

**MANITOWOC COUNTY YOUTH SPORTS, INC.
GIRL'S SOFTBALL PROGRAM**

2026 MACHINE PITCH SOFTBALL LEAGUE RULES

*******SPECIAL NOTE: Unless noted in this document, all league rules are to follow the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) Softball Rules Book. Reference <http://www.nfhs.org/>.**

Additions or clarifications to rules for 2026 are in **bold block font**.
Deletions to rules for 2026 are ~~struck out~~.

I. ORGANIZATION

1. All entries for teams desiring to play in the Machine Pitch Softball League must submit entry by the date established at the Annual Spring Meeting each year.
2. An official master schedule with designated Machine Pitch Softball League regular season game dates and starting times will be released no later than one day after the Annual May Coaches Scheduling Meeting each year.
3. Machine Pitch Softball League games will be generally played on Monday evenings.
 - a. Any team may, by mutual agreement with the opposing team, change the date or time of play if necessary. Postponed games should be rescheduled in good faith and in a timely manner. The Machine Pitch Softball League Commissioner must be notified of the date or time change.
 - b. Teams must schedule make-up games within 2 (two) weeks after postponement due to weather or other conflict. If a new date and time cannot be agreed upon, teams are directed to work with the Machine Pitch Softball League Commissioner to facilitate rescheduling. If they are not scheduled within this time, a letter request may be filed by one of the teams with the Machine Pitch Softball League Commissioner regarding forfeiture.
 - c. If one team does not show or is not ready to play 15 (fifteen) minutes after the designated starting time, a forfeit can be requested from the Machine Pitch Softball League Commissioner.
 - d. A team failing to field 7 (seven) players at game time shall forfeit the game.
 - e. All forfeits in this rule must be presented to, and granted by the Machine Pitch Softball League Commissioner.
4. A Machine Pitch Softball Tournament may be scheduled upon the completion of the regular season. A Machine Pitch Softball Tournament will be structured as follows:
 - a. Team participation in the Tournament is voluntary.
 - b. Tournament bracket structure and seeding will be set by the Machine Pitch Softball League Commissioner, but will be generally based upon regular season record.

- c. Member Communities may bid on hosting the Machine Pitch Softball Tournament Games at the Annual May Coaches Scheduling Meeting.
 - i. Machine Pitch Softball Tournament championship games may be bundled with other League Tournament championship games.
 - ii. If multiple bids are received, the games shall be awarded to the Community with the longest time passing since last hosting.
 - iii. In case of a tie, a random drawing of bidding Communities will determine the winner.
 - d. In Tournament championship games for first/second or third/fourth place, establishing Home Team is by means of the flip of a coin - heads or tails.
 - e. If any team fails to show up for their scheduled first/second or third/fourth place games at the appropriate tournament site and date, the MCYS would:
 - i. Impose a fine of \$500 (five hundred dollars) which would be paid by the Community who the team plays for and paid to the MCYS Treasurer. This monetary amount would be then given back to the community hosting the tournament.
 - ii. All MCYS awards acquired during the year would be forfeited.
 - iii. Penalties in this rule must be approved by the Steering Committee.
5. The Machine Pitch Softball League utilizes a coach-operated mechanical pitching machine to deliver pitches, using a 10 (ten) inch softball.
 6. The following dimensions shall apply for the layout of the ball diamonds for Machine Pitch Softball:
 - Base path distance – 60 (sixty) feet
 - Pitcher’s mound distance – 35 (thirty-five) feet (this distance is from the front of the pitching rubber to the rear point of home plate)
 - A 16 (sixteen) foot diameter circle is required to be marked (chalked) around the center of the pitcher’s mound.
 7. All Machine Pitch Softball half-innings shall end with either 3 (three) outs or once the 5th (fifth) run of that half-inning crosses home plate, regardless of the number of outs.
 8. All Machine Pitch Softball regular season games shall be of 6 (six) innings or a 1-1/2 (one and one-half) hour time limit. No new inning can start after the 1-1/2 (one and one-half) hour limit.
 - a. If a game is called because of weather or darkness, 3-1/2 (three and one-half) innings will be considered a complete game if the home team is in the lead, or 4 (four) innings if the visiting team is in the lead.
 - b. If a pitching machine breaks and can’t be fixed or replaced in a reasonable amount of time, the game shall be suspended, rescheduled, and resumed from the time of the suspension.
 - c. A regular season game shall be ruled a tie if the score is tied after 6 (six) innings and the 1-1/2 (one and one-half) hour limit has been reached.
 - d. All post-season (tournament) games must be continued until a winner is determined.

