

Mounds View Softball Association

Mounds View Softball Association



Coaching Manual and Guide
Updated April 2020

QUICK REFERENCE PAGE

BOARD MEMBERS

Please visit <https://moundsview.softballsystems.com/mvsaboard> for the most up to date Board Members and contact information.

BOARD MESSAGE

New and Returning Coaches:

We want to take this opportunity to welcome you, as a coach, to the Mounds View Softball Association (MVSA) and thank you on behalf of the board, parents and MVSA players. Your motives could be as varied as the ability of the girls you will teach: you love the game, you like working with kids, you want to give back to the community, or you want to spend more quality time with your daughter or family member. Whatever the reason, we are excited to have you on board and hope the resources found in this guidebook will be helpful to you before and during the upcoming season! If you ever have questions, comments or concerns, please feel free to reach out to your Coach's Coordinator or any other board member listed on the previous page. Your participation and input is a big reason for MVSA's success so thank you again for your time and talents!

Thank You!

MOUNDS VIEW SOFTBALL ASSOCIATION

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Contents

QUICK REFERENCE PAGE.....2
BOARD MESSAGE.....3
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....4

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....6

I. THE MOUNDS VIEW SOFTBALL ASSOCIATION.....6

WHAT IS MVSA?.....6
MVSA Mission Statement.....6
Affiliation.....6

MVSA WEB SITE, COMMUNICATIONS, and EVENTS.....6
Clinics.....6
Events.....6

WHAT PROGRAMS ARE OFFERED?.....7

WHERE DO WE PRACTICE AND PLAY GAMES?.....7
Rice Creek Fields:.....7
Field Locations for Other Tri County League Teams:.....8

II. ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT COACHING IN MVSA.....8

PLAYER COMMUNICATION.....8

MVSA COACHES GUIDELINES and REQUIREMENTS.....9
Background checks and other required trainings/certifications.....9

ROSTERS.....9
How many players make a team?.....9
Birth certificates.....9

Scheduling.....9
Practice Fields.....10
League Games.....10

TOURNAMENT INFORMATION.....10
Tournaments.....10
Tri County League State Qualifier Tournament.....10
State Tournament Berths.....11
Awards.....11
Additional Tournaments.....11

UNIFORMS.....12

EQUIPMENT.....12
Need Equipment?.....13
Returning Equipment.....13

POSTGAME and Practice RESPONSIBILITIES.....13

COMMUNICATING WITH PLAYERS and PARENTS.....13

THE PLAYER/PARENT MEETING.....14
Timing.....14
Site.....14
Agenda.....14
Breaking the Ice.....14
Introductions.....15
MVSA’s mission and philosophy.....15

Key Messages.....	15
Schedules.....	15
Expected Commitment from Players.....	16
Sportsman-like Behavior.....	16
Team Building Activity.....	16
Expected Commitment of the Parent.....	16
Volunteering.....	17
Where can I find Instructional help?	17
PRACTICE GUIDANCE	17
Give Your Players Ample Time to Get Ready.....	18
Line up Assistants and Get Them on the Same Page.....	18
Keep Each Drill Short and the Practice Moving.....	18
Give Your Players Periodic Breaks.....	18
Communicate with Your Players.....	18
Player Conflicts: You are the coach - NOT the baby sitter!.....	19
How do I get to use the Pitching Machine?.....	19
PITCHER DEVELOPMENT	19
Coaching the Pitcher.....	19
Providing the Right Amount of Guidance at the Right Time.....	19
How much work is involved in becoming a pitcher?	20
How to pitch according to the Rules.....	20
Developing the Catcher	21
Coaching the Catcher.....	22
VI. PLAYER SAFETY.....	22
DO NOT JEOPARDIZE ANY PLAYERS HEALTH FOR ANY REASON!	22
1. The Infield Fly Rule.....	25
2. The Dropped Third Strike.....	25
3. The Overly Aggressive Runner or “Look Back” Rule.....	26
Pre-game Routine Checklist.....	26
Setting the batting order and defensive line-up.....	27
Players.....	27
What About Playing Time?.....	28
Travel	31
Lodging.....	31
Tournament Day - Before your team plays its first game	31
During The Tournament	31
The object of this exercise is to have your players get to know one another better.	36
Player's Code of Ethics	42
MVSA Parent/Guardian Guidelines	43
Note: Every athlete participant must have a parent or guardian signature to participate.	43

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Mounds View Softball Association (MVSA) extends its thanks to all the Board and Association members who contributed to the development of this manual. Special thanks go to the Arlington Girls Softball Association, Arlington, Virginia, who's own Coaches Manual provided the framework for this Manual and Guide. Some of the information included here is adapted from their Manual.

I. THE MOUNDS VIEW SOFTBALL ASSOCIATION

The following pages are designed to tell you, the coach, what the Mounds View Softball Association is all about: who we are, how to contact us, what programs we have and how we interact and support you as a coach and the players you coach.

WHAT IS MVSA?

MVSA is made up of a Board of Directors, participants and their parents. Nominations and elections of all officers are held annually at a time announced to all voting members. The family of each child participating in the softball program shall be granted one vote per participating child. MVSA holds announced meetings, in which any member of the Association may come and participate. Association decisions are made according to parliamentary procedure where motions are made and seconded, discussion held, votes recorded and minutes taken. We have written by-laws, which are available on the [MVSA webpage](#).

The Board of Directors is responsible for: organizing the Association; assigning coaches; representing the Association in meetings with the local community, the Tri-County League, County, State and National softball organizations; setting overall policy direction; managing the budget; developing the yearly calendar of events; acting as the final decision body for any issues; establishing a code of conduct for players, coaches and fans that is in the best interest of fair play and sportsmanship; and identifying the tactical objectives to achieve these strategic goals.

MVSA Mission Statement

MVSA exists to provide opportunities for girls to play fastpitch softball by promoting and supporting fastpitch softball in the Mounds View 621 School District area. Emphasizing development of fundamental softball skills in a fun, safe and competitive environment, MVSA has the objective of ensuring that girls participating in the program will have a positive and rewarding experience that will maximize personal and team growth.

Affiliation

MVSA is affiliated with the Tri County Fastpitch League and is part of the MMFL.

MVSA WEB SITE, COMMUNICATIONS, AND EVENTS

To get the most up-to-date and complete information regarding games, events, clinics, field information, and schedules please visit **www.MVSAfastpitch.org**. You can also join the newsletter email list by emailing Angie Branco (contact information listed above).

Clinics

We will typically conduct batting, hitting, fielding and base running clinics in the winter. Further, additional pitching clinics will be conducted, as demand requires and resources permit.

Events

Each year there are a number of key meetings and events. See this year's calendar at <https://moundsview.softballsystems.com/importantdates> for specific dates. The following timetable describes the normal sequence of events and meetings for the Association.

Summer Registration	January
Player Tryout and Team Assignment	March
Coaches Meeting/Clinic	April-May
Practices begin	Early May
Tri County League Play Begins	May-June
Mounds View Madness 12U Tournament	Early May
Mounds View Madness 14U tournament	Mid June
Tri County Tournament	Late June and Early July
State Tournament Games	Early-Mid July
14-18U Tryouts	After State/Before Nationals
Fall/Next summer tryouts	Late July
Fall Season Registration	Late July
Fall Season Begins	Mid August
Fall Season Ends	End of September
Election of MVSA Officers	October/November
Player development Clinics	Fall and winter
12U and under tryouts	February/March

WHAT PROGRAMS ARE OFFERED?

The Mounds View Softball Association offers a complete program for girls to participate in Traveling Fastpitch Softball for girls from 7 to 18 years old. Teams are formed at the 8U, 10U, 12U, 14U, 16U and 18U level. League age is determined by player's age as of December 31 of the preceding year. A player who is younger than the minimum age may play "up" on an older team. However, no player may play "down" on a younger team (see Resolution #01-01).

Summer Ball typically begins around mid-April (weather dependent) with practices and then games beginning in May. 12U and under typically begin games in mid-May and 14U and up begin games late May and sometimes early June depending on the High School softball season wrapping up. Double headers are typically played on Tuesdays and Thursdays for 10U and 14U and Mondays and Wednesdays for 12U and 16U. Teams usually participate in a minimum of two weekend tournaments sometime from late May through the end of June (see tournament information below for more details). These tournaments are selected and registered for by the coach. The regular season wraps up in late July with qualifiers, the state tournament, and sometimes Nationals if the team has qualified.

Fall Ball begins in Mid August and goes through the end of September. Games are double header games played on Sunday's. Fall Ball provides a more casual, developmental atmosphere for players wishing to develop their skills, play a new position, or just continue playing ball. Players are mixed and matched to form competitive play. Players are required to play in the League that they will play in the following spring. For example, this means that a player who played 12U in the spring, but will play 14U the next spring, will play 14U in the fall. This provides an excellent opportunity for both players and coaches who will move up, to experience the higher league in a more relaxed atmosphere.

A great deal of time and effort is invested by MVSA in this program to make it fun while developing players with a competitive love for the game. The program is designed to gradually introduce players to the NAFA and MN Softball rules of play, especially at the younger levels. Our focus is to teach the fundamentals and develop players in a fun and competitive environment.

WHERE DO WE PRACTICE AND PLAY GAMES?

MVSA holds practices and plays its games on the primary fields below. These fields are scheduled by the City of Shoreview as needed.

Rice Creek Fields:

There are four fields at Rice Creek, numbered 1-4. These fields are located north of County Road I on Rice Creek Parkway (5880 Rice Creek Pkwy, Shoreview, MN 55126). These fields are primarily for the traveling program's games and practices. Restrooms at this location are time-locked and controlled by the City of Shoreview. Every effort will be made to have them available during scheduled practice times. If you encounter a re-occurring problem, contact the board

Field Locations for Other Tri County League Teams:

These locations vary. Make certain you know where you are playing and have conveyed that information to your parents. We suggest going to the Tri County League site under the fields tabs. Most coaches should have the appropriate link to the games.

II. ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT COACHING IN MVSA

Webster's dictionary defines Coach as: "one who instructs, trains and directs student athletes." The volunteer coach is the heart of MVSA. It is the coach who has responsibility for developing players and building a "team." For the season, the softball experience of a dozen girls will be shaped and formed by you, the coach. Explain to the parents and players your coaching philosophy, what you expect out of them, and what they should expect from you. Remember, you will make mistakes – we all have. The mark of a good coach is one who keeps an open mind and learns from his or her experiences. MVSA encourages all of its coaches to continue to develop their coaching skills by attending coaching clinics, reading instructional material and viewing training videos.

Coaching is a major responsibility. The Board and other coaches will do whatever possible to assist a coach. In addition, MVSA has a responsibility to protect the well-being of all players. As a result, part of the coach selection process includes background checks on all of our prospective coaches and assistant coaches, regardless if they have coached previously in our Association. This demonstrates to our players, parents and other coaches that you have been deemed "certified" to work with the youth of MVSA. In the following pages, we will give you the basics you need to organize and field an MVSA team.

PLAYER COMMUNICATION

The coach generally sets the team's attitude and demeanor. As representatives of MVSA you are being judged, not only as an individual team, but also as an entire Association. Be positive with your team. Teach good sportsmanship. Be humble in victory and dignified in defeat. Make sure all players participate in the end of game handshake.

Make sure your players clean the dugout that you occupied and that they empty the bench area quickly, as there most likely is another team waiting to use it.

After games, take five to 10 minutes for the players and coaches (without parents) to process the game just completed. Reinforce positives and learn from errors, whether mental or physical. Use the completed game to become better as a team.

Remember that each game is only ONE game of a long season. Development will come through experience. While winning games is nice, and certainly will make you feel like a successful coach, the goal is to develop players and build a TEAM. Players and parents will remember much more about how you conducted yourself than they will about the score of any one game or the final season record. Keep your cool, support your players, and avoid on-the-field negative comments. Be discrete. Remember that players' parents probably are listening to you more intently than are your players. Speak to the team in general; don't point out negatives about any one player to the entire team. Instead, wait for the appropriate time during or after the game to take the individual player aside where you can explain what she needs to work on to improve.

