

Methacton Audubon Recreation Association (MARA)
Softball Rules and Goals

This handbook is designed to be a guide for present and future members of the METHACTON AUDUBON RECREATION ASSOCIATION (MARA).

The Philosophy, objectives, procedural statements and other information contribute to the smooth operation of the MARA SOFTBALL LEAGUE.

No handbook could possibly provide all the answers to all the Softball League questions, but familiarity with this manual, along with good judgment, should help in making good decisions for the League.

All items in this handbook are subject to revision periodically. Ideas for improvements are encouraged at any time. The various chapters in this manual deal with all facets of our League operation. Any part of this manual shall be considered the "rules" of the MARA SOFTBALL program and should be adhered to accordingly.

PHILOSOPHY

Methacton Audubon Recreation Association (MARA) exists to provide a safe, enjoyable environment for children to learn the great game of Softball. The safety and well being of young players is the primary objective of MARA. The League's goal is to teach softball skills so the players can improve and develop satisfaction and enjoyment of the game, and also values such as sportsmanship, teamwork, and service that will enable them to improve as individuals and give back to the community.

GENERAL RULES – ALL LEVELS (Regular Season)

1. Babe Ruth Softball rules apply unless specifically excepted in this document.
2. MARA is a RECREATIONAL League. The intensity in a softball game should never reach a level that detracts from the basic rules of good sportsmanship and fair play.
3. All Managers must conduct their program in a manner that ensures the safety of each player.
4. All Managers and coaches must have completed the required MARA Background check before being able to coach at any level. The link to the Protect Youth Sports website can be found on the MARA web site. Background checks are good for one year from the date of issue.
5. Managers are responsible for keeping their coaches, players, and partisan spectators under control, observing good etiquette, and exhibiting sportsmanlike conduct at all practices and games.
6. Managers will conduct a mandatory team meeting involving players and parents at the first practice so that expectations are clearly communicated. At this meeting Managers and coaches should make clear the rules of good conduct with all parents.

7. Managers are responsible to have the best interest of the PLAYER in mind at all times.
8. Managers will provide all players with a game schedule once the League has approved the schedule. The Softball Commissioner and League Coordinator will develop a practice schedule that is fair to all teams.
9. Only Managers, coaches, scorekeepers, players, umpires, and League officials are permitted in the dugout during a game.
10. Base coaches must remain in the coach's box when their team is at bat and in the dugout behind the fence when their team is in the field.
11. Hitting sticks are not permitted at the MARA complex at any time.
12. Managers, coaches, and parents are responsible for limiting the communication and items passed during the games to the players while on the team benches and playing field. This includes food, drinks, and conversation between players, parents, and siblings. The goal is to offer encouragement with the least amount of distractions.
13. Only the Manager may question an umpire's ruling and such cases are limited to rule interpretations only. A judgment call of an umpire should never be questioned. The Manager shall not allow any coaches, players, or parents to question or harass an umpire in any way. The Manager may never leave the dugout or coach's box to talk to an umpire, without first receiving the umpire's permission. MARA is a RECREATIONAL League. The intensity in a softball game should never reach a level that detracts from the basic rules of good sportsmanship.
14. Protests are not allowed during the regular season. During the playoffs, protests are allowed for rule interpretations only. The umpire and the Softball Commissioner (or his designate) will resolve the protest BEFORE play resumes. Judgment calls are not subject to protest.
15. Managers, players, coaches, and spectators shall not behave improperly or use abusive language.

The penalty for this behavior is:

- a. First Occurrence – Automatic ejection from the game.
- b. Second Occurrence – Automatic ejection from the game PLUS suspension for the next game.
- c. Ejection from the League for the year.

Any ejection can be appealed to the MARA Board of Directors or their designate, with the player, Manager/Coaches, and umpire attending. The decision is final and not subject to further appeal.

16. For the safety of the players and umpires, the intentional throwing of any equipment is prohibited. Managers should teach their players the proper way to drop the bat after hitting the ball. Penalties for throwing of equipment are at the umpire's discretion, up to ejection for repeat offenses.

17. When coaching and/or umpiring clinics are offered, attendance by ALL Managers and coaches

is strongly recommended. Attendance at such clinics will be consideration for future-coaching positions at all levels.

