

Softball Rules

Valid through 2025

Special Olympics
New Hampshire



Special Olympics New Hampshire has created this set of rules based on the rules outlined by Special Olympics International as well as the World Softball Confederation (WBSC), the international governing body for softball, rules for slow pitch softball.

These rules shall be used to govern all Special Olympics New Hampshire Softball competition through the end of 2025 when we next review these rules.

Events Offered

- Unified Sports Slow Pitch Team Competition
- Individual Skills

Registration

- A team must consist of a minimum of 12 players, 6 athletes and 6 Unified Sports partners.
- Each team shall have an adult, non-playing coach responsible for line-up and conduct of the team during competition.

Divisioning

- Individual skills athletes will submit Individual Skills Sheet with practice scores that will be used to division for competition.
- A classification round of games is played to determine appropriate skill level brackets and ensure fair and competitive medal-round competition.
- Each team will bat through their complete line up once or twice (depending on team count) and play defense when opposing team in divisioning round(s) is batting through their line up to determine divisions.
- Divisions will be posted immediately following divisioning round.

Equipment

- The softball shall be a 12-inch regular smooth-seamed, concealed stitch or flat surfaced ball. Softballs used in Special Olympics play must meet the standards set by the ISF Equipment Standards Commission or National Governing Body (USA Softball) Standards and must be stamped with the ISF or NGB Slow Pitch approved mark adopted and approved by the Equipment Standards Commission or NGB.
- The bat should be made of metal or wood and shall be round and smooth.
 - It should not have an exposed rivets, pins, rough or sharp edges or any form of exterior fastener that would present a hazard.

- Metal bats should be free of any burrs or cracks and should not have a wooden handle.
- Bats should have a safety grip of cork, tape (no smooth plastic tape), or composition material. Resin, pine tar, or spray substances placed on the safety grip to enhance grip are allowed on the grip only. Any tape applied to the bat must be in a continuous spiral and should not exceed two layers.
- Bats should be marked the manufacturer “OFFICIAL SOFTBALL or USA SOFTBALL APPROVED”. If the approval notice cannot be read due to wear on the bat, the bat may still be used if it is in compliance with ISF or NGB Rules in all other respects and that compliance is determinable with reasonable certainty.
- Softball gloves and mitts (including lacing) must not be the same color of the ball. Top lacing, webbing or other device between the thumb and body of the glove or mitt worn by a first baseman, pitcher, or catcher or a glove worn by any fielder, must not be more than 12.7 cm (5 in) in length.
- Soles of shoes may either be smooth or have soft or hard rubber cleats. No metal cleats or hard plastic, nylon or polyurethane spikes similar to those of a metal sole and heel plate are allowed.
- Catcher must wear a mask with a throat protector and an NOCSAE approved helmet. It is recommended that the catcher also wear a body/chest protector, cup, and shin guards.
- Any player, excluding the catcher, may wear an approved plastic facemask/guard, helmet and/or protective body equipment.
- Helmets are mandatory on offense for batters, on-deck batters, batter-runners, runners, bat boys and girls, and player coaches coaching third or first base.
- For individual skills: Stopwatch, measuring tapes, softballs, small cones or marking stakes, batting tee, 30.5-centimeter (12-inch) red-stitch restricted-flight softballs for hitting.

UNIFORM

- All players should wear a uniform alike in colour, trim and style. Players may wear a uniform, solid colored undershirt (it may be white). It is not mandatory that all players wear an undershirt but if one player wears one, those that are worn should be alike.
- The back of the uniform shirt must have a number at least 6 inches in height. No player or coach on the same team may wear an identical number (numbers 1 and 01 are examples of identical numbers) and only whole numbers 01-99 may be used. Players without numbers will not be permitted to play.
- Individual names may be worn above the numbers on the back of all uniform shirts.
- Caps are optional for players but should be of the same color. Plastic or hard visors are not allowed.
- No jewelry may be worn. Medical alert necklaces or bracelets are not considered jewelry but must be taped to the body.

Competition

FIELD OF PLAY

- The playing field is the area within which the ball may be legally played and fielded. It should have a clear and unobstructed area with the minimum radius as outlined below.
- The Official Diamond shall have base lines that are 65' but may be modified to either 60 or 70 in accordance with NGB guidelines.

- The Official Diamond Shall Have Two Pitching Plates. Minimum pitching plate at 12.19m (40ft) and maximum pitching plate at 16.76m (55ft.). Note: If during the game, the base distance or the pitching distance is found to be at the wrong distance, correct the error at the start of the next full inning and continue playing the game.
- Bases (first, second, and third), other than home plate, should be 15in square and should be made of canvas or other suitable material and not more than 5in in thickness. Bases should be securely fastened in position. A safety base at first base is allowed.

