

4-H Softball is a 4-H activity designed to teach cooperation, teamwork and other life skills to 4-H members. The focus of 4-H Softball is to build self-confidence and to be FUN for the members.

The 4-H Softball Committee has the authority to make any and all decisions necessary in order to insure the safety and integrity of the 4-H Softball program.

### TEAMS

1. Only 4-H members will be allowed to participate in Rock County 4-H Softball. First-year members who joined 4-H after March 1st may play regular season games but are not eligible for the tournament. Any team found in violation of these regulations will forfeit the game.
2. The junior division will consist of 4-H members ages 6-13 inclusive for the regular season **ONLY** and ages 8-13 inclusive for the tournament **ONLY**. The senior division will consist of 4-H members ages 14 & up inclusive. 4-H age (as of January 1) will be used in determining in which division the youth will play. 4-H members (age 11-13 years) may play in the senior division, but senior division players **CANNOT** play in the junior division. Special needs youth will be allowed to play in the Junior Division as long as there is no physical threat to anyone.
3. Most clubs have a junior team and a senior team. Clubs may have more than one team per division if there are a large number of youth interested. It is suggested the team be divided by geographical location or alphabetically. If a club cannot get enough players for a team, they may combine with another club to form a team but must do so as a club. All individuals from the same club must play with the team with which the club combined.
4. Each 4-H member must have a permission slip completed and signed by a parent or guardian to play softball. Each club must keep these permission slips for the entire season.
5. Team Commitment Forms, one roster per team (individual roster for each junior team and individual roster for each senior team) and all fees are due to the Extension Office no later than 5:00 p.m. on the third Monday in April. Teams not submitting rosters by this deadline will be ineligible for the tournament. Roster changes can be made by calling the Extension Office and are allowed until 5:00 p.m. on the day prior to the third regular season game. After that day, rosters become the official team rosters for the regular season and the tournament.
6. Team fees are determined by the 4-H Leaders Council budget and are \$30.00 per team. Teams playing in the tournament must pay an additional \$30.00 deposit per team. Teams completing one tournament game will receive a refund of the \$30.00 deposit. If the team's umpire leaves the tournament before fulfilling his/her commitment, the team will forfeit the tournament deposit.
7. Teams consist of 10 players at a time. Minimum of 8 players is needed for a game to be played.
8. The use of chewing tobacco, cigarettes or any other tobacco product by players, coaches or umpires will not be allowed on the field. **The 4-H Member Behavior Agreement and the 4-H Adult Volunteer Expectation Agreement are in effect at all times.** Behavior related violations may result in immediate ejection from the game and removal from the immediate area and may also be handled through the Rock County 4-H Disciplinary Review Procedure.
9. The official tournament umpires for each tournament team must be on the roster sheet turned in by the deadline or the team may not participate in the tournament. Tournament umpires must be adults. Umpires for regular season games may be youth if both team's coaches agree.
10. There must be at least one adult enrolled as a 4-H softball coach present from each team at each game due to liability issues.
11. **SPORTSMANSHIP IS THE PRIMARY CONCERN AND IS IN EFFECT AT ALL TIMES.**

## **FIELD LAYOUT**

12. The limits of the playing field may be agreed upon by the teams whenever backstops, fences, stands, vehicles, spectators or other obstructions are within the prescribed area.
13. No equipment shall be left lying on the field, either in foul or fair territory.
14. Base lines shall be 60 feet in length. Pitcher's mound shall be **46 feet from home plate** for senior division, **40 feet** for junior division. **(See drawing A at the back of this booklet)**
15. Coaches and players should stand back at least 30 feet from the first and third base line, and people must not stand behind home plate. **(See drawing A at the back of this booklet)**
16. The official slow pitch mat will be used to determine the strike zone. The ball must be pitched with an arc that is above the batter's head and hit any part of the mat to be a strike. Any pitch not striking the mat or not having the correct arc will be a ball. The official slow pitch mat shall be 24"x36". The slow pitch mat should be of a contrasting color from the home plate and placed against the plate. **(See drawing B at the back of this booklet)**

