



2026 Rules – HARD Senior Softball

I. GENERAL RULES

1. The current edition of the SSUSA Rulebook will be used, except as supplemented or changed by the following rules. All rules apply to all leagues, unless otherwise stated.
2. Not all of the following rules are special rules for our leagues. Some are included because of frequent confusion about those rules.
3. Team managers are responsible for the conduct of their teams' players.
4. Only the team manager, assistant manager, or a designated manager in their absences may discuss disputed calls with the umpires. Any player who persists in complaining about an umpire's decision after one warning from his manager or an umpire shall be referred to the Discipline Committee.
5. Team members who are not playing defense, batting, running bases, coaching, on deck, or umpiring, must remain either in the dugout or behind the fences bordering the infield.
6. All games shall start at 9:30 AM. Forfeit time will be 9:40 AM.
7. Managers will meet before the game, to exchange lineup cards and to identify late arriving and early departing players. They may also discuss special ground rules based on field conditions. Managers may agree to modify rules, due to special circumstances.

II. TEAMS

1. Number of Defensive Players

- a. A maximum of 11 defensive players are allowed, including a Rover. Managers in the 70+ League may agree to allow more defensive players.
2. **10 Players:** If a team has only 10 players, the other team will provide a catcher, who could play right field instead, at the discretion of the defensive team's manager.
 - a. A catcher or right fielder supplied by the other team is expected to make a normal effort to play defense, and the outs will count.

3. **9 Players:** A team with 9 players will have 4 outfielders, 4 infielders, and a pitcher. The other team will supply a catcher, who could play right field instead, at the discretion of the defensive team's manager.
4. **8 Players:** A team with 8 players will have 3 or 4 outfielders and 3 or 4 infielders, manager's choice, and a pitcher. The other team will supply a catcher, who could play right field instead, at the discretion of the defensive team's manager.
5. **7 Players:** In the 50+ League, a forfeit will not be automatic if a team has only 7 players. A game can be played under the following conditions.
 - a. Cones will be placed in a straight line with home plate, half-way between 1st and 2nd base.
 - Balls hit by right-handed batters that land to the right of the line marked by those cones will be foul balls.
 - b. If either team has one or more left-handed batters, cones will be placed in a straight line with home plate, half-way between 2nd and 3rd base, for those batters.
 - Balls hit by left-handed batters that land to the left of the line marked by those cones will be foul balls.
 - c. A team with 7 players will have 3 infielders (including a 1st baseman, 2 outfielders, a pitcher, and a Rover. The other team will provide a catcher.
 - d. The other team can have a maximum of 10 fielders, with 3 or 4 infielders (including a 1st baseman), 3 or 4 outfielders, a pitcher, catcher, and a Rover. If this team has only 7 or 8 players, the other team will provide a catcher.
 - e. Under these special rules, both teams are allowed to have a Rover, regardless of the number of players.
6. **6 Players or Less:** A forfeit will occur if one or both teams have 6 or fewer players present at game time. If only one team has 6 or less, that team will be charged with a loss, and the opposing team will be given a win. If both teams have 6 or less, each team will be given a ½ win and a ½ loss. The game will be counted the same as a tie game.
7. **Late Arriving Players:** If a player shows up late and is not ready to bat when he or she is due to bat for the first time in the game, then that player will be moved to the last spot in the batting order.
8. **Player Qualifications:** Leagues require that men reach the minimum age for that league (50 or 70) in the calendar year for that season, January 1 through December 31. Women must reach a 40-year-old minimum age in the calendar year for that season, to qualify for any league. Age exemptions for younger players may be granted by request, at the discretion of the league commissioners. There are no maximum age limits for any of the leagues, and people are allowed to play in more than one league.

III. THE FIELD

1. **Length of Base Paths:** Because it is necessary to accept the existing specifications for the fields allocated to our leagues, both 65 and 70-foot base paths are approved.
2. **Point of No Return Line:** A “point of no return” line shall be placed 20 feet from home plate, perpendicular to the line between home plate and 3rd base, in foul territory.
3. **Scoring Line:** A scoring line shall be placed in foul territory, starting 4 feet away from the front left corner of home plate or next to the large green mat, even with the front edge of home plate, perpendicular to the 3rd base foul line.
4. **Base “Safe” Lines**
 - a. A “safe” line shall be placed, beginning 3 feet outside the right front corner of 1st base, even with the front edge of the base (closest to home plate), extending 3 feet into foul territory, perpendicular to the 1st base (right field) foul line.
 - b. Safe lines shall also be placed at 2nd and 3rd bases. These lines shall be on both the left and right sides of 2nd and 3rd bases, beginning 3 feet from the side of the base and extending another 3 feet from the base, even with the front edge (closest to the approaching base runner) of each base. The safe lines for 2nd base will be perpendicular to the baseline between 1st and 2nd bases, and the safe lines for 3rd base will be parallel to the 3rd base (left field) foul line.
5. **Restraining Line:** Cones will be placed in an arc, approximately 150 feet from home plate. The corner cones shall be placed on the foul lines, even with the painted marks on the fences.
 - a. Outfielders must stay behind the restraining line arc, until the ball is hit.

