



MONTANA SOFTBALL ASSOCIATION 2026 HANDBOOK

MSA PROGRAM + DEVELOPMENT MANAGER

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MSA BOARD MEMBERS/PLAYER REPRESENTATIVES

Laura Verhaeghe, President
Michael Rogers, Treasurer
Matt Loomis, Secretary
Kelly Berk
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Pete Giardino
Keith Kress
Gwen Landquist
Jesse Schafer

DISTRICT REPRESENTATIVES

Ethan Prestler, District Commissioner
Kelly Berk, District Player Rep
Dan Chamberlain, Umpire-in-Chief

SOCIALS

Facebook: Missoula Softball Association
Instagram: MSAsoftball
Venmo: @montana-softball

MAILING ADDRESS

Montana Softball Association
P.O. BOX 4041
Missoula, MT 59806

MSA welcomes your suggestions about softball. Please make your ideas known to an MSA Board Member, District Player Rep, or the District Commissioner. You can find the latest contact information on our website at missoulasoftball.com/contact-us.

MISSOULA PARKS AND RECREATION DEPARTMENT (MPR) POLICIES

General Rules:

- Be aware of flying and errant balls at all times.
- Cyclists must dismount bikes before entering the complex.
- Dispose of gum and waste in trash receptacles.
- Dogs must be leashed, and owners are responsible for picking up waste.
- Glass containers are prohibited at all sports fields.
- Children 10 and under need to be under direct supervision at all times.
- Alcohol consumption requires a Permit for Alcohol in Parks, which can be purchased directly from Missoula Parks & Recreation.
- MPR follows the 30/30 lightning rule. All safety determinations are made by the MPR site facilitator and/or MPR facility supervisor.

The following are prohibited at Fort Missoula Regional Park (FMRP):

- Use of tobacco products.
- Metal cleats.
- Firearms/weapons.
- Hitting or throwing balls against fences or backstops.
- Climbing on outfield fences or backstop fencing.
- Unsportsmanlike behavior and language.
- Outside food or drinks / coolers.
- Bike riding, roller skating, roller blading, skateboarding, and scooter riding.
- Confetti / glitter.
- Paint and adhesives (including duct tape).
- By City and County ordinances, there is no overnight camping in any park.
- There are no vehicles allowed in the parks. The City of Missoula and Missoula County have ordinances prohibiting parking or driving in parks for reasons other than for official vehicles to maintain the park.

GENERAL MSA POLICIES

MSA asks that all players, spectators, and managers actively participate in the following:

- Everyone always appreciates good sportsmanship including players, fans, coaches, and especially the umpires.
- MSA reserves the right to capture photos and videos of players during games and events and utilize any media for MSA marketing, social media, and publication purposes.
- Please pick up your trash before you leave the dugout.
- Absolutely no warm-up on the walkways.
- If your game has been postponed or canceled because of poor field conditions (rain), please **STAY OFF** the fields.
- When warming up before a game, please take batting practice down the baseline and not from the batter's box.

