



RULES OF PLAY

The rules to follow have been crafted over a long period of time, with input from many different league members. The most recent efforts made since the last off season were focused on bringing even more clarity to those rules and focusing on areas of concern from our membership. While we know that no set of rules can account for every conceivable scenario that may come about, it is designed as our leagues guide in presenting ourselves as the best possible stewards for the game in our community.

Changes for 2024 are in red.

INDEX

Section

- A. Code of Conduct
- B. Forfeiture
- C. Scoring Line
- D. Hitting and Base Running
- E. Double Bag & Second Base Plays
- F. Bunting, Stealing & Sliding
- G. Outs
- H. Pitching
- I. Limit on Runs per Inning
- J. Commitment Line and Outfield Limitation Line
- K. Courtesy Runners
- L. Equipment
- M. Game Starting Time and Format
- N. The Lineup

O. Rule Changes

P. Parity

Q. Postponements

R. Selection of Teams

S. Umpires

T. #1 Players

U. Playoff Seedings

V. Discipline Policy

SECTION A – CODE OF CONDUCT

All members of VSS League shall conduct themselves on the field of play in a manner that brings honor and good will to the organization.

Keeping in mind that the VSS League has expanded in recent years to be a family oriented group, members must refrain from the use of profane language, gestures, and expressions that would cause any uneasiness or embarrassment to spectators or players. A VSS League member should enjoy the game for its exercise and camaraderie by displaying good sportsmanship. All VSS League members should conduct themselves as gentlemen and ladies playing by the rules and regulations, of Senior Softball (seniorsoftball.com) and this organization.

The organization has the right to disassociate itself from any member for fraud, theft, or gross moral turpitude. If the Board of Directors feels that the member is or has had an adverse effect and improper influence upon the organization, it may vote to have the membership terminated.

During a game, a member violating this code of conduct, violating the rules of the game, or deliberately trying to cause injury to a fellow member, umpire or spectator of the game shall be promptly ejected from the game by the officiating umpire or at the direction of the Commissioner.

There is no way to possibly anticipate every instance or contingency that may occur during the course of our season, however, we have the template here that will aid in the leagues development. If a rule does not reference specific recourse for an action, the league and effected players may follow the disciplinary process outlined in section T below. An incident report may be filed for Board of Director and Disciplinary Committee review and submitted through the process listed.

SECTION B – FORFEITURE AND SHORT TEAM RULES

Forfeitures shall be avoided at all times. If a team cannot field at least 8 players from its own team roster the game shall be forfeited. Pool players, if available, may be used to meet the 8 player requirement. A team is considered short if it has less than 11 players.

If a team is short, (less than 11 players) the manager may ask any current registered Vernon Senior Softball member to fill out their game roster up to a maximum of 11 players. **If a manager in good faith invites a player to play as a sub, that player shall be allowed to play even if one of the team's unexpected players shows up unexpectedly.** Substitute players may play any position in the field provided that they are not displacing a player that normally plays that position. Substitute players must bat at the bottom of the lineup. Any time during a game when a team drops below 10 players due to a player who in the judgement of the umpire has been injured during the game, the injured player can be replaced with a substitute if one is available.

The league has published a list of players on each team that qualify as a #1 player. These #1 players can only substitute for another #1 player on the team that is short. The exception to this rule is in the case of a pitcher needed by the short team when none of their regular pitchers are available. In that case, a #1 player can be added to the short team as a "pitcher" only. If a team has more than two #1 players, they may not be replaced.

Substitute players are allowed during the playoffs if a team is short. Substitute players during the playoffs cannot be #1 players and are subject to the approval of the opposing manager or of the commissioner if the managers cannot agree.

SECTION C – SCORING LINE

A second home plate shall be used at the scoring line. A runner headed to home shall run across the second home plate. The second home plate shall be placed eight feet from extended home plate and in line with the first base foul line. The offensive player must touch the second home plate or the runner shall be called out. The catcher (or other defensive player) must make all defensive plays on the extended home plate. All plays at home will be force-outs; the catcher or any other defensive player may not apply a tag to a runner advancing to the second home, unless such offensive player has not crossed the commitment line.

SECTION D – HITTING AND BASE RUNNING

Unlimited base advancement on any hit is allowed, however, each team will be limited to two over the fence home runs per game. **The next two** balls hit over the fence by that same team during the game would be a double. **Any additional balls hit over the fence by that team will be outs.** Unlimited inside the park home runs are allowed. If a player using a courtesy runner from home (see section K below) hits a ball over the fence, it shall be a home run the first time and a single each subsequent time during the same game.

