

# HCSSL RULES 2026 EDITION

Effective February 5, 2026

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Harris County Senior Softball League (HCSSL) plays under official Senior Softball USA (SSUSA) rules, as modified by the changes and additions in this document. Note that SSUSA rules specific to organizing official tournaments (e.g., geographic regions, age, groups, categorization, and rating of teams by skill categories, roster registration requirement, etc.) are not applicable to HCSSL League play. Board members and umpires have the Official Senior Softball-USA Rulebook.

These rules will remain in force until officially revised and communicated by the HCSSL Board of Directors.

## **1. PLAYING FIELD**

### **1.1 CATCHER'S BOX**

There is no requirement that a catcher's box be physically marked on the field.  
(Reference SSUSA # 1.11)

### **1.2 BASE DISTANCE AND COMMITMENT LINE**

Bases on Field # 1 (United/American) are set 70 feet apart, with a commitment line 30 feet from home plate. Bases on Field # 2 (Continental/National) are set 65 feet apart, with a commitment line 20 feet from home plate. (Reference SSUSA # 2.4 and # 8.8)

### **1.3 STRIKE MAT**

The National Division has opted to use a larger strike mat, measuring 19" X 23".

## **2. PLAYERS' EQUIPMENT**

### **2.1 UNIFORM SHIRTS**

For the summer season (no such restriction for winter), each player must wear an unmodified (no cutoff sleeves, cutting a V-neck, etc.) current team sponsor's jersey in all scheduled and playoff games. The purpose is to provide advertising for HCSSL sponsors. A player wearing a previous year's jersey may play as long as the sponsor's name is their current team sponsor, and the jersey is the same color.

If a player has no shirt at the field, the player will be declared ineligible. This is not an ejection. If discovered during the game, the umpire will correct the problem the next offensive half-inning either by the player getting his/her team's throwdown jersey, his/her team replacing him/her either with an available roster player or by obtaining a pickup player selected by the opposing manager. Player will not bat, or play a defensive position, until he/she has a suitable jersey. Pickup players must also wear their HCSSL sponsor's shirt during the summer season.

### **2.2 BATS**

The rules and guidelines of Senior Softball-USA in determining the legality of bats will be followed, meaning that any bat marked 1.21 BPF or below is approved for play. (SSUSA # 3.4(4)). The penalty for deliberate use of altered or illegal bats will be ejection from the League for the balance of the season. Bat warmers may be used in HCSSL games. Bat warmers have been banned from SSUSA tournaments.

# HCSSL RULES 2026 EDITION

Effective February 5, 2026

## 2.3 BALLS

Only HCSSL furnished balls will be allowed.

## 2.4 GLOVES

A softball glove or first baseman-type mitt may be used by any defensive player.  
(Reference SSUSA 3.6)

## 2.5 Hats

All players wearing a hat must wear either an unaltered HCSSL hat, or a hat of a known team. No hat shall be allowed which would be deemed offensive to a reasonable person.

## 3. PLAYERS AND SUBSTITUTES

### 3.1 PICKUP PLAYERS

A. A team with less than six players must forfeit the game. Exceptions:

1. The six-player minimum is reduced by the number of players from the team attending senior softball tournaments. This exception is in effect from the Tuesday before a tournament through the Monday following a tournament. Note, no game will be cancelled or rescheduled as the result of players playing in tournaments.
2. If the average team roster size in the division is less than twelve players, a team with at least five players need not forfeit and may pick up the necessary pickup players.
3. For the winter season, the minimum is waived, and all teams may pick up players as necessary.

B. A team with enough of its own players not to forfeit a game may pick up other eligible players in this order:

1. Tryout Players: Both new players and late signup returning players, who have not been assigned to a team, are allowed a maximum of four automatic/priority games, one per night, as a tryout period. During their tryout period, these players are still pickup players and all pickup player restrictions, except that they may play any defensive position, remain in effect. Please note that a tryout player may play two games in one night if chosen for the second game from the general pool of players, per # 3 below. In the second game, all the usual pickup player restrictions apply. Tryout players will be placed on a team at mid-season, provided there is an opening, unless the Board agrees to an earlier placement. **After four (4) tryout games, tryout players become non-priority pickup players if they are not assigned to a team.**
2. Players from bye teams: Players from bye teams do not have preference unless a division elects to grant them a preference. This preference must follow the preferences for players during their tryout period.
3. Other eligible players: Other players, only from that same division, are to be drawn by number from a line-up ten minutes prior to start of the game in which pickup players are needed. This includes players not yet assigned to teams who have completed their tryout period.

