Merrimack Valley Senior Softball

Association (MVSSA) Rules – 2025

1. **Umpires and starting the game:**
	1. USA softball umpires will be supplied at $65 per game. The fee is handled by the league. Umpires will be paid by check by the league treasurer; teams are not responsible for paying the umpire at the field. One umpire per game in the regular season, 2 umpires in the finals, unless otherwise decided by the league officers.
	2. Prior to the game, the decision to begin the game due to field conditions is up to the 2 coaches, or the Haverhill Recreation Department, if available. If the 2 coaches disagree on the field conditions and/or the decision to start the game, the umpire will make the decision. Once the game begins, the decision to continue is at the discretion of the umpire (rain, lightning, etc). Obvious pre-game decisions to cancel games due to rain will be made by the Haverhill Rec Dept, or a designated league representative, and communicated to the coaches. If time allows, a message will be posted on the league website announcing the cancellation, and/or a group email to the players.
	3. Umpires must be paid half-fee by the league if the game is called off immediately prior to game time, and a full fee after the 1st pitch of the game. If an umpire is scheduled for 2 games, the umpire is still only paid a half-fee for one game.
	4. Coaches should review league rules and ground rules with the umpires prior to the start of the 1st game of the doubleheader.
	5. Note: all games are scheduled for 7 innings, and are played with the batter beginning with a 0-0 count.
	6. Teams must be able to field a minimum of 8 players within a 15-minute grace period.
		* Forfeits: if a team cannot field a team of at least 8 players within the 15-minute grace period, the game will be declared a forfeit. Teams are encouraged to seek replacement players if there is a chance they may not field at least 8 players. See rule 1i. The umpire is paid $65 by the league for a forfeit.
	7. Teams may play with 11 defensive players, including a mid-fielder, positioned anywhere on the field. Teams may not position more than 3 infielders on either side of 2nd base.
	8. If a team starts with 8 players, the other team should supply a catcher, and handle all plays at home plate. If a 9th player arrives, that team must supply their own catcher.
	9. Replacement players: teams must start with at least 8 players, but can finish with 9 or more. Managers are expected to add players from the substitute list supplied by the MVSSA, or players from the team on the bye week, to make a lineup of 11 players. Players from the sub list or another team may bat anywhere in the order (new for 2025), and may play any position (new for 2025). Once the game starts, teams can only add players from their own team. See rule 1k below.
	10. If a team only has 8 players to begin the game, the 9th position in the lineup is an out.
	11. Players arriving after the start of the game must be inserted at the bottom of the lineup. If the team that has players arriving late has not batted, the players do not have to be inserted at the bottom of the lineup.
	12. If a team loses a player to injury, or if a player leaves during the game for personal reasons, and a substitution is not available, then that position in the lineup is NOT an out. Exception: if a team drops to 7 players during a game for any reason, including injury, the game is then forfeited.
2. **Fields/Days:** Games are all played on Sundays at Riverside Park at Haverhill Stadium, Fields 1, 2, and the Puglielli Field (The Pug). Games that are rained out may or may not be re-scheduled, at the discretion of the coaches, and approved by the Haverhill Rec Dept.
3. **Start times:**
	1. **Start Times**: every Sunday, doubleheaders beginning at 9:00 AM. See the schedule on the league website - [**www.leaguelineup.com/mvssa**](http://www.leaguelineup.com/mvssa)
		1. A break of 10 minutes between games is allowed.
	2. **Home Team**: the home team will be listed 2nd on the schedule.
4. **Run rule**:
	1. Each team is limited to scoring 5 runs per inning until the final inning or extra innings, when the run limit is unlimited (open inning). This rule applies even if a HR that clears the fence would have given a team more than 5 runs.
	2. A team that is trailing in the 6th inning (only) by more than 5 runs may score as many runs as it takes to tie the game.
	3. **Flip-flop rule**: when the home team trails by 10 or more runs entering the open inning, the home team bats first in the open inning. If the home team still trails after 3 outs, the game is over. If the game is tied or the home team takes the lead, the visiting team gets its at-bat.
5. **Home Runs**:
	1. A player who hits a HR over the fence may just walk off the field. He does not have to run to 1st base, or run all the way around the bases.
	2. If there are runners on base when a batter hits a HR, they may just walk off and do not have to advance to the next base, or continue to home plate. No outs can be made through appeal on a HR that clears the fence.
	3. There will be a 5 HR per game limit per team. Only balls that clear the fence for a HR are counted towards the limit. Any HR over the limit will result in an out.
		1. The HR limit is not extended in extra innings.
6. **Rosters, Age Requirement:**
	1. Players must be at least 48 years old by 12/31/25 to play in the league.
	2. Players added to the roster during the season must also meet the age requirement.
7. **Playoff Eligibility:**
	1. Each player needs to play 1/3 of the scheduled games to qualify for the playoffs. Ex: 24 game schedule – players must play 8 games or more during the regular season.
	2. Players can only play for their own team in the playoffs.
	3. Injuries or roster issues that prevent a player from qualifying will be handled on a case-by-case basis, as determined by the league board (7 coaches in 2025).
8. **Softballs:** the league supplies the balls, and no substitution balls are allowed. The ball for 2025 will be the Worth Hot Dot, ASA approved, 52 cor 300 lbs., or a similar ball as designated and approved by the league.
9. **Bats:**
