



GRADE 3-4 LEAGUE RULES - 2021 SEASON

Note:

The League will be monitoring the latest COVID-19 guidance from the state. As of March 1st, we are in Phase III, step 2. The Basics of what that means for Rec Softball:

- Softball is considered a "moderate risk" sport. Since it is an outdoor activity, the requirements are less stringent than for indoor sports, so it should be an almost normal season. That said...
- We will follow physical distancing guidelines in the dugout and sidelines.
- Masks are required when athletes are not on the field of play.
- Masks are still required for all athletes when distancing is not possible. For now, this includes players in the infield and batters. Athletes will be encouraged to take frequent mask breaks when they are safely able to distance from other players.
- Masks are always required for spectators and coaches.
- We will minimize the sharing of equipment. Equipment that is shared will be disinfected. Balls do not count as shared equipment.
- We will continue to review guidelines from the state of MA, from USA Softball of MA and from the City of Newton and make changes to our protocols as appropriate.

Newton Girls Softball plays by the ASA rulebook except as noted below. In selected cases we have simply restated an existing ASA rule with the intent of avoiding a misunderstanding.

PLAYING FIELD

1. The distance from the back of home plate to the center of the pitcher's rubber = 35 feet
2. The distance from the back of home plate to the back of 1st and 3rd base = 60 feet
3. The distance from the center of 2nd base to the furthest part of 1st and 3rd base = 60 feet
4. Pitcher's circle – is a circle (real or imaginary) with a radius of eight feet from the center of the pitching rubber
5. The umpire is the final arbiter of the distances

PLAYERS AND SUBSTITUTION

1. A team will play with a maximum of ten players in the field (six infielders and four outfielders).
 - a. A team should play defense with no more than three additional fielders than the short-handed team.
 - b. In any inning that one team is short-handed by three or more players than their opponent, the short-handed team will have an automatic out called after the last present person in their batting order completes their at bat.
 - i. There is no limit on how many times the automatic out rule can be called in an inning if a short-handed team bats around the order.
 - c. A ball hit to an open outfield position of a short-handed team (less than nine fielders) can be called a "ground rule" double or triple at the umpire's discretion.
 - d. The team that is *not* short-handed may at their discretion waive the automatic out rule while keeping in mind that this rule is more about balancing the at bats and playing time for both teams and less about balancing the teams' competitiveness.
 - e. Playing a game with fewer players is fun for the players. They will get more at bats and receive more fielding opportunities.
2. All outfielders must stand at least fifteen feet behind the base path until the ball is hit, which is typically where the outfield grass meets the infield dirt.
3. A player removed from the game may re-enter the game at any time, in any position.

BALANCED PLAYING TIME

1. Each player who is available for five innings must play at least two innings in the infield and three innings overall.
 - a. A player present for four innings must play at least one inning in the infield and two innings overall.
 - b. A player who is present for one or two innings must play at least one inning.
 - c. Coaches should attempt to achieve balanced playing time for each player during the first four innings and not rely on a five inning game.
2. All players in attendance must bat in order. Players who come late to the game (after the batting orders have been exchanged) must bat at the end of the order.

THE GAME

1. A regulation game consists of five innings. The home team bats last in each inning.
2. Games tied at the end of regulation will not go into extra innings.
3. No team shall be allowed to score more than **four** runs in any half-inning.
 - a. Once **four** runners cross home plate the ball is dead, all offensive players should stop running, and no additional defensive plays should be attempted.
 - b. All five innings will be played except, if after the 4th inning, a team is ahead by more than 10 runs and the *team who is behind* chooses to apply the “mercy rule” or if the time limit rule is applied.
4. A game will be considered an official game regardless of # of players in attendance and if at least one full inning is completed. The score will revert to the last full-inning played should the home team not complete their half of the inning and be behind in the score.
5. The home team takes the first base-side bench. The home team is responsible for supplying and positioning game bases, pitching rubber, new 11” RIF 10 game ball, and umpire’s equipment.
6. Coaches are responsible for keeping score and ensuring the opposing coach follows our player substitution rules.
7. A coach from each team must report the final score and # of innings pitched by each pitcher, to their commissioner within 24 hours.

