

D.O.L.L.S. Minor League Rules

4th Grade

Revised September 2023

Emphasis of this league is on improving basic softball skills and developing advanced softball skills such as proper mechanics, bunting, bunt coverage, proper base coverage and sliding. **D.O.L.L.S. prioritize Development over Winning and seek to staff the teams with coaches who embrace this set of priorities as well.** USA Softball rules apply for this age group for all aspects of the game not addressed by the below rules

1. Player Rotation Rule

- a. At every game, all girls are required to play 1 complete inning in the infield and 1 complete inning in the outfield. No player may play the outfield a 2nd inning until all players on the roster have played outfield for 1 inning. All players must rotate sitting out, no player may sit out 2 innings in a row. Every player must sit out once before any player sits out twice. Equal playing time is required for all participants.
- b. Rotation Rule Violations
 - i. It is the responsibility of each team to monitor that the opposing team is following the rotation rules. A violation of the rotation rule shall be brought to the attention of the head coach of the violating team. The violation shall be immediately corrected.
 - ii. Rotation rule violations will not be addressed with the umpire at the Fourth Grade level.
 - iii. There will be no penalty for a first violation of the rotation rule. For a second violation, the violating team will forfeit 3 runs (regardless of how many girls are out of rotation, and regardless of team score, so the violation may result in a negative score). For a third violation, the violating team will forfeit 7 runs (regardless of how many girls are out of rotation, and regardless of team score, so the violation may result in a negative score).
 - iv. If a rotation violation is not discovered until after the end of the half-inning in which the violation occurred, there will be no penalty.

2. A continuous batting order is mandatory. "Continuous" batting order means that all players present are placed in the batting order, regardless of which players are playing in the field any given inning. If a batter or runner is injured, the player that recorded the last out will replace the injured player. If the injured player is at bat, the replacement player will assume the ball/strike count. If the injured player cannot continue in the game, no out will be recorded when their turn at bat comes around again.

3. Maximum of 9 defensive players per inning will be allowed, including 3 outfielders. Outfielders are required to begin each play in the outfield. A team must field at least 8 players to avoid forfeit. A fifteen (15) minute grace period will be in effect for each team to field the required number of players before a forfeit is declared. In the event of a forfeited game for lack of the requisite number of players, the game shall proceed if at all possible as an "exhibition" game. In an "exhibition" game situation the opposing team shall provide player(s) to play as many outfield positions as necessary so the forfeiting team has 9 players playing in the field. The opposing team players shall not bat for the forfeiting team. The opposing team players playing in the field shall not miss their turn at bat, so the opposing team may be required to shuttle players in and out of the outfield when they are at bat. The point here is that this is an

instruction league, and that games should be played and fun should be had at every opportunity.

4. If necessary, a player may be called up from the level directly below (Third Grade). Each coach is responsible for obtaining a substitute player.
 - a. A substitute player shall not be called upon if her attendance would knowingly create a roster of 10 or more players
 - b. A substitute player may not pitch or catch
 - c. A substitute player shall bat last in the line-up
 - d. At no time shall a girl who is not a registered member of the D.O.L.L.S. organization be allowed to participate as a player
 - e. A player cannot be called up if she is on the roster for a Rebels team or another travel team.
 - f. If a team puts someone in its lineup that is contrary to these guidelines they will forfeit the game regardless if the infraction is discovered during or after the game.
5. This level shall use a 11" regulation ball. The home team is responsible for setting up the field approximately 30 minutes before game time.
6. If a batter or runner is injured, the player that recorded the last out in any manner will replace the injured player. If the injured player is at bat, the replacement player will assume the ball/strike count.
7. A team's turn at bat concludes if:
 - a. Defensive team records 3 outs, or
 - b. Teams will be limited to 5 runs per inning, with the exception of the final declared inning agreed by both coaches, teams may score up to 10 runs. If a team scores more than 5 runs on a play in any given inning before the final declared inning, for example a team has scored 4 runs in an inning and with the bases loaded the batter hits a grand slam, the team would only score 5 runs, not 8. This also applies in the final inning where a team cannot score more than 10 runs in the inning.
8. Play of game
 - a. A complete game shall consist of 7 complete innings.
 - b. No new inning can begin after 1 hour 45 minutes of play.
 - c. Drop dead rule for regular season games:
 - i. The game will end after 2 hours of play. If the current inning is not completed, the official score will revert back to the last completed inning unless the home team has tied the game or has gone ahead during the current inning at the drop dead time.

