

2026 Howard County Rules

Substitution rule for all age groups:

Should a substitute player or players be needed, the substitute **MUST** come from a lower age division, bat last, and play in the outfield. No exceptions. **If a pitcher is needed, please see the substitution section of the corresponding age group.**

6U Howard County Rules

The playing field will have a pitching rubber placed 20' (twenty feet) from the front of home plate. The pitching circle will have an 8' (eight foot) radius. The girls will play with an 11" non-vinyl softball. Any rules not specified below default to ASA rules.

GENERAL GAME REGULATIONS

1. Games will be 60 minutes long. The inning in progress at the end of the allotted time will be completed.
2. Every player will have an at-bat each offensive half-inning.
3. Every player will play in the field each defensive half-inning.
4. In the event of inclement weather, it will be implied that canceled games will not be rescheduled.
5. All games will be coach pitch (please see below for further explanation)
6. Teams should have a player in the circle, acting in the capacity as pitcher. The pitcher must start three feet behind the coach.
 - a. The player may stand at the side of the coach, but three feet back for safety.
 - b. The player is only required to have one foot inside the circle prior to the pitch.

PITCHING REGULATIONS

1. Coaches pitch to their own team from 20 feet from the front of the plate.
2. The pitching coach must avoid all contact with the ball and players. The girls should throw the ball back to the player that is in the pitcher position after every live ball.
 - a. The pitching coach may stop errant throws.
3. The pitching coach will not direct runners in any way at any time.
4. The defensive player that is in the pitcher position must stay three feet behind pitching coach until the ball is hit.
5. An 11" non-vinyl softball shall be used for play.

BATTING REGULATIONS

1. Every girl bats.
2. The batting order will be provided and announced at the beginning of each game, and will remain unchanged, except as noted in #3 below.
3. Any player not present at the beginning of the game will become the last batter on the roster in the official batting order.
4. Any "official softball" or t-ball bat may be used.

PLAYING RULES OFFENSE

1. A total of 3 (three) pitches will be thrown. In the event the batter does not make contact with the ball landing in fair territory, they will then hit off the tee.
2. All players should be encouraged to hit off the coach. If there is a player who is not capable of hitting the coach's pitch, the coach may immediately allow the player to hit off the tee.
3. Hit ball, runners will advance one base at a time.
 - a. The last batter in the line up will advance all four bases, regardless of where the ball lands in fair territory.
 - b. It is recommended for coaches to rotate the batting order from game to game to allow all players to "hit a home run".

6U Howard County Rules Continued

4. All runners should be encouraged to take at least two steps off the base after each pitch.
 - a. No leadoffs before the ball released from the coach's hand.
 - b. If this skill is too advanced for some players, you do not need to practice it until they're ready.
5. The two base coaches shall not impede or assist the runner in any way. Coaches are not allowed to touch the runner while the ball is live.

DEFENSE

1. Once a ball is put into play, the defensive players should make an attempt to throw the runner out at first base.
2. Each team will play with unlimited infielders.
3. Coaches should place defensive players in five of the six traditional infield positions.
 - a. The five traditional infield positions refer to the pitcher, first, second, third, and shortstop positions.
 - b. All other players should be placed in the infield in between the traditional infield positions. c. Coaches will fill the role of catcher.
4. Three coaches are allowed on the field when their team is on defense.

NOTES

1. This age level is meant to be fun.
2. The goal is for everyone to be able to hit from the coach by the end of the season, **BUT** if that isn't the case it is fine.
3. Teach the basics of throwing, catching, and hitting.
4. Be encouraging. Be goofy. Have fun.

8U Howard County Rules

The playing field will have a pitching rubber placed 35' (thirty-five feet) from home plate. The pitching circle will have an 8' (eight foot) radius. The girls will play with an 11" non-vinyl softball. There will be a 30' (thirty foot) hash line between all bases except down the first base line.

Any rules not specified below default to Babe Ruth rules.