- e. To resume a suspended game, resume game play where it was left off at the time of the suspension. If any players are missing when the game resumes, those players are removed from the batting order without penalty. Any additional players available for the game completion would be added to the end of the batting order, just like if they arrived for the game late.
9. All Machine Pitch Softball regular season and tournament (non-championship) games shall have the following run rule limits.
 - a. If a 12 (twelve) run lead exists after 4 (four) innings, the scoreboard will be turned off (with that score being reported for official game results), but the game will be finished with no scoreboard.
 - b. Any Machine Pitch Softball regular season or tournament game can be ended before 6 (six) innings by agreement of both managers.
 10. There is no run rule limit for MCYS Tournament Machine Pitch Softball Championship games. Any MCYS Tournament Machine Pitch Softball championship game shall be a 6 (six) inning game unless tied, or unless called before 6 (six) innings by agreement of both managers.
 11. Lightning or thunder protocols during games shall be per NFHS Guidelines on Handling Practices and Contests during Lightning or Thunder Disturbances (see Appendix A). It is recommended that practices use these same protocols.

II. EQUIPMENT

1. Steel spikes are **NOT ALLOWED!** Any player actively listed in the lineup found wearing steel spike shoes, shall change them immediately before the player can continue to participate in the game.
2. All catchers must wear full equipment, mask with throat protector, chest protector, and shin guards.
3. All offensive players shall wear a full protective helmet (with ear flaps and face guards) while batting and running the bases, or at any other time while on the playing field, such as entering or leaving the playing field, or when in the on-deck circle.
4. The official ball for the Machine Pitch Softball League will be determined each year at the Officer', Director's, and Commissioner's Meeting. 1 (one) dozen balls are supplied with each team entry. See the General Commissioner to purchase additional balls from MCYS inventory, or to obtain the official ball make and model for purchase elsewhere.
5. The use of aluminum bats is legal, however, if used, it must be intact. All bats must be taped or equipped with rubber grips. Any change in the basic form of the bat causes it to be illegal.

III. ROSTERS (PLAYERS - RESTRICTIONS)

1. To be eligible to play in the Machine Pitch Softball League, a player may not reach her 9th (ninth) birthday before June 1st of the current year.
 - a. Any appeal for an age or other MCYS roster exemption must be submitted to the MCYS Steering Committee before the Annual May Coaches Scheduling Meeting.
 - b. Machine Pitch Softball League participation is open to girls only, defined as female (girls) as indicated on the child's birth certificate.
2. No player may participate in this program unless they have a current liability form on file with the MCYS. A player is not eligible to participate in any game until a current liability form is properly filed with the Machine Pitch Softball League Commissioner.
 - a. Penalty for using a player that does not have a current liability form properly filed will be forfeiture of those games played. Penalties in this rule must be approved by the Steering Committee.
3. No players shall change from one Machine Pitch Softball team to another after the start of the season. Before the first league game is played, a roster is to be filed with the Machine Pitch Softball Commissioner. Failure to do so will result in forfeiture of all games played until such roster is filed.
 - a. Players can be added to a roster at any time during the regular season. A player is not eligible to participate in any game until they have been added to the official roster. Penalty for using a player that has not been added to the official roster will be forfeiture of those games played.
 - b. Penalties in this rule must be approved by the Machine Pitch Softball League Commissioner.
 - c. The number of players on a roster will be unlimited.
4. Players are generally limited to play on one team and one league only within the MCYS program to give as many players as possible an opportunity to play.
 - a. Starting in 2024, Machine Pitch Softball players that are currently eligible and actively playing on an MCYS Machine Pitch Softball Team, may also play on an MCYS Grade School Modified Fast Pitch Team. To be eligible for this special roster exemption, players must be registered to play on Machine Pitch Softball and Grade School Modified Fast Pitch teams from the same community, and must have reached their 8th (eighth) birthday by June 1st of the current year. This special roster exemption will apply for the regular season, and for tournament play.
5. To be eligible for tournament play, players must have a current liability form on file and must be on the official roster in the Machine Pitch Softball League Commissioner's possession before July 1st. Exceptions to this rule must be approved by the Steering Committee.