GAME PROCEDURE

- Each game will be 5 innings or 70 minutes, whichever comes first. The clock starts with the first warm-up pitch.
- The choice of the first or last bat in the inning shall be decided by a toss of a coin.
- The pitcher must take a position with both feet on the ground and with one or both feet in contact with the pitcher's plate. The ball must be delivered with a perceptible arc of six to ten feet. Three warm-up pitches may be taken before the start of an inning.
- An athlete using a wheelchair can participate during team competition with a helper:
 - While in the field, the helper stands near the athlete in the wheelchair with the role of fielding the ball and giving it to the athlete who will make the throw.
 - The helper does not count against the partner count but is part of the athlete-helper unit because they are working together.
 - When at bat, the athlete using the wheelchair hits the ball off the tee but does not wheel to first; the helper serves as the designated runner.
- A game that is tied at the end of five innings shall be continued by playing additional innings, or until one side has scored more runs than the other at the end of a complete inning, or until the team second at bat has scored more runs in their half of the inning before the third out is made.
- If the 70 minutes time is reached and the game is tied, the tie breaker rule shall be in effect at the start of the next inning. The score of a forfeited game shall be 7-0 in favor of the team not at fault.

Rosters:

- Each team shall have a non-playing head coach.
- The roster must contain a proportionate number of athletes and Unified Sports partners.
- The batting order for each team must be on the score sheet/line-up card. Batting order shall alternate between athletes and partners.
- Two athletes and two partners must play in both the infield and outfield.
- An athlete and a Unified Sports partner must be pitcher and catcher.
- If there is a "helper" on the field when a team is on defense – that person must wear a vest to distinguish they are a non-player and are unable to touch the ball while it is in play.
- A substitute may take the place of a team's player whose name is in his/her team's batting order.
- Any player may be substituted in the game during any dead ball.
- If there is an injured or bleeding player, a substitute player can be used, but the player must be of the same designation (athlete or Unified Sports partner) as the injured and bleeding player.

- Each team shall have an adult non-playing coach responsible for the lineup and conduct of the team during competition.
- If playing under the shorthanded rule and the team has dropped a Unified Sports partner, an out must be taken when the line-up reaches that Unified Sports partner's place in the batting order.

Scoring of Runs

- One run will be scored each time a runner legally touches first, second, third bases and home plate before the third out of the inning. The only exception is if the tie-breaker is used, the runner starting at second base does not have to touch first base in order for a legal run to be scored.
- A run will not be scored if the third and/or last out of the inning is a result of
 - the batter-runner being put out before legally touching first base.
 - a runner being forced out (including on an appeal play) due to the batter becoming a batter-runner.
 - the runner fails to keep contact with the base to which he is entitled until a pitch is batted or reached home plate.
 - a preceding runner being declared out.

Batting

- A strike is called by the umpire
 - For any ball pitched legally entering the strike zone before touching the ground and at which the batter doesn't swing.
 - For each pitched ball including an illegal pitch, struck at and missed by the batter (the batter cannot legally swing at any pitched ball that hits the ground or plate, however, if the batter swings and misses the pitch prior to the ball hitting the ground or place, it is a strike)
 - For each foul tip. The batter is out if it is the third strike. The ball is dead on any strike.
 - For each foul ball when the batter has less than two strikes.
 - For each pitched ball struck at and missed which touches any part of the batter.
 - When any of the batter's person or clothing is hit with their own batted ball when they are in the batter's box and they have less than two strikes.

Tiebreaker rule

- Starting with the top of the sixth inning, and each half inning thereafter, the offensive team shall begin its turn at bat with the player who is scheduled to bat last in that respective half-inning being placed on second base. The player who is running can be substituted in accordance with the substitution rules.
- Note: If an incorrect runner in the line-up is placed on second base, this error may be corrected as soon as it is noticed. There is no penalty.

Mercy rule:

- If at the end of four innings, one team is ahead by 15 runs or more, the game will be called.

Home Run Rule:

- A limit of two, over-the-fence home runs will be used in all Unified Sports divisions.
 - For any in excess, the ball is dead, the batter is out, and no runners can advance.

- Any fair fly ball touched by a defensive player that clears or has cleared over the fence in fair territory, should be declared a four-base award and shall not be included in the total of over-the-fence home runs.
- A home run will be charged for any ball hit over the fence whether runs score or not.
- Both athlete and partner home runs count toward the Unified limit.

Shorthanded Rule:

- To start a game:
 - A game may begin or finish with one less than required to start.
 - The vacant position must be listed last in the batting order.
 - An out will be recorded when the vacant position in the batting order is scheduled to bat.
- If a team plays shorthanded with either three in the infield or outfield, at least two of the three must be athletes and at least one of the three must be a Unified Sports partner.
- A team may play with an uneven number of athletes and Unified Sports partners as long as there are more athletes than Unified Sports partners.

Courtesy Runner:

- Any eligible player on the official line-up including available substitutes may be used as a courtesy runner.
- Only one courtesy runner may be used per inning.
- Only an athlete may courtesy run for an athlete and only a Unified Sports partner may courtesy run for a Unified Sports partner.

