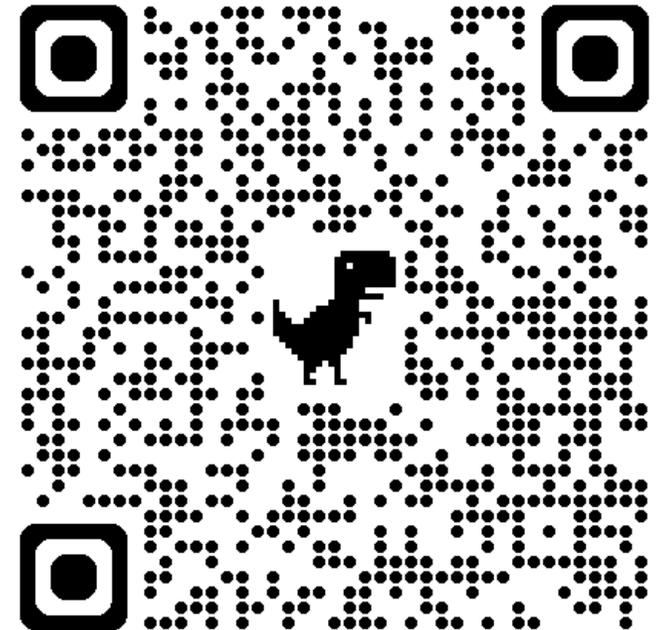
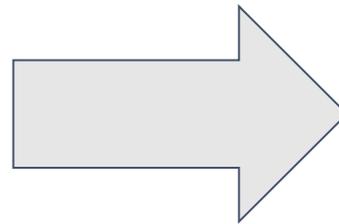


2026 Hot Stove Umpire Clinic: Softball



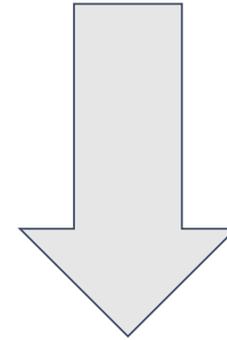
Digital Umpire Data
Sheet

please complete only one
(no school or work
emails, if possible)



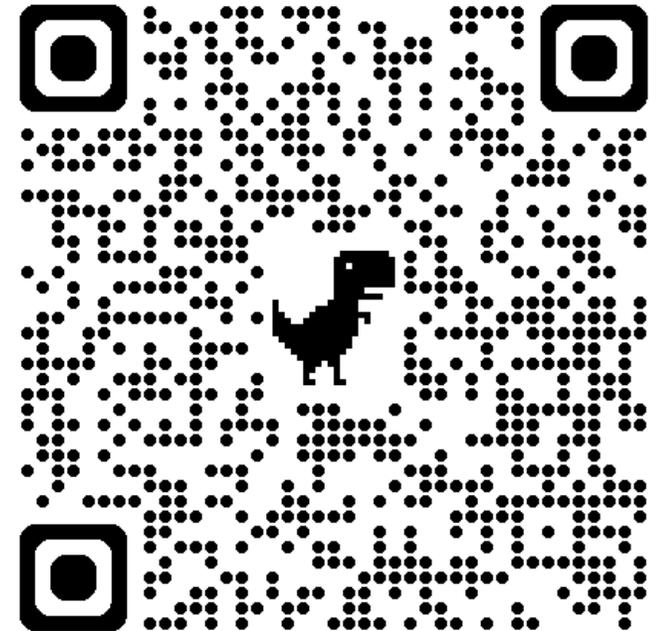
Welcome!

- Thank you for attending!
- Ensure data sheets are completed – one paper & one digital (don't use school email address, if possible)
- Obtain Lorain County Hot Stove Softball rule book
 - PDF (searchable) rule books, rule sheets, & umpire clinic presentations are available on LorainCountyHotStove.com
- Obtain all handouts in packet
- Introduction of State and County Officials present
- Introduction of Community Head Umpires and officials
- Breakdown of schedule (break around halfway point)
- Please silence cell phones – there is a lot of important information to provide in a relatively short period of time!



Digital Umpire Data Sheet

please complete only
one
(no school or work
emails, if possible)



Important Hot Stove Dates to Note

- Remaining Umpire Clinic Dates:
 - Sunday, March 22, 2026, from 12:30 – 5:00 p.m. (Baseball only – if you didn't attend 3/15 clinic)
 - Medina High School, Seniors Common Space – park/get dropped off in parking lot “D”
 - Sunday, April 19, 2026, from 1:00 – 5:00 p.m. (Mechanics Clinic – Baseball & Softball)
 - Location TBD – likely @ North Ridgeville High School turf baseball or softball field
 - Beginner-level, outdoor, supplemental, *moving* clinic with on-field work
 - Highly recommended for new umpires & those with ~less than five years of experience
 - Location, registration, & details will be confirmed on LCHS website
- Baseball Regional Tournament (locations TBD):
 - **Mandatory umpire meeting:** Friday, June 26, 2026, from 6:00 – ~7:00 p.m.
 - Reservoir Park – Grafton (pavilion between fields A & B)
 - Saturday, June 27 & Sunday, June 28
 - Saturday, July 11 & Sunday, July 12
- Softball State Tournament (locations TBD):
 - **Mandatory umpire meeting:** Wednesday, July 1, 2026, from 6:30 – ~7:00 p.m.
 - Reservoir Park – Grafton (pavilion between fields A & B)
 - First week: July 6 – July 9, 2026
 - Second week: July 13 – July 16, 2026

About this Clinic...

This Clinic is designed to be *interactive*! Our outline has been tweaked and perfected (hopefully!) over the past 30+ years – from former State and County Head Umpire, the late Bob Feierabend, to current State President Lou Vasi, and Lorain County Hot Stove Umpire-In-Chief, Jerry Clapper. Input is garnered from the senior umpire staff. Please ask questions – we will be more than happy to answer any umpire questions.

Lastly, remember to have fun!

Rules Disclaimer – this clinic covers Hot Stove rules:

- Hot Stove Softball: mostly based on NFHS (i.e., high school) rule set w/ modifications
 - Non-Hot Stove games you work may use other rule sets (e.g., USA Softball, USSSA)
 - Significant overlap between rule sets, but be aware of major differences when working between leagues, etc. (this clinic may address important differences, where applicable)
 - Softball rules are not 100% universal
 - Online & social media are useful, but be aware of what rule set is being discussed

A Few Thoughts About Umpiring

- The quality of the game can never exceed the quality of the umpiring available.
- Every game is a new game, every pitch a big one.
- Let the umpire lose his temper, and he/she is through.
- Let the umpire get pushed around, and he/she is through.
- 6 words describe what an umpire should be: *Quick to think, Slow to anger.*
- Perhaps the most difficult part of being a successful umpire is the ability to ignore outside influences and internal pressures and to maintain absolute concentration on the game and only the game, including each individual play and pitch.
- There are no close plays: only Ball or Strike, Safe or Out.
- In the public mind, the umpire appears at best to be a necessary evil; at worst as a Neanderthal bent upon robbing the home team of its just desserts. How else to explain the singular propensity of umpires to blow calls obvious even to those sitting in the last row of the upper deck, and to misinterpret rules known even to those who have never read a rule book?
- The way to study the rule book is to read a rule and then out it in play in your mind, visualize it, make application of that rule to the play. In your mind you see the play in the field, and then, when it comes up, it's like it's been there before.
- In order to be a good umpire you have to have the desire to learn something every day. Every umpire feels that he/ she is the best umpire there is. But the best umpire is the one that feels that way and then learns something new the next day.
- The toughest call an umpire has to make is not the half swing; the toughest call is throwing a guy out of the game after you blew the hell out of the play.
- To be an umpire, you must have good judgement, good eyesight and confidence that you can do the job. You do not know or care to know who you are calling safe or out, and when the ball reaches home plate, you know only that it is either a ball or a strike. That's integrity; if an umpire loses that, he's lost everything. If players and managers know an umpire calls the play the way he sees it, they will respect him even if he might not be the best umpire.

State of Ohio Concussion Return-to-Play Law

- All Hot Stove managers, coaches & umpires must comply with this law!
- Use this site to get your **free** certification: [NHFS Free Concussion Course](#)
 1. Select “Ohio” from the drop-down. You will be prompted to log in or create an account.
 2. Under “Concussion in Sports,” select “Order Course” – then, “Start Learning” on next page.
 3. Select “Begin Course,” and proceed until the course is finished & a certificate is earned.
 4. If you want additional information on this law, visit [Ohio Department of Health](#) website.
- By law, the course must be taken every three years while officiating
- A community may be asked to provide proof of compliance
- Save a picture of your completion certificate on your phone and keep it with you, as needed
- The course is intended for awareness – umpires don’t diagnose concussion, but we should alert a coach, etc., if a potential issue arises



Coach Education
www.nfhslearn.com

Umpire Dress Code – Softball

(LCHSS Rules 12.1.C & 14.19.G)

- Hat (various styles available) – **required** for all umpires (NEW for 2026):
 - Black or Dark Blue (blank w/ no non-Hot Stove logos)
 - Hot Stove & Hot Stove Baseball/Softball are the only logos permitted
 - 4-stitch (2” brim) / 6-stitch (2.5” brim) recommended (“combo” – only need to buy one hat); 8-stitch (2.75” brim) is OK (typical ball cap); 3-stitch (1.5” brim) OK for *plate umpire only*
 - **ALWAYS** wear the brim forward, even when behind the plate – unless you are wearing a hockey style helmet (then no hat is required for the plate umpire)
 - *Hats should be clean, with no visible dirt or stains*
- Shirt: Hot Stove Softball umpires wear **black MLB replica shirt w/ striped collar & striped sleeve cuffs** (pictured) as official uniform shirt (required in tournaments)
 - Only Hot Stove patch(es) permitted, if any: (1) on left sleeve, or (1) one on left + (1) on right sleeve – two finger widths above cuff & centered (USA flag / number are also OK)
 - Umpire shirts are *typically sized to fit over a chest protector* (i.e., order your normal shirt size)
 - Any color MLB, etc. replica umpire shirt may be worn during the regular season, provided *both umpires are dressed exactly alike* (examples pictured)



Umpire Dress Code – Softball

(LCHSS Rules 12.1.C & 14.19.G)

- Red Undershirt (if an undershirt is worn): never wear a visible, red long sleeve undershirt under short sleeve umpire shirt (long sleeve that *matches* umpire shirt underneath is OK in cold)
- Coat:
 - Any black / dark blue coat (pictured – not expected to buy one)
 - No hoodies or logos over umpire shirt
 - Visible dark sweatshirt under umpire shirt OK for cold games
- Gray Pants – **DRESS SLACK-STYLE ONLY** (no jeans, capris, leggings, sweatpants etc.); no shorts *ever*:
 - *Charcoal gray* most common & preferred, but different shade of gray is OK
 - “Umpire pants” available (fit nicely over plate gear), but normal dress pants may work
- Black Belt: **REQUIRED** – we *never* umpire without a belt on



