

2021

MIDDLESEX RETIRED SOFTBALL LEAGUE

ARTICLE V (RULES OF PLAY)

July 27, 2021

The League shall adhere to the current *SSUSA rules* and regulations for all playing matters, except as provided in the League rules of play. League rules take precedence over all other rules.

Before the start of each softball season, the League Board will review and decide on playing rules that shall be in the best interest of the League. The Board shall also adopt a schedule for the regular season. Subsequent suggested revisions to individual regular season game dates, times, and fields may be made with the approval of the Executive Board.

The Executive Board shall consist of the Commissioner, the Associate Commissioner, and the manager of each team. Each member will have one vote. In the case of an individual serving in two capacities, they will only have one vote. Majority rules with ties broken by the Commissioner.

The Executive Board will authorize any rule changes and any roster additions during the season.

Due to the potential absence of any manager, each team must designate an "Assistant Manager" who will manage field operations and will participate in discussions and have voting privileges and responsibilities in the absence of the manager.

The current League rules of play are as follows:

1. Team field strength will be a **maximum of eleven (11) players and a minimum of nine (9)**. If during the game a player is injured the team may continue with less than 9 players. A team may use 11 defensive players even if the opposing team has less than 11 players. With only 10 players, one (1) player **must** be "borrowed" from the other team for defensive purposes only without a forfeit called. A maximum of one (1) player may be borrowed and this borrowed player must be placed in and execute the catching position only.

Lineup headcount differences: If the number of players for one team exceeds the number of players for the opposing team by 3 or more players, the two opposing managers should work together so that the team with more players loans 1 or more players to the team short players. This should be done to maintain the competitive balance of the game, meaning the loaned players should be representative level players. This action is specifically designed to eliminate or mitigate the inherent advantage a team batting fewer players sometimes enjoys.

2. **Eligibility:** Before the start of or during a game, an opposing manager may require a player to provide proper identification to confirm his age or roster eligibility. If a manager has reason to believe that an opponent's team includes (an) ineligible player(s), he may play the game under protest, with a subsequent investigation and ruling to be made by the League Executive Board. Player must turn 58 in the current calendar year.
3. A game will be **forfeited if a team cannot field a minimum of nine (9) players, fifteen (15) minutes** after the scheduled starting time or during play. If both teams cannot field nine men, then both teams forfeit the game.
4. Game Length and modifications based on weather conditions
 - A. **Game Length:** All games will be 7 innings in length, with each batter starting with a ball/strike count of 0 and 0.
 - B. **No Courtesy Foul:** NO COURTESY FOUL when starting at 0/0 count. Any foul at 2 strikes is an out.
 - C. **Warm ups** between innings: After the 1st inning, pitchers will have 3 warm up pitches and infielders 1 warm up throw each.
 - D. **Exceptions:**
 - I. Weather: In the event of temperatures of 90 degrees or higher, the opposing managers may agree to play shortened games of 5 innings in length and/or institute a ball/strike count of 1 and 1 with Courtesy Foul.
5. There will be **ROUND ROBIN** batting (i.e., everyone bats, whether or not playing in the field). There is no penalty if an injured player is unable to bat. All runners must run to 1st base before using a pinch runner. Official "Taxi Squad" members are not required to bat or play the field if attending a game. Taxi Squad designation is determined by the Executive Board in conjunction with the authorization of the opening rosters. Managers may agree upon the use of a Designated Hitter (player does not have to play the field) if that player is listed on the Taxi and Injured list as part of the opening rosters.
6. **Players over 80 have the choice to use a rabbit runner** from home plate who must be the last batted out.

7. **There shall be no designated runner from home plate.** A player may not be thrown out at first base from the outfield on a clean hit UNLESS the player (now a runner) makes a turn towards second base.

A. If a ball is hit cleanly through or over the infield UNTOUCHED and is not caught in the air, the batter is awarded first base. If there are runners on base, they may be forced out at any other base or plate. However the original batter cannot be put out at first base. (This rule is designed to let slower runners reach base on a clean hit and eliminated the designated runner (the rabbit) from home plate. Runners on base but not forced, may advance at their own risk.

B. If an infielder touches a batted ball in fair territory, that infielder or any other defensive player may complete the defensive play including throwing the batter out at first base.

C. The mid-fielder or rover can play as an infielder or outfielder as long as the 4 other infielders are on the dirt of the infield and the 4 outfielders are on the outfield grass. The mid-fielder is subject to the rules stated above.

D. The automatic single rule will be re-interpreted to be a ball centric rule. The rule is as follows:

Whenever a batted ball hits the ground in the outfield grass before touching any defensive player (including such player's glove, uniform, or hat), the batter-runner will be automatically awarded first base and therefore cannot be forced out at first base.