IV. PITCHING REGULATIONS

1. **Strike Zone Mat:** A strike mat will be used in lieu of home plate. The currently approved mat measures 19 inches wide by 34 ½ inches long. A pitched ball striking any part of the mat is a strike, as long as it is within the required range of arc.
2. **Arc of Pitch:** The arc of a pitched ball must attain a maximum height of between 6 feet and 12 feet from the ground. Umpires must call an illegal pitch before it lands, if in their judgment, the pitch is not within the required range of arc.
 - a. An illegal pitch is a ball, if the batter does not swing at it. However, if the batter swings at an illegal pitch, the result will be the same as if the pitch had not been called illegal (a swing and miss, a foul ball, or the ball put into play).
3. **Pitching Rubber Distance:** The pitching rubber shall be 50 feet from home plate.
4. **Pitching Screen Placement:** The screen must be placed 6 feet in front of the pitching rubber, parallel to the rubber, with one side of the screen touching the (visual) line from the midpoint of the rubber to the midpoint of the strike mat.

- a. The pitcher's front foot must be behind the screen when the ball is released. Otherwise, the pitch is an illegal pitch and will be called a ball.
- b. The pitcher's box is an area the width of the rubber and extending 10 feet behind the rubber. Both of the pitcher's feet must be in the pitcher's box when the pitcher starts the delivery.

V. THE GAME

1. **Balls and Bats:** The Amateur Softball Association (ASA) approved 12-inch, 375 COMP .44 COR poly-core center ball (optic yellow preferred) will be used in the 50+ League. A 12-inch, 300 COMP .52 COR restricted flight ball will be used in the 70+ League. Women may choose to hit an 11-inch, 375 COMP .44 COR ball, instead, in any of the Leagues. The home team will provide the balls. Any softball bat rated at 1.21 BPF or lower, SSUSA approved, or having an ASA stamp, is acceptable.
2. **Warm-Up Pitches:** In the first inning, each pitcher may have 6 warm-up pitches. Each relief pitcher may also start with 6 warm-up pitches. In subsequent innings, not more than one minute will be used for the pitcher to deliver not more than 3 warm-up pitches. **The umpire has the authority to keep the game moving by preventing excessive delays.**
 - a. Fielders must finish throwing the ball around when the pitcher finishes the warm-up pitches.
3. **Innings:** All games will normally be 9 innings. If the game is tied after 9 innings, extra innings will be played, unless one team concedes defeat or the managers agree to a tie.
 - a. In innings 1 through 8, each team can score a maximum of 5 runs, before 3 outs are recorded.
 - b. The 9th inning in all leagues is an open inning, with no scoring limit, until 3 outs are recorded or a win is obtained.
 - c. Extra innings are open innings, with no scoring limit.
 - d. In all leagues, the "Flip Flop" rule will be in effect if the home team is trailing by 10 or more runs after the 8th inning. The home team will bat first in the 9th inning. The visiting team will bat second, if the home team ties the score or leads after batting.
 - e. In the 70+ League, each team will bat for 2 consecutive innings (6 outs) before switching from offense to defense, in innings 1 through 8. Bases are to be cleared after 3 outs or 5 runs are obtained, before starting the next inning.
4. **Balls and Strikes:** A 4-ball, 3-strike count will be used, starting with a 0-0 count. A batter who hits a foul ball with 2 strikes is not out. After being walked once in a game, any player will have the option of refusing a subsequent walk in that game, until striking out, fouling out, or putting the ball in play.