MSA SOFTBALL LEAGUE – GENERAL RULES

1. Team managers are responsible for:
 - Obtaining schedules and rules and relaying this information to their team.
 - Taking part in MSA captain meetings and election of MSA Board Members.
 - Reporting any change in the team manager's contact info to MSA promptly.
2. This is a recreational league. Your participation is voluntary, and it is the responsibility of each player to determine their participation. You play at your own risk regardless of the weather.
3. Unless otherwise stated below, MSA follows USA Softball rules.
4. **ROSTERS:** Each one of our divisions is structured based on the level of play and competition. Therefore, players may not be rostered and play on more than one team in each offered league (Men's, Women's, Co-Rec, 45+). There is no tolerance for individuals who roster and play regularly with multiple teams (two co-rec teams or two men's teams), and MSA and its representatives may eject players and further suspend an individual. Players may play in the following league combos, if eligible:
 - Men's Players: 1 Men's team, 1 45+ team, and 1 Co-Rec team
 - Women's Players: 1 Women's team, 1 45+ team, and 1 Co-Rec team
5. **TEAM CLASSIFICATION FOR MSA LEAGUE:**
 - It is the philosophy of the MSA Board to allow teams to play in the league/division they request. However, the greater mission of the MSA Board is to do what is in the best interest of each league and Missoula softball as a whole. This may require the MSA Board to decide whether a particular team or teams feel is not in their best interest. The most likely scenario occurs when a team is reclassified and placed in a league they did not request. It is the job of the MSA Board to evaluate each league at the end of each season and before the beginning of the new season. A team that wins their league will always be assessed and considered for reclassification. This does not mean all league winners will be moved up, nor will all last place finishers be moved down. There may be no reclassifications. It does mean, however, that conversations will take place regarding what is in the best interest of the league. While we realize there will never be complete league parity, we also recognize that league dominance can be unhealthy and not in the best interests of a league. If it occurs at the highest level, there is nothing we can do about it. No team should ever be disallowed from league participation.
 - **RECLASSIFICATION CRITERIA:** MSA reserves the rights to reclassify a team (move them to a higher or lower league of play), at the beginning of the season, based on the following criteria:
 - The team's win-loss record for the prior season(s), whether that team participates in post-season play.
 - If significant changes occur on the team's roster. These changes indicate the team has added, or lost players, to the degree that the talent level of the team has been clearly altered and it would be in the best interest of the league, to move them either up or down.
 - If it is determined to be in the best interest of the league, to not honor a team's

request. For example, a team finished 0-20 and requested to remain in the same league the following season. The MSA Board decided to deny that request and move the team to a different league. Inversely, a team may consistently win or finish at the top of a league, and request to remain in that same league. This request will be honored or declined, based on what is in the best interest of the league.

- If there are not enough teams to fill a league, teams may be moved up or down, which will allow all teams the opportunity to participate in league.
 - It is understood that the USA Softball of Montana State Commissioner, along with our District Commissioner, have the authority to reclassify a team based on their finish at the State Tournament, superseding the MSA Board classification.
6. **PICK-UP PLAYERS FOR DISTRICT/STATE TOURNAMENTS:** Pick-ups are granted at the discretion of the District Commissioner and are generally limited to 3 hardships per team from June 15th until the Wednesday before the appropriate District/State Tournament.
 7. **TEAM CLASSIFICATION FOR DISTRICT/STATE TOURNAMENT:** The District Commissioner will classify all teams for District/State Tournament play. Classification will determine eligibility for tournaments. Any team interested in National Tournaments must contact the District Commissioner within 48 hours of their respective State Tournament.
 8. **UNIFORMS:** All teams will be encouraged to wear the same-colored uniform shirt. Numbers are not required for MSA play but may be required for other tournaments.
 9. **HOME TEAM:** Home team will be decided by a coin flip. Home team must keep the official scorebook.
 10. **ALCOHOL:** MSA does not condone or allow alcohol on the field of play during games.
 11. **WEATHER-RELATED POSTPONEMENTS:** Make-ups will be scheduled with a 1-week notice to the team manager. Failure to field a team is a forfeit. No game may be rescheduled for any other reason. A game canceled due to weather will be rescheduled if the game has not completed the 5 full innings or reached its time limit. Rescheduled games will start from the beginning. Make-ups may be scheduled on any day of the week. We will do our best to reschedule on the same typical league night, but there are no guarantees we are able to accommodate this due to field availability.
 12. **PICKUP PLAYERS:** League teams may begin games with 9 MSA/USA Softball of Montana rostered players. However, of those nine, only one can be pick-up. You must have at least 8 rostered players plus one or both allotted pick-up players to begin a game. Teams can pick up 2 MSA/USA Softball of Montana rostered players to get to 10 in the batting order and no more. This means you may not bat more than 10 if you have any pick-ups in the lineup. Furthermore, pick-up players **must bat at the bottom of the lineup** (9th, 10th or 9th and 10th as the situation dictates). If a team has a pick-up player filling in for one of their players, the team must promptly substitute their own player for the pick-up player, when/if their player(s) arrives. The pickup player may not continue to play if the team has 10 of their own players. Players may not pick up for lower division teams. C league players cannot play D league and so forth.
 13. **LINEUP:** A team that begins play with 9 players shall not be penalized with an automatic out in the 10th spot of the batting order. A team shall not be allowed to start or finish a