Scenario for examples: After 5 innings the game is tied 5-5. The sixth inning begins 1 hour and 45 minutes after play started. (An inning begins immediately after the 3rd out of the previous inning is recorded). The sixth inning begins at that point.

Example 1: The visiting team scores 4 runs in the top of the sixth inning to take a 9-5 lead. The home team's first batter steps to the plate at the 2 hour mark after play began. The game ends per the drop dead rule. The sixth inning was not completed. The score reverts back to the last fully completed inning – the fifth inning – and the game score is a 5-5 tie.

Example 2: The visiting team scores 2 runs in the top of the sixth inning to take a 7-5 lead. The home team scores 2 runs in the bottom of the sixth inning

without an out being recorded. With no outs, the next batter steps to the plate just as the 2 hour drop dead limit is reached. The home team has tied the game. The game score is a 7-7 tie.

Example 3: The visiting team scores 2 runs in the top of the sixth inning to take a 7-5 lead. The home team scores three runs in the bottom of the sixth inning, with the third run crossing the plate 1 hour and 58 minutes after the game began. The drop dead time limit has not yet been reached. No new inning may begin because more than 1 hour 45 minutes has passed since the game began. The home team wins because it has taken the lead in the bottom of the game's last inning. The game score is 8-7.

- d. For end of season playoff tournament games the International Tie Breaker will be used if time has expired and the game is tied (games cannot end in a tie).

INTERNATIONAL TIE BREAKER: This rule to be used as follows:

At the top and bottom of each extra inning, each team starts with a runner on second base. The base runner will be the last scheduled batter of the inning (if every player were to bat once). Game continues playing regular rules until the tie is broken.

9. PACE OF PLAY:

- a. There will be a two-minute time limit between half innings to keep the games moving.
- b. There will be a maximum of 5 warm up pitches allowed between innings.
- c. A mandatory pinch runner will be used when a scheduled catcher is on base with 2 outs. The catcher must be ready by the third out (unless they were the last batter)
- d. A pinch runner may also be used for the pitcher scheduled to pitch in the next inning, but is not mandatory.
- e. The substitute runner(s) will be the last recorded out(s) of the inning

10. Fourth Grade Level Pitching: Full Player Pitch

- a. A pitcher is allowed to pitch any part of 3 innings per 7 inning game.
- b. A pitcher must be removed from an inning if she hits 3 batters in the same inning (this inning counts as an inning pitched for both pitchers).
- c. One pitch shall constitute an inning for a pitcher.
- d. A pitcher may return to pitch in subsequent innings if she has not pitched in any part of 3 innings.
- e. Coach may make a trip to the pitcher to talk with the pitcher and team. On the second trip to the pitcher in the same inning, the pitcher will need to be removed from the winning. The pitcher may be switched to a position on the field as long as rule 2 is in compliance. At the end of an inning, the coach's trip to the mound resets allowing a coach to visit the same pitcher for upcoming innings.
- f. The Fourth Grade level pitching distance is 35 feet from the back tip of home plate to the pitching rubber.
- g. Equal playing time generally does not apply to the pitching position. All girls who want to pitch should be given an opportunity to pitch. However, all coaches, players and parents need to recognize that games are not primarily pitching practice for girls who have not put in reasonable practice time and effort. Poor and/or unprepared pitching is counterproductive to both the enjoyment and development of softball at this level. DOLLS recommends the following guidelines for pitching:
 - o A girl should be able to demonstrate pitching competency. That is, she is able to

consistently throw a minimum of 8 strikes out of 20 pitches (40%).

- Even if a girl cannot consistently throw strikes at this rate, she should still be allowed to pitch during games if she has demonstrated to the coach that she has been putting in reasonable practice time and effort during the week and her pitching skills continue to improve throughout the season.

