

INFORMATION FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL GAMES

Mechanics

Communication: Please do not tell a coach or parent that you are only a fast-pitch umpire and do not create the impression that these games should only last an hour. We have had complaints in past years regarding umpires opening the strike zone much too far in an apparent effort to see how quickly they could complete the game. As discussed later, the MCPS rules provide for a two-hour no new inning game.

Umpire Masks: An umpire mask is optional.

Calling Time: the umpire should call time any time the ball is held in the infield and all action has stopped.

Catcher Readiness: Encourage coaches to keep their catchers dressed. This means shin guards (optional) and chest protectors on and the catcher's mask where the catcher can find it.

Time Between Innings: Only give the teams 1 minute between innings.

Keep a Copy of the These Rules: Keep a copy of these rules and the MCPS Handbook in your car and review them before going to the field. Both can be on the [Information and Links](#) page of the [CASO website](#).

General Rules

Applicable Rule Book: Middle school games are played under National Federation of High Schools (NFHS) slow-pitch rules and are scheduled for 7 innings.

Batter's Count: If the batter fouls off a pitch with two strikes, the batter is not out. The batter is entitled to one courtesy foul.

Hit Batter: If a batter is hit by a pitch, do not award the batter first base. Call it a ball or strike as appropriate.

No Sliding: There will be no sliding, diving, leading, stealing, or bunting. (Call the violator out.)

Jewelry: NFHS softball rules have eliminated most of the jewelry restrictions. Unless you determine a specific jewelry item to be distracting or potentially dangerous, let it play. This is now your judgement call. If you have any questions regarding the fall program, please give Joe Holonich a call.

Balls and Strikes: The batter comes to bat with a no balls and no strikes count, 0-0 count.

A 3rd strike does not have to be caught by the catcher. The batter is always out on the 3rd strike. If a batter attempts a bunt and makes bat contact with the ball, batter is out. If a batter attempts to bunt and fails to make bat contact, it is only a strike. It is not an out unless it is the 3rd strike.

The batter gets a “courtesy” foul after reaching two strikes. On a foul ball with two strikes, the batter is not out. If, after using a courtesy foul, the batter fouls off another pitch, second foul ball with two strikes, the batter is out.

Any pitched ball that hits the plate before it is swung at is a ball.

Leading and Stealing: A runner may leave base after the pitch reaches the plate, touches the ground, or is hit. Stealing is not permitted.

Dead Ball on the Pitch: A pitched ball that touches the ground is dead and cannot be put in play.

Pivot Foot of Pitcher: The pitcher must keep her pivot foot in contact with the pitcher’s plate. The other foot may remain stationary or move forward, sideways, or backwards.

Illegal Pitch: Illegal pitches are called during the pitch, not after the pitch has ended. If an illegal pitch is swung at, disregard the illegal pitch call.

Ending a Half Inning: In innings one through six, the offensive half of a team’s inning ends with three outs or if a team bats their lineup, either 8, 9, 10, or 11 batters if an extra player (EP) is used.

Any runners left on base when the 8/9/10/11-batter (bat-around) rule is enforced start their next offensive inning on base. This rule does not apply in the 7th or later innings. Runners left on base in the 6th inning under this rule will start the 7th inning on base. This is like the nine-batter rule in JV softball except runners must return to base at team’s next at bat. The coach does not have an option like JV softball.

Game Management

Lineup: A team may start and bat 8, 9, 10 batters or 11batters if using an EP in their lineup) in a single inning but must have a minimum of 8 players to start the game. Umpires do not need to keep lineup cards like in high-school games.

When a team starts with 8 or 9 players, there is no automatic out taken for the empty spots in the batting order. When a team starts with fewer than 10 players, they may add players up to a maximum of 10 players.

Any time a player LEAVES the game with no substitute available, an automatic out is taken for that spot in the batting order.

If a team starts the game with eight or more players but drops below eight players in the lineup any time during the game, the game is terminated.

The “DP/flex” rule does not apply in slow-pitch softball.

Weather Delay: For each lightning strike or thunderclap, the teams must abandon the field for 30 minutes. The 30-minute interval starts anew with each lightning strike or thunderclap. The clock does not stop during a weather delay. If there are less than 30 minutes in the game when a lightning strike or thunderclap occurs, the game is complete.