GENERAL GAME REGULATIONS

1. Games will be 6 (six) innings or 75 minutes long, whichever occurs first. The inning in progress at the end of the allotted time will be completed. In this case, the beginning of an inning starts when the third (3rd) out or the 6 (six) run rule, if applicable, is reached in the previous inning.
2. Games are to be played the full 75 minutes. All started innings will be completed.
3. In the event of inclement weather, it will be implied that canceled games will not be rescheduled unless both leagues agree to reschedule. Exception – tournament games.
4. A team will not start a game with fewer than 8 (eight) players. However, if both managers agree, a team may play with fewer than eight players and it will count as an official game. If the managers cannot agree, then the team with fewer than eight players will forfeit.
 - a. **Tournament games MUST be played with a minimum of eight players. No tournament game can be agreed upon to be official with less than eight players.**
 - b. **During Howard County Tournament games, teams should have nine players. If a team is playing with eight players, they must take an out each time the missing ninth player would be up to bat.**
5. A game that is still tied at the end of the allotted time limit will be recorded as a tie.
 - a. **Exception: tournaments will utilize international tie break**
6. All county association games will be **COACH PITCH** unless agreed upon by both coaches before the game.
7. **For the Howard County Tournament, home/visitor will be determined by double coin flip.**
8. **Howard County Tournament will be coach pitch ONLY.**
9. In order for a player to be eligible to play in the Howard County Tournament, they must play in a minimum of 60 percent of the regular season games. Team scorebook will prove attendance if player is opposed.
 - a. **Cases of injury or extenuating circumstances will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis.**

PITCHING REGULATIONS

1. Coaches pitch to their own team from the front of the 8' (eight foot) pitching circle.
 - a. **The coach that pitches must have both feet inside the circle at all times.**
2. The pitching coach must avoid all contact with the ball and players.
 - a. **The pitching coach MUST leave the playing field while the ball is live.** If, in the umpire's judgement, interference by the pitching coach was intentional, the lead runner is out. If the interference is unintentional, it shall be ruled a DEAD BALL/REPITCH. *This includes if a coach is hit by the ball off the bat.*
3. **The pitching coach shall not direct the batter in any way unless the ball is dead.**
4. The defensive player that is the pitcher position must stay in the circle until the ball is hit. Only one foot is required to be in the circle. The defensive player that is in the pitcher position must be no farther forward than the coach who is pitching with at least one foot in the circle.
5. An 11" non-vinyl softball shall be used for play.

8U Howard County Rules Continued

BATTING REGULATIONS

1. Every girl bats whether she is in the field that inning or not.
2. The batting order will be provided and announced at the beginning of each game, and will remain unchanged, except as noted in rules #3 and #4 below.
3. Any player not present at the beginning of the game will become the **last batter** on the roster in the official batting order.
 - a. **Example:** Susie arrives after the game has started. Before her arrival, there were 11 (eleven) girls on the roster. She will become batter NO. 12.
4. Any player removed from the batting order due to illness or injury shall not result in an out.
5. Any "official softball" or t-ball bat may be used.

PLAYING RULES

1. A total of 5 (five) pitches or 3 (three) swinging strikes shall count as an out. Three outs per half inning. Exception: if the fifth pitch is a foul, continue hitting until strike or hit.
 - a. **Two (2) pitches will be thrown by the player and three (3) pitches will be thrown by the coach IF teams agree to use player pitch during regular season games.**
 - b. **IF player pitch is being utilized the player will pitch from a distance of 30 feet.**
2. No walks.
3. Hit ball, runners may advance at their own risk. No limit. Penalty of being put out. Exception: overthrow rule, see below.
4. The infield fly rule shall not apply.
5. The 6 (six) run rule per inning shall apply. Mercy rule: 15 (fifteen) after three innings, 11 (eleven) after four innings, 7 (seven) after five innings.
6. No stealing. *Penalty: runner is out.*
7. No intentional bunts. *Penalty: batter is out.*
8. No leadoffs before the ball is hit. *Penalty: runner is out.*
9. Each team will play with 6 (six) infielders and all others must stay in the outfield grass until the ball is hit.
 - a. The 6 (six) refers to the pitcher, catcher, first, second, third, and shortstop positions.
10. Two defensive coaches are allowed in the outfield when their team is on the field.
 - a. **For the Howard County Tournament, coaches in the outfield should stay in foul territory on either the first base or third base side.**
11. The two base coaches shall not impede or assist the runner in any way. Coaches are not allowed to touch the players while the ball is live. *Penalty: runner is out.*

DEAD BALL CLARIFICATIONS

1. **REMOVED—A player may NO LONGER run in front of the lead runner and call time out. —REMOVED**
2. A dead ball will be called when any defensive player carries the ball into the pitcher's circle and raises their hands above their head, no play may be made after this.
3. The placement of the runners shall be determined by their location when a dead ball is called. If they have passed the 30' hash mark, they are awarded the next base. If they have not passed the 30' hash mark, they shall return to the last base legally touched.