Umpire Dress Code – Softball

(LCHSS Rules 12.1.C & 14.19.G)

- Ball Bag(s) – *only* worn by the PLATE umpire, *never* by a base umpire:
 - One bag: always on the right side
 - One bag on each side is optional
 - If you are left-handed & need the bag on your left, wear two ball bags
 - Gray, Black, or Navy Blue are acceptable; both bags must match if wearing two (typically match w/ hat)
- Clicker & Brush are a must (both plate ump & base ump):
 - Indicators/clickers come in three- or four-wheel varieties (always in left-hand during play)
 - Brushes also come in a variety of shapes & sizes
- Plate Gear: chest protector (fitted snug under your chin), leg guards, & personal protective gear are *always* worn UNDER the uniform shirt & pants (catchers gear OK for young games)



○ **ALWAYS BRING YOUR PLATE GEAR TO A GAME**

Umpire Dress Code – Softball

(LCHSS Rules 12.1.C & 14.19.G)

- Black or Dark Blue Socks: at least crew length (no ankle/no-show socks)
- Black Shoes: **shined (clean appearance)**, with black laces; some white trim, etc. is OK
 - “Plate shoes” (pictured) recommended for plate umpire
 - How to clean ideas: dish soap & water spray bottle w/ rag & brush, car interior wipes, leather shoe shiner



Where to buy umpire items:

- Purchase Officials Supplies (store in Akron + shop online)
- Final Score Sporting Goods (store in North Royalton + shop online)
- Play It Again Sports (closest store in North Olmsted + shop online)
 - Used sports gear only – availability varies
- Honig’s (online only)
- Ump Attire (online only – ump-attire.com)
- Flemings Referee and Sport (store in Columbus & shop online)
- Amazon (quality may vary)
- Used gear (e.g., Facebook Marketplace)

Umpire Dress Code – Softball

(LCHSS Rules 12.1.C & 14.19.G)

PERCEPTION IS REALITY WITH UMPIRE APPEARANCE

- All umpires should be clean and neat
- Jewelry: NO metallic items (e.g., visible chain); no/limited non-metallic wristbands; smart watch not advised; NO traditional watch; wedding band is OK
- Sunglasses: OK to wear if needed (avoid mirrored/highly reflective)
 - Remove them when speaking face-to-face with a coach
- *Dress as an umpire to do a game, dress as a fan to watch a game – no umpire uniform in the stands*
- NO smoking/vaping, chewing tobacco, or nicotine pouches during a game or near playing field *(LCHSS Rule 14.15.A)*
- NO cell phone use during a game
 - OK to use to keep track of time limit for games (umpire's responsibility) *(LCHSS Rules 6.3.1 & 14.9.C)*
 - If you have your cell phone, keep it in your pocket & only use it to call 9-1-1 for emergencies

Former North Olmsted and North Ridgeville Hot Stove Umpire and Current MLB Crew Chief, #92 James Hoye.



Pregame & Umpire Etiquette

- Find out who your partner is – if you have one – from your game assigner or from online, if your game is assigned online, before arriving at the game facility.
 - If working solo, never accept the offer of a non-certified spectator or coach to “help on the bases.” Only carded umpires may officiate games – & you’re probably better off working solo than w/ someone random.
- Obtain your partner’s phone number, if possible, to text/call before arriving at the facility. Discuss, at a minimum, where you’ll park/meet up (game assigner may be able to assist if there’s designated umpire parking).
 - What vehicle to look for, uniform options (shirt/pants), & who is doing plate/bases can also be discussed.
- Arrive at the game facility *at least* 30 minutes before the scheduled start – *especially* when working with a partner. *NEVER walk straight to the field* to wait! Umpires always walk to the field together.
 - Communicate with your partner if you are running late. Don’t leave them guessing where you are.
- If you don’t know who your partner is, ask! Don’t be shy. All umpires are willing to help the new ump.
- If not discussed already: (1) find out what umpire shirt you’re both wearing (if you only have one shirt, it should be the black MLB replica) & (2) discuss who is doing plate & bases. Do not plan to be a “base guy/girl” forever.
- Look at each other’s appearance. If the veteran is dressed wrong, tell them. Don’t allow them to go out dressed incorrectly, including jewelry. Tell them if their shirt collar is not flat & neat.

Pregame & Umpire Etiquette

- If you have questions, ask. This is your time to get important things set in your head. Before & after games, feel free to discuss game situations or rules you're unsure of with veteran/other umpires. (But don't be late arriving at the field.)
- The Umpire-In-Chief (UIC)/Crew Chief is usually the plate umpire. The older/more experienced partner may be the UIC for the game and do the bases; this allows the newer umpire to get plate experience without the added pressure and responsibilities of being the UIC. (*OHSBL Rule 9.3.C*)
- Ensure both umpires are on the same page for class-specific rules (e.g., balks, uncaught third strike).
- Discuss partner signals (next slide) & essential crew mechanics (discussed in sport-specific clinics).
- *Do not carry a physical rulebook with you to the field in Hot Stove* (exception: Farm Minor rule sheet).
- Walk together to the field *10–15 minutes* before the scheduled start time. (*LCHSS Rules 12.1.B/D*)
 - Check equipment – including bats, helmets, & catcher's helmets (requirements discussed later & in sport-specific clinics). Umpire jurisdiction begins when arrived at field to inspect equipment.
- Go to the bathroom before the game. Typically, umpires do not take a bathroom break during a game; however, you may go if it is unavoidable.

Umpire Partner Signals – Softball

Work out a set of hand & arm signals for you & your partner to communicate nonverbally.

Examples (may vary slightly from partner to partner):

- Touching the top of the head: Plate umpire needs the count; partner should flash the number of balls on left hand, strikes on right against body (shirt)
- Right hand over heart, number of outs (0 or 1) in left hand: Infield fly rule is in effect
 - Right hand w/ fist (0 out) or one finger (1 out) on bill of cap also common
 - Infield fly rule discussed later
- Wipe hand down arm: Infield fly is no longer in effect
- Right Index & middle fingers together tapping wrist: A time play is possible with 2 outs
- Base ump on uncaught 3rd strike: point to ground = no catch, fist straight down = catch
- Two closed fists tapping on top of one another: Good call / I agree with you
- Taking cap off/subtly tapping chest: on a coach's appeal, I have information about the play to share (e.g., pulled foot, trapped ball on ground)

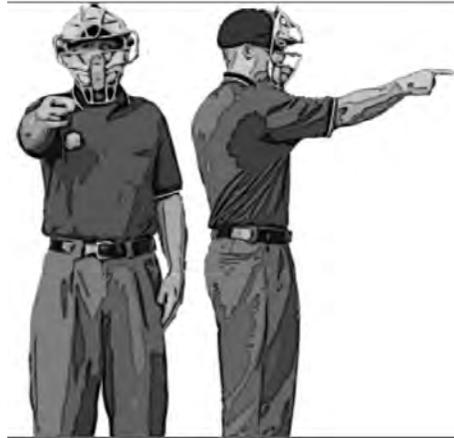
Check swing: Base umpire only rules if asked BY THE PLATE UMPIRE; return the signal same way – silent or verbal (OK for plate ump to appeal to base ump who is not on foul line, but base ump usually shouldn't overturn a no-swing call unless the plate ump's vision was clearly blocked)

Umpire Mechanic Signals – Softball

These signals should not be altered much between games & with different partners. Note which hand is used for each signal.



**Time Out / Foul Ball /
Dead Ball**



Play Ball



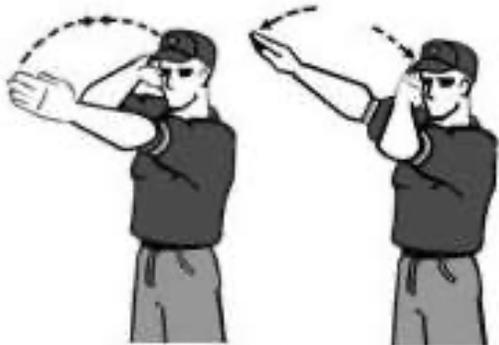
Delayed Dead Ball



Fair Ball



Strike / Out



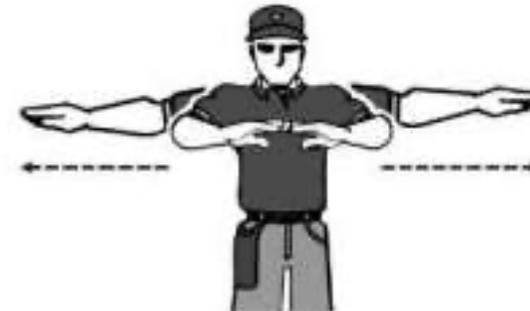
Foul Tip (discussed later)



Count (balls left hand,
strikes right hand)



Infield Fly (when
ball is at its apex)



Safe



Do Not Pitch (also
means "Time")

Hot Stove Age Classes – Softball

(LCHSS Rule 1.1)

Playing age is determined by age on August 31 of previous year:

- Farm Minor: 5–6-year-old girls
- Farm Major: 7–8-year-old girls
- Class A: 9–10-year-old girls
- Class B: 11–12-year-old girls
- Class C: 13–14-year-old girls
- Class D: 15–18-year-old girls

Hot Stove Bat Rules – Softball

(LCHSS Rules 4.1, 4.2, & 11.3)



Allowed in all games

The below requirements are for ALL CLASSES. There are no drop restrictions.

- Must bear one or more of **ASA 2000**, **ASA 2004**, &/or **USA Softball** certification marks (all three marks pictured) – & **not be listed on** the USA Softball Non-Approved Bat List with Certification Marks
- No more than 34 inches in length, 2¼ inches in diameter, & weigh no more than 38 ounces
- **Any bat less than 30 in.** or bat barrels made entirely of wood are not required to have certification markings
- Not be damaged – must be free of burs, dents, cracks, sharp edges, rattles & show no signs of excessive wear
- Must not be an altered bat or an illegal bat (LCHSS Rules 2.1, 2.30, 2.31 8.1.C/D, 8.11.B/C, 9.7.K, & 10.1.U/V)
 - **Altered bat:** a bat that was once legal, but the physical structure has been changed & is now illegal
 - PENALTY: Ball is dead, batter/batter-runner is out, no baserunners may advance. Player using bat is ejected.
 - **Illegal bat:** a bat that doesn't meet the requirements in Rule 4.1 (e.g., a baseball bat).
 - PENALTY: Ball is dead, batter/batter-runner is out, no baserunners may advance. No ejection; remove bat.

