



2026 Sparkler Rules & Regulations

1. GENERAL

- a) All players must be registered on the AYBS website. Players must be baseball age 8 or under based on the 2026 Little League Age Chart. All rostered players must reside in the same city/town as the team they are rostered on. AYBS reserves the right to allow exceptions on these eligibility rules. Formal requests must be made to AYBS Sparkler Committee and approved or denied on a case by case basis.
- b) Only players, coaches and officials are to be allowed on the field at all times.
- c) One head coach and three assistant coaches are allowed in the dugout.

2. THE GAME

- a) The Little League Rulebook, not the Tournament rules section, will be the guide for all rules not specifically addressed in this document. Situations not covered in either this document or in the Little League Rulebook will be decided by the board of Ashland Youth Baseball & Softball. The board's decision will be final and may not be appealed.
- b) The home team provides the game balls and should provide the umpire with three balls in new/very good condition at the start of the game.
- c) AYBS will provide each team with a dozen balls for the tournament and additional balls for playoffs.
- d) No new innings shall be started after 1 hour 45 minutes from the scheduled game start time. Any inning starting after 1 hour 30 minutes of game time, shall be considered the final inning of the game. For the purposes of time limit determination, a new inning starts simultaneously with the ending of the prior inning (e.g. 00:01 on the clock when 3rd out of bottom of the 5th inning is made or 5 run limit has been reached, then the 6th inning will be played). Coaches should not use the time limit as a strategic advantage or disadvantage for any reason (e.g. mound visits, batter time-outs); they should coach as if the time limit does not exist and only refer to the current time remaining when determining whether or not a new inning should be played. During a game the scoreboard timer does not stop for any reason including but not limited to pitching changes, mound visits, injuries, or weather delays.
- e) The away team is responsible for manning the scoreboard. This needs to be done by an adult and cannot be passed to a sibling. Coaches and/or scorekeepers are responsible for monitoring time of play.

- f) A game may be called at any time by the umpire or town coordinator due to extenuating circumstances such as weather, darkness, field conditions, or unsportsmanlike conduct.
- g) A minimum of 8 players are required to start or continue a game. In the event that only eight players are available at the start of a game, the ninth roster spot shall be entered in the line- up and if not filled during the game by an eligible eight year old player, the ninth roster spot shall be an automatic out each time it is reached in the batting order. When and if the ninth player arrives, the opposing coach and umpire shall be notified. If a team starts a game with nine players, but is forced to reduce its roster to eight due to injury only, that roster spot shall be skipped in the lineup and will not be considered an automatic out.
- h) A team with less than the minimum number of players at the scheduled start time will be given 10 minutes to reach the minimum player requirements or forfeit the game. In the event of a forfeit, both teams are encouraged to use the scheduled field time to conduct a scrimmage or controlled practice. Umpires will not be available to officiate scrimmages.
- i) Forfeits shall be reported to a tournament official prior to proceeding with a scrimmage.
- j) The inning ends when 3 outs are recorded or 5 runs have scored, whichever occurs first.
- k) In the final inning, if the visiting team is losing or the game is tied, the visiting team may score unlimited runs up to a maximum of 5 more than the home team's total. If the visiting team is ahead going into the final inning, the 5 run maximum rule applies. If the home team is losing in the bottom of the last inning, they may score unlimited runs until the game is won or ended with 3 outs.
- l) Games with a 12-run differential after 4 complete innings or 3 ½ innings if the home team is ahead will be stopped and recorded as a complete game. At any time after 4 complete innings or 3 ½ innings if the home team is ahead, if one team reaches a 12-run differential, the game will be stopped immediately and recorded as a complete game. This is referred to as the mercy rule. The teams will not continue to play for practice.
- m) Home team player areas are on the Third Base line for both fields.
- n) Players are only permitted to use a bat with the USA Baseball stamp. No older bats will be permitted into play - <https://www.littleleague.org/playing-rules/bat-information> If a player comes to bat with an older bat it must be removed from play.

3. SUBSTITUTIONS

- a) Players may be freely substituted, with the exception of the pitcher (see Pitching)
- b) Continuous batting order is used. All players present are in the batting order each inning regardless of their fielding position. Players arriving after the game has started are added to the end of the batting order.
- c) Defensive play minimums. The following minimums must be observed for all players on each team before the completion of a game:
 - 2 of the first 4 innings at any defensive position
 - 3 of the first 5 innings at any defensive position
 - 4 of the first 6 innings at any defensive position
 - 1 of the first 4 innings at an infield position

