



GREATER ESSEX SOFTBALL LEAGUE

9U

OFFICIAL RULES

Fall and Spring 2026 - 2027

gesl.org

email: admin@gesl.org

The 9U Division prioritizes skill development, sportsmanship, and fun, using modified rules to encourage participation and support young players. Coaches are encouraged to provide feedback on identifying areas for improvement in future seasons.

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	16.1 Each team must provide to the league:		

The Greater Essex Travel Softball League will utilize all USA Softball Rules with the following exceptions:

1 Section 1 – Age Eligibility

The Greater Essex Softball League follows USA Softball age eligibility guidelines; any exceptions must be approved by the coaches based on appropriateness, in the spirit of the game, and in the best interests of the town softball program.

2 Section 2 – Teams & Affiliations

- 2.1** All teams must originate from a specific township or regional school district.
- 2.2** The term “Town” in these rules refers to any specific town, or regional school district, where players reside.
 - a)** Teams are to be sponsored by their town, school district, or local athletic association, and provide proof of insurance.
- 2.3** Club teams are not accepted as participants in the Greater Essex Travel Softball League.

3 Section 3 – Rosters

- 3.1** A maximum of 15 players can be on the roster.
- 3.2** Teams must submit a roster which includes players’ name, number, address, school, grade and birthdate.
- 3.3** If a single program is registering teams for multiple age groups, players rostered on younger age group teams may play up during the regular season and do not need to be listed on both rosters.
- 3.4** A player cannot be on 2 different rosters.
- 3.5** A team may have a maximum of 3 exempted players (out-of-Town player):
- 3.6** A player must play in a minimum of 4 games to play in the playoffs.
- 3.7** If a team is short a player, it may use an 8U player from the Verona League (CSSL) for that game during the regular season.
 - a)** The same call-up is permitted in the playoffs only if that player has played in the required minimum number of regular-season games. games (see 3.6).

4 Section 4 – Field Set Up

- 4.1 Bases – The distance between bases will be 60’**
- 4.2 Pitching Distance**

- (9U) – 35'

4.3 Each team will provide one game ball (11" 9U) for both home and away games during the regular season and the playoffs (The League provides for the Championship Game).

5 Section 5 – Defense

5.1 (9U) Defense

- a)** 10 players in the field.
- b)** 1 Defensive Coach allowed in the outfield, but they cannot assist in the play. Instructional only.
- c)** Free substitution, reentry rule not in effect, substitutions need not be announced.
- d)** Only 6 players are allowed to be positioned in the infield at the start of the play. When playing on a field with larger than 60' base paths, the infield extends 10 feet beyond the bases.

5.2 (9U) Infield Fly and Dropped 3rd Strike

- a)** No infield fly rule and no dropped third strike.

6 Section 6 – Pitching

6.1 Player Pitchers

- a)** The pitcher starts every inning.
- b)** If a pitcher issues a combined total of four (4) walks or hit batters in a single inning, the coach must replace the pitcher for the remainder of that inning. This combined total is independent of the hit batsman replacement rule in 6.6. A pitcher removed under this rule may return in a later inning unless otherwise restricted (e.g., by Rule 6.6).

6.2 Coach Pitcher

- c)** Coaches from their own team will pitch their own batters.
- d)** Batter will be allotted 6 total pitches or 3 swinging strikes.
- e)** If the 6th pitch is not put in play, the batter is automatically out, unless it is fouled or tipped, in which the batter will receive another pitch. Batter can strike out swinging only.
 - Hit by pitch counts as a pitch, batter does not advance to first.
- f)** No balls or strikes will be called by umpire during coach pitch.
- g)** Player pitcher must be in circle next to coach pitcher on the field.
- h)** Coach cannot interfere with ANY play.
- i)** Coach must stand on rubber when pitching.

6.3 Inning Limit

- a)** The league will not mandate, nor police inning limitations for pitchers. It is the coach's responsibility to make sure his/her pitchers are not overworked and that the pitching staff is being adequately developed.

6.4 Pitching Windup

- a) Windmill is allowed, Babe Ruth rules apply. Pitchers may start with both feet on the rubber and begin their motion with a step back.
- b) Or pitchers may start with their pivot foot on the rubber and their stride foot behind the rubber with no step back in the wind up.

6.5 Intentional Walks

- a) No intentional walks without pitching to the batter.

6.6 Hit Batsman

- a) A pitcher must be replaced if they hit three (3) batters in a single inning or four (4) batters in a game.
- b) A pitch that bounces off the ground before hitting a batter does not count as a hit batsman but is counted as a ball in the ball/strike count.
- c) A pitcher removed under this rule may not return to pitch in the same game.

7 Section 7 – Batting

7.1 Batting the Entire Roster/Cinderella Batting

- a) All players in attendance bat.
- b) The additional players are treated as Extra Players (EP) and can freely substitute into the field.
- c) If a player must leave or is injured, the player is skipped in the batting order without an automatic out being counted.
- d) If a player arrives late, she is added to the bottom of the batting order as an additional EP.

