

Above the Dirt Sports Rules

Basic USA Rules Govern with some Rule Exceptions as Amended October 2025

THE PLAYERS

- Age Qualifications
- December 31 is the official cut-off date. Any member whose birthday (50, 55, etc) occurs on or before December 31 of that current year is eligible to play with a registered team in the age bracket or a lower age bracket.

- Player Identification
- A Player shall show proof of identity and check in every tournament they play
- A Player is ineligible until he scans the Above the Dirt Sports Card to a personnel member at the table

- Player Eligibility
- A Player shall play for only one team in their age bracket on a tournament weekend.

- Uniforms
- All Players on a team shall properly wear shirts are alike in base color, trim and style. If a shirt is required to be changed, because of the blood rules, there will be no penalty.
- Pitchers are not permitted to wear any item on the pitching hand, wrist or thigh that could be distracting to a batter.
- Players may wear colored undergarments beneath their uniform shirts or shorts.
- Numbers must be worn on all uniforms. No Players on the same team may wear the same number.
- Ball caps or visors must be properly worn. No backwards were of ball caps A protective helmet is allowed.

- Casts, prothesis and metal braces may be worn,

- THE GAME

- Time Limit
- 1. A time limit of 55 minutes shall be allotted in regular game play.
- When the 55 minutes expires, the teams shall finish that inning and one more complete inning, if necessary.
- An inning ends when the home team makes the 3rd out (it is not when a batter comes to the plate.)

- In the event the score is tied after regulation play, Runner will be placed on second base, max runs 5 runs per inning,
- The clock is to be stopped in the event of an injury requiring medical attention.
- The clock is to be started when all Players are on the field, and the batter is in the box umpire calls "Play Ball".
- Courtesy Runners
- Unlimited courtesy runners are allowed at any time and maybe anyone on the roster with no change of players
- A Player can be a courtesy runner only once an inning
- A runner may not replace a courtesy runner unless there is an injury
 - a. The injured Player must be removed from the line-up and cannot return to the game
- Any Player replaced by a courtesy runner may not become a courtesy runner in the same inning.
- Penalty for use of an ineligible courtesy runner shall be removal of the runner from the base and an out is recorded against the base runner for which the courtesy runner is used.
- If a Player is on base as a courtesy runner when it is his time to bat, he shall be declared out.
- If this is the first or second out of the inning, the Player will bat in his regular spot.
- If this is the third out of the inning, the Player will be the first batter in the next innings.
- A Rabbit runner 3 ft behind the rear back left corner of the plate. They may not start to run until the ball is hit by the batter. If they do they are out, and all other runners return. If the rabbit runner rounds first base they are out. All runners will return one base.
- A rabbit runner will be considered in the game as a courtesy runner once a pitch is thrown to the batter, he is announced by the umpire. They may not be used as a courtesy runner for that inning.
- Likewise, if the batter runs up the line past 10 feet, they will be declared out. A white chalk line should be drawn 10 feet from home plate across the baseline, it will be a delayed dead ball, if there is a play via a double play or other bases.
- The player may choose to forgo the rabbit runner option in a game, but will not be allowed to have a rabbit runner for the remainder of the game. He will be able to utilize the rabbit runner option for the next game
- Once the ball is hit, the Rabbit Runner may not run beyond the first base bag unless:
- The batted ball is a 'ground rule double.'
- The batted ball is a 'home run.'
- An infielder throws the ball out of play (advance to the next base plus one).
- An outfielder throws the ball out of play (2 bases from the time of the throw).

- Bases shall be 70 feet from each other, 65 feet will be acceptable, depending on the park/field ability to place bases

- Start times

All teams must be at the park and checked in 30 minutes prior to start time of their scheduled games.

If we are ahead as schedule we will call for the teams to start the next game on that field, If you team is not there you will forfeit the game.

Offense

- An offensive team may designate up the 15 Players in the batting order.
- The offensive team shall have a minimum 9 Players present to start and finish a game in the 50's, 55's and 60's Divisions.
- A minimum of 10 Players is required to start and finish a game in the 65's, 70's, 74's and 80's divisions

- Defense

- A defensive team shall designate 9 Players present to take the field in the 50's through 60's Divisions and may play as many as 10 Players
- In the 65's through 80's Divisions, teams need at least 10 Players in the field and may play as many as 11 Players.