HINT: If you have constructive criticism to give to your players, do it in a conversational manner after each half inning. Get your players into the habit of sitting on the bench after each half inning for a few moments, while you review what they did right, and what needs to be improved.

Finally, remember to tell your team that our primary goal is to learn, develop, play softball and have **FUN!**

MVSA COACHES GUIDELINES AND REQUIREMENTS

Coaches will be required to support the entire MVSA program and must abide by the MVSA By-Laws. Specifically, coaches should read, understand and comply with the following MVSA resolutions:

- Resolution #97-04 Coach Selection and Obligations
- Resolution #02-01 Conflict Management
- Resolution #02-02 Grievance Procedures
- The resolutions stated above and Resolution #01-01 Team Formation Policy are included on the MVSA website.

A summary of coaches' obligations as stated in Resolution #97-04 follows.

- Coaches shall treat each player with respect, dignity and fairness.
- Coaches are responsible to help all players learn the fundamentals of fastpitch softball and develop to their fullest potential.

BACKGROUND CHECKS AND OTHER REQUIRED TRAININGS/CERTIFICATIONS

All coaches must complete online training for good coaching basics and concussion protocols. A background check is also required. This information will be emailed to you prior to the start of the season. This training and background checks **MUST BE COMPLETED PRIOR TO YOUR FIRST PRACTICE**. Please direct any questions to the President, VP, or Coach's Coordinator. Links to these background checks and certifications in addition to your team page setup instructions can be found on the "team pages" tab on the Tri-county website here: <https://www.tricountyfastpitch.com/>

ROSTERS

How many players make a team?

Obviously, nine players are needed to cover all playing positions and a minimum of 8 players is required to start and finish a game. However, too many players on a team create the logistical problem of providing individual instruction at practices and getting everyone into a game. Team size is guided by Resolution #97-06 of the MVSA by-laws which states *"The board recognizes that MVSA has an obligation to our players to keep roster sizes to a manageable level, thereby providing maximum playing time for all participants. Tri County rosters will be typically limited to twelve (12) players per team for 14U, 16U, and 18U and thirteen (13) players per team at 8U, 10U & 12U. Expansion of these rosters must be approved by majority vote of the board members present at the team formation meeting."*

Team and coaching decisions are typically finalized in late February/early March. Rosters will be sent to coaches ASAP by the Traveling Director.

You must create an official team roster through the Tri-County Fastpitch website www.tricountyfastpitch.com. Information can be found on the "team pages" link. Adding your roster is easy and allows you to print copies for tournaments throughout the season and make adjustments if allowed. Official rosters are required for all tournament play.

Birth certificates

Parents should have an electronic copy of their daughter's birth certificate available upon request for tournaments, especially State and Nationals where verification of age may be requested. In the past, coaches were asked to collect hard copies to have on hand but this presents confidentiality concern. So, as long as you tell parents they need to be prepared to offer a copy on short notice, especially during tournament registration and if a protest comes up during tournament play, that will suffice.

SCHEDULING

Prepare a season schedule and distribute to your parents. Be sure it covers the whole season including any possible post-season gathering, such as a parent/player picnic or players vs. parent's game. It should also include:

- Practices – times and days of the week
- League dates, times and location

- Tournament dates and times
- League Qualifier and State and Nationals playoffs (include **all possible** state tournament dates)

Practice Fields

The only individual authorized to schedule a field is the MVSA board member responsible for Fields. Once the season starts, a field schedule for games and practices is maintained on **www.MVSAfastpitch.org**. All practice scheduling is subject to change to accommodate games. If you desire a field during a time slot that is full, contact the Fields board member at least 48 hours in advance and an attempt will be made to find another suitable location.

All communication in reference to the fields should take place using the GroupMe app.

- Coaches and Assistant Coaches will need to download the app and will receive an invitation to the “MVSA Fields” group.
- Once the invitation is accepted, members will be able to send a chat message to the entire group or send a direct message to individual members.
 - Chat messages will be sent to the entire group in reference to weather cancellations.
 - Direct messages should be used to request cancellations, changes and reservations.

League Games

<u>Date</u>	<u>Event</u>	<u>Game Days</u>
First week of May	Start date 12 and Under	Monday and Wednesday
First week of May	Start date 10 and Under	Tuesday and Thursday*
Mid-late May	Start date 14 and Under	Tuesday and Thursday
Late May/early June	Start date 16 and Under	Monday and Wednesday
Late May/early June	Start date 18 and Under	Tuesday and Thursday

* (10U will start the season playing one night per week on Thursday double headers and after school ends play games on Tuesday and Thursday)

TOURNAMENT INFORMATION

Tournaments

The coach is responsible for registering for tournaments. **It is important to register early as they fill up quickly.** MVSA pays for 2 tournaments per team/season but some teams, especially those who are more advanced, will play more. MVSA encourages teams to register for some of the same tournaments so girls at different ages get to watch other teams play, increase MVSA camaraderie, and have fun as a group. Regardless of which tournaments you pick, tournaments are a great way to have fun as a team, especially if the tournaments are out of town and involve hotel stays. MVSA encourages all teams to take advantage of the two paid tournaments and more if your team and parents are up for it. Any tournaments beyond the first two must be covered by parents so discuss this with them in advance if this is something you plan to do so they are aware of the costs and extra time commitment. Information about tournaments can be found on the Tri County and MN softball pages or by talking to the President, Travelling Director or Coaches Coordinator. See below for more information.

Tri County League State Qualifier Tournament

All tournaments will be conducted as double elimination tournaments. Tri County Fastpitch will supply umpires and game balls. Go to the Tri County website for all updated information about tournament rules and timing.

Tournament seeding –

Point standings for all teams will be used to seed the teams

The seeding will be posted on-line. Teams will find out on-line knowing their opponent and the time and location of their first tournament game. District tournaments start on Friday at 4:00 and you must win one game to make it to state. MVSA expects coaches to play to win at

State Tournament Berths

Assignment to the MMFL State tournament will be made following the Tri County Tournament. Teams will be awarded entries based on their finish in the Tri County Tournament. Multiple teams finishing in the same round will be awarded state tournament berths in order of incoming seed number. In the event of Tri-County Tournament cancellation, contact the MVSA VP of Traveling for your State Tournament information.

Awards

Tier league champions shall be awarded individual medals. Tournament individual medals will be awarded to 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th place teams at 10U, 12U, and 14U age levels. Consolation medals for 1st and 2nd place awarded at 10U, 12U, and 14U tournaments with 32 or more teams. 16U and 18U 1st and 2nd place teams are awarded individual medals.

Season-ending State Tournaments

(Plan your vacation schedules now☺!!)

12U and under begin season ending tournaments a week earlier than 14U-18U. Qualifiers for 12U and under typically start in late June followed the next weekend by the state tournament and are done by mid-July. Qualifiers for 14U-18U typically start in early July followed by the state tournament and are typically done mid-late July.

Nationals

Nationals for each age group (if qualify) follow state with the 14U-18U groups wrapping up by the end of July. For the most up to date information on all qualifier, state and national tournaments, go to the MN Softball website and click on the “tourneys” tab.

<https://fastpitch.mnsoftball.com/tourneys>

Additional Tournaments

MVSA allows each team to select two tournaments for their summer teams. These tournaments are paid for by MVSA and are in addition to Tri County Qualifiers, State Tournaments and MVSA sponsored tournaments. Some coaches may decide to play in additional tournaments but that must be communicated to your parents and players in advance as it will be covered by them. Some coaches prefer to have one or both tournaments fairly close to home but time a weekend tournament out-of-town offers great team bonding at hotels so consider doing at least one of these if possible. When choosing a tournament, speak to other coaches in the association to see what experience they may have had with the sponsors and what kind of tournament they run.

Also, when choosing a tournament make sure you fairly evaluate your team’s potential. Most tournaments ask for a level of play barometer on their registration form. It is suggested that you contact the tournament director and ask what level of tournament they are expecting. Most directors will be honest in their evaluation of competing teams.

There are a number of ways to find tournaments. One of the best sources is the Internet. The websites that offer the most information for Minnesota, as well as much of the upper Midwest, are found on www.MMFL.net and the “invitational” tournament page on the MN Softball website (fastpitch.mnsoftball.com). You may get tournament information from other search engines, flyers or even individual association websites.

When picking tournaments, make sure you are selecting dates that you and your staff will be available. If picking “family” days – Mother’s Day, Memorial Day, Father’s Day, Fourth of July, make sure you will have enough players to compete the entire tournament. Remember, it is

your decision what tournaments your team goes to whether local or out of town. It is also your responsibility to field a team when entered in tournament play. Forfeits during tournaments cause much harm to the association as a whole and can result in the suspension of MVSA teams from future tournaments.

Once you decide what tournaments you would like to compete in, you may register and notify your team about dates/details. Coaches can either coordinate with the treasurer to get a check for registration or pay registration and request reimbursement from treasurer. You will receive a confirmation letter, the tournament rules, draw and much more information from the tournament sponsors about two to three weeks before the tournament. Make sure you go over this information very carefully. Know the rules being played, the field locations and the game times. It is recommended that this information be given to players and parents at least two weeks prior to a tournament. Finally, look at what each tournament offers in terms of Nationals berths before registering if that is important to you. Not all offer them equally.

UNIFORMS

MVSA requires individual players to purchase their own uniforms and helmets with a face masks. All jerseys, shorts, socks, helmets and hats/visors are requested through the MVSA Uniform Coordinator. All hats and visors worn during competition should bear an MVSA logo design. Coaches and parents will get an email announcing when uniform orders are open and instructions for being assigned a number. Go to the MVSA website for more information:

<https://moundsview.softballsystems.com/jerseysuniform>

EQUIPMENT

Each Team/Coach will be assigned an equipment bag. Instructions for picking them up along w/ balls, rulebook and scorebooks will be given by the equipment coordinator who will contact you before the season begins. Make sure your team's equipment bag is ready and all equipment is in working order and accounted for. At a minimum, your MVSA team bag should include:

- Catcher's equipment (mask, chest protector and shin pads). Preferably you'll have a second set for use by your backup catchers. Make sure all straps are in good working order and adjusted so they fit properly. NOTE: ANYONE under 18 years of age warming up pitchers on the sidelines is required by ASA rules to wear a catcher's mask.
- Bats are typically only provided at the beginner level but MVSA has extras if needed. Please contact the equipment coordinator for any needs and encourage sharing amongst teammates. As you coach older girls, it is particularly important that you know what bats your players are using and what is legal/illegal. It is ultimately the coach's responsibility to make sure all bats being used are legal. What bats are legal/illegal changes constantly. You must check requirements for each tournament you are in and to ensure legal bats are used during regular season play. USA Softball is a good resource (<https://www.teamusa.org/USA-Softball/Certified-Equipment/Equipment-Bats>) but feel free to ask Board members any questions.
- Batting helmets are not provided by MVSA but are mandatory for girls to participate.
- Scorebook and NAFA rulebook. Used for recording the "official" game results. Usually a parent will volunteer to handle the scorekeeping at most games in which case they can possibly be responsible for getting the book to and from your games. Always have a spare – just in case they don't show, you lose one or you run out of unused pages in your scorebook.
- First aid kit – well stocked with all necessary essentials. MVSA generally will provide a kit to all head coaches. Kits are also available at Target or WalMart for \$12-\$15.
- MVSA will provide you with an ample stock of new balls at the beginning of the season.

In addition you may want to add the following items:

- Towels, small rags, etc. – they come in handy keeping balls clean, as a holder for ice if you need to apply ice to an injury, or for other needs.
- Lots of warm-up balls for batting practice and pre-game fielding drills. A five-gallon plastic bucket (with cover) works really well for keeping the balls in one accessible spot when not being used. The bucket also works well as a dugout stool during the game.
- At least one NEW game ball for league games, possibly two for tournaments. Consult league/tournament rules and requirements.