Other Bat Information

- Bat handles can be space taped or continuous; “Lizard grip” is legal; no more than two layers
- Choke-up knobs are illegal (pictured)
- Shock absorber knobs are legal
- Pine tar/resin allowed on bat grip only (not on taper or barrel)



Batting Helmets – Softball

(LCHSS Rules 2.28, 4.11.A.5, 9.7.L, & 14.12.E)

- ALL batters must wear a NOCSAE-approved batting helmet. They must not be reflective or distracting & must be in a safe condition – not broken, cracked, dented or have been illegally altered (judgement call).
- **Girls Farm Minor** are *required* to wear a chin strap.
- Chin straps are optional to be worn in all classes. If worn, they must be worn properly & touching the underside of the chin.
- Facemask *required* & must be installed correctly if used. Facemask must also be NOCSAE approved.



Batting & Catching Helmets – Softball

(LCHSS Rules 4.9, 4.11.A.5, 7.13, 9.7.L, 14.12.E, & 14.13)

- Umpires' responsibility to ensure a batter is wearing proper headgear. The game is stopped until corrected.
 - If a batter is discovered to not have proper headgear, correct the situation and warn the player & coach. (No bench restriction/ejection for first offense).
 - Player may be called out if they fail to wear proper headgear after being instructed to do so by the umpire – *but use discretion*.
- Non-adult (under 18), player base coaches, & all bat boys/girls must wear a batting helmet while on the field.
- Catcher's helmets must also have a NOCSAE stamp. All hardware must be properly and securely attached with no screws missing.
 - Skull cap & mask combination (pictured) is illegal in softball.
- Any player anywhere (e.g., field, bullpen) warming up a pitcher by catching pitches must wear a catcher's helmet.



Other Equipment Rules – Softball

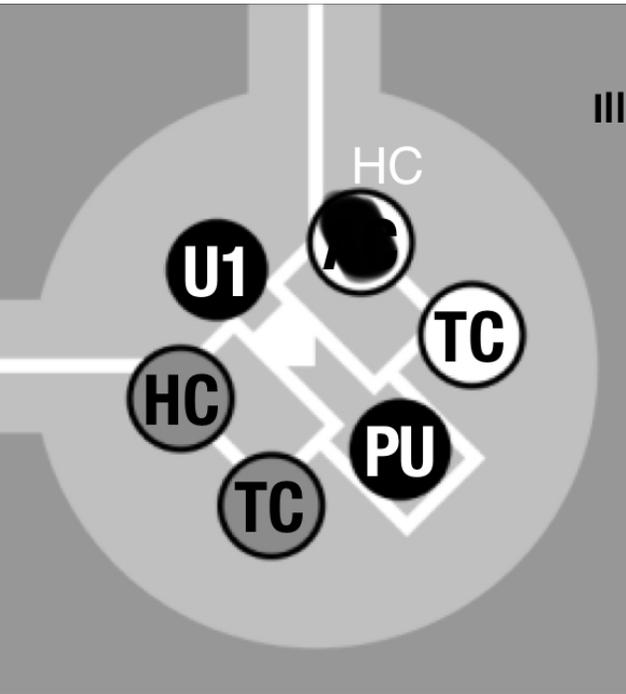
(LCHSS Rules 4.7, 4.8, 4.11.A.6/7/8/9, 11.2.C, & 14.13)

- Jewelry: Jewelry is permissible unless an item is deemed unsafe, unsportsmanlike, or distracting by the umpire
 - Don't go looking for trouble with jewelry, including smart watches; times have changed!
- Sunglasses: OK for any player to wear if not deemed distracting by umpire (e.g., mirrored)
- Playcard bands: Permitted, & must be worn on forearm or left in pocket
- Casts: Exposed plaster or other hard substance not permitted (must be padded). Any exposed metal may be considered legal if covered by soft material and taped
- Pitcher's Compression Sleeve / Sweat Bands: Compression sleeves on throwing arm OK but may not be optic yellow or be distracting to batter (i.e., below elbow) (judgement call)
- Pitcher's Glove: May not be optic yellow; batting glove is permitted under mitt if not distracting (judgement call)
 - All Fielder's Gloves/Mitts: Mitts and gloves (any colors/combinations of colors) are legal for all other players at every other position
- Cleats: Non-metal cleats *only* allowed to be worn in Farm Minor, Farm Major, Class A, & Class B; Classes C & D are additionally permitted to wear metal spikes
- Defensive facemask: Required for pitcher, 1st & 3rd baseman in **Farm Minor, Farm Major, & Class A ONLY** – optional for other positions; completely optional in Classes B–D

Ground Rules Preliminaries – Softball

(LCHSS Rules 6.2 & 12.1)

Umpires, Head Coaches, & Team Captains (if any) shall stand at the pregame plate meeting as shown below:



- Ground Rules are given at or around Home Plate (no infield practice at this time).
 - Usually given by the Crew Chief or UIC for the game, but may be done by either umpire. In tournament games, it is the Field Judge's responsibility (followed by anything the umpires want to add).
- Home team manager shall determine the fitness of the playing field before a game starts; after a game begins, the umpires are solely responsible for judging if a field is unfit to continue playing on.
- Home team manager may determine initial ground rules, but any disagreements will result in the Crew Chief establishing ground rules, including any special ones.
- Know the ground rules for the field you are on. If an area of the field may need clarification, the home head coach may be able to assist by offering the typical interpretation.
- A ground rule can never supersede a playing rule (e.g., no “ground rule triple”).
- NO warnings *ever* at the plate meeting (e.g., “someone is ejected if...”) – only reminders, as deemed necessary by the umpires.

Ground Rules Items to Discuss – Softball

*(Essential items in **bold**)*

The pregame plate meeting should typically last one to three minutes:

- **Both umpires should introduce themselves.** Coaches and any team captains will do the same.
- **Crew Chief shall discuss the ground rules of the field** (home team manager may offer assistance, if needed).

Starting behind home plate, going around the whole field starting on the 3rd base side, & finishing at home plate.

(Players shall raise their hands & not touch the ball if out of play, & the base umpire shall confirm.):

- Backstop fence: Mention holes or areas of concern & any entryways (typically pole to pole for out-of-play line). Are any field markings missing or incorrect (e.g., batter's boxes)?
- 3rd base bench area/dugout: Where equipment is & should be. Where the on-deck circle is (batter's switching sides is typically OK). Any fence openings. Is there a properly marked foul line?
- 3rd base side fence (beyond dugout): Is the fence the entire length of the field, or is there out of play area (is out of play marked with a line, if so)? Is there a properly marked foul line?
- Outfield: Is there a fence? Any branches hanging over fence (fly ball hitting tree = home run)? Any holes in the fence? Temporary fence? If no fences, is there an out-of-play area (e.g., wooded area)?
- 1st base side fence & bench area/dugout: Same criteria as the 3rd base side. Is there a double first base present? (No rules for baseball, so typically treated as one big base.) Is there a properly marked foul line & runner's lane?
- Additionally: Are there any excessively muddy areas of the field or ground under repair that we may consider establishing as dead-ball territory? (Dead ball rules apply, if so.)

Ground Rules Items to Discuss – Softball

(Essential items in bold)

- “One from the mound, two from the field” & “catch and carry” rules in relation to the ground rules.
- **Ask both managers if all of their players are properly equipped per the rules; a verbal “yes” is required.**
- **What batting lineup each team is using (Classes A-D only):** two to three options available (next slides).
 - No need to accept a lineup card in Hot Stove (ignore references in LCHSS rule book).
- Both sides must keep on foul balls & return them to the plate umpire.
- Players must always hustle on and off the field. Be sure a pitcher & catcher are always ready to warm up.
- **Consider discussing age-/class-specific items** (e.g., time limit, balk/illegal pitch warnings, how you’ll help during coach pitch in Class I/Farm Major).
- Ask if there are any emergency personnel who may need to use a cell phone during the game.
- Remind coaches that if they have a question on any play/call, they shall *call & be granted time after playing action concludes*; the calling umpire on the play shall then decide whether to confer with their partner or not. Judgement calls will not be appealed.
- **Reiterate the importance of good sportsmanship.**
- **Ask if they have any questions. Answer only questions related to the ground rules. If they have a rules question, politely defer to a more appropriate time. Do not discuss what “your strike zone is.”**
 - If asked: “by the book, coach” or “my interpretation of the rule.”
 - **No “gentlemen's agreements”**; umpires only enforce written rules (e.g., coach wants no running on overthrows).
- Wish both teams good luck, & the home team has a few minutes to take the field. Coaches must relay this message to players.

Batting Lineup + Starting a Game – Softball

(LCHSS Rules 5.1, 5.4, 6.3.F.7, & 11.4.C)

Each team shall declare which of the following batting lineup options they are choosing to use:

- Farm Minor & Farm Major: Required to use a continuous lineup – everyone bats
- Classes A & B: – (2) lineup options (discussed separately in next slides):
 - Straight 9 batters
 - Continuous order
 - A & B shall use *matching* for a non-continuous order (playing time requirement for a certain number of players – next slides)
 - Additional option for Classes C & D: DP-Flex (not discussed – see Rule 8.13)

Required number of players to start a game:

- Farm Minor & Farm Major: Should have 9 players; if a team shows up with fewer than 9, play the game. There is no minimum to start a regular-season game.
 - May use up to 10 players on defense
- Classes A–D: 9 players required to start a game
 - A team may drop to 8 players, if needed; if this happens, the team may not return to 9 players

Playing Time Rules – Softball

(LCHSS Rules 5.3 & 11.4)

- Girls Farm Major: Continuous batting order required & all players must play 6 defensive outs
- Classes A & B: All players must play a minimum of 12 outs (2 innings). SUBSTITUTES must play these 12 outs consecutively.
 - Matching: Coaches have to match players in this rule. Example: one team has 14 & the other has 11 – only 11 players *have* to play for the team with 14 players; the team with 14 must list which 11 players will be used to match the 11 from the other team (the other 3 players don't have required playing time).
 - Player matching may not be used by a team using a continuous batting order
 - Once the starters and subs have played 12 outs, free substitution rule may be used (i.e., players may enter & re-enter the game without restriction)
 - Subs should be in by the top of the 3rd inning; a game may be protested if sub rules aren't fulfilled
- Classes C & D: No substitution rules that require any minimum playing time.

Straight 9 Batting Order – Softball

(LCHSS Rules 5.3 & 5.4)

A nine-player batting lineup – no more than (9) players in the game at a time (Classes A–D only). The batting order can never change (a player can never bat in another spot).

- Substitution rules to be aware of:
 - If a player becomes sick or injured and unable to continue in the game: a legal, available substitute may enter the game.
 - A player removed due to illness or injury is ineligible to return for the remainder of game.
 - If no legal sub is available, the opposing coach may select a player to enter the lineup in the sick or injured player's spot. This is the only situation in which the batting order may change.
 - If a player is *ejected* and no legal sub is available, there shall be out declared in the ejected player's spot.
 - Classes C & D: one re-entry for all starters & subs
- If a team only has 9 players to start a game, & a player leaves the game, drop to 8 players and play on. An out is declared in the missing player's spot in the batting order.