	1. Players that will be 60 or older in 2025 may use “senior” bats with the SSUSA stamp on them. A player less than 60 years of age prior to the end of the calendar year that uses a senior bat may be subject to be put out if an appeal is made prior to the first pitch of the next batter. If the appeal is upheld, the batter will be declared out and all runners will be returned to the base they held prior to the at-bat.
	2. Team coaches and those that use senior bats should monitor this rule to avoid those not eligible from using the senior bats.
	3. **If a player is caught with an altered bat, he will be suspended for 1 calendar year.** By definition, an approved bat shall be considered altered if it has been rolled, repainted, weighted, or modified to change the characteristics from that produced by the manufacturer.
10. **Shoes**: Metal spikes are not allowed. Any player wearing metal spikes will be asked to remove them by the umpire. Subsequent use of metal spikes after the initial warning shall result in ejection from the game.
11. **Jerseys:** To display the league as a structured organization, players are expected to wear the league-issued shirts during the regular season and playoffs. No player shall be excluded from participating simply because he does not have his jersey, however. Coaches should have extra shirts available.
12. **Bases**: shall be placed 65 feet apart. For measurement purposes, the distance is measured from the back of home plate. The distance to 2nd base is 92 feet.
	1. For safety reasons, the orange base may be placed approx. 18-24 inches to the right of the white base to minimize collisions whenever possible.
	2. The runner must touch the outside portion (orange or red in color) of the base if a play is being made at 1B. The fielder must touch the white portion of the base to allow room for the runner to touch the orange/red part of the base. A batter-runner may touch the white base if he does so to avoid a collision with the first baseman who is fielding a throw which takes him into the path of the batter-runner. If the batter-runner is advancing to 2nd base and no play is made at 1st, he can touch either the white base or the orange/red base.
13. **Keeping Score**: Each team is responsible for keeping their own score, and teams should agree on the score at the end of each half inning to avoid any controversy. Posting of the score on the scoreboard is recommended. The umpire will help update the scoreboard.
14. **Courtesy Runners:** Any player in the lineup may be used as a courtesy runner. A courtesy runner may be used for a baserunner at any base, but that player can act as a courtesy runner only once per inning. The courtesy runner must be inserted prior to the 1st pitch of the next batter. Should a courtesy runner be on base when his turn at bat arrives, he will be declared out on the base, and take his turn at bat.
15. **Extra Innings/Tie-Breakers:**
	1. Extra innings will start with a runner on second base and no out.
	2. The last batter in the previous inning will be the runner to start the inning, unless he is a player that normally gets a courtesy runner. In that case, the next available player would be the runner.
	3. **Note:** Teams cannot use the courtesy runner (see rule 14) until the player that started at 2nd base has advanced one base. No exceptions.
16. **Ejections:**
	1. If you have 10 or more players and one is ejected, you can play with 9 players.
	2. The position in the batting order that was occupied by the ejected player will be an out.
	3. If you play with 8 players and one is ejected, the game will end in a forfeit. You cannot play with 7 players or less for any reason (see rule 1l). All ejections are subject to possible suspension from play for future games. Umpires are required to report all ejections to the umpire in chief (UIC), and a decision on suspensions should be rendered prior to the player’s next game. If a player is ejected in the first game of a doubleheader, he may have to sit out the 2nd game, with the discretion of the umpire and both teams.
	4. If a team only has 9 players, and one is ejected, the team can play with 8 and borrow a catcher (see rule 1g).
17. **Pitching rules:**
	1. Pitchers must start on the rubber, or a designated mark if no rubber is present at the field, and maintain at least one foot on the rubber when delivering the ball. Pitching distance is 50’. The teams will be responsible for marking the distance prior to the start of the 1st game, if needed. The umpire shall declare an illegal pitch when a ball is delivered from a distance other than 50 feet.
	2. **Strike plate:** There will be a mat or piece of wood at home plate for the strike zone. The rectangular mat will be 19” wide and 34 ½” in length. The strike plate is placed over home plate and aligned with the front edge of the plate. Defense: a defensive player making a play at home plate will be allowed to complete the play by touching any portion of the strike plate. If, during the play, the strike plate is dislodged, the defensive player shall touch home plate rather than the strike plate. A legally pitched ball landing on the strike plate is a strike. The minimum height for a legal pitch in ASA is 6 feet, and the maximum height is 12 feet. Any pitched ball less than 6 feet or higher than 12 feet, in the umpire’s judgment, should be declared an illegal pitch by the umpire while the ball is in flight. An illegal pitch not swung at is a ball, but if an illegal pitch is swung at – the result of the play stands. Note: an illegal pitch that lands on the plate is still an illegal pitch, which is a ball.
	3. **Face Mask:** For safety reasons, all pitchers must wear a face mask. Pitchers may wear additional safety equipment, but only a face mask is required. No exceptions.
18. **Intentional Walks**: are only allowed in the last inning of the game and extra innings. Pitching to the batter is not required for an intentional walk. Coaches should enforce this rule and make the umpire aware if necessary. In the spirit of good sportsmanship, and prior to the 7th inning, all hitters should be given the opportunity to swing on every at-bat. If a pitcher is making no attempt to throw a hittable pitch to a batter, that batter has the option to stay at bat until a hittable pitch is made, or take the walk. If he remains at bat, and takes a strike or hits a foul ball, the count will revert to 3 balls and 1 strike. If a ball is then thrown, the batter must take a walk.