- Wiffle balls and/or practice golf balls (the kind with holes) work well for taking batting practice in tight places. Not all fields have sufficient areas to throw and hit in prior to your game. Plan accordingly!
- A coach's notebook, such as a three-ring binder, that has everything you might need in a pinch. This could include information on players (i.e. birth certificates, multiple copies of your official team roster (tournament officials may request to see this form when checking in or while your team is on the field), etc.), league rules/schedules, the "official" ASA, NAFA rule book, extra pens and pencils/paper and other supplies you might need and any other pertinent data you can think of. Having a list of all teams and coaches in your league (including phone numbers) is a pre-requisite and can come in really handy in a pinch. Having to call other coaches for game information or directions to the field happens quite often.

Need Equipment?

Should you need additional equipment, such as practice balls, game balls, catcher's equipment or bats, contact the MVSA board member in charge of Equipment. Just because the equipment is not broken, does not mean it is not in need of replacement. This is especially true of helmets and catcher's gear. Please examine your equipment before the season begins. As the coach you are responsible for keeping and caring for the equipment you have been given.

Returning Equipment

At the end of the season, contact the MVSA board member in charge of Equipment to arrange for drop off. Coaches are responsible for all equipment, bats and balls. Before returning equipment, coaches should inventory it and make note of anything missing or in need of repair or replacement. MVSA organizes equipment by team equipment bags.

Therefore, keep all your equipment together in the team equipment bag.

POSTGAME AND PRACTICE RESPONSIBILITIES

Coaches are responsible for the condition of the fields at the end of practice or a game. At Rice Creek this includes:

- Putting away all equipment, (including scoring machines and tables, bases and plugs, rakes, and anything else you see laying around) and making certain all doors are secured and locked before leaving.
- Keeping the bench and spectator area clear of litter and debris. This is expected of MVSA teams regardless if they are at Rice Creek or visiting at another location.
- Raking the area around home plate, the mound, and any other location that received heavy use. This will prevent water accumulation in case it rains before the City can maintain the fields.
- Putting the plugs into the base slots

COMMUNICATING WITH PLAYERS AND PARENTS

It cannot be overstated that communicating with both players and parents is one of the most important parts of being a successful coach. Once you receive your roster, please reach out to your families ASAP to introduce yourself and talk about the plan for the upcoming season including:

- Team Schedule
- Coaches' home and cell phone numbers
- Coaches' and team email addresses
- VP Traveling contact
- Coach Coordinator contact
- MVSA President contact

SET UP YOUR TEAM PAGE

Each team should create its own page to track upcoming games, record scores, and use to communicate with players and parents. The Coaches Coordinator will email the head coach's email to Tri-County so you will have access to your team page on their website. There are

instructions on the Tri-County website for basic questions. If you run into problems, please contact the Coaches Coordinator for assistance. Once your team page is setup, you can use the Sports Engine App to communicate with your players and families throughout the season, schedule practices, send communications and updates, etc. The Sports Engine App is easy to download and will connect you to your team page once that has been set up. Each page will have its own code that you can send to players and parents so they can download the app and get connected. Go to <https://www.tricountyfastpitch.com/> and click on the “teams pages” tab to get started setting up your team page. **This page will also have important information on how each coach MUST complete their mandatory concussion, background check, ACE and Safesport certifications.**

THE PLAYER/PARENT MEETING

Once tryouts have been completed, teams have been formed and coaches recruited, you will be contacted by the Travelling Coordinator with your roster and parent contact information. Once you receive this information, you should contact parents ASAP to introduce yourself and set a parent/player meeting to discuss the upcoming season and gameplan. MVSA recommends that each coach hold a parent/player team meeting before the first practice or game. The meeting lays the foundation for all parties – coaches, players and parents to explore and communicate their expectations and concerns.

A recent Sports Illustrated article also highly recommends a parent/player meeting prior to starting the season. See “A Pre-Season Meeting Can Set The Stage For Success” by Rick Wolff in the Coaches’ Tool Kit located at the end of this document. The following are suggestions and examples of how to plan and conduct a parent/player meeting. These meetings and the information included will vary based on the age level and caliber of the team (tier I vs. tier II) but the basic outline and information are similar.

The key to a successful parent/player meeting is to be well organized and have all the points you want to cover laid out and printed on a handout for parents.

Timing

Pick two or three times you can hold a team meeting, then email the parents and pick the time/date that works for the majority. Given everyone’s busy schedules, it is important to try and find a time that works for the majority because your goal is to only have to communicate the information once. A well-attended meeting helps build team unity right from the start of the season.

Site

It is important to find a site where you can have plenty of room and a quiet environment for at least one hour. Some local locations are the Shoreview Community Center, schools, your church, a coach’s or parent’s home, bowling alley, and as a last resort, the practice field.

Agenda

There are many topics the coach has to cover. Below is a list of topics to cover during the meeting or through email at the beginning of the season with more information on each in the following sections:

- Ice Breaker
- Introductions
- MVSA Mission and Philosophy
- Key Messages
- Schedules
- Expected Commitment from Players
- Sportsman-like Behavior
- Team Building Activity
- Expected Commitment of the Parent

Breaking the Ice

A player information sheet example can be found in the Coaches’ Tool Kit. This form can be used both when notifying parents and players about being on your team and then during the

parent/player meeting. The first part is meant to have a conversation with the player and find out a little bit about their likes and dislikes establishing a rapport before you even meet them. Modify it to what questions you feel comfortable in asking your new team members. The second portion is used when having a conversation with the parent regarding the child's medical condition(s), special needs and to discuss proposed dates and times of the parent/player meeting.

Introductions

Meet players and parents at the door to introduce yourself and have a parent sign the roster and fill out a medical form (example in Coaches' Tool Kit) while waiting for others to arrive. Once the meeting begins, introduce yourself and fellow coaches, and give an overview of your background and experience. Ask the girls to stand and introduce themselves.

MVSA's mission and philosophy

The key is to emphasize that MVSA wants to help girls with the development of fundamental softball skills in a fun, safe and competitive environment. MVSA has the objective of ensuring that girls participating in the program will have a positive and rewarding experience that will maximize personal and team growth.

Key Messages

For your players to hear your message, particularly at the younger ages, it needs to include things like how much fun they are going to have, how they are going to improve and how good they are getting at any given skill.

A good communicator has to present his or her message in a form the audience can easily understand. If you want to reach your players and parents, you have to understand why they play the game. A Youth Sports Institute survey of boys and girls ages 10 – 18 asked why they participate in non-school sports. Yes, "Win" was one of the choices. With both boys and girls it came in **12th place**. Following is the rank listing of the top answers:

- | | |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1. Have fun | 6. Learn new skills |
| 2. Stay in shape | 7. For the excitement |
| 3. Get exercise | 8. Play as part of a team |
| 4. Improve my skills | 9. Make new friends |
| 5. Do something I am good at | 10. For the challenge of competition |

In the same way, how do we communicate with parents who may have very high expectations for their young athlete? Most parents want very similar things for their children in sports:

- | | |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1. To be treated fairly | 6. To be psychologically safe |
| 2. To be taught skills | 7. To enjoy friendships |
| 3. To enjoy playing softball | 8. To spend time with quality adults |
| 4. To be a winner | 9. To get to play |
| 5. To be physically safe | 10. To have family watch them play |

By making clear at a parent/player meeting your philosophy about playing time, players conduct, and winning you will help assure parents that their children will be treated fairly.

One of the first things we, as coaches, should also communicate to our players is that they are OK no matter what their athletic ability. Helping to develop a positive self-image is job one. Cindy Bristow, past director of the Amateur Softball Association Junior Olympic program and professional coach stated, "Most of us coaches will have more impact on the lives of our young athletes than we ever will on their ability to play softball (in spite of what we think). You might not even make better softball players out of your kids...but if you deal positively with them you will probably make better people out of them. If your kids are better people for you having been their coach, then you have without any doubt, been a successful softball coach. Help unlock their abilities to believe in themselves and you will be amazed at just how good those kids can be!!!" The article appeared in the May 1989 issue of Balls and Strikes.

Schedules

Help your parents plan ahead. If a player or parent has many conflicts with the schedule it is better to find out now before the season, than on the weekend of a tournament. If the parents

cannot make the commitment to insure their player's participation, you may want to discuss it with the Vice President Traveling to determine if the player should be placed on a lower level team or if you can live with the missed dates and plan accordingly.

Expected Commitment from Players

Clarify what commitment level is required from parents and players by going through the list below. You may also want to print out the Player Code of Ethics (Coaches Toolkit), which players are expected to follow.

- MVSA expects all players (tryout teams) to attend all scheduled games and practices.
- Players should be at all scheduled practices and games at least 15 to 30 minutes prior to going on the field, respectively. To begin practice promptly and end it at the scheduled time requires that players arrive early to warm up and do stretching exercises before practice begins. Although they may have other obligations, players must remember the commitment they have made to fastpitch and to their team.
- Players should come properly dressed for the weather, equipped and prepared to participate.
- Players should bring a supply of water to each practice and game.
- Players should agree to follow a code of ethics.

Sportsman-like Behavior

Remind players, parents that the umpire must be treated at all times with respect and courtesy. Coaches cannot allow any player, parent or fan to berate, openly criticize or otherwise harass any umpire. **Players, parents, and spectators who display 'unsportsman-like' behavior toward an umpire, and coaches who permit such behavior, reflect negatively on their team and MVSA.** As a matter of record, MVSA will not condone any such action by a player, coach, parent or supporter.

Upon investigation, MVSA will take whatever disciplinary action is required to prevent a re-occurrence of such conduct. This may include such actions as reprimand, player and/or coach suspension, or even game forfeiture. The Board of Directors will determine the nature of the discipline. **Our goal is that no coach, player or parent be removed from any game for unsportsman-like behavior.**

Team Building Activity

After discussion of each player's responsibility and commitment, you can have the girls leave the area and develop posters that depict their likes and goals. See example in the Coaches' Tool Kit. This gives you some private time to discuss with parents what you expect from them.

Expected Commitment of the Parent

Each Parent must sign the MVSA Parent/Guardian Guidelines which are located in the Coaches' Toolkit. Parents' continual support and involvement are necessary to MVSA's success. Their conduct reflects on the team, MVSA, and our community. Parents' privileges at any game, scrimmage, or practice are solely restricted to the enjoyment of that event.

Parents should make sure their child arrives on time for all games and practices, and to let the coach know if their child will not be able to attend a practice or game, or if they will be riding home with someone other than their parent. Remind parents that they should pick up their players promptly after practices. While the coach is obligated by MVSA to stay with the player until a parent or guardian arrives, don't let "tardy" parents make you a baby sitter.

Other ways parents can help the team:

- Learn basic rules and terminology of the game and attend scheduled parent meetings.
- Keeping their child's glove, bat, uniform, etc. clean and ready to use at each practice and game (or reminding the older players to do so themselves).
- Praise your child. If criticism is necessary, keep it positive and instructive.
- Put the welfare of the player ahead of all else. Children generally accept disappointment better than their parents. Don't put your disappointment on the players.
- Encourage and applaud all members of the team, and be tolerant of mistakes. They will make many as they learn, but remember not all players have achieved the same skill levels.

- Know the requirements of the player's level of play. Tryout teams require high-level ability and commitment for the entire season and post season,
- The financial and time commitments for tryout team participation are great. You and your child should know these requirements and be committed to live up to them.
- Get to know the coaches. Discuss your expectations, problems or the progress of your player with the coach at the proper time. The proper time is NEVER in the company of other players and parents.
- Support your child's coaches – they need your help. Appreciate the fact that the coach has the responsibility for an entire team. Activity and behavior of the players at all times is the sole responsibility of the parents.
- Don't be a chronic complainer. If you are convinced something is wrong on your child's team, discuss things as soon as possible with the coach. If the issue cannot be resolved, the Vice President Traveling, the Vice President In-House Program/Player Development, and the President of MVSA are your next points of contact.

Volunteering

See who is interested in volunteering to help you, the team, and MVSA. The more of these jobs you can delegate to parents the more time you will have to coach your players.

