\*\* SPECIAL NOTE -- These rules must be enforced at the time of an infraction. Failure to enforce the rules during the game will void all subsequent appeals based on rules violations. If agreement cannot be reached on the field of play, either team may request that the game be rescheduled and played under the supervision of a League Commissioner. Do not attempt to enforce these rules after the fact.**

## **I. LEAGUE RULES**

- 1. During U.S. Senate Softball League games, these rules SUPERSEDE the rules of all other softball organizations wherever they differ from those rules.** Some of these rules are taken from official ASA rules, and are included for information purposes. Others, however, intentionally differ from ASA rules. Keep this in mind when reporting disputes or appealing rulings.
- 2. Individuals participating in the U.S. Senate Softball League do so at their own risk.** The league is not responsible for injuries or property damage incurred during participation. Coaches of each team are responsible for making all participants aware of this before they commit to play. Coaches are responsible for signing and having all players on their team sign a liability waiver provided by the league before taking the field. Waivers must be turned in to your respective Division Commissioner no later than **June 12, 2026**. Any team not submitting their waiver will forfeit any games played after cut off until their waiver is received. You may add players names throughout the season but any additions to the waiver must be turned in to your Division Commissioner by **June 12, 2026**. If your team is eligible for the league tournament a waiver must be on file for all players on your 20 person roster.
- 3. No player may play on more than 1 team in the league.** All games in which such a player participates will be ruled forfeits. Any player who violates this rule during a season will be ineligible to participate in any league games during that season and, at the option of the Commissioners, future seasons. This rule is in effect for both the regular season and the playoffs. This rule will be strictly enforced by the league to ensure that games are played by representative teams. If a team compiles 3 forfeits during the season (including forfeits from violating this rule), the team will be disqualified from the league for the remainder of the season (See "Team Responsibilities" below).
- 4. Each division of the league is managed by a Division Commissioner, who reports to the Head Commissioner.** Complaints, disputes, wins, and other communications are reported to respective Division Commissioners by each team manager.

## II. TEAM RESPONSIBILITIES

1. **Each team is responsible for providing its own playing field and equipment.** The team that provides the playing field will be the HOME team. The home team will provide the game ball, which will be a RESTRICTED FLIGHT softball, designated by the manufacturer with **max 375 lbs max .44 cor** printed on the ball.
  - a. The “Home” team is responsible for securing a “playable” field for game time. If the visiting team has viable permitted field and “home” team has chosen not to play there and cannot find or secure a playable field by agreed to game time, the Home team will forfeit.
2. **Each team is responsible for scheduling its own games.** The playoffs will be scheduled by the league on fields provided by the league.
  - a. **Each team must play all other teams in its division to be considered eligible for the playoffs.** Un-played games will count as losses. No exceptions.
  - b. **\*\*\*Each team is responsible for turning in their seasons schedule of games to their respective commissioner by April 17, 2026.\*\*\***
3. **Both teams are responsible for confirming the score at the end of the game.** The official record will reflect only the score as reported by the WINNING team.
4. **The winning team is responsible for reporting the score of the game to the appropriate Division Commissioner within 24 hours after the game.**
  - a. Games should be reported via Senate Softball website or may be reported by emailing commissioner.
  - b. Games not reported within 24 hours may not be considered valid.
  - c. Only division games should be reported; non-division and non-league games do not count toward the official standings.
5. **Each team is responsible for completing and reporting all games by \*JULY 17, 2026\*.** This includes making up all rain outs and postponements.
6. **A team wishing to cancel a game must give notice to the other team AT LEAST 48 HOURS before the scheduled game time (non-business days cannot count as part of the 48 hours).** Failure to do so will result in a forfeit for the canceling team. Please remember that many teams must pay in advance for their fields, whether a game is played or not.
  - a. If a team DOES wish to reschedule a game AND gives notice prior to the 48 hour deadline listed above, both teams have until the original date and time of the scheduled game to find a mutually agreeable date. Please include your division commissioner on email chains and both teams must make every effort to communicate.