C. As pickup players are drawn, they are to be assigned to teams as follows:

# HCSL RULES 2026 EDITION

Effective February 5, 2026

1. If one team requires more pickup players than the other team, pickup players are drawn for that team until both teams require the same number of pickup players. After that, the following pickup players drawn are to be assigned to alternating teams until both teams have either reached their legal number of players or there are no more pickup players to be drawn, whichever comes first.
  2. If both teams require the same number of players, the first player drawn goes to the home team and after that the following pickup players drawn are to be assigned to alternating teams until both teams have reached their legal number of players or there are no more pickup players to be drawn, whichever comes first.
  3. In the summer season (no such restriction in the winter season) a team may pick up at most one more first or second round draft choice than has been picked up by the other team unless no other players are available. When a 2<sup>nd</sup> first or second round draft choice is drawn, that player will immediately be assigned to the team not having picked up the 1<sup>st</sup> first or second round draft choice. If the 2<sup>nd</sup> first or second round draft choice is to be assigned to a team that has its legal number of players, that 2<sup>nd</sup> first or second round draft choice will not be assigned to either team and will not be allowed to play in that game.
- D. There are limitations on players eligible to serve as pickup players:
1. Any player, otherwise eligible to be a pickup player, who is not prepared to take the field immediately may not stand on the line to be drawn as a pickup player.
  2. No player will be allowed to play more than two games in one night, typically one with his/her own team and one as a pickup player, unless no one else is available.
  3. During the playoffs, only players permanently assigned to teams in the division are eligible as pickup players.
  4. Before summer season playoffs begin, division coordinators and managers will identify "listed players" meaning the top "impact players" for each division. The list may include up to 20 percent of the division players. The intent is to be roughly comparable to first and second round draft picks, but with additions and/or deletions reflecting actual season experience. This list should be in alphabetical order before being distributed or posted.
  5. Listed players are not eligible as pickup players during the playoffs.
- E. A manager, if physically able to play, may not pick up a player in his/her place.
- F. On offense:
1. Pickup players must be placed at the bottom of the batting order in the same order they were selected.
  2. The maximum number of bases that a pickup player is allowed in an at bat, is one base. Each time the pickup player comes to bat, they shall tell the umpire that they are a pickup player. The umpire will announce in a clear, loud voice the maximum number of bases allowed for this batter. Runners already on base can advance only one base from the base they were on at the time the ball was hit. A baserunner attempting to advance beyond that

# HCSSL RULES 2026 EDITION

Effective February 5, 2026

- maximum will be at risk to be tagged out until they return to the base to which they were allowed. Should the runner touch the next base past the one allowed or cross over (or step on) the commitment line they will be automatically called out by the umpire. This is a delayed dead ball and subsequent runners may also be called out for trying to advance past the base they were allowed.
- G. On defense, during the summer season (no position restriction during the winter season) the positions of pickup players, not necessarily in the order selected, will be as follows:
1. Based on the number of pickup players selected, defensive positions are to be filled in the following order; catcher, right field, right center, left center, left field, rover (if appropriate), first base, second base, third base, shortstop, pitcher.
  2. If a team has an injured roster player, that player may play catcher with permission from the opposing manager. In the National division, no approval is necessary for any roster player to serve as catcher.
  3. A pick-up player may play any defensive position with the approval of both team managers.
- H. Should a player arrive on the field after the game has begun and a pickup player was selected for him/her, he may not enter the game until the pickup player has completed one turn at bat. The late-arriving player will be inserted in the lineup where his/her pickup player batted. Exception: If the game was started early and the player reports to the umpire prior to the scheduled start time, then the player can replace the pickup after the end of the next half inning.
- I. Any pickup players bumped by a late-arriving roster player after the game has started will be the players used, in the order they were originally picked, for substitutions due to a team losing a player during a game. In the situation where players are drawn for both teams, one substitute may not bump a substitute from the other team simply because he was drawn before that player. The last player selected will be the first player bumped by a late-arriving roster player.
- J. A team must have a minimum of nine (ten in National and Continental) in order to play a game. Even when a team has enough of its roster players to avoid an automatic forfeit, if there are not enough pickup players to get them to nine (ten in National and Continental), that team must forfeit. If both teams are in that situation, both are treated as having forfeited the game. A team playing with only nine players (ten in National and Continental) must take an automatic out the first time the tenth player (eleventh in National and Continental) would otherwise have come to bat. (*Reference SSUSA # 4.3*)

