

Summarized Softball Rules

Game Time & Duration

- Pitching Distance: **40 feet**
 - Game Time Limit: **Hard stop at 2 hours**
 - No new inning may start after **1 hour 45 minutes**
 - **Home team does not bat in the bottom half** of the final inning if they are ahead.
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Mercy Rule

- **15-run lead** after 3 innings
 - **12-run lead** after 4 innings
 - **10-run lead** after 5 innings
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Age Division Specific Rules

- **14U:** No dropped third strike rule.
 - **18U:** Dropped third strike rule is in effect.
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Stealing

- Players may **steal on a walk** and **steal off the plate**, but **not on the pitch**.
 - **"5-8 rule"** applies (context-specific; may need clarification based on league).
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Field & Safety

- No rule requiring sliding.
 - Field Surface: **James Moser Turf Field**
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Jewelry

- Jewelry is **not allowed if deemed dangerous by the umpire.**
 - Must be removed and cannot be worn during the game if instructed.
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Cleats & Footwear

- **No metal cleats** allowed.
- **Metal sole or heel plates** may be used **only if they do not extend more than $\frac{3}{4}$ inch** from the shoe.
- **Round metal spikes** are **illegal.**
- **Detachable screw-on cleats** are **not permitted.**
- **Screw-in cleats that are embedded into the shoe** are **allowed.**

General Overview

Governing Body: USA Softball oversees the sport nationally, recognized by the US Olympic & Paralympic Committee.

Purpose: Promote competitive balance and safety in amateur softball.

Playing Field & Equipment

- **Field Dimensions:** Vary by division (adult/youth) and type of pitch. For example, base distances range from 55' to 70' and pitching distances from 35' to 50'.
- **Equipment Standards:** Includes detailed specifications for bats, balls, gloves, helmets, and catcher's gear.
- Bats must have USA Softball certification.
- Balls are color-coded based on COR (coefficient of restitution) and compression.
- Helmets and masks must be NOCSAE-approved where required.

Players, Substitutes & Coaches

Team Structure:

- Minimum and maximum players defined (e.g., 9–11 with EP or DP/Flex options).
- Coed requires equal male/female player balance in specific positions.
- Designated Player (DP)/Flex Rule (Fast Pitch): Allows an extra player for batting or defense.
- Extra Player (EP) (Slow Pitch): Allows up to 2 EPs.
- ADA Accommodations: Allows reasonable modifications for players with disabilities, including sign language interpreters.

Gameplay Rules

Batting Order: Must be maintained unless substitutions are made per rule.

Pitching Regulations:

- Each style (Fast, Modified, Slow, 16”) has unique legal delivery mechanics.
- Foreign substances on the ball or body are prohibited.
- Specific pitching infractions lead to illegal pitch penalties.
- Stealing: Allowed under certain rules in Fast Pitch; restricted in others.

Uniforms & Safety

Uniforms must be alike in color and style.

Jewelry is restricted if deemed unsafe.

Mandatory protective gear for catchers and helmets for JO players and coaches.

Umpires, Conduct & Penalties

Ejections & Disqualifications: Misconduct results in removal from play or field.

Blood Rule: Players with visible blood must be treated and cleared before returning.

Forfeits: Can be declared for infractions like not having enough players.

Game Structure

Regulation Games: Typically 7 innings; time limits apply in certain divisions.

Run-Ahead Rule: Mercy rule ends games early if one team leads by a large margin.

Tie-Breaker Rule: Applies in extra innings with a runner starting at 2nd base.

Here's a more detailed breakdown of the **Playing Rules** section from the 2024 USA Softball Rulebook, which governs the actual conduct of the game across all formats:

Rule 1: Definitions

This section defines all the key terms used throughout the rulebook, such as:

- **Batted Ball, Infield Fly, Foul Tip, Obstruction, Interference**, etc.
 - Clarifies positions (DP, Flex, EP) and roles (batter-runner, catcher, umpire).
 - Establishes what counts as a **legal catch, fair vs. foul ball, tag**, and **appeal play**.
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Rule 2: The Playing Field

- **Field Layout:** Dimensions vary by age and division (Youth, Adult, Coed, etc.).
 - **Pitching distance** and **base paths** are clearly specified (e.g., Adult Slow Pitch = 70' bases, 50' pitching).
 - Includes detailed specs for **batter's box, on-deck circle, catcher's box**, and **coach's box**.
 - Fields must have a **clear, unobstructed radius** and proper **fencing and backstop placement**.
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Rule 3: Equipment

Covers all legal equipment:

- **Bats** must have a USA Softball certification mark and follow strict dimension/safety rules.
 - **Balls** are approved based on COR and compression, and color-coded (e.g., red, black, blue stamps).
 - **Gloves/mitts, helmets, face masks, and catcher gear** must meet defined safety standards.
 - Uniforms must be alike in color/style, and rules on headwear, shoes (e.g., cleats), and jewelry are included.
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Rule 4: Players & Substitutes

- **Roster Limits:** Defines starting lineups for different formats (e.g., 9-player Fast Pitch, 10-player Slow Pitch).
 - **DP/Flex Rule:** Used in Fast Pitch to allow an extra offensive or defensive player.
 - **EP Rule:** Used in Slow Pitch to allow more batters; up to two EPs can be used.
 - **Substitution & Re-entry:** Players may be substituted and re-enter once.
 - **Shorthanded Rule:** Teams may continue with one player short, under specific conditions.
 - **ADA Rule:** Special accommodation guidelines for players with disabilities.
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Rule 5: The Game

- **Length:** Standard game is 7 innings.
- **Run-Ahead Rule:** Games can end early if one team leads by 15, 12, 10, or 7 runs depending on inning and division.
- **Tie-Breaker Rule:** In extra innings, the last batter starts on second base.
- **Scoring:** Details on when runs count and do not (e.g., scoring on third outs, home run rules).