- Defensive Players may play anywhere on the playing field in fair territory

- Injuries

- In the event of an injury and the Player is removed from the game and is unable to take his time at bat.
- If there is no substitute Player to bat in his place, an out will be recorded the first time the injured Player comes up to bat. Only if you are batting 12 or less. Then the flowing is true

- After that, the line-up will compress and there will be no more outs in that spot.

- Also, that injured Player is not allowed to play again in that game.

- IF you are batting 13 – 15 you will record and out each time.

- Balls and Strikes

- There shall be 4 balls and 3 strikes.

- In a regular game, each batter starts with a 1 and 1 count.

- On the first foul ball after reaching a 2-strike count, the batter will have a courtesy foul, However if the ball strikes the pitchers net. and the ball is declared dead.

EXCEPTION: If the foul ball is caught for the first or second out, the ball remains live and the runners may run at their own risk.

- A foul tip by the batter into the catcher glove DOESN'T HAVE TO GO OVER THE BATTER HEAD FOR THE OUT
- Pitcher's Plate
 - The pitcher's plate is located 50 feet from the rear point of home plate.
 - The pitcher must be in contact with the pitcher's plate at least momentarily before releasing the ball.
 - The pitcher must have one foot on the plate (rubber) when he releases the ball.
- Strike Zone/Plate Mat
 - A strike zone mat will be used
 - From the top of the plate, including the mat, the area shall measure 19" x 34 1/2".
 - The pitching arc shall be from 6' from the ground and 12' at its highest.
 - If the ball hits any part of the plate, before striking the ground, it will be called a strike.
- Catcher's Box
 - The box measures 8'1" wide by 10' deep.
 - The catcher must remain within the lines of the box until the pitched ball is batted, touches the ground, mat or reaches the catcher's box.
- Commitment Line
 - The commitment line shall be marked in foul territory thirty feet from home plate and at a 90-degree angle to third base.
 - Once the runner passes the line, he may not go back to third base. If he does, he is out.
 - Once a runner touches or goes beyond the line, the defense can only get the out by touching home plate, with the ball in hand, before the runner touches the second plate or his foot is down across the scoring line.
 - At no time is the defender to touch the runner after he crosses the commitment line
 - a. If the runner is tagged after he crosses the commitment line, the runner is safe, the run scores and the ball remains live
- Base Running
 - Base stealing is not permitted
 - A second home plate, or line, shall be placed adjacent to the left rear corner of the righthanded batter's box and in line with the first base.
 - A runner is called out if he touches the original home plate and not the extra plate.
 - The runner is called out if he slides into the second plate.
 - If the runner is called out, the ball remains live
- Safety Base
 - A safety base is mandatory for first base

- The safety base shall be placed so that the white portion is where the first base normally would be and the colored base is located in foul territory next to the white base.
- A batter/runner shall only touch the colored base on the initial play, unless the throw forces the runner to run inside to avoid a collision. Then that play is up to the umpire to make the correct call
- If there is a question of touching the wrong base intentionally, the umpire will call the batter/runner out and a live ball will continue. In the case of a bobbled ball, the appeal can be made to the umpires.
- If the ball is hit to the outfield either bag can be touched
- If the ball is hit to the infield, only the colored base will be touched unless there is a throw that takes the runner off line.
- If a runner slides into the safety base, that runner is called out, unless the slide is an attempt to avoid a collision with the defensive player.
- A runner that does not discard his bat before reaching first base shall be called out.
- If a runner walks, the ball is dead, and he is not out if he carries the bat to first
- A runner at first base and third may step off the bags when a batter comes up to bat. They must retag the base before proceeding to the next one
- If a runner is hit by a batted ball while standing on the base, it will be called a dead ball and the batter will be awarded first base. If there is runner on first, they will go to second. If there is a runner on second or third and first base is open the batter is awarded first and all base runners remain on second and third.
- Mercy/Run Rule
- 14 after 5 innings for 50's and 60's Divisions
- 15 after 5 innings for 65's through 80's Divisions • Ejections
- Players ejected by an umpire or sit out a minimum of that game, and may be suspended pending Board action.
- The Site Director has the authority to reduce or increase the penalty to more than one game
- All ejections are subject to Board review and possible further action.
- If there is no player to replace the ejected player, an out will be recorded every time his position in the batting order comes up.
- Appeal of Rules
- Procedure: Any Player or manager of the two teams playing may ask the home plate umpire for time out. Once granted, either umpire may be asked to clarify the rule in question. If the answer is not clear, the Player or Manager may ask the umpires to get together and discuss the rule or question.
- Umpire Judgement: Decisions may not be appealed on calls involving
- Balls and Strikes
- Safe or Out