game with fewer than 9 players. If a 10th player arrives after the game has begun, and his team has already batted through the lineup, that player may be added but must bat 10th in the batting order. This type of line-up addition is allowed when a team must begin the game with only 9 players. If a team begins the game with 10 players and another rostered player arrives after her/his team has batted through the lineup, the late arrival may only enter the game as a substitute. If a team bats all their players, the batting order must remain the same the entire game. A team must finish the game with the same number of batters as they had at the start of the game, except in the case of an injury, ejection, or a player being unable to continue due to unforeseen events.

- In these cases, if a team still has 10 players available, the injured/ejected player may be scratched from the lineup, without penalty.
 - If a team begins with 10 players and loses a player due to ejection (leaving 9 players) and does not have an available substitute on the bench, that team may continue to play; however, that team will be assessed an out whenever that ejected player comes up in the batting order.
 - If they have no substitute and the ejection(s) drops them below 9 players, the game is a forfeit, due to not having enough players. A team **may not** pick up a player to substitute for an ejected player.
 - If the team loses a player due to an injury or unforeseen event, the team may scratch that player from the lineup and continue without penalty of an out, unless it drops that team below 9 players. In case of an injury or unforeseen event, a team will be allowed to pick up a player(s) to bring their line up back to 10 players.
 - For co-rec teams that play the game with 9 (5 females/4 males or 4 females/5 males), the lineup must be the same for the entire game. Do not use a 'waterfall' style lineup. If there are 5 males, the lineup should begin with a male, or if there are 5 females, the lineup should begin with female. Alternating male/female through batters 1 – 9 and then beginning again at the top of the order. This will result in a male batting at 9 and 1 or a female batting at 9 and 1. In the event a 10th player shows up mid-game, they shall go in at the 10th spot in the lineup, resulting in a normal co-rec alternating lineup.
14. **INTERNATIONAL TIE BREAKER RULE:** One additional inning will be played. The last batter to complete their at-bat goes to 2nd base. The inning begins with zero outs, and batters start with the normal 1-1 pitch count. Both teams will bat. The team with the highest score wins. In case of a tie after one inning, the game will be recorded as a tie.
15. **FORFEITS:** A forfeit occurs 10 minutes after the scheduled starting time. MSA teams are allowed a 10-minute grace period. However, the one-hour clock will begin at the regular posted start time.
16. **RUN RULE:** 12 runs after 5 innings.
17. **PITCH COUNT:** 1/1 pitch count will be in effect. No courtesy foul.
18. **HOME RUNS:** League home run rules are as follows:
- **Summer:**
 - **Men's D/E:** 4 home runs per team. Home runs after that are outs.
 - **Men's E-1:** 2 home runs per team. Home runs after that are outs.
 - **45+:** 3 home runs per team. Home runs after that are singles.