5. **Positioning of Infielders:** In deference to weaker hitters, no defensive player, except the pitcher, may play in front of the base lines between 1st and 2nd bases or between 2nd and 3rd bases, until the ball is hit. If this rule is violated, the batter and all runners will be called safe.
 - a. All 4 infielders must have both feet entirely on the infield dirt, until the ball is hit. If there are hazardous conditions in the infield, the managers may agree to make exceptions to this rule, before the game begins.
6. The batter or courtesy runner, while running to first base, cannot be thrown out by any of the outfielders after the ball touches the grass. A minimum of a single is assured.
 - a. No ball thrown by an outfielder to an infielder can result in a batter or courtesy runner being called out while running to 1st base. However, if the batter (in the judgement of the umpire) attempts to advance to 2nd base and gets tagged out while attempting to return to 1st base, the batter will be out.
7. **The “Rover”:** As long as a team has 4 infielders on the dirt infield and 4 outfielders (beyond the cones, approximately 150 feet from home plate), the Rover can play in either the infield or the outfield (in front of or behind the cones). The Rover is allowed to throw out the batter or courtesy runner at 1st base. The throw cannot be relayed; it must go directly to 1st base.
 - a. Any fielder may be designated as the Rover and can set up and play either on the infield dirt or the outfield grass, as long as there are still 4 outfielders behind the cones and 4 infielders on the dirt.
8. **Protests:** Protests will be resolved using HARD Senior Softball rules, in conjunction with SSUSA rules. A protest must be declared by a manager before the next pitch. In the event of a protest, the two managers will confer with the umpire, but only with a paid umpire (not an umpire supplied by one of the teams), to resolve the issue. If there is no resolution, a league commissioner will decide the outcome of the protest, before the game proceeds. If no league commissioner is present at the time, the protest will be declined, and the game will proceed.

VI. BATTING

1. **Bunting/Chopping:** The batter will be called out for deliberately (in the judgement of the umpire) bunting or chopping the ball downward, in either fair or foul territory.
2. **Foul Balls:** After a batter has 2 strikes and then hits 2 foul balls, the batter is out. Any foul ball, regardless of height, is an out if it is caught by the catcher, unless the ball hits a screen first.
3. **Batter’s Box:** Some part of both of the batter’s feet must be in the batter’s box when the ball is pitched and hit. The batter is out if he or she touches the strike mat while swinging, before making contact with the ball.
4. **Pitching Screen:** A batted ball hitting the pitching screen is a foul ball, if the ball is not touched first by a defensive player. A batter hitting the ball into the screen 3 times

in one at-bat will be out. A batter hitting the ball into the screen with 2 ½ strikes (2 strikes of any kind followed by a foul ball) will also be out (as with any other foul ball with 2 ½ strikes).

- a. After a batted ball has been put into play, a throw that hits the pitching screen or screen frame will be in play.

VII. BASE RUNNING and AVOIDING COLLISIONS

1. First Base: A runner from home plate must not touch the white base (the inner base of a double base) when there is a possible play at 1st base. The runner can either touch the orange base (the outer base of a double base) or run to the outside of the orange base.

- a. The runner may run around the outside of 1st base and does not have to touch 1st base, to advance toward 2nd base. The runner may also touch the white base, if there is no throw going to 1st base, the 1st baseman is standing clear, and there is a possibility of advancing to 2nd base.
- b. The 1st baseman must touch the white base or tag the runner to record an out.
- c. Runners are encouraged to run across the safe line when a throw is expected to go to the 1st baseman, in case the 1st baseman backs into foul territory to catch the throw.

2. Second and Third Bases, Avoiding a Collision

- a. When there is a play expected at 2nd base or 3rd base, the runner must run across the safe line, on the side of the base opposite from where the expected throw is coming from.
 - If the throw is off-line and pulls the baseman toward the side of the base the runner is correctly running to, the umpire should consider this a legal running situation, even if there is contact with a fielder.
 - If a runner sees that contact is going to occur and runs out of his way or slows down to avoid it, the umpire may call the runner safe even if the ball beats the runner to the base, if in the umpire's judgment, the runner would have been safe if he hadn't changed his path or slowed down to avoid contact caused by an inaccurate throw.
- b. A base runner must touch 2nd base before attempting to advance to 3rd base, and must touch 3rd base before attempting to score. If the runner runs wide (on the outside or inside) of 2nd or 3rd base, the runner must go back and touch the base before advancing to the next base.
 - If a runner doesn't touch 2nd or 3rd base and advances to the next base, an umpire who sees the mistake will not automatically call the runner out. This is an appeal play, with the appeal to be requested by a defensive player.
- c. The base runner will be called out for colliding with a defensive player who is on the base while attempting to make a putout, unless the runner had to step on 2nd or 3rd base to avoid contact with a fielder who moved into the path he or

she was taking to comply with the rule stated above in 2.a. (umpire's judgement, regarding running to the side opposite from the throw).

