



# **Youth Softball Coaches Handbook**

## **Dedication**

This handbook is dedicated to the hardworking volunteer coaches who make our softball program possible. We appreciate the time, effort, and dedication you give to the children of Town of Ayden. The staff of Ayden Arts and Recreation Department offers many thanks for helping us provide this opportunity to the youth of our Town. We hope that you find this handbook helpful in your coaching endeavors.

Many Thanks!

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## **Mission Statement**

*The mission of Ayden Arts and Recreation Department is to provide high quality, diverse and accessible programs, services and facilities that enhance the quality of life for all ages, cultures, and abilities.*

## **Philosophy**

The game of softball is just a game. The number one reason (well documented in a number of studies) children participate in youth sports is to have fun. If you take the fun out of sports, you take the child out of sports. It is detrimental to the player if there is too much pressure placed on them too early to achieve a result rather than simply experiencing the sheer joy of a youth game. As a coach you want to create a stress free relaxed environment for your team. Let your kids know that it is okay to make mistakes. Get to know your kids individually and determine what they need to be successful. For some kids it might be a specific skill. For others it might be encouragement or even something as simple as acknowledgment.

Ayden Arts and Recreation youth softball is not about how many wins or losses are accumulated! Proper softball development is achieved by children participating in age appropriate activities so that they are able to experience, comprehend, and execute the game as it relates to where they are in their cognitive development. It is achieved by all of the team members receiving equal playing time. It is achieved by teaching the skills, rules and vocabulary of the game. Finally, it is achieved by teaching sportsmanship. Learning about winning and losing, playing by the rules, and respecting an opponent are just as important as learning softball skills.

The Ayden Arts and Recreation wants you to respect the game of softball, respect the players, the opponents, the referee, and the parents. Go about your teachings in a thorough, positive, yet humble manner. Players should come out of their experience with the coach as better people and better citizens, not just better softball players.

## **Role of the Coach**

As a coach in youth sports, one must assume the responsibility of ensuring that each participant has an enjoyable and safe experience learning softball. To fulfill these responsibilities, a coach must wear many different hats. Listed below are some prominent roles a coach may take on.

### ***Facilitator***

- Set up the conditions and environment for learning.
- Give only positive feedback (sarcasm and negativity should never occur).
- Encourage players to give each other positive feedback.
- Coaches should be enthusiastic, organized, patient, sincere, and fair.
- Practices should be conducted in the spirit of enjoyment and learning.
- De-emphasize winning and losing and emphasize sportsmanship and fun.
- Invite parents to help and participate.

### ***Positive Role Model***

- Work with all players equally.
- Treat each team member with equal regard and respect.
- Demonstrate respect for opponents, referees, parents, spectators, opposing coaches, and opposing players.
- Show respect and responsibility for the game of softball.

### ***Understand who you are coaching***

- Children are not defined by chronological age only.
- Each child matures and develops at a different pace.
- Treat each child as a unique individual.
- All activities should be age appropriate.
- Recognize that kids participate for different reasons. Some may be there because their older siblings play and it is expected in their family that they play. Some may play because they have a parent that is a frustrated athlete and wants to live through their child. Some may play because all their friends do, and they want to be with them. Others may play because they love Softball.

***“THERE IS NO GREATER GIFT THAN THAT OF A GOOD COACH”***

*Bruce Brown (Former college coach)*

### **Coaches' Responsibilities and Guidelines**

Coaches are role models for teaching the fundamentals of the sport, sport skills, tactics and sportsmanship. Coaches are responsible for their personal conduct and behavior, as well as, the conduct and behavior of players. Coaches are required to follow the Ayden Arts and Recreation Department guidelines at all times. A coach who does not follow the guidelines provided by the Ayden Arts and Recreation Department will need to meet with the Arts and Recreation Department Recreation Director in order to continue to coach. All volunteer coaches shall be "at will coaches," and may be discharged by the Ayden Arts and Recreation Department with or without cause. Only coaches who have been approved by the Ayden Arts and Recreation Department will be allowed to go on the field of play or court during practices and games.

#### ***Responsibilities and Guidelines***

Coaches participating in Ayden Arts and Recreation Department youth sports shall:

- Be reliable, and on time. (The first to arrive and the last to leave...)
- Be responsible for distributing a game/practice schedule to parents/guardians prior to the beginning of the season.
- Have with you, at all practices and games, the Emergency Contact Information forms for each child on the team.
- Be responsible for making sure first aid kits are on-site at every practice and game. Ayden Arts and Recreation Department will supply these kits.
- Be responsible for ensuring players' parents/guardians are informed of changes to the game or practice schedule. This includes cancellations the day of the game or practice.
- Ensure that each player receives playing time in games according to Ayden Arts and Recreation Department policy on playing time. Equal participation in the program as a whole is the desired goal.
- Be responsible for communicating Ayden Arts and Recreation Department playing time policy as well as their own philosophy regarding playing time to parents/guardians & athletes prior to the start of the season.
- Have all players and team coaches shake hands after the completion of the game.
- Never play an injured or bleeding player. Think of the player first and not the team's final outcome.

