

Elk River Youth Softball

Tryout & Team Placement Guidelines

2026–2027 Season

Team Placement Philosophy

Fall team placement will be based on a combination of:

- Third-party evaluation data
- Head coach collaboration
- Player skill level
- Player development
- Positional needs/roster creation
- Overall age-group strength
- The goal of fielding the most competitive rosters possible across all players

The intent is to create teams that are competitive, while also establishing strong development goals based on roster strength and the overall talent and needs of each age group.

Elk River Youth Softball's goal is not simply to rank players from top to bottom. Instead, the organization uses objective evaluation data and coach input to build rosters that promote player development, support competitive play, and strengthen the program overall.

Fall, Winter, and Spring/Summer Structure

Fall Tryouts:

Fall tryouts will serve as an important benchmark for evaluating players and helping guide team placement throughout the year. They provide valuable insight when forming spring and summer teams, but they will not be the only factor considered in the team selection process.

Fall tryouts also provide coaches with a consistent third-party evaluation data set, using the tryout evaluation criteria outlined on page 4. This helps begin the process of understanding:

- Player skill level
- Roster structure
- Team dynamics
- Positional needs
- Competitive readiness
- Overall age-group strength

After fall tryouts and fall team placement, teams and players will continue to develop throughout the year.

Winter Development:

During the winter, all players — returning players, new players, fall players, and non-fall players — are welcomed and encouraged to participate when they can.

Winter development sessions are **free for all players** and will be organized by age group. These sessions are a great opportunity for players to get re-immersed with their age-level peers and coaches. They also provide a valuable opportunity for new registrants to become familiar with the program, meet coaches, build relationships with teammates, and begin developing within the age-group structure.

These sessions will allow coaches to continue working with players, evaluate growth, support skill development, and better understand each player beyond a single tryout snapshot.

Players will continue to be evaluated consistently through winter development and pre-spring group practices before teams are formed again for the spring/summer season.

Spring Evaluation for Spring/Summer Season

In the Spring, head coaches will work together to form spring/summer rosters. Rosters will be restructured while factoring in all of the criteria below:

- New players entering the program
- Returning players who could not participate in fall or winter development
- Players who completed private training or outside development that supported their development and growth
- Pre-spring group practices
- Positional needs
- Team competitiveness
- Overall roster construction

Model Overview:

This model is designed to better support multi-sport athletes. Each individual session or season is not intended to be treated as mandatory for every player. Instead, player placement and roster decisions will be based on the full picture of player development, coach evaluation, third-party evaluation data, positional needs, roster construction, and coaching continuity.

By having consistent coaches involved across fall, winter, and spring/summer programming, players can maintain relationships with coaches and remain connected to the age-group program even when they are balancing other sports or family commitments. This process will allow coaches to consider player's development over time, rather than any single event or assessment. Coaches will consider a variety of factors throughout the year, including player growth, evaluation data, positional needs, roster composition, and overall development when forming teams.

Playing Up Recommendations

Elk River Youth Softball recommends that players participate at their respective age levels whenever possible.

Parents can check their player's age eligibility using the Minnesota Softball age calculator:

<https://mnsoftball.com/pages/cms/age-calculator>

Top programs across the state that consistently field A-level teams typically have rosters filled with players who are at the top of their respective age threshold. Keeping players within their appropriate age group creates a greater opportunity for our athletes to play higher-level competitive softball, develop confidence against strong competition, and better prepare them as they continue to move up through each age group during their softball career.

Families are encouraged to explore the Minnesota Softball rankings to view current top-ranked teams. From there, you can click into team rosters to review player ages and better understand how many highly competitive programs structure their teams:

<https://mnsoftball.com/pages/rankings>

Ultimately, parents know what is best for their child. If you believe playing up may be the right path for your player, please feel free to connect with members of the coaching staff or board to discuss the best option. We are here to support you and your athletes.

A scenario where the Elk River Youth Softball Association Board may not support a player moving up an age group would be when moving a player up an age class would then prohibit us from having enough athletes to form a roster at the age level they would be departing.

In this scenario, parents would be invited to a board meeting to discuss in greater detail.

The goal of this recommendation is to support individual players while also protecting the overall health, balance, and development of each age group within the association.

Tryout Evaluation Criteria

8U Evaluation Areas

8U players may be evaluated in the following areas:

- Speed: Home to first
- Infield ground ball drills
- Throwing strength and accuracy
- Outfield pop fly drills
- Hitting: contact, power, missed hits, and misses
- Sliding

10U and Up Evaluation Areas

10U and older players may be evaluated in the following areas:

- Speed: Home to first
 - Infield ground ball drills
 - Throwing strength and accuracy
 - Outfield pop fly drills
 - Hitting: contact, power, missed hits, and misses
 - Sliding
 - Bunting
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Pitchers and Catchers

Pitchers and catchers will have the opportunity to try out and be evaluated on skills specific to those positions.

Players may opt in to have their pitching and/or catching evaluation included as part of their total evaluation score.

Pitching and catching scores may also be used by coaches during roster formation to help support positional balance, player development, and competitive team placement.

Pitchers will be evaluated on:

Accuracy, Velocity, Pitch Arsenal (and accuracy of said pitches)

Catchers will be evaluated on:

Blocking, Catching, Form, Arm strength, pop time

Overall Goal

The overall goal of the tryout and team placement process is to create a fair, consistent, competitive, and development-focused structure for Elk River Youth Softball.

The process is designed to:

- Maximize player development
- Build competitive rosters
- Empower coaches to lead
- Support multi-sport athletes
- Strengthen each age group
- Create a stronger foundation for future higher-level team formation