## 3.2 SUBSTITUTIONS

- A. Only ten players (eleven in National and Continental) may play on defense but there are no restrictions on substitutions on defense. Defensive substitutions may be made at any time.
- B. All players in the batting lineup must play a minimum of two innings on defense, or three innings if the game goes six or more innings. If the player

# HCSSL RULES 2026 EDITION

Effective February 5, 2026

arrives late or is injured during the game, his/her manager shall not be required to play him/her any number of innings. Managers are encouraged to play all players at least one-half of the game. The opposing manager may protest a violation of the three-inning rule. If the protest is upheld, the offending team shall forfeit the game. Protests will be reviewed and ruled upon by the Board.

- C. A manager, unless injured, must play if the team is short of players and may not sit out the game in lieu of a pickup player. A manager, unless injured, who is not playing must substitute for an injured player on his/her team.
- D. There is no requirement that teams submit lineup cards to the umpire or to one another. (*Reference SSUSA # 4.2.A*)
- E. There is no requirement that a substitute, inserted into the game in place of another player, officially announce his/her presence to the umpire. (*Reference SSUSA # 4.7A*)
- F. There is no limit on the number of times a player can be removed from a game for another player, then re-enter the game. (*Reference SSUSA # 4.6*)

## 3.3 EJECTIONS/SUSPENSIONS

An ejection is the result of an incident that requires removal of a player from the game by the umpire, whereby the ejected player or coach can no longer participate in the game and must leave the playing field and dugout. A suspension is the number of games a player must serve due to an ejection or the violation of HCSSL's rules. Incidents that will be reviewed for possible suspensions can come from any source, including (but not limited to) ejections, video review, manager information, or spectator complaints.

Only managers are allowed to discuss any violations or infractions of the rules with the umpires.

- A. Offenses subject to ejection/suspension include:
  - 1. Outburst of profanity or obscene gestures directed at umpires, players, or spectators.
  - 2. Display of hostility directed at umpires, players, or spectators, including verbal threats of a physical nature.
  - 3. Fighting, violent and/or threatening behavior.
  - 4. Swinging or throwing bats, or other equipment, in a disrespectful or violent manner and/or destruction of HCSSL or Harris County Park property.
  - 5. A violation of HCSSL's sexual harassment policy (as documented in HCSSL's Administrative Policies).
  - 6. A violation of HCSSL's Code of Ethics.
- B. All ejections will be reported by the umpire to the Rules Director. The Rules Director will keep a history of all ejections including details of the suspension and the length of the suspension. The Rules Director will furnish the historical ejections/suspensions report monthly for the HCSSL Board of Directors meeting and be prepared to discuss any prior month ejections. The Rules Director must notify the Rules Committee of any ejection within 24 hours of