- Conduct themselves in a professional manner at all times, and shall refrain from directing abusive or sarcastic language or gestures toward officials, other coaches or players.
- Serve as a role model for players and spectators.
- Ensure that Ayden Arts and Recreation Department equipment is accounted for, and maintained in usable condition and returned promptly at the end of the season.
- Leave facilities in the same or better condition than they were when the team arrived.

## **Coaches' Code of Conduct & Code of Ethics**

**I will honor the fact that youth sports exist for youth, not adults.**

### **Expected Behavior:**

- Maintaining a positive, helpful and supportive attitude.
- Exercising your authority/influence to control behavior of fans and spectators.
- Exhibiting gracious acceptance of defeat or victory.
- Accepting and adhering to all league rules and policies related to participation of adults and youth. Playing all players according to the equal participation rules established by the league and the follow the spirit of those rules.
- Fulfilling the expected role of a youth coach to adopt a "children first" philosophy.
- Allowing and encouraging the players to listen, learn and play hard within the rules.
- Placing emphasis on fun, participation and team.

**I will do my very best to make youth sports fun for my child and other children involved.**

### **Expected Behavior:**

- Recognizing the differences of each child and treating each player as an individual while demonstrating concern for their individual needs and well-being.
- Encouraging all players, regardless of skill level, to be included as a member of the team.
- Recognizing that some physical tasks, drills and demands are not appropriate for all youth.
- Recognizing that youth may vary greatly in physical, social and emotional maturation and considering these factors when setting up competitions and when interacting with youth.

**I will do my best to organize practices that are fun and challenging for all my players.**

### **Expected Behavior:**

- Establishing practice plans that are interesting, varied, productive and aimed at improving all players skills and individual abilities.
- Devoting appropriate time to the individual improvement of each player.
- Conducting practices of reasonable length and intensity appropriate for the age and conditioning of the players.

**I will exercise good sportsmanship by demonstrating positive support for all players & officials at every game, practice or other sports event.**

### **Expected Behavior:**

- Adopting the position, teaching and demonstrating that it is our basic moral code to treat others as we would like to be treated.
- Abiding by and supporting the rules of the game as well as the spirit of the rules.
- Providing an environment conducive to fair and equitable competition.
- Using the influential position of youth coach as an opportunity to promote, teach and expect fair sportsmanship and fair play.



**I will make sure all children play in a safe, healthy environment.**

**Expected Behavior:**

- Maintaining a high level of awareness of potentially unsafe conditions.
- Protecting players from sexual molestations, assault, physical abuse and emotional abuse.
- Correcting or avoiding unsafe practice or playing conditions.
- Using appropriate safety equipment necessary to protect all players.
- Seeing that the players are provided with adequate adult supervision while under the coach's care.

**I will insist that my team exercise good sportsmanship toward coaches, officials, fans, and other players.**

**Expected Behavior:**

- Becoming knowledgeable, understanding and supportive of all applicable game rules, league rules, regulations and policies.
- Teaching and requiring compliance of these rules among players, so that with this understanding good sportsmanship can be maintained.
- Teaching techniques that reduce risk of injury to both the coach's own players and their opponents.
- Discouraging illegal contact or intentional dangerous play and administering swift and equitable discipline to players involved in such activity.

**I will provide a sports environment for my team that is free of drugs, tobacco, and alcohol. I will refrain from their use at all Ayden Arts and Recreation Department youth sports events.**

**Expected Behavior:**

- Being alcohol and drug free at all team activities or in the presence of players.
- Refraining from the use of any type of tobacco products at all team activities or in the presence of your players
- Refraining from providing any type of alcohol, drug or tobacco products to any of your players
- Encouraging parents to refrain from the public use of tobacco products or alcohol at team activities.

**I will place the safety and physical development of my players ahead of my personal desire to win.**

**Expected Behavior:**

- Using appropriate language in appropriate tones when interacting with league officials, players, game officials, parents and spectators. *At no time is profanity acceptable.*
- Including all players in team activities without regard to race, religion, sex, body type, national origin, ancestry, disability, ability or any other legally protected classification.

- Treating all players, league officials, game officials, parents, and spectators with dignity and respect.
- Playing all players according to the equal participation rules established by the league and the playing by the spirit of those rules.
- Encouraging youth to participate in other sports and activities to promote all aspects of their development.
- Allowing reasonable absences from practices.