- **Women's:** 2 home runs per team. Home runs after that are outs.
 - **Co-Rec D/E:** 4 home runs per team. Home runs after that are outs.
 - **Co-Rec E-1:** 2 home runs per team. Home runs after that are outs.
 - **Co-Rec Just for Fonzies:** 1 home run. Home runs after that are singles.
 - **Fall Ball**
 - **Men's Maroon:** 4 home runs per team. Home runs after that are outs.
 - **Men's Silver:** 2 home runs per team. Home runs after that are outs.
 - **Co-Rec Maroon:** 4 home runs per team. Home runs after that are outs.
 - **Co-Rec Silver:** 4 home runs per team. Home runs after that are outs.
 - **Co-Rec Black:** 2 home runs per team. Home runs after that are outs.
 - **Co-Rec Just for Fonzies:** 1 home run. Home runs after that are singles.
19. **ILLEGAL BATS:** Umpires may check bats at any time. If they find a suspected illegal bat, they can notify the team captain. If a player enters the batter's box with the bat after notification, the player will be ejected from the game. The umpire will hold the bat for review. The bat will be returned to the team after inspection. Only USA Softball approved bats may be used. This applies to all leagues including 45+. No senior bats will be allowed.
 20. **PROTEST PROCEDURE:** Protest must be made known to the umpire before the next pitch. The umpire must then inform the opposing team. A protest is entered into the scorebook, and the game is continued under protest. The protesting team must deliver a typed explanation to missoulasoftballboard@gmail.com along with a **\$25.00** fee within 48 hours of the protest. The fee will be returned if the protest is found to be valid. In special circumstances, the Umpire-in-Chief may convene a protest committee.
 21. **METAL CLEATS:** Metal cleats are not allowed in any MSA event.
 22. **FACILITY HOURS:** All games must be complete by 11 PM, regardless of start time.
 23. **LEAGUE PLAYOFFS:** For summer league or fall ball, if a league has an end-of-season playoff included, the following apply:
 - Home Team: Determined by the upper seed.
 - Except for the championship game, ties will be decided by the international tie breaker rule. Additional innings with the same rule will be played until a winner is declared.
 - Run Rule: 12 runs after 5 innings, except for JFF.

MSA SOFTBALL LEAGUE – WOMEN'S RULES

1. **STEALING:** Stealing is allowed.
2. **BATTING LINEUP:** An unlimited number of rostered players can bat.
3. **TIME LIMITS:** No new inning after 1 hour and 5 minutes.
4. **AGE LIMIT:** Age limits for players are determined as of December 31 of the current year. Captains are responsible for verifying birth dates. Women's age limit is 17 and up.

MSA SOFTBALL LEAGUE – MEN’S RULES

1. **STEALING:** Stealing is allowed.
2. **BATTING LINEUP:** An unlimited number of rostered players can bat.
3. **TIME LIMITS:** No new inning after 1 hour.
4. **AGE LIMIT:** Age limits for players are determined as of December 31 of the current year. Captains are responsible for verifying birth dates. Men’s age limit is 18 and up.

MSA SOFTBALL LEAGUE – CO-REC RULES (JUST FOR FUNZIES SEE NEXT SECTION)

1. **BATTING LINEUP:** Up to 16 players can bat. Order must alternate sex, with an even number of males and females batting.
2. **TIME LIMITS:** No new inning after 1 hour.
3. **AGE LIMIT:** Age limits for players are determined as of December 31 of the current year. Captains are responsible for verifying birth dates. Co-Rec age limit is 18 and up.
4. **FIELD POSITION:** Defensive positioning must include 2 males and 2 females in the outfield, 2 males and 2 females in the infield, and 1 of each sex in the battery.
5. **CO-REC LEAGUE INJURED PLAYER RULE:** Co-Rec teams may continue a game with 9 or 11 players with all stipulations of USA Softball Shorthand Rule in effect. The intent of this rule is that injury may not cause a forfeit.
6. **SUBSTITUTIONS:** Players may substitute in any part of the batting order if they sub in a male for a male and a female for a female and do not bat ahead of their previous position in the batting order – meaning they cannot bat twice through the batting order.

MSA SOFTBALL LEAGUE – CO-REC JUST FOR FUNZIES RULES

Co-rec rules in the above section apply with the following exceptions:

1. **TIME LIMITS:** No new inning after 1 hour and 5 minutes.
2. **AGE LIMIT:** Age limits for players are determined as of December 31 of the current year. Captains are responsible for verifying birth dates. Co-Rec age limit is 18 and up. Exceptions can be made with the approval of the MSA Board.
3. **WALKS:** All walks are singles regardless of the batter’s sex.
4. **FIVE-RUN RULE:** The 5-run scoring rule is in effect. A team may score only 5 runs per inning unless they are behind in the score. If a team is behind, they may score as many runs as it takes for them to go ahead by no more than 5 runs. The final inning of the game will be an “open inning,” meaning there is no limit on the amount of runs they may score.
5. **MERCY RULE/12-RUN RULE:** There will be no “mercy rule”. All games will be played for either 7 innings or until they have reached the time limit.
6. **STRIKE MAT/PITCHING ARC:** The JFF League will use an orange strike mat. All pitches that are within the legal height limits (6’ – 10’) and land on the strike mat are a strike.