7. **Disputes must be reported to the appropriate Division Commissioner within 24 hours after the game in question.**
8. **Each team is responsible for being familiar with the League rules, for having a copy of the League rules at each game, and for filling out and confirming the pre-game checklist with the opposing team.**
  - a. Disputed games may not be appealed if League rules are not enforced during the course of the game.
9. **In order to be eligible for the playoffs, each team must submit a roster of no more than 20 players by **June 12<sup>th</sup>, 2026** with their waiver.** Rosters will be submitted to the respective division commissioners.
  - a. Players appearing on this roster may not have played on any other team in the U.S. Senate Softball League during the regular season.
  - b. All players listed on playoff roster must sign the waiver prior to June 12<sup>th</sup>, 2026 when rosters are due.**
10. **If a team compiles 3 forfeits at any time during the season, it will be automatically disqualified from official participation in the U.S. Senate Softball League for the remainder of that season, to include the playoffs. All games previously played, and all future scheduled games will be nullified. The league fee will not be refunded.** Past scores and results will be canceled, and teams not yet played will not be required to play the disqualified team. The results of any further division games will not be officially recognized, and will not count in the official records of League teams.

### III. GAME FORMAT

1. **Weeknight games will begin no later than 6:45 p.m.** Weekend games may be played at any mutually agreeable time.
  - a. A team not able to begin a scheduled game at 6:45 p.m. may be assigned a forfeit by the opposing team, if that opposing team is able to begin the game.
  - b. After the assessment of a forfeit, it is permissible to play a NON OFFICIAL game, the results of which will be unofficial.
  - c. Commissioners will not recognize a forfeit unless the forfeit is CLEARLY announced BEFORE any non-official game begins.
  - d. Visiting teams are solely responsible for having accurate directions to the home teams' field and for arriving on time.
  - e. If the field location changes before notice can be given to the visiting team (in the case of a disputed field on the Mall, for instance), the home team will keep at least one player at the original location until 6:45 p.m. to provide new directions for the visiting team.
2. **The team that provides the playing field will be considered the home team.** The home team will bat second, and it will set the ground rules for the field. Ground rules will not supersede league rules.
3. **The team at bat will provide first and third base coaches.**
  - a. These coaches will serve as umpires, making "out" and "foul ball" calls. Their decisions are final.
  - b. Any team that chooses not to field a first or third base coach at any point in the game gives fielding team authority to call plays at 1st and 3rd.
4. **Each team is responsible for keeping a written inning-by-inning score.**
5. **Teams will exchange written batting orders prior to the game.** (See "Players and Substitutes" below).
6. **Games will consist of 7 innings. The completion of 4 full innings is required for the game to be considered official.**
  - a. If the game is interrupted by darkness, rain, or any other event at any time after the completion of 4 full innings, the score will revert to the last full inning played.
  - b. If a game is called for rain, darkness, or any other reason before the completion of 4 full innings, the game will be rescheduled and replayed from the beginning.
7. **At the sole discretion of the leading team, a game may end after the completion of 5 full innings if that team is ahead by 10 or more runs.**
  - a. This rule will only take effect if the winning team notifies the losing team.
  - b. The leading team may permit the game to continue only by suspending this rule.

#### IV. PLAYERS and SUBSTITUTES

1. **Each team will field a MINIMUM of nine players, a MAXIMUM of ten players.** Failure to field nine or more players will result in a forfeit.
  - a. A team playing with nine players must designate one slot in the batting order as an empty slot. This slot will be counted as an automatic out each time it comes up in the rotation until a player arrives to fill it.
  - b. **AT LEAST three fielders must be women.** Failure to field at least three women at game time will result in a forfeit.
  
2. **Each team may bat a maximum of eleven players:** ten fielders and one designated hitter.
  - a. **At no time during the game may a player change slots in the batting order.**
  - b. **AT LEAST three players must be women.** Failure to play at least three women will result in a forfeit, even if a team fields only 9 players.
  - c. **The same three slots in the batting order which are assigned to women at the beginning of the game will remain female slots THROUGHOUT the game.**
    - i. These three slots must be indicated on the written batting order exchanged prior to the game.
    - ii. All other slots in the batting order may be used for men and women interchangeably.
  - d. **A team must field ten players in order to use a designated hitter.**
    - i. Designated hitters cannot be added after the game begins, regardless of the number of players a team starts the game with.
    - ii. A designated hitter may move from DH directly into a defensive position, but must remain at the same slot in the batting order. The replaced defensive player's position in the batting order will then become the DH slot.
  