## **EQUIPMENT**

17. Bats shall be as follows: A. Bats shall be official softball bats including aluminum bats and shall not be altered from factory production except for re-taping of handle for safety reasons. B. T-ball and Pee Wee bats are allowed provided they measure not more than 34 inches long, and not more than 2 1/4 inches in diameter at its largest part and its weight shall not exceed 38 ounces. C. All bats shall include **knob and tape or grip**.
18. Bats banned by the American Softball Association (ASA) are not allowed. The list of banned bats can be found at [www.asasoftball.com](http://www.asasoftball.com).
19. Home team shall furnish the softball and it shall be a Red Dot or Blue Dot softball.
20. Each team shall furnish a first aid kit, including ice packs, for all regular season and tournament games.
21. The home plate shall be made of a flat material, and should be 17" wide and 12" long.
22. The pitcher's plate shall be wood or rubber and be 24" long and 6" wide. It shall be 46 feet from home plate (senior) or 40 feet from home plate (junior).
23. The bases, other than home plate, should be 15" square and no more than 5" thick. Promote regular bases.
24. No metal spikes allowed.

## **SCHEDULING**

25. Games will be played on the night designated unless both clubs agree to change.
26. Home field coaches should confirm the games with their opponent at least two days ahead of time as to place, time, etc. Any postponements between two teams must be decided at least one week ahead of time (unless rain or unforeseen circumstances arise.)

27. Both junior and senior division games will be played on the same night. Junior division games **will start at 6:00 p.m. and last for one hour or seven (7) innings**, with all innings completed, whichever comes first. Senior games must **start no later than 7:30 p.m.** We suggest earlier starting times at the beginning of the season due to less daylight.
28. Score sheets will be provided by the Extension Office. These score sheets need to be kept by an official scorekeeper from each team. The coach may not be the official scorekeeper.

### **BASIC RULES AND EXPLANATIONS**

29. A regulation game shall consist of seven innings or one hour, whichever comes first. If, after four innings, one team is winning by more than ten runs, the game shall be over.
30. The home team will bat last in the inning, the visiting team first.
31. Each player when on the offense shall become a batter in the order in which his/her name appears on the score sheet.
32. The game shall be played with a three ball, two strike ruling. Foul balls are counted as strikes. The following shall constitute an out: two fouls; one foul and one strike; or two strikes.
33. There is no advance on a foul ball, whether it is caught or not.
34. The ball is dead when the ball is out of the playing area, time is called, the ball is fouled off, or the ball hits a runner. It is not in play again until the pitcher is in position, ready to pitch.
35. A ball hitting any base is fair. A ball that hits home plate and stays fair is a fair ball.
36. All team members who are present at the game and who want to play in that game must be placed in a batting order and play in the field at least one complete inning by the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> inning. The batting order must start with the first batter and proceed through the entire line-up and start at the top again in that order (this means 1-15, 1-18, etc. as listed on the batting roster.) Unlimited substitutions in the field are allowed. This rule applies to **all** 4-H games, during the season and at the tournament. Note: special needs youth may be exempt from this rule.
37. A courtesy runner will be allowed to complete the play for an injured player. The courtesy runner must be the player who made the last out. Injured players will be removed from the game without the "automatic out" penalty. However that player will not be allowed to re-enter the game.
38. For the tournament, if a qualifying team does not take the field by ten (10) minutes after the posted game time, the game will be declared a forfeit unless the team is completing another scheduled tournament game. Players not present by the end of the first complete inning will not be eligible to play in that game.
39. For the tournament, every player must wear a legible number on his or her back. A number may be used only once for each team.

### **BASE RUNNING**

40. The base runners must touch the bases in legal order.
41. There is no leading off and no stealing. Players cannot leave the base until the ball is touched by the bat.

42. Sliding is allowed in both divisions **in the baseline**. Any sliding attempt to insure or break up a play shall result in the ejection of the person and that person shall be called out. Malicious running into the fielder whether there is a play being made by that player or not shall result in the ejection of the runner and an out.
43. The “infield fly rule” is not in effect.