TIMING OF THE GAME

1. All players and coaches are expected to arrive at least twenty minutes before the officially scheduled starting time.
2. All infield practice must be completed ten minutes prior to the officially scheduled game time. This will ensure the coaches have sufficient time to exchange batting orders and start the game on time.
3. Coaches should have their line-ups and batting orders planned before arriving to the field.
4. The game begins after a coach from each team meets together with the umpire at home plate, to review “field” rules and exchange batting orders. The batting order sheet must list the name, uniform number, and place in the batting order of each player present for the game.
 - a. The name, uniform number, and batting position of any late-arriving player must be forwarded to the opposing team’s coach before that player may enter the game.
5. Games should start on time and move along with as little delay as possible between half-innings.
 - a. Pitchers are limited to 5 warm-up pitches (with or without the catcher) between innings.
 - b. Catchers should be dressed and ready-to-go before the final out of the preceding half inning. If they are on base, it is requested that either a courtesy runner (last batter to make an out) be inserted for them as a base runner or a different catcher be considered for the coming inning.
 - c. Coaches will be prepared to announce the defensive positions immediately after the third out is called.
 - d. A parent of the defensive team is encouraged to back up their catcher, as necessary, to speed-up the play of the game. They should not interfere with a passed ball if a player may be stealing 3rd base.
6. Weekday games will begin at 5:45 p.m. *On or before May 15*, no new inning shall start after 7:15 PM; *after May 15*, no new inning shall start after 7:30 p.m.
7. Weekend games will begin at 3:00 p.m. and no new inning shall start after 4:40 p.m.
 - a. If another game is following on the same field, no new batter shall receive a pitch after 4:50 p.m. (no exceptions). The final score reverts to the last completed full inning.
8. The first scheduled game of the week cancelled due to rain will be rescheduled for the following Saturday at 3:00 p.m. Sunday is considered the first day of the week. If two games are cancelled in the week the coaches are responsible for rescheduling the second cancelled game with their grade commissioner.
9. Once a game begins (first pitch is thrown), only the umpire has the authority to stop the game due to darkness, rain or for any other reason.

BATTING

1. The original batting order is followed throughout the game regardless of substitutions made on the field.
2. No player shall throw the bat (intentionally or unintentionally) upon swinging at a ball. The first time a batter throws a bat that team will receive a *team warning*. The second and each subsequent time any batter on the offending team throws a bat, the batter will be ruled out and no runners may advance.
3. ASA defined strike zone is that space over home plate between the batter's armpits and knees when the batter assumes a normal stance in the batter's box. NGS softball umpires are instructed to enforce the ASA strike zone for adult-pitchers and expand the strike zone for player-pitchers, based on the pitcher's ability.
 - a. An expanded strike zone should consider the batter's ability to make contact with the pitch, either wider and/or higher than the ASA strike zone.
 - b. For example, a slow, loopy pitch could hit the plate and still be called a strike because the umpire determined it was a hittable pitch.
 - c. An expanded strike zone is used to reduce walks and encourage batters to swing at the expense of teaching the batter plate discipline.
4. A batter who is hit by a pitch outside the strike zone has the option of continuing her at bat or taking first base. If she elects to continue batting, the pitch will be counted as a hit batter and a ball in the ball and strike count.
5. Intentional walks are not allowed. If the umpire feels a pitcher is intentionally throwing a ball, they can call it a non-pitch.
6. Bunting is not allowed.

