

MFA Travel Policy

AGE DIVISIONS

Teams are formed according to age guidelines set by the American Softball Association (ASA):

- 8 and under
- 10 and under
- 12 and under
- 14 and under
- 16 and under
- 18 and under

PROGRAM GOALS

The following are the program goals for MFA travel:

- Provide a high-quality experience for players and coaches at all levels.
- Strive to create a positive self-esteem for every player.
- Strive to create an environment that is both fun and developmental for the players, families, coaches and community.
- Provide a program that works with and is admired by other fastpitch programs.
- Seek to maximize the potential of every player in the program.
- Develop players and teams that are able to compete at a national level.
- Seek to foster player participation for the full length of a player's youth sports career.
- Foster the importance of teamwork and success as part of a team.
- Increase the number of girls participating in competitive sports.

ELIGIBILITY*

Players are eligible to participate subject to the following criteria:

- Resident of boundaries of the Mandan Public School District, regardless of school attended, or are currently attending school within the Mandan Public School District, or are a resident of the city of Mandan.
- Non-residents may be allowed to play in the travel program if the board determines that:
 - 1) additional players are needed at an age group, or
 - 2) to provide a team with needed pitching and catching, or
 - 3) to grandfather players who have played with MFA in previous year(s).
 - 4) Waiver is required to play with MFA if the player attends a school outside of the Mandan Public School District
- Must have paid all applicable fees- past and present.
- Must have filled out all required forms, including any signed waivers and commitment forms required.
- Must meet age guidelines. This is determined by ASA rules. Current rules are based on the age as of December 31st of the current calendar year (summer season).

*See also the Team Selection criteria.

PLAYING UP

All players requesting to "play up" must still register and try out at their current age level (the youngest age group they qualify for). To be considered for "playing up" to a higher age level, all of the following must apply:

- Player must be in the final year of their age group to be considered.
- There must be roster vacancies on the team for which the player would be playing up to join.

- The MFA travel director must be notified of the request to play up prior to try-outs.
- If the player's position is anything other than a pitcher, the player must try out for both age levels and meet all three of the following requirements:
 1. Must finish ranked in the top 5 in evaluation points/ranking of the higher age level tryout final totals.
 2. Must finish in the top 4 in evaluation points/ranking of their normal age level tryout final totals.
 3. If trying out for a catcher position, player must finish ranked in the top 2 catchers at higher age level.
- If the player's position is pitcher, the player must meet the requirements in #1 above, tryout for both age levels and meet the following two requirements:
 1. Player must finish ranked in the top two pitchers at the higher age level.
 2. Player must agree that if selected, she may, depending on ability (at the coaches' discretion) have limited playing time at the other defensive positions.
- Exceptions to the above can be made on a case by case basis by the Board and the Team Selection Committee. Requests must be approved by majority vote of the MFA board members.

REGISTRATION

Registration for summer travel softball opens in January and is done online through the MFA website. A registration deadline will be posted and it may be different each year. Late registration is not typically allowed, however, if numbers permit, players may be allowed to register after the deadline with Board approval.

FEES AND EXPENSES

Travel softball registration fees cover the following expenses:

- General administration fees
- Team insurance
- Equipment expenses
- Playing fees (umpire fees, tournament fees, chalk, game balls, field maintenance, Parks and Recreation field use fee)
- League fee

Additional expenses may include:

- Team uniform
- Glove, cleats, sliding or compression shorts
- Extra tournament expenses
- Travel expenses to and from games
- Overnight expenses for out of town tournaments

REFUNDS

Full, partial or pro-rated refunds will be given under certain conditions. The amount of refund granted will be at the discretion of the MFA board. A full refund will be granted to a player who does not make a travel team. Once teams are determined, and practices have begun, no refunds will be made. Refund requests must be submitted to the MFA Treasurer listed on the website.

SEASON

The summer travel season is for players who desire a more competitive softball experience. Teams play in a number of weekend tournaments that may require travel (see Tournament section). Practices start in March with tournaments running from the start of June through the end of July. Additional

games with area teams may be scheduled throughout the summer season. Players on the 8U, 10U and 12U levels are required to participate in recreational league (see Recreational League Policy).

PLAYING TIME

In the travel program, there is no requirement for participants to receive equal playing time. Over the course of the season, coaches will work to ensure that each player gets an ample amount of playing time, but not necessarily at the player's or parent's desired position. As the season progresses, players will be positioned so that the team is competitive.

At the younger the age groups, more individual player development and playing time is stressed. The older the age group and higher level of play, the more team development and placing the most competitive team on the field is stressed. Playing time is at the discretion of the head coach with consideration to developing depth of talent at every position.