**I will support other coaches and league officials.**

**Expected Behavior:**

- I will back and support league officials and coaches when working with my players and parents. I will enforce league rules.
- If I have concerns or questions, I will direct them to recreation staff or coach at an appropriate time, not during a practice or game. I will not criticize another coach, an official, or a recreation staff in front of my players or parents.
- I will cooperate and offer assistance whenever I can.

**I will remember that children play, referees call, fans cheer and coaches TEACH. Anytime someone steps out of their area of responsibility, a strain is created on every other areas involved.**

## **Offense & Penalty**

Coaches must conduct themselves in a sportsmanlike manner at all times, and are, otherwise, subject to removal from coaching staff. No matter the situation, coaches must act with the upmost respect and integrity.

Coaches ejected from a game by an official will be immediately removed from the premises. Said Coach will serve a minimum one (1) game suspension. Each situation will be reviewed, and penalties will be issued on a case by case basis.

Minimum means the coach will receive at least the prescribed penalty depending on the severity of the offense. Maximum means this the highest penalty a coach may receive for that offense. Multiple offenses will result in the doubling of penalties and may result in suspension from coaching for the remainder of the season as well as in any other Ayden Arts and Recreation Department function.

***Offense:*** Failure to follow established guidelines, rules, policies and procedures as applicable to related sport

***Penalty:*** Not necessarily proceeded by a warning...immediate ejection, removal from the premises and a minimum two (2) game suspension.

- This includes regular season and tournament games.
- This includes coaching or assistance of any other youth sport teams.
- For coaches involved with multiple teams, the two (2) game suspension will not be lifted until the team in which the infraction occurred has been played.

***Offense:*** Malicious obscene/profane/vulgar verbal abuse directed towards another individual.

***Penalty:*** Not necessarily proceeded by a warning...immediate ejection, removal from the premises and a minimum of two (2) game suspension

- This includes regular season and tournament games.
- This includes coaching or assistance of any other youth sport teams.

- For coaches involved with multiple teams, the two (2) game suspension will not be lifted until the team in which the infraction occurred has been played.

***Offense:*** Racist or other language that could incite a riot.

***Penalty:*** Not necessarily preceded by a warning. Immediate removal from the premises and a minimum suspension of the remainder of the season with a maximum of two (2) years suspension will ensue.

- This includes regular season games, tournament games, practices, award ceremonies, and any other Ayden Arts and Recreation Department function.
- This includes coaching or assistance of any other youth sport teams.
- For coaches with players(children) in other sports. Will not be allowed to attend any regular season games, tournament games, practices, award ceremonies until the sport in which the infraction occurred has had the season end.
- Coaches will be allowed to attend regular season games, tournament games, practices, award ceremonies as a parent. After the season has ended for the sport in which the infraction occurred.
- Suspension coach will act as role model for other parents. Action such as negative cheering, coaching from the sideline, etc.... will result in immediate removal from the premises and suspension of the remainder of the season.

***Offense:*** Physical aggression towards another; pushing, shoving, striking or touching another individual.

***Penalty:*** Not necessarily preceded by a warning. Immediate removal from the premises and a minimum suspension of the remainder of the season with a maximum of five (5) years suspension will ensue.

- This includes regular season games, tournament games, practices, award ceremonies, and any other Ayden Arts and Recreation Department function.
- This includes coaching or assistance of any other youth sport teams.
- For coaches with players(children) in other sports. Will not be allowed to attend any regular season games, tournament games, practices, award ceremonies until the sport in which the infraction occurred has had the season end.
- Coaches will be allowed to attend regular season games, tournament games, practices, award ceremonies as a parent. After the season has ended for the sport in which the infraction occurred.
- Suspension coach will act as role model for other parents. Action such as negative cheering, coaching from the sideline, etc.... will result in immediate removal from the premises and suspension of the remainder of the season.

***Offense:*** Any violation of North Carolina law; possession of firearms, knives, explosive devices weapons or under the influence of alcohol, narcotics, controlled substances, chemical or drug paraphernalia; assault with or without a weapon.

***Penalty*** Not necessarily preceded by a warning. Immediate removal from the premises and a minimum suspension of the remainder of the season with a maximum of eight (8) years suspension will ensue.

- This includes regular season games, tournament games, practices, award ceremonies, and any other Ayden Arts and Recreation Department function.
- This includes coaching or assistance of any other youth sport teams.
- For coaches with players(children) in other sports. Will not be allowed to attend any regular season games, tournament games, practices, award ceremonies until the sport in which the infraction occurred has had the season end.

