Special Olympics Ohio

Softball Rules Manual (Rev. 10/2026)

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.

All Special Olympics Ohio regional and state level competitions will enforce the participation regulations for athletes and Unified partners, of which is derived from Article 1 of the Special Olympics Sport Rules. This rule shall be that each team and/or individual athlete or Unified partner, must play all eligible and rostered team members in every game unless a player is injured or has been removed due to disciplinary reasons. Coaches must notify the competition management prior to each game if players on the approved tournament roster will not be playing due to injury or disciplinary reasons, and this needs to be approved by the tournament director. Failure to play all eligible team members in each game will result in forfeit and disqualification.

New SOOH Rules Manual Changes Below:

- Starting in 2026, there will be a reduction in the number of fielding skill trials/attempts from 10 to 5 for a possible max score of 25 for that skill.
- Added the format of State Competition to the rules manual based on the number of teams in a division.
- Rosters will have a minimum of 9 and a maximum of 16 athletes for both traditional and Unified divisions.
- Unified will only have 1 division, instead of 2.
- Additional clarification has been added to what a coach pitch team should look like:
    - Should you intend to have a coach pitch team due to the lack of any athletes not having the ability to occupy the position of a pitcher, you should make every effort to coach up an athlete and be a traditional division 3 team. Coach Pitch is intended as a step above individual skills, and not intended for athletes with higher ability and understanding of the game. Failure to recognize and adhere to this may result in your team being nominated for review by the state games committee for proper divisioning.
- Once the game has begun, the batting order may not change, however the defensive positions of the players may change.
- Anyone playing as an outfielder, whether you have 3 or 4 outfielders, must remain a minimum of 3 meters behind the infield at the start of each play.
    - After the batter makes contact with the ball, these positions may shift to make a play, but must return to the outfield at the end of the play, prior to the next batter.
- If a team utilizes an Extra Player (EP), the 11th player is an extra batter and must remain in that position for the entire game. When using the extra player, the 10 defensive positions can change, however the batting order must remain the same for the entire game.

- Short-Hand Rule: A game may begin or end with 1 less player than the required number. For all divisions, including coach pitch and unified divisions, this number would be 9. The vacant 10th position in the batting order should be listed last on the lineup card, and when that position comes up in the batting order, an automatic out will be taken. This automatic out can end an inning or a game.
- Intentional Walks
    - A team may choose to try and intentionally walk a batter. This includes when the intentional walk would result in the application of the automatic out taken due to playing short-handed. However, should a team decide to do this, pitches must still be thrown, with the plate umpire still calling the pitches, still allowing the batting athlete/partner the opportunity to have their at bat.
- At no time may any team play with only 8 players (meaning 2 fewer than normal). This is true even if a player becomes injured or incapacitated and cannot continue. The team will have to forfeit.
- Both traditional and unified divisions will start each at bat with a count of 0 balls and 0 strikes.
- If at least one of the batter's feet is completely outside the lines of the batter's box and touching the ground or any part of their foot is touching home plate when the ball is hit, either fair or foul, the batter receives an automatic out.
- Coach Pitch - Pitch Count Rule Change:
    - Each batter will receive up to 5 pitches*. Three missed swings at any time during the 5 pitches, or no swing on the fifth pitch, will result in an out.
        - Foul balls do not count as missed swings, but do count towards the pitch count.
        - *If the batter fouls the ball on the 5th pitch, the batter will be granted another pitch. Should the batter foul the extra 6th pitch, the batter will be out.
        - The Coach-Pitcher may not instruct the active batter to swing on the 5th pitch during their at bat. If this occurs, the batter will be out.
- The Coach-Pitcher is required to be a member of the Official Roster of the team that he/she is pitching for, however does not count toward the maximum roster limit. The coach-pitcher must be at the chaperone level of certification.
- A unified softball team consists of 5 Special Olympics athletes and 5 partners (6 athletes and 6 partners if the EP is used).
- The batting order shall be an alternation of athletes and partners, and shall not change once the game has begun.
    - If due to injury or illness, and the game is able to continue with the legal number of athletes and partners on a team, the result is that an automatic out will occur when either 2 unified partners or two athletes bat back-to-back.
- During competition, the position requirements are as follows: two athletes and two partners in both the infield and outfield, and one athlete and one partner as pitcher or catcher.
- If a unified team plays shorthanded with either three in the infield or outfield, at least two of the three must be athletes and at least one of the three must be a partner