3. **A defensive player may leave and reenter the game only once, and only after sitting out for one full inning.** That player may return to any other defensive position, but must return to the same slot in the batting order.
  - a. Designated hitters do not have to sit out when moving directly from DH to defense.
  - b. Defensive players do not have to sit out when moving directly from defense to DH.

## V. GAME PLAY

1. **Pitches must be delivered with a perceptible arc** from an area that is a minimum of 40 feet and a maximum of 50 feet away from home plate in a direct line towards second base.
  - a. It is illegal to intentionally and continually use a pitcher who cannot throw a reasonable number (40%) of hittable pitches. A “hittable” pitch is one that is above the knees, in front of the batter, and reachable without leaving the batter’s box.
  - b. As a last resort, at the request of the opposing coach, a pitcher incapable of throwing a reasonable number of hittable pitches must be replaced in the next inning.
2. **Strike Mats are required for all league games.** The League shall provide a strike mat for each of the teams in the League, and the strike mats are mandatory for all required, regular-season, Division games. The strike mat will be used to determine "good" and "bad" pitches. A good pitch (strike) is defined as a pitch that hits the (properly placed) strike mat. A bad pitch (ball) is defined as a pitch that is not hit by the batter AND does not hit the strike mat.

**Strike Mats are required to help enforce rule V. section 1, regarding legal pitching.** The strike mats will also help with the speed of game play and accuracy for tournament play.

\*While strike mats are required for all games, you may choose to play with the optional strike mat rules. Both teams must agree to these rules before game commences. The below rules will be recognized with all Commissioners in the case of dispute.

- a. After ten (10) pitches that do not hit the strike mat have been thrown to that batter during that at-bat, the batter may then opt to walk after the 10th such pitch. The fielding team should consider replacing the pitcher after 2 walks by the same pitcher in the same inning. This allowance is not intended to preclude a batter from otherwise striking out, per the League's strikeout rules.
- b. A batter that fails to either advance or strike out (per the League's strikeout rules) after ten (10) "good" pitches during his/her at-bat will be considered to have struck out.



**ALL batters, both male and female, will be out after three strikes.**

Strikes are: 1) swing-and-a-miss, or 2) foul ball.

- ALL foul balls count as strikes, including the last strike.

3. **No bunts.** A full swing in which the ball does not reach the pitcher is not considered a bunt.
4. **No stealing or leading.** Base runners may not leave base until the batter makes contact with a pitched ball.
5. **Sliding is no longer allowed in any game for any reason.**
6. **Obstruction is not allowed.** Obstruction is when a defensive player affects or prevents a batter from swinging at a pitched ball or hinders the progress of a runner. For example, a catcher can be called for obstruction if the catcher's glove makes contact with the hitter's bat or when a defensive player doesn't have possession of the ball and blocks a base or base path. If the defensive player has the ball, they are allowed to block the base or base path to apply the tag for an out.
7. **No metal cleats.**
8. **The infield fly rule is in effect.** A batter is automatically out after hitting a fair fly ball which can be caught with ordinary effort by an infielder PROVIDED both first and second bases are occupied, AND there are less than two outs.
9. Only ASA-approved bats will be permitted in League games. Anyone bringing an illegal bat to the plate will be ejected from the game and the team's next game. To determine whether a bat is ASA-approved, go to <https://www.teamusa.org/usa-softball/~link.aspx?id=015F4358A30B44368FC142350D112FFF&z=z>

## **VI. Spirit of the League; Sportsmanlike Conduct.**

**Spirit of the League.** The U.S. Senate Softball League is a volunteer-run, social organization that promotes teamwork, competitive softball, and fun. Teams that join the League are expected to play in a manner that is consistent with the spirit of the League. The spirit of the League requires sportsmanlike conduct at all times and encourages participants to meet new people and enjoy summer afternoons playing ball. Consistent with the spirit of the League, the League holds an organizational meeting at the beginning of each season to allow coaches to get acquainted and a League party at the end of each season to allow everyone to celebrate the end of the season.