- Coaches will be allowed to attend regular season games, tournament games, practices, award ceremonies as a parent. After the season has end for the sport which the infraction occurred.
- Suspension coach will act as role model for other parents. Action such as negative cheering, coaching from the sideline, etc.... will result in immediate removal from the premises and suspension of the remainder of the season.

## Youth Sports Players

A growing body of research literature finds that in addition to improved physical health, sport plays a primarily positive role in youth development, including improved academic achievement, higher self-esteem, fewer behavioral problems, and better psychosocial. Many studies focus on the effects of sport on the five “C’s” competence, confidence, connections, character, and caring, which are considered critical components of positive youth development. It has long been thought that the many facets of playing sport—the discipline of training, learning teamwork, following the leadership of coaches and captains, learning to lose, provide lifelong skills for athletes.

### *Four Truths about Children and Sports*

- Fun is pivotal. If it isn’t fun, children will drop out of sports.
- Skill development is a crucial aspect of fun.
- Intrinsic rewards (self-knowledge that grows out of self-competition) are more important in creating lifetime athletes than are extrinsic rewards (victory or attention from others).
- The most rewarding challenges of sports are those that lead to increased self-knowledge, self-improvement, self-confidence, and self-esteem

### *Age Group Characteristics*

Before you are able to effectively coach the children that have been entrusted to your care, you need to understand the characteristics of whom you are developing. It is imperative that you understand that when you are dealing with children that you take the time to comprehend where they are currently in their own development.

#### **Ages 7 - 9**

This is the stage where players begin to understand the concept of passing to a teammate.

From a physical standpoint they still lack a sense of pace and tend to exert themselves hard and then drop. They are now starting to develop some physical confidence in themselves and they are still into running, climbing, rolling and jumping.

From a mental perspective they feel if they tried hard then they performed well (regardless of the activity’s outcome). They are beginning to show a limited ability to tend to more than one task at a time.

From a social perspective they have a great need for approval from adults and like to show off individual skills. Negative comments carry great weight. Their playmates start to emerge and they will start to move towards small groups. They want everyone to like them at this age. You should be positive with everything that you do.

### **Ages 10 – 12**

Children at this age are on the edge of childhood and adolescence. It can present a multitude of problems, but also an abundance of potential.

From a physical standpoint strength and power become a major factor in their performance. Their muscles mature and they realize how much more they can do on the court. Their coordination significantly improves and it shows up in the execution of a child's technical ability.

From a mental perspective they can sequence thoughts and perform complex tasks. A coach can expect his players to understand the game and use teammates to solve problems. They are usually eager to learn.

From a social perspective whether a child enters puberty early or late is significant. Girls tend to form cliques while boys take a more broad approach to team relationships. The manner in which they feel about themselves can determine how they relate to their teammates. Sometimes popularity influences self-esteem.

### **Ages 13 - 16**

From a physical standpoint they are experiencing many physical changes. They are entering puberty where boys' voices are changing; they are experiencing a growing spurt.

From a mental perspective they are expanding to include more abstract thinking. They are beginning to understand cause and effect and are ready for more in-depth and more long-term experiences. They also like to set goals based on their needs and interests. They are also moving from fantasy to reality where their life goals or career are concerned.

From a social perspective a child at this age are transitioning into involvement with opposite sex groups. They are more interested in what their peers say than their parents' advice. They do search for adult role models outside of their parents



## **Youth Sports Players Playing Time and Practice Requirements**

### **Playing Time**

To foster enjoyment and personal development for all players participating in team sports, the Ayden Arts and Recreation Department expects coaches adhere to the following time requirements. League rules should be followed if the minimum playing time is greater than the Department requirement.

Softball: Each player plays at least two (2) innings in the field per game and is a part of a continuous batting lineup; i.e. if league rules permit a continuous lineup.

**After playing requirements are met, coaches will be encouraged to give players additional playing time. Equal playing time is encouraged.**

**Note:** For more information about playing time, see the coach's handbook for that particular sport.

### **Practice Requirements**

Ayden Arts & Recreation Department wants to insure that your athlete is safe while on the court or playing field. Youth sports of Ayden require athletes to attend practices that will allow them an opportunity for them to gain the skills needed to participate in their chosen sport safely. While the Department understands how difficult it can be to bring your child to practice, it is important to know that when athletes miss practices they are not only hurting their team and their coach, but, most importantly, themselves by not acquiring the necessary skills and understanding of the game.

