



Special Olympics Ohio

Softball Rules Manual (Rev. 08/2023)

All Special Olympics Ohio Softball games and tournaments are run according to the USA Softball rules. Any modifications to those rules shall be found in this manual.

OFFICIAL EVENTS

Teams must qualify for the State Tournament by winning their division in an approved Regional Qualifying Tournament, which are held prior to the State Tournament. Individual Skills athletes must qualify for State Individual Skills competition by participating in an approved Regional Qualifying Skills Competition.

Special Olympics Ohio provides a range of events to offer athletes of varying abilities the opportunity to compete. The following is a list of official events available in Special Olympics Ohio and the division criteria within those events.

- Individual Skills Competition
- Coach Pitch Team Competition
 - Division 1
- Traditional Slow Pitch Team Competition
 - Division 1
 - Division 2
 - Division 3
- Unified Sports Slow Pitch Team Competition
 - Division 1
 - Division 2



DIVISIONING

This information should be used as guide to coaches when determining at what level your team should compete.

Coach Pitch Team Division 1

Most if not ALL players have little understanding of rules or team play. Limited basic skills: hitting, running, fielding, and throwing

- Hitting – Majority of players struggle to make contact, ball is rarely hit beyond the infield.
- Running – Majority of players rely on verbal cues.
- Fielding - Majority of players struggle to field the ball and need verbal cues on where to make a play.
- Throwing - Majority of players need verbal cues as to where to throw the ball and demonstrate limited accuracy. Players don't have the basic skill to have accuracy and consistency to be the pitcher.

Traditional Slow Pitch Division 1

Most if not ALL players have full understanding of rules and team play.

- Hitting – Players hit the ball with force and makes great contact with the ball, may have the ability to place the ball when hitting and consistently hits it out of the infield
- Running – Doesn't need verbal cues when running the bases and understands the skill of sliding
- Fielding - Able to field balls without little to no errors
- Throwing - Doesn't need cues from coaches on where to throw the ball or where the play is, all throws or close to are accurate, walks are very limited and pitchers skill is very high

Traditional Slow Pitch Division 2

Good, basic understanding of rules and team concept. Consistent skills: hitting, running, fielding, and throwing

- Hitting – Consistently makes good contact with the ball and understands the strike zone, Demonstrates the ability to hit with more power
- Running – Can initiate base running consistently without verbal cues and understand the skill of sliding



- Fielding – Instinctively approaches a hit ball and CONSISTENTLY are able to field most balls on the ground and fly
- Throwing – Rely on few verbal cues as to where to throw the ball and demonstrate CONSISTENT accuracy. Pitcher has the ability to throw consistent strikes, limited number of walks

Traditional Slow Pitch Division 3

Players have useable, but some limited concept of rules and team play. Players have useable, but some limited skills: hitting, running, field, and throwing

- Hitting – More consistency with contacting the ball and will see some balls hit out of the infield. Limited knowledge of the strike zone with limited amount of power delivered through the bat.
- Running – Players rely on some verbal cues and have limited base running skills, should not have understanding on how and when to slide into a base
- Fielding – Players are able to field some ball and not have to wait for the ball to stop rolling before doing so. Some success in catching fly balls
- Throwing – Players rely on some verbal cues as to where to throw the ball and demonstrate accuracy at times. Pitcher has less accuracy then Level 2 at throwing strikes, walks are more common in this division

Unified Sports Slow Pitch Division 1

Players on this team fall into the Competitive Model of Unified Sports. Teammates (Athletes and Partners) have a high to basic understanding of the rules and team play. Players have high to consistent skills in hitting, running, fielding, and throwing. Majority of Athletes fall within Division 1 or 2 standards.

Unified Sports Slow Pitch Division 2

Players on this team fall into the Player Development Model of Unified Sports. Teammates (Athletes and Partners) have differing ability levels, and teammates who are of higher ability levels serve as mentors to assist teammates of lower abilities. Athletes and Partners could have useable, but some limited concept of rules and team play. Majority of Athletes fall within the Division 3 or Coach Pitch Division standards.



THE FIELD

The softball diamond shall have 65 feet baselines (19.81m) for male divisions and 60 feet baselines (18.29m) for female divisions. The pitching distance will be 50 feet (14.02m) for both males and females.

A 16 ft. diameter circle around the pitcher's rubber will be added to the infield for coach pitch competition.