Continuous Batting Order – Softball

(LCHSS Rules 5.3.G & 10.2.C)

- Optional for Classes A-D
- If one team uses a continuous batting order, the other team is not required to use it
- Must be declared at ground rules
- All players present at game must be placed in batting order
 - Late-arriving players are placed at the bottom of the lineup
- If a player is ejected, the spot vacated in the batting order becomes an out for the remainder of the game
- All defensive substitution rules must still be met for Classes A & B
- If a player is removed for illness/injury or ejection, the vacated spot becomes an out for the duration of the game; a player who vacates their batting position may not return to the game
- Farm Minor & Farm Major: continuous batting order is mandatory; no out is declared if a player is removed until the batting order is below 10 players

Hot Stove Coach Expectations

(LCHSS Rules 2.15, 14.12, & 14.15)

- No muscle/cutoff shirts – we wear sleeves in this league!
- No cutoff shorts or torn/tattered jeans (use discretion if coach is coming from work)
- No hats on backwards when on the field (in the dugout is OK)
- No sandals/open-toe shoes/Croc-like shoes
- No cursing when others (e.g., young players) may hear; use discretion in older ages
- No smoking, vaping, smokeless tobacco, or alcohol use permitted on field/bench area
- Cell phone may not be used on the field/in coach's box(es)
 - Emergency personnel/first responders may have cell phone for emergency use only (must be identified at ground rules)
 - If a call is received, coach must leave field of play to complete call
 - May use cell phone/tablet for electronic scoring (i.e., GameChanger)

Any violation & refusal to comply with the items above can result in a verbal warning by the umpire & subsequent bench restriction or ejection, if deemed necessary (next slide)

Discipline – Warnings & Ejections

Steps below may be skipped, if necessary. Umpires never should want to eject, but use these tools.

- Ignore – Step 1 (players & coaches): Not everything requires a reaction. A brief glance at a coach may help.
- Verbal Warnings – Step 2 (players & coaches): Can be issued when warranted.
 - If a coach is being overly belligerent, try talking quieter; in turn, it may make them settle down to hear you.
 - Do not get into an argument with coaches. Maintain composure.
 - Try, “I won’t respond to that volume, coach.” The responsibility is now on them to calm down if they really want to discuss something.
 - If verbally warning a player, make it known to their head coach that further action by their player could result in further discipline (i.e., ejection).
- Bench restrictions – Step 3 (coaches only): An option in both baseball & softball. Coaches that are bench restricted may not leave the dugout and come into the field of play, or foul territory, for the remainder of the game. Use for conduct that isn’t overly egregious, but still deserves discipline.
- Ejections – Step 4 (players & coaches): Once you issue a warning, you must follow through if conduct warrants an ejection; if you don’t, you risk losing respect and control of the game. Ejections should be the ***absolute last*** option. (Ejection = out of sight & hearing range of playing field; players may stay on bench if no one to take them)
 - Try not to box yourself in, if possible, to where you have no choice but to eject due to something you said (e.g., “one more word, coach, & you’re gone”). However, coaches or players may do or say things that undoubtedly get themselves ejected.

Discipline – Warnings & Ejections

(LCHSS Rule 14.19.E)

Any bench restriction or ejection issued in a game MUST be reported via email to the County Umpire-in-Chief within 24 hours for record keeping & for discipline to be administered, if needed.

The head umpire/assigner who assigned you that game may like to know, as well.

- General tips:

- Be firm but polite. Let **head** coaches have their say – they are only doing their job. Once you’ve heard them out, act on their request, and be done.
 - We have much less tolerance for the actions of *assistant* coaches. Head coaches must keep their entire team under control.
- Use preventive officiating when possible. There are times when you can stop something before it starts, & you don’t have to enforce an unfortunate for one team or the other (e.g., between innings).
- Use the rule book to back you up whenever possible. “By rule,…” is a powerful tool if you are confident in your rules knowledge.
- Use “in my judgment” whenever possible. Your judgment can’t be continuously argued.
- Coaches are responsible for their spectators. *Umpires don’t eject fans.*

Umpire Game Management – Softball

(LCHSS Rules 12.9 & 14.19.H)

- By knowing and enforcing the rules, the game will move at a good pace & be less argumentative.
 - If doing a younger level game, where three outs may not always be the end of the inning, make sure you know the rules and enforce them from **day one**.
 - Be firm, but polite. Make it clear that the rules will be followed. A question about a rule should be courteous and brief. Talk to your partner (if needed – discussed later), make a call, and move on.
- NO fraternization upon arrival at the field. If you aren't distracted by talking, you can more effectively do your job.
- If you need a drink, have it close – you can drink and still pay attention. *Stay hydrated, especially on hot days.*
- **Keep your temper. No rabbit ears.**
 - We may hear mostly everything, but we don't act on anything unless necessary.
 - Don't allow taunting or unsportsmanlike behavior to continue between teams if you notice it.

Umpire Game Management – Softball

Umpires have some control over the flow of the game – especially the plate umpire.

Between half-innings:

- *Plate umpire* usually stands on the side of the team coming to bat, near the foul line & away from the dugout. *Base umpire* goes to short right field. Talking to your partner between innings should be kept to a **minimum** (only essential information/if training – & *never after a controversial play the previous inning*).
- Plate Umpire:
 - Watch the transition between innings, & ask teams to hustle up if they are taking too long.
 - Request the pitcher and a catcher (or someone to warm up the pitcher). Fielders don't need the infield practice between innings.
 - This will allow the coach time to set the other players while the pitcher is warming up.
 - Track warm-up pitches (next slide).
- Base Umpire:
 - Always have a brush, and use it to clean off bases as needed, and the pitcher's plate.
 - Observer transition between innings & ensure players are hustling on & off the field.

Umpire Game Management + Conferences – Softball

(LCHSS Rules 2.14, 6.9, 7.8, 7.11 & 8.7.E)

- Softball Pitchers have no more than one minute to throw no more than (5) warm-up pitches – new pitcher or not (use discretion).
 - If it is cold, the plate ump may allow more pitches. Tell the catcher this, and that she needs to throw the 5th pitch down.
- Plate umpire should be counting pitches, & remind the catcher to throw the last one down. If he/she doesn't, don't allow him/her to waste more time. Allowing the ball to be thrown down is a *courtesy*.
- When the last warm-up pitch is done & the catcher has thrown it back, the plate ump should already have their brush out & be cleaning the plate off. By the time they're done, the pitcher will be ready.
- Base Umpire: Like the plate ump, the base ump can be ready; position yourself near the mound, so when the ball goes to 2nd base, you can clean the rubber and jog back to first base before the pitcher is ready to throw.

Coach conferences (plate ump should keep track &/or have scorekeeper record – inform coach of each one):

- **Offense:** one conference per inning while batting
- **Defense:** (3) conferences in a regulation game without penalty
 - Changing a pitcher does not count as a charged conference
 - Only one conference per extra inning allowed without penalty
 - PENALTY: Any conference beyond the allowable amount requires the pitcher to be removed for the rest of the game.
- Injury visits do not count against a pitcher so long as the coach does not talk softball/situations

Umpire Game Management – Softball

(LCHSS Rule 8.1.E)

- Plate Umpire: If a batter tends to wander too far away between pitches, ask them to stay closer. You could request he keep one foot in the batter's box if this gets excessive.
 - The batter has 10 seconds to be ready to bat from the time the pitcher gets control of the ball within the 16' circle.
- Plate ump should announce the count about every 2-3 pitches, or (1) when there's 2 strikes or 3 balls / (2) after something happens (e.g., stolen base, conference, passed ball)
- **HUSTLE!** Umpiring is not a spectator sport. Move smartly to your next position. Don't walk – jog.
- If you're going to make a call: stop first, see it, let your mind process what your eyes just saw, and make a call (1-2 seconds to process – followed by your call). Our calls look & sound much better when we take our time compared to calling a play too quickly.
 - When making a call, **angle** is more important than **distance**.
 - Mechanics discussed more later/in sport-specific clinic.

Calling Time Outs & Putting the Ball in Play – Softball

(LCHSS Rules 2.14 & 12.8)

Time Outs – use proper mechanic w/ verbal, “Time!”:

- Managers/Coaches/Players can request time out. It is up to the umpire to grant it. If you grant it, put both hands in the air & call time out.
- Offense is allowed one coach visit/conference per inning (*OHSBL Rule 5.10.F*)
- If a time out is requested after ball four, wait until the batter/runner has touched first base, and any other runners have advanced, & stopped, before calling a time out. Watch the coach to make sure they stay in the dugout area until time is granted.
- If the coach begins his way to the mound, remind him, politely, to please wait for time to be granted. (Or after a walk, say, “wait until he/she gets to first base, coach”).



Anytime the ball is dead, the umpire must put the ball back in play with the proper mechanic & a verbal, “Play!”, only when (all four conditions must be met):

- The pitcher has the ball in the 16’ circle,
- The catcher is in position in the catcher’s box,
- All other fielders are in fair territory, &
- The batter is *ready* for a pitch while in the batter’s box (not *just* feet in the box)



Courtesy Runner – Softball

(LCHSS Rule 9.10)

- ALL Classes: A courtesy runner may be used for the catcher or pitcher at any time during the game that the catcher or pitcher gets on base or is already on base.
 - The same runner may not be used for both positions in the same inning.
- This situation is NOT considered a substitution.
- Must be a player not currently in the game (exception for only 9 or continuous order)
- Catcher has to play defense BEFORE they are entitled to a courtesy runner, or be the catcher the next inning.
 - Exception: Top of 1st inning, the visiting team has not yet played defense. They are still entitled to a CR. The individual identified on the lineup card as the catcher (or pitcher in softball) must play defense as the catcher (or pitcher in softball) in the bottom of the 1st inning (head coach is bench restricted if this doesn't happen).
- **This is a speed up rule.** Ensure the catcher/pitcher (softball) is getting ready to play defense.

Slide or Give Up?