7.2 Bunting

- a) Bunting IS allowed at 9U.
- b) Fake bunting and then swinging away (slash) is not allowed at any level. The batter is automatically out and runners return to their previous base.
- c) Slap hitting IS allowed.

7.3 Batting out of order

- a) Batting out of order will result in that batter being out and any runners in the field must return to their previous base if there was an advance during that out of order batter.

7.4 Inning End/ Batter Limit

- a) Each inning has a batter limit:
 - 10 batters for 9U.
- b) The umpire will announce the last batter before their at-bat, and they will bat as normal.
- c) The inning ends when either:
 - Three outs are recorded, or
 - The batter limit is reached, whichever comes first.

- d) When the last batter comes to the plate, the play is treated as if there are two outs, regardless of the actual out count. The play remains live until:
 - An out is recorded, or
 - The pitcher securely possesses the ball in the pitching circle and is ready for the next batter, as if there were another batter to come to the plate (even though there is no additional batter).
- e) The batter limit applies to all innings, including the last inning,

8 Section 8 – Base Running

8.1 Leading

- a) Runners may lead on the pitcher's release.
- b) The runner shall be called out if she leaves the base early. There will be one warning per team, per game.

8.2 Stealing

- a) Runners may steal third base only and cannot advance beyond third on an overthrow that occurs on that play, even if the ball goes out of play. Runners cannot steal second or home.
- b) Stealing is allowed when the coach is pitching.

8.3 Pick-off

- a) Runners on first or third base cannot advance on a pickoff attempt from the catcher, even if the ball goes out of play or if the pitcher misses the throw back from the catcher.

8.4 Courtesy Runners

- a) A courtesy runner may be used for the pitcher or catcher at anytime.
- b) If the team is using Cinderella batting for all players in attendance, the last batter to make an out must be used as the runner.
- c) If a team is following normal substitution rules, a player that is not currently in the game must be used.
- d) No player may be used as a courtesy runner more than once in an inning.

8.5 End of Play

- a) Ball hit to the outfield: The ball remains live. Runners may advance until the pitcher securely possesses the ball in the pitching circle. Once the ball is secured in the circle, the look-back rule is in effect (see below).
- b) Ball hit to the infield: There is no advancing on an overthrow to any base. Runners may advance only on the initial play; an overthrow does not allow an extra base, even if the ball goes out of play.
- c) Once the pitcher securely possesses the ball in the pitching circle:
 - i. A runner standing on a base must remain on that base or is out.
 - ii. A runner between bases may make one stop, then must immediately return or advance. Dancing between bases is an out.

- d) If the pitcher leaves the circle, fakes a throw, or throws in an attempt to make a play, the ball is live again and runners may advance without restriction (outfield plays only; infield overthrow restriction in 8.5(b) still applies).

8.6 Continuance

- a) Does not apply at 9U.

8.7 Sliding

- a) Where there is the chance of a 'play at the plate', runners are required to slide to avoid collisions with the catcher.
- b) A 'play at the plate' is determined solely by the umpire.
- c) No headfirst sliding, except when diving back to a base.

9 Section 9 – Game Length

9.1 Innings

- a) Game length will be 6 innings.
- b) Mercy at 12 runs after 4 innings and 10 runs after 5 innings. (3 ½ and 4 ½ innings if home team is leading)
 - Unless both coaches agree to continue until time limit, umpires should be asked to stay if it is agreed to extend the game up to the time limit. No win is guaranteed if the game is extended.

9.2 Time – Regular Season and Playoffs

- a) The goal is to keep the game length to 2 hours. No new inning, beyond the 4th inning should start after 1 hour and 45 minutes.
- b) Games are considered official, if 4 full innings have been played (3 ½ innings if home team is leading).
- c) A new inning officially begins as soon as the third out is recorded in the previous inning.
- d) Please choose an official timekeeper (usually the umpire) prior to the game.
- e) Once an inning is started, it should be completed, even if it exceeds the two-hour guideline.
- f) Regular season games can end in a tie, playoff games cannot end in a tie. (see Section 15)

9.3 Time – Playoffs and The Championship Game

- a) Playoffs have time limits.
- b) There is no time limit in the Championship Game
- c) Playoffs and The Championship Game cannot end in a tie (see Section 15)

9.4 Forfeit

- a) Unless sufficient notice is given (minimum 24 hours), a team must be able to field 8 eligible players by game time. There will be a 20-minute grace period. If a team does not have enough players after 20 minutes, that team forfeits. The teams may then choose to play a scrimmage.

9.5 Weather or Darkness

- a) Thunder & Lightning – The game should be stopped immediately if any lightning or thunder is present. The umpire should stop the game for 30 minutes from the last occurrence. Umpires with consultation of the coaches, determine if games are too hazardous to continue due to rain.
- b) Weather or Darkness - if a game needs to be stopped due to bad weather or darkness prior to 4 full innings have been played (3 ½ innings if home team is leading), it should be considered complete once it is official. Games are considered official if 4 full innings have been played (3 ½ innings if home team is leading). If a regular season game gets stopped prior to becoming official, it must be started from the same inning (replaying that inning in its entirety) at a later date. Playoff games must be completed from the point (mid- inning) where they left off. If teams are scheduled to play an additional game later in the season, the suspended game should be completed immediately prior to the full game being started. Suspended games should resume from the same point in the line-up. Players no longer in the line-up should be removed, while any new players should bat after all returning players have batted. If a suspended game cannot be completed prior to the last Regular Season date, then it will be a tie in the standings.