Notes:

1. This rule does not affect any runner going to 2nd, 3rd or home.

2. It does not matter where any defensive player is situated in the field either before or after the ball is batted.

3. The same rules for catching a fly ball will apply in determining whether the ball hits the ground in the outfield.

8. There is no rule governing **individual playing time** in the field; however, team Managers must make every effort to give sufficient playing time to all players who desire it. Player complaints about inadequate playing time in the field will be addressed to and ruled on by the League Board.

9. There is **free substitution** in the field; i.e., a player may be removed from the field of play and reinstated at any time thereafter without liability, including pitchers.

10. Base runners may not leave a base until the pitched ball crosses home plate.

11. There is no limit on **Pinch Runners** except that the same pinch runner may run only once during the same inning. A pinch runner must be inserted **immediately** when the batter reaches his base. A pinch runner can't be replaced on the base paths. If PR is, that PR must be removed for the remainder of the game. (An injury).

A PR whose turn at bat occurs, shall be called out and not replaced. He/she will then take the proper turn at bat.

12. **If a player is removed from the game or leaves without pre-game notification** to the opposing manager, an automatic out will be recorded (only) for the removed player's next scheduled turn at bat. (No additional outs will be recorded for subsequent scheduled turns at bat).

13. Before the start of the game, players planning to leave a game before its conclusion must inform the umpire and opposing manager of their intended departure time; no penalty will be imposed. Note that the team is still subject to (non-monetary) forfeiture of the game, if it is unable to field nine (9) players as a result of (a) player(s) leaving or having been removed from the game (except if due to injury).

14. Players arriving at any time subsequent to the start of the game will be inserted at the bottom of the lineup.

15. This is a **lob pitch league** with a minimum arc of six (6) feet and a maximum arc of twelve (12) feet above the ground.

16. **The pitcher's box shall be two (2) feet wide and six (6) feet deep.** The pitcher can pitch from any spot in the box, as long as he has one foot in the box. The pivot foot must remain in the pitcher's box throughout the delivery. Consistent with current regulations, the pitcher must pause at least one (1) second before the start of delivery i.e. he cannot run up while in the box.

17. **A strike zone mat or wooden plate** will be used in all League games. The wood plate and the mat shall constitute the strike zone. Any legal pitch striking the mat or wooden plate is a "strike". Size 22 Inches by 36 Inches.

18. If the umpire calls a **pitch illegal** and the batter swings and connects, the ball is in play. If the pitch is taken, it is an automatic called Ball. An illegal pitch is one which exceeds 12 feet in height or is lower than (flat) 6 feet in height.
19. **A THIRD STRIKE FOUL BY A BATTER IS AN AUTOMATIC OUT.** If such a foul out is **caught by a fielder, the ball is dead, and runners may not attempt to advance. There is not courtesy foul with an 0/0 count.**
20. All foul balls caught by the catcher are **out**.
21. All base paths are **sixty-five (65) feet between bases and the pitching rubber is fifty (50) feet** from home plate except where otherwise agreed or dictated due to field limitations.
22. A batter running to 1st base **must use the secondary base located a minimum of 12 inches outside the 1st base foul line whenever a play is being made, even from the outfield.** If there is no play at 1st base, the runner may make the turn rounding 1st base using the inside base. **A runner will be called out if touching the wrong base.**
23. **No base stealing, bunting or slap hitting is allowed.**
24. All games will be Seven (7) innings (6-1/2 if the home team is winning) In case of inclement weather, for seven inning games, Five (5) innings must be completed, (4 ½ if home team is winning). For five inning games, 5 innings must be complete 5 innings (4 ½ if home team is winning).
25. When **tie games require extra innings**, each extra inning will require the last official batted out from the previous inning to start as a base runner on 2nd base (**International tie breaker**). **No substitute runner will be allowed until the base runner reaches 3rd base.**
26. **Catch-up plus five (5) run rule will be in effect, with no restrictions in the last inning or extra innings.**
27. **Mercy Rule:** a 7 inning game is officially over if one team leads the other by **fifteen (15) runs after five innings** of play have been completed (or 4-1/2 innings if the home team is in the lead). 5 Inning games must complete 5 or 4 ½.
28. **All bats must be slow-pitch officially approved by ASA for the current year with the exception of all Miken Freak bats.** Bats with altered [original manufacturer] markings are prohibited. **A batter using a bat prohibited by these rules will be declared out and ejected from the game.** SEE POINT 42 C, D
29. **Metal spikes are not allowed (Player will be ejected).**
30. **Overrunning of bases other than first is not allowed.**
31. **Sliding is allowed at 2nd or 3rd base only.** When a runner is advancing to 2nd base and there will be a throw from 2nd to 1st (double-play), the runner **must either (1) slide or (2) veer off the base path to allow the throw without hitting the base runner.** The umpire will declare (an) out(s) as appropriate if this rule is violated. If the runner runs into the fielder and, in the umpire's judgment, it was a dangerous play; the runner will be ejected from the game and may face suspension. The player's action will be reviewed by the League Board to determine if further disciplinary action should be taken. Any decision made by the Committee will be strictly enforced. We are a "fun" League.
32. **On a play at home plate, the catcher can record an out only by touching any part of the home plate mat.** This means that the catcher **cannot tag out a runner** coming home or block him from crossing the scoring plate, even if the incoming throw draws him toward the runner and/or scoring plate. Correspondingly, the **runner who touches home plate** or interferes with the incoming throw at home plate shall be **automatically called out.**
33. A **Commitment line** will be designated one-half the distance (32.5 feet) between 3rd base and home. Whenever a runner crosses this commitment line, he must proceed to home and cannot return to 3rd base. Runner must touch the alternative home plate before the ball reaches the catcher standing on ANY section of the home mat.
34. **Home team** for each game will provide 1 new and 1 backup ball.
35. **Judgment calls cannot be protested.** Except for player-eligibility protests, a protest, when allowed, must be made before the next pitch and submitted in writing within two (2) days to the Board. The protest must be important to the outcome of the game and the League Executive Board will render a decision.