(LCHSS Rules 2.58 & 9.8.S)

- LCHSS DOES NOT have a “Slide or Give-up” rule.
- LCHSS allows jumping over or around the defensive player attempt to slide to avoid being tagged.
- A runner is *never* required to slide – but if they do, it shall be a **legal slide** (see below).
 - PENALTY for illegal slide (see requirements below): The runner is out, the ball is dead, and all other runners must return to the last base touched at the time of the interference.
- When a defensive player has the ball and the runner remains on her feet and deliberately, with great force, crashes into the defensive player, the runner is to be declared out.
 - If, in the umpire's judgement, malicious/flagrant contact is witnessed, the runner may also be ejected from the game.
- Legal Slide – May be either feet first **or** headfirst.
 - If a runner slides feet first, at least one leg and buttock shall be on the ground. If a runner slides, the runner shall be within reach of the base with either hand or a foot when the slide is completed.
- Illegal Slide – A slide is illegal if:
 - The runner uses a rolling pin or cross-body slide into the fielder.
 - The runner’s raised leg is higher than the fielder’s knee when the fielder is in a standing position.
 - The runner goes beyond the base and makes contact with or alters the play of the fielder.
 - The runner slashes or kicks the fielder with either leg.
 - The runner tries to injure the fielder.

Interference – Softball

- Interference (Rule 2.41): The act of an **offensive** player or team member which impedes or confuses a defensive player attempting to execute a play. **The ball is dead immediately.**
 - Generally, in softball, the player who interferes is the player called out.
 - When a batter or baserunner is called out for interference, all other baserunners shall return to the last base which was, in the judgement of the umpire, legally touched by her at the time of the interference. *(Rule 9.6.C)*
- Umpire Interference: When the umpire hinders or impedes the catcher's throw to prevent a stolen base, or, when a fair ball touches an umpire before it passes any fielder, aside from the pitcher.
 - When the plate umpire interferes with the catcher's attempt to throw, it's a *delayed dead ball*. If a baserunner is thrown out, ignore the interference; if no one is thrown out, baserunners return to the base occupied at time of interference. *(Rule 9.6.D)*
 - A batted ball shouldn't touch a base umpire before passing a fielder since base umpires are positioned behind the infielders in softball.

Interference – Softball

- A runner must avoid contact with any fielder that has a chance to make an initial play on a batted ball. Failure to do this will result in interference being called on the runner. *(Rule 9.8.J)*
- Putout or runners who score must not interfere with a defensive player's opportunity to make a play on another runner. The runner closest to home plate at the time of the interference shall also be declared out. *(Rule 9.8.R)*
- Examples:
 - The catcher is attempting to field or throw a ball, and the batter steps out of the batter's box or hinders the catcher while standing in the batter's box. Batter is out, all runners return. *(Rule 8.3)*
 - Double first base: There is a force play and the batter-runner touches only the white portion and collides with the fielder about to catch a thrown ball while on the white portion of the base. The batter-runner is out for interference. *(Rule 4.6.C)*
 - Runner is struck, while not touching a base, by a batted ball before it passes a fielder (not including the pitcher) before the ball is touched. Runner is out, all runners return unless forced, and batter runner is entitled to 1st base. *(Rules 9.2.E & 9.8.K)*

Obstruction – Softball

Obstruction is the act of: (1) A **defensive** player or team member which hinders or prevents a batter from striking or hitting a pitched ball; and (2) a fielder, while not in possession of the ball, **or** in the act of fielding a batted ball, which impedes the progress of a baserunner who is legally running the bases. (*Rule 2.47*)

- Fake Tag: A form of obstruction which impedes the progress of a runner. Defensive player could be bench restricted. (*Rule 2.22*)
- Double first base: Obstruction is called on the defense when there is a force play on the batter-runner, who touches only the colored portion and collides with the fielder about to catch a thrown ball, while also on the colored portion. (*Rule 4.6.C.3*)
- Defensive/Catcher's Interference: When the catcher obstructs, or any other fielder interferes with or prevents a batter from striking at a pitched ball. (*Rule 9.2.D*)
- All forms of obstruction: *judgement call*, and **delayed dead ball** (until obstructed runner is put out – then ball becomes dead and penalties enforced, if applicable).
 - PENALTY: Runner(s) awarded the base(s) they would have received, in the umpire's judgement, had there not been obstruction. Runner(s) not protected if they pass the base the umpire judges they would have reached. (*Rule 9.5.B*)
- If initial play on the infield is “flubbed”, the defensive player is protected if the ball stays within a “step and reach”. However, once a fielder, excluding the pitcher, misplays a batted ball, that fielder is not permitted to obstruct the advancement of the runner. (*Rule 9.5.B*)
- See indexes for more specific rules regarding Interference and Obstruction.

Obstruction – Softball

1 min 54 sec



<https://youtu.be/IQ7J9FpfmQE?si=7P-Rj7SaWSHBsjSq>

Obstruction

1 min 11 sec



<https://youtu.be/lBy-maGTDNw>

Courtesy / Runner's Lane – Softball

(LCHSS Rule 9.7.G)

- When running to first base, halfway down the baseline there is a three-foot courtesy lane. The lines marking the lane appear to the right of the Fair/Foul line.
- The runner MUST run in this lane to avoid penalty, should, in the umpire's judgement, interference be a possibility.
 - Example: Batter bunts the ball, and runs inside fair territory. Fielder throws ball wild or hits runner. Because runner was not in the lane, the runner can be called out for interference.
- Throw MUST originate from the home plate area (behind runner).
- IF the runner is in the three-foot lane, and gets hit with the ball, there is no penalty, as this is her lane. Outside of the lane = one or both feet completely outside the lane (the lines are considered inside the lane).
- IF the field isn't marked with a line, it is still assumed to be there.
- Fielder doesn't have to throw the ball to have interference. If she hesitates because of assumed interference, you may still call it.
- She may run outside the three-foot line to avoid a fielder attempting to field a batted ball.



“Baseline”: Is the runner In or Out of It? – Softball

(LCHSS Rules 2.4 & 9.8.A)

- The Fair/Foul lines down third and first are generally considered “baselines”.
- Runner makes his/her own **base path**.
 - An imaginary line three feet on either side of a direct line between the base runner and the base to which the base runner is attempting to reach.
- A base runner **who attempts to avoid a tag** by running more than three feet to either side of the fielder that has possession of the ball shall be declared out.
 - Base path becomes established when a defensive play is being attempted on the runner (they can almost run wherever they want between the bases until that point).
 - Base path can constantly change on a rundown play.



Catch + Catch & Carry – Softball

(LCHSS Rule 9.5.1)

Catch: (1) A fielder must gain *secure possession* in hand or glove of a ball in flight. (2) The fielder must hold the ball long enough to prove that he/she has complete control of the ball. Then, (3) when he/she *releases the ball it must be voluntary* and intentional.

- One of the most basic but important rules with lots of nuances to be aware of

Catch & Carry

- When a live ball is unintentionally carried by a fielder from playable territory into dead ball territory, the ball becomes dead. All baserunners are **awarded one base**, without liability to be put out, from the last base touched at the time the “fielder” enters dead ball territory.
 - NOTE: A fielder carrying a live ball into the dugout or team area to tag a player is considered to have unintentionally carried it there.
- If, in the judgement of the umpire, a fielder intentionally carries a live ball from playable territory into dead ball territory, the ball becomes dead, and all baserunners are *awarded two bases* from the last base touched at the time she entered dead ball territory. (NOTE: A dead ball line is considered in play.)
- **This rule is important to understand when covering ground rules.**

Infield Fly Rule – Softball

(LCHSS Rules 2.38 & 11.4.L)

- Is a fair fly ball, not including a line drive or attempted bunt, that:
 - Can be caught by an Infielder with ordinary effort (think young player vs. high schooler).
 - With runners on first and second; or runners on first, second, and third bases.
 - There are less than 2 outs (Zero or One).
- Pitcher, Catcher and any outfielders may also catch the ball.
- This is a **judgement call!** If not called at the time, it could still be an Infield Fly if criteria was clearly met.
- Call when it is at apex (top) of arc.
 - Yell out, “Infield Fly – Batter is Out!”
 - IF the ball is near the foul line: yell out, “Infield Fly – Batter is Out If Fair!”
- Ball is LIVE, and runners advance at their own risk. Remember this for younger age games where Infield Fly plays may become chaotic!
- Girls Farm Major, Farm Minor: No Infield Fly Rule

Farm Major Special Situations

(LCHSS Rule 11 – Multiple changes for 2026)

- 3 innings of coach pitch (up to six pitches per batter) followed by 3 innings of player pitch.
- 4 outfielders allowed (must play behind the baseline) with up to two coaches behind baseline.
- No infield fly, dropped 3rd strike, lead offs, or bunting (coach pitch innings only – bunting is legal during player pitch).
- 10 batters, 5 runs or 3 outs ends a half inning (except last inning – unlimited runs).
 - A team with 9 players can bat a maximum of 9 in an inning.
- Pitch that rolls into a batter is not a hit batter.
- LOGICAL CONCLUSION: The play will be called dead when the lead runners progress has stopped. (A change of direction is considered stopping). *Applies to Classes I, HH, & H* (official rule interpretation).
 - Inching forward to negate this rule will not be tolerated.
 - This is a JUDGEMENT CALL by the UMPIRE.
 - Umpire will place hand in the air to signify time is out.
 - Runners will be returned to last base touched (NO “halfway” rule).
- Review LCHSS Rule 11 before working a Farm Major game, if needed
- See mechanics guide handout for Farm Minor & Farm Major

Class A Special Situations

- Games are 6 innings of player pitch.
- When a batter is walked, the runner can continue running to second base provided he does not stop at first.
 - This is a judgement call as to whether he rounds first properly and if play has come to a logical conclusion.
- 7 runs per inning. A team may score no more than 7 runs in their half an inning until the 6th or last inning. Continues in extra innings.
 - The inning is considered the “last inning” if the visitors are ahead by 10; if after 2 hours at any point in any inning a team is ahead by 10, or the umpire declares last inning due to impending darkness or weather.
- Dropped third strike – Not applicable; Batter is out.
 - With less than 2 outs, baserunners on first, second and/or third base may advance at own risk.
- Pitchers can pitch no more than 4 innings total. (*Rule 7.14*)

