



Hillcrest Softball League

Official Rulebook

Version for 2025 Leagues

Section A - Rules of the Game

Introduction:

The rules of a regulation game in the Hillcrest Softball League will be the same rules as a standard regulation USA softball game, with the following amendments. These rules govern all HSL adult softball properties.

In case of any uncertainty, the rules should be interpreted in the “spirit of the rule”, even if it conflicts with the way it is written. The Commissioner shall have final say to resolve any league related issues, including but not limited to, in-game rules, roster rules and scheduling related issues.

Article 1 - Number of Players, Lineups and Fielding Requirements

- I. Each team must have at least **8** players to play a game. Failure to produce **8** players will result in a forfeit (see *Section A, Article 1, Rule XI* regarding forfeit specifics).
- II. All teams will play with a maximum of ten fielders (and a minimum of **8** fielders). Except the catcher, all fielders must be positioned in fair territory before the release of every pitch.
- III. **MAJOR RULE CHANGE:** If a team has only 8 players present, the other team will be *REQUIRED* to supply a catcher until a ninth player shows up. The catcher’s only role will be to return the ball to the pitcher after each pitch. The catcher supplied by the opponent will otherwise be considered ‘dead’ and cannot make any plays, including, but not limited to, catching foul tips for the third strike.
 - A. When a team has 8 players, the lineup will be considered a 9-man lineup, with the 9-hole hitter being an automatic out as long as the team has 8 players. Once a 9th player shows up, the newcomer will bat in the 9-hole of the lineup, the opponent-supplied catcher will be removed from play, and the automatic out will no longer be in effect.

- B. Once a team has 9 eligible players at the field, a catcher will no longer be supplied, even in the case where someone leaves the game early. The team will need to play with a smaller field and supply their own catcher.
 - C. The minimum number of players required in a team's lineup is **8**, in which case *Rule III.A* will be in effect.
- IV. Teams *ARE* required to submit an active starting roster listing all players who will be in their starting lineup in advance of each game, thereby locking the number of players in their lineup for that game. Teams do not have to inform the opposing team or the umpire of the order of their lineup in advance of the game. Each lineup position locks and is set individually as each player takes his first at-bat of the ballgame. **Teams ARE required to announce intentions prior to first pitch to both the umpire and the opposing team if they plan to use a DH.**
- V. The lineup may not be altered thereafter, other than for a pinch hitter/runner substitution.
- VI. **MAJOR RULE CHANGE:** The maximum number of hitters allowed in a team's lineup is **12**. If a team has 11 or 12 – a team may rotate positions freely having 10 fielders in play, and the rest not playing in the field; A team may use a DH (see rules below). The lineup must always stay the same. **PLEASE NOTE, IF A PLAYER IS PINCH HIT FOR OR REPLACED IN THE FIELD, THAT PLAYER MAY NOT RE-ENTER THE GAME FOR ANY REASON.**
- VII. If a player in the lineup is not present at the start of his at-bat, the team will take an automatic out for the lineup slot. For scoring purposes, this will count as a strikeout.
- VIII. If a team chooses to only bat 9 players in the team's lineup, the maximum number of fielders allowed for the team for the entire game will be 9. If a team fields 10 players during the game, it is required to have at least 10 players in the lineup.
- IX. If a team wants to include more lineup slots than players at the field during their first go-through the lineup, those lineup slots will be announced to the umpire, must be placed at the end of the lineup, and will be considered automatic outs so long as they are not filled by an eligible player
- X. **MAJOR RULE CHANGE:** The designated hitter rule allows teams to use another player to bat in place of a specific fielder. Because the fielder is still part of the team's ten defensive players, the designated hitter -- or "DH" -- does not take the field on defense.
 - A. The DH must be selected prior to the game. A team that chooses not to select a DH prior to a game is barred from using a DH for the rest of that game. A player who enters the game in place of the DH -- either as a pinch-hitter or a pinch-runner -- becomes the DH in his team's lineup thereafter.
 - B. If a player serving as the DH is later used on defense, he continues to

bat in his same lineup spot. But for the rest of the game, his team cannot use a DH to bat in place of the original fielder. A team is also barred from using a DH for the rest of the game if the original replaced fielder pinch-hits or pinch-runs for the DH.

- XI. If a team does not have the minimum number of players within **15 minutes** of the scheduled game start time, the game will start with the undermanned team batting. If they are unable to produce an 8th player once they take the field, the game is forfeited with a 15-0 score.
- XII. **MAJOR RULE CHANGE:** Home field advantage will be determined at the field via a coin toss (where a team can choose to be home or away). If a team is missing their eighth player, they will automatically become the away team (after 15 minutes waiting), and if they fail to produce their eighth player after their turn at bat, the forfeit will automatically come into effect.