A batter cannot be called out before reaching first base on a batted ball that reaches the outfield grass. Runners can be forced or tagged at other bases.

After receiving one walk in a game, players have the option to take first base on subsequent walks or may continue to remain at bat continuing with the same strike count.

SECTION E – DOUBLE BAG, SECOND & THIRD BASE PLAYS

A double bag shall be used at first base – a white base inside the foul line, and an orange bag outside the foul line.

The runner must touch the orange bag if the ball is hit to the infield or if there is a play at first. If he fails to do so, he will be called out.

If the ball is hit to the outfield where there is no play at first, the runner may touch the inside bag and continue to second if he is able.

The defensive player must touch the white bag or tag the runner to get an out at first base. After reaching 1st base, if a runner makes a turn and tries to advance to second base, he/she must be tagged out.

Players who overrun second must be tagged out. Any runner who overruns 3rd base and before reaching the 3rd base commitment line, must be tagged out.

Any player who runs to the bag and in doing so, in the judgment of the umpire, results in interference with a player or the play itself, will be called out.

SECTION F – BUNTING, STEALING & SLIDING

Bunting and stealing are prohibited. Any one attempting bunting or stealing shall be called out.

Players may, at their option, slide into second or third base. A runner returning back to first, second, or third base may slide or dive back to the bag. However, if in the judgment of the umpire, the runner deliberately tries to make contact with a defensive player, he shall be called out.

SECTION G – OUTS

All plays at home plate are considered force-outs once a runner crosses the commitment line on the 3rd base side.

Runners may be tagged out while approaching a base (either arriving or returning) if the defensive player has the ball and tagging the runner instead of the base facilitates a putout. However, a runner to the scoring plate may not be tagged out once the runner crosses the commitment line.

A runner may be tagged out only with the hand or glove containing the ball.

Any foul ball caught by the catcher before the ball hits the ground will be an out, regardless of whether the ball was over the batter's head.

For purposes of these rules, crossing a line on the field, such as the commitment line, 160 line, or courtesy runner line, shall be deemed to have occurred when the player has one foot down on or beyond the line.

SECTION H – PITCHING

An extended home plate will be used. If a pitched ball strikes any part of the extended home plate first before making contact with the ground, the pitch will be considered a strike, regardless of the direction the ball bounces.

The pitch count shall start as 1 ball and 1 strike.

A second foul ball on third strike shall result in the batter being out.

The arc of the pitched ball must be between 6 feet and 12 feet above the ground. If the pitch is too low or too high, the umpire shall call it an illegal pitch while the ball is in the air, and it shall be deemed a ball. If the batter swings at the ball and misses, it will be called a strike. If the batter swings and hits the ball it shall be in play and called fair or foul.

If the pitcher starts to deliver the ball and either stops the delivery or reverses the delivery while no time out is called, a ball shall be called.

The pitcher must take a position with at least one foot in contact with the pitcher's box before starting the pitch delivery.

A pitcher must move behind the pitching screen after delivering a pitch but can then come out to field a batted ball. The umpire shall remind pitchers of this rule as necessary. If the pitcher does not move behind the screen after delivering a pitch, any batted ball fielded by the pitcher will be a dead ball hit. All runners will advance one base. The umpire's decision is final for any dispute regarding the screen.

The first ball a player hits into the pitching screen during an at bat shall be a dead ball. If the player hits an additional ball into the pitching screen during that at bat, the player will be called out. Thrown balls that hit the pitching screen will be in play.

SECTION I – LIMIT ON RUNS PER INNING

A five (5) run limit shall be applied each inning except when the one hour rule is used (see section M), the seventh inning or extra innings.

SECTION J – COMMITMENT LINE & OUTFIELD LIMITATION LINE

A minimum 6' commitment line shall be established 30' from home plate. Once a runner has crossed the commitment line, (a) he/she cannot return to third base, (b) must continue to the Home Plate scoring line and (c) can no longer be tagged out by a defensive player. A defensive player MUST tag the extended home plate as the runner is subject to a force out.

If the runner does not cross the commitment line, he may return to third base. An exception is made for runners who pass the commitment line on a fly ball and said fly ball is caught. The runner must return to third base after the catch. He may then tag up and proceed to home plate.

An outfield limitation line shall be established at a distance 160 feet from home plate. The four outfielders shall position themselves no closer to home plate than the outfield limitation line prior to the ball being hit by the batter. No fielders may position themselves on the grass between the skin of the infield and the

outfield limitation line. Once the batter has made contact, the fielder may pursue the ball into this area.