8U Howard County Rules Continued

4. In the event of multiple runners, the lead runner shall govern the placement of all runners.

OVERTHROW RULE

1. In the event of an overthrow at **ANY BASE**, the runner may advance no further **than the next immediate base** at their own risk. No runners are awarded a free base. A play can be made on any of the runners to achieve an out.

The ball is DEAD after the overthrow. No additional bases may be gained while the ball is being returned to the circle. (Exception – see Overthrow Chaos Example)

- a. **Example:** Mary is on first base when the ball is hit, short stop fields the ball and throws to second base overthrowing the base. Mary may run to third but **MUST** stop and stay on third until the next ball is hit into play, then she may advance at her own risk.
- b. **Batter Example:** Mary has advanced to third on an overthrow to second and **MUST** stay there. Susie was the batter of the overthrown ball. Susie may advance to second base at her own risk without penalty, or being called back to any base **UNLESS** the play is ruled dead and the baserunners are placed based on their proximity to the 30' hashmarks between the bases or they have been thrown out.
- c. **Overthrow Chaos Example:** Mary has advanced to third on an overthrow. Susie advanced at her own risk to second base. The ball was thrown back to the pitcher's helper Betty. Betty did not call time out and was not in the circle properly. Betty decided to throw the ball down to third, overthrowing the base. All runners may run at their own risk at this point advancing as far as they can until the ball is ruled dead.

10U Howard County Rules

The playing field will have a pitching rubber placed 35' (thirty-five feet) from home plate. The pitching circle will have an 8' (eight foot) radius. The girls will play with an 11" non-vinyl softball.

Any rules not specified below default to Babe Ruth rules.

GENERAL GAME REGULATIONS

1. Games will be 6 (six) innings or 75 minutes long, whichever occurs first. The inning in progress at the end of the allotted time will be completed. In this case, the beginning of an inning starts when the third (3rd) out or the 6 (six) run rule, if applicable, is reached in the previous inning.
2. Games are to be played the full 75 minutes. All started innings will be completed.
3. In the event of inclement weather, it will be implied that canceled games will not be rescheduled unless both leagues agree to reschedule. Exception – tournament games.
4. A team will not start a game with fewer than 8 (eight) players. However, if both managers agree, a team may play with fewer than eight players and it will count as an official game. If the managers cannot agree, then the team with fewer than eight players will forfeit.
 - a. **Tournament games MUST be played with a minimum of eight players. No tournament game can be agreed upon to be official with less than eight players.**
 - b. **During Howard County Tournament games, teams should have nine players. If a team is playing with eight players, they must take an out each time the missing ninth player would be up to bat.**
5. A game that is still tied at the end of the allotted time limit will be recorded as a tie. **Exception: tournaments will utilize international tie break**
6. **For the Howard County Tournament, home/visitor will be determined by double coin flip.**
7. You must bat your official team roster.
8. In order for a player to be eligible to play in the Howard County Tournament, they must play in a minimum of 60 percent of the regular season games. Team scorebook will prove attendance if player is opposed. **Cases of injury or extenuating circumstances will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis.**

PLAYING REGULATIONS 1.

1. No dropped third strike.
2. No infield fly rule.
3. Four (4) outfielders can be played.
4. No coaches in the outfield.

PITCHING REGULATIONS

1. A pitcher can only pitch 2 (two) of the first 3 (three) innings.
 - a. After the third inning, any pitcher may re-enter the game (even if they pitched 2 of the first 3 innings).
2. All pitching is done by 10U pitchers. No coaches pitch.
3. Pitchers will throw from 35'.
4. Pitchers are permitted to utilize the "step back" rule.

BASERUNNING REGULATIONS

1. Runners may leave after the pitcher has released the ball. *Penalty: runner is out if the runner leaves early.*
2. Hesitation (look back) rule is in effect. The runner **MUST** return to the base or advance (if allowed – if base ahead is occupied, runner must return) once any player has the ball in control in the pitching circle.