Time Limit: No new inning may start after two hours. The two-hour time limit begins immediately at the conclusion of the pre-game conference at home plate, or if a team arrives late, the two-hour time limit begins at the scheduled start time. If the latter, the MCPS handbook states "Teams will have a minimum warm-up period of 15 minutes and the pregame conference is conducted with the clock running once teams are ready to play.

The two-hour time limit is not a "drop dead" time limit. Complete any inning that is started except when the home team is leading in the bottom of an inning and the time limit has been reached. Losing teams get the ability to complete their at bat under the rule.

Mercy Rule: If a team is ahead by 15 or more runs in the 5th inning, the game is complete. If the home team is ahead by 15 runs after 4.5 innings, the game is complete.

Tied Games: The International Tiebreaker (ITB) is not used. If the score is still tied, additional innings may be played if less than two hours have elapsed.

Coach Ejection: If a coach is ejected from a game, the team will forfeit the game. Parents may not coach on the field but can keep the score book.

Base Coaches: Players not on the team cannot coach a base. If a player coaches a base she must wear a helmet.

Thrown Bats: A bat thrown carelessly but dangerously is handled by notifying the coach that if another incident occurs in which one of the coach's players throws a bat, the coach will have to remove that player from further participation in that game. Explain to the coach that this ruling is made for the protection of coaches, other players, and the umpire. Do not try to give a blanket warning to either team.

A bat thrown in deliberately in anger is an ejection.

Field and Equipment

Pitching Distance: Per the Middle School Athletic Handbook, the pitching distances are 40 feet for girls and 46 feet for boys.

The Pitch: The pitch must be delivered with a minimally perceptible arc not to exceed 12 feet (off the ground).

Bats: Although not required in high school, for the middle school season, we will inspect bats before a game and at any time that a new bat might be brought into the game. The reason is, in the past, we have found that several illegal bats have been brought to games.

The only permitted bats are those softball bats bearing either the 2000 or 2004 ASA Certification Marks or the 2020 USA Certification Mark or a wooden softball bat. Under no circumstances do we permit a bat with either of the 2013 Certification Marks because these bats are not legal under NFHS rules. Acceptable markings are:



Both the 2013 ASA and USA Certification Marks are shown below. Do not permit any bat bearing these marks to be used in middle school slow-pitch softball.



When you hold the pregame meeting at home plate, let the coaches know that these bats are illegal. If the batter enters the batter's box with this illegal bat, and it is discovered, it must be replaced immediately. Coaches have reported that there is inconsistency in what bats are allowed to be used. Permitting the wrong bat in a game not only makes you liable for any injury but could put all CASO at liability. Because of this, if it is found you allowed an illegal bat in a game, the remainder of your schedule will be removed.

Softballs: The 12-inch regulation, 0.44 core restricted flight softball will be used by both boys and girls. This is different from the .47 core used in high schools.

Catchers: All catchers must wear a helmet and mask combination that meets NOCSAE standard and bears the permanent NOCSAE seal, a throat protector or helmet with an extended mask to protect the throat, and a chest protector. The old style "skull cap" with a separate catcher's mask is not acceptable. Shin guards for catchers are optional.

Catchers on boy's teams must wear a protective cup. Do not ask a male catcher if they are wearing a cup. However, if you see evidence that they are not, then ask them. If they are not wearing a cup, they cannot catch.

Shoes: Players may wear shoes with molded rubber cleats. Screw in and metal cleats are not permitted. Tennis shoes are permitted. Open-toed shoes are not permitted.

Batting Helmets: NOCSAE certified batting helmets must be worn by all batters, base runners, and student age base coaches. Face masks are not required but are permitted in slow-pitch softball.

If you have a player who cannot wear a batting helmet because of his/her religion, permit the player to play defensively and permit another player not in the lineup to bat and run for that player. This is consistent with the arrangement we have with the MCPS regarding this issue.

Do not permit any player to play offense without a batting helmet.

Uniforms: Per MCPS rules, please permit jackets, sweaters, sweatshirts, etc. to be worn over the required jersey, particularly in the cooler weather.

Pregame Conference

Start of Conference: The pre-game meeting at home plate starts 5 minutes before scheduled game start. Start the two-hour time limit at conclusion of pre-game meeting. The clock starts at game time or once the pregame conference ends. If the clock has started, teams get a 15-minute warmup period and then the pregame conference is conducted with the clock running.

Cover Illegal Bats: Cover the illegal bat situation in your pregame meeting and remind the coaches that when a batter has an illegal bat and it is discovered, it must be replaced immediately.