Appeal Plays – Softball

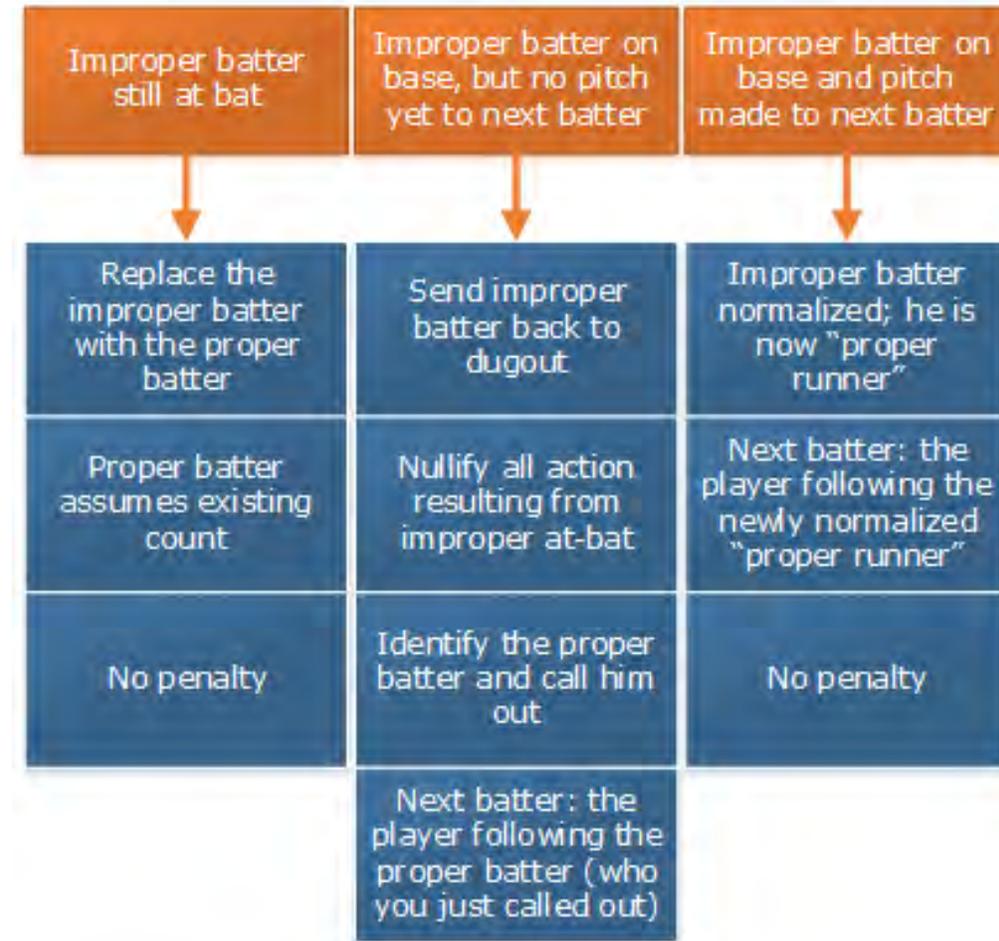
(LCHSS Rules 12.1.F/G/J, 12.6)

- Appeal: An act of a fielder in claiming violation of the rules by the offensive team.
- A play in which an umpire ***cannot decide until requested by a manager or coach, or player***. The appeal must be made before the next legal or illegal pitch, or before the defensive team has left the field. Umpires cannot verbalize/signal calls on these type of plays unless properly appealed to.
- Live ball appeals (player must tag player/base), & *dead ball* appeals (verbally by coach or player after being granted “time”)
- Common types:
 - Runner misses a base while running the bases
 - Batter-runner overruns 1st base & makes an attempt towards 2nd
 - A runner leaves a base too early on a tag up play (i.e., before the ball is touched)
 - Checked swings
 - Batting out of order (next slide) – offense or defense calls time to alert plate umpire
- If Coach Asks: Umpires are not required to grant judgement call or rule appeals, but they may consult with their partner if they desire to get their take/to discuss a rule.
 - Umpires can't overrule their partners; they may only share information with one another. Calling umpire makes the call.
- *There is no video review in Hot Stove! Don't EVER watch someone's video to make a decision!*

Batting Out of Order – Softball

(LCHSS Rule 8.2)

- Batting order is set once given to the scorekeepers, & umpire says, “play ball.” It may not change (unless illness/injury.)
- Should list all 9/10+ players in the starting lineup by name and number/position with matching substitutes, & all other subs available. Home scorebook is the official book.
- Proper batter: The correct batter at bat with respect to the official lineup (can only be one person at a time.)
- Improper batter: Any offensive player other than the proper batter who is up to bat.
- Once appealed, check scorebook(s) if needed & rule accordingly
- Three types of scenarios:
 - Improper batter still at bat: Abel is up. Baker bats. 2-2 count. Offense calls time. Notices out of order. Abel takes his proper spot but keeps the 2-2 count.
 - Improper batter on base, but no pitch yet to next batter: Abel is up. Baker Bats. Baker gets on first. Coach calls time out, informs you Baker was out of order. Check scorebook(s). If this is correct, Abel is out. Baker is up next.
 - Improper batter on base & pitch made to next batter: Abel is up. Baker bats. Baker gets on first. Charlie comes up, takes a pitch. Coach calls time out, says batting out of order. Once another pitch or play has occurred, Baker is legalized as the correct batter. No one is out. Charlie stays hitting. Abel is skipped.



Batting Out of Order

2 min 22 sec



<https://youtu.be/lZpXXymitvA>

Look-Back Rule

Rule 9.8.T

- The Look-Back Rule goes into effect when (ball must be live):
 - The pitcher has control of the ball in the 16' circle (both feet on or within lines).
 - The batter-runner has touched first base (for any reason) *or* has been declared out.
 - The pitcher is not attempting a play on a runner (judgement call; a fake throw is considered an attempt).
- After the pitcher has control of the ball in the circle (with all the above conditions met), all runners must immediately attempt to advance to the next base OR immediately return to her base – with no more than one stop.
 - PENALTY: The ball is **dead**, and baserunner is out. “No pitch” is declared, if applicable.
- Once the runner returns to a base for any reason, she will be declared out if she leaves said base, unless (*only one baserunner may be called out at a time*):
 - A play is made on her or another runner (e.g., fake throw).
 - The pitcher no longer has possession of the ball in the 16' circle.
 - The pitcher releases the ball by a pitch to the batter. Say, “Dead ball! She left early! She’s Out!”

Pitching

Rule 7

- Pitchers have 20 sec. to deliver the next pitch after getting the ball under control in the circle.
- *When stepping onto the pitcher's plate, the pitcher must:*
 - Have her hands apart (ball can be in the hand or the glove).
 - Have her pivot foot in contact with the pitcher's plate and non-pivot foot on or behind the pitcher's plate, with both feet on the ground within the 24-in. length of the pitcher's plate.
 - Have her shoulders in line with first and third bases.
- *From the position described above, the pitcher must take or simulate taking a sign from the catcher on the pitcher's plate (she can take the actual sign from anywhere inside the 16' circle).*
- Next, her hands must come together for not less than one second and no more than ten seconds before delivering the pitch (ball can be inside or pressed on outside of the glove).
 - She may remove herself from the pitcher's plate by stepping back with one or both feet with hands separated or together before any windup motion has been made.
 - She is permitted to step backward with her non-pivot foot in this position.
- *Start of pitch is when her hands separate. She may take one step, which must be forward towards the batter. Her pivot foot may **only** push off from the pitcher's plate. Both feet may be disengaged from the playing surface.*
- **PENALTY** for violating any of the above rules: Illegal pitch called immediately.

Other Pitching Requirements

Rule 7

- The release of the ball and follow through of the hand and wrist must be forward, past the straight line of the body.
- The hand shall be below the hip, and the wrist not farther from the body than the elbow.
- The catcher must be within the lines of the catcher's box when the pitch is released.
- No stop or reversal of the forward motion.
- Can't make two revolutions of the arm in the windmill pitch (no more than 1.5 revolutions). A pitcher may drop her arm to the side and to the rear before starting the windmill motion.
- She may not continue to wind up after taking the forward step, which is simultaneous with the release of the ball.

Pitching

22 sec



<https://youtu.be/SCdinw8aGgg>

Pitching Infractions

Rule 7

- The pitcher may not take the pitching position on or near the pitcher's plate without having the ball in her possession.
- Replanting the pivot foot, resulting in the pitcher being farther away from the pitcher's plate. Pushing off with the pivot foot from a place other than the pitcher's plate resulting in the non-pivot foot becoming closer to home plate is **illegal** (historically called a "crow hop").
- Both feet must land inside the 24 inch width of the pitcher's plate (Judgement).
- A rocker action in which, after having the ball in both hands in the pitching position, one hand is removed from the ball, and a backward and forward swing is taken, and the ball is returned to both hands in front of the body is illegal.
- The "leap" is *no longer illegal* (i.e., both feet may disengage from the playing surface at the same time).



Pitching

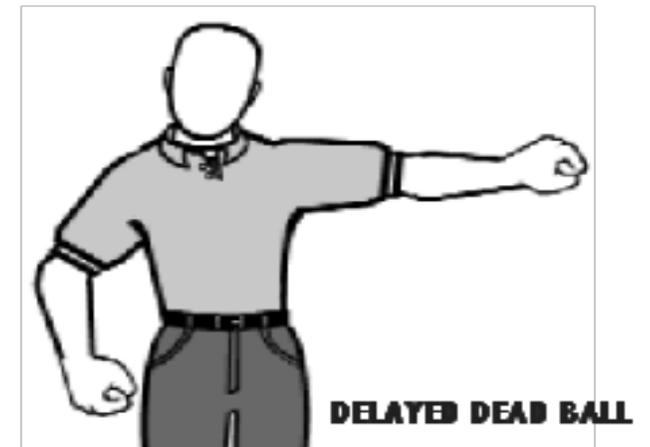
1 min 37 sec



<https://youtu.be/yOP4pJxmSfw>

Illegal Pitch

- PENALTY: A ball is called on the batter. If an illegal pitch hits the batter, the batter is awarded first base.
 - If the batter does not reach first base safely or if any base runner fails to advance at least one base, the coach of the team at bat shall have the option of the result of the play or the penalty of the illegal pitch.
 - If the pitcher completes the delivery of the ball to the batter; and, if the batter hits the ball and reaches first base safely; and if all baserunners advance at least, one based on the action resulting from the batted ball, the play stands and the illegal pitch nullified.
- An illegal pitch is a **delayed dead ball**. (If pitcher stops when you call it, then call time & enforce the penalty.)
- A ball that slips out of the pitchers hand it is considered a pitch and a ball is awarded to the batter.
- Hot Stove Softball calls illegal pitches from day one.
 - Class A: Warnings are given in the first half of the season.
 - Enforce penalties starting June 1
 - Class B: One warning per pitcher for any infraction in the first half of season.
 - No warnings starting June 1
 - Class C & D: NO Warnings



Foul Tip or Foul Ball?

Rule 2.27

- FOUL TIP: A batted ball which goes directly from the bat, not higher than the batter's head, to the catcher's hands and is legally caught by the catcher.
 - NOTE: It is not a foul tip unless caught, and any foul tip that is caught is a strike. The ball is in play. It is not a catch if it is a rebound unless the ball first touched the catcher's hand or glove.
- Umpire Mechanic: Indicate with hand/arm signal (pictured).
 - Unlike a foul ball, a foul tip can be a batter's third strike.
 - A Foul Tip is a LIVE BALL (runners may advance)
 - **NEVER verbalize** the words "foul tip" – only "foul ball!" or nothing at all if the ball is fair (with the hand signal pictured on a foul tip).