10U Howard County Rules Continued

- a. Both feet inside of or on the white line is considered inside the circle. *Penalty: runner is out*
 - b. Example: Susie is on second base. She leads off, standing five steps off the bag. Pam, the pitcher, enters the circle and keeps her hands down. Susie acts like she is going to go back to second base but turns to third and takes off. Ruling: Susie is out due to not remaining with the first chosen direction.
 - c. Once the runner has chosen their direction, they cannot pause and start again. That would result in the runner being out.
 - d. Non-Example: Susie is on second base. She leads off, standing five steps off the bag. Pam, the pitcher, enters the circle and raises her hand with the ball, to fake a throw to second base. Susie, who had been heading back to second, turns and runs to third base.
3. A runner may only steal **or advance** 1 (one) base per pitch.
- a. If any runner advances on a steal, no additional base can be gained, regardless of an overthrow to the base the runner is advancing to or an attempted put out at another base.
 - i. Example: runner steals from second to third, rounds third for a lead off, catcher throws to third base, runner cannot advance, even on an overthrow. If the runner was to advance, it would be 2 (two) bases per pitch.
 - ii. Example: runners on first and second, pitch is thrown, both runners steal, catcher throws to second base to attempt to get the runner out, runner that advanced to third base cannot run home. That, again, would be 2 (two) bases.
 - b. The purpose of this rule is to allow the development of catchers. We want to encourage them to throw to the bases on steal, but with no penalty for an overthrow. *Penalty: dead ball, runners return to last legally gained base.*
4. Stealing home is allowed. One base per pitch rule still applies.
5. If the pitcher makes an attempt on a baserunner from within the circle including a pump fake/fake throw, it is considered a live ball and runners may advance at their own risk.
6. Warnings can be issued by the umpire on first infractions **if they so choose. Umpires do not have to issue a warning first.**

SUBSTITUTIONS

1. If a team has less than 9 (nine) players, they may use substitutes, including tournament games. A. Player must be from a younger age group.
 - a. Example: A 8U player may sub in a 10U game and a 10U player may sub in a 12U game. **b.**
No same age substitutions.
 - i. In the event a pitcher is ill or injured and **NO OTHER DEVELOPED** pitcher is available, a coach may pull a substitute player for the same age division. The pitcher may only pitch in the third inning.
 - ii. **NO SAME AGE PITCHING SUBSTITUTIONS ALLOWED DURING TOURNAMENT PLAY**
 - c. Substitute must bat last and play the outfield.
 - i. **Exception – As stated above the pitcher may pitch BUT bat last.**

RUN RULE

1. Six (6) run rule per inning.
 - a. **In the Howard County Tournament only, the sixth inning will be unlimited runs.**
2. Mercy rule: 15 (fifteen) after three innings, 11 (eleven) after four innings, 7 (seven) after five innings.

10U Howard County Rules Continued

BATTING REGULATIONS

1. Every girl bats whether she is in the field that inning or not.
2. The batting order will be provided and announced at the beginning of each game, and will remain unchanged, except as noted in #3 and #4 below.
3. Any player not present at the beginning of the game will become the **last batter** on the roster in the official batting order.
 - a. **Example:** Susie arrives after the game has started. Before her arrival, there were 11 (eleven) girls on the roster. She will become batter #12.
4. Any player removed from the batting order due to illness or injury shall not result in an out.
5. Any “official softball” bat may be used.

12U Howard County Rules

The playing field will have a pitching rubber placed 40' (forty feet) from home plate. The pitching circle will have an 8' (eight foot) radius. The girls will play with a 12" non vinyl softball. Any rules not specified below default to Babe Ruth rules.

GENERAL GAME REGULATIONS

1. Games will be 6 (six) innings or 75 minutes long, whichever occurs first. The inning in progress at the end of the allotted time will be completed. In this case, the beginning of an inning starts when the third (3rd) out or the 6 (six) run rule, if applicable, is reached in the previous inning.
2. Games are to be played the full 75 minutes. All started innings will be completed.
3. In the event of inclement weather, it will be implied that canceled games will not be rescheduled unless both leagues agree to reschedule. **Exception – tournament games.**
4. A team will not start a game with fewer than 8 (eight) players. However, if both managers agree, a team may play with fewer than eight players and it will count as an official game. If the managers cannot agree, then the team with fewer than eight players will forfeit.
 - a. **Tournament games MUST be played with a minimum of eight players. No tournament game can be agreed upon to be official with less than eight players.**
 - b. **During Howard County Tournament games, teams should have nine players. If a team is playing with eight players, they must take an out each time the missing ninth player would be up to bat.**
5. A game that is still tied at the end of the allotted time limit will be recorded as a tie. **Exception: tournaments will utilize international tie break**
6. **For the Howard County Tournament, home/visitor will be determined by double coin flip.**
7. In order for a player to be eligible to play in the Howard County Tournament, they must play in a minimum of 60 percent of the regular season games. Team scorebook will prove attendance if player is opposed. **Cases of injury or extenuating circumstances will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis.**
8. More than two batting time outs in a single at bat will result in the batter being out.
9. Injury or time out by coach in the last five minutes of the game will result in the game clock stopping.
10. You must bat your official team roster.