BASE RUNNING

1. Base runners can leave the base as the ball leaves the pitcher's hand. The first time a base runner leaves a base early her team will be given a team warning. Each successive early-lead infraction by that team will be ruled an out.
2. A play is considered dead and the *half-way rule* goes into effect when the player-pitcher or pitcher-helper has possession of the ball roughly within the pitcher circle. The adult-pitcher should *never* field a ball that is in play.
 - a. Halfway rule: base runners who are more than halfway to the next base may take that base; base runners who are less than halfway must return to the previous base.
 - b. A by-product of the dead ball rule is that a base runner cannot bait the pitcher into starting a "pickle" play.
3. Base runners may only advance one base on an overthrown ball that stays in foul territory. Otherwise base runners may advance at will (except on an overthrown ball during a stolen base attempt) until the pitcher has possession of the ball within the circle.
4. In order to prevent injury and protect a defensive player attempting to make a play, the runner will be called out (runner interference) if they *crash* into a defensive player holding the ball, preparing to apply a tag or positioning herself to catch a thrown or hit ball. To avoid interference, the runner can slide, jump over the top of the player, or run around the player without being called out (even if forced to go outside the base path). If the runner is called out for interference the ball becomes dead. In summary, it is the runner's responsibility to avoid crashing into a defensive player.
5. Base runners are entitled to advance to the next base if a fielder obstructs the base runner from advancing while in the base path (fielder interference), unless the fielder is in the process of fielding a batted ball or has possession of the ball and ready to tag the base runner (see runner interference).
6. The base runner is out if she intentionally interferes with a thrown ball.
7. The base runner is out when struck with a fair, untouched batted ball while not in contact with a base.
8. A ball thrown by a fielder that hits the base runner is a live ball.
9. A batted or thrown ball hitting the umpire is in play.
10. The infield fly rule is not in effect. Players advance at their own risk on any infield fly.
11. A batter is out if the catcher catches a foul ball, which goes over the batter's head or if she catches a third strike foul tip. The batter is out on a called third strike even if the catcher drops the ball.

BASE STEALING

1. Base runners can only steal second to third base and providing they start the steal before the ball reaches the catcher.
 - a. The goal is to increase the players' skills in base running, catching, and fielding; not to provide a base runner with a free base on a passed ball.
 - b. Coaches are encouraged to teach good, aggressive base running within this rule.
 - c. Umpires should assess the intent of the base runner before deciding to rule the base stealer out or send her back to second base without penalty.
2. Base runners cannot steal first to second or third to home under any circumstances.

PITCHING

1. Pitching is done by players. Balls and strikes are called. **No batter can receive a walk on balls.** When a player-pitcher delivers four called balls to any player, the following rule goes into effect:
 - a. The player-pitcher is replaced by an adult-pitcher from the hitting team for the remainder of that batter's at-bat.
 - b. The strike count will not change if the batter has zero or one strike at the time an adult-pitcher enters the game. The strike count will revert to one strike if the batter has two strikes at the time of the switch.
 - c. Strikes will continue to be called by the umpire and the batter can strike out. No additional balls will be called on that batter. This is not charged as a coach's visit to the mound.
 - d. The player-pitcher becomes the "pitcher's helper", positioned at least three feet behind the adult-pitcher while maintaining full visibility of the batter.
 - e. The adult-pitcher does not play defense. A batted or thrown ball hitting the adult-pitcher is live and cannot be fielded by the adult-pitcher.
 - f. The player-pitcher continues to pitch to each new batter until the batter receives four pitches called as a ball.
2. Any batter hit by the ball has two options:
 - a. Hit batters are encouraged to complete their at bat and follow the same rules as if they received four balls. The adult-pitcher enters the game, the strike count reverts to zero or one strike depending on the strike count when she was hit.
 - b. If, for any reason, the batter is uncomfortable completing her at bat, she may take first base.
3. A pitcher must be removed for the remainder of the inning upon hitting three batters in an inning or after the second visit to the mound by a coach. A pitcher may be reinserted in a subsequent inning.
4. Pitchers other than the designated pitcher (see below) may only pitch a maximum of three innings per game. If a pitcher delivers one pitch in an inning she shall be charged with one inning pitched.
5. Prior to the start of the game, each team can select one player as their designated pitcher. The designated pitcher is encouraged to relieve the player-pitcher, should the adult-pitcher be required to pitch to three or more players in that inning. This relief appearance will not count towards the maximum of three innings per game. There is no limit on the number of relief appearances by the designated pitcher.
6. Pitchers are limited to five warm-up pitches between innings. Relief pitchers are limited to eight warm-up pitches.
7. Partial or full windmill pitching is encouraged but not mandatory. ASA rules stipulate that both feet of the pitcher be in contact with the pitching rubber at the start of the pitching motion. The pitcher is not allowed to step backward off the pitching rubber at any point during the pitching motion and her throwing-side foot must stay in contact with the pitching rubber as she is releasing the ball.
 - a. We allow a beginner pitcher to place her glove-side foot behind the pitching rubber as long as she does not rock back and forth, and providing her throwing-side foot stays in contact with the rubber from the beginning of her motion until she starts to release the ball.
 - b. The intent of this rule is to ensure the pitcher's safety while not gaining a significant competitive advantage from an illegal pitch as defined by ASA.
8. Discussions about the legality of a pitcher's motion must be done discreetly within a coach/umpire conference. If, in the umpire's opinion, the pitcher is being distracted by the conversation, the umpire shall declare the pitching motion legal for the remainder of the game, and no further discussion will be entertained during the game.
9. A pitcher must demonstrate an ability to throw at least 50% of her pitches as strikes in practice, before being inserted into a game.