3. All Bases

- a. The runner's foot must be down on the base or on the ground, on or beyond the safe line, for the runner to be ruled safe.
 - b. The runner may overrun any base as needed to avoid injury.
 - c. When a runner is attempting to advance an extra base, to either 2nd base or 3rd base, it will be treated as a force out, in that the fielder does not need to tag the runner. The purpose of this rule is to avoid collisions. However, if the runner stops before the base or safe line, it becomes a tag play, because the runner has created a rundown situation.
 - d. The hitter and the runner, or two runners, will be called out if a runner interferes with a defensive player's ability to complete a double play.
4. After a runner has been called safe at 1st, 2nd, or 3rd base, that runner cannot be tagged out, unless the runner (in the umpire's judgement) made an attempt to advance to the next base and was then tagged out while attempting to return to the base. In this situation, a runner returning to a base must be tagged out, before the runner touches the base. It is not a force play.
5. **Obstruction:** If a defensive player without possession of the ball impedes a runner's progress while the runner is in the base path, the runner will be awarded the base.
- a. **If there is no play at a base, the fielder must allow the runner to have clear access to the base.**
6. **Judgement Call Disputes - Do the Right Thing:** When teams provide their own umpires, managers **MUST** get together to discuss judgement calls questioned by either manager, and if an agreement is reached, an umpire's call can be changed. If the managers can't agree, the umpire's call will stand.

7. Plays at Home Plate

- a. **"Point of No Return" Line:** A base runner whose foot lands on or beyond the "point of no return" line will be called out if he or she retreats toward 3rd base.
- b. A runner will be called out for touching the strike mat or running through the batter's box when attempting to score. The runner will also be called out for stepping on the large green mat, when it is being used. The runner must cross the scoring line, to avoid colliding with the catcher.
- c. After crossing the "point of no return" line, a runner from 3rd base is out if his or her foot does not land on or beyond the scoring line before the catcher has the ball (under control), while standing on the strike mat.
- d. Whether standing on the strike mat or not, the catcher can never tag out a runner who is on the home plate side of the "Point of No Return" line.

- e. Any defensive player standing on the strike mat is considered to be the catcher.

8. Other Base Running Rules

- a. A thrown ball that strikes a runner is still in play. This is a standard rule, not a special rule for our leagues.
- b. If a batted ball hits a base runner in fair territory, that runner is out, and the ball is dead. The batter is awarded 1st base, unless he or she is the one hit by the batted ball. However, if the ball passes by or through an infielder, except the pitcher, or is deflected by an infielder or the pitcher before hitting the runner, the runner is not out. This is a standard rule, not a special rule for our leagues.
- c. If a runner abandons a base and steps into a dugout, that runner is out. However, if a runner's momentum takes him or her past 3rd base and into the dugout, that runner will not be called out.
- d. A runner may stand in foul territory, clear of 1st or 3rd base, to avoid being struck by a ball that is hit toward either base. The runner must re-tag the base before advancing. A runner standing clear of either base cannot be doubled up on a line drive that is caught by an infielder.

9. Courtesy Runner: A courtesy runner runs from home plate for a batter. Any player can have a courtesy runner at any time during the game, and is not required to have a courtesy runner for every at-bat in the game.

- a. A courtesy runner must start at the middle of the backstop, directly behind home plate. A courtesy runner cannot start running toward 1st base until the batter hits the ball.
- b. A courtesy runner cannot advance beyond 1st base, even if the ball goes into a dugout or out of play. A courtesy runner cannot be tagged out while returning to 1st base, because a courtesy runner is not allowed to advance to 2nd base.
- c. A courtesy runner becomes a pinch runner if he or she reaches first base safely. That runner cannot be replaced by another pinch runner in that inning.
- d. In any league, a courtesy runner who does not reach 1st base safely may run again as a courtesy or pinch runner in that inning.

10. Pinch Runner: A pinch runner is a player who runs for another player who has reached 1st, 2nd, or 3rd base.

- a. Once a player steps on a base as a pinch runner, that player is committed to being the pinch runner and cannot be replaced by another pinch runner.
- b. In the 50+ League, no player may pinch run more than 5 times in a 9-inning game. A pinch runner who runs a 6th time in a 9-inning game or twice in the same inning will be called out. Players can pinch run one additional time in an extra inning game.
- c. In the 70+ League, a player may be a pinch runner once every inning.