6. The Machine Pitch Softball League will play with a maximum of 10 (ten) defensive players on the field, which includes a maximum of 6 (six) players on the infield (includes a pitcher and a catcher). During the regular season only, this can be increased to a maximum of 12 (twelve) defensive players on the field, again with a maximum of 6 (six) players on the infield. Each player must play a minimum of 2 (two) innings defensively. Outfield positions must, at the start of the pitch, occupy a position outside the cut of a normal infield.
7. Defensive coaches may be on the field when their team is playing defense. These defensive coaches shall position themselves in the outfield. All defensive coaches are considered to be part of the playing field, if hit by a batted or thrown ball. All defensive coaches may not purposely interfere with a batted or thrown ball. Such interference shall result in a dead ball call, base runners will advance 2 (two) bases from their original base, and the batter shall be awarded second base.

IV. BASE RUNNING

1. Machine Pitch Softball League base runners may lead off only after the ball crosses home plate. There will be *no base stealing*.
 - a. A warning will be given if a base runner leaves early.
 - b. A second offense for the same base runner in the same inning will result in the base runner being called out.
 - c. The runner *may not* be put out on a throw from the catcher after leading off.
 - d. On a dropped third strike, the batter is out. The batter may not attempt to go to first base.
2. The base runner is limited to one base per overthrow. Additional overthrows will allow the base runner to advance additional bases. **An overthrow is defined as a ball that clearly leaves the reach of the defensive player covering the base. An overthrow must occur for a runner to attempt to advance beyond the base where a play is being made on that runner.**
3. No base runner shall, upon seeing the catcher or another defensive player who has the ball waiting for the runner, deliberately and with great force, crash into the defensive player in hopes of jarring the ball loose. The umpire shall declare such runner out, and if in the umpire's opinion, it is flagrant act; the runner shall be ejected from the game.
4. The Steering Committee recommends, that all managers instruct the base runners that have run past first base and have not made a break or started for second base to return to first base via foul territory so there is no question as to their intent.
5. When a fielder attempts to make a throw to the pitcher inside the circle, any base runner not halfway to the next base at the point when the ball reaches the pitcher or would have reached the pitcher if thrown accurately, must go back to the previous base.

6. If a batted ground ball is hit directly to and fielded by the pitcher while inside the pitching circle, any runner may advance one base [at her own risk] if they make an immediate move toward that base.

7. ~~6.~~ Base runners are encouraged to slide feet first into a base when a play is being made on them.
8. ~~7.~~ While running bases, if contact occurs between the base runner and a defensive player, the umpire's best judgment should be used to determine if the contact is illegal and results in an out call. Remember these kids are learning the game.

V. **BATTING**

1. A batter shall be called out after 3 (three) swinging strikes. The maximum pitch count per at-bat is 5 (five) pitches unless the batter fouls off the 5th (fifth) and subsequent pitches to keep the at-bat alive. A batter reaching the maximum pitch count per at-bat will be called out. No walks will be issued.
2. A batter cannot advance to first base when hit by a pitch.
3. Bunting or squaring around to slap-bunt is illegal. If a batter squares to bunt, the umpire will call a strike on the batter. If the pitch hits a batter attempting to bunt, the umpire will call a strike and keep the batter in the home plate box, and not award the batter to first base. If the batter attempting to bunt with two strikes is hit by a pitch or fouls off the pitch, the batter is out.
4. Infield fly rule shall not apply.
5. A batted ball that hits the pitching machine, the ball bucket behind the machine, or the pitching coach, and goes into foul territory shall be considered a fair ball.
6. Both teams shall ~~roster bat. If a player must leave the game (due to injury, etc.) their spot in the batting order shall be vacated without penalty.~~ **use what is known as Roster Batting to create their batting order. The following modifications to NFHS rules would then apply.**
 - a. **All eligible players present must be included in the batting order. Any eligible players arriving after the game officially starts are added to the bottom of the order. Players may not be moved to another batting order position.**