### **PITCHING REGULATIONS**

44. The official slow pitch mat will be used to determine the strike zone. The ball must hit any part of the mat to be a strike. Any pitch not striking the mat from the air is a ball.
45. At the top of its arc, the pitch must be over the batter’s head. The umpire has the option of calling a “ball” after the ball reaches the plate if the arc is inadequate. **(See drawing C at the back of this booklet)**
46. There shall be no quick return pitch.
47. The pitcher shall take a position with both feet firmly on the ground and in contact with the pitcher’s plate.
48. The pitch starts when one hand is taken off the ball or the pitcher makes any motion that is part of his/her windup. In delivering the ball, pitcher shall not take more than one step forward, toward the batter, and simultaneously with the delivery of the ball to the batter. The pivot foot must remain in contact with the pitcher’s plate until the ball has been released.
49. A legal delivery shall be a ball which is delivered to the batter with an underhand motion, with a perceptible arc above the batter’s head.
  - a. The release of the ball and the follow through of the hand and wrist must be forward past the straight line of the body.
  - b. The hand shall be below the hip and not farther from the body than the elbow.
50. The pitcher may use any wind-up, provided:
  - a. He/she does not make any motion to pitch without delivering the ball to the batter.
  - b. He/she does not make more than one revolution of the arm in the windmill pitch. A pitcher may drop his/her arm to the side and to the rear before starting the wind-up motion.
  - c. The pitcher may intentionally walk the batter by telling the umpire before pitching.

### **UMPIRES**

51. A person may **not** simultaneously coach and umpire - they must do one or the other.
52. The umpires are representatives of the 4-H softball program. They are authorized and required to enforce each section of the rules. They have the power to order a player, coach or manager to do or omit to do any act which, in their judgment, is necessary to give force and effect to these rules, and to inflict penalties as herein prescribed. The plate umpire shall have the authority to make decisions on any situation not specifically covered in the rules.
53. The umpires should inspect the playing field boundaries and equipment and clarify all ground rules with both teams and their coaches.

54. Each umpire shall have the power to make decisions on violations committed any time during playing time or during suspension of play until the game is over.
55. Umpires **MAY** change places at the 3 1/2 inning mark or at 1/2 hour, whichever comes first, the plate umpire moving to the bases and vice-versa.
56. The plate umpire and base umpire shall have equal authority to:
  - a. Call a runner out for leaving the base too soon;
  - b. Call **TIME** for suspension of play in the field during the game only;
  - c. Remove a player, coach, or manager from the game for violation of rules.
57. Umpires may consult on decisions. The umpire closest to the play will have the final authority.
58. Any umpire **MAY** consult his/her associate at any time when requested by a coach. However, the final decision shall rest with the umpire whose authority it was to make the decision and who requested the opinion of the other.
59. There shall be no appeal of any decision of either umpire on the grounds that he/she was not correct in his/her conclusion as to whether a batted ball was fair or foul, a base runner was safe or out, a pitched ball was a strike or ball, or on any play involving accuracy of judgment. No decision rendered by either umpire shall be reversed except that he/she is convinced it is in violation of these rules. Under no circumstances shall any player or person other than the manager or the captain seek a reversal on claim of rule conflict.
60. Umpires for all tournament games will be selected by the tournament officials.
61. Games are to be fun - let's not have any arguing!!! **DECISIONS OF UMPIRES ARE FINAL!**
62. If there are any other questions not covered in these rules, use the rules as published by the American Softball Association (ASA). ASA rules can be found at [www.asasoftball.com](http://www.asasoftball.com).

## **PROTESTS**

63. Coaches should file protests at the time of occurrence. Protests must be filed within five (5) days of the incident.
64. The Softball Committee will handle grievances. To file a grievance, the coach should send a written report to a member of the Softball Committee. The report should include the date, inning (if applicable) and all circumstances surrounding the complaint (runners on base, count on batter, umpire's names, etc.) If necessary, the Softball Committee will meet. Rule interpretations or violations are reasons for protests, not umpire's decisions. If the Softball Committee meets, there must also be a representative from each team involved, including the coaches of both teams. The Committee will hear the complaint and make a decision. **Let's keep 4-H softball a fun activity and not one which necessitates this procedure!**

## **SOFTBALL EVALUATION AND RULE CHANGES**

65. Coaches and umpires are encouraged to attend the Softball Evaluation Meeting, the exact date of which is published in the 4-H newsletter. At this meeting any rule changes are voted on, the Softball Committee members are introduced, and other concerns are discussed.