- Fair or Foul ball
- EXCEPTION: In the event of a possible pulled foot, bobbled ball or missed base, a Player or Manager may ask the umpires to convene and discuss the play. • The decision, after they convene, is final
- Mercy rules
- 15 runs after 5 complete innings. 25 after 4 complete innings. If you are the home team and you cannot catch up due to 7 run rules per inning. You need bat in that inning it may affect the outcome of a two-way tie (runs score against)

- **Not showing up for your last game, due to no chance of winning the bracket.**

Unless your players have a medical or family emergency which makes the team short to 9 players. There is no other reason for your team not to play all four games. Teams that forfeit will not be allowed to play in tournaments without paying a fine of \$100.00. By not playing all four games, it affects the outcome of bracket winners with 2- or three-way ties. Repeat offenders will be sent to the board for further actions

- Protests
- All disputes during tournament play must be resolved at the point of the protest.
- The clock is stopped at that time
- The UIC/Commissioner/Site Director will be called to hear the disagreement if it deals with “playing rules” or “personnel rules”.
- The Site Director will make a final decision
- After that is completed, the clock will be restarted again
- All decisions may be subject to review by the Board of Directors
- Home Runs
- A home run over the fence, a four-base award, or a four base error allows the hitter to “hit and sit”
- A home run that leaves the field of play and over the fence is a dead ball, and if the batter-runner carries the bat to the 1st base bag, it is not an out

- **Home run limits are in effect, D is 3 C is 6 B is 9 A is 9**

- Game Balls
- All tournament balls must be approved by the Board of Directors
- Game Bats
- All bats must be approved by the Board of Directors

- Bats may not be altered in any way from the manufacturer's design
- A safety grip on the end of the bat, or tape is legal
- Bats that are worn, but still retain the legal markings, are legal
- Cracked or damaged bats and bats that cannot be identified (make-model) are illegal.
- Once a bat is removed from play, by an umpire or tournament Officer, it cannot be brought back into play
- The Player that uses an illegal bat will be treated with the same penalty as if using an altered bat.

- Runs per Inning

- The 50's and 60's Divisions will use a limit of 7 runs per team, per inning with the last inning being declared "open" with no maximum run limit
- The 65's through 80's Divisions will use a limit of 5 runs per team, per inning with the last inning being declared "open" with no maximum run limit.

- Pitching Screen

- The pitching screen must be placed in front of the pitching plate no more than 4' in front of the plate and must cover a minimum of one half of the pitching plate
- Once the screen is in place, it may not be moved in that half inning unless a new pitcher comes in or the screen is moved by a batted ball. **If a pitcher moves the screen, mid inning, without the above exceptions being met, the batter will be awarded a "ball" in his count.**
- The pitcher may release the ball from either side of the screen, but must have at least one foot in contact with the plate itself.
- Before releasing the ball, and in contact with the plate, the pitcher must pause at least one second before he may release the ball or it is an illegal pitch.
- If the batter hits the screen with a batted ball and there is less than 2 strikes, it becomes a dead ball immediately and runners, if any, return to their bases.
- If there are 2 strikes on the batter and he hits the screen with a batted ball, he is out and the runners return to their bases.
- After the pitcher releases the ball he must immediately move behind the screen.
- He may field the ball as soon as the ball is hit.
- **If the umpire rules that the pitcher did not get behind the screen, the pitcher will receive a warning. First is free, second you will be removed from the pitching mound**
- If a ball is released by the pitcher and he is ruled not behind the screen and the batted ball is touched/caught by the pitcher, the umpire will rule the play dead, the batter will be awarded first base and any forced runners will move up one base.
- Any live ball thrown from any fielder that hits either side of the screen will remain in play

• Interference

1. When a batter runner is called out for an illegal slide/interference at second base, or any other base, that person is out and the person closest to home is also out
 - (Example) If the bases are loaded and there is an illegal slide/interference at second base, the batter runner is out at second and the runner going to the plate is also out.
 - (Example) If there are runners at first and second and the batter runner is called out at second for illegal slide/interference, the runner going to third is also out because he is the closest to the plate. Any other runner goes back to the base they were at prior to the pitch
2. This rule is to penalize, to the hilt, anyone who commits an illegal slide/interference at any base. It is a safety issue.