The double base is approved for use at the first base. Half the base is secured in fair territory, and half the base (of a different solid contrasting color) is secured in foul territory.

- A batted ball hitting the fair portion is declared fair, and a batted ball hitting the foul portion only is declared foul.
- If a play is made at first base on any batted ball, and the batter-runner touches only the fair portion, and if the defense appeals prior to the batter-runner returning to first base, the batter-runner is out. Note: This is treated the same as missing the base.
- A defensive player must use only the fair portion of the base at all times.
- After the batter-runner passes first base, they may return to either portion of the double base and may stand on either portion for the beginning of subsequent plays. When tagging up on a fly ball, either portion of the base may be used.

Baserunner's (Second) Home Plate

- All competition should use the Baserunner's (second) home plate. The second home plate should be located in foul territory from the back tip of the regulation home plate.
 - The second home plate should be located in foul territory 2.43m (8 ft.) from the back tip of the regulation home plate extended from the third base foul line, still measuring 65 feet from third base to home plate. The Commitment Line should begin 6.09m (20 ft.) up the third base line from the tip of home plate and marked through the baserunner's line a minimum of .9m (3 ft.).
- Once a baserunner passes the commitment line defensive players can touch only the regulation home plate and baserunners can only touch the second home plate. Runners must touch the second home plate to be declared safe at home and score a run. All plays at home plate are force outs.
- A baserunner may not be tagged out after crossing the commitment line. They may be tagged before crossing the line.
- A baserunner who touches or crosses the regulation home plate shall be declared out (the ball remains live). Baserunners may only touch the second home plate for their run to count.



EQUIPMENT

- The catcher must wear a facemask, **helmet**, and chest protector.
- All batters and base runners must wear a tight-fitting batter's helmet. Chinstraps on batter's helmets are optional.
- A 30.5 cm. (12 inch) YELLOW, red stitched ball shall be used.
- Bats should be marked by the manufacturer in an easily visible way with a certification from USA Softball. A list of certified bats can be found at this link: <https://www.usasoftball.com/certified-equipment>
 - Bats shall not be modified in any way and should not rattle.
 - All bats and equipment are subject to umpire inspection prior to and during the game when necessary.
- No metal cleats are allowed in any division at any level of play.
- All players on a team should wear the same style and color shirts with numbers on the back for identification purposes. Numbers are not required on the front of the uniforms.
 - Teams **MUST** wear matching uniforms. T-shirts or jerseys **MUST** be of the same color with numbers on the back of the shirts. Members of the team may wear shorts, softball pants or sweats. All players do **NOT** have to wear the same kind of pant, but **MUST** be of the same color.
- All player pants shall be either all long or all short in style.
- Players may wear a uniform, solid colored undershirt. It is not mandatory that all players wear an undershirt but if one player wear one, those that are worn must be alike.
- Caps, visors, and headbands are optional for players but can be mixed. If more than one type is worn they all must be same color and each of the same type must be of the same color and style. Plastic or Hard visors are not allowed.
- Players will **NOT** be allowed to play in blue jean shorts or pants. Nor will they be allowed to wear hard soled shoes (unless for orthopedic purposes).
- No jewelry items, other than medical alert bracelets or necklaces may be worn. Medical alert bracelets and/or necklaces are not considered jewelry, but if worn, they must be taped to the body.

GENERAL TEAM RULES

At any SOOH Competition, for any team who is not ready to play at the game time, the competition director will contact the teams, if not present, and make a ruling on if a forfeit is necessary. The outcome of this ruling will not be allowed to have a protest submitted from an opposing team.

- A coin toss prior to the start of the game will determine the choice of home team. The team winning the toss may elect to bat first or take the field first.
- A regulation game shall consist of seven innings. The game will be considered complete if after four full innings of play one team leads the other by 20 runs, 15 runs after 5 innings or 10 runs after 6 innings. The game shall last no longer than 75 minutes for Regional or Local



Competition and 90 minutes for State Competition. No new inning will start after 90 minutes for State Tournament.

