

# 2026 RULES FOR NCSSA SOFTBALL TOURNAMENTS

NCSSA Rules Supersede SSUSA Rules

Rule Changes for 2026 are printed in **RED**

January 21, 2026

*Changes to the NCSSA rules are administered by NCSSA Rulebook Committee and approved by the NCSSA Board of Directors.*

1. **Pitcher Face guard and Shin Guards:** The NCSSA has adopted the SSUSA rule on the mandatory wearing of approved face guards by the pitcher. The NCSSA has also adopted a rule stating that the pitcher must wear some sort of shin guards.
2. **Defensive Players:**  
60+ and younger Teams: No more than 10 players  
65, 70, 75 and 80 Teams: No more than 11 players  
85+ Teams: No more than 12 players  
Teams in Groups 11 or above: No more than 12 players
  - If 65+ teams have to play younger teams, they may still use their extra player(s) on defense.
  - A minimum of eight defensive players must be available to start a game. When players arrive, they must be put at the bottom of the batting order and can only bring the team up to above limits.
3. **Home Team:** The home team will be determined before each game by a toss of a coin between team representatives. There are no exceptions to this rule. A 62-minute game clock begins at the conclusion of the coin toss.
4. **Five Team Brackets:** All games will be played as regulation games and teams who are scheduled to play each other twice will receive either 1/2 of a win or 1/2 of a loss for each game played.
5. **Protests:** A committee composed of the tournament director or his assistants, and the game umpire will make the final decision on protests. Protests must be made to the umpire immediately following the questioned decision or ruling and before play resumes.
6. **Game Scheduling:** A team should not be scheduled for more than three games per day, no more than two back-to-back games, and not under lights for 60 or over divisions. Travel distance to schedule bracketing for tournaments will be determined by the team zip code. The current NCSSA recommended schedule/bracketing format shall be used.
7. **Five Games:** A team should play a minimum of five games per tournament. (If less, it must be documented on the tournament flyer **and agreed to by all affected managers**). All games must be played. A team that plays forfeited games will still be able to win the tournament. No team may refuse to play an opponent but may play any game under protest. Unless mutually agreed upon by both managers, a team that does not play all its games will not be eligible for any prize and will pay a fine of \$75 per game not played to NCSSA and subject to rules 12 and 17. The fine will be awarded to the team (s) involved.

Teams are encouraged to recruit players and continue as an exhibition team. Teams who are denied games because their opponent withdraws must request any rebate or compensation in writing to the NCSSA Board.

8. **Tournament Brackets:** Tournament directors will have a cut-off date at least ten days prior to the start of their tournament. Brackets must be approved by their Primary Region Representative. If the Tournament Director is the Primary Region Representative, his brackets must be approved by the NCSSA Tournament Liaison Officer. Game schedules must be out at least seven days in advance. Entry fees and the NCSSA approved rosters must be in by the cut-off date. The most recent NCSSA roster is the official roster for that tournament. Tournament Directors are allowed to make adjustments to bring parity to a bracket.

9. **Rosters Restrictions:**

- NCSSA rosters are limited to 22 players.
- **Teams are limited to four (4) roster changes a year after their initial roster submission. No more than one (1) change a month is permitted. Roster corrections or removed players do not count as roster changes.**
- Players are allowed to be on two permanent team NCSSA rosters, but the player must meet all applicable team age requirements (*see exceptions below for 70+, 75+ and 80+ teams*).
- Teams may add two temporary players for a tournament, but they must meet all applicable team age requirements (*see exceptions below for 70+, 75+ and 80+ teams*).
- Teams in Group 11 and above, may add up to five temporary players for a tournament, but they must meet all applicable team age requirements (*see exceptions below for 70+, 75+ and 80+ teams*).
- **70+ teams may have up to three players aged 69 on the team's permanent roster. For any tournament, the total number of underaged players, whether temporary and/or permanent, cannot exceed three (3).**
- 75+ teams may have up to five players aged 74 on the team's permanent roster. **For any tournament, the total number of underaged players, whether temporary and/or permanent, cannot exceed five (5).**
- 80+ teams may have up to seven underage players aged 78 and 79 on the team's permanent roster, with no more than three being age 78. They may temporarily add players age 78 and 79 to the roster for any tournament, not to exceed the limits of underage players.

10. **Tournament Rosters:** A team's permanent roster is frozen at the beginning of their first game. Any team adding three or more players to its latest approved NCSSA roster will not be eligible for awards and the games will not count in the standings and recorded as exhibition only. Player(s) added must be on the team's submitted roster prior to their first game. Managers must declare to the Tournament Director if he has add-ons, who the add-ons are and if his team is playing games as exhibition. Any team failing to declare as exhibition when playing with an illegal roster for any given tournament will pay a fine equal to the cost of the tournament, payable to the NCSSA, and be subject to Rule 18.

11. **Players- One Roster per tournament:** All players are restricted to one roster during a tournament. A player who plays on two teams will cause the second team to forfeit any games the player plays in. The

first team he plays for becomes his only team for that tournament. Exception --four-day tournaments where a player who is on two permanent team rosters may play for both teams providing that one team plays on Thursday-Friday, and the other on Saturday -Sunday.

12. **Drop Out Penalty:** If a team drops out of the tournament after the cut-off date, it will lose its entry fee. Any team dropping out of a tournament after the schedule is out will automatically be suspended commencing 15 days after that date until the Board can review the problem and/or enact penalty or reinstatement.