# HCSSL RULES 2026 EDITION

Effective February 5, 2026

- the incident. The notification should provide all the details of the ejection but should not make any recommendation for the length of the suspension.
- C. The Rules Committee (the Rules Director and the four Division Coordinators) will review the circumstances of each ejection and determine the severity of the ejected player's actions and the duration of the suspension. Division Coordinators are allowed to vote in their own division. The Rules Committee's decision will be communicated from the Division Coordinator to the Manager who will inform the ejected player. The decision of the Rules Committee is final. Ejected players should be notified within 72 hours of the incident.
  - D. Suspensions should be in line with previous suspensions for similar incidents, with adjustments for special cases. The Rules Committee may, in the case of exceptional circumstances, increase or decrease the length of the suspension from the guidelines. The reason for the exceptional circumstances must be documented. The HCSSL Board of Directors must approve any suspension of twelve or more games.
  - E. Excessive ejections by any one umpire will be reviewed for a possible performance issue.
  - F. A player ejected from a game must leave the game and facilities. **When a player is ejected from a game, the player is not allowed to play in games later that night.** If the player does not respond to the umpire's instructions to leave the game and/or facilities, it becomes his/her manager's and team's responsibility to control the player and if they cannot or will not do so, the umpire may declare a forfeit.
  - G. Offensively, the ejected player's team must take an automatic out in the lineup spot of the ejected player. Defensively, the team may insert an available roster player in the place of the ejected player but is not allowed to pick up a supplemental player for that purpose if no roster player is available. If the manager has not been in the lineup, but is able to play, he may be inserted as an available roster player for defense and should then be added at the end of the batting lineup.
  - H. A "playable game" is defined as a game played by the suspended player's team. Rainouts and byes are excluded. A suspended player, ineligible to play in his/her team's game, is likewise ineligible to take game night batting practice or participate as a pickup player in any other game while suspended.
  - I. An ejected player that uses threatening gestures or threatening and abusive language will be subjected to additional disciplinary action to include additional game suspensions and/or a permanent ban from HCSSL for more egregious actions. These additional disciplinary actions are to be determined by the Board of Directors.
  - J. A player ejected a second time within one calendar year will be suspended from his/her team's next twelve playable games and must then appear before the Board of Directors for reinstatement.
  - K. A suspended player attempting to play during his/her suspension will be banned from further play until reinstated by the Board of Directors.
  - L. A suspended player attempting to play while suspended, or re-entering the grounds after being told to leave, does not automatically result in a forfeit for

# HCSSL RULES 2026 EDITION

Effective February 5, 2026

his/her team. (Reference SSUSA # 4.8). However, if the player does not respond to the umpire's instructions to leave the game and/or facilities, it becomes his/her manager's and team's responsibility to control him/her and, if they cannot or will not do so, the umpire may declare a forfeit.

- M. A suspended player, while he cannot play or coach, is welcome to attend his/her team's games or those of other HCSSL games as a spectator, so long as he exhibits no inappropriate or disruptive behavior while there. However, if the suspended player exhibits inappropriate or disruptive behavior and does not respond to the umpire's instructions to leave the game and/or facilities, it becomes his/her manager's and team's responsibility to control him/her and, if they cannot or will not do so, the umpire may declare a forfeit.
- N. A manager may suspend any of his/her players for actions detrimental to the team, including players refusing to play assigned position, and/or League. Such suspensions are for one game unless the Division Rules Committee approves more. The Board in its discretion may allow an appeal of such suspension.

## 4. **THE GAME**

### 4.1 **STARTING TIMES**

- A. The game begins when the umpire says, "Play ball.", not at the first pitch.
- B. On nights when three games are scheduled (typical of the summer season), games begin at 6:30, 7:40 and 8:50 pm. When only two games are scheduled (typical of the winter season), games begin at 6:30 and 7:45 pm. Divisions may elect to change the two game starting times to 7:00 and 8:15 pm.
- C. The game clock for the first game of the evening shall start at the published game time. The umpire may grant a grace period on the start of play with the approval of both managers with no delay in the start of the official game clock. The game will still end per the "Length of Game" rule below. (*Reference HCSSL # 4.2*)
- D. If the previous game runs over the time limit, the umpire will instruct both teams to hustle and will instruct the scorekeeper to start the clock for the next game as soon as possible to the scheduled game time.
- E. If a game finishes early, the next game may start early but only with the agreement of both managers. Otherwise, the clock will start at the scheduled game time.

### 4.2 **LENGTH OF GAME**

- A. A game will be seven innings or limited by time as follows:
  - 1. The game clock begins with 55 minutes if three games are to be played that evening or 60 minutes if two games are to be played and counts down.
  - 2. Once the game clock shows no time left in the game, that inning (sixth or less) will be finished and then one more final inning will be played (unlimited time). If after the last inning the game is tied, the game will end in a tie. No regular season game may go beyond seven innings regardless of the time remaining.
  - 3. Playoff games cannot end in a tie and there is no time limit for playoff championship games.

# HCSSL RULES 2026 EDITION

Effective February 5, 2026

4. The Board may adjust the 55 or 60 minute game time to stay within the guidelines of Harris County Bayland Park curfew.
- B. If there are any game delays from rain, lightning, other weather, injury, or anything else, the following adjustments will be made for the remaining games.

The following is applied if delay(s) happen during game 1:

1. If the total delay is 15 minutes or less, games are played normally.
2. If the total delay is 16 - 30 minutes, game times for all three games are reduced to 45 minutes.
3. If the total delay is 31 to 60 minutes, game times are 35 min. and one-pitch.
4. If the delay in play exceeds 60 minutes, games are cancelled.