- 2 of the first 6 innings at an infield position

4. PITCHING

- a) The pitching distance will be modified to 43' (instead of the 46' regulation) to encourage more hittable pitches being delivered. Players shall not be used as pitchers until they demonstrate in practice enough control and poise to throw strikes to live batters in a game situation. This is to avoid innings with high numbers of walks.
- b) A pitcher will be replaced on the mound if he hits 3 batters in one game. It is the umpire's discretion to not count as hit batsmen, batters who step into a pitch, fail to move from a pitch, are hit with a bouncing, slow pitch, or any other situation where there is minimal danger of injury or lack of wildness on the pitcher's part.
- c) If a pitcher walks 4 consecutive batters in one inning, the coach should use their discretion on whether or not to replace the pitcher. After the sixth consecutive walk in a single inning or eighth total walk in a single inning, the pitcher must be replaced by a new pitcher. This includes situations where the 6th consecutive walk or eighth total walk also ends an inning. A hit batter is considered a walk.
- d) Scorekeepers and/or coaches shall be responsible for keeping track of walks and hit batsmen and shall replace pitchers when needed.
- e) If a pitcher takes the mound and pitches to one batter, this is considered an inning pitched. Partial innings are considered a full inning even if an out is not recorded.
- f) A pitcher that has been removed during a game may not re-enter as a pitcher in that game and must have the required rest.
- g) Pitchers are limited to 6 innings per week. The week starts on Saturday and ends on Friday.
- h) Pitchers are limited to 2 innings per game. Coaches will be responsible for entering innings pitched on the tournament website after the completion of each game.
- i) During the playoffs, a new pitching week will start on the day of the championship game.
- j) Pitchers must have one calendar day of rest after pitching 2 innings in a single game. For example, if a player pitches 2 innings on Saturday, they cannot pitch again until Monday. One inning pitched in a single game does not require a calendar day of rest.
- k) Balk rules will not be enforced but coaches should instruct as situations arise.

5. RUNNING

- a) Each player is allowed one "successful" steal per inning. A successful steal is any base advancement after a pitch, where the ball was not put in play by the batter - including passed balls. Attempted steals where the runner is called out by the tag, in run down, running out of the base path or for not sliding are not considered a steal and do not count toward the allowable steals per inning.
- b) Each team is allowed 4 "successful" steals per inning. Double steals count as two stolen bases.
- c) Runners may not advance on overthrows on steals or attempted steals.

- d) A player cannot steal until the ball has passed the batter.
- e) Stealing of home IS allowed
- f) Runners cannot attempt to steal a base on the throwback from the catcher to the pitcher. No delayed steals.
- g) In 1st & 3rd situations where the runner on 1st attempts to steal 2nd, the runner on 3rd may attempt to steal home immediately after the catcher throws the ball to 2nd. If the runner on 3rd does not immediately attempt to steal home after the catcher throws to 2nd (e.g. waits for the ball to reach 2nd), or the catcher throws the ball back to the pitcher, the runner on 3rd is not permitted to steal home.
- h) Runners will be allowed one base on an overthrow per ball put in play. For example, on an overthrow past first base, each runner may take one additional base at their own risk. As long as the overthrow remains in play, the defender will be allowed to throw out the base runner. No additional bases may be taken after the first overthrow.
- i) Runners will not be allowed to take home on an overthrow on a steal or attempted steal. Runners are, however, allowed to take home on an overthrow of a ball put in play by the batter.
- j) Play terminates when the ball comes into the possession of any infielder in the infield (including foul territory around home plate and up the foul lines to where the outfield grass begins). If a runner is advancing to a base when the defensive player gains possession of the ball, the runner may continue advancing to the base but can be thrown out.

On a struck ball fielded by an infielder, one base will be allowed to be attempted by any baserunners on an overthrow. No additional bases will be allowed on that overthrow nor on any subsequent overthrows made on the same play, regardless of who collects the ball after the initial overthrow.

On a struck ball fielded by an outfielder, one base will be allowed to be attempted by any baserunners on an overthrow, only if the overthrown ball then comes into the possession of an infielder in the infield. If the overthrown ball is collected by any player that is not in the infield, then play is not terminated, and a subsequent overthrow can lead to another base being attempted by any baserunners on the same play.

Example: LF throws wildly trying to get a force at 2nd. On the overthrow, that runner heads to 3rd, and the batter heads to 2nd. The RF picks it up and throws wildly to 3rd. The runners can attempt to advance to home and 3rd, respectively, because an infielder has yet to possess the ball in the infield to terminate the play.

- k) Runners shall slide into all bases where there is a play being made. Failure to slide will result in the player being called out if they do not slide in a close play.
- l) No head first sliding is allowed, unless returning to a bag. Players sliding head first into a base shall be called out.
- m) Obstruction and interference will be called.
- n) Catcher's interference will be called after one warning.

6. **BATTING**

- a) Helmets with face cages are recommended, but not required. It is the responsibility of each team to follow its league rules for helmets and equipment.
- b) If the batter throws the bat during a swing he will receive a warning after the first incident. Any additional occurrences will result in the player being called automatically out.
- c) One on-deck batter is allowed in the caged areas only.
- d) There will be no bunting in this tournament.

7. FIELDING

- a) The infield fly rule will not be called.

8. SCORE REPORTING

- b) We will be using the AYBS website to keep track of game results. The site address is <http://tshq.bluesombrero.com/Default.aspx?tabid=1711777>. We will provide instructions at the beginning of the season.
- c) Head coaches will be given access to report scores on the website
- d) Scores and innings pitched must be reported no later than 12 hours after the completion of the game.