- b. If a player leaves the game due to injury or illness, the opposing coach and umpire must be notified prior to the at-bat, that player is removed from the batting order, and no out is recorded when that spot in the batting order comes up later in the game. If removal of the player reduces the number of players to 6 (six) or less, an out will be recorded when that spot in the batting order comes up later in the game. The player removed from the game or batting order for any reason cannot re-enter the game.**
- c. If a player leaves the game due to reasons other than injury or illness, that player is removed from the batting order and an out is recorded when that spot in the batting order comes up later in the game, unless an arrangement for that player to leave the game has been agreed upon with the umpire and opposing coach prior to the start of the game. The player cannot re-enter the game.**
- d. All players are eligible for defensive play, and can be substituted into any defensive position at any time.**

VI. PITCHING

1. Pitching machine set up: The back end of the pitching machine will be placed 2 (two) feet in front of the pitching rubber (to avoid too much drop in the pitch). The Power Pedal ~~should~~ **must** be set on the #3 setting. **The Power Pedal setting shall be confirmed by the umpire(s) prior to the start of each game.** A #2 setting on the release arm and #4 setting on the micro setting will likely give a good pitch. You may need to dig in one end of the machine or prop up one end in order to get the best height on a pitch. Consistently placing the sweet spot of the ball (often referred to as between the “horseshoes” of the laces) on the adjusting bolt can often provide a more consistent pitch.



2. An offensive pitcher-coach shall be positioned behind the pitching machine, and shall operate the pitching machine. At the start of each half inning, the pitcher-coach shall have the full complement of game balls in their possession, in 1 (one) of the game ball bags or other containers. The game ball bag or other container shall be placed directly behind the pitching machine.
3. The pitcher will assume a defensive position near the mound, to either side of the pitching machine and must have both feet inside the pitching circle. The catcher will assume a normal defensive position behind home plate.
4. A catcher-assistant shall be positioned behind and off to one side of the catcher, also having 1 (one) of the game ball bags or other containers. If the catcher fields pitched balls cleanly, they shall deliver them to the catcher-assistant. If pitched balls are not fielded cleanly by the catcher, the catcher assistant can retrieve them to help speed up the batting process. The catcher-assistant shall deliver accumulated game balls (in bulk) back to the pitcher-coach as needed. The catcher-assistant should be an adult or of high-school age, and can be a different person from each team, or can be the same person for both teams.
5. The pitcher-coach and catcher-assistant, as well as the pitching machine and game ball bag or other container, are considered to be part of the playing field, if hit by a batted or thrown ball. A pitcher-coach or catcher-assistant may not purposely interfere with a batted or thrown ball. Such interference shall result in a dead ball call, base runners will remain at their original base, and the pitch shall be ruled a no pitch.

VII. HOME TEAM RESPONSIBILITY

1. The home team shall furnish at least 1 (one) umpire per game, but 2 (two) umpires per game is desired. Once a game starts, the umpires shall have complete control over how the game proceeds. The umpires shall eject from the game, any player, coach, or manager for using profane language. The umpires may also eject from the game, for good reason, any person or player at any time they feel it is necessary for the good of the game and the program. Such ejections shall be agreed upon by all umpires working the game and shall be reported to the Machine Pitch Softball League Commissioner as soon as possible, but in no case later than the following day. If there is only 1 umpire, they should be positioned behind home plate and can request the help of coaches in the field if needed for a call on the bases. **Any home team not supplying the required umpire(s) at the start of the game is subject to forfeiting that game, at the discretion of the Machine Pitch Softball League Commissioner.**

2. The umpires must be well versed in the rules of the game, especially MCYS special rules. At least 1 (one) adult umpire is required per game ... must be 18 (eighteen) years of age or older, while the second umpire (if used) must be 12 (twelve) years of age or older. The adult umpire may be positioned either behind home plate or on the bases. The umpires shall, in all cases, be persons worthy of the position, of sufficient maturity to use good judgment, and do a satisfactory job.