Unified - Extra Player:

- "UNIFIED EXTRA PLAYERS," referred to as "EPs" is optional, but if used, it must be made known prior to the start of the game, and the players' names listed on the line-up card as two of the twelve hitters in the batting order.
- If the EPs are used, they must be used the entire game.
- If EPs are used, all twelve must bat, and any ten (five athletes and five Unified partners) can play defense.
- Defensive positioning may change as long as the Unified positioning is followed. The batting order must remain the same throughout the game.
- If a team cannot complete the game with two EPs, they may continue with only the athlete EP, but an "out" must be automatically recorded when the missing Unified partner EP is due to bat. The athlete EP must remain in the same position in the batting order for the entire game.

Timeouts:

- There shall only be one charged offensive timeout in an inning.
- There shall only be three charged defensive timeouts in a seven-inning game.
- For every inning beyond seven, there shall be one charged timeout per inning.

Disqualification & Protest

- A disqualified player is prohibited from playing but can remain in the team area or serve as a coach.

- If a player is disqualified, a team can play shorthanded (with 9 players), however if a player is ejected and the team does not have enough players, play cannot continue, and the game is forfeited.

INDIVIDUAL SKILLS

- The Individual Skills Competition is provided for athletes with limitations (such as walkers and wheelchairs), younger athletes and athletes new to the sport of softball and older athletes who still have the skills to play softball but cannot play an entire game. Individual Skills is NOT for athletes who can already play the game.
 - An athlete using a wheelchair, or an assistive device (electric wheelchair/walker) may still be permitted to compete in the individual skills competition.
 - If an athlete uses a manual wheelchair:
 - Base Running may be modified. Athlete can circle the bases with their wheelchair for time, but bases may be replaced by chalk or mats that will not pose a safety risk to the person using the wheelchair. The athlete will then be able to wheel over each marked base.
 - Points for fielding may still be recorded for blocking a ball with their wheelchair.
 - If an athlete does not use a manual wheelchair:
 - A coach/volunteer may assist the athlete in the individual skills components; however, all athletes using a wheelchair with assistance will be in the same division to ensure fair play.
- The Individual Skills Competition is composed of four events:
 - BASE RUNNING: To measure the athlete's base-running ability. The athlete starts on home plate, and runs around the bases as fast as possible, touching each base *en route*.
 - Scoring: The time starts when the athlete leaves home plate and stops when the athlete returns to home plate after circling the bases. The time elapsed in seconds is subtracted from 60 to determine the point score. A penalty of five seconds for each base missed or touched in improper order shall be assessed. The best score of two trials is recorded.
 - THROWING: To measure the athlete's ability in throwing for distance and accuracy. The player being tested stands behind the restraining line, back far enough to take one or more steps in preparation for throwing. The player has two trials to throw the softball as far and as straight as possible down the throwing line, without stepping over the restraining line. Coaches, assistants, or other waiting players should be positioned in the field to indicate, using a cone or marking stake, the spot where each ball first touches the ground. The better of the two throws is measured and recorded as the player's score. If a player steps on or over the line before releasing the ball, the trial must be repeated. There will be a maximum of two attempts.
 - Scoring: The net throwing score equals the throwing distance, measured at a point on the throwing line straight across from (perpendicular to) the spot where the ball landed, minus the error distance, the number of meters the ball landed off target, away from the throwing line. The player's score is the better of the two throws. Both

error scores and distance are measured to the nearest meter; for example, if a ball lands even with (perpendicular to) the 50-meter point on the measuring tape, but is 6 meters off to one side, the player's score is 44 points (Distance thrown [50] minus number of meters off target [6] results in a net score of 44 meters). Athletes score one point per meter; for example, 44 meters equals 44 points. If the score falls between meters, the score should be rounded down, for example 44.73 equals 44 points.

- FIELDING: To measure athlete's fielding ability. The athlete will stand between and behind the two cones. The official must throw the ball on the ground to the athlete, between the cones. The throw to the athlete must hit the ground before the 6.10-meter (20-inch) chalk mark. The athlete may move aggressively toward the ball. If the thrown ball is outside of the cones, the throw must be repeated. Each athlete gets five fielding attempts per trial. Each athlete receives two trials.
 - Scoring: The athlete receives five points for a clearly fielded ball (either caught in glove or trapped against the body, but off the ground); two points for a ball that is blocked; zero points for a missed attempt, for a maximum score of 50.
- HITTING: To measure the athlete's ability to hit for distance when hitting off a batting tee. The athlete receives three attempts.
 - Scoring: The distance of the longest hit shall determine the athlete's final score. The distance of a hit is measured from the batting tee to the point where the ball first touches the ground. The distance is measured to the nearest meter; for example, one-meter equals one point; 46 meters equals 46 points. If the score falls between meters, scores should be rounded down; for example, 46.73 equals 46 points. A player's final score is determined by adding together the scores achieved in each of the four events which comprise the Individual Skills Competition.
- The athlete's final score is determined by adding together the scores achieved in each of these four events. Athletes will be pre-divisioned according to their total scores from these four events.