ALTERED BAT PROCEDURE

- A. Directors and /or umpires can confiscate any bat believed to be altered.
 - The bat may be sent to the manufacturer for testing, or be tested by a Board Officer using a battesting device
 - If deemed to be altered, the user will immediately be suspended for five years
 - If not, it will be returned to the Player
 - If found to be altered at the site, the penalty could begin immediately
 - If a bat is confiscated, the game shall resume at that point
 - The accused player must voluntarily allow the bat for inspection by the FHCASA
 - If he refuses, he will be immediately suspended until the next Board Meeting where a final decision will be made
 - If the bat is sent for testing, the Director will remove the tape and write down the ID number and give that to the player as a receipt
 - If necessary, the FHCASA will send the bat to the manufacturer for testing
 - If the bat is not considered to be altered at the manufacturer, the player will receive a new bat purchased by the FHCASA just like the one that was tested

ALTERED BAT POLICY

- A. We will take the bat when a Player is struck directly by a batted ball and the Player is injured.
 - The same penalties mentioned above will prevail, if necessary
 - We reserves the right to confiscate any equipment deemed questionable for legal play.
 - Anytime a bat is tested on site and the bat fails the onsite test, the Player is to be removed for the remained of the tournament
 - Additional penalties will be determined by the Board

- Any Player knowingly using an altered bat in a tournament is subject to the following
- If the Player refuses to hand over the bat, he will be immediately ejected from that game. He could receive a penalty from a suspension to a lifetime suspension from tournament play
- It is up to the Board to determine whether the bat will be sent to the manufacturer or to be checked on site
- If the bat is sent, the player will be allowed to play until the test process is completed.
- Even if a bat is found to be altered, the results of the game will stand
- If the bat is found to be altered, the Player will be suspended for five years from participation in activities

INCLEMENT WEATHER – SHORTENED GAMES

Rain delays. Any stoppage of games due to rain or lightning, games will resume after the park official clears us to play. Rain delays could last a few hours

- In the event of inclement weather, the tournament director/commissioner may make the decision to play shortened games. All rules of the game will still be in effect,
- but the game times will be shortened: 35 minutes and 1 pitch
- For all age divisions, a time limit of 35 minutes shall be allotted,
- In the shortened game format, three full innings is considered a complete game.
- Any game started in the regular game format on Saturday will be completed utilizing the existing time remaining on the clock or 35 minutes, whichever is less.
- If a shortened game format is used on Saturday and the weather is good on Sunday, the decision could be made to return to the regular game format.

AWARDS

At the conclusion of each tournament, the winners of each bracket shall received an award for the sponsor and each individual, up to 15.

Bracket winners will be determined as follows:

1. Bracket record
2. If there is a two-way tie, in a normal bracket, head-to-head play is used. In a 3 or 4 team bracket, all games are used to determine the least number of runs given up, or the most scored, to determine the bracket winner.
3. For a 3-4-5-way tie, least runs allowed in all games played.
4. Any teams still tied after 3 above, the most runs scored in all games played.
5. If still tied, winner shall be determined by a coin flip.

If a tournament cannot be completed, the awards are determined as follows:

1. Win/loss record
2. Head-to-head play
3. Least runs allowed in all games played
4. Runs scored in all games played
5. Blind draw of teams in the bracket/division

Rule changes

Changes to the rules can be suggested by any player or coach via email and it will be considered during the annual board meeting. However, if there is a rule change that will enhance game play or make the game safer, The board will present that rule change for a vote to all coaches before the annual meeting. It must pass with 90 percent of coaches voting yes for the change. Coaches that will be allowed to vote will be the ones that have played in at least three tournaments for that year. The vote shall be open for one month. All efforts will be made to have coaches cast their vote.