UMPIRE PROTOCOL

1. Once the game begins, the umpire is in complete control of the game.
2. The league-supplied umpires shall stand behind the catcher and must wear covered shoes/sneakers plus shin guards, chest protector, and umpire's mask supplied by the home team.
3. A coach may talk to an umpire only between half-innings and in the presence of the opposing team's coach. All coach/umpire conferences must take place behind home plate and with quiet voices. Regardless of the circumstances, coach/umpire conferences may only take place between half innings.
4. Umpires are not responsible for the violation of any special league rules such as pitching or playing time. If you believe the opposing team has violated any of our rules, you may call for a coach/umpire conference after the half inning or lodge a complaint to your grade commissioner after the game.
5. If an umpire does not arrive within 10 minutes of game time, the coaches must agree on a substitute umpire. If an agreement cannot be reached, the game will NOT be rescheduled. Please inform the umpire commissioner that your umpire was a no show.

SAFETY ISSUES

1. Teams are encouraged to play games in light to medium rain. Games must be suspended at the first sight of lightning and not resumed until 15 minutes have passed since the last sight of lightning.
2. Coaches are expected to remain on the bench or in the general vicinity of the bench during the game. All players not in the field, at bat, or on deck are expected to remain on the bench during the game. Only team players and a designated safety-adult are allowed on or near the players' bench.
3. Coaches are responsible for keeping the equipment, players, parents and other spectators behind an imaginary line drawn from the end of the backstop to the fence in front of the player's bench. This imaginary line extends beyond the distance of the left and right fielder.
4. Batters, on-deck batter, base runners, and player base-coaches must wear helmets and chinstraps at all times.
 - a. Batting helmets must have an attached face mask. Each team has received two of these helmets and can receive more on request.
5. Beginning in 2017, for safety during the games, the league is strongly recommending that girls playing in the position of pitcher, 1st, and 3rd base wear an infielder's face mask. Face masks are provided as team equipment although some girls may choose to supply their own.
6. Catchers must wear shin guards, chest protector and catcher's mask.
7. Only official, ASA sanctioned bats or league supplied bats engraved with NGS and a number may be used.
8. Sneakers or rubber cleats may be worn. Rubber cleats are recommended, as they are safer, especially in damp weather. Metal cleats are not allowed.
9. Players should wear NGS softball shirts, pants, and socks to the game.
10. No jewelry, including watches, rings, necklaces, or earrings (except small studs) may be worn during the game.
11. No juice breaks or snacks until the game is over. Water bottles on the bench are okay.
12. No dogs are allowed near the players' bench, even if on a leash. Dogs at the field must be leashed at all times.
13. No smoking or alcoholic beverages are allowed at the field.
14. Please pick up debris on the field and by the player's bench following the game.

ZERO TOLERANCE

1. The coaching staffs are ultimately responsible for the safety of all players and behavior of the parents of their team and their fans.
2. Taunting of players by anyone will not be tolerated.
3. Players, coaches and fans must treat the umpire with respect.
4. Protests of umpire's judgment calls (including balls and strikes), arguing, baiting, yelling "nice pitch" before the umpire calls the pitch, making a safe signal before the umpire calls safe/out, etc. are all considered heckling.
5. Umpires will report un-sportsmanlike heckling or conduct by players, coaches or spectators to the coach of the offending team. If a warning goes unheeded, the offender will be ejected from the field. If the heckling or conduct persists, the game may be suspended by the umpire, to be replayed in its entirety in the presence of league officials and without the offending person(s).