OFFICIAL EVENTS

Athletes must be in a training program for at least 8 weeks prior to the Regional Competition.

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

Format at State Competition

- 4-Team Division
    - Traditional 4 team bracket with each team receiving 2 games.
- 3-Team Division
    - Round Robin, with each team receiving 2 games. Tie breaker will be the least points allowed total across both games.
- 2-Team Division
    - Best of 3 Games

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.

Should you intend to have a coach pitch team due to the lack of any athletes not having the ability to occupy the position of a pitcher, you should make every effort to coach up an athlete and be a traditional division 3 team. Coach Pitch is intended as a step above individual skills, and not intended for athletes with higher ability and understanding of the game. Failure to recognize and adhere to this may result in your team being nominated for review by the state games committee for proper divisioning.

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.

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.
- Once the game has begun, the batting order may not change, however the defensive positions of the players may change.
- 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 a minimum of 3 meters behind the infield at the start of each play.
    - After the batter makes contact with the ball, these positions may shift to make a play, but must return to the outfield at the end of the play, prior to the next batter.
- If a team utilizes an Extra Player (EP), the 11th player is an extra batter and must remain in that position for the entire game. When using the extra player, the 10 defensive positions can change, however the batting order must remain the same for the entire game.
- Short-Hand Rule: A game may begin or end with 1 less player than the required number. For all divisions, including coach pitch and unified divisions, this number would be 9. The vacant 10th position in the batting order should be listed last on the line up card, and when that position comes up in the batting order, an automatic out will be taken. This automatic out can end an inning or a game.
- Intentional Walks
    - A team may choose to try and intentionally walk a batter. This includes when the intentional walk would result in the application of the automatic out taken due to playing short-handed. However, should a team decide to do this, pitches must still be thrown, with the plate umpire still calling the pitches, still allowing the batting athlete/partner the opportunity to have their at bat.
- 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 any team play with only 8 players (meaning 2 fewer than normal). This is true even if a player becomes injured or incapacitated and cannot continue. The team will have to forfeit.
- 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.

- Both traditional and unified divisions will start each at bat with a count of 0 balls and 0 strikes.
- If at least one of the batter's feet is completely outside the lines of the batter's box and touching the ground or any part of their foot is touching home plate when the ball is hit, either fair or foul, the batter receives an automatic out.

COACH PITCH GENERAL RULES

- 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 play will be considered "dead" when an effort to return the ball to the athlete in the position of the pitcher is made, and the athlete is within 1 meter of the circle. Final determination is made at the discretion on the umpires.
  - Each batter will receive up to 5 pitches*. Three missed swings at any time during the 5 pitches, or no swing on the fifth pitch, will result in an out.
    - Foul balls do not count as missed swings, but do count towards the pitch count.
    - *If the batter fouls the ball on the 5th pitch, the batter will be granted another pitch. Should the batter foul the extra 6th pitch, the batter will be out.
    - The Coach-Pitcher may not instruct the active batter to swing on the 5th pitch during their at bat. If this occurs, the batter will be out.
  - The Coach-Pitcher can NOT walk a batter
  - 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, however does not count toward the maximum roster limit. The coach-pitcher must be at the chaperone level of certification.