9. UMPIRES

- a) Umpires will be provided by AYBS and the league will make every reasonable effort to schedule both a home plate and base umpire for all games. In the event only one umpire is available for a game, the game will still be played with a home plate umpire.
- b) All umpires being used for this tournament have completed an AYBS training program and have experience umpiring regular season AYBS games. The league has also identified top performers from the season to serve as tournament umpires.
- c) All umpires must be a minimum of 13 years old.
- d) Keep in mind, the recommended 8U strike zone is an expanded zone that is intended to encourage active plate appearances. Please see the reference image in the appendix for a visual representation of the strike zone. Our umpires will be using the 10U zone outlined in the image.
- e) All umpire calls are final and are not to be argued by coaches. Feedback should be provided to Sparkler Tournament Officials in a respectful manner if issues arise during a game. We will be enforcing a zero-tolerance policy as it relates to unsportsmanlike conduct directed at umpires (please refer to **Section 12: Behavior** for more detail).

10. PLAYOFFS

- a) Standings/seedings are determined based on points earned during the season; 2 points for a win, 1 point for a tie, 0 points for a loss.

- b) In the event there is a tie in the standings, head-to-head competition will be used to determine the higher seed. Run differential in head-to-head games will be the second tie breaker. If teams split evenly in head-to-head or did not face each other or there is a multiway tie with no clear delineation of advantage we will use Runs Against for the tournament.
- c) For each playoff game, the higher seed will be the home team.
- d) Playoffs are single game elimination with the winning team advancing to the next round.
- e) All teams will qualify for the playoffs.
- f) The championship game will be a single elimination game.
- g) All rules apply in the playoffs with the exception of the time limit; no new innings shall be started after 2 hours from the scheduled game start time. In the event a game is tied at the end of regulation, extra innings will be played until a winner is determined. If a playoff game is suspended due to darkness, the lighted field will be used if it is available that evening and play will resume. If a game is in progress on the lighted field, the teams will wait for this game to conclude before taking the field. The game will not resume on the lighted field after 9:00 PM, and, if necessary, the game will resume on the next available date, as determined by AYBS.

11. BATTING CAGES, DUGOUTS, and PRE-GAME WARMUPS

- a) Each field has two batting cages and each cage is available 60 minutes prior to game time. There are also two bullpens on each field that is also available 60 minutes prior to game time. Please yield to any pitchers warming up in an active game taking place prior to yours.
- b) There is NO infield or pitching practice allowed prior to the game. Players and coaches are permitted to take grounders and pop-ups to warm-up in the outfield area only.
- c) Each team is responsible for removing trash from its own dugout after each game.

12. BEHAVIOR

- a) No unsportsmanlike conduct will be allowed by any player, coach or fan under any circumstances. Teams shall play with courtesy and be considerate of the opposing team in all games. All teams should refrain from chanting from dugouts during games.
- b) AYBS has instituted a zero-tolerance policy regarding and all teams are responsible for following the code of conduct. To that end, no arguing with the umpires will be allowed under any circumstances by any player, coach or fan. If any such incidents occur, the coach of the respective team will be warned (or, if appropriate in the discretion of the umpire or tournament officials, removed from the game and the field) to maintain control of the incident. Any further occurrences will result in the removal of the coach from the field and facility, forfeiture of the current game, and a one-game suspension to be served by the coach during the next scheduled game.

Coaches are also responsible for the behavior of their team's fans and any unsportsmanlike conduct from fans will follow a similar process. On the first offense, a warning will be issued to the coach and the coach will be asked to speak to the fan(s) in question. If the fan(s) continue to display unsportsmanlike conduct after the initial

warning, the fan(s) in question will be asked to leave the premises, the coach will also be removed from the game, the current game will be forfeited by the offending team and the coach will serve a one game suspension to be served during the next scheduled game.

If warranted, additional disciplinary measures may be taken and could include removal of a team from the tournament without reimbursement. All decisions will be at the sole discretion of the AYBS Sparkler Committee and all decisions will be final and may not be appealed.

It is our sincere hope that we don't need to worry about encountering any situation of this magnitude, so remember to keep it fun for the kids and don't forget - this is 8-year-old baseball.

13. PARKING

- a) The parking area beyond the right field fence of the front field is reserved for head coaches and vehicles with a valid handicap parking pass.
- b) Each team will be issued one (1) parking pass prior to the season allowing one coach from each team to park along the fence across from the right field fence on the back field. Passes must be displayed on the vehicle dashboard.
- c) The area under the High Street overpass shall be reserved for umpire parking.
- d) For everyone's safety, no other vehicles are allowed to enter this area.
- e) Overflow parking is available across the street at the Burnhams parking lot

14. CONTACT INFO:

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APPENDIX

Strike Zone Reference: Umpires will use the 10U zone when calling balls and strikes during the Sparkler Tournament.