18. Managers and coaches should strive to make playing time as equal as possible for all players on the team during the regular season. During the regular season, each player must play four (4) innings in the field, unless:

1. The game is shortened due to weather, time limit, or darkness.
2. A player arrives late or leaves early.

19. During regular season games all players should be given the opportunity to play the infield and outfield in each game. All players should be given the opportunity to play the infield for at least 2 innings each regular season game, unless:

1. The game is shortened due to weather, time limit, or darkness.
2. A player arrives late or leaves early.

20. There are no intentional walks.

21. Games in the Minors and Majors will consist of six (6) innings. The Senior Division will play seven (7) innings. During the regular season, there will be no extra innings in case of a tie. Tie games will not be replayed. Games are considered official after four (4) full innings, or 3 1/2 if the Home team is ahead. The League will attempt to reschedule games that are not official during the regular season based on field availability. The Instructional Leagues will play as many innings as the allotted time permits or as warranted considering other factors (e.g. weather) given the ages of the players.

22. In the event of inclement weather or lack of daylight, the League may suspend play. If the League has not suspended play, the Managers and Umpires will use their discretion on whether or not to play, with the players' safety in mind.

23. Only the Softball Commissioner or his designate may cancel a game for reasons other than weather.

24. The League Coordinator will reschedule canceled and unofficial games, with priority given to canceled games. Games will be rescheduled based on field availability. The League reserves the right to not reschedule a game if fields are unavailable. Rescheduled games will be replayed in their entirety.

25. Pitching limits of unofficial or tie games count toward consecutive game inning allotments.

26. The umpire will notify both teams of the official time of the first pitch. There is a one hour and thirty minute time limit on the game (1:30). Once the time limit has been reached, the current inning (top and bottom halves, if Home team is trailing or tied) may be completed without regard to the time limit. However, no new inning may begin after the time limit has been reached.

Example: Team A (home) and Team B begin at 1:01 PM. Teams C and D are scheduled to play at 3:00 PM. At 2:31 PM, the time limit is reached in the top of the 5th inning and Team B leading. The game will end after the bottom of the 5th inning.

27. All players present must bat consecutively. All players must play at least half the game in the field. A manager may sit a player for disciplinary reasons but must report the incident to the Softball Commissioner before the next scheduled game. Players arriving late will be put last in the batting order.

28. Each Manager will supply a copy of his batting order, consisting of the players' last names and number, to the opposing manager. Managers must keep scorebooks that include players' first and last names and numbers and return to the League Commissioner once the season has ended. This is an important administrative matter in order to support the eligibility of players for the travel season.

29. The Home team will occupy the third base dugout.

30. Players in the field and on the bench are encouraged to "chatter" to support their teammates. However, "chatter" should not distract the batter nor be derogatory to the opposing team in any way. Chatter while a pitcher is in her motion is not permitted.

31. Catchers may catch the entire game, but Managers should attempt to utilize more than one catcher in a game whenever possible, especially on hot days.

32. If a pitcher throws one pitch in an inning and is removed from the mound for any reason, she is considered to have pitched one inning. There are no thirds of an inning when calculating pitched innings.

33. If a pitcher hits two batters in a game she will receive a warning. If a pitcher hits another batter in that game (total of 3), the pitcher can be removed from the mound for that game at the umpire's discretion.

34. A Manager or coach is permitted to make one trip to the mound in the same inning to the same pitcher. On the second trip in the same inning to the same pitcher, that pitcher must be removed from the mound for the entire game. However, if a pitcher is injured, the Manager may notify the umpire that he is visiting the mound to check the injury and he will not be charged with a visit.

35. Pitchers must pitch from the pitching rubber.

36. Any player warming up a pitcher, whether on the field or on the sidelines, must wear a glove and protective mask.

37. **MANDATORY NO CONTACT RULE (Slide or Surrender):** During the first few weeks of the regular season (until May 1st), if a runner does not slide and makes no effort to avoid contact with the player making the play, the umpire can use their discretion and issue a warning the runner as opposed to declaring the runner out. A second offense will result in the runner being declared out. Subsequent to April 30th, a runner will automatically be declared out if a runner does not slide and makes no effort to avoid contact with the player making the play.

38. Headfirst slides are not permitted unless diving back into a base that a runner has successfully reached. Any runner making a headfirst slide will be declared out. Repeat offenses by any player in the same game will result in the ejection of that player.

39. Players are not permitted to coach at first or third base.

40. Only the on-deck batter is permitted in the designated on-deck area. All other players must remain on the bench when not in the field, on the bases, or at bat. Players may not swing bats in any other area.