10 Section 10 – Miscellaneous

- 10.1** Coaches are responsible for keeping the backstop clear of spectators and players. Sportsmanship – All players will shake hands after the game.

11 Section 11 – Game Results

- 11.1** Home team must email game results to geslscores@graa.org within 24 hours of the game.
- a) Please include the winning and losing team names, division, day, date game played, location, originally scheduled game date and the score.
 - b) Game results and standings will be posted on the Greater Essex Travel Softball website (gesl.org) and kept for playoff seeding.
- 11.2** Playoff seeding will be based on points earned.
- a) Teams will be awarded 3 points for a win, 2 points for a tie, and 1 point for a loss.
 - b) Teams forfeiting a game will be awarded 0 points. Teams winning by forfeit will be awarded 3 points.
 - c) The tie breaker will be head-to-head competition, winning percentage of games played, and then coin flip. Runs scored or allowed will not be considered for seeding (by design, we don't want teams piling on, have fun and switch things up).

12 Section 12 – Schedules

12.1 The league will have a flexible schedule system. We will provide a guideline, by week of when each team should play each team. It's up to the coaches to confirm dates/times with other teams when you know your Town's field availability. The league will schedule season games with a goal of 50% home and 50% away games. It is up to the home team to schedule fields and umpires. The home team is also responsible to reschedule makeup games directly with their opponent. If either team cannot make a scheduled game, they must notify the opposing coach with a phone call at least 24 hours prior to the start of the game. Failure to do so will result in a forfeit.

13 Section 13 – Make Up Game Procedure

13.1 The home team must contact the visiting team to find a mutually agreeable makeup date.

13.2 The home team must provide the field and umpire.

a) If the home team does not have field availability, the visiting team may host the game.

14 Section 14 – Umpires

14.1 The home team must secure the umpire for regular season games and initial rounds of the playoffs. The home team pays the umpire fee during the season. Both teams split the umpire costs during the playoffs. The League covers the costs for the umpire for the Championship Games. Umpires are independent; GESL does not employ or supervise them.

14.2 Please make sure the umpires hired for your home games receive a copy of the rules in advance and know what age group they will be working with.

14.3 Please do not argue with the umpires over judgment calls. If you believe a rule has been interpreted incorrectly, please call time out and have a conference with the umpire and the opposing coach to review the rule.

a) Once reviewed, the umpire has the authority to reverse the call or let it stand. As with the judgment call, the umpire's decision is final.

b) If you believe a rule has been interpreted incorrectly, please contact the league at admin@gesl.org to review the situation and clarification for future games. If there was a misinterpretation, a communication will be sent out to all coaches indicating the situation and the correct interpretation.

15 Section 15 – End of Season Playoffs

15.1 There will be an end of playoffs for each division.

15.2 All teams make the playoffs.

a. Minimum 6 games (fall) 7 games (spring) must be played to make the playoffs

b. Trophies and or Championship Shirts will be awarded for the winners.

15.3 If a team mercies 75% of their games in the regular season, they may be placed in the 10U bracket.

- 15.4** The higher seed will host preliminary playoff rounds and the cost (umpires and balls) are split by teams.
- 15.5** During the playoffs, teams have 4 days to schedule and play each round.
- a.** If a team cannot play within that window, it forfeits and the opponent advances.
 - b.** Both coaches should make a good-faith effort to find a date. The higher seed is responsible for offering field and umpire options inside the window.
 - c.** If the home team cannot find a field, the away team must be offered the chance to host.
 - d.** A team that cannot play within the window forfeits, and the opponent advances.
 - e.** Weather postponements may extend the window only with agreement of both coaches, and with notification to the league.
- 15.6** The Championship games may be held at a League hosted field, with the League covering the umpires and cost of balls.
- 15.7** If a game needs to be stopped due to bad weather or darkness, it should be considered complete if official (4 full innings have been played, 3 ½ innings if home team is leading).
- a.** If the game gets stopped prior to becoming official, it must be completed at a later date from the point at which it ended.
- 15.8** If the game ends in a tie after the regulation number of innings (6), the international tie breaker will be used in the subsequent innings until the tie is broken.
- a.** A runner starts on second base for each extra inning. The runner selected must be the last batted out from the previous inning.
- 15.9** The Championship games will not have a time limit.

16 Section 16 – Documentation Requirements

- 16.1 Each team must provide to the league:**
- a.** Completed Team Registration form with payment
 - b.** Rosters with Date of Births
 - c.** Copy of insurance certificate with certificate holder section completed as followed (see registration for details):
 - d.** Birth Certificates or official age verification cards must be in the coach's possession during the games. Team rosters will be available for each team.
- 16.2** Teams exceeding limits on the exempted players without prior approval by the league may be removed from the league without refund.