11. Umpires

- DOLLS intends to provide umpires for all fourth Grade level games. In the event an umpire is not obtained for a particular game, the batting team will provide an umpire (usually a coach) to call balls and strikes.
 - Umpires at this level will generally be high-school aged youth.
 - Umpires at this level are mainly responsible for calling balls and strikes, and calling safe and out. They will not be responsible for, and will not be charged with calling, “higher” level softball rules such as an illegal pitching motion.
 - **Strike Zone:** It is recommended that the strike zone be broad – anywhere below the armpits but above the shins, and less than or equal to one ball diameter outside the plate on either side. Umpires will be directed to follow the schematic below for the strike zone. The point of a large strike zone is to encourage batters to swing.
 - Rule clarifications between both coaches and the umpire shall be conducted prior to the start of the game.
 - Questioning the umpire’s judgement-based call (e.g., ball or strike, safe or out) is strictly prohibited, is considered unsportsmanlike conduct, shall be reported to the President of In-House and Umpire Coordinator, and shall result in disciplinary action, up to and including suspension.
 - Coaches are allowed to communicate with umpires BETWEEN INNINGS regarding the correct application of a rule, PROVIDED THAT the coach does so with deference, civility, and respect. ANY semblance of a rude, sarcastic, or disrespectful talk or behavior toward an umpire is unsportsmanlike conduct, shall be reported to the President of In-House and Umpire Coordinator, and shall result in disciplinary action, up to and including suspension.
 - The above rules apply to coaches and spectators equally. Coaches accept responsibility for spectators of their team. Spectators are NEVER allowed to question an umpire’s call or dispute a rule or engage with an umpire at any time. If this occurs, the coach has the responsibility to remind the spectator of these rules. If the spectators continue, the coach shall request the spectator to leave the game. If the spectator refuses, the coach shall inform the President of In-House and the Umpire Coordinator.

12. Base Running

- a. The runner is allowed to take a lead-off after the pitch has crossed the plate.
- b. Runners may advance on an overthrow at any base. Runners are limited to one base per overthrow. If the overthrow goes out of play (past the fence lines) then the runner advances to the base they were running toward plus one more (1 + 1).
- c. A runner attempting to steal a base cannot advance beyond the base they are attempting to steal on an overthrow (or underthrow) by the catcher. This means a runner starting at first base who attempts to steal second base cannot advance to third base on the catcher’s throw, and a runner starting at second base who attempts to steal third base cannot advance to home plate on the catcher’s throw.

- d. Play is stopped when the ball is in possession and control of any defensive player within the pitching circle. The pitching circle shall be drawn with an 8 foot radius from the pitcher's mound.
- e. **Avoidance of Contact**: All base runners must attempt to avoid a collision with a fielder in possession of the ball, or about to field a batted or thrown ball. Runners have three options to avoid a collision: 1) slide into the base they are going to, 2) step around a fielder, or 3) pull up and allow themselves to be tagged.

13. Stealing bases:

- a. Stealing bases is permitted; EXCEPT for home plate.
- b. Advancing to the next base on a passed ball is allowed; EXCEPT for home plate. As explained below, home plate is closed.
- c. Runners will be allowed to steal only one base per batter.
- d. A runner can steal from first base to second base and a runner can steal from second base to third base upon the ball crossing the plate. Two runners can steal at the same time but cannot steal more than one base per batter.
- e. If a runner leaves early on a steal attempt, then she must return to the original base at no risk and the pitched ball is ruled dead, even if the batter puts the ball in play. It will be up to the base or home plate umpire or first base coach to monitor whether a runner has left early.
- f. Home plate is "closed" for purposes of stealing, passed balls, and any attempts by the catcher to make an out at third base on a runner who started the pitch at third base. Stealing home plate is not permitted. Advancing to home from third base on a passed ball is not permitted. Advancing to home plate on an attempt by the catcher to make an out at third base on a runner who started the pitch at third base is not permitted. A base runner on third base when a pitch is thrown can advance home only pursuant to (i) a batted ball, or (ii) a bases loaded walk.

14. Fourth Grade level base peg length is generally 55 feet, although Fourth Grade teams will also play on fields with 60 foot base peg lengths. The Washington Park and Puffer Elementary School fields have 55 foot base pegs (Washington Park also has 60 foot base pegs, so take care in setting up the field).

15. Home team is official scorebook. Win/loss records/standing shall be kept at this level. The season shall be completed with a double-elimination tournament. Tiebreakers will be head to head record, and then head to head run differential.

16. The infield fly rule **does not** apply at this level.

17. The dropped third strike rule **does not** apply at this level.