MSA SOFTBALL LEAGUE – 45+ RULES

1. **BATTING AND SUBSTITUTIONS:** Teams may have as many players in their lineup as they wish. All players in the lineup must bat. If a player chooses not to be in the starting lineup, he may enter the game only as a substitute (for one of the players in the original starting lineup). If he goes into the game, a player must come out of the game. The substitute player must assume the place in the batting order of the player for whom he substituted. This player may only re-enter the game for the player for whom he originally substituted. In other words, no team may substitute a player in a way that changes the original batting order. If a team has 10 of their own players, they may not pick up a player from another team. 45+ League is allowed unlimited substitutions plus a pinch runner.
2. **ONLY HAVING 9 PLAYERS:** A team will not be penalized if a player must leave the game due to injury, illness, or emergency. If the team has 9 players, and there is a substitute available, the substitute player must enter the game in the injured player's spot in the batting order. Teams may begin and end games with 9 or more players. It will not be an out when the 10th player's turn at bat comes. Captains will be able to pick up the necessary players to play the game and notify the other team before the start of the game. Teams cannot pick up players if they already have 10. Tournament only: If team only has 6 of their own rostered players, they may pick up 2 more rostered players and play with 8 players.
3. **PLAYING DEFENSE:** All players in the batting order must play at least one inning of defense. They need to enter the game, as a defensive player, by the fifth inning.
4. **SCORING LINE:** The 45+ League will use the "Scoring Line" (second home plate). All runners must cross the Scoring Line to score a run. If a runner mistakenly touches home plate, it is an automatic out.
5. **COMMITMENT LINE:** The 45+ League will chalk a "Commitment Line" between 3rd base and the Scoring Line. The Commitment Line shall be 20' from the Scoring Line. If a runner touches or runs past the Commitment Line, that runner must continue running to the Scoring Line. If the runner passes the Commitment Line and turns back and runs back across the Commitment Line, it is an automatic out. If the runner runs towards home plate rather than the Scoring Line and realizes the mistake in time to touch the Scoring Line, they are not out unless they interfere with the defensive player(s). This is a judgment call to be made by the umpire.
6. **OUTS AT HOME PLATE:** Once the base runner has crossed the Commitment Line, all defensive outs at Home Plate are Force Outs. Defensive players may only tag the runner out prior to the runner reaching the commitment line. (For example, if the runner is caught in a rundown/pickle. Once the base runner has crossed the Commitment Line, the defense must touch home plate to make the out.) A base runner may slide into the Scoring Line.
7. **INTENTIONAL INTERFERENCE/INJURY:** If, in the umpire's judgment, a base runner intentionally knocks down or injures the defensive player, the base runner shall be ejected from the game. That team may substitute another player in the ejected player's position. There will be no further penalty for the team.