Other things that could impact playing time include, but is not limited to:

- Unexcused absences at practices, games, tournaments and team meetings.
- Effort of the player in practices and game situations.
- Commitment of the player to improve her skills.
- Skill level of the players on the team.
- Disciplinary action being taken.
- The player has been suspended.
- The player is injured or sick.
- Shortened games due to time limit or inclement weather.

PLAYER DEVELOPMENT

Player development shall be encouraged at every age group. Players should be given opportunities to play at positions where they will be successful and will build self-confidence. As a result, every player needs to receive numerous opportunities during games to learn to perform in all game situations. However, not all players have the attributes or training required to play certain positions (for example, pitcher or catcher). Travel coaches will continue to develop the skills of every player on the team. The younger the age group, the more that playing time should be arranged to enhance the development of skills for every player at more than one position. Team development shall consist of positive reinforcement, teaching teamwork and the concepts of working together towards a common goal.

SCHOLARSHIPS

Each year MFA designates funds in hopes that every girl who wants to play softball will be able to play regardless of her family's financial situation. Applicants for a partial or full scholarship may contact the registration coordinator listed on the MFA website for further information. Each application will be reviewed by the Scholarship Committee.

FUNDRAISING

Fees charged for each season's program are expected to cover normal expenses of the program so that proceeds raised from fundraising may go into the general fund to be put to use at the discretion of the Board. However, MFA also relies on private fundraising to meet its financial objectives. In order to be strategic and ensure that fundraising efforts are executed in a manner consistent with MFA's vision, the MFA Board has established these guidelines:

- ORGANIZATION FUNDRAISING

The MFA Board of Directors and the Fundraising Coordinator will develop one or two fundraising events during the year. These events will be developed with all MFA players and families in mind. All funds raised will support the greatest needs of the organization. Projects targeted for funding in this category of fundraising dollars include field development and improvements, travel and league equipment purchases, coaches training, scholarship and booster funds, player development and specialized clinics.

- **INDIVIDUAL TEAM FUNDRAISING**

During the season and when teams are fully formed, individual teams may pursue fundraising activities for their team in an effort to support team equipment, tournaments or travel. To avoid duplication, and to ensure fundraising strategies are consistent with the MFA vision, teams are required to inform the Board in writing prior to committing to the activity and a disclosure form completed for filing with the Board. Funds raised through individual team fundraising will be available only to that team and as such shall not be presented to donors as supporting MFA.

- **SCHOLARSHIP AWARD FUNDRAISING**

MFA awards a scholarship annually to a Mandan High School junior or senior. Funds will be solicited each year for the scholarship. In addition to a presence on the website, parents will be asked to donate in support of this scholarship at the Parent Meeting.

- **BOOSTER FUNDRAISING**

MFA aims to support fastpitch softball throughout the community and will set aside a portion of its fundraising, when financially feasible, to support Mandan High School Fastpitch. Funds marked for Booster activity will be accounted for separately but at no time will the Booster fund exceed \$8,000 at the end of the fiscal year. Excess funds may be transferred to the MFA general fund for support of other program efforts.

PRACTICES

Travel team practice begins in March with a goal of practicing and developing skills and reinforcing fundamentals before the first tournament. Pitchers and catchers will be expected to put in more time. After the summer season begins, a typical week will consist of two practices with at least one weeknight taken off, and a weekend tournament. This will be consistent for the 10U and 12U travel teams.

For teams in the 14U and up levels with a significant number of players on high school teams will have fewer practices prior to the first tournament as they are not able to participate until their school season has been completed.

TOURNAMENT FUNDING

The fees collected by MFA will include a State Tournament and any related State Qualifier. MFA will cover the entry fee for three tournaments in addition to any State Qualifier and State Tournament. MFA's policy is to support every level travel team's participation in the following:

- Bismarck Blast Tournament
- Minot Storm Tournament
- Mt. Rushmore Classic Tournament
- ND State JO Fastpitch Tournament

If teams elect to participate in tournaments in addition to those listed above, the Head Coach may request of the Board to provide for the entry fee. The Board, in its sole discretion, shall determine if the financial support will be provided.

Travel costs other than the entry fee for tournaments (i.e., lodging, meals, gate fees, etc.) are the responsibility of the player. Any team that qualifies for a National Championship Tournament and elects to participate will incur additional expenses, including travel for up to a week depending on location. Teams may do their own fundraising to offset the costs of participating in National Championship Tournament. The board, in its sole discretion, may elect to assist with National fees from general fundraising efforts.