### **Suspended games** - (regular or playoff) are picked up at point of interruption. Ex: darkness, power failure, or any other unusual or rare occurrence.

### **Rain Outs** - will be played over again if the schedule allows, unless it’s a regulation game that is 4 ½ innings or 5 complete.

### **League Website: www.leaguelineup.com/mvssa** Standings, schedules, and rosters, along with other league news, can be found there.

1. **Player fee (2025)** – will be $150 per player, payable prior to week #1, by check to MVSSA, or cash, or by arrangement with the league treasurer. The fee will cover the following: field rentals with the city of Haverhill, umpires, softballs, shirts/hats, USA Softball registration, MVSSA website, umpire assigner fee, prize fund, miscellaneous expenses.
2. **League schedule** – there will be 7 teams in the MVSSA in 2025. Each team will be scheduled 2 doubleheaders versus their opponents for a total of 24 regular season games, weather permitting. One team will have a bye each week, and each team will have 2 bye weeks this season.

**Senior Rules:**

* 1. **Avoid collisions**:
		+ The offensive player must avoid contact at all times. Any contact by the offensive player will result in the player being called out. It is the offensive player’s responsibility to avoid contact regardless of where the defensive player is positioned.
		+ The defensive player cannot go wide of the bag to generate contact. The runner has the right to run directly to the bag, but if he creates contact with a fielder who is positioned at the bag, he is out. It is his responsibility to avoid the contact, and is encouraged to run wide of the bag if it will avoid a collision.
		+ Runners may not intentionally cause contact with a defensive player to break up a play or to jar the ball loose. If the runner fails to veer out of the way, or slide, the runner will be declared out. Runners cannot disrupt a potential double play by physical contact or running in the path of the second throw. If this interference, in the umpire's judgment, is an obvious attempt to prevent a double play, the runner closest to home plate shall be called out.
		+ A runner who intentionally gives him/herself up going into 2nd or 3rd base on an obvious force play may be awarded the base when the defensive player drops the throw to that base. The award will only be given if the runner is close to the base, not, for example, 20-30 feet from the base.
	2. **Return line between 3rd and home** – a “commit” line shall be drawn or painted on the dirt 30 feet from home plate. If a runner going towards home plate touches or crosses that line, he must continue to home plate. If he touches or crosses the line, then comes back towards 3rd base, he shall be declared out by the umpire. Note: this rule also applies in a rundown between 3rd and home.
	3. **Alternate home plate** – a 2nd home plate shall be placed approx. 8-10 feet from home plate in foul territory, 1st base line extended. Runners attempting to score must step on the alternate plate to avoid collisions. A run will score if the runner steps on the alternate plate before a defensive player catches a ball with any part of his body on the standard home plate. A runner who touches the fixed home plate in error shall be called out immediately, the ball is still live, and the runner is not given the chance to touch the alternate plate. Note: the catcher can only record an out at home if he touches the fixed plate (to avoid collisions). There are no tag plays at home plate.
	4. **Runner for an injured batter** – only in extreme circumstances should a batter be allowed to designate a player to run in his place. The designated runner should be the last batter in the previous inning, if available, and he should stand in a ready position in foul territory, 8 feet past the batter’s box, and should only run once the ball is put into play. Prior to the first pitch, it should be announced that there is a runner from home.