41. A fielding glove, batting glove, approved batting helmet with facemask, and bat(s) is the only personal equipment a player can use, except the catcher. If a catcher has her own equipment, she may use it as long as it is considered "normal" catcher's equipment.

42. To speed up play, Managers are encouraged to use a courtesy runner for their catcher when:

1. The next inning's catcher is on base, and
2. There are two outs.

Courtesy runners are not permitted in any other instances except in the case of injury. The courtesy runner will be the player who made the last batted out.

43. Call Up Players – The call up program allows short-handed teams to play with a full team and exposes younger players to a higher level of play. As such, calling up a player should not be used as a mechanism to improve a team. The League Coordinators in the Instructional 8U, Minors, and Majors will identify a pool of higher-skilled players that will be available for temporary use by short handed teams. This list will be distributed to the Managers and League Coordinator of the higher Leagues. Managers may call up a player or players from a lower League to bring his/her team up to 9 players. Call up players can not play up if their regular team has a scheduled game. Call up players are subject to the same playing time provisions as regular players with the following exceptions:

1. Call up players may NOT pitch.
2. Call up players may only play two innings in the infield, including catcher.
3. Call up players must bat at the bottom of the batting order.
4. Call up players can not play more than a rostered player (a rostered player can not sit a 3rd inning if a call up has only sat 2 innings)

The Softball Commissioner reserves the right to review and appropriately address any use of the call up rules deemed inconsistent with the intent of the rule.

44. A team may only score five (5) runs in an inning (See Minors rules below for exceptions). Once the fifth run in the inning has scored, the half-inning is declared over. This rule does NOT apply in the sixth inning or extra innings. This rule applies to all Leagues.

45. After the completion of the fifth inning, if either team is ahead by 10 or more runs, the game will be declared over.

46. Players may not wear any jewelry or non-softball headwear. However, a player may tape a medical emergency tag or religious medallion to their body.

47. The home team is responsible for bringing any necessary equipment (e.g. pitching machine) to the field and preparing the field before the game (lining and dragging the field, etc.). The visiting team is responsible for returning equipment (and locking the relevant shed) and for raking the field after the game. Both teams must return any League batting helmets to the storage box after the game, and must ensure that the storage box is locked. Both teams must clear their dugout area of litter and police the field after the game.

48. Alcoholic Beverages are not permitted at MARA Premises.

49. Tobacco products are not permitted on the playing field or in the dugout.

50. All players in MARA Softball are required to play in the League for which they are age-appropriate as defined by Babe Ruth Softball. The only exception to this rule is 8 year old players who made the 8U all-star team the year before as a 7 year old or a 10 year old player who made the 10U team as a 9 year old. In both of these cases, approval is still required from the Softball Commissioner in order to play up. Any other exceptions require the approval of the Softball Commissioner.

51. The Softball Commissioner's approval, in consultation with the Board of Directors, is required for players to play below their age-appropriate League (playing down).

ADDITIONAL PLAYOFF RULES (Minors, Majors & Seniors)

1. Playoffs will be in a double-elimination format. All teams are eligible for the playoffs. The Softball Commissioner or his designate will conduct the playoff draw. The Home team will be determined by a coin flip called by the higher seed, except for the first game of the championship, where the winner's bracket team will be the Home team. If a second "championship" game needs to be played, the Away team from the first game will be the Home team.

2. During the playoffs all games must be played to completion (no ties) without regard for time limits. If the Home team is ahead by 10 or more runs after 3 1/2 innings, or if the visiting team is ahead by 10 or more runs after the 4th or later innings, and both teams have had an equal number of at bats, the game is over.

3. Time Rule for Playoffs: Once both coaches in conjunction with the umpire decide that the 1:45 time limit is too close to expiring to be able to play a full six innings, the next inning should be declared "last inning" and the unlimited run rule will go into effect. No additional innings will be played regardless of time being left after it has been declared "last inning."

4. Games may be suspended due to darkness or weather conditions. Suspended games will be

resumed at the exact point they left off, the next day if at all possible. The game is resumed exactly at the point it was suspended as if the suspension never occurred. If players from the suspended game are missing at the resumed game, they will be skipped in the lineup, no automatic out. No players who did not play in the suspended game are eligible to play in the resumed game. If the current batter is not present at the resumed game, the next player in the lineup assumes her batting count. If any base runner is not present at the resumed game, the most recent batter(s) will assume the base runner position(s). All pitching limitations remain in effect. Playoff games that are dependent on the outcome of a suspended game will be played immediately following the conclusion of the game unless otherwise decided by the Softball Commissioner.