    - 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

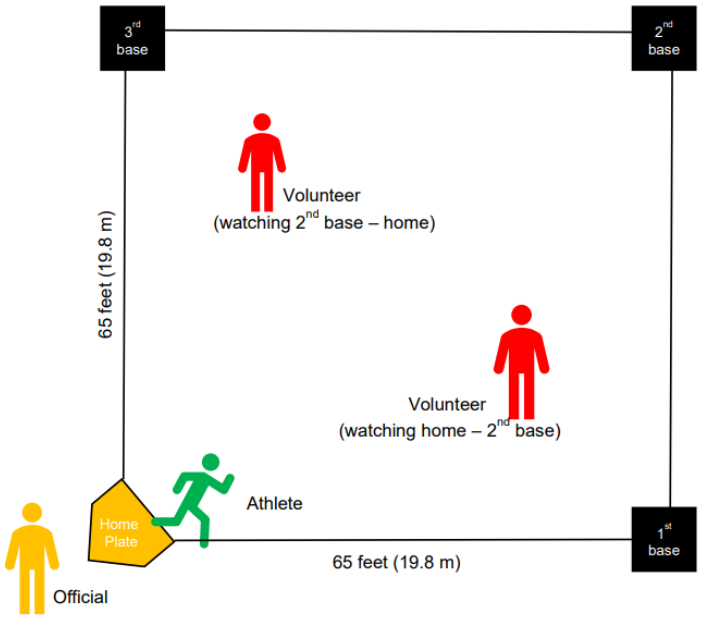
An overall roster shall contain proportionate numbers of athletes and partners.

- The batting order shall be an alternation of athletes and partners, and shall not change once the game has begun.
    - If due to injury or illness, and the game is able to continue with the legal number of athletes and partners on a team, the result is that an automatic out will occur when either 2 unified partners or two athletes bat back-to-back.
- During competition, the position requirements are as follows: two athletes and two partners in both the infield and outfield, and one athlete and one partner as pitcher or catcher.
- When a "Replacement Player" is used, the player must be of the same designation (athlete/partner) as the injured player
- If a unified team plays shorthanded with either three in the infield or outfield, at least two of the three must be athletes and at least one of the three must be a partner
- 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

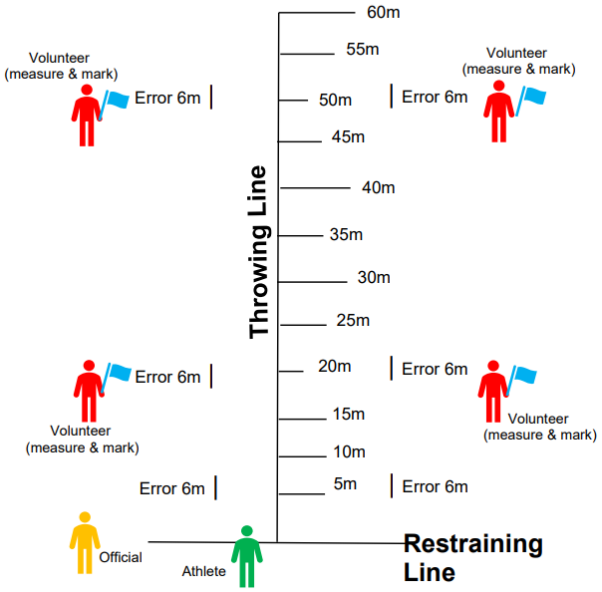
Base Running



- 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. There should be no guide runner unless given permission or accommodation in advance from games director. Athletes should complete the skill independently.
- Wheelchair
    - Unassisted either by motorized or non-motorized propulsion
    - If unable to propel themselves, they may compete in base running, but will receive a score of zero for this skill.