- d. A runner who is replaced by a pinch runner may not be used as a pinch runner or courtesy runner for the remainder of the inning.
 - e. A pinch runner on base when it is his or her turn to bat will be declared out. That runner will be removed from the base, and another pinch runner cannot be substituted. The pinch runner called out will not lose his or her at-bat.
- 11. Play Suspended – “Time-Out”:** Play in the field is suspended, and no runner may advance once the ball is controlled by an infielder, including the pitcher, while on the infield dirt, and after all immediate play has been completed. The umpire shall call “Time,” but a failure to do so will not permit the runners to advance.
- 12. No Stealing:** Base stealing is not permitted.
- 13. No Leadoff:** A base runner may not leave the base until the pitched ball crosses the plate, touches the ground, or is hit by the batter. The umpire may call the runner out for leaving the base too soon.
- 14. Sliding and Diving:** A base runner will be called out for sliding or diving into a base. However, the runner is allowed to slide or dive when attempting to return to a base. A runner returning to a base must be tagged out, before the runner touches the base.
- 15. Infield Fly Rule:** When a batter hits a fly ball that can be routinely caught by an infielder, with runners on 1st and 2nd or with bases loaded, and fewer than 2 outs, the umpire shall call the batter out. Base runners can advance at their own risk. If the ball is caught, the runners must tag up first, before advancing. (This is a standard baseball and softball rule.)
- a. If a Rover sets up on the infield dirt, the Rover will be considered an infielder.
 - b. If the Rover sets up in the shallow outfield and catches a routine fly ball, it will be the umpire’s judgment as to whether to invoke the Infield Fly Rule.
 - c. Because of the limited mobility of some pitchers and catchers, a short pop-up between the pitcher and catcher is often not considered to be a routine fly ball, and therefore the Infield Fly Rule might not be invoked.
 - d. **Only the umpire can call an infield fly, foul ball, safe, out, dead ball, time out, or any other call reserved for the umpire. If players make these types of calls out loud, these expressions can be considered Obstruction, and the base runners can be awarded bases accordingly.**

VIII. THE LINE-UP

- 1. Batting the Entire Line-Up:** All defensive players must bat, unless the opposing manager agrees to an exception. Defensive substitutions may be made at will. However, the batting order must remain in its original order. If any player has to leave the game for any legitimate reason, such as an injury, it will not be an automatic out when that player’s turn to bat comes around, providing the opposing team’s manager is notified.

2. Guaranteed Playing Time:

- a. In the 50+ and 60+ Leagues, all players will be guaranteed a minimum of 3 full innings of defensive play. All players must play a minimum of 3 innings in order to be in the batting rotation. A new player cannot be brought into the game after the 6th inning has started. That player must bat last.
- b. In the 70+ League, a player may bat without playing on defense.

IX. SPECIAL DRAFT RULES

1. A player may request to play on the same team as another person. This preference may be stated on the registration form. However, the player making the request must be willing to play on another team.
2. Requests for players to be on the same team will be announced before the draft.
3. After the draft, managers may agree to trades, to accommodate the requests. However, managers are not required to make trades.

X. DISCIPLINE

1. Unsportsmanlike conduct will be subject to disciplinary action, to be determined by the League Commissioners.
2. Disciplinary actions may include suspension for one or more games, or expulsion from the League.
3. Paid umpires will have the authority to eject a player for unsportsmanlike conduct.

XI. SPECIAL RULES FOR FILL-IN PLAYERS

1. When a league has an odd number of teams, the team with a bye on game day can provide fill-in players for a team that has fewer than 11 players.
 - a. A team with fewer than 11 players can add a maximum of 3 fill-in players for the game. A team adding players cannot have more than 11 players.
 - b. If the number of people who want to play exceeds the number needed, names will be drawn from a hat.
 - c. Fill-in players are only allowed to play catcher, 1st base, or right field.
 - d. They must bat last in the line-up, and their hits are limited to singles.

XII. NEW RULES FOR 70+ LEAGUE

1. Infield Fly Rule Situation Rule Change:

With runners on first and second or first, second and third, and less than two outs, any infield fly that is caught will result in a dead ball, with the batter called out, and all runners will return to their base. No runner can be called out for being off base after the ball is caught. If the infield fly is not caught, any runner forced out on a base, including first base, will result in a dead ball. All runners will be awarded the next base. The purpose of this rule is to eliminate the Infield Fly Rule and call, and to ensure that only one out can be made in “Infield Fly Rule” situations.

2. Designated No Double Play Batters:

Prior to the game, both managers will agree to a list of players over 80 years of age, and designated women, to be batters that cannot be doubled up on a ground ball. If one of these designated batters hits a ground ball that results in a force out, they then cannot be thrown out at first base. The ball is live, and play continues, but the batter/runner is awarded first base and cannot advance. As with the “designated runner from home” rule, under no circumstances can this batter/runner advance beyond first base on any play. If the designated batter chooses not to run and uses a designated runner from home instead, the above rule does not apply. The purpose of this rule is to eliminate the designated batter from being the second out a double play, but does not preclude a double play if the designated batter is the first out or if two runners are thrown out on the bases