- Tie Breaker: Starting with the top of the eighth inning or after the time limit has expired, 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. The player who is running can be substituted in accordance with the substitution rules.
- **There is NO sliding into home plate. If this occurs, the athlete will be called as out.**
- A roster shall include a maximum of 16 athletes.
- Roster are not allowed to change from the regional tournament to the state tournament.
- A line up must be provided to the home plate umpire at least 10 minutes prior to game time.
- All substitutes should be listed on the line up as a substitute.
- The following 9 positions must be filled to start a game:
 - Pitcher
 - Catcher
 - First Baseman
 - Second Baseman
 - Third Baseman
 - Short Stop
 - Three Outfielders (left field, center field, right field)
- If a team starts the game with 10 players, the additional defensive position will be a fourth outfielder.
 - The outfielders would be in positions: Left field, left center, right center, right field
- Anyone playing as an outfielder, whether you have 3 or 4 outfielders, must remain 3 meters behind the infield at the start of each play.
 - After each play has begun, these positions may shift to make a play, but must return to the outfield at the end of the play.
- If a team utilizes an Extra Player (EP), the 11th player is an extra batter.
- Short-Hand Rule: A game may begin or end with 1 less player than the required number. For traditional and unified divisions playing short hand, this number would be 9. For coach pitch divisions playing short hand, this number would be 8, as the pitching coach does not count toward the player count.
- A team may utilize the optional extra player (EP) in its line-up. If a team begins the game with 11, the EP, then they may finish the game with 10. As always, you must report these changes to the Official Scorebook keeper.
- If a team begins a game with only 9 players, the vacant position must be listed last on the line-up card. An out will be taken in the vacant position each time the “missing player” comes up to bat.
- At no time may a traditional or unified team play with only 8 players (meaning 2 fewer than normal). This is true even if a player becomes incapacitated and cannot continue. The team



will have to forfeit. Coach pitch may play with 8 players as part of the short hand rule above.

- All Divisions have a limit of 2 over-the-fence home runs per team, per game.
 - Both athlete and partner over-the-fence home runs count toward the team limit.
 - In the event a third over-the-fence home run is hit, the batter is automatically called out.
 - Home runs that occur by the ball not being hit over-the-fence, do not count toward the limit.

COACH PITCH GENERAL RULES

Coach Pitch division has been created to replace the traditional division 4. The only difference between Coach Pitch and Division 4 is the use of a Coach Pitcher.

Due to safety considerations, Teams who are entered in the coach pitch division but do not have the appropriate skills will be moved to their proper traditional division.

- The coach-pitcher will pitch only to players on his/her team. A Special Olympics athlete should be in the defensive pitcher position with the 16-ft diameter circle.
 - The coach-pitcher will not be able to coach base runners.
 - From the pitcher's position on the field, he/she will NOT be allowed to instruct the batter where to stand in the batter's box.
 - The Coach-Pitcher will NOT be allowed visits to home plate to place batters.
 - The Coach-Pitcher must obey the arc and distance rules as described in the Special Olympics International rule book.
 - Once the ball is hit or there is a play in progress, the Coach Pitcher may NOT have any more verbal contact with the player.
 - Coach-pitchers must wear the same color shirt or jersey as athletes. They may not wear blue jean shorts or pants. Flip Flops and sandals are not permitted.
 - The Coach-Pitcher can NOT walk a batter. A batter will be entitled to three swinging strikes (3rd swinging strike would be an out) or 6 pitches and two foul balls in the same at bat before being called out on a strike out.
 - If on the 6th pitch, the batter hits their first foul ball, they will be given another pitch. If they hit an additional foul ball then the batter will be considered out.
 - i. Coach-Pitchers will not be required to pitch from the pitching rubber. However, Coach-Pitchers must be within the dimensions of the pitching circle when pitching the ball.

NOTE: The Coach-Pitcher position was added to assist the lower level teams become more successful at the offensive end of the game. The philosophy is that the Coach-Pitcher is someone who will work with the players offensively at practices and therefore will know the particulars for each batter. The Coach-Pitcher should be a coach familiar with the team and the players familiar with his/her pitching. The Coach-Pitcher is required to be a member of the Official Roster of the team that he/she is pitching for. The individual must be at least 16 years of age and an approved Special Olympics Volunteer.



- Clarification of the Coach-Pitcher Rule:
 - If a hit ball hits, touches or is caught by the coach-pitcher, the play is ruled dead. This means that:
 - The batter will return to the plate to continue the at-bat. The pitch count will remain the same as it was before the pitch that hit the coach-pitcher.
 - All base runners will return to the last base occupied.

UNIFIED TEAM RULES

An overall roster shall contain proportionate numbers of athletes and partners.