MVSA Sponsored Tournaments at Rice Creek Park

MVSA expects the families of MVSA teams in tournaments at Rice Creek to run concessions and scoreboards, rake fields, and help in other ways during the tournaments. The board's Tournaments and Clinics coordinator will provide a form that defines the times and task slots your team is responsible for. You should assign a team coordinator to fill out the schedule. Make sure to verify that all slots are filled – we really need every MVSA coach to step up and require full participation of all families on their team.

Concessions

One of the key areas that need to be covered is the responsibility of team parents to help at the concession stand. This is in addition to helping with the team during the season (see below). MVSA has total responsibility for the concessions at Rice Creek. This is one way that the Association helps fund its activities, replaces and updates equipment, and keeps participation fees low. Coaches should appoint a team concession coordinator who is responsible for signing up parents to work during the season when their team is playing at Rice Creek.

Other parent volunteer opportunities that don't count towards concession hours are:

- Practice assistants
- Scorekeeper (book)
- Scorekeeper (scoreboard)
- Prepare the field before games
- Team coordinator for out of town events, making room reservations for tournaments out of town or on holiday weekends.
- Communications coordinator, i.e. email addresses, phone trees, handouts, birth certificates, etc.

WHERE CAN I FIND INSTRUCTIONAL HELP?

Don't worry. We all feel this sense of fear as the season approaches. We also realize that your time is limited. To facilitate your efforts as coach, we have videotapes and other resources listed in the Coaches' Tool Kit. There are also a number of good websites (just Google softball practice drills) that include a variety of basic drills, which will help you develop both individual and team skills. More resources are being added to the MVSA webpage.

PRACTICE GUIDANCE

Whether you're a new or experienced coach, you want to be successful, and MVSA wants you to be successful. Here are some basic points regarding practice. First, map out the season...evaluate your team...and plan ahead. How much time do you have before your first game? What do you need to cover? Realize that you can't cover all facets of the game in a couple of practices. Look at the big picture, not just the day's practice, and prioritize.

Factors to consider when making a daily practice plan:

- Availability of fields
- Number of coaches and/or assistants to help
- Number of players
- Skills and drills to cover
- Weather: plan for rainy day practices
- Practices between competition (fundamentals versus executions that failed)

Give Your Players Ample Time to Get Ready

It is necessary to start with stretching exercises. Experts in sports medicine counsel coaches to get their players used to doing stretching before exercising. Exercising without proper preparation can overextend even young muscles.

Get players to warm up by throwing the ball easily among themselves. This accomplishes two things: first, it gets them doing something and second, it gives you time to interact with the parents (to hand out information, discuss team issues, get the parents to fill out the roster form or complete partially filled out forms, etc.).

This is critical. No player should participate in any on-field supervised event, unless they have first filled out and signed the MVSA Registration Form. If you do not have the player fill out the registration form, and get it signed by her parent or guardian, you are at risk and subject to liability should she get injured in the course of your practice.

Line up Assistants and Get Them on the Same Page

You should have a practice plan prepared for each practice. Divide up practice time to include hitting, fielding, strategy (offense and defense), and base running /conditioning. Don't do it all yourself. If you don't have assistants, recruit any parents who are standing by watching or reading the newspaper in the stands. Don't be bashful. They wouldn't be there unless they are interested and probably dying to get involved. This is particularly true for the older leagues, where at least two to three assistants are necessary. By planning in advance you'll make better use of time, keep your players motivated and get more accomplished at practice.

Keep Each Drill Short and the Practice Moving

For the younger girls, you should limit the length of drills from 10 to 15 minutes. If you have assistants, have multiple drills (stations) going and have the girls rotate to the next station or drill. Standing around invites disorganization. Don't be hesitant to suspend the drill and call for running laps around the field. Where possible, make practices game-like. For example, during batting practice have your players work on stepping in and out of the box between balls and include situational hitting. You can keep the other players involved as base runners or include a defense. Don't hesitate to ask other MVSA teams to scrimmage.

One good drill to end a practice is to split the players into two equal teams. Place one team at second base and the other at home plate. Give each a ball. At your call they should begin running the bases in a counter-clock wise fashion, touching all bases on path to the base from which they began. At this point they should hand the ball off, in relay fashion, to the next team member. Put coaches and parents at third and first base to ensure that each base is touched. Failure to touch the base will mean the player must return to touch the base. Cheer on each team as they run the bases until all players have run an equal number of times. The first team to successfully touch all bases, WINS. As a reward, the winning team can help put away the equipment. The losing team should run an additional two laps (or whatever you feel appropriate) around the circumference of the field.

Give Your Players Periodic Breaks

Particularly in hot weather, be sensitive to the impact of the sun and heat on your players. You may need to schedule brief water breaks.

Communicate with Your Players

- Tell them what you plan to work on at practice.
- After practice, review what you did. Give your impression and ask the same of players.

- Tell them what you plan to do next practice.
- Remind them of the next scheduled practice or game.

Player Conflicts: You are the coach - NOT the baby sitter!

MVSA coaches are volunteers. They are not expected to tolerate disruptive or disrespectful behavior by players or parents. Profanity, verbal abuse, or physical abuse will not be tolerated. Discipline for detrimental behavior conducted during any MVSA sponsored event, or events where MVSA is a participant, is the responsibility of the head coach (see **Resolution #02-01 CONFLICT MANAGEMENT** at the back of this manual).

NOTE: While we do not want to turn away anyone, we have a responsibility to the entire team. We can't allow one or two players to spoil the experience for the rest of the players. The Association realizes the contribution you as coach are making to our program. We want you to have a good experience as well as the players.

Coaches should contact the Vice President Traveling for advice or help solving problems that may arise.

HOW DO I GET TO USE THE PITCHING MACHINE?

MVSA has 4 electrically-operated mobile fastpitch pitching machines. Operation of the machines requires proximity to a power source (there is an electrical receptacle behind home plate at all Rice Creek Fields). Use of the pitching machines is on a first come, first serve basis. If you know you will need a pitching machine you are advised to check the field schedule and confer with the coaches of other teams practicing at the same time. A note of caution; although these are industrial strength machines, they do require care when handling. If you are unfamiliar with their use, we ask that you seek guidance before using them.

PITCHER DEVELOPMENT

MVSA recognizes that to create a strong program we must place an extra emphasis upon the development of pitchers and catchers. How important is pitching? Simply, to be competitive in fastpitch softball you need three things. Pitching, more pitching and much more pitching!

In fastpitch softball, the pitcher controls the game more than any other player in any other team sport. The tempo of a game will ebb and flow on the capabilities of the pitcher.

A good rule of thumb is that you should have at least two players who can pitch if needed, besides your primary pitcher. The earlier you start developing these pitchers the better off you are going to be. Allocate practice time for the pitchers alone. With the younger teams, try everyone as a pitcher. See who sticks with it, is willing to put in the extra practice, and is increasingly able to throw strikes. You'll be surprised at the results!

Coaching the Pitcher

Beginning pitchers will throw more wild pitches and hit and walk more batters than they will throw strikes and get players out. Understand this, and make sure that your pitcher and her teammates understand this as well. You as coach must have patience and give your potential pitchers every opportunity to learn to pitch. But do it at your pace. Don't let a player pitch that is not ready from your perspective. The absolute worst thing you can do is to embarrass a potential pitcher. Despite her protestations of **"I can pitch,"** you need to **see her pitch first hand and NOT in a game situation!** If you have a player who becomes easily upset over walking batters and throwing wild pitches, then she's probably not ready to pitch. In fact, she may never be an effective pitcher until she can control her emotions. Explain that it will take time and practice to learn to pitch and build confidence.

When you are ready to let your player pitch, do it in moderation. If she begins to become upset from too many walks or wild pitches, or just is too wild, call time and try to calm her down. If this doesn't help, replace her as a pitcher. It is easier to recover from a bad start than to endure a long inning of misery. Use your new pitchers sparingly and if at all possible in situations where the game decision is not at stake. This would be when you have a huge lead, a huge run deficit, or in a scrimmage game.

Providing the Right Amount of Guidance at the Right Time

When an experienced pitcher begins to have control problems, the most common refrain heard from coaches is, **“JUST THROW STRIKES.”** Well, don't you think that is what your pitcher is trying to do? It's just not happening and she doesn't know why. Your job as the coach is to give her the advice she needs to get back on track. Try to refrain from calling out advice after every pitch. Instead, develop hand signals that cover some of the basic correcting advice you would normally give verbally. This avoids drawing too much attention to what may already be an embarrassing situation to your pitcher. The worst advice you can give as a coach is to have your pitcher slow down her delivery and aim the ball. She may throw more strikes, but she will also give up more hits and you will do irreparable damage to her as a pitcher. Instead, encourage her to focus on the fundamentals of how to position and deliver the pitch but to continue to throw hard.

If your pitcher continues to struggle, ask for time from the umpire and go talk to her or have the catcher talk with her. Most likely she is doing something fundamentally wrong. Suggest she reflect back on her training, specifically with regard as to how to stand, how to leap, how to pivot, how to rotate her arm and release the ball.

Sometimes your pitcher will be doing everything right, but she can't get a strike called. A basic rule to remember is that the strike zone, regardless of what the rulebook states, is **“whatever the umpire wants it to be!”** Remind the catcher to tell your pitcher where the umpire is calling strikes and have your catcher do her best to frame pitches accordingly. The bottom line is that the pitcher is already under enough pressure. Your job is to guide her back on track. If that doesn't work, don't be afraid to take her out as pitcher even if you know it may cost you the game. Remember that there is always another day to pitch, but not always another pitcher if your player loses her confidence.

HOW MUCH WORK IS INVOLVED IN BECOMING A PITCHER?

To become a pitcher requires a combination of dedication, mind-set and self-confidence. Providing opportunities for players to pitch when they are younger will allow them to see if pitching is something that are willing to work for. As coach, you should advise your players that if they want to be a pitcher they must work harder and longer than any other player on the team. There are simply no shortcuts to becoming a good pitcher. It is estimated that tournament-quality pitchers throw an average of 100 balls a day, 700 a week and 25,000 pitches a year. Coaches are advised to tell pitchers (and catchers) to come early or stay late after practice to work on their skills.

There just is not enough time in a regular practice to work on pitching. Some coaches have alternative practice schedules for pitchers. However you do it, you must communicate to those players who want to be pitchers that it takes work. **Only the player herself can learn to be a pitcher!**

****Pitchers need to be developed earlier than spring practice****

Off-season pitching clinics are the answer. Pitching clinics are held primarily in winter. MVSA hires instructors for pitching clinics and we compliment these with our own MVSA pitching coaches. Refer to www.MVSAfastpitch.org for the most recent updates.

HOW TO PITCH ACCORDING TO THE RULES

During a game the umpire may call an illegal pitch. The penalty is usually a warning, with the call of illegal pitch resulting in a “ball” being called on the batter. To deliver a “legal” pitch, the player must abide by the following rules:

FIRST, the pitcher must stand with both feet positioned on, or touching, the rubber.

SECOND, before beginning her motion the pitcher must “present the ball” to the batter. Simply, the pitcher facing the batter with both feet in contact with the rubber, comes to a full stop with arms separated and the softball visible in one hand, for at least one second, before

THIRD, once stopped and conceivably acknowledging the pitch sign from the catcher, the pitcher can begin the 360-degree circular motion of the Windmill.

FOURTH, as the pitcher begins the Windmill, she can only make one full circle arm motion with the ball. Any more, is considered a “double pump” or illegal pitch.

FIFTH, as the pitcher delivers the ball, the back (power) foot or pivot (right for right handed pitchers) foot must remain in contact (or level) with the ground. Any skip or hop that results in the foot leaving the ground and being planted before the pitch is considered an illegal “Crow Hop pitch.”

FINALLY, the delivery must be underhanded with the wrist not farther from the body than the elbow (“no side-arm delivery”).