5. If a playoff game is tied after six full innings, international tie breaker rules will be used.
6. Teams must bat their full roster or at least 9 batters, whichever is greater. If a team has two or more players than the other team, the team with fewer will take an automatic out at the end of the batting order. If a team only has eight (8) players, the game is a FORFEIT.
7. Call-up players are permitted in the playoffs only to avoid forfeits or to reach the minimum of 9 players. A team may only call up the same player once during the playoffs. Any exceptions must be approved by the Softball Commissioner or his/her designee. The playing time rules for call up players are the same as in the regular season. The Softball Commissioner reserves the right to review and appropriately address any use of the call up rules deemed inconsistent with the intent of the rule.
8. All pitching limits reset at the commencement of playoffs.
9. No player may sit more than 2 consecutive innings in the field, except in the case of injury or an extra-inning game.
10. All players must play a minimum of 3 innings in the playoffs, unless:
 - a. The game is shortened due to weather or darkness.
 - b. A player arrives late or leaves early.

MINOR LEAGUE ADDITIONAL RULES

1. An 11-inch softball shall be used
2. The infield fly rule is not in effect.
3. Bunting is allowed. However, once a batter "shows" bunt, the batter cannot take a full swing at the pitch. The batter must bunt or take the pitch. If the batter "shows" bunt and then swings, the batter will be declared out and a dead ball will be called.
4. Stealing of all bases is allowed. A runner stealing a base may not advance on an overthrow – the player stealing the base must stop at the base being stolen. A team may only steal home once per inning. No stealing of home during machine pitch. Players may leave the base after release of the ball

from the pitcher, or after the ball is dropped in the pitching machine. A runner caught leaving early after a warning in the same inning will be called out. No continuous walks or delayed steals.

5. A play will be declared over once the pitcher has control of the ball in the pitcher's circle. Runners must have achieved at least $\frac{1}{2}$ the distance to their next base when play is stopped to earn the additional base. The call is made in the umpire's judgment and is not subject to appeal. During the regular season, coaches should not take advantage of the lack of skill of players at this age and send players to the next base simply to advance a runner. A good general rule of thumb is "if the players in the field were of an advanced age and skill such that you normally would not consider sending the runner, then don't send her."

6. With the exception of the pitching position, free substitution is allowed.

7. A pitching machine set at 38 mph will be used for the first two innings (maximum of 5 runs per inning) and a pitcher will pitch the remaining innings (maximum of 3 runs per inning, except the 6th inning, if reached, will have unlimited runs). During machine pitching (where the machine will be fed by the umpire, or if unable to do so, by the coach of the hitting team) each batter will get five hittable pitches from the pitching machine to put the ball in play. If after the fifth hittable pitch from the machine, the ball has not been put in play, the batter will be declared out. The batter will also be called out when they swing and miss on the third strike. A dead ball is immediately called when a batted ball hits the machine. The batter is awarded a single and all runners advance one base.

8. If the batter swings regardless of a no-pitch call, the pitch is a strike.

9. If 5th pitch is fouled off, the batter will get additional hittable pitches until the ball is put in play or the batter strikes out. If a hittable pitch occurs after the 5th hittable pitch and the batter does not swing, they will be declared out.

10. During the player pitch segment of the game, normal softball rules regarding balls and strikes will be in effect with the exceptions set forth in section 11 and 12 below.

11. An expanded strike zone will be used at the discretion of the umpire. This especially applies during the beginning of the season. Players should be encouraged to swing at hittable pitches.

12. Runners may be forced home on a walk.

13. The pitcher re-entry rule shall apply. A pitcher may re-enter a game one time as a pitcher under the following conditions:

- She must be the starting pitcher, and
- She must be eligible to pitch.

14. Pitchers may pitch a maximum of three innings in a game and four innings in any two consecutive games. Innings pitched include games rained out or otherwise interrupted.