Ayden Arts & Recreation has developed the following penalties for players missing practice:

Softball:

- One (1) missed practiced – will play minimum requirements
- Two (2) missed practices – limited to one (1) inning in the playing field
- Three (3) or more missed practices – not allowed to play in the field for the whole game

### **Players' Responsibilities and Expectations**

Participation in youth sports programs can have a lasting and meaningful effect on children's lives. Therefore, it is the goal of the Ayden Arts and Recreation Department to provide the highest quality of athletic programs to ensure that a child's experience with sports is a positive one. It takes the cooperation of everyone involved, including the participant, to make this happen. The Ayden Arts and Recreation Department has established the following responsibilities for participants to adhere to:

- Players will listen to their coaches and be respectful of their elders.
- Players will take care of the facilities, equipment, and uniforms which they are given or participate in.
- Players will make sure to eat the right foods and drink plenty of water before and after practices and games.
- Players will avoid all types of taunting and belittling remarks to their teammates or opponents.
- Players will show good sportsmanship at all times, win or lose.
- Players will not make sports a priority over schoolwork or family.
- Players will participate for the love of the game and social interaction with peers.

### ***Players Code of Ethics***

Players are expected to conduct themselves in a positive manner regarding their youth sports experience and accept responsibility for their participation by following the Players Code of Ethics Pledge:

- I will encourage good sportsmanship from fellow players, coaches, officials, and parents at every game and practice by demonstrating good sportsmanship.
- I will attend every practice and game that I can, and will notify my coach if I cannot.
- I will expect to receive a fair and just amount of playing time.
- I will do my very best to listen and learn from my coaches.
- I will treat my coaches, other players, officials and fans with respect regardless of race, gender, creed or abilities, and I will expect to be treated accordingly.
- I deserve to have fun during my sports experience and will alert parents or coaches if it stops being fun!
- I deserve to play in an environment that is free of drugs, tobacco, and alcohol and expect adults to refrain from their use at all youth sporting events.
- I will encourage my parents to be involved with my team in some capacity because it's important to me.
- I will do my very best in school.
- I will remember that sports are an opportunity to learn and have fun.

### **Offense & Penalty**

Players may not conduct themselves in an unsportsmanlike manner at any time and may be removed from the league if they do. Regardless of the situation, we expect our players to act with the upmost respect and integrity in any scenario.

***Offense:*** Failure to follow established guidelines, rules, policies and procedures as applicable to related sport.

***Penalty:*** Not necessarily proceeded by a warning...immediate ejection, removal from the premises and a minimum One (1) game suspension.

***Offensive:*** Malicious obscene/profane/vulgar verbal abuse directed towards another individual.

***Penalty:*** Not necessarily proceeded by a warning...immediate ejection, removal from the premises and a minimum one (1) game suspension. This includes regular and tournament games, practices, award ceremonies or any other Ayden Arts and Recreation Department function(s).

***Offense:*** Physical aggression towards another; pushing, shoving or touching another individual.

***Penalty:*** Not necessarily proceeded by a warning...immediate ejection, removal from the premises and a minimum one (1) game suspension. This includes regular and tournament games, practices, award ceremonies or any other Ayden Arts and Recreation Department function(s).

***Offense:*** Physical aggression towards another; striking or throwing a punch towards another individual.

***Penalty:*** Not necessarily proceeded by a warning...immediate ejection, removal from the premises and could result in a maximum of one (1) year suspension. This includes all youths' sports regular and tournament games, practices, award ceremonies or any other Ayden Arts and Recreation Department function(s).

***Offense:*** Any violation of North Carolina law; possession of firearms, knives, explosive devices weapons or under the influence of alcohol, narcotics, controlled substances, chemical or drug paraphernalia; assault with or without a weapon.

***Penalty:*** Not necessarily proceeded by a warning...immediate ejection, removal from the premises and could result in a maximum of three (3) years suspension. This includes all youths' sports regular and tournament games, practices, award ceremonies or any other Ayden Arts and Recreation Department function(s).

## **Player Safety**

As a volunteer coach you will have the care, custody, and control of someone else's children. In this capacity you have the potential to create and to prevent accidents and injuries.

- You must provide adequate supervision to your players. The health and safety of your team members are entrusted to your care. You must provide adequate supervision to avoid foreseeable accidents and injuries. NEVER leave players unattended! NEVER leave after a game or practice until all parents or guardians have arrived!
- Evaluate your players and determine any limitations that they may have. Be sure players are physically and mentally capable of performing the required skills. Evaluate injuries as they occur and determine if it is safe for the player to play.
- If any minor or major injuries occur, always fill out an accident report and give it to a recreation staff member.

## ***Care and Prevention of Injuries***

The first line of defense in the treatment of injuries is to prevent them. Factors that can prevent injuries are:

- The proper use of equipment
- No jewelry allowed
- Make sure there is ample water and rest periods
- Make sure players don't return too early from an injury

The care of an injured athlete should begin the moment an injury occurs. Immediate care will reduce the severity of the injury and possibility of long-term disability. Upon seeing an injured player on the court/field a coach should:

- Stay composed
- Determine if a player is conscious and coherent (if not, dial 911)
- Question the player in regards to the injury
- Avoid moving the player if it appears major in any way
- Inspire confidence and reassure the player
- Determine how the injury occurred

After determining that an injury is not life threatening, the nature of an injury can be further determined. Note the position of the injured part. Is it swollen or deformed? Compare the injury with the uninjured opposite body part. Do not move the injured part.