As coach, you have a responsibility to know as much as your pitcher does about pitching. It is essential that you make every effort to attend the pre-season pitching clinics, watch the available pitching videos or ask other MVSA coaches how best to teach the motion. Don't feel embarrassed if you do not know how to do this. We all had to learn this delivery. **The worst thing you can do as a coach, is not ask.**

DEVELOPING THE CATCHER

Whereas pitching is the most emotionally demanding position, the position of catcher is the most physically demanding. A good catcher is strong and able to withstand the stress of a hot day under the pads and mask. The catcher is the final “soldier” guarding home base from the opposition. If your player is afraid to get dirty or suffer a few bruises behind the plate she won't last long at catcher.

Framing, blocking, chasing down pop-ups, holding onto third strikes and foul tips, fielding bunts, and plate blocking are critical skills that must be mastered. There are a number of books, videos and websites that provide specific practice and conditioning drills for catcher development. Catching, however is more than blocking balls and throwing out base runners. Catchers need to have a tough personality and a calming presence on the field. A good catcher knows how to keep pitchers motivated and emotionally steady while on the mound, and know not to panic when things aren't going well for their team. Remember, it's the catcher who can call time out, go to the mound, and talk to a wild pitcher without the threat of removal. **No player has a greater influence on a pitcher's performance than the catcher.**

The catcher should be the one who calls the signals during the game. You are probably thinking “**but my catcher doesn't know how to call a game.**” This may be so, but the truth is, **SHE NEVER WILL UNLESS YOU TEACH HER HOW!** Even if you only have your beginning catcher call for the occasional change-up, you've accomplished much when both she and the pitcher learn that they can be more effective when they are working together as a team. How many times have you seen a pitcher throw a beautiful third strike change-up, only to have the batter advance to first base because the catcher wasn't expecting the pitch!

A great catcher possesses not only defensive skills but also strong leadership skills. The catcher, without a doubt, is the leader of the team. Her role is much like a general's. The pitcher and the fielders are her troops. Pitchers and position players look to their catcher for guidance and confidence. In addition to calling the pitches, it is the catcher who should call plays once the ball is hit. As such, catchers should have more softball smarts than anyone else on the field. Most importantly they must be able to take on leadership responsibility.

The catcher is the only player facing the entire field. On certain plays in the infield, especially bunts, it's the catcher's responsibility to yell out where the ball should be thrown. Teammates need to learn to trust the catcher's eyes and judgment. Teach your catcher to

shout "One! One! One!" for first base and "Three! Three! Three!" for third base in a firm voice and without hesitation. **Extra time spent with your catcher on game strategy and tactics will always pay off.**

Coaching the Catcher

The catcher and pitcher are the ones who have to get the job done during the game. As a coach it is your job to build a strong connection between your catcher and pitchers. If done well, the majority of your input during a game will come between innings. Get in the habit of taking your pitcher and catcher aside at the end of a half inning and talking to them privately. Briefly review the past inning and get them in the habit of looking at the roster to anticipate the next group of hitters they will face.

The battery has a number of situational things to consider as they work together during the game. They must know each other's ability. Does the pitcher have speed or ball movement pitches, or a combination of both? Knowing this will influence catcher signal calling patterns. Knowing the pitcher's best pitch and when to use it, and/or when your pitcher has confidence in using it, is fundamental to getting batters out. Knowing what pitches each pitcher has is important as well. It does no good to call for a drop ball when your pitcher doesn't have one!

No player on your team will get a closer look at the opposing batters than the catcher. A good catcher knows how to read batters, set-up batters and how to work with an umpire. Calling for hard inside pitches at the hands of bunters, slow moving inside pitches to known pull hitters, and change-ups and corner pitches against strong or anxious hitters are all part of the game.

No player on your team will have more contact with the umpire than your catcher. A catcher who is courteous, friendly and respectful of the umpire is probably more likely to get the advantage on a close pitch or call at the plate than a catcher with a bad attitude. A catcher can question the position of a pitch that was just called a ball in a less threatening and more effective way than any coach from the dugout. A good battery will take advantage of what information they can get about the umpire's strike zone and adjust to it accordingly.

VI. PLAYER SAFETY

DO NOT JEOPARDIZE ANY PLAYERS HEALTH FOR ANY REASON!

Each coach has a duty to safeguard the health and safety of his or her players. Plan your practices and games with safety in mind. Here are few tips to keep in mind:

- Players must stretch before exercising and bring water to drink.
- Remind players in the field to always watch where the ball is and not be 'day-dreaming' and looking elsewhere. Once hit, a player will quickly realize there is nothing SOFT about the softball. By paying attention, players should hopefully escape this pain.
- Base runners and batters must wear protective helmets at all times.
- The player on-deck should be in the on-deck circle with helmet and bat. There should be no other player holding or swinging a bat.
- All players other than those fielding, on base, at bat or on-deck should be seated on the team bench. Discourage wandering over to the other team's bench or sitting in the spectator bleachers.
- Catchers must wear all of their protective gear whenever they are catching. That means not only in a game, but while they are warming up a pitcher on the sidelines.
- Players must be taught not to throw a bat after a hit ball. An umpire will give the player a first warning. After the second instance, the umpire will most likely EJECT the player from the game, for the safety of both the other players and the umpire.
- When warming up, players should face each other in pairs, and each pair should be parallel to all other pairs warming up. This will avoid errant throws from striking other players.
- Players should be taught to slide and NOT to try to run standing up into a catcher or base fielder. Such contact will usually result in the player being called out, regardless

if they are safe or not.

- Pitchers should warm up for at least 15 to 20 minutes before entering a game, regardless of the urgency to get them into the game.
- Do not overwork pitchers. Be aware of pitcher complaints of elbow, shoulder or arm soreness. It is not a good practice to have the pitcher throw if experiencing any pain.
- Only coaches are allowed to stand in the base line coaches' box without a helmet. All players or individuals under the age of 18 must wear a helmet in the baseline coaches' boxes.

WHAT TO DO IN THE EVENT OF PLAYER INJURY?

Despite our best efforts to promote safety, injuries can and will occur. Normally, the injuries bear watching but are not serious. Each coach should have a first aid kit. If there is not one in your team equipment bag, call the MVSA Equipment coordinator.

Injuries to pay particular attention to are head and limb injuries. Any player who sustains head trauma should be taken out of the ball game and sat down. Take nothing for granted!

In case of severe injuries, such as head trauma, it is recommended that **911** be called for emergency assistance. Do not move the player. Let trained medical personnel take over.

We follow the guidance provided through the **"ASA Blood Rule."** Specifically, any player, coach or umpire who is bleeding or who has blood on their uniform should be prohibited from further participation in a game, until such time as appropriate treatment can be administered. Medical attention should be provided utilizing the medical kit provided to each coach. Use the rubber gloves, gauze, ointment and bandages to clean and stop the bleeding. Once administered, it will be the judgment of the umpire as to when the player may re-enter the game.

The MVSA coordinates as part of its spring coaching clinic a session on first aid. We strongly advise that you take the time to attend this session when held. Please consult the MVSA calendar for date, time and location of this very important session.

All coaches must have training in **concussion awareness**. It's a **Minnesota law** as of 2011.

I. GAME TIME: LET'S PLAY BALL!

LEAGUE RULES

MVSA is a member of the Tri County Fastpitch League. Tri County has an established protocol for league play and tournament play. At the spring coaches meeting, each head coach will get a copy of the official ASA/NAFA rules book. In addition, a summary of the Tri-county league rules is provided below. BELIEVE US, you need to read these rules. You will be surprised how knowing the rules will make your life as a coach ultimately more comfortable.

Why is it important to know your league's rules? Avoid surprises! It's a good idea to also bring a copy of the league rules to each game. That way, if a question comes up, you can show the umpire the official league rules. However, don't bring a rulebook onto the field as a first means of dispute. Do so only at the umpire's request. At the coaches' meeting, playing rules for Tri-County League will be reviewed prior to the upcoming season. It is essential that all coaches attend this meeting.

Tri County League Play –

Age requirements are set by ASA/NAFA. Levels of play are:

18U	(A & B)
16U	(A & B)
14U	(A, B & C)
12U	(A, B & C)
10U	(A, B & C)

Inside the level of play, divisions are: A (highly competitive); B (competitive); and C (beginner). All teams will have the opportunity to advance to state tournaments.

Team rosters are developed in accordance with local rules and Tri County guidelines. MVSA tries to set a standard of 12 players per team. Deviation may occur with board and/or coach approval.

Scheduled league games: 18U, 14U, and 10U games will be scheduled on Tuesday and Thursday nights. Games may be rescheduled by mutual agreement of the respective coaches. 16U and 12U will be scheduled on Monday and Wednesday nights. Games may be rescheduled by mutual agreement of the respective coaches. **If you are considering rescheduling a game, first check on field and umpire availability.**

8U is a local coach-pitch league with Centennial and White Bear Lake. This league replaces the Mounds View in-house program. It is a great way to introduce the girls to the game of fastpitch using the same rules as 10U fastpitch – striking out, 3 outs an inning, etc. However, there is no stealing, no leading off, and no walks. Like 10/12U Fastpitch, there will be travel to other local associations. Coaches focus on the fundamentals of softball: throwing, catching, hitting, and base running. There are no tryouts for 8U. Girls 7 or 8 years old on December 31st of the previous year are eligible to play.

8U Fastpitch Commitment:

- 2 practices or 1 game and 1 practice per week
- MV Tournament: TBD
- State Tournament: TBD
- Games start mid-May

10U will start the season with one double-header per week on Tuesdays or Thursdays. After the school year ends, games will be held on both Tuesdays and Thursdays. Single games will be seven innings, and no new inning will begin after 65 minutes of play.

Double-header games (all levels) will begin at 6:00 p.m., unless both teams have agreed on another starting time. No new inning shall begin after 65 minutes of play following the first pitch.

All games must be a minimum of three innings, or 2 ½ if the home team is ahead.

Games tied after seven innings shall be played with the Tie-breaker rules are used starting the 8th inning with the last batter on 2nd, **no new** inning can start after 65 minutes, **and league games can end with a tie.** These are doubleheader games and it is the responsibility of the umpire to keep the games going in order to complete both games.

Any team not in attendance fifteen minutes after the established game time will forfeit the game. Teams not in attendance within an additional fifteen minutes will forfeit the second game.

During a league contest, any team ahead by 10 runs after the third full inning of play shall be declared the winner and the game is complete.

Coaches may negotiate a different run limit prior to competition (such as inning run limit or game run limit). The umpire will be informed prior to start of play.

In 10U play, the five-run rule shall apply. The team ahead is limited to scoring five runs per inning. In such innings when play is stopped due to the five-run rule, the last player to bat shall be considered the third out.

Teams needing a postponement for reasons other than playing condition (weather or field) shall notify the opponent at least 24 hours prior to the scheduled game. The home team

shall notify umpires by contacting the Umpire coordinator (see board member page on website).

Sanctioned umpires are required for all 18U, 16U and 14U "A" games. Trained umpires are required for all other games.

If not sanctioned, the umpire shall not be the husband or wife of a coach, or under 16 years of age for 14U "B" or "C".

Umpires are expected to enforce all playing rules. This includes the administration of the casual profanity rule, the "no taunting" rule and the "blood rule."

All equipment shall meet the specification as described in the ASA Guidelines.

The home team will supply one "new" and one "very good" ball for their home game. Dudley SB12 yellow optic balls will be used for all games.

The host team will be the home team during the first game of double headers, the opponent will be the home team for the second game.

Roster batting is required for 12U and below. 14U and above should bat the roster during league play but allow the coach to decide how many girls to bat in tournament play

THREE RULES THAT WILL KILL YOU!

1. THE INFIELD FLY RULE

The purpose the Infield Fly Rule is to prevent infielders from intentionally dropping a pop-up to get a double play. The Amateur Softball Association defines it in the Official Rules of Softball as: "**Infield Fly:** An infield fly is a fair fly ball (not including a line drive or an attempted bunt) which can be caught by an infielder with ordinary effort when first and second bases or first, second, and third bases are occupied before two are out. Any defensive player who positions herself in the infield at the start of a pitch shall be considered an infielder for the purpose of the rule. The infield fly is ruled when the ball reaches the highest point based on the position of the closest fielder regardless of who makes the play. When it seems apparent that a batted ball will be an infield fly, the umpire shall immediately declare, "Infield fly, the batter is out," for the benefit of the runners. If the ball is near a foul line, the umpire shall declare, "Infield fly, the batter is out if fair."