The manager or coach of a team involved in a game shall not umpire that game, unless by mutual agreement with the manager or coach from the opposing team.

- a. If the home team has not supplied the required, qualified umpire(s) within 15 (fifteen) minutes after the designated starting time, a forfeit can be requested by the visiting team (see Rule I.3.e).
 - b. If both teams agree to use umpires that do not meet these requirements, then all decisions made by those umpire(s) will be upheld as final (MCYS will not allow protest of the game results).
3. The home team shall furnish the official scorer. Both teams shall submit full names, first and last, **and player numbers (if their jerseys have numbers)**, to the official scorer. **Any home team not supplying the required official scorer at the start of the game is subject to forfeiting that game, at the discretion of the Machine Pitch Softball League Commissioner.**
 4. The winning team shall be responsible for reporting results to the Machine Pitch Softball League Commissioner. Results should be phoned, texted, or emailed to the Machine Pitch Softball League Commissioner, preferably the night of the game or the morning following the game, but in no case, later than 2 (two) days after the scheduled date of the game.

5. The home team shall have available a current year or one year old copy of the Softball Rules Book from the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS), and the current year Machine Pitch Softball League Rules for each game. The MCYS shall provide a new NFHS Rules Book to each coach in every even-numbered year. (The expectation is that new coaches in odd-numbered years will receive their copy of the NFHS Rules Book from their predecessor).
6. The home team shall supply a minimum of 6 (six) game balls per game, in new or in good condition. For 2026
7. and beyond, the original optic pink and yellow ball will again become the official game ball, but the yellow game balls used in 2023 and 2024 will continue to be an acceptable game ball, as long as they are in good condition. The same style of ball (pink & yellow optic or yellow optic) shall be used for the entire game.
 - a. The home team shall also supply 2 (two) ball bags or other such small containers to hold official game balls during play by the pitcher-coach and / or the catcher-assistant.
8. The Machine Pitch Softball League will utilize a Louisville Slugger Blue Flame Pitching Machine, a low-cost mechanical pitching machine, for delivering pitches to each batter. The home team shall provide the pitching machine for each game. (Pitching machines will be able to be purchased through MCYS at cost). **It is recommended that the pitching machine springs be replaced as often as needed to provide consistent pitching, as their elasticity is compromised through excessive use.**

VIII. MISCELLANEOUS MCYS RULES

1. To promote sportsmanship and fair play, umpires, managers, and coaches should insist that conversation between opposing teams during the game be addressed to play position, rather than name, nickname, or other forms of razzing. This is of prime importance in the younger leagues. We feel it is equally important for spectators to act in the same manner.
2. The Steering Committee will be composed of the Officers, Directors, and Commissioners of the MCYS. It shall be their responsibility to evaluate any problems or questions submitted to them by any member of this program and to make such decisions and take such action as they feel is necessary to rectify these situations. They shall have authority to suspend temporarily or permanently any member of the program, or to make such reprimands as they deem necessary.
3. Game Protest Procedures and Requirements.
 - a. All game protests must be submitted verbally (no texting) to the appropriate MCYS League Commissioner within 24 (twenty-four) hours of game completion.