36. During play, **only team managers can discuss calls with the umpire**, or other items pertaining to the nature of play. Managers must make this clear to their players.
37. An umpire may remove a player for verbal abuse or physical abuse. Physical abuse will result in being removed from the League for the remainder of the year, **SEE CODE OF CONDUCT**
38. A player removed from the League for physical abuse will be subject to review by the League Board regarding possible future reinstatement the following year, **SEE CODE OF CONDUCT**
39. **A player removed from the game** by an umpire must leave the vicinity of the ballpark, or sit in his car for the remainder of that game. Failure to do so will result in his team's (non-monetary) forfeiture of the game. A player removed from the first game of a doubleheader can return for game two of the doubleheader UNLESS THE PLAYER HAS BEEN REMOVED BECAUSE OF AN ILLEGAL BAT VIOLATION. WHICH RESULTS IN A FULL DAY BAN.
40. Any player who knowingly uses an illegal bat will be ejected from league. Any bat used during a game will be subject to reinspection either during that game or immediately after the end of the game.
41. If a team is short players and it becomes necessary for the opposing team to supply a catcher that player is required and must attempt to make any and all plays that may occur at home plate.
 1. **End of season ties** in the standings will be decided by the record of each team against all teams with which it is tied. If ties still exist, a coin toss in the presence of representatives of all affected teams shall decide. Won/lost percentage, rather than games ahead/behind, will be the criterion for comparing records. Executive Board will determine playoff format and publish the format prior to 75% of the season elapsing. Playoff positions will be determined by team performance.
 2. **Players must participate** in at least 50% of regular season games to be eligible for playoffs.
 3. **Umpires: The Catcher will call balls/strikes and fouls.** For all other calls, either a non-player in the game will make all other calls (safe/out), etc. or a player from the batting team will volunteer to umpire. Managers should insure an umpire is promptly in place to avoid delays in the game. Lack of an umpire by the batting team after completion of authorized warm-up allowance will permit the defense to make the calls (preferably the pitcher). **The designated umpire will be responsible for calling illegal pitches (too high/low/flat).** Once the game begins; it cannot be terminated over dissatisfaction with the umpiring.

Official umpires will be utilized for league all league games and playoffs.
4. While it is preferred that all players wear **uniforms**, this provision shall not be mandatory.
5. **Safety:**
 - A. Protective Masks: Pitchers (defined as anyone throwing pitches to a batter) are required to wear a protective mask during pre-game warm ups and during games. No Exceptions. Each team has been supplied with an extra protective mask to support this requirement.
 - B. Bats: Only ASA approved bats can be use for Middlesex Retirement League games. No Ultra's or Senior Bats may be used. Only Bats rated 1.20 BPF or less may be used.
 - C. Bat Testing; Bats will be tested and an authorization sticker will be affixed to those bats passing the test. Only Authorized Bats may be used for league games and warm ups. Testing will occur during the first three weeks of the season after which all bats must have the appropriate sticker.
 - D. Zero Tolerance: Use of an illegal bat will result in ejection from that day's games. A second violation will result in suspension from the league for the current season. Batter may be asked to show the appropriate authorization sticker by the opposing catcher and team management.
6. The League has adopted a **"Code of Conduct"**. It is posted on our website.