Article 2 - Eligible Players

- I. **MAJOR RULE CHANGE:** Prior to the first pitch of the game, each team captain must submit an accurate, active roster listing all players eligible to participate that night. Not all players on the roster must be in the lineup, but any player who enters the game in any capacity must appear on the submitted roster. The active roster will be shared with both the umpire and the opposing captain. If a player who is not on the submitted roster enters the game at any point, the opposing team may file an appeal. All players on the preseason roster are considered on the game roster.
- II. During the regular season, any player who plays for more than one team within the same league will not be eligible for any playoff roster within that league.
- III. **MAJOR RULE CHANGE:** Prior to each season, a list will be published with pitchers who are only eligible to pitch in A League. There may be players added to the list during the season, based on the commissioner's discretion, which will be discussed after a player makes his first pitching appearance.
- IV. **MAJOR RULE CHANGE:** Teams are required to keep a play by play of their batting innings and submit it to the captains chat following the game. This will be used for any scoring disputes and to provide a lineup from the game for record-keeping.
- V. **RULE CHANGE:** If a team uses an ineligible player during a playoff game (see eligibility below), the team forfeits that game.
- VI. **MAJOR RULE CHANGE:** For a player to be an eligible player on a playoff roster, they must play in a minimum of 33% (rounded up) of team games. To be considered having played a game, one must either have 2 plate appearances OR 3 defensive innings OR played in a complete and final game.
- VII. The captain is responsible for ensuring his team has enough playoff-eligible players. He should prepare his team in case of players not being available.

- VIII. If a player is unable to play in a playoff game due to injury/funeral/act of G-D, and a team does not have another eligible player to take his place, the league (at the hands of the commissioner) may allow a player of similar skill level to take their place for the playoff weeks that they are unavailable due to the above circumstance.

Article 3 – Mercy Rule and Other Batting Rules

- I. **MAJOR RULE CHANGE:** Mercy rules will only apply during the regular season. The mercy rule for this league will be 10 runs after 5 innings (4 ½ if the home team leads after that point) or later
- II. **Home teams will have a chance to close the lead and bat in the bottom of the inning if they are mercy-ruled in the top of the inning**
- III. **RULE CHANGE:** Foul balls and foul tips will follow USA/USA rules
- IV. Drop third-strikes do not apply; the batter is out if he swings and misses on strike three, regardless of whether or not the catcher catches the ball.
- V. Bunting is not permitted, and an intentional check-swing will be treated as a bunt; any bunt attempt will be an automatic strike, and a dead ball.

Article 4 – Baserunning Rules

- I. Base runners are not permitted to lead off of any base prior to a pitch. Should a batter from any team be leading from any base then the runner will be called out.
- II. Runners are allowed to lead/run AFTER the pitcher has released the ball towards home plate for a pitch. If at any time a runner is off the base (because he ran after the ball has been released, etc.), the batter must return to the base which he left. If the ball arrives at that base before he does, the runner is out. There is a force to the base. (The fielder need only step on the base.) If the catcher overthrows the ball to a base, the play is considered live. The runner, however, must step back on the bag before running to the next base. If the catcher throws the ball back to the pitcher (not to a base), then the play is dead.
- III. *Slide or avoid* – For any close play at any base other than first base, a base runner must **slide** (into the base) **or avoid** interfering with the play being made at that base in any way he can. If the runner does not, and he noticeably interferes with the fielder's ability to make the play, then the runner is out. What constitutes interference will be determined by the umpire.
 - A. At home plate, the same rules apply – however, the catcher may not intentionally block the runner from reaching the plate. The catcher should not be in the base path or attempt to block the plate, unless he

is making an attempt to catch/field the ball and the basepath is unavoidable. A runner may not barrel into the catcher as such, and should slide as to avoid injury on a close play.

- B. At first base, if the runner is running through the base, the runner **MUST** use the orange safety bag and not the fair territory white base. The runner is otherwise out.

Article 5 – Courtesy Runners

- I. During a game, no more than **3** players from each team may be declared to be allowed the use of a courtesy runner. The player requiring a courtesy runner must be declared both to the umpire and to the opposing captain, as soon as he reaches base safely and the play has ended. The players who will be using courtesy runners do not have to be declared prior to the game.
- II. After the declared designated player (as above) has finished any of his at bats, and has reached base safely, then the player that last batted out may run instead of that designated player, as a courtesy.
- III. After a pitch has been thrown, no one on base can then be replaced with a courtesy runner, except in a situation with an injury, where umpire can have discretion if the runner is well enough to stay in the game, but not enough to run; once a runner sees one pitch from a base, he can no longer be replaced in any at bat (except in injuries at umpires discretion).
- IV. A player who is run for as a courtesy *is required* to have a courtesy runner run for him *every single time* he reaches base.
- V. In an emergency, where there was an injury on the field as deemed by the umpire, a courtesy runner may be used for that runner, if needed – without counting against the maximum three allowed. The player need not come out of the game.