No infielder other than the pitcher, may play closer to the batter than the base line. Once the ball is hit by the batter, the infielder may field the ball wherever it is hit.

SECTION K – DESIGNATED COURTESY RUNNERS

The maximum advancement by a courtesy runner from home on any play is first base. If the courtesy runner from home makes any move to advance to second base the play will be called dead. All runners will go back to the last base they reached.

The league will place tape on the backstop fence as far back as safely possible to indicate the location of the courtesy runner line. A courtesy runner from home must start with both feet behind the courtesy runner line. A courtesy runner from home cannot cross the courtesy runner line until the ball is hit by the batter. In the event a courtesy runner from home crosses the courtesy runner line before the ball is hit by the batter, the batter will be called out.

At the beginning of the season, each team will provide the Board a list of players who will have a courtesy runner from home plate. This list will be approved by the board and provided to each manager. This list will be reevaluated by the board at the mid-point in the season.

Players approved by the board to have a courtesy runner from home have the option of deciding before each game whether they wish to use a courtesy runner from home for that game. A player using a courtesy runner from home during a given game must use a courtesy runner for all at bats during that game. If a courtesy runner from home is being used by a player, the umpire must allow the courtesy runner from home to take his/her position before the first pitch is thrown even if the batter has stepped into the box. If a player is using a courtesy runner from home during a given game and the courtesy runner from home is not in position when the first pitch is thrown, the batter will be called out.

A player may request to have a courtesy runner once he/she reaches any base safely. If a player receives a courtesy runner, they themselves cannot be a courtesy runner in that inning. The umpire will announce the use of a courtesy runner to the defensive team. A courtesy runner may only run once per inning however they may run each and every inning that occurs during the game. A courtesy runner whose turn at bat comes while on base will be called out. The courtesy runner will be removed from base and take their turn at bat. A second courtesy runner is not permitted at this time.

If an injury occurs during the season and that player is unable to run for an extended period of time, they may request a runner from home, with the Board of Directors approval, for a specified length of time. Additional time beyond what is specified can be granted with the Boards approval at a later point.

If a courtesy runner from home doesn't reach first base safely it doesn't count towards his one per inning limitation.

SECTION L – EQUIPMENT

No metal cleats shall be permitted.

Masks: A mask MUST be worn by all pitchers. The VSS League will provide the mask. The catcher is not required to wear a mask (although a mask provided by the League is available).

Pitching Screen: All pitchers must use the pitching screen while pitching. The screen shall be placed on the pitcher's glove side with at least one end of the screen in alignment with the end of the mound. The screen shall be placed 3-5 feet in front of the mound.

Bats: In order for a bat to be legal, a) it must have an ASA certification stamp if the bat was manufactured in 2020 or before, or b) it must have a USA sticker if the bat was manufactured in 2021 or later. This ensures the bat will have a ball launch velocity of 98 mph or less when using our 44/375 core league approved softballs.

After field testing, some bats have been found to exceed that launch velocity after a break in period and/or have been found to have defects that can affect its performance or safety. Those bats are listed under the USA "banned" bat list with ASA or USA certifications. Banned bats may not be used even if they have the appropriate sticker. A current copy of that list is posted on the VSS web site

Senior bats are defined as a) those bats with a BPF up to 1.21 or with an SSUSA sticker if the bat was in manufactured in 2020 or before, or b) those bats with an SSUSA sticker if the bat was manufactured in 2021 or later. Senior bats may be used by male players aged 70 and older and by any female player. Players who turn 70 during the current calendar year will be considered aged 70 throughout the year for purposes of this rule. The Board of Directors will publish a list of players approved to use senior bats. Senior bats must be approved by the league and have a league sticker prior to use. The senior bat sticker will be distinct from the sticker used for other bats. Any player not on the published list that takes their stance in the batter's box with a senior bat, whether by deliberate or inadvertent means, will be called out and will forfeit their at bat.

It is up to the individual league member to ensure their bat is NOT on the banned list. In addition, regardless of whether a bat has been used in previous play within the VSS League, all bats must have a current year's "approval" stamp on them. The Board of Directors will appoint no less than (2) representatives each year that will provide players approved stickers upon request. Once again, it is up to the individual player and the playing team's manager to ensure that an ASA/USA approved bat is legal or not for league play.

Ball: The official ball shall be an official slow pitch 12" softball with a core of 44, and a compression of 375 lbs. The color of the game balls will be optic yellow.