The following is applied if delay(s) happen during game 2:

1. If the total delay is 15 minutes or less, games are played normally.
2. If the total delay is 16 to 30 minutes, game times for games 2 and 3 are reduced to 45 minutes.
3. If the total delay is 31 to 60 minutes, game times for games 2 and 3 are reduced to 35 minutes and one-pitch.
4. If the delay in play exceeds 60 minutes, games two and three are cancelled.

The following is applied if delay(s) happen during game 3:

1. If the total delay is 15 minutes, games are played normally.
2. If the total delay is 16 to 30 minutes, game time for game 3 is 35 minutes and one-pitch.
3. If the delay in play exceeds 30 minutes, game three is cancelled.

\* When the game time is reduced, if there is no time left on the clock then the next inning is the open inning.

- C. A lightning strike within 3 miles calls for a 15 minute stoppage of play. For the next 15 minutes, if there is another lightning strike within 3 miles, restart the timer. The electronic lighting detector in Field 2 score house will be used to track the nearest lightning.
- D. The umpire is responsible for keeping track of the time. There is no need for the umpire to announce the time remaining, other than when time expires, so long as the scoreboard clock is working and visible. (*Reference SSUSA # 5.12*)
- E. A manager may not declare outs in order to complete an inning. Batters must take their turn at bat to complete an inning.
- F. Any game that has a potential champion will be played 7 innings with no time limit.

## 4.3 GAME DELAYS

- A. All pre-game batting practice must stop ten minutes prior to the first scheduled game time.
- B. Players should hustle on and off the field between innings.
- C. Throwing the ball around the infield after a putout is not allowed. The batter shall be awarded a ball for each throw that delays the game.
- D. A ball hit out of play will not be returned to the game until there is a break in play.
- E. A pitcher has 10 seconds to release next pitch after receiving the ball, or after the umpire indicates "play ball". The umpire will call a ball when the pitcher fails

# HCSL RULES 2026 EDITION

Effective February 5, 2026

to do this. The first pitch of an inning should allow time for the pitcher to don his/her protective equipment.

- F. A batter has 10 seconds from the end of the prior play to enter the batter's box. The umpire will call a strike if the batter fails to enter the box within this time. The first batter of an inning should allow time for him/her to come from the outfield and/or to remove a pitcher's protective equipment.
- G. Courtesy runners should be in place within the 10 seconds for the batter to enter the batter's box. The umpire will call a strike if they fail to do this.
- H. Attempting to get a courtesy runner after a ball or strike has been called will result in the runner being called out.
- I. No in-between game gatherings should take place except for pictures and safety training.

## 4.4 WARM-UP

- A. Infield and outfield practice will only be allowed in the first inning. Each ball thrown on the infield or outfield after the first inning that delays the game, unless allowed by the umpire due to injury, will be called a ball on the batter.
- B. A new pitcher will be allowed three pitches and no more than one minute to warm up.

## 4.5 RUN RULE

If the visiting team is ahead by 15 runs or more at the end of fifth or the end of any later innings, or if the home team is ahead by 15 runs or more after the end of 4 ½ innings, or any later ½ inning, the umpire shall declare that the game is over.

- A. Teams may score a maximum of 12 runs in the buffet.

## 4.6 FLIP-FLOP RULE

As a time control measure, if the visiting team is leading by the number of runs (or greater) as determined by the managers at each Divisions draft, as the final inning of a game is about to be played, the home team will bat first in the final inning. This option will remain in effect for the entire Summer Season. Exception is the National Division which is always one (1) run.

## 4.7 TIE GAMES

- A. Games ending in a tie, after seven innings or time limit, will not be completed later. Each team will be credited with one-half game in the win and loss columns in the standings.
- B. Playoff games cannot end in a tie. A playoff game, tied after seven innings or time limit, will continue until one team is ahead after the completion of a subsequent inning. Per International Rules for handling tie games, the last batter to bat in the previous inning will be placed on second base as each inning begins. A courtesy runner may be used after the runner has advanced one base.

## 4.8 REPLAYING INCOMPLETE PLAYOFF GAMES

Any playoff game that has not reached five innings, or 4 ½ innings if the home team is ahead, will be replayed from the beginning if it does not reach the time limit due to acts of God or power failure. The game will continue until there is a winner.