"The ball is alive and runners may advance at the risk of the ball being caught. The runner can tag up and advance once the batted ball is touched (prior to catching), the same as on any fly ball. If a declared infield fly becomes a foul ball, it is treated the same as any foul."

Here are some things to remember about the infield fly rule:

- It must be called by the umpire
- It only applies when there are less than two outs
- It only applies when there are runners on first and second bases, or runners on first, second and third bases
- When the umpire calls it, the batter is automatically out
- The ball is not dead
- An infield fly is treated as a regular fly ball; base runners are not forced to run, but they must tag up, before advancing with the risk of being thrown out.

2. THE DROPPED THIRD STRIKE

A batter has the ability to reach first base, if the catcher should "drop" the pitched ball. Once dropped, the catcher must either "tag" or "throw out" the runner. Should the runner reach first base without being "tagged" or "thrown out" the runner is considered safe and no out is recorded.

A runner can only advance to first base on a dropped pitched ball when there are fewer than two outs and first base is unoccupied at the time of the pitch, or anytime there are two outs in the inning. *This one rule is the most commonly forgotten and overlooked rule in softball.* Coaches should continually remind their catchers of this rule during game situations where the count is at two strikes and first base is unoccupied or there are two outs.

3. THE OVERLY AGGRESSIVE RUNNER OR “LOOK BACK” RULE.

The scenario is this. You have a rally developing. Your player has just hit a single and your runner at first base races to second, turns toward third base and stops. The ball is thrown to the pitcher, who is standing in the pitcher's circle. The pitcher faces your runner, and your runner fakes a run motion toward third. All of a sudden you hear the umpire scream, "**Base runner, you are out!**" So ends the rally.

What happened? Any base runner can attempt to advance to any base they wish, but they cannot stop and then give any indication that they will again advance, while the ball is in the control of the pitcher within the pitcher's circle. The runner can advance however, if the pitcher attempts or indicates an intention to make a play (fake throw).

WHO DETERMINES POSTPONEMENT DUE TO WEATHER CONDITIONS?

Until game time, the home team coach may postpone the game for unplayable conditions. After game time, the umpire shall decide if the field is playable. The decision to postpone a game may include consultation with the visiting team and the umpire. If not, the home team shall notify the opponent and the umpires as soon as possible if field conditions warrant a postponement. A fee may be charged if the call does not reach the umpire prior to the game start. Once the game has begun, the decision to discontinue play is purely that of the umpire. Postponed games shall be made up within a reasonable time. If your team doesn't have enough players on hand at game time, and the game isn't canceled due to weather, it is usually considered a forfeit. Keep in contact with the opposing coach to determine the best course of action. If you have to call off a game quickly (prior to leaving for the opposing field) having a team “phone tree” or phone app works well. Establish a communication channel early in the season to facilitate quick communication among teammates, coaches and parents.

NOTE: Frequently, thundershowers will force the postponement of a game at one location but not at another. Unless it is so specified, you should not assume your game is also canceled. Coaches should make every effort to get their team to the field site ready to play, until the umpire makes the decision.

PREGAME: GETTING YOUR TEAM READY TO PLAY

PRE-GAME ROUTINE CHECKLIST

- Make sure your team's equipment bag is ready and all equipment is in working order.
- If you have an away game during league play, make sure you know where you're going well beforehand. If necessary, call the opposing coach to verify directions and field numbers. Distribute directions to all players well before game day.
- As a general rule, request that all your players be at the field ready to warm-up at least 30-40 minutes prior to game time. As coach, you should be at the field well before your players to set up and do a pre-game field inspection. Note

any problems with field conditions or issues that could result in injury: Consult with opposing coaches and umpires when necessary to discuss possible problems and/or alternatives.

- Make sure your team knows what you expect of them at the field. This

includes dugout etiquette and organization, such as how you expect them to treat each other and their opponents while at (on) the field, and how to enter and leave the field (“we run on and run off”), etc. **Remind everyone that they are representing MVSA while at the fields.** Accordingly, fields and dugouts should be left in a clean condition following all games, wherever they are played! After your game, please make sure your team quickly picks up the dugout in consideration of the team playing the next game, which quite often is waiting to get into the dugout. This process and protocol should be discussed at practice so that by game time your team knows and understands your pre-game/post-game process and plan.

- If you’re playing a home game at Rice Creek, please make sure the automated scoring systems are set up, plugged in and synchronized. Tables, chairs and the scoring systems are stored in the umpire’s room. You’ll need your key for access to the umpire room next to the concession stand. It’s helpful to enlist the services of a few parents to handle the automated scoring responsibilities so that you as coach can focus on preparing your team for a successful game! See the MVSA website or contact Mike Robertson for help.

SETTING THE BATTING ORDER AND DEFENSIVE LINE-UP

- Be Prepared! Come to the game with a written batting order and position list so that you can use your pre-game time wisely. Use a line-up card (or line-up template) that allows you to pre-define what positions your players will be occupying for every game (see Player Rotation Form in the Coaches’ Tool Kit).
- Make sure you know who will be absent at every game beforehand if at all possible. Do your line-ups in pencil! Unfortunately, coaches often don’t know when someone will be sick or unable to make a game, until just before game time. For this reason, using a pencil can make last-minute changes easier.
- Depending on your opponent and game situation, consider where your players will be successful for that game (i.e.; some players are better playing 2nd than 3rd, or are more efficient at 1st base than in center field). Know your players’ strengths and weaknesses. Try your best to know something about your opponent in order to plan accordingly. Watch the opposing team warm up!

PLAYERS

Time goes by quickly during pre-game warm-ups. The more focused your team is during this time, the more ready players are to play. Warm-up drills are numerous and every coach has particular drills they like and which work best for them. Because time before each game is limited, it’s imperative that your pre-game routine is well defined. Here are a few things to consider prior to game time:

- Have your players get warmed up by running – a slow jog gets the muscles warmed up. Follow this with a couple minutes of stretching. Experts say stretching and warm-up exercises reduce injury.
- Batting practice – getting the bats ready for game time is important. Give each player 5 to 8 pitches they can hit to get the “feel” and build some confidence prior to game time. Finish with 2 to 3 bunts. Then rotate in another batter.

Players who have already batted or are still waiting to bat can be fielding and retrieving the batted balls, getting some practice in during this process.

- Another group of 4 to 5 players should be taking infield ground balls on the sidelines. After cleanly fielding the ball, they should make a good throw as if throwing to first base.
- Pitchers and catchers should be first to bat so they can devote 10 to 15 minutes warming up along the sidelines prior to game time.
- Be ready to complete pre-game drills so your team is in the dugout 5 minutes before game time. This will provide ample time for you to address your team

prior to the game. Every player needs some time to focus on the task at hand. Use this time to set some goals, re-emphasize some strategy and go over something you might have worked on at the last practice.

- Review with your players how you plan to substitute. **Remember** that everyone gets the opportunity to play in the field and bat.

WHAT ABOUT PLAYING TIME?

Development of players, particularly at the younger age levels and lower tiers, is valued over a winning record. Each girl is to learn and play several positions. An easy way to assure equal time on younger teams is to track innings played by each player on the form found in the appendix.

Guidelines for 8U, 10U , 12U and lower tiers:

- Girls shall be given the opportunity to learn and play several positions including an infield and outfield position.
- Every player will play, but not necessarily an equal amount.
- Playing time is dictated by commitment, attendance, and skill level.
- Roster batting (batting all players) shall be used when allowed. Roster batting is mandatory in Tri County at 10U-traveling and 12U.

Guidelines for Tier "A" teams at 14U, 16U and 18U:

- Teams will be highly competitive and coaches may use their own discretion in assigning positions.
- All players shall play at least ½ of the innings for league games and ½ of the innings for tournament games. Some factors that may reduce playing time include: arriving late or missing games (especially without informing the coach beforehand); excessive absence at practices; or lack of effort.

Coaches are obligated to honor tryout results regarding pitchers. Barring injury, the #1 and #2 rated pitchers assigned to each team shall: pitch a minimum of 1/3 of total team innings; start one game of league double-headers; and start one of three tournament games. Coaches are encouraged to have the #1 rated catcher catch at least 1/3 of the innings. The use of other players as pitchers and catchers will be at the discretion of the coach.

GAME MANAGEMENT

Working with Blue: Dealing with Umpires!

MVSA hires umpires to officiate the league home games. Every effort is made to assure quality officials. MVSA believes the umpire has complete authority once a game begins. Remember, umpires are human. They are going to make mistakes just as you might. Youth league umpires like to umpire youth games because they love the sport and most of them see it as a way to contribute to the sport and the community. They get paid little for the hours they are spending in the heat. Umpires should not be looked upon as adversaries but rather as an important part of the game. The more that you communicate with them in a positive, respectful manner; the better they will work with you.

Good Practices When Dealing With Umpires:

1. Know the umpire's name. Most umpires will respond to the name "Blue," but referring to him or her by name is even better.
2. Treat the umpire with mutual respect.
3. Should you wish to discuss an on-the-field ruling, you should request time from the umpire. Once granted, the coach should approach the umpire and ask for clarification on the ruling or the on-the-field call. Be brief and speak in a controlled voice. After making a point, listen to the response.
4. Keep your distance and don't get in the umpire's face. This kind of behavior

- only tends to put the umpire on the defensive. He or she will become more concerned with how you are acting, rather than listening to what you have to say.
5. Never get personal with your comments. Never use profanity.
 6. Don't continually "pick" at the umpire. Asking the umpire between innings to be aware of something is much more beneficial than constantly yelling at him or her from the bench.
 7. Do not waste the umpire and players' time unless you "know" the rules. A coach should make sure that he or she has the rule right when protesting a call.
 8. Don't bring a rulebook onto the field. If a coach is not satisfied with a call, he or she should ask the umpire for an explanation. If a coach still doesn't agree, there is the choice of protesting the game. A coach should never use the protest as a threat, and should always remain calm and professional.
 9. If the home coach cancels a game, it is his or her responsibility to inform the umpire scheduled for that game. A list of contacts and a schedule of anticipated officials will be available before the season starts.
 10. Most of our officials prefer to work with the older ages. The scheduling is done so to distribute the more highly sought after games equitably between our regular officials. Please, DO NOT ask officials to switch assignments, and make certain the official on your field is the one assigned before you start play.
 11. If an official does not appear at your home game, it is the coaches' responsibility to report that occurrence to the Fields and Umpires coordinator the following day.

Protesting A Game/Team Conduct Complaints

If the coach is not satisfied with the umpire's explanation, the coach may follow the "game protest procedures." A coach will calmly and professionally inform the umpire that the game is being played under protest. After the game, the coach should call the MVSA Vice President Traveling to explain the incident.

In regards to opposing team conduct, appropriate complaints would be incidents that involve the use of profane or vulgar language or gestures; physical contact between or among players; or unruly demonstrations of players, coaches, parents or supporters.

KEEPING THE SCOREBOOK

It's a good idea to keep a detailed scorebook for each game regardless if you are the home or away team, and to check the score with the opposing team periodically. This will help to avoid confusion and misunderstanding. Each team is responsible for keeping its batting order straight and batting in order.

It is courteous to give the other team your batting order, with player's numbers, at least 5 minutes before the game time. Few things are more hectic than trying to get a team on the field or ready to bat, and also having to write down the opposing team's batting order in the scorebook while the pitcher is warming up!

If you want to do so, you can keep your scorebook in a way that allows you to keep track of what each player did, and, if you are so inclined, keep a set of batting and pitching statistics. (Fielding statistics can be kept too, but by more adept observers.) If you would like to keep batting or pitching statistics for your team, a Microsoft EXCEL spreadsheet is available from MVSA. There are more sophisticated packages available commercially or over the Internet.

There is no one official method of keeping score. What follows is a simple system that is an amalgam of several systems. Be as detailed as you want or as your scorekeeper is able.