- **Home Run Limits:** Specific caps for each classification (e.g., Class D gets 3 HRs/game).
 - **Time Limits:** Especially relevant in youth divisions and tournament play.
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Rule 6: Pitching Regulations

Split into 4 parts for:

- **6A: Fast Pitch**
- **6B: Modified Pitch**
- **6C: Slow Pitch**
- **6D: 16-Inch Slow Pitch**

Key rules include:

- **Pitcher's Footwork:** Must maintain contact with the rubber until ball release (specific variations exist per pitch type).
 - **Legal Delivery:** Underhand in all cases, with arc requirements in Slow Pitch.
 - **Illegal Pitches:** Includes penalties, like awarding a ball or base.
 - **Use of Foreign Substances:** Prohibited on ball or hands.
 - **Pitch Clock:** 20 seconds (Fast/Modified), 5–10 seconds (Slow Pitch).
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Rule 7: Batting

- Establishes the **batting order**, how **batting out of order** is handled (appeal play).
 - Rules for **on-deck batters**, **bunting**, **intentional walks**, and **foul balls/tips**.
 - Enforces the **strike zone** based on player stance and pitch height (varies by pitch type).
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Rule 8: Batter-Runner and Runner

- Rules on:
 - **Base running**
 - **Advancing on hits or errors**
 - **Stealing (allowed in Fast Pitch)**
 - **Tag-ups, force plays, interference, and obstruction**
 - **Sliding and over-sliding bases**
 - Includes **appeal plays, missed bases, courtesy runners, and runs scored vs. third outs.**
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Rule 9–12: Special Circumstances

- **Protests (Rule 9):** Teams may protest rule misinterpretations—not judgment calls.
- **Umpires (Rule 10):** Authority and responsibilities including judgment, penalties, ejections.
- **Scoring (Rule 11):** Official scorekeeping rules, including earned/unearned runs and errors.
- **Use of Rules (Rule 12):** Clarifies usage hierarchy—Procedural Code overrides Playing Rules if there's a conflict.

The **Penalty Page** in the 2024 USA Softball Rulebook is a compiled appendix listing various rule violations along with their corresponding rule numbers, sections, articles, and effects. It's essentially a quick-reference guide for coaches, players, and umpires to identify what happens when rules are broken. Here's a detailed breakdown of some key penalties and their consequences:

Common Rule Violations & Penalties

◆ Equipment Violations

- **Altered or Non-Approved Bat:** Batter is out and ejected. In tournaments, they may face additional penalties2024_OfficialRulebook_U....
- **Illegal Glove:** If used in play, may result in the nullification of plays and runners being awarded bases.

◆ Batting Violations

- **Batting Out of Order:** Results in an out if properly appealed
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- **Using an Altered Bat After a Hit:** Batter is out, ejected, and all runners return to their base at the time of the pitch.

◆ Pitching Violations

- **Illegal Pitch (Fast/Slow Pitch):**
 - **Fast Pitch:** Ball on the batter and all runners advance one base.
 - **Slow Pitch:** Ball on the batter; runners do not advance unless forced
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◆ Running & Base Violations

- **Leaving Base Early (Fast Pitch):** Runner is out2024_OfficialRulebook_U....
- **Passing Another Runner:** Immediate out.
- **Runner Using Illegal Bat:** If discovered before the next pitch, runner is out and play is nullified.
- **Assisting Another Runner:** Runner is out.

◆ **Fielding & Interference**

- **Obstruction by a Fielder:** May result in awarding bases to runners depending on situation2024_OfficialRulebook_U....
- **Interference by Runner, Batter, Coach:** Can result in outs and may return runners to previous bases.
- **Detached Equipment Interference:** If equipment is thrown or detached and contacts a live ball, bases are awarded.

◆ **Unsportsmanlike Conduct**

- **Coach Leaving Coach's Box to Talk to Batter:** First a warning, then an offensive conference is charged.
- **Use of Electronic Devices:** Can lead to **disqualification or ejection** after a warning 2024_OfficialRulebook_U....
- **Ejected Participant:** Must leave the premises and is suspended for one additional game2024_OfficialRulebook_U....
- **Repeat Violations:** Escalate from warnings to ejections.

Special Penalty Cases

- **Shorthanded Play:** If a team becomes too short-handed due to ejections and cannot continue, the game is forfeited2024_OfficialRulebook_U....
- **Forfeits:** Occur if teams violate eligibility, refuse to play, or do not obey ejection rulings2024_OfficialRulebook_U....