# HCSL RULES 2026 EDITION

Effective February 5, 2026

## **4.9 FORFEITS**

If a manager declares his/her team's intention to forfeit via email or text to the Division Coordinator, the opposing team is not required to come to the fields to gain a win.

## **5. PITCHING REGULATIONS**

### **5.1 PITCHER SAFETY EQUIPMENT**

Pitchers are required to wear a protective face mask while pitching, which includes batting practice as well as games. Pitchers are encouraged, but not required, to use other personal safety equipment such as chest protectors and shin guards.

### **5.2 PITCHER PROTECTION SCREEN**

- A. The pitcher protection screen must be used by all pitchers in all Divisions.
- B. The screen is intended purely as a safety mechanism for pitchers, not to be employed as an additional defensive player. Therefore, the back, inside foot of the screen is to be placed within three feet of the front of the pitcher's rubber and aligned with the edge of, or within the 24 inches width of the pitcher's rubber on the pitcher's glove side. The face of the screen must be parallel to the front of the batter's home plate. Pitches must be delivered around the side of the screen, not over the top of the screen.
- C. A batted ball striking the screen is a foul ball. If the courtesy foul has been used the batter will be out. A thrown or deflected ball striking the screen during active play remains in play.
- D. After releasing a pitch, the pitcher must stay within the 24-inch plane of the pitcher's rubber or behind the pitching screen until the ball is batted. If the pitcher moves outside the plane of the rubber, on the first occurrence, the umpire will immediately call "Dead ball." And issue a warning to the pitcher. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> occurrence, the pitcher will be removed from the pitching position for the remainder of the game.

## **6. BATTING**

### **6.1 BALL-STRIKE COUNT**

Each batter starts his/her at-bat with a one ball and one strike count unless Game Delays rules are applied. When the count reaches two strikes, one courtesy foul ball will be allowed. A second foul ball will result in the batter being called out.

### **6.2 LINEUP**

- A. Managers may or may not play, at their own discretion, if the team has more than 10 players (11 - National & Continental). This determination must be established at the beginning of the game. However, if a player is injured during the game, the manager may enter the game to make a full defensive team (10 players, 11 in National & Continental).
- B. If a team is batting more than ten (eleven in National & Continental) and a player has to leave the game, unless due to an ejection, that spot in the batting order will be scratched and no out is declared. An ejected player's spot in the batting order becomes an automatic out each time it comes up.
- C. If a team has to go to nine players (ten in National & Continental) due to injury, emergency, etc., anything other than an ejection, it will immediately add a pickup player who will take the departing player's spot in the batting order and

# HCSSL RULES 2026 EDITION

Effective February 5, 2026

play in the field under pickup player defensive rules. If there was a pickup player previously bumped from the game by the arrival of a roster player, and if he is still available to play, he fills the vacant spot. (Reference HCSSL # 3.1.H) Otherwise, the opposing manager selects a pickup player from available players.

D. If a player is lost due to being ejected see *HCSSL 3.3.G*.

## 6.3 BATTING ORDER

- A. All team members present for a game are included in the batting order, which means the batting lineup may include more than ten players (eleven in National & Continental).
- B. The scorekeeper shall, or the defensive team may, alert the umpire to an attempt by the offensive team to bat out of order, including the situation where the scheduled batter is on base as a courtesy runner for someone else.
- C. A courtesy runner on base when it is his/her turn to bat will be declared out and will then take his/her turn at bat. A second courtesy runner cannot be substituted.

## 6.4 HOME RUNS

There is no limit to the number of home runs a team may hit during a game.  
(Reference *SSUSA # 8.4 (2) thru (5)*)

## 7. ON-BASE SITUATIONS

### 7.1 COURTESY RUNNERS

- A. It is the runner's option whether he wants a courtesy runner to run for him/her.
- B. The home plate umpire will give the courtesy runner time to get to the base, but will not delay the game for the manager to select a courtesy runner. If a courtesy runner is not inserted immediately on completion of a play, then he may not be inserted until after the next batter has completed his/her turn at bat.
- C. After a walk, the batter/runner may proceed directly to the dugout without touching first base and the designated courtesy runner should go immediately to first base.
- D. Pickup players cannot be used as courtesy runners during the summer season. There is no such restriction during the winter season.
- E. If the team has an injured player, for example with a sprained wrist, that does not want to play defense or bat but still wants to be a courtesy runner, that player will be allowed to run for one of his/her teammates.
- F. Base runners may lead off first and third bases in foul territory to protect themselves from batted balls, however, they must retouch the base to advance.