Strike Zone

Rule 2.61 (pg. 15 in green book)

- The Strike Zone is that space over any part of home plate between the batter's arm pits and the top the knees when the batter assumes a natural batting stance.
- Any part of the ball crosses and part of the plate is a strike.
- The black edges are not considered part of the plate for ball/strike calls (realistically, it will be in most games)
 - Your strike zone will & typically should be bigger than the book definition younger-age games
- Swinging strikes: Motion only
- Called Strikes: Emphasize third strike but do not call out.

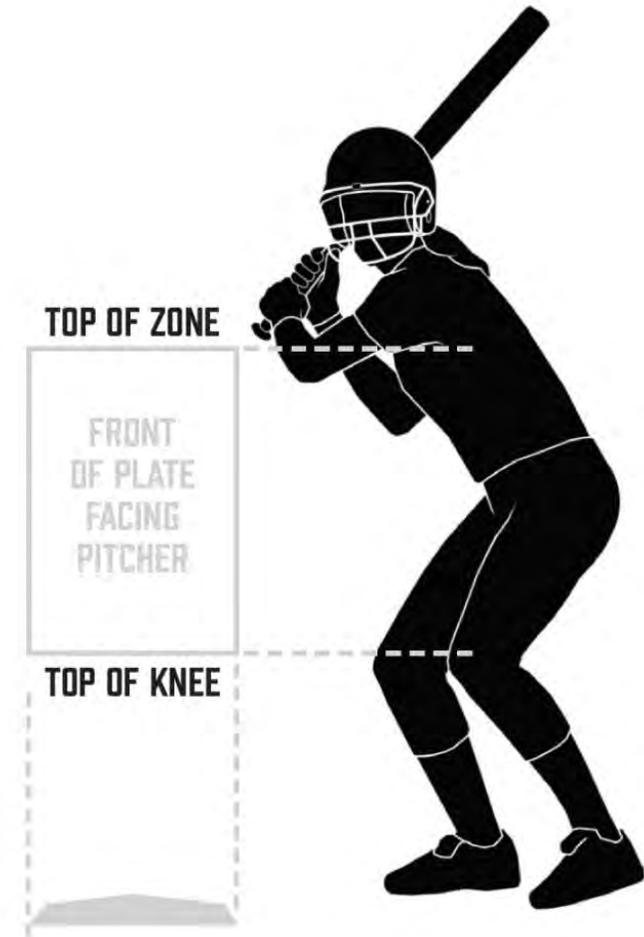


Plate Umpire Mechanics

- Positioning: Squared up behind the catcher, in the slot, within an arms reach of him. Bend at the knees up and down as needed. Also may put hands on knees, but watch for fouls and wild pitches.

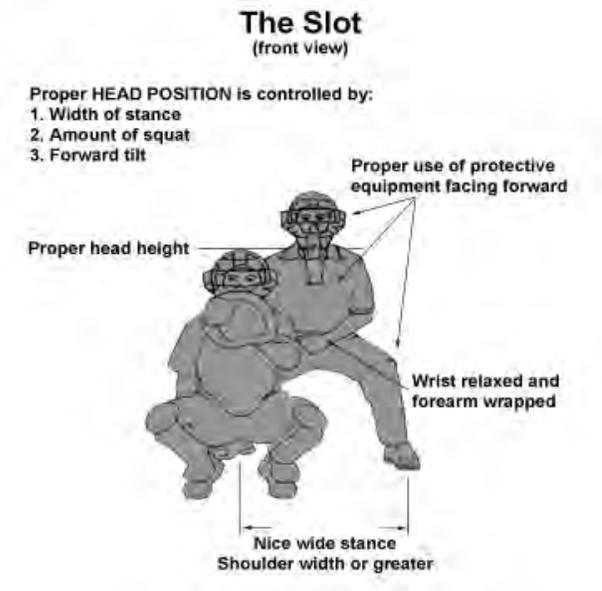
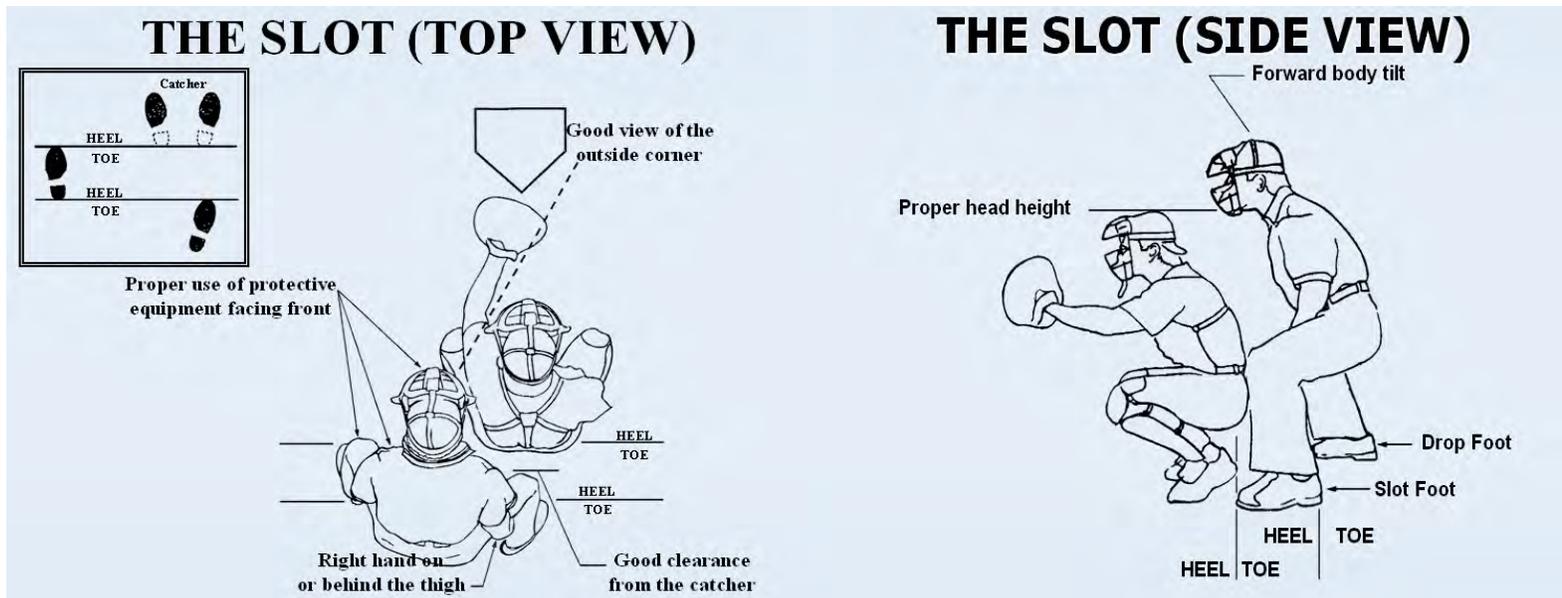


Plate Umpire Mechanics

- Brushing Plate - Between pitcher and catcher, facing catcher, bend over and do this quickly, at a natural break in game if possible.
- Walk around batter and catcher, returning to your position.
- Walks/Ball four- point with LEFT hand toward first base, or no motion.
- Call Foul balls, Point fair balls
- OK to talk to catcher.
- DO NOT call location of pitch.
- If catcher says “outside, blue?”- agree with her. Do not offer information.



Plate Umpire Mechanics

- TIMING! Track the pitch, watch it into the catcher's glove, pause for a second or two to think about what you just saw, then make call
- Brushing Plate - Between pitcher and catcher, facing catcher, bend over and do this quickly, at a natural break in game if possible.
- Walk around batter and catcher, returning to your position.
- Foul tip-Indicate with hand/arm signal.
 - A Foul Tip is a pitched ball that tips off the bat and travels directly to the catcher's hands and is caught.
 - Unlike a foul ball, a foul tip can be a batter's third strike.
 - A Foul Tip is a LIVE BALL (runners may advance)
 - NEVER verbalize the words "foul tip" – only "foul ball!" or nothing at all if the ball is fair (with the hand signal pictured on a foul tip).



Plate Umpire Mechanics – Softball

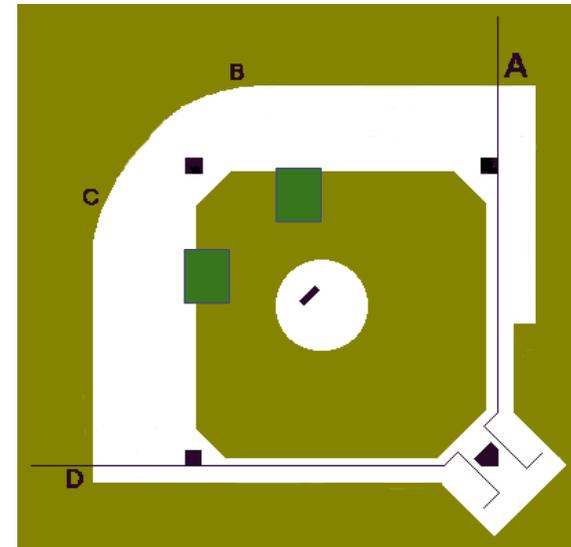
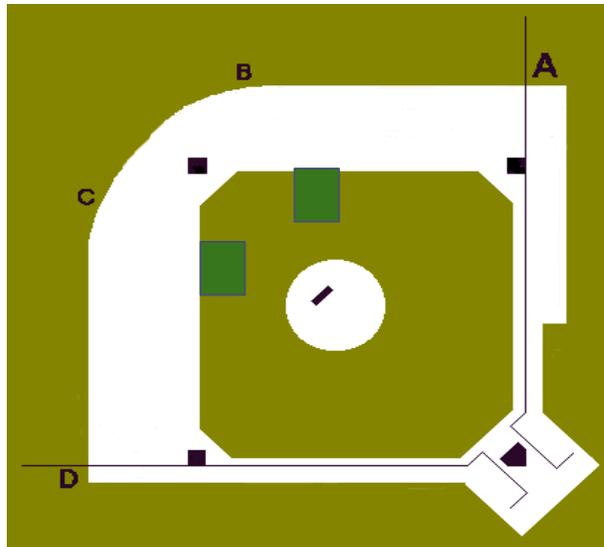
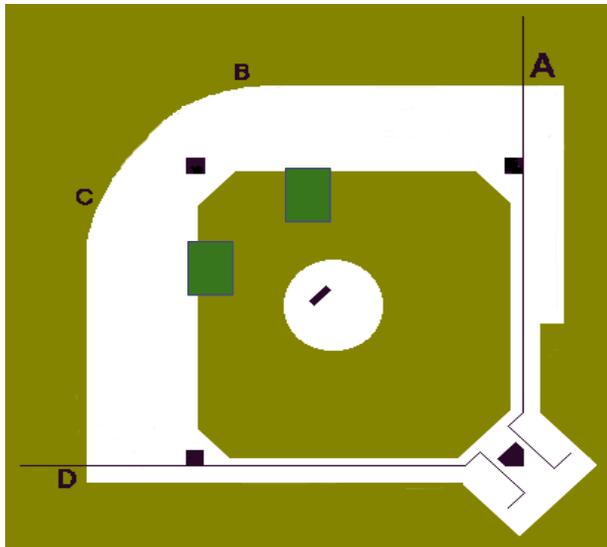
4 min 35 sec



https://youtu.be/xhCk8R_G378

Field Umpire Mechanics

- With the pitch, begin a slow walk toward first base, keeping your eye on the ball.
- To make a call at first base, position yourself inside the first base line, at a 90 degree angle to the play (45 degree angle to the base).
- If runner only on first, position yourself in the B position, around where the second baseman plays, closer to the pitcher.
- Any other combination of baserunners is worked from the C position.
- Bases Loaded, Second and Third, First and Second, Third only.