EACH FIELDER HAS A NUMBER:

Pitcher=1

Catcher=2

First Base=3

Second Base=4

Field=9 **Third Base** = 5

Shortstop=6

Left Fielder=7

Center Fielder=8

Right

USE LETTERS OR ABBREVIATIONS TO DESCRIBE GAME OCCURRENCES

BB=Walk

K=Strike Out

HBP=Hit By Pitch

E=Error

1B=Single

2B=Double

3B=Triple

HR=Home Run

WP=Wild Pitch

FO=Foul Out

SLB=Slap Bunt Hit

SB=Stolen Base

CS=Caught Stealing

DP=Double Play

PB=Passed Ball

RBI=Runs Batted In

SF=Sacrifice Fly Ball

G=Ground Ball

LD=Line Drive

FB=Fly Ball

SAC=Sacrifice Bunt

- Combining the numbers and letters tells a lot about each play. For example, **E-4** means that the second base person made an error. **E-4g** would add the information that a ground ball was "flubbed."
- Mark a batter's progress around the base paths by drawing a line from base to base on the template printed in your scorebook (MVSA will provide the scorebook). If a batter reaches home safely and scores, lightly color the diamond in. Why lightly? Otherwise, you may obscure information written inside the diamond.
- It helps to record outs (first out=**1**, second out=**2**, and third out=**3**) and then circle the out number, so that you can easily keep track of the outs.
- For the brave of heart, a scorebook can provide the basic data you need to keep a set of statistics for your team. Stats can be handy in making decisions about the batting order and in helping your pitchers develop. They can hold surprises, too. For example, your quiet sixth hitter may steadily and unobtrusively be poking singles through the infield and piling up a lot of runs batted in (**RBI's**).
- Batting statistics are easy to generate from the scorebook. To develop pitching statistics, you'll need to consult the score you have kept for the other team.

A FEW TIPS ON KEEPING SCORE IF YOU WANT TO DEVELOP PITCHING STATISTICS

- As noted above, keep a detailed account of the other team's batting, if you want to keep track of your pitcher's performance.
- Remember, "earned runs" are not charged to a pitcher when the runner reached base because of an error or passed ball, or whose "career" on the base paths is prolonged by an error. Errors made by the pitcher are treated like other errors; runs stemming from them are not charged to the pitcher. Wild pitches are charged to the pitcher.
- Be sure to indicate clearly in the scorebook when pitchers are relieved.

There you have it, the 1-2-3's of keeping the scorebook. It's worth the time and effort to keep the book. Your player's will like to see how they are doing and what progress they are making. This is a good job for a parent who would like to help but does not want the burden of having to be coaching as well.

TOURNAMENT PLAY

One of the most rewarding coaching experiences in youth sports is participating in tournaments. Your players have an opportunity to display their individual skills in games where the stakes are higher than in regular season games. As you progress through a tournament, the need to play as a team becomes more pronounced. Of course, there's nothing quite like the feeling a coach experiences when seeing his or her team celebrate a victory in a tournament game that really means something important. Perhaps the game was

for a trophy, or maybe it was only for a moral victory. Either way, the tournament experience will have a positive effect on the growth of your girls both as players and as young women. Tournament play is an integral part of the summer fastpitch season and includes the Tri County League State Qualifier, the State tournament, and optional tournaments.

The success you experience in a tournament will no doubt reflect the talent of your players. However, we have all seen a more talented team lose to the underdog. Your team's success will also depend on your preparation before the tournament begins, and your decisions during and after the tournament.

TRAVEL

Depending on where the games are played, you may want to assign a parent to ask your team if everybody has a ride. Who is riding with whom? Early in the year encourage parents to *buddy up* with each other for ride sharing. If you are traveling out of town it is suggested that for safety and to limit liability, the girls who were not accompanied by a parent maintain ride share arrangements throughout the tournament. Make sure every parent has your cell phone # in the event they get lost or experience transportation problems.

LODGING

If you are playing an out-of-town tournament that requires an overnight stay, try to have the entire team stay at the same hotel. This will promote the *team concept*, and makes organizing and logistics easier once you arrive. Kids will be kids. Remind the girls that hotels are public places. They should buddy-up when leaving their parents, and never go off alone! Never go into a stranger's room. Ask them to be on their best behavior. Remind the girls that they represent MVSA.

TOURNAMENT DAY - BEFORE YOUR TEAM PLAYS ITS FIRST GAME

On tournament day, make sure you arrive at least one hour prior to your team's first game. Most tournaments require this. Hand in your roster and any balls that are required at tournament headquarters and have your bats checked with the UIC (umpire in charge). Also, any rule questions you have should be asked at this time.

Make sure that you know that the equipment your team is using is ASA certified (See ASA Rule Book: Rule 3 Sections 1 – 7). Refer to this ASA Web page if you are in doubt about equipment used by your team: <http://www.teamusa.org/USA-Softball/Play-ASA/Certified-ASA-Equipment.aspx>

A copy of your team roster, completed on the official ASA or NAFA roster form, must be turned into the Tournament Director prior to your first game. Along with the roster, you'll need copies of birth certificates signed by each player. A picture of each player should be taped or stapled to each player's birth certificate. These must be in your possession on the bench during each game. They will be used to verify player's ages if challenged. Finally, the players medical release forms should also be in your possession on the bench for use in the event of injury.

Double-check times and fields for any last minute changes. Pick a place to warm up and give yourself at least 30 minutes of warm-up time before a tournament starts.

Be as organized as possible. Drive to the fields well ahead of your first game. You never know when a map might be wrong, a road closed, etc. If out of town, organize a team caravan from the hotel to the fields whenever possible. People get lost when they are out of town, even when they have a map and directions. Try to have a plan for what your team will do during breaks between games. Periods of two hours or more are great opportunities to get away from the park. You might run home depending on how close you are. Otherwise, try to keep the team together. Meet everyone for lunch – keep it light!

DURING THE TOURNAMENT

Good warm-ups include: stretching, throwing, soft toss, and infield/outfield. Allow your pitchers and catchers plenty of time to warm up. Let your team know your expectations

and routine, and they will respond well.

Setting your lineup – know if the tournament is a roster bat or 9/10 with DP format. Know the courtesy runner, re-entry, free substitution rules. Make every effort to get all players into the game.

1. Roster batting - Everyone on your roster bats in the order you establish before each game. Only roster players not in attendance at the game may be excluded.
2. Line-up batting – only the nine defensive position players bat in the order established before each game (ASA Rule # 4 Section # 1, & Rule # 7 Section # 2).
3. Designated Player, DP, may be placed into the batting order to bat for one of the defensive players (ASA Rule # 4 Section # 3, & Rule # 7 Section # 2).
4. Limited substitution with designated player – game begins with nine defensive position players and DP (if used) in the line-up (ASA Rule # 4 Section # 1, & Rule # 7 Section # 2). Remaining players on the roster are substitutes. Use of these players is subject to Re-entry and Substitution rules (ASA Rule # 4 Sections # 5 & 6).
5. Roster changes or additions – your team must compete with the same roster in tournaments as used during the regular season (ASA Article 502). One exception is that teams are allowed to pick up three players when advancing to State and National Tournaments Championship Play (ASA Articles 502 & 503). These changes must be made no later than July 15. Added players must have been registered to a team in same state/metro association, in the same division of play, and in same or lower classification during current season.

Hints:

1. Assign a parent to check the official tournament bracket board for your team's next game, field location and time.
2. Keep yourself aware of your team's status in pool play or elimination rounds.
3. Know the tiebreaker procedures. Most round-robin formats use runs scored or given up as a main tiebreaker. Don't hurt your team by not knowing the possibilities.
4. Have a plan for inclement weather. Only one or two coaches should be near the fields. Have the players, parents and other spectators in a sheltered area.
5. Keep water and other liquids plentiful for players during games, especially during summer months. Watch for signs of fatigue from your players. Playing all day isn't the only time your players can get fatigued. Most of the players are playing hard all of the time and fatigue can set in very quickly.

After the post game meeting, invite parents in and have a plan for the next step (next game, leaving the facility for break, what time and where to be back to start the preparation all over). Upon completion of your last game, check with tournament directors for any post tournament commitment your team may have (trophy presentation or whatever). If you have completed your play for the day, make sure that all players are accounted for and have transportation.

Send e-mails to the MVSA Board of Directors with your tournament results, highlights and accomplishments!

CONCLUSION OF THE SEASON

The end of the season is a bittersweet time. You and your players have experienced a highly active, intense and most likely rewarding time together. Many times your season will end with a loss at a state qualifier or state tournament. This sometimes is abrupt and leaves an unfinished feeling for the players, parents and the coach. Our advice is to have some sort of gathering. Mid-way through the season, you should ask a parent to volunteer to organize the end-of the season gathering. One suggestion is to plan an end of season player/parent picnic and/or player vs. parent softball game. The girls like to show off by beating the parents and it's a nice way to end the season in a more positive manner. Some teams have picnics, others go to a local pizzeria and others just get together for a while at the end of the last game to talk about the season. The parents and players want to show their appreciation to you and your assistants for all the time and effort you have given. NOTE: In the In-house program, there is a traditional season-ending tournament. Here all teams come together to celebrate the season.

V. COACHES' TOOL KIT

MVSA is working to create a new coach resource page on the MVSA website. We have left some resources in this manual below but there are tons of great training videos on youtube that you can use to help you with your practices during the season. Stay tuned for more updates on the MVSA website.

PLAYER INFORMATION SHEET

PLAYER _____ NICKNAME _____
ADDRESS _____ CITY _____ ZIP _____
MOTHER _____ FATHER _____
HOME PHONE _____ HOME PHONE _____
WORK PHONE _____ WORK PHONE _____
CELL PHONE _____ CELL PHONE _____

PLAYER INFORMATION:

BIRTH DATE _____ AGE _____
SCHOOL _____ GRADE _____
RIGHT HANDED _____ LEFT HANDED _____
NUMBER OF YEARS YOU HAVE PLAYED SOFTBALL/BASEBALL _____
FAVORITE POSITION _____ LEAST FAVORITE _____
OTHER SPORTS _____

EQUIPMENT:

BAT _____
RECOMMENDED SIZE BASED ON HEIGHT, WEIGHT AND AGE: LENGTH _____ WEIGHT _____
SHOE/CLEETS _____

UNIFORM _____ JERSEY NUMBER _____

OTHER GEAR (eg. Catchers equipment) _____

QUESTIONS FOR PARENTS:

Does your child have any medical condition I should know about?

Does your child take medication of any kind?

Are there any foods your child cannot eat?

Are there any foods your child should not eat?

Are there any other individuals you would authorize to pick up your child after a game or practice?

SPECIAL ADVERTISING FEATURE

DODGE PRESENTS Parents' Guide To Youth Sports

A Preseason Meeting Can Set The Stage For Success

BY RICK WOLFF

This coach only plays a handful of kids. Why didn't he tell us parents that before the season began?"

- "My daughter always gets benched because she has to miss practice on certain days. But I don't have a full practice schedule, so what can we do?"

- "My son and I didn't know the coach's policies on discipline, and now he's punishing my kid for breaking a team rule that we've never heard about before!"

If you're a coach fielding these complaints or a parent making them, there's a good chance you didn't grasp the importance of preseason meetings.

For coaches at any level of youth sports, the first date to put on your schedule every season is a meeting with the parents and players. It might only take 15 or 20 minutes, but it can set the tone for the whole season by letting you communicate your coaching philosophy, your approach to practices and games, and, most important, your expectations for the players.

For parents, attending the meeting is vital. Understanding right away where the coach stands will help prevent disruptive disputes during the season that keep your kids from enjoying their sports experience. Don't let yourself be blindsided by decisions and situations the coach discussed months before.

Coaches: Give the kids and their parents plenty of notice so they can be at the meeting. Make it clear that you want both parents to attend because you'll be discussing their behavior at practices and games as well.

Start the meeting by handing out practice and game schedules, a team roster with phone numbers, a list of equipment needs and their costs, and directions to away games. Also, if you plan to have a "team parent," this is the time to ask for volunteers or introduce one you already have in place.