## ***Injury Policy***

Any participant injured, in either league sanctioned play or that outside of sanctioned play (non-league sanctioned), that requires medical attention will not be eligible to participate until the department (Ayden Arts & Recreation) receives signed medical release from doctor noting that the child is eligible to play or when they will be eligible to play with specific date.

This policy will be strictly enforced and is in the best interests of parents, participants, coaches Ayden Arts & Recreation, and all other involved parties.

## **PLANNING FOR THE SEASON**

Holding a pre-season parent meeting is beneficial for the parents, players and coach. Take this opportunity to inform parents of the goals and expectations as outlined in the Youth Softball Coaches' Manual.

### ***Parent Orientation Meeting***

All Coaches are encouraged to establish effective lines of communication with the team parents early in the season by holding a parent orientation meeting. This may take the form of a casual discussion at your first practice. The time you invest will pay dividends for all concerned throughout the season. If a meeting is impossible, then the following information could be put in a letter to parents/players. But, a face-to-face meeting is preferred.

### ***Purpose of a Parent Orientation Meeting***

- Enables parents to understand the objectives of the team.
- Allows parents to become acquainted with you, the coach.
- Inform parents about the nature (and inherent risks) of the sport.
- Articulate your expectations of them and of their children.
- Enables you to address any parents' concerns.
- Establishes clear lines of communication between you, parents, and players.
- Allows you to obtain parental support (assistant coaches, team parents, etc.).
- Designate a "Team Mom" to arrange a schedule for snacks and refreshments for each game.

### ***Important Points to Cover***

- Introduce yourself and assistant coaches (or ask for volunteers at this time).
- Give background information about yourself (why you are coaching, experience)
- Coaching philosophy
- Discuss the value of the sport and the health benefits to the children.
- Discuss the philosophy of age appropriate activities.
- State the importance you assign to having fun and developing technique.
- State how you evaluate player development through skills and not winning.
- Discuss any team rules and guidelines.
- Let them know that all players will receive equal playing time.
- Discuss how players must respect opponents, coaches, officials, and the game itself.
- Briefly discuss rules of the game.

## **Youth Softball Rules**

### ***Age Requirements:***

A player's age as of January 1<sup>st</sup> the current year will determine the age group they participate in:

T-Ball League: ages 4-5

Machine Pitch League: ages 6-8

Coach Assistant League: ages 9-11

Senior League: ages 12- 16

### ***Purpose:***

The purpose of the Ayden Youth Softball Program is to provide a wholesome recreational activity for girls ages 5-14 that will help them to build self-esteem and teach them the basic fundamentals of softball.

The program is designed for the following purpose:

- To help players learn the basic skills of basketball.
- To help players develop self-discipline and build positive attributes such as teamwork, respect for authority and good sportsmanship.

### ***Rosters and Registration:***

- All players will be entered into the draft every year.
- The draft will take place following the registration period. A second draft may occur to fill remaining roster spots.
- Draft order will be determined by picking numbers out of a hat.
- For other Draft rules see Youth Sport Manual

### ***Fields Rules and Sportsmanship:***

- No alcoholic beverages are allowed on recreation property. This is a state law. If necessary, proper legal action will be taken to enforce this rule.
- A coach, player, or spectator with alcohol on their breath will be asked to leave the recreation area.
- No tobacco products—smoking, chewing, dipping, etc. are allowed on the field or spectator area.
- No profanity
- No negative cheering
- Children not participating must be under supervision by a parent/adult at all times. No children may be unattended at any time in any facility.

### ***General Players Rule:***

- No jewelry, watches or any accessory of hard materials may be worn during games.
- Players must wear their team shirt for all games.
- Shoes - Tennis shoes or molded sole shoes with multiple cleats are acceptable.
  - Cleats: Molded multiple cleats, studs or bars less than ½ inch in diameter or width that does not extend more than ½ of an inch from the sole and are not of an extreme conical design is permissible. Detachable fiberglass or steel-tipped cleats are not legal

- Catchers-Catchers must wear a mask, hockey style helmet, check protector, and shin guards furnished by the Ayden Arts and Recreation Department.
- Facemask- All players are encouraged to wear protective face mask while playing defense.
- Helmets: Batting helmets with face guards required for all batters.