		+ Note: a player that runs for an injured batter may only advance to 1B on a hit, but may advance to 2nd base on an errant throw that goes out of play. All other baserunners may advance as usual. A runner from home who continues to 2nd base to deceive the defensive team may be called out by the umpire.
		+ If the injured batter hits a HR over the fence, the runner is not restricted to reaching 1st base. The runner will score as a result of the HR.
		+ Teams may not use the courtesy runner for an injured batter. The courtesy runner rule is intended for runners on base only.
* **Playoff FORMAT: to be determined by the coaches, depending on field availability, etc. All teams make the playoffs. Every attempt will be made to use a best-of-3 series prior to the finals, and best-of-5 in the finals, if the calendar allows.**

 ***Additional Rules***

* **Sidewalk rule:** Any foul ball on either Field 1 or Field 2 that lands on, or goes beyond, the sidewalk on the 1st or 3rd base side, from the end of the fence of the bench area, straight back to the sidewalk, will be an automatic out. Defensive players may field a foul ball up to the sidewalk. This rule is in place per the Haverhill Rec Dept. to protect the walkers in the park. No exceptions.
	+ **Note:** it does not matter HOW the ball gets to the sidewalk to be an out. Example 1: If the ball hits a number of branches on a tree hanging over the field or the bench area, and lands on or beyond the sidewalk, and also past the end of the fence of the bench area as described above, the batter is out. Example 2: same scenario, but the ball lands before the end of the fence of the bench area, it is a foul ball. If there were 2 strikes at the time of the pitch, the batter is out.
* **Keeping Score**: All teams should attempt to legibly write the first and last name of all players in their team scorebook in pen. Please, no pencil! All teams should use one scorebook for all their team’s games. No separate pieces of paper will be accepted. If a team doesn’t have the game in question in their book that proves a player’s eligibility for the playoffs that player will not get credit for those games, and will not count.
* No alcohol will be allowed at any field, or in the bench area during games. This is not a beer league!
* We have a ***ZERO Tolerance*** policy regarding excessive arguing with an umpire, or the use of profanity towards an umpire. The umpire will be within his right to eject a player from the game. That ejected player must leave the playing area before the game can resume and will receive a one game suspension or more if the offense warrants it.
	+ If a player assaults an umpire or another player, that player will be suspended for a minimum of one calendar year. ***Absolutely ZERO Tolerance***
	+ Only coaches can question calls made by umpires. Any questioning of a call will be done in a civil manner. No yelling at, pointing, threatening or any other physical or verbal abuse with an official will be tolerated. Players will be immediately ejected, suspended for a minimum of 1 game, and up to the remainder of the season, or from the league if the severity calls for it. Throwing a bat in an aggressive manner may also be cause for immediate ejection.
	+ If you are ejected from a game you MUST leave the premises, and failing to do so will result in a forfeit to your team. If you are ejected in game 1 of a doubleheader, you may return for game 2 unless the offense that resulted in the ejection is deemed egregious by the umpire.
	+ Trash talking, racial or religious remarks will not be tolerated. Players may be ejected immediately. The league reserves the right to suspend any player or team for unsportsmanlike conduct, and all monies for suspended players may be forfeited.
* **Protests**:
* All protested games must have the scorebook signed and dated by the umpire. The only exception is player eligibility protests. The team making the protest has until the conclusion of the next working day to present said protest to the league officers. If that team fails to present the protest within that time frame, the protest will automatically be dropped.
* Unless stated otherwise, USA softball rules apply.