Then you should review league rules, which requires some preparation. Beforehand you'll have to check with the league board of directors regarding such regulations as guaranteed playing time, eligibility questions and mandatory equipment.

If your league or team has a code of conduct, go over each part of it carefully and make certain every child and parent signs it and gives a copy back to you. Remind them this is an important contract into which they have entered.



ILLUSTRATION BY S.B. WHITEHEAD

Parents who skip a preseason meeting might never be on the same page as the coach.

Finally, talk about your coaching philosophy—how you will work with the kids and what everyone can expect from you in terms of issues like discipline, playing time and commitment. This is the best way to prevent future misunderstandings.

When you're finished, be sure to give everyone your telephone number and/or e-mail address. You might also want to include certain times during the week when you know you will be home and available for their calls.

Parents: The preseason meeting is a conversation, not a lecture. When the coach has finished speaking, ask questions—questions about anything and everything you want to know, because this will be your best opportunity.

Perhaps most important, you might find in the meeting that the coach's philosophy clashes with yours. If it is clear to you that problems are on the horizon, this is the time to see if your child can play on another team in the league.

Regardless of wins and losses, the best seasons in youth sports are those that are fun for all the players, parents and coaches. A preseason meeting is a great way to start down the road to that kind of success.

Rick Wolff is chairman of the Center for Sports Parenting at the Institute for International Sport. He can be contacted at www.sportsparenting.org.

EXAMPLE TEAM BUILDING EXERCISE

THE OBJECT OF THIS EXERCISE IS TO HAVE YOUR PLAYERS GET TO KNOW ONE ANOTHER BETTER.

Divide your team into 2 to 3 groups; try to split up players that are sitting next to each other.

Have each group design a poster that represents the entire team. Materials needed are 2 to 3 small sheets of poster board and marker pens.

Instruct them to quiz each other on things such as:

- Favorite food
- Favorite sports
- Favorite color
- Pets
- Family (siblings)
- Activities
- Interests
- Etc.

When finished, have each group explain their poster so that parents and other groups know more about the members of each group.

INSTRUCTIONAL RESOURCES

MVSA would like to create a sharing library of fastpitch softball resources. MVSA is in the process of accumulating books, articles and videotapes concerning coaching fastpitch softball. The resources that will be available to coaches or parents are located in the office room at Rice Creek. The items will be labeled indicating the owner but may be borrowed by signing the file card with each resource and placing the file card in the file card box. Please indicate the date the item was checked out and please return the item within one week.

POSITION SKILLS CHECKLIST

Catchers

- Fielding Bunts: throws to first, second, third
- Three throws to first: passed ball, bunt, pickoff
- Pickoffs
- Holding Runners
- Throws to third with a right handed batter
- Knee throws to bases
- Cutoff
- Rundowns
- Foul balls
- Playing the fence
- Pop-ups
- First-and-third play
- Force-out at home and throw to first
- Passed ball with a runner at third
- Blocking Balls
- Framing
- Giving Signals
- Blocking the plate
- Intentional Walk

Pitchers

- Fielding Bunts
- Squeeze Play
- Pop-ups
- Fielding balls to the left side
- Covering home on passed balls
- Double Plays
- Intentional Walk
- Pitchout
- First-and-third play
- Backing up third and home
- Rundowns

First Base

- Tagging the base
- Tagging the runners
- Fielding the bunt
- Working with the pitcher on bunts
- Working with the second baseman covering first
- Working with the second baseman on balls wide of first
- Throws to third
- Tagging first and throwing home
- Double plays
- Cutoff
- Short first base

Second Base

- Covering first on a bunt
- Working with the first baseman on balls wide of first
- Double plays
- Pickoffs

- Fake Pickoff
- Relay from right field
- Foul balls behind first
- Pop-ups
- Shallow flies to center and right field
- Rundowns

Shortstop

- Covering on steals (2nd & 3rd)
- Covering second and third on bunts
- Pickoffs (2nd & 3rd)
- Double plays from the pitcher, second, and first
- Relay from left and center
- Taking a charge
- Foul balls behind third
- Pop-ups
- Shallow flies to left and center
- Holding runners
- First-and-third play
- Fake throws
- Rundowns

Third Base

- Fielding bunts
- Squeeze
- Force-out at third and throw to first
- Holding runners and throw to first
- Fake throws
- Balls in the hole
- Double plays to second
- Covering third on a pickoff
- Pop-ups
- Playing the fence
- Coverage on intentional walks
- First-and-third play
- Rundowns
- Relay on the left-field line

Outfield

- Blocking balls
- Do or Die
- Hitting relay
- Hitting cutoff
- Covering bases
- Playing the fences
- Throwing to bases
- Footwork: drop step, inside roll, outside roll
- Diving for balls
- Balls hit overhead
- Tweeners: infield & outfield
- Communication: infield & outfield

GENERAL SKILLS CHECKLIST

Hitting

- Contact
- Right side
- Hit-and-run
- Protecting the hitter
- Taking a pitch
- Two-strike adjustment

Base running

- Out of box
- To first
- Rounding bases
- Between bases
- First-and-third play
- Second base to home
- Home to second base
- Second-and-third play
- Tagging
- Tag and draw throw
- Hit-and-run
- Bunt-and-run

Fundamentals

- Throwing
- Receiving
- Footwork
- Fielding ground balls
- Fielding fly balls
- Covering Bases
- Force play footwork
- Backing up
- Tagging runners

Bunts

- Sacrifice
- Push
- Slap (righty & lefty)
- Drop

- Drag
- Squeeze
- Safety
- Fake
- Knob
- Bunt-and-run

Rundowns

- Sliding
- Regular
- Pop-up
- Hook
- Rollover
- Headfirst
- Coaching at Home

Team Defense

- Rundowns
- Relays
- Cutoffs
- Pickoffs
- First-and-third play
- Bunt Defense
- Slap Defense
- Double plays
- Cutting the run at the plate
- Bloop hits (Texas Leaguers)
- Bases loaded
- Steals
- Hit-and-run
- International tiebreaker
- Intentional walks
- Shielding the sun
- Diving for balls
- Communication

EMERGENCY MEDICAL AND TRANSPORTATION FORMS

MVSA Emergency Medical Authorization & Information

PLAYER: _____ **PLAYER NAME:** _____ **PARENT / GUARDIAN** _____ **NAME** _____

DATE OF BIRTH: _____ **ADDRESS** _____

DATE OF LAST TETANUS SHOT: _____

MEDICATIONS: _____ **HOME PHONE:** _____

ALLERGIES: _____ **BUSINESS PHONE** _____

_____ **PAGER IF AVAILABLE** _____ **CELL PHONE** _____

_____ **MEDICAL HISTORY/CONDITIONS:** _____

PHYSICIAN / CLINIC _____

ADDRESS: _____ **SPECIAL NOTES** _____

PHONE: _____

HOSPITAL PREFERRED: (if circumstances permit) _____

INSURANCE CARRIER: _____ **POLICY #** _____

I, _____ the undersigned parent or person having legal custody or the legal guardian of _____ do hereby authorize and direct the team coach or designate to consent to any x-ray examination, medical, surgical, or dental diagnosis or treatment and hospital care to be rendered to the above named minor under general or special supervision and upon the advice of a licensed physician, surgeon or dentist. IN GIVING THIS CONSENT I RECOGNIZE AND UNDERSTAND that in situations where the above named minor requires immediate medical or hospital care it may not be possible to contact me, and that in such situations I will not be able to knowledgeably evaluate and choose among the available alternative treatments or procedures, if any, or to evaluate the risks attendant upon each, and the risks attendant to foregoing all treatment; in such situations, I authorize a physician, surgeon or dentist to exercise their professional judgment and assess the risks incident to and choose the necessary treatment from any available alternatives and to render such care and perform such treatment as they in their professional judgment determine to be necessary for the health and safety of the above named minor.

Signature of Parent / Guardian _____ Date _____

MVSA FASTPITCH

TRAVEL FORM

MVSA requires a "responsible adult" for each player travelling to out of town tournaments. Softball tournaments can be great family experiences and we strongly encourage parents to travel with their daughters to all games. If for any reason parents can not join us, **it is the responsibility of that family to arrange for a "responsible adult"**. It can be a relative or another parent (not a coach) travelling with the team who accepts responsibility. It is NOT recommended that the responsibility for individual players be added to the duties of the traveling coach.

DESTINATION: _____

A completed travel form must be turned into team coach prior to departure in order for a player to TRAVEL AND PARTICIPATE AS A MEMBER OF OUR MVSA FASTPITCH TEAM.

(PLAYER) _____ My parents will travel with us and remain with the team during our trip.

YES NO

(IF NO) MY PARENTS AND I AGREE THAT THE FOLLOWING ADULT WILL BE RESPONSIBLE FOR ME DURING OUR TRIP.

_____ Date _____ Date
RESPONSIBLE ADULT (signature) PARENT AUTHORIZATION (signature)

It is the responsibility of every player, coach, parent, and friend to represent our Association in a spirit of good sportsmanship.

PLAYER ROTATION FORM

Date: _____

Opponent _____ Location _____

Outcome _____

Inning	1 st		3 rd	4 th	5 th	6 th	7 th
P							
C							
1B							
2B							
3B							
SS							
LF							
CF							
RF							
bench							
bench							
bench							
bench							
bench	Team listing			Batting Order		Innings Played	
			1				
			2				
			3				
			4				
			5				
			6				
			7				
			8				
			9				
			10				
			11				
			12				

PLAYER'S CODE OF
ETHICS

1. I will participate because I want to, not because my parents or coaches want me to.
2. I will play by the rules, and in the spirit of the game.
3. I will control my temper - fighting and "mouthing off" are not acceptable.
4. I will respect my teammates and opponents.
5. I will do my best to be a team player.
6. I will remember that winning isn't everything - that having fun, improving skills, making friends and doing my best are most important.
7. I will acknowledge all good plays and performances - those of my team and of my opponents.
8. I will remember that coaches and officials are there to help me. I will accept their decisions and show them respect.
9. I will remember that when I play or practice the game of softball, wherever I am, I represent MVSA, my team, but most of all myself.
10. I will practice good stewardship of the Rice Creek Facility and do my part to keep it clean.

MVSA PARENT/GUARDIAN GUIDELINES

NOTE: EVERY ATHLETE PARTICIPANT MUST HAVE A PARENT OR GUARDIAN SIGNATURE TO PARTICIPATE.

1. I will remember that all athletes will be given the opportunity to participate regardless of ability. (Obligations and guidelines may vary depending on age group for more details see Bylaws under Team Formation)
2. I will place the emotional and physical development of my child ahead of any personal desire to win.
3. I will lead by example and demonstrate good sportsmanship.
4. I will remember that all coaches are volunteers and are committed to the program because they enjoy the sport and working with children.
5. I will remember all coaches, youth, parents, umpires and league representatives of MVSA should be treated with respect.
6. I will remember that Mounds View Softball Association (MVSA) is committed to:
Providing opportunities for girls to play fastpitch softball; **Promoting and supporting** fastpitch softball in the Mounds View 621 School District area; **Emphasizing** development of fundamental softball skills in a fun, safe and competitive environment; and **Ensuring** a positive and rewarding experience to maximize personal and team growth.
7. As a parent I also understand that MVSA has an established grievance procedure. If I feel that the coaches are not following the coaches guideline as outlined in the Bylaws and an issue arises I will follow the guidelines and communicate with the coaches at an appropriate time and setting vs. confronting a coach during a game or in the presences of any athletes.
8. Bottom line, I will remember that I am a parent and that the game is for the athlete.

Failure to abide by the rules and guidelines set for by the MVSA will result in disciplinary action that could include but is not limited to the following:

1. Verbal warning by coach
2. Written warning
3. Action by the MVSA Governing Board that may include but is not limited to:
 - Parental game suspension with written documentation of the incident
 - Parental week suspension with written documentation of the incident
 - Parental season suspension
 - Player expulsion from the program

Player Name: _____

Parent Name: _____

Parent Signature: _____