### 7.1.1 COURTESY RUNNER FROM HOME PLATE

In the National Division, a batter may have a courtesy runner run for the batter from home plate.

- A. Use of a courtesy runner from home plate is at the discretion of the batter. The manager may ask the batter if they would like a courtesy runner when batting prior to the beginning of the game, but the manager cannot tell the player that someone will run for them.

# HCSL RULES 2026 EDITION

Effective February 5, 2026

- B. Once a player has been designated as using a courtesy runner from the plate, that player must have a courtesy runner every time they bat.
- C. The courtesy runner from the plate may be any team member. A different team member may be used each time the batter come to the plate. The courtesy runner, unless injured, may not be replaced by another courtesy runner.
- D. To designate the courtesy runner's starting position, a 6-to-8-foot chalk line will be placed corresponding to an imaginary line even with the middle of the base runner's home plate and extending about 8 to 10 feet starting behind the batter's box towards the visitor's side screen.
- E. The courtesy runner from the plate may begin to run as soon as the batter swings. Courtesy runners may not stand further back from the start line in order to get a running start.
- F. The courtesy runner from the plate shall be treated as a pickup player and may only advance one base. All other rules regarding pickup players running shall apply.

## 7.1.2 TRYOUT PLAYERS

Tryout players are limited to one base. They may play anywhere in the field and are available to pinch run.

## 7.2 CONTACT

It is the base runner's responsibility to avoid both contact with and or interference with a defensive player and may be called out for either. However, the defensive player shall not block or impede the runner from making contact with the base. If this occurs, the runner shall be determined safe, even though the runner does not touch the base.

Sliding or diving into first base or the scoring plate/line is permitted only to avoid a collision with a defensive player. This is an umpire's judgment call and is not subject to protest or appeal. A player may also slide or dive into second or third bases or returning to any base. A runner must make every effort to avoid colliding with opposing players while running the bases or sliding or diving. If, in the umpire's judgment, a runner misses a base to avoid a collision, and would otherwise have been safe, the runner will not be called out.

### 7.2.1 INTERFERENCE WITHOUT COLLISIONS

If in the judgment of the umpire, a runner, without making contact, interferes with a defensive player making a play, the ball will be declared dead and that runner called out. All base runners except the batter will be returned to their previous base unless forced to advance. If in the judgment of the umpire the runner's interference with the defensive player involved in the play negates a double play, the umpire may award a second out.

### 7.2.2 AVOIDING COLLISIONS

If in the judgment of the umpire, the runner fails to avoid a collision with a defensive player involved in the play, the ball will be declared dead, that runner called out. All base runners except the batter will be returned to their previous base unless forced to advance. If the potential for a double play existed, the

# HCSSL RULES 2026 EDITION

Effective February 5, 2026

umpire shall award a second out with the most advanced runner being the second out.

## 7.2.3 INTENTIONAL CONTACT

If in the judgment of the umpire, the runner or defensive player intentionally creates contact, that player, in addition to any other penalties required, shall immediately be ejected from the game.

## 7.2.4 PEEL OFF LINE RULE

The peel off line rule only applies to a **FORCE PLAY** at second base and can be utilized when there is a throw from an infielder or an outfielder. A peel off line is marked three (3) feet from second base on both the right field and the third base sides for runners to avoid contact with fielders on **FORCE PLAYS** at second base. The three feet on both sides of second base, including second base, is considered a **FIELDER SAFETY ZONE**. The **NO CONTACT RULE APPLIES** to the base runner if the runner is **WITHIN THE SAFETY ZONE**. The **NO CONTACT RULE DOES NOT APPLY** if the throw takes the fielder outside the **SAFETY ZONE**. Runners going to second base or through the **SAFETY ZONE** are **IN JEOPARDY** and can be tagged out.