15. If a pitcher pitches one ball and then is removed from the mound for any reason, the pitcher will be credited for one full inning pitched towards her allotment.
16. The pitcher must use the underhand or windmill type motion, as described in the Babe Ruth Softball Rule Book.
17. One foot must be in contact with the pitching rubber to start the pitch and must remain in contact with ground (toe drag) until the ball is released.
18. The front of the pitching rubber shall be placed 35 feet from the rear of home plate.
19. Each team will field nine players. When the pitching machine is used, a fielder will be positioned at the pitcher's mound. This fielder must be positioned even with or behind the machine until the ball is put in play with at least one foot inside the pitcher's circle. Three outfielders must be positioned in the outfield grass.
20. The "dropped third strike" rule shall not apply.
21. The home team is responsible for setting up the pitching machine and the visiting team is responsible for putting it away.
22. If a base runner makes contact with a defensive player who, in the judgment of the umpire, is in the act of making a play and the base runner is not sliding, the base runner shall be called out. A dead ball shall be called. The intent of this rule is to protect the fielder and runner from a collision. Coaches should be teaching the players how to slide properly. Coaches should not look to have a player called out simply because a player does not slide and there was no real close play at the base.
23. Batter Interference: In the case of batter interference at a play at the plate, on the first occurrence the batting team will be issued an inference warning; the run will not score and the runner will be returned to Third Base and all other runners will return to their base at the start of the pitch. Subsequent batter interferences for that team will result in an out (runner trying to score is declared out if less than two outs; batter is declared out with two outs and the run does not score; all other runners are returned to their base at the start of the pitch). If the runner is put out during batter inference, the out stands and play continues with runner advance, but the team will still receive an interference warning and subsequent batter inference plays will result in an out for that team.

Additional Rookie League Rules (8U)

1. An 11-inch softball will be used, mechanical pitching machine release point 35' from the back of home plate, 8' radius pitcher's circle.
2. Games will consist of 6 innings or 80 minutes (finish the inning regardless of score) from the

scheduled game time, whichever comes first.

3. No infield fly, no dropped third strike, no steals (baserunner(s) must maintain contact with the base until the pitched ball reaches the plate/ball is struck off the tee), no walks, no hit-by-pitches. After three swinging strikes or five pitched balls (regardless of mispitches and/or foul balls), whichever comes first, the tee will be used for the batter to have three strikes to put the ball in play.

4. The half inning will turn over when the defensive team gets three outs or the offensive team scores five runs, whichever comes first. Score will be kept but no mercy rule, no unlimited last inning, and no tiebreakers during the regular season.

5. The player fielding the pitcher position may not be closer to the batter than the release point of the pitching machine and must have at least one foot inside the pitcher's circle until the ball crosses the plate. Only one fielder may begin inside the circle.

6. When the ball hits the pitching machine, bucket, or an adult in the field before a player has a chance to make a play on it, it is an immediate "dead ball" and the batter gets one base as does each baserunner (only if forced).

7. On a batted ball, each runner may advance a total of up to two bases at a time at their own risk. Halfway rule is in effect: If the pitcher secures the ball inside the circle before a base runner is at least halfway to the next base, the base runner must go back to the previous base (without risk of being put out).

8. The offensive coach running the pitching machine may only coach their batter- they may not give directions to the batter-runner or any baserunners. This teaches the players to get used to listening to their 1B and 3B coaches.

9. Up to two defensive field coaches will be allowed behind the infielders while their team is on defense to maintain proper positioning of players, encourage players to stay engaged, and to ensure their players know what to do if the ball comes to them and what to do if the ball doesn't come to them. Field coaches should be positioned in a way as to not obstruct or interfere with play or players' view.

10. Bunting is allowed (except off the tee); no fake bunts where the player pulls back and swings, which will result in an automatic out.

11. Effort should be made to minimize downtime between pitches, batters, and innings. To keep the game moving, the catcher will only throw the ball back to the pitcher if she catches it. The pitching machine coach should keep a bucket of balls at the mound and reload the pitching machine expeditiously. A second bucket should be kept by the backstop to collect the passed balls.

12. No children or siblings other than the rostered players will be allowed in the dugout.

13. Batting lineup will include the full roster of players present at the start of the game. Any player

arriving late will be added at the bottom of the lineup. Any batter ill or who needs to leave early will be skipped without penalty.

14. Defensive Lineup: Free substitutions; regulation is 9 defensive fielders but may have a maximum of 10 in the field. No more than 5, excluding the catcher, can be positioned inside the infield baselines and no player may start farther up than the arc of the pitching machine at the time of release. Every player should play at least two innings in the infield and no player may sit out more than once before everyone on the team has sat out in a game. All infield players must wear a softball fielding mask (catcher must wear catcher's mask).