NATIONAL TOURNAMENT FEES

If an MFA supported team wins the ND State JO Fastpitch Tournament - Division A, or another National qualifying tournament and qualifies for a National Championship Tournament event, MFA will pay the entry fee for the team to attend and be reimbursed by the ND ASA State Office, if applicable. The MFA's vision is to enhance and elevate the competitive level of players playing within the program and will aim to support any MFA teams that qualify to compete on the National level.

Individual teams will be required to cover their travel fees, gate fees, pins, and/or gifts associated with attending the National Tournament event.

TEAM DETERMINATION

As numbers permit, there shall be one or more teams at each age group. The board will determine the make-up of the teams depending on the talent level involved.

8U – These teams will be equally balanced. Teams will be formed based on identifying quality coaches and equally dividing the remaining girls among the number of teams that are formed. The 8U program is developmental and will consist mostly of interleague play with modified rules. The MFA Board must approve a request for an 8U team to travel for an 8U tournament.

10U – the decision on level of play “A” or “B” will be evaluated each year by the Travel Director and Team Selection Committee, with input of the head coach. The decision on class of play is influenced by the number of players, general talent and/or pitchers and catchers available.

12U and up – The MFA Board's vision is to recruit and maintain enough players in the program to maintain an “A” level and “B” level team in each age group. When this is not possible, additional care must be exercised to ensure the team plays at a level to which it is competitive.

TEAM SELECTION

Teams are selected based on the following:

- Selection from eligible players based on try-outs (see try-out criteria)
- Players desiring to “play up” if the guidelines are met
- Players from outside the eligibility area if needed to field a team (see eligibility)
- Coaches available

The Team Selection Committee will review the tryout scores and all other information available and select the teams. The Team Selection Committee will consist of the Travel Director and two other board members chosen at the discretion of the Travel Director. Additional members will be added to the committee if two or more of the committee members daughters are trying out at the same age level.

TRAVEL SOFTBALL TRYOUTS

General

This policy establishes guidelines for conducting tryouts within MFA travel softball. Tryouts may be

needed to select members of a single team at an age group or to select an “A” team and/or “B” team when multiple teams are offered at an age group or in the case of 8U to evaluate players to aid in the distribution of talent among teams.

Travel tryouts for the 10U and 12U levels should be scheduled by March 15th each year and may be held indoors if weather prohibits an outdoor tryout. Tryouts for the 14U and up age groups should be held before April 30th due to a number of these aged participants playing in high school programs.

Eligibility

Players are eligible to participate in MFA travel softball team tryouts provided they meet the eligibility guidelines of the program. (See eligibility)

Participation

Tryout sessions will be scheduled based on facility and evaluator availability. Players must participate in all scheduled tryout sessions unless an excused absence is granted by the Board. An excused absence from any of the scheduled sessions must be granted prior to the start of that session. Excused absences will include illness or injury, school functions, family vacations and games for in-season sports.

Attendance will be taken at the beginning of the tryout session. Players who are absent from all tryouts without being excused will not be eligible for “A” (Top) teams.

Makeup Tryouts

Players who miss the scheduled tryout session due to an excused absence, may be granted an alternate tryout session (if available) or will be placed on a team based on other available information from prior play and at the discretion of the Board and/or Tryout and Competition Committee.

Player Evaluation

Players will be evaluated on the skills of catching, fielding, throwing, hitting and bunting. A separate evaluation will be used for players interested in pitching and catching. Specific tryout criteria are developed and then posted on the MFA website a minimum of two weeks prior to tryouts.

Tryout and Team Selection Committees

The tryout will be conducted by members of an independent third party who are known by MFA to possess the knowledge necessary to evaluate a player's skills. Only members from this group will be allowed to record evaluation scores. MFA members may be asked by the Travel Director to help facilitate the tryout. Facilitation may include hitting and catching balls during evaluation drills and acting as catcher as needed by the evaluators. No MFA member is allowed to help facilitate the tryout at the age in which their daughter is being evaluated. Only girls participating in the tryout, the evaluators, and those asked to help facilitate the tryout are allowed to be present during the tryout.

Opening Travel Tryout

If, after MFA travel registration has closed, the number of players registered for a specific age level does not represent the number of players required to fill a complete roster(s) for a team, MFA will open tryouts to allow players from other nearby cities/communities who may not have access to playing travel. The open tryout is intended to maximize the number of eligible and qualified MFA players who wish to play travel softball by facilitating our ability to field a complete team(s).