Runners have the **OPTION** to peel off to either the right field side or the left field side of second base. Runners are encouraged to peel off to the opposite side from which the throw is coming. Runners will be called safe if the runner has touched/crossed the peel off line before the fielder has control of the throw on second base. Runners utilizing the peel off line may overrun the line without being tagged out by a fielder. Runners who run to the peel off line **MUST TOUCH SECOND BASE** before advancing to third base. If a runner is hit with a thrown ball while **PROPERLY** peeling off, a dead ball will be called and the runner **CANNOT ADVANCE** to third base.

## 8 MISCELLANEOUS

### 8.1 RULES COMMITTEE

- A. The HCSSL Rules Committee is chaired by the Rules Director and includes each Division Coordinator.
- B. Each division also has a division rules committee, made up of the coordinator and managers, which can propose altering the rules under which that division plays. Such rule changes should typically reflect the preference of a clear majority of the players in that division. The Division Coordinator will submit any changes via the Rules Director to the Board for its awareness and approval. Before any changes become effective, they must be approved by the Board and communicated to the players.

### 8.2 SCOREKEEPER/FIELD WORKER

- A. There are typically two score keepers assigned per game unless the division has a paid professional scorekeeper. This is only in effect if the paid scorekeeper is unavailable.

# HCSSL RULES 2026 EDITION

Effective February 5, 2026

- B. If a player does not fulfill his/her duty as a scorekeeper/field worker or provide a replacement, he will be suspended for his/her team's next playable game. If his/her team does not provide a substitute worker, the team will lose one-half game in the win column of the standings. It is preferred that the replacement worker be from the player's team, but when necessary, the replacement may be from another team.

## 8.3 PROTESTS

- A. The Division Coordinator will be called to the field to assist the umpire(s) in settling any dispute. If the Coordinator is not available, any Board member may assist. Any Coordinator or Board member playing in the disputed game may not assist in settling the dispute.
- B. Protests are to be made before the end of the game or if on the last play of the game before the umpire(s) leave the playing field. Only managers or acting managers may notify the home plate umpire of their intent to protest. (*Reference SSUSA # 1.55*)
- C. The home plate umpire is to notify the scorekeeper that a protest has been made and instruct the scorekeeper to note the details of the protest on the score sheet for that game.
- D. The Board of Directors makes the final decision on all protested games. Protests shall be made in writing by the manager (along with a \$15.00 cash deposit) to any Board member within three days after the game in question. The cash deposit will be returned if the protest is won or will be put into HCSSL's general fund if the protest is lost.

## 9 RULE ADJUSTMENTS FOR WINTER SEASON

This section is a recap of winter season adjustments for convenience purposes only. In case of a conflict between the items in this section and items in prior sections, the items in the prior sections will take precedence.

### PLAYERS' EQUIPMENT

2.1 Players are not required to wear the current year sponsor's shirt.

### PICKUP PLAYERS

- 3.1 A minimum number of team roster players is waived and all teams may pick up players as necessary. No game is to be forfeited due to not having sufficient players.
- 3.1.C.3 Any active player in the division may serve as a pickup player. There is no limitation on first or second round draft picks not being eligible as pickup players.
- 3.1.F.2 The maximum number of bases that a pickup player is allowed in an at bat is unlimited.
- 3.1.G Pickup players may play any defensive position.

### THE GAME

- 4.1 When only 2 games are scheduled, games are to begin at 6:30 and 7:45 pm. However, each division may elect to change that to 7:00 and 8:15 pm.

# HCSSL RULES 2026 EDITION

Effective February 5, 2026

- 4.2 The game clock begins with 65 minutes if two games are to be played and remains at 55 minutes if three games are to be played and counts down.
- 4.3 At 3:00 PM, if the projected wind chill is 45 degrees or below at 6:00 PM, the games will be called.

## ON BASE SITUATIONS

- 7.1.D Pickup players may serve as courtesy runners.

## RULES ELECTED BY DIVISION OPTION

This section is a convenient recap of rules elected each season by division option, meaning by the managers in each division. In case of conflict between the items in this section and items in prior sections, the items in the prior sections will take precedence.

- A. Whether players from bye teams have preference as pickup players. (See 3.1.B.3)
- B. Game start times for season when only two games are scheduled each night. Options are 6:30 and 7:45 pm or 7:00 and 8:15 pm. (See 4.1)
- C. Whether to play first and second inning for six defensive outs by National Division.
- D. The numbers of runs used for the Flip-Flop rule in the United, American, and Continental Divisions.