13. **Fees:** Team registration of **\$100** along with the NCSSA approved roster must be in before a team can play. Team fee includes insurance and team registration for the current season to Senior Softball USA. Tournament directors must send \$150 to NCSSA per tournament to register and for insurance before their scheduled tournament date (s).

14. **Home Run Rule: A 1-year pilot program is being implemented for teams in Groups 1 and 2.**

Teams in Groups 1 and 2 may hit up to six home runs (untouched ball hit over the fence). Each home run hit after a team reaches the home run limit is a dead ball out and base runners cannot advance. Homeruns hit over the fence and Four Base Awards, are walk offs for the batter & base runner (s). Runners don't have to touch any bases.

In cases where a Group 1 or Group 2 team plays a team that is not in Group 1 or 2, the game will be played using the "One-Up Home Run" rule as described below.

**Groups 3 and above (One-Up Home Run):** Teams in Group 3 and below (i.e.; 3- 14) cannot have more than one home run (untouched ball hit over the fence) than their opponent. All subsequent home runs (untouched balls hit over the fence) will be counted as a walk, and base runners may only advance one base if forced. Homeruns hit over the fence and Four Base Awards, are walk offs for the batter & base runner (s). Runners don't have to touch any bases. The home team may go 1 up in home runs in the bottom of the last inning.

15. **Injured Players:** There will be no penalty on a batter who leaves the game with an injury or for an emergency. No out will be assessed. A substitute will take that spot in the lineup. If no substitute is available, that spot in the lineup will be deleted. The player leaving the game may not re-enter that game.

16. **Tie breakers** in any bracket at the end of a tournament will be resolved in the following manner:

1. WON/LOSS record.
2. HEAD-TO-HEAD competition.
3. LEAST RUNS SCORED AGAINST. \*
4. RUN DIFFERENTIAL
5. Least runs allowed in the tournament between all teams.

In a 5-team bracket, only the first five games played count in this tie breaker.

Only the scores of the teams involved in the tie will be considered in calculating 3 and 4 above. Once a team is eliminated from the tie, it cannot be brought back into the tie consideration.

\* If a team has a forfeit, then the game with the least runs scored will be removed from the equation of all affected teams. SS-USA rule 13.6

17. **Unsportsmanlike conduct:** per SSUSA Section 16 Disqualification Rule 16.6

18. **Discipline:** Any violations of these rules will be reviewed by the Board of Directors, and the appropriate punishment shall be administered.

19. **Flip-Flop rule:** In a tournament game, when the visiting team is ahead by 10 runs or more at the commencement of the “open inning”; the home team will bat at the top of the inning and visiting team if needed will bat at the bottom of the inning. Or if the visiting team is ahead by 15 or more runs in the open inning, the teams flip flop, even though the visiting team has not completed their at-bat. The number of outs (if any) and the location of any runners is recorded, and the home team comes to bat. If the home team scores less than 15 runs, the game is over. If the home team ties or takes the lead, the visiting team is allowed to continue their at-bats where they left off, prior to the flip flop.

20. **Courtesy Runner:** A courtesy runner may only enter prior to the first pitch to any batter and when a batter is walked, a courtesy runner can take first base without the batter-baserunner touching first. The batter can go directly to the dugout.

21. **Distance between bases** will be 65 or 70 feet, with a commitment line 30 feet from home plate.

22. **Run Equalizers:** When different groups must be combined in a single bracket, the following awarded runs will be followed. For example, when a Group 7 team plays a Group 5 team, this would equal 2 groups, and the Group 7 team would be awarded 5 runs.

1 group = 3 runs awarded at the beginning of the game to the lowest rated team(s).

2 groups = 5 runs awarded at the beginning of the game to the lowest rated team(s).

3 groups = 7 runs awarded at the beginning of the game to the lowest rated team(s).

23. **Tournament Wins:** After a team has played a minimum of four NCSSA tournaments, and has won more than 50% of tournaments entered, that team shall give up an additional 5 runs, over and above any run equalizers, to every team within their tournament bracket, until the percentage of tournament wins falls to 50% or below. These runs will be given at 1 run per inning, starting with the second inning.

24. **Lineup cards** will be required at all NCSSA tournaments.

25. **First basemen gloves** or mitts are legal in NCSSA play for all defensive players.

26. **Official Softball:** The following balls are approved for NCSSA tournaments- Baden Fire, .44/375 softball; Trump .44/375 Micro Cell Technology softball; Demarini GSL .44/400 softball or Onyx .44/375-softball.

27. **Sun Affecting Batters Rule:** This rule has been eliminated from SSUSA. NCSSA has voted to keep it in the NCSSA. The rule states, If the sun is affecting the batter’s ability to see the ball, the batter may request to the umpire that the pitcher pitch from up to six feet on either side of the pitching rubber, at the side chosen by the batter. The request, if granted, shall be applied on a full-inning basis only.

28. **Jerseys:** NCSSA emphasis is on Rule 3.8 of the SSUSA Rulebook, “Wearing of Jerseys with individual numbers”.
29. **Balls and Strikes:** In All Groups of the NCSSA, the batter will start with a 1-1 count.
30. **Pitching Screens:** Teams are not allowed to use pitching screens during tournament games.
31. **Bat warmers** are permitted at all NCSSA tournaments.
32. **Batter’s Box:** NCSSA has adopted the SSUSA batter’s box rule regarding the batter’s rear foot. On the swing, the batter’s front foot may step out the front of the box, but the rear foot cannot be fully in front of the line defining the front edge of the plate when making contact with the ball (fair or foul). This is a dead ball out. The batter’s foot cannot step out of the side or rear of the batter’s box. This is also a dead ball out.

Edited by the NCSSA Rulebook Committee