Players must wear team jerseys and must wear League hats or no hats. Every League Manager will have additional jerseys and hats available at every game. Items other than Team jerseys or League hats are prohibited. Non-conformity results in a player not being eligible to play that game. New players that have yet to receive their jerseys or substitute players for that game are excluded from this mandate.

SECTION M – GAME STARTING TIME AND FORMAT

Community Field:

Game 1, when scheduled, will start promptly at 3:30 pm on Mondays through Thursdays.

Game 2, when scheduled will start promptly at 4:55 pm on Mondays through Thursdays.

Henry Park games will start at 3:30 and 4:45 pm.

After 65 minutes of play, the next full inning is the final and open inning where a team can score as many runs as they are able to and it is also the last inning of the game. No inning can start after 75 minutes of game time.

These beginning and ending times are subject to change depending on the availability of the field as determined by the Vernon Recreation Department. All games will be played at Community Field, which will be cleared for play 10 minutes prior to the first scheduled game. The first game home team is responsible for putting away the pitcher's screen and insuring the sponsor's banner is up and all equipment (plates, board, clock, etc.) is set up.

The format shall consist of single inning games but will conclude promptly at the completion time set forth above. If an inning is not completed by the time deadline, the final score will revert to the end of the previous completed inning. An inning will be considered completed when both teams have completed batting for that inning, or, if the home team is leading, the inning is completed when the visiting team has completed batting for that inning.

A game will be considered a complete (regulation) game when five full innings are played; or if the home team has scored more runs in four or more innings than the visiting team has scored in five or more innings. If the game is suspended and does not meet the above criteria, the game will be rescheduled and played as a new game with no score.

Flip-Flop Rule - The flip-flop rule will be invoked in any game when there is a 10-run differential in favor of the visiting team at the start of the "open inning." If the visiting team is ahead by ten or more runs, the home team will remain at bat and start a new "at-bats"(beginning their final at-bats). All runners then on base will return to the dugout. It will be an open inning. If the home team fails to tie or go ahead of the visiting team, the game ends and the visiting team wins. If the home team ties or goes ahead, the visiting team takes its turn at bat.

Mercy Rule - If a team is ahead by 15 or more runs after five innings have been completed (if visiting team is leading) the game shall be declared a completed regulation game. If the home team is leading by 15 or more runs after 4 ½ innings, the game shall also be declared a completed regulation game.

Following the completion of the last game of the day, the Home Team will be responsible for stowing the sponsor banner, and all League equipment (bats, balls, home plate, and the clock).

SECTION N – THE LINEUP

All teams shall use an official scorebook. The responsibility for the scorebook shall be the team manager or whomever he designates.

An official lineup or batting order must be filled out prior to each game and the scorebook should be maintained in a manner commensurate with established score keeping guidelines for slow pitch softball.

Teams are allowed unrestricted field substitution to promote participation. All healthy players present will be put in the batting order. All healthy players present must play at least two innings in the field, unless injured. At least one of those two innings must be prior to the 6th inning. Players returning from injury may request from the commissioner to be a designated hitter only for up to two weeks, exempt from the two

innings in the field rule. Players arriving after the game begins will be placed at the end of the batting order. **Managers must notify umpires before the game about players who anticipate leaving during a game.** Players leaving during the game will not be recorded as an out **when the umpire has been notified before the game that the player will be leaving or if the player has been injured.** **Players ejected will be recorded as outs.**

SECTION O – RULE CHANGES

Any team manager may petition the commissioner for any redress that is required because of a violation of the rules.

The commissioner may request the Rules Committee to further review the rules, if necessary.

Members of the League may request rule changes to the Rules Committee or the Commissioner at the end of each season. Proposals should be submitted in writing and may be given to any member of the Rules Committee or the Board of Directors.

Any rule that impacts player safety, or negatively affects the integrity of Vernon Senior Softball, can be reviewed and changed at any time by the Board of Directors.

SECTION P- PARITY

The league tries to keep a competitive balance, and to help achieve this the season will be split into two equal parts. At the end of the first part, internal competition may adjust rosters as needed to accomplish this goal.

SECTION Q – POSTPONEMENTS

The Commissioner has final decision-making authority in all matters concerning postponements. In the event that ample notice cannot be given, last minute decisions will be made by the managers of the opposing teams and umpires, based on field safety at the site of the game.

No game will be played while lightning is seen in the vicinity. Once an umpire has suspended play, all teams must vacate the field for at least 30 minutes from the time of the last sign of lightning. Make up games will be re-scheduled as quickly as possible.

If the heat index using National Weather Service data for Windsor Locks at approximately 1 pm is 97 or above, the games will be canceled.