### **1. Sportsmanlike Conduct.**

- a. **Requirements.** A team that does not agree with the spirit of the League, and the requirement for sportsmanlike conduct, should not participate in the League. Consistent with the spirit of the League and ASA rules, each coach, player, and spectator at a game shall not, in connection with a League game-
  - i. make disparaging or insulting remarks to or about opposing coaches, players, officials, or other spectators;
  - ii. commit, or threaten to commit, an assault, battery, or bodily harm to another individual; or
  - iii. take any other action that is inconsistent with the spirit of the League, as determined by a Division Commissioner.

### **2. Penalties.**

- a. **Ejection and removal of individual.** If a coach, player, or spectator engages in unsportsmanlike conduct during a League game, the individual shall be ejected from the game and remove himself or herself from the field of play and the immediate vicinity of the field.
- b. **Forfeiture of game.** If a coach, player, or spectator of a team engages in unsportsmanlike conduct during a League game that is serious (as determined by the Division Commissioner), the Division Commissioner may assess a forfeit loss against the offending team or take other actions determined appropriate by the Division Commissioner.
- c. **Removal from League.** If a team engages in a pattern or practice of unsportsmanlike conduct during League games (as determined by the Division Commissioners), the Division Commissioners may remove the team from the League for the duration of a season, bar the team from further participation in the League, or take other actions determined appropriate by the Division Commissioners.

## VII. PLAYOFF QUALIFICATION

1. All games must be completed and recorded by **July 17, 2025** in order for a team to be eligible for the playoffs.
2. Unless otherwise announced, the top four teams in each division will qualify for the playoffs.
3. To be eligible for the tournament, a team must play at least 60 percent of their division games. The commissioners will apply, and may adjust, this rule on a case-by-case basis.
4. Division standings will be determined by won/lost records. Ties will be broken in the following order:
  - a. Head-to-head record
  - b. Head-to-head run differential
  - c. Overall run differential
5. In determining overall run differential, no games played against a team that has forfeited to any tied team will be counted. For instance, if teams A, B, and C are tied in record, head-to-head competition, and head-to-head run differential, and team A has received a forfeit from a fourth team, D, the results of Bs and Cs games against D will not be counted in computing overall run differential.
6. Tie games will be counted as .5 of a win and .5 of a loss for each team.

## VIII. Playoff Rules

1. The league will provide fields, schedules, and ASA-certified umpires and game balls for all playoff games.
2. During the first round of the playoffs, the home team will be the higher seeded team in the bracket. After the first round, home team will be determined by coin flip.
3. Professional umpires will call balls and strikes.
  - a. Umpires will have the final word on game play, rules interpretations, and team discipline. They will have the authority to eject players from the game and to declare forfeits at their own discretion.
  - b. The umpires' decisions are final. There will be no appeals to the Commissioners during the playoffs.
  - c. Unless otherwise announced, there is a STRICT time limit per game, until the semifinal round. No new innings will be started after 50 minutes unless the game is tied.
4. There is a STRICT 5- minute forfeit rule. Games MUST start within 5 minutes of scheduled time, or offending team receives forfeit. (Team MUST field a minimum of 9 players, which MUST include 3 women). No exceptions for any reason.
5. The 10-run rule is in effect after 5 innings, 15 runs after 4 innings, and 20 after 3 innings.
6. There is no time limit for semifinal or final round.
7. Only ASA approved bats will be permitted in the playoffs. Each umpire will determine this approval at his or her discretion at each game. Be sure to have your and your opponent's bats inspected prior to each game. Umpires' decisions are not subject to appeal. Anyone bringing an illegal bat to the plate will be ejected from the game and the team's next game.
8. The count will start at 1-1, with courtesy foul rule in effect.
9. The "male-walks-female-walks" rule will be in effect for tournament play.
  - a. With 0 or 1 out if a male is walked that has a female next in batting order, the male automatically goes to 2nd base. The female bats as she would normally.
  - b. With 2 outs if a male is walked with a female next in batting order, the male automatically goes to 2nd and the female has the choice to bat or may take 1st.
10. There will be a maximum of 3 over the fence homeruns per team per game. Any additional over the fence hits will be considered outs. If both teams have 3 over-the-fence homeruns, the umpire will allow additional home runs on a one-to-one basis.