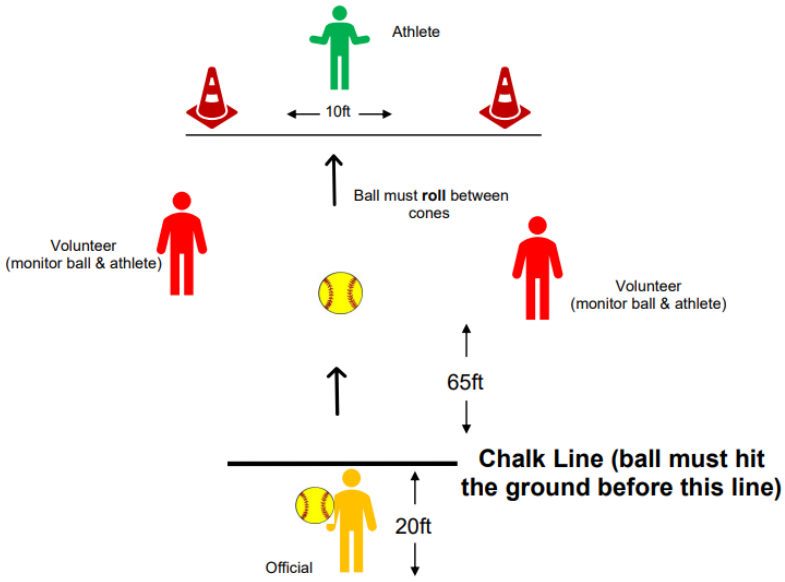
Scoring: The time starts when the athlete leaves home plate and stops when the athlete returns to home plate after circling the bases. The time elapsed in seconds is subtracted from 60 to determine the point score. Any amount of time over 60 seconds will result in a score of 0 points for this skill. Negative points will not be given. A penalty of five seconds for each base missed or touched in improper order shall be assessed. Bases must be completed consecutive order to be scored for that skill. Failure to do so will result in a score of 0 for this skill. Both trials should be recorded and the best time will be scored using the above formula.

Throwing



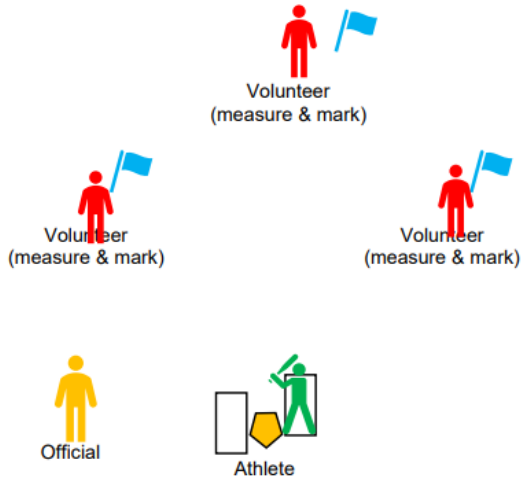
- Equipment: Regulation field, two measuring tapes, softballs, two small cones or marking stakes
  Purpose: To measure the athlete's ability in throwing for distance and accuracy.
- Description: The player being tested stands behind the restraining line, back far enough to take one or more steps in preparation for throwing. The player has two consecutive 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. However, each attempt should be recorded. 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, which are spaced 10ft apart. 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-feet) 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 consecutive fielding attempts for this skill.
- Scoring: The athlete receives five points for a clearly fielded ball (either caught in glove or trapped against the body, or a ground ball controlled in the glove); two points for a ball that is blocked but not controlled in the glove; zero points for a missed attempt, for a maximum score of 25. All tries should be recorded.

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 consecutive attempts.
- Scoring: The distance of the longest hit shall determine the athlete's final score. However, each attempt should be recorded. 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. All practice swings must be made outside of the batter's box. Any swing that is executed while the athlete is in the batter's box will count as an attempt, regardless if contact is or is not made with the ball. If no contact is made with the ball, that swing attempt will be recorded as a 0. Additionally, if the athlete hits a foul ball either behind the tee or outside of the foul lines, a score of 0 should be recorded for that attempt.
- A player's final score for softball skills is determined by adding together the scores achieved in each of the four events which comprise the Individual Skills Competition.