Article 6 – Pitching

- I. This league will use standard USA MODIFIED pitching rules unless otherwise noted. **Please note that rules from previous WHSL or HSL leagues are no longer in play, and we will defer the rules to the USA rulebook, except when listed otherwise in this rulebook.**
- II. **MAJOR RULE CHANGE:** A pitcher must start on the pitching rubber line and release the ball having one foot on the pitching rubber. Failure to do so will result in an automatic ball.
- III. A hit batter will NOT be awarded first base automatically. If the ball was in the strike zone, then it will count as a strike, and if not it will count as a ball

Article 7 – Field Dimensions

- I. **MAJOR RULE CHANGE:** Per USA men's modified pitching rules, the pitching rubber will be 46 feet from the back of home plate
- II. All bases will be 65 feet apart

Section B - Equipment, Injuries, Conduct, and Appeals

Article 1 - Equipment

- I. Bats will not be provided by the league. Only certified ASA, USA Softball, or USSSA softball bats are allowed. Wooden softball bats are not allowed. Baseball (metal or wooden) or plastic bats are not allowed. If a player uses an illegal bat, that player may be charged with an automatic out.
- II. Catchers are *required* to wear a mask when catching.
- III. Metal cleats are NEVER allowed at any field.

Article 2 - Injury

- I. The league is not responsible for any injuries! You are playing at your own risk! All safety equipment you require should be brought by you with you to all games. The league will not be held liable for any injuries.
- II. All players playing in an official HSL game are required to sign a liability waiver (either a paper document or an electronic Google form-style waiver).

Article 3 - Conduct

- I. There is to be no arguing with umpires. Only the captain may appeal a game rule. Judgment calls may NOT be appealed. An umpire may eject an unruly player at his discretion without refund.
- II. Offensive behavior and language towards opposing players will not be tolerated. The umpire, at his discretion, can give the offender a warning or eject him from the game. Repeated offenses can result in suspension at the discretion of the commissioner, and no refund will be given.

Article 4 – Protests / Appeals

- I. Any play in which a team believes was not called in line with the rules of the league may be protested/appealed to the league commissioner. To do so, the captains must announce to the umpire and the other team, as well as text the

commissioner/president on the basis of the protest and the game situation at that time.

- II. Within a week, the commissioner will review and respond to the protest/appeal. The umpire will be contacted, and both captains and any relevant players must be available to comply with an investigation into the protest/appeal/complaint. The judgment of the commissioner/president will be final.

Section C - The Season Schedule

MAJOR RULE CHANGE: *Official Definition:* A “new inning” begins as soon as the last out is made.

Article 1 - Game Length, Official Games, and Suspended Games

- I. **RULE CHANGE:** For 7-inning games, no new inning should start 90 minutes after first pitch; for 9-inning games, no new inning should start 115 minutes after first pitch
- II. All regular season games must go at least **4 1/2** innings to count as a played game. As mentioned regarding the mercy rule in article 3.II if the away team take a mercy lead, the home team still needs a turn at bat to match.
- III. During the regular season, if an in-progress game must be stopped, either by time constraints, danger or any other reason:
 - A. If 5 full innings have been played (4 ½ if the home team leads at that point), then the game officially counts. The score reverts back to the last full inning played, unless the home team tied the game or took the lead in that last inning.
 - B. If a full game has not been played, then the game will be suspended and continued from the last event when the game was suspended at a later date.
- IV. During the regular season, games may end in a tie. This will happen if the score is still tied when the game is stopped, either by time constraints, danger, or any reason as above, and there was a full game played.
- V. During the playoffs, if an in-progress game must be stopped, either by rain, emergency, or an unavoidable situation as above, then the game will be suspended, and continued from that point at a later time/date.
- VI. In the completion of a suspended game, the lineup must remain the same as it was when the game was suspended. Since the game is on a different night, there may be new players who were not present at the original game. They

would be substituted into the lineup just as a pinch hitter/runner would be. A new designated fielder may be assigned, if desired.

Article 2 - Extra Innings

- I. For any regular season game, if a game is tied at the conclusion of the regulation innings, all innings thereafter will begin with a “ghost runner” on second base to start each half inning. That “ghost runner” will be the last batter who batted in the previous inning.
- II. If a playoff game is tied at the conclusion of the regular innings, the game will carry on to extra innings as normal (no “ghost runner”).

Article 3 - Standings

- I. The rules for determining the order of the league standings are as follows:
 - A. The overall record (winning percentage) is the chief factor in determining the standings. A better record means a higher ranking.
 - B. If two teams have the same record, then the tie will be broken as follows:
 1. The higher ranking team shall be the team with the better statistic in (in order of tie breaker):
 - a) Head-to-Head record
 - b) Run differential
 - c) Runs scored
 - C. If three or more teams have the same record, then the tie will be broken as follows:
 1. The highest ranking team shall be the team with the better statistic in [If there is no highest, then the lowest ranking team with shall be the team with the worse statistic in] (in order of tie breaker):
 - a) Head-to-Head record against the other two teams
 - b) Run differential
 - c) Runs scored

Article 4 - Playoff Rules

- I. Playoff formats will be discussed/decided on a season-by-season basis, and will be established prior to opening day,
- II. In all playoff rounds, the higher-seeded team has the home field advantage (bats last) for the odd-numbered games of the round. The lower seed team will have the home field advantage in the even games of the round.

Article 5 – Team-wide game date roster issues

- I. In the case of an act of G-D, the commissioner will have first and final say on whether the game in question will be played. Captains should inform the commissioner of the situation as soon as they know about it

Rules Committee:

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