The **Rules Supplement** section of the 2024 USA Softball Rulebook is designed to provide additional context, clarifications, and practical interpretations of certain rules. It is not a replacement for the core playing rules but helps clarify how specific situations should be handled in real games. Here are several important highlights from this section:

Key Interpretations in the Rules Supplement

Shorthanded Rule (Supplement #48)

- Teams can start or continue a game with fewer than 10 players under certain conditions.
 - Once a player is disqualified or injured and no sub is available, the team may play with 9.
 - If the number drops below 9 (Slow Pitch) or 8 (Fast Pitch), the game is **forfeited**.
 - In Fast Pitch tie-breakers, if the shorthanded spot in the batting order is due up, the **player before them** goes to 2nd base—not an automatic out
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Sporting Behavior (Supplement #49)

- Emphasizes fair play and good conduct.
 - Examples of **unsporting behavior**:
 - Uniforms worn improperly (jerseys untucked, caps backwards).
 - Mismatched undergarments.
 - Coaching tactics that jeopardize player safety.
 - Returning illegal equipment to play after inspection.
 - Using equipment for unintended purposes.
 - Using artificial noisemakers during championship play
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Stealing in Slow Pitch (Supplement #50)

- Not allowed in:
 - JO Girls and Boys (10U–16U),
 - Coed,
 - Masters,

- Seniors divisions.
 - Since the ball is dead on balls and strikes, runners must remain on base and cannot be picked off.
 - If a runner leaves early or breaks contact before the pitch is legal, they're out
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Courtesy Runners (Supplements #12, #54)

- Specific eligibility and rules apply:
 - Seniors/Masters can use multiple courtesy runners.
 - New clarifications allow for a **second runner** for the pitcher under some circumstances.
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Equipment Clarifications

- **Throwing the glove** at a ball is penalized (Supplement #52).
 - **Carrying a bat on the bases** is addressed as unsporting conduct.
 - Guidance is given on how to handle **bats with dents, foreign substances, and altered equipment**.
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Special Play Situations

- **Appeal Plays (Supplement #1):** Covers both live-ball and dead-ball appeals and when a team loses the right to appeal.
 - **Obstruction (Supplement #36):** Clarifies the difference between types of obstruction and expected base awards.
 - **Fake Tags (Supplement #19):** Prohibited as they can lead to player injuries and confusion.
 - **Dropped Third Strikes, Intentionally Dropped Balls, and Look-Back Rule** are each explored in more detail for accurate enforcement.
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Examples of Rule Application

Throughout the supplement, real-life examples are given to show how a rule would apply in practice—like what to do if a player overruns first base, or how to proceed when an illegal re-entry occurs.

The **Playing Rules & Rules Supplement Index** in the 2024 USA Softball Rulebook serves as a comprehensive lookup guide that connects specific rules and scenarios to their rule number, section, and article within the rulebook. It's found at the end of the rulebook (starting around page 152) and is extremely helpful for quickly navigating complex rules during games, meetings, or disputes.

Here's how it's structured and some examples of what's included:

Index Format

Each entry includes:

- **Topic** (e.g., “Illegal Bat”)
- **Rule Number** (e.g., Rule 3)
- **Section** (e.g., Section 1)
- **Article** (e.g., Article A) This directs readers to the exact location of the rule within the full document.

Examples from the Playing Rules & Supplement Index

Gameplay Situations

- **Run Ahead Rule** → Rule 5, Section 9, Article A
- **Tie Breaker** → Rule 5, Section 11
- **Dropped Third Strike** → Fast Pitch – Rule 8, Section 1, Article B

Equipment and Uniforms

- **Illegal Glove Usage** → Rule 8, Section 8, Article O (with Rules Supplement #23)
- **Metal Cleats** → Rule 3, Section 6, Article G (Senior Slow Pitch-specific)

- **Helmets** (including cracked or broken) → Rule 3, Section 5, Article E

Players and Positions

- **Flex Player** → Rule 4, Section 3, Articles B, D, E-I (with Supplement #15)
- **Courtesy Runners** → Rule 8, Section 9 or 10 (varies by division)
- **Illegal Re-entry** → Rule 4, Section 6, Article F(4)

Infractions and Penalties

- **Ejection From Game** → Rule 4, Section 8, Articles B & C
- **Illegal Pitch Penalty:**
 - Fast/Modified Pitch: Rule 6A/B, various articles
 - Slow/16-Inch: Rule 6C/D, Article 10
- **Protests** → Rule 9, Sections 1–7 (with Supplement #42)

Special Rules

- **Obstruction** → Rule 8, Section 5, Article B (with Supplement #36)
- **Look-Back Rule** → Rule 8, Section 7, Article T (with Supplement #34)
- **Fake Tag** → Rules Supplement #19

How to Use This Index

This index is especially useful for:

- **Umpires** during rule clarification or challenges.
- **Coaches** preparing teams for tournament play.
- **Players** learning situational rules or checking legal actions.
- **Scorekeepers and officials** referencing scoring procedures and equipment legality.