



2026 Playing Rules Addendum

Pool Play Rules:

- Official game will end at 7 innings or at the completion of the last completed inning after the 1 hour and 20 minutes with no new inning to begin
- Games tied at completion of inning will end in a tie
- Unlimited defensive substitutions / Unlimited batters
- Courtesy runners for pitchers/catchers will be allowed per Rule 8 Section 10
- Home team will be determined by coin flip at home plate prior to start of game

Bracket Play Rules:

- Official game will end at 7 innings or at the completion of the last completed inning after the 1 hour and 20 minutes with no new inning to begin
- Games tied at completion of last inning will begin international tie breaker at the top of the next inning with the batter to bat last being placed at 2nd base.
- Unlimited defensive substitutions / Unlimited batters
- Courtesy runners for pitchers/catchers will be allowed per Rule 8 Section 10
- Home team will be determined by higher seed. If teams are same seed, then a coin flip at home plate prior to start of game

Mercy Rule:

- 12 after 3, 10 after 4, 8 after 5

Tie Breaker Rules for Bracket Seeding:

1. **Record**
2. **Head-to-Head** (Used only when all tied teams have played each other)
3. **Runs Allowed** (An average is used if teams have not played equal number of games)
4. **Runs Scored** (An average is used if teams have not played equal number of games)
5. **Computer Generated Coin Flip** (A system random number generator break ties at this stage)

Note: If the system cannot break ties at a particular tiebreaking stage, the system will move to the next tiebreaker and not return or revert back to a previous tiebreaker.

Note about the Head-to-Head tiebreaker: Head-to-Head is ignored if all tied teams do not play each other at least once. For example, if three teams are tied, and one team plays the other two, but the other two do not play, this tiebreaker is ignored (regardless of the outcome of the two games played by the first team).

Teams playing a 4th game in pool play do not count for bracket seeding for the team playing a 4th game. Teams playing an out of pool game will not count for bracket seeding.

Incomplete Tournament:

- The order of finish for an incomplete tournament will be determined by the 2025 USA SOFTBALL Procedural Code Article 310 G 02

Substitution Rules:

Unlimited defensive substitutions - Anyone on the line-up card, whether they are batting or not, can be a starter or substitute defensive player. Unlimited means, reentry rules do not apply unless they are going in as an offensive player. If a player uses up their reentry on offense, they are still allowed to play defense.

- Unlimited batters - Teams can bat as many players as they want. Additional batters shall be listed as an EP anywhere in the line-up. One FLEX may also be used. The integrity of the batting order must be maintained. If a team is batting more than 9 batters and a player is injured, disqualified, or ejected, simply compress the line-up, and do not record an out for that empty slot.
- Courtesy Runners - Courtesy runners for the pitcher and/or catcher. Use the JO Pool Play Rule 8-10-C-Exc: "Any player can be used as a courtesy runner." The following rules still apply:
 1. (8-10-A3) Once a player runs for the catcher in a game, they will never be able to run for the pitcher and vice versa. (Umpires need to record who is running for the P or C)
 2. (8-10-D) A player may not be a substitute in the same half-inning that they were a courtesy runner (exception for injury)
 3. (8-10-F) A courtesy runner cannot be replaced with the pitcher/catcher or another courtesy runner (exception for injury)
 4. If the CR is on base when it is their time at bat, the CR will bat and the player who the CR ran for will be called out. If a coach realizes that the CR's turn at bat is coming up and they do not want to take an out; they can replace the CR with a legal substitute (if they have one). This would be a substitute for the pitcher/catcher who the CR was running for. It would be wise for the coach to make sure that there is no chance that the CR's turn at bat is coming up.

Case Play: Top of the 1st. The Pitcher gets on base. ANYBODY can run for the pitcher whether they are in the line up or not. #3 runs for the pitcher. (For the remainder of the game, 3 will never be able to CR for the catcher) Top of the 3rd. The pitcher gets on base. # 3 or ANY OTHER player may CR for the pitcher if that player did not CR for a catcher.

Unreported Courtesy Runner: An unreported CR will be treated the same as an unreported substitute runner (see rule 4-6-C-5)

Protests:

USA Softball of Virginia has embraced advancements in technology over the past decade, including platforms such as GameChanger, PitchCom, GoRout, and online rostering systems. These tools have greatly improved efficiency, communication, and transparency within our sport.

For the past three years, USA Softball of Virginia has utilized an online rostering system that is now widely adopted by many teams. These online rosters display limited player information to the public, including first name, last initial, age, and graduation year. Due to the challenges associated with adding "guest players" to online rosters, we have allowed teams to submit guest player information via email for specific tournaments. This information includes the player's first name, last name, full address, and date of birth.

We also continue to accept handwritten rosters. These include more detailed information (first name, last name, full address, and date of birth) but, in the interest of protecting the privacy of minor athletes, these rosters are not published or shared publicly.

We are providing this clarification because, during our first event of the current season, we experienced more roster protests than in the previous five years combined. Given that we host 26 tournaments annually, this increase highlights the need for clearer communication and consistent procedures.

As a result, USA Softball of Virginia is moving toward a fully mandated online rostering system, which will take effect on September 1, 2026, marking the start of the 2027 tournament season.

Additionally, the USA Softball of Virginia Board of Directors has approved the implementation of a \$100 protest fee for roster-related protests. This process is already used by almost every other sanctioning softball body and other USA Softball local associations in the country. The process will be as follows:

- A coach must submit a written description of the alleged roster violation to the umpire.
- The umpire will immediately notify the site supervisor.
- The site supervisor will collect a \$100 fee from the protesting team and the written description of the alleged roster violation.
- The game will continue while the matter is reviewed.
- If no violation is found, USA Softball of Virginia will retain the \$100 fee.
- If a violation is confirmed, the offending team will be disqualified, and the \$100 fee will be refunded to the protesting team.

These steps are intended to ensure fairness, protect player privacy, and maintain the integrity of competition while reducing unnecessary disruptions.