- A unified softball team consists of 5 Special Olympics athletes and 5 partners (6 athletes and 6 partners if the EP is used). However, a team can only have a maximum of 5 athletes and/or 5 partners in the lineup. Failure to adhere to required team composition during competition results in a forfeit.
 - May play with a minimum of 4 athletes and 4 partners.
- The batting order shall be an alternation of athletes and partners.
- During competition, the position requirements are as follows: two athletes and two partners in both the infield and outfield, and one athlete as pitcher or catcher.
- When a “Replacement Player” is used, the player must be of the same designation (athlete/partner) as the injured and bleeding player
- The coach may not be on the team roster. The non-playing coach must sign and submit the lineup. The coach must be on the bench or in the coaching box during the game. The coach is the only team representative that can address the umpire or scorer.

INDIVIDUAL SKILLS COMPETITION

- The Individual Skills Competition is composed of four events: Base Running, Throwing, Fielding and Hitting.
- The athlete’s final score is determined by adding together the scores achieved in each of these four events.
- Athletes will be pre-divisioned according to their total scores from these four events

Base Running

- Equipment: Three bases, home plate, stopwatch. Purpose: To measure the athlete’s base-running ability.
- Description: Bases are set up like a baseball diamond and positioned 19.81 meters (65 feet) apart. The athlete is instructed to start on home plate, and run around the bases as fast as possible, touching each base in route.
- Scoring: The time starts when the athlete leaves home plate and stops when the athlete returns to home plate after circling the bases. The time elapsed in seconds is subtracted from 60 to determine the point score. A penalty of five seconds for each base missed or touched in improper order shall be assessed. The best score of two trials is recorded.



Throwing

- Equipment: Regulation field, two measuring tapes, softballs, two small cones or marking stakes
Purpose: To measure the athlete's ability in throwing for distance and accuracy.
- Description: The player being tested stands behind the restraining line, back far enough to take one or more steps in preparation for throwing. The player has two trials to throw the softball as far and as straight as possible down the throwing line, without stepping over the restraining line. Coaches, assistants or other waiting players should be positioned in the field to indicate, using a cone or marking stake, the spot where each ball first touches the ground. The better of the two throws is measured and recorded as the player's score. If a player steps on or over the line before releasing the ball, the trial must be repeated. There will be a maximum of two repeats.
- Scoring: The net throwing score equals the throwing distance, measured at a point on the throwing line straight across from (perpendicular to) the spot where the ball landed, minus the error distance, the number of meters the ball landed off target, away from the throwing line. The player's score is the better of the two throws. Both error scores and distance are measured to the nearest meter; for example, if a ball lands even with (perpendicular to) the 50-meter point on the measuring tape, but is 6 meters off to one side, the player's score is 44 points (Distance thrown [50] minus number of meters off target [6] results in a net score of 44 meters). Athletes score one point per meter; for example, 44 meters equals 44 points. If the score falls between meters, the score should be rounded down; for example, 44.73 equals 44 points

Fielding

- Equipment: 30.5-centimeter (12-inch) softballs, measuring tape, chalk/line, cones. Purpose: To measure athlete's fielding ability.
- Description: The athlete will stand between and behind the two cones. The official must throw the ball on the ground to the athlete, between the cones. The throw to the athlete must hit the ground before the 6.10- meter (20-inch) chalk mark. The athlete may move aggressively toward the ball. If the thrown ball is outside of the cones, the throw must be repeated. Each athlete gets five fielding attempts per trial. Each athlete receives two trials.
- Scoring: The athlete receives five points for a clearly fielded ball (either caught in glove or trapped against the body, but off the ground); two points for a ball that is blocked; zero points for a missed attempt, for a maximum score of 50

Hitting

- Equipment: Batting tee, 30.5-centimeter (12-inch) red-stitch restricted-flight softballs, bat, measuring tape and chalk.
- Description: Standing in a regulation-size batter's box (i.e., 2.31 meters [7 feet, 7 inches] by 99 centimeters [3 feet, 3 inches]), the athlete is instructed to hit the ball off the tee. The athlete receives three attempts.



- Scoring: The distance of the longest hit shall determine the athlete's final score. The distance of a hit is measured from the batting tee to the point where the ball first touches the ground. The distance is measured to the nearest meter; for example, one-meter equals one point; 46 meters equals 46 points. If the score falls between meters, scores should be rounded down; for example, 46.73 equals 46 points. A player's final score is determined by adding together the scores achieved in each of the four events which comprise the Individual Skills Competition.