### ***General League Rules***

Ayden Arts and Recreation Department will utilize the National Federation of High School rules except as modified within:

- DUG OUTS: Teams must clean the dug out before exiting after a game or practice
- MINIMUM NUMBER OF STARTERS: A team must begin the game with six players. (Failure to comply—Forfeit).  
Note: One or Less Outfielders: If the ball goes to the outfield and there is one or less outfielders, the batter can only advance as far as second base at their own risk. All other base runners will be allowed to advance up to two bases at their own risk.
- GRACE PERIOD: 10 minute grace period for the 1<sup>st</sup> game of the night. There will be no grace time allowed for any games other than the 1<sup>st</sup> game. Games will be scheduled every 45 minutes
- OUTFIELD: A team may play with up to 4 outfielders. Outfielders must play on the grass. If the ball goes under the outfield fence, the outfielder should raise her hands in the air immediately to notify the official.
- PARTICIPATION RULE: We will play free substitution on defense. Players can be switched and rotated on or off the field each inning. No player will be allowed to sit the bench two innings in a row. If they sit two innings in a row, that player will be allowed to play every inning of the next game.
- BATTING LINE-UP: A team will bat the entire line-up. 1-12
- TIE BREAKER: If the game expires and the score is tied, the international tie breaker will be used. International Tie Breaker: Both the home and the visiting team will start each inning with the last batted out on second base. If the score is still tied after 2 innings of play, the home and visiting team will start each inning with the last 2 batted outs on second and third base.
- TIMEOUTS: Coaches are allowed 4 times outs per regulation game. 1 time out per inning will be issued in extra innings.
- COACH: Three coaches per team will be allowed in the dugout.
- TOURNAMENT: The tournament will be held directly after the regular season. Tournament brackets will depend on the number of teams participating. All regular season rules



will apply to the tournament. Tournament will be single elimination unless otherwise stated. Seating for the tournament will be determined by the regular season standings. If two teams have the same season recorded head to head play will determine the seeds. If head to head play is equal, then a flip coin will determine the seeds. (except T-Ball no tournament)

### ***Division Rules***

#### **T-BALL RULES**

4 -5 years old: This non-competitive league to teach this age group the fundamentals of softball.

#### ***Game Rules:***

- Games will consist of 5 innings or 40 minutes time limit, whichever comes first. No new inning after 35 mins.
- A complete inning will consist of a team batting their lineup.
- Bases will be 50 feet apart.
- Tee Balls will be used, provided by the Recreation Department.
- Offense
  - Teams will bat their entire roster before switching sides.
  - If a hit ball travels less than then (10) feet from the tee it is a foul ball.
  - The offensive team may have a maximum of 3 coaches on the playing field, one each in the coaches' boxes located near first and third base, and one at home plate.
  - If an out is made, the base runner will remain on the base.
- Defense
  - There will be free substitution on defense.
  - Defensive players must remain in position until the ball is hit.
  - No infield fly rule.
  - No stealing bases or no leading off. Base runners may not leave their base until the batter makes contact with the ball with her bat.
  - The defensive team may have a maximum of 2 coaches on the field, who must be positioned so as not to obstruct the offensive team or its coaches in any manner.
  - To stop play, the ball must be returned to the pitcher's circle. The pitcher does not have to catch the ball, but the ball must remain inside the circle.
  - Outfielders cannot make an out by tagging a runner or stepping on a base.
  - Coaches should encourage their defensive players to throw the ball to attempt to make an out, rather than allowing their players to engage in a foot race with a base runner to make an out.

## PITCHING MACHINE LEAGUE

6-8 years old: This league is to teach the fundamentals, skills, and team building.

Games will consist of 5 innings or 60-minute time limit, whichever comes first.