SECTION R – SELECTION OF TEAMS

VSS will complete a registration process by the second week in April, using a combination of mail-in and live registrations.

Players during the registration process will have an OPT OUT option. If a player wishes to exercise this option, they he/she must do so through written communication, either by email, regular mail, or during the live registration with the Boards representative. The Board must honor a player's desire to OPT OUT. The player has an absolute guarantee of reassignment to another team and is barred from being re-selected by the same team in a draft. Players, who have not opted out, do not receive a similar guarantee of assignment. In the event a conflict arises during the execution of the plan, a player's right to OPT OUT supersedes all other considerations.

With the exception of players opting out and players registering later than the allowed deadline, all players from the previous year's roster will remain on the team. Opting out players, new registrations, returning players who were not registered with a team in the previous year, and late registrations will be put in a common pool for selection. **New players will not be placed on a team unless they have attended a tryout or practice or their skills have been evaluated by the commissioner or board members.**

The board will determine a target team size known as a "cap", based on the number of registrants. The teams will draft, at a minimum, the difference between their tentative roster size and the cap. Example: The Board sets the cap at 14 and a team's tentative roster size is 11. That team will be able to draft 3 players, to reach the cap.

Members of the common pool will be assigned to teams via a scheduled draft or by slotting by the Boards representatives, depending on the amount of eligible players in the pool. If a draft is to take place, assuming one is needed, it would be administered by a Board member(s) and would work as follows:

1. The last place team, from the previous year, picks first in every round. The sequence is next to the last team picks second, and so on.
2. Once a team reaches the predetermined cap size, they no longer pick.
3. If the cap is reached by all teams, an additional round of drafting may be required.
4. Late teams must draft 4:55pm players only.

SECTION S- UMPIRES

All regular season games at Community Field and all playoff games will have two assigned Umpires. Games can be played with one umpire, if the second umpire becomes unavailable for any reason. Games at Henry Park during the season will be self-umpired unless volunteer umpires are available. Every team in the league is responsible for providing knowledgeable, qualified umpires with the goal of offering at least (2) per team. If someone is physically capable of umpiring, we have many seasoned umpires that can assist with coaching/training of new VSS umpires. This will ensure both consistency and integrity across the league as umpiring is a shared responsibility.

SECTION T – #1 PLAYERS

Players who have consistent execution at a high level in all areas may be designated as #1 players. At the start of the season, managers will recommend three players from their team to the board for consideration as #1 players. From these recommendations, the board will develop and publish a list of #1 players.

SECTION U – PLAYOFF SEEDINGS

Regular season champions and playoff seedings will be determined by winning percentage. Ties count as half win and half loss. The tie breakers for seeding are head-to-head games; then run differential in head-to-head games; then coin flip.

SECTION V – DISCIPLINE

The league will use a yellow card / red card system to monitor and warn players of unacceptable conduct during the season.

If a player verbally abuses another player, coach, or umpire, the umpire may issue the player a yellow card. If a player touches another player in anger, the umpire shall issue that player a red card. Umpires should report the issuance of yellow cards and red cards to the commissioner and umpire coordinator. If there are multiple umpires, all umpires must be in agreement of yellow cards or red cards to be issued.

If a player receives two yellow cards or a red card during a season, they will be suspended for a game. If a player receives two additional yellow cards or a second red card during a season, they will be suspended for the remainder of the season.

The Commissioner and the Board of Directors may establish an ad-hoc committee for disciplinary review as needed throughout the season. This will not be a standing committee. All Board of Directors, Managers, Assistant Managers and Umpires may be called upon to serve on a Disciplinary Committee(s) at any point in the season. Committee members reviewing circumstances may NOT have any conflicting interests in the outcome.

(Note: Any BOD member serving on a Disciplinary Committee will not be able to vote as part of an appeal of an issue whereby the BOD member voted on the initial penalty). He/she would abstain during the board vote.

II. Disciplinary **Review Hearing-if required**

Schedule a formal hearing of the Discipline the committee which may or may not include affected parties

- 1) Determine, to the best of the Committee's ability, what happened
- 2) Determine the best resolution for the incident - limited to the following-
 - * No action required by the Committee
 - * A Warning ranging from general to severe
 - * A suspension of 1 or 2 games (Commissioner can reduce on the spot if too severe)
 - * Referral to the Commissioner with the recommendation of a suspension of more than 2 games

- * Referral to the Commissioner with the recommendation of an expulsion from the league for the remainder of the season or beyond.

These are the guidelines our league is to follow. There are no rules to cover every potential scenario, but on balance, the league has the framework to address any issue that arises.