8. **FLIP-FLOP RULE:** If the home team is trailing by five or more runs at the beginning of the final inning, the home team may choose to use the “flip-flop” option. This means they would remain at bat. If they do not score enough runs to tie the score or take the lead, the game is over.
9. **FIVE-RUN RULE:** The 5-run scoring rule is in effect. A team may score only 5 runs per inning unless they are behind in the score. If a team is behind, they may score as many runs as it takes for them to go ahead by no more than 5 runs. The final inning of the game will be an “open inning,” meaning there is no limit on the amount of runs they may score.
10. **MERCY RULE/12-RUN RULE:** There will be no “mercy rule”. All 45+ League games will be played for either 7 innings or until they have reached the time limit.
11. **COURTESY RUNNER:** A player may be a substitute runner only once in an inning. Unlimited courtesy runners may be used in a game.
12. **SUBSTITUTE RUNNER FOR THE BATTER:** Players who can bat, but unable to run because of injury or medical reasons, may have a substitute runner. This runner must stand at the backstop. It is the corner of the wall behind home plate along the 1st base wall. If, in the umpire’s judgment, the substitute runner clearly (leaves early) begins running towards 1st base before the ball is hit by the batter, he will be ruled a dead ball out and base runners must return to where they were prior to the hit. It is the batter’s responsibility to not cause any interference with the defense. If the batter is standing at home plate or on the base line after the hit and interferes with the defenses’ ability to make a play, he shall be ruled out and all base runners must return to their bases.
13. **STRIKE MAT/PITCHING ARC:** The 45+ League will use a strike mat and a 12’ foot height limit for pitches. All pitches that are within the legal height limits and land on the strike mat are a strike. Pitches must be at least 6’ high to be a legal pitch.
14. **TIME LIMITS:** Games are 65 minutes. If at the expiration of time there are innings left to play and the open inning has not occurred, then the current inning will complete and one last inning will be played as the open inning.
15. **TAKING INFIELD BETWEEN INNINGS:** No infield shall be taken between innings after the first inning, except when a player is going to an infield position for the first time in the game (after the first inning) only the new player will be able to take 3 practice ground balls from the 1st baseman. No other infielder shall receive extra infield in this situation.
16. **PITCH COUNT:** 1/1 pitch count will be in effect with one courtesy foul.

MSA SOFTBALL LEAGUE – PLAYER EJECTIONS/SUSPENSIONS

1. **IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING AN EJECTION:**
 - A player ejected in a league game is done playing softball for the day and suspended from their next league game. This player forfeits their right to pick up with other teams that day as well as any additional days in which they are suspended. If the ejected player is playing as a pick-up player when ejected for a league game prior to their own game, they have lost the right to play for their team that day and in their next league game. This rule applies for all divisions of play for the said individual. If

the player is suspended from a game in one division or level, they may not play in a game in a different division. For instance, if a player is ejected from MSA co-rec on Sunday and has a 2-game suspension and they play MSA men's on Monday and Wednesday, they must sit out the men's games on Monday and Wednesday. The 2-game suspension will be served, and the player can play in the co-rec game on the following Sunday.

- Once a player has been ejected from a game, they are required to leave the fields/complex for everyone's safety. No exceptions. If a player refuses to leave the premises, the game may be called a forfeit at that time at the umpire's discretion. The umpire reserves the right to call 911 to report trespassing or for safety purposes if the player does not leave the fields/complex.
- Once a game is over, any action, be it verbal or physical, deemed by the umpire to have warranted an ejection had the game been going on, shall be dealt with as an ejection. The suspension committee has the right to review, discuss, and/or adjust all ejections, if properly appealed by said player and or umpire.

2. CHAIN OF COMMUNICATION:

- All written reports/account from player(s), witnesses, and both team captains (as needed) will be submitted to missoulasoftballboard@gmail.com within 48 hours of the incident.
- Umpires involved in ejections must notify the MSA President immediately following the game of the incident in Assignr with appropriate contact info of the player(s) and captain(s).
- All written reports/account from umpires will be submitted to missoulasoftballboard@gmail.com within 48 hours of the incident.
- All communication will be forwarded to the MSA Ejection/Suspension Committee.
- The MSA President will contact the player with any decisions made in writing.
- Any decisions made by the MSA Board are independent of any rulings made by the USA Softball of Montana District Commissioner and/or State. Further and separate action may be taken by the District Commissioner and/or State.

3. PROBATION & SUSPENSION:

- If the player is ejected or suspended from a game, they may not attend the game or be at the complex until their suspension is up – regardless of if they are as a spectator, player, or coach.
- All ejections include an automatic 1-game MSA suspension. Further suspension will be assessed by the MSA ejection/suspension committee and may warrant additional game suspensions.
- An ejected player has probationary status for the remainder of the current season and calendar year, regardless of the team or division they play.
- Once on probation, if a player is involved in any future incident, the MSA board/committee will reconvene and determine further steps.
- **Captains are accountable for their players' actions.** Please do your best to help your teammates avoid these scenarios.