- come first. No new inning after 50 mins.
- A half inning will consist of 3 outs or 5 runs.
- 11inch Softball will be used, provided by the Recreation Department.
- The pitching machine will be set up at a distance of 35 feet from home plate. The speed will be set between 34-40 mph. As the season progresses, we will gradually increase the speed.
- Offense
  - Batter: Each batter will get 5 pitches to hit the ball. After 5 unsuccessful attempts to hit the ball the batter will be out. A foul ball will not count as a last strike. If the ball is batted and hits the pitching machine, it will be ruled a single and all runners will advance one base.
  - Passed Balls at 1st Base: If there is a pass ball/overthrow at first base, the batter can advance one additional base. Runners advance at their own risk. Other Base Runners: All other base runners will be allowed the advance one extra base at their own risk. A pass ball/overthrow at first will be at the umpire's decision/opinion.
  - Stealing: There will be no stealing in this league. Runners can only advance to the next base when the ball is hit. Runners are allowed to take a lead off the base when the ball crosses the plate.
  - Dropped Third Strike Rule: Batters may not advance to first base on a dropped strike.
  - Offensive Coaches: Offensive coaches MUST stay in the coaches' boxes located by first and third base.
- Defensive
  - Pitcher: A defensive player will be allowed to play in the pitching circle. The pitcher should play on the left side of the pitching circle/closest to first base to avoid the pitching wheel.
  - Returning the ball to the Pitcher: The ball/play will be ruled dead when the ball is thrown back to the pitcher circle. The pitcher does not have to successfully catch the ball but she must be inside the circle for the ball/play to be ruled dead. If the base runners are more than half way when the ball is ruled dead, the official will allow them to go to the next base. If the baserunners are less than half way when the ball is ruled dead, the official will have the runners go back to the previous base.  
NOTE :Always encourage your base runners to run to the next base. The official will tell them if they need to go back to the previous base.
  - Defensive Coach: One defensive coach will be allowed on the field while his/her team is on defense. The coach must stand and remain behind 2nd base and not interfere with the offense in any way. If the defensive coach interferes with the play, the batter will be ruled safe and all runners will advance to the next base.
  - Infield Fly: No Infield fly rule.

*Tournament rules:*

- Play-Off /Tournament Games: The team that is trailing may play offense until tie or three outs, which ever come first.

COACH ASSIST LEAGUE

9-11 years old: This league develops gross motor skill fundamentals and competitive play.

*Game Rules:*

- Game will consist of 5 innings or 1:15 minute time limit,
  - which ever come first. No new inning after 1:05 mins.
  - A half inning will consist of 3 outs or 5 runs, which ever come first. .
  - 11inch Softball will be used, provided by the Recreation Department.
  - Offense
    - Bunting will not be allowed when the coach is pitching. Any attempt to bunt with the coach pitching will result in a strike.
    - Passed Balls at 1st Base: If there is a pass ball/overthrow at first base, the batter can advance one additional base. Runners advance at their own risk.
    - Other Base Runners: All other base runners will be allowed the advance one extra base at their own risk. A pass ball/overthrow at first will be at the umpire's decision/opinion.
    - Stealing: Runners may leave the base when the ball crosses home plate. Stealing will not be allowed when the coach is on the field. Base runners may only steal one base per pitch/play. This includes the actual pitch from the pitcher to the catcher as well as the throw back from the catcher to the pitcher/or any baseman. Runners stealing home must slide or they will be called out. Stealing is defined by: Advancing to the next base when the ball has not been hit or bunted by the batter. Base runners may advance as many bases as possible on a batted ball.
    - Dropped Third Strike Rule: Batters may not advance to first base on a dropped third strike. The ball is not dead and base runners may advance at their own risk.
  - Defensive
    - Pitching: Pitchers will pitch from 35 feet. If the pitcher hits the batter with the ball, the batter will be awarded first base. 3 strikes will be an out. 4 balls will prompt the offensive team's coach to come on the field and throw the rest of the strike count to the batter.
    - Coach Assist: The coach may stand 20-35 feet from home plate when pitching to the batters. The offensive coach on the field may not interfere with the defense during a play. If there is interference, the play will be ruled dead and the batter will be out. Coaches will only be allowed to throw one "ball" per strike.
      - 4 Balls / 0 Strikes = coach has 6 pitches to throw 3 strikes to the batter
      - 4 Balls / 1 Strike = coach has 4 pitches to throw 2 strikes to the batter
      - 4 Balls / 2 Strikes = coach has 2 pitches to throw 1 strike to the batter
- NOTE: Any pitch that is in the strike zone will be called a strike regardless if the batter swings.
- Infield Fly: No Infield fly rule.

*Tournament rules:*

- Play-Off /Tournament Games: The team that is trailing may play offense until tie or three outs, which ever come first.

SENIOR LEAGUE

12-16 years old: This league reinforces the fundamentals and gross motor skills in a competitive environment putting emphasis on sportsmanship.

*Game Rules:*

- Game will consist of 5 innings or 1:30 minute time limit,
- which ever come first. No new inning after 1:20 minutes.
- A half inning will consist of 3 outs or 5 runs, which ever come first.
- 12inch Softball will be used, provided by the Recreation Department.
- Offense
  - Pitching: Pitchers will pitch from 40 feet
  - Pitching Changes: Pitchers can be changed during a game at any time. If you pull a pitcher and sit her on the bench as a sub, she can re-enter the game to any position other than pitcher. If you pull a pitcher and keep her on the field, you can switch pitchers as often as needed. EX: every other inning, every other batter.
  - Stealing: Runners may leave the base when the ball leaves the pitchers hand.

*Tournament rules:*

- Play-Off /Tournament Games: The team that is trailing may play offense until a tie or three outs, which ever come first.

Revised July 8, 2020