Two-Person Umpire Mechanics – Softball

1 min 36 sec



<https://youtu.be/9IdxZhHCYXs>

Umpire Mechanics

- Base Umpire responsible to watch runners touch bags. Also in ALL levels, watch runners leaving early.
- Watch the ball into the glove, listen for foot to hit bag.
- Watch for runner turning toward second. Was there an attempt?
- Go out on fly balls that need a closer look. Trap? Fair/Foul?
- With runners on base, Hands on knees, or hands at side/behind back.
- Any umpire can call an illegal pitch. Base Ump typically watches feet. Plate ump upper body and 24" violation.
- If defensive player asks you to move, do so.
- Keep your eye everlasting on the ball. If you don't know where ball is, call time.
- Do not call plays too fast or too slow. See the play. Evaluate it (about 1 second). Call it.
- The closer the play, the louder the call.
- Don't get caught up on a close call. Keep your head in the game. If the coach wants an appeal, such as a pulled foot or if she left early on a tag-up, you may or may not grant it. If you do, take the advice of your partner. If you are sure, don't give it. (If you are new allow the question and talk to your partner about it).
- Bottom line is: Get the call right.

Ending & Halting a Game – Softball

(LCHSS Rules 6.2, 6.3, 6.11, 6.12, 12.1.B, 12.8, & 14.9)

- Games End After (if time limit is reached & game is tied, LCHS regular season games may end in a tie):
 - **6 innings** in Girls Farm Minor + Farm Major & Class A (5 ½ innings if the home team is ahead)
 - **7 innings** in Classes B, C, & D (6 ½ innings if the home team is ahead)
 - Tie score w/ extra inning(s) (except Farm Minor): last batter from previous inning/pinch runner placed on 2nd base
- Umpires have sole authority to determine (not *predetermine*) when a game shall be called, halted, or resumed on account of weather or the conditions of the playing field once a game has started. See *Rule 6.3* for factors that determine if a halted game is complete or suspended.
 - **Lightning** (no thunder rule): game delayed 30 min. once spotted; time restarts each time lightning is observed (“heat lightning” at night may be OK)
- Run Rules (Mercy Rules) – home team must always complete their turn at bat if losing:
 - **10-run Mercy Rule after 4 ½ or 5 innings**: all classes (except Farm Minor)
 - **15-run Mercy Rule after 3 ½ or 4 innings** (in addition to 10-run rule): Classes B, C, & D
 - **2-hour Mercy Rule** (all classes except Farm Minor): If home team is ahead by 10 or more runs after 2 hours have been played, the game ends immediately. The home team must complete their half of the inning if losing & the 2-hour limit is reached.
- Time Limits (time starts when umpire declares “play” in regular season & for preliminary tournament games) – no new inning may begin after:
 - **Girls Farm Minor**: 1 hour 30 minutes
 - **Farm Major & Class A**: 2 hours
 - **Classes B, C, & D**: 2 hours, 15 minutes
 - *The Crew Chief shall keep time & administer it, not a coach or scorekeeper; stop time if game is halted due to weather/field conditions*
- Sign the scorebook if asked (not required, but OK to do)
- Umpire jurisdiction ends when umpire leaves the field after last out is made
- Umpires must ALWAYS leave the field together (leave as soon as the last out is made); exit through winning team's/least contentious side's dugout

Protests – Softball

(LCHSS Rules 13 & 14.20)

- Since Hot Stove allows protests in all Classes except Farm Minor, ***umpires shall not carry a physical copy of rule book on the field or use a digital copy during a game to aid in a decision.***
- Only (1) misinterpretation/incorrect application of playing rules/penalties by umpires & (2) ineligible players playing in a game may be protested – *never judgment-based calls.*
- If a *head coach* wants to protest a regular season game for (1) above, they must notify the plate ump *before the next pitch or play* (don't allow game to be protested if not notified in time); player eligibility may be protested after a game to the league.
- Regular season procedure:
 1. Manager of team protesting calls time & explains infraction to crew chief.
 2. If playing rule-based, both umpires meet & determine if ruling will be changed or upheld.
 3. If ruling is upheld, a manager may declare the game is being played under protest. Notify opposing manager, if so.
 - If ruling is changed, & opposing manager disagrees, they may protest changed ruling.
 4. If game is under protest: get both scorekeepers together, make sure the scorebooks match (score, batter, outs, count, baserunners, etc.), mark both books where the game is currently at as “under protest,” & umpire(s) initial books.
 5. Resume play (manager is responsible for sending written protest & \$200 fee to charter after game).
- Tournament games: (1) one, two, & three above for regular season, (2) if manager wishes to protest, stop the game & summon the Field Judge/Tournament Director (they handle it from there; coach has a few min. to write it up and pay \$200).

2026 Softball Rule Changes/Edits

Many edits were made for the 2026 LCHSS Rule Book for clarity & to align closer to Hot Stove Baseball, where applicable.

1. Substitute rules for all Classes updated. See Rule 5.3.D.
2. Required number of players updated. See Rule 5.4.
3. Substitute announcement policy updated. See Rule 5.5.
4. Complete game criteria updated. See Rule 6.3.C.
5. Mercy (run) rules updated. See Rule 6.3.D.
 - 15 run mercy rule removed for Farm Major & Class A.
6. Time limits updated. See Rule 6.3.I.
 - Hot Stove Baseball & Softball time limits are now the same for each age group (was previously 2 hours for all classes).
7. 7-run per inning rule for Class A updated. See Rule 6.10.A.
 - Was previously a 5-run per inning limit.
8. Weather rule updated to remove thunder. See Rule 6.11.
9. Pitching requirements updated to reflect broader recent rule changes. See Rule 7.
10. Farm Major Rules updated. See Rule 11.
 - No hash marks between bases will be used.
 - Some rules were removed & others updated to align closer to Boys Class I.
11. Tournament time limits updated. See Rule 14.9.

How To Get Games and Get Paid!

- Know who the Head Umpire / assigner is for the communities you wish to work in. The list is on the Lorain County Hot Stove (About → Community Head Umpires).
 - They receive the list of umpires who become carded each year.
- **YOU are responsible** for reaching out to head umpires / assigners to get games. They will not look for you.
- *Be available as much as possible. The season is relatively short.*
- If you schedule a game, do the game. It is hard to get someone else at the last minute because you change your mind. The more reliable you are, the more games you'll get. Schedulers schedule first who they know want to work.
- Many games pay cash before or after a game, but pay procedure may differ between communities & assigners.
- If you want games but are not being assigned, contact the County Umpire-in-Chief, Jerry Clapper. There are always games available somewhere.

Test Prep – Softball

True or False?

- Running out of the baseline to avoid a tag is a violation and immediate dead ball.
- When an improper batter is discovered in the batter's box and at bat, she is immediately called out.
- A batter's hands are considered part of the bat when determining hit by pitch.
- A batter must attempt to avoid being hit by the pitch in order to be awarded first base.
- If the batter fails to be ready within 5 seconds after the ball is returned to the pitcher, the umpire shall call a strike.
- On a bunt, the batter must run the entire distance to first base in foul territory to avoid interfering.
- The ball becomes dead immediately when a batted ball touches any baserunner, after a fielder has had a chance to make a play.
- The ball becomes dead immediately when the batter swings at a pitch that touches her clothing.
- Prior to starting the delivery, the pitcher must take a position with both feet on or partially on the top surface of the pitcher's plate.
- On a walk, while in the 16 foot circle, the ball only needs to be in the pitcher's possession for the look back rule to be in effect.

Test Prep – Softball

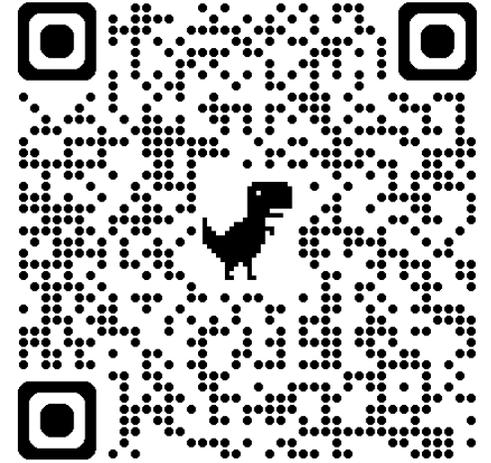
True or False?

- A runner on 1B is forced out when the SS tags second base with her glove while she has the ball firmly grasped in her hand and the ball touching the ground.
- Umpire jurisdiction ends when the final out is recorded and the defensive team leave the field.
- With two runners on base, the base umpire is responsible for all runners tagging up on a fly ball.
- With no runners on base, the field umpire will always start from 1B foul ground.
- Once a game has started, if it is discovered that the pitching distance is incorrect, the correction shall be made after both teams have pitched an equal number of innings.
- “No Pitch” shall be declared if a runner is called out for leaving the base too soon.
- The pitcher's pivot foot may or may not remain in contact with the ground, or may push off and drag away from the pitching plate, after the non-pivot foot touches the ground.
- The pitcher's pivot foot may or may not remain in contact with the ground, or may push off and drag away from the pitcher’s plate, prior to the non-pivot foot touching the ground.
- While in the pitching position on the pitcher’s plate, the pitcher must take (or simulate taking) a signal from the catcher.
- The runner is out for interference if she accidentally contacts a fielder attempting to throw the ball.

Softball Test Time!

- The 2026 Hot Stove Softball Umpire test is online only
- You may only take the test if you were present at a clinic
- This presentation & rule book are posted on the [Lorain County Hot Stove](#) website (Resources → For Officials)
- Please make sure phone number & email (no school or work address, if possible) are correct
- At least 60% score required to become carded
- Cards will be emailed to you
- Contact Jerry Clapper with any questions
 - jerry@loraincountyhotstove.com

LCHSS Umpire Test



Digital Umpire Data Sheet