PLAYING REGULATIONS

1. Dropped third strike in effect.
2. Infield fly rule in effect.
3. Four (4) outfielders can be played.
4. No coaches in the outfield.

PITCHING REGULATIONS

1. A pitcher can only pitch 3 (three) of the first 5 (five) innings.
 - a. **After the fifth inning, any pitcher may re-enter the game (even if they pitched 3 of the first 5 innings). (Once a player throws a pitch it counts as an inning played)**
2. Pitchers will throw from 40'.
3. Pitchers are permitted to utilize the "step back" rule.

BASERUNNING REGULATIONS

1. Runners may leave after the pitcher has released the ball. *Penalty: runner is out if runner leaves early.*

12U Howard County Rules Continued

2. Hesitation (look back) rule is in effect. The runner **MUST** return to the base or advance (if allowed – if base ahead is occupied, runner must return) once any player has the ball in control in the pitching circle.
 - a. Both feet inside of or on the white line is considered inside the circle. *Penalty: runner is out.*
 - b. **Example:** Susie is on second base. She leads off, standing five steps off the bag. Pam, the pitcher, enters the circle and keeps her hands down. Susie acts like she is going to go back to second base but turns to third and takes off. Ruling: Susie is out due to not remaining with the first chosen direction.
 - c. Once the runner has chosen their direction, they cannot pause and start again. That would result in the runner being out.
 - d. **Non-Example:** Susie is on second base. She leads off, standing five steps off the bag. Pam, the pitcher, enters the circle and raises her hand with the ball, to fake a throw to second base. Susie, who had been heading back to second, turns and runs to third base.
3. No limit on steals.
4. On an overthrow, runners may advance at their own risk.
5. Stealing home is allowed.
6. Players running home **MUST SLIDE** into home **when there is a play being made at the plate.**
7. If the pitcher makes an attempt on a baserunner from within the circle, it is considered a live ball and runners may advance at their own risk.
8. Warnings can be issued by umpire on first infractions **if they so choose. Umpires do not have to issue a warning first.**

SUBSTITUTIONS

1. If a team has less than 9 (nine) players, they may use substitutes, including tournament games.
 - a. Player must be from a younger age group.
 - a. **Example:** 8U player may sub in 10U game and a 10U player may sub in a 12U game.
 - b. No same age substitutions.
 - i. In the event a pitcher is ill or injured and **NO OTHER DEVELOPED** pitcher is available, a coach may pull a substitute player for the same age division. The pitcher may only pitch in the third and fourth innings.
 - ii. **NO SAME AGE PITCHING SUBSTITUTIONS ALLOWED DURING TOURNAMENT PLAY**
 - c. Substitute must bat last and play the outfield.
 - i. **Exception – As stated above the pitcher may pitch BUT bat last.**

RUN RULE

1. Six (6) run rule per inning.
 - a. In the Howard County Tournament only, the sixth inning will be unlimited runs.
2. Mercy rule: 15 (fifteen) after three innings, 11 (eleven) after four innings, 7 (seven) after five innings.

BATTING REGULATIONS

1. Every girl bats whether she is in the field that inning or not.
2. The batting order will be provided and announced at the beginning of each game, and will remain unchanged, except as noted in #3 and #4 below.
3. Any player not present at the beginning of the game will become the **last batter** on the roster in the official batting order.

12U Howard County Rules Continued

a. **Example:** Susie arrives after the game has started. Before her arrival, there were 11 (eleven) girls on the roster. She will become batter #12.

4. Any player removed from the batting order due to illness or injury shall not result in an out.
5. Any “official softball” bat may be used.