- b. The protest shall then be presented in writing (email is acceptable – texting is not) to the MCYS President within 48 (forty-eight) hours of the verbal submission.
 - c. A \$100 (one hundred dollar) protest fee shall accompany any written protests and must be in the MCYS President’s possession before the protest will be reviewed. This fee will be refunded if the protest is ruled in favor of the protesting team.
 - d. No protests will be allowed on judgement calls. Protests will only be allowed on the application of MCYS or NFHS rules.
 - e. Any protests will be decided by the MCYS Steering Committee and the teams involved. If a protest is upheld, the original game shall be declared a “no-game”, and will be rescheduled by the appropriate MCYS Commissioner, with the rule infraction corrected.
 - f. There will be no protests allowed in tournament games.
4. Smoking or alcoholic beverages will not be allowed on the playing field or in the play area (dugouts, benches, etc.).
5. Any proposed changes or modifications of these rules must be submitted in writing to the MCYS General Commissioner by February 1st of the next year. The appropriate League Commissioner (or Commissioners, should the requested change directly affect multiple Leagues) shall review the request and shall decide whether to submit the request to the full Steering Committee for review and a formal vote on adoption, or to place the request on the MCYS next business meeting agenda as a discussion item only. If the decision is to submit for review and formal vote, the Commissioner(s) shall work with the Requestor and the MCYS General Commissioner to draft language for the Steering Committee review. If the decision is for discussion only (not to submit for review and formal vote), The Commissioner(s) shall provide feedback to the Requester after the Steering Committee discussion has been completed. The Steering Committee shall conduct either the reviews with formal vote, or the discussions only, at a regular or special business meeting prior to the annual Spring Meeting.
6. Coach Guidelines for MCYS Machine Pitch Softball League
- Goal is to have our youngest girls focus on hitting, base running, and defensive fielding, and generally learning the basics of fast pitch softball, while keeping them safe and having fun. Make it so that the kids want to come back and continue playing in the future.
 - Sportsmanship is a must for players, coaches, and fans.
 - Work with opposing coaches to do what is best for kids. Such as letting a team bat more than 3 outs in the final inning to get kids at bats if losing by large margin in the final inning.
 - Work with neighboring communities if you have interest in fielding a team, but not enough players. Such cooperative teams are encouraged.
 - Remember to keep the games moving. Suggestions to speed up play include having the batting order ready before the game starts, decide defensive positions for the next

inning while batting, encourage kids to hustle on & off the field, have an adult help the catcher get her equipment on, etc.

- Communicate frequently with the Machine Pitch Softball League Commissioner, especially when you have questions.

Appendix A

NFHS GUIDELINES ON HANDLING PRACTICES AND CONTESTS DURING LIGHTNING or THUNDER DISTURBANCES

National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) Sports Medicine Advisory Committee (SMAC)

These guidelines provide a default policy to those responsible or sharing duties for making decisions concerning the suspension and restarting of practices and contests based on the presence of lightning or thunder. The preferred sources from which to request such a policy for your facility would include your state high school activities association and the nearest office of the National Weather Service.

Proactive Planning

1. Assign staff to monitor local weather conditions before and during practices and contests.
2. Develop an evacuation plan, including identification of appropriate nearby safe areas.
3. Develop criteria for suspension and resumption of play:
 - a. When thunder is heard or a cloud-to-ground lightning bolt is seen, the leading edge of the thunderstorm is close enough to strike your location with lightning. Suspend play for thirty minutes and take shelter immediately.
 - b. Thirty-minute rule. Once play has been suspended, wait at least 30 minutes after the last thunder is heard or flash of lightning is witnessed prior to resuming play.
 - c. Any subsequent thunder or lightning after the beginning of the 30-minute count will reset the clock and another 30-minute count should begin.
4. Review annually with all administrators, coaches and game personnel.
5. Inform student athletes of the lightning policy at start of season.

For more detailed information, refer to the "Lightning Safety" section contained in the NFHS Sports Medicine Handbook.

Revised and Approved October 2014

DISCLAIMER – NFHS Position Statements and Guidelines

The NFHS regularly distributes position statements and guidelines to promote public awareness of certain health and safety-related issues. Such information is neither exhaustive nor necessarily applicable to all circumstances or individuals, and is no substitute for consultation with appropriate health-care professionals. Statutes, codes or environmental conditions may be relevant. NFHS position statements or guidelines should be considered in conjunction with other pertinent materials when taking action or planning care. The NFHS reserves the right to rescind or modify any such document at any time.