If players from other nearby cities/communities participate in MFA's travel softball tryouts, preference will be given to all MFA players such that all players meeting base level criteria for inclusion to play travel softball at the relevant age level will be selected for placement on a team before consideration for

non-MFA players will be given. Players from other nearby cities/communities who meet the base level criteria for inclusion to play travel softball and will be allowed to play with MFA based on the need to fill a complete roster will be placed on the appropriate team by the MFA Team Selection committee based on their MFA tryout performance results.

Travel Softball Team Rosters

MFA softball team rosters will be set based on the discretion of the Team Selection Committee and will range between 11-13 players. As potential absences for any number of reasons will occur through the course of the season, having 11 players will allow teams to tolerate some level of absence and still field a competitive team. Additionally, having more than 13 players per team will materially diminish the association's ability to properly support each player's development based on the limited amount of playing time available in games relative to the number of fielding positions.

Tryout Philosophy

The team selection process attempts to determine overall softball skill and ability by evaluating players based on their current skills demonstrated in an impartial tryout process and, when applicable, previous coach's player evaluation. The Team Selection Committee will have the final decision on team placement.

MFA will hold a separate Pitching and Catching Try-out. All pitchers and catchers must still go through the general evaluation.

With regard to the "A" team:

- All but the final three evaluation scores are locked on the team. On a team of 12, the top 9 scores are locked. On a team of 11, the top 8 scores are locked.
- The top two pitchers and catchers are assigned to "A" team.
- A player who tries out for pitching or catching can also try out as a position player. If a player does not make the "A" team as a pitcher or catcher, but does qualify as a position player, the player may elect where they would like to play. If they choose to play on the "A" team they will likely see significantly less pitching or catching time.
- The final three players will be placed based on tryout scores, prior year's coach's player evaluation and discussions with the head coach of that team, where appropriate, at the discretion of the Travel Director.

With regard to the "B" team if there is a "C" team:

- All but the final three evaluation scores are locked on the team. On a team of 12, the top 9 scores are locked. On a team of 11, the top 8 scores are locked.
- The 3rd and 4th highest scoring pitchers and catchers are assigned to "B" team.
- A player who tries out for pitching or catching can also try out as a position player. If a player does not make the "B" team as a pitcher or catcher, but does qualify as a position player, the player may elect where they would like to play. If they choose to play on the "B" team they will likely see significantly less pitching or catching time.
- The final three players will be placed based on tryout scores, prior year's coach's player evaluation and discussions with the head coach of that team, where appropriate, at the discretion of the Travel Director.

At tryout check-in, each player interested in pitching or catching for the upcoming season will be required to complete a form indicating their placement preference. Each pitcher or catcher will need to choose one of the following, sign the form, have their parents sign the form and turn it in prior to the start of tryouts.

The two choices are:

1. If I do not rank in the top two pitchers or catchers (based upon pitching or catching evaluation score), but I otherwise qualify for the upper team, I would prefer to be placed on the upper team, even though I may receive little to no pitching or catching.
2. If I do not rank in the top two pitchers or catchers (based upon pitching or catching evaluation score), but I otherwise qualify for the upper team, I would prefer to be placed on the lower team and receive more pitching or catching time.

COACH SELECTION PROCESS

Application

There is a place on the website registration form to indicate a willingness to serve as a coach for the upcoming season. Anyone who has not coached previously through MFA and is interested in coaching a travel team is encouraged to contact the Travel Director to share their background to ensure full consideration. In addition, potential coaches will have to complete the Coach Application Form which is located on the MFA website.

Each candidate will be evaluated by the Travel Director and MFA Board and decisions will be made based on commitment to coaching, experience and knowledge of the game as well as coaching philosophy.

Candidates will be required to submit to a background check, attain and maintain an ASA ACE Coaching certification and may be asked to complete additional coaching certification and/or clinics. The Travel director and coaches' selection committee will have the responsibility of selecting coaches giving preference to past experience coaching with MFA, knowledge of the game, coaches' survey results, coaching philosophy and style and active participation in coaching clinics.

Travel Team Coaching Stipends

Each year the MFA Board will review and determine the amount to pay non-parent coaches to coach traveling softball teams, if applicable. Coaches who are coaching MFA travel teams are required to follow all MFA policies.

Parents serving in the role as a head or assistant coach will not be paid. Parent coaches will be provided a coaching polo shirt and hat as the standard apparel for coaches to wear for games. Coaches may choose to receive a performance t-shirt or jacket if they already have the coaching polo shirt from previous seasons.

A maximum of four coaches will be the standard number of coaches assigned per team. These coaches will be offered the coaching apparel along with credit for their yearly season volunteer hours. Coaches are expected to commit to attending most, if not all, practices, games, and tournaments.