

National Wiffle League Association National Tournament

2023 Rules

The Official Rules of Baseball and the Case Book of the Official Rules of Baseball as adopted by the Major League Baseball Playing Rules Committee will govern all tournament gameplay circumstances, with the following exceptions.

Tournament Rules

TEAM ELIGIBILITY: Teams are required to meet requirements as well as submit information to the host committee as requested. Teams who fail to meet the requirements or submit information to the host committee shall be declared ineligible for the tournament and replaced. The rules committee will be the final arbiter of team eligibility. The qualifications for team eligibility are as follows:

- **LEAGUE ELIGIBILITY:** A league will be deemed eligible if it is recognized by National Wiffle, has at least 4 teams, with 10 games scheduled per team, with games occurring on non-consecutive days (two day schedules are not allowed, three day schedules are acceptable). The league must have a website/social media with current content, a publicly available schedule, and a publicly available statistic database. Ideally, a league will also have video of their games, either by live stream or uploaded video.
- **PLAYER ELIGIBILITY:** An individual player will be deemed eligible if he/she has played 5 games in league play, complete with statistics and video. A player must also be 16 years of age prior to the first game of the Tournament. Players aged 16-17 will be required to get a parent/guardian signature on their player waiver.
- **PLAYER MOVEMENT:** A player that has played for a team in 2022 will not be allowed to change teams in 2023. A player sitting out a year will be allowed to change teams if they choose to. Players can ask the National Committee to waive these requirements. The National Committee will then determine whether the player has grounds to switch teams. If the player's former league is still active in the tournament, they must receive permission from that league. If the league is not active in the tournament, the player will be free to change teams if they choose to.

TOURNAMENT FORMAT:

Pool Play: Each team will play three pool play games. Teams will be drawn randomly into pools based on a tiered system determined by the National Committee. Pool Play games will be 5 innings (no new inning may be started after the game has reached 70 minutes of play).

Tournament Round: Once pool play is completed, all 16 teams will be seeded into the Double Elimination Round, featuring four quads. Teams will be seeded based on winning percentage. In the event of a tie between teams with the same winning percentage, the tie will be broken in this order: 1) head-to-head play 2) final pool position 3) run differential (maximum differential of +10 per game) 4) runs allowed per defensive inning 5) coin flip/wheel spin. These games will be 6 innings with no time limit.

“Final Four”: The winner of each double-elimination quad will advance to a single-elimination “Final Four” featuring the semifinals and championship. These games will be 6 innings with no time limit. Pitching rotations DO NOT reset from double-elimination to the “Final Four”.

INNING LIMIT: Pool play games shall be inning/time limited, regardless of whether or not there is a winning team. No new inning shall be started after the 5th inning of the game, no matter if under the time limit. Ties are allowed and will be reflected as half a win in the winning percentage calculation.

ROSTERS: Rosters must be officially submitted to the tournament by the Manager no later than 12 AM on the Sunday before the first scheduled games of the pool play round. Rosters must be no less than 4 players and no more than 8 players. Rosters may contain coaches and team staff. Only rostered players, coaches, and staff will be allowed in the bench area during games. No loud/offensive music is to be played from the bench area during games.

COMMISSIONER OR LEAGUE PRESIDENT: Anytime the rules refer to League President or Commissioner of Baseball this shall refer to the Rules Committee of the tournament, which shall consist of one voting member from each team participating in the tournament, designated by each team’s manager.

Playing Equipment

1.00 : BALL: Only unaltered baseball sized Wiffle ball brand balls with be used (8 slots on one side).

1.01 : BASES AND PITCHERS PLATE All Bases will be 45’ apart, the front edge of the Pitcher’s Plate shall be 45’ from the back point of home plate.

1.02 : STRIKE BOARD: The strike zone will consist of a board that measures 20” wide by 32” tall. The strike zone will be 12” off the ground, and located 2.5’ behind the back point of home plate (47’6” from the front of the pitching rubber.

1.03 : BAT: Only unaltered "classic Yellow" wiffle bats are to be used. Bats may be taped on the molded grip area. Tape is not to cover the hole at the base of the bat, and knobs cannot exceed 2 inches in diameter. No alterations (paint, writing, tape, etc.) are allowed past the first curvature on the bat (the handle area).

1.04 : GLOVES: Baseball gloves are NOT allowed while playing a defensive position.

1.05 : FOOTWEAR: No metal spikes are allowed. Plastic cleats or turf cleats are permitted. No bare feet allowed.

Team and Game Regulation

2.00 : TEAM PLAYER REQUIREMENTS: Minimum of 4 players per team to play a regulation game. 6 player's maximum may be in the lineup in a game. Any batters who are not in a designated fielding position shall be considered Extra Hitters. Extra hitters are treated the same as the fielding positions for defensive substitution purposes, and may be freely rotated.

2.01 : PITCHER DEFENSIVE SUBSTITUTIONS: Once a player has been in the pitchers position, and has been removed from that position, the player may not return as the pitcher in that same game.

2.02 : AGE REQUIREMENT: All players MUST be at least 18 years of age.

2.03 : FIELDING: Teams are required to have 3 fielders; two fielders and one pitcher.

2.04: GAME LENGTH: A regulation game is 6 Innings.

2.05 : MERCY RULE: Games shall be over if either team leads by 20 runs after 3 innings, or after 2.5 innings if the home team is ahead. Games shall be over if either team leads by 10 runs after 4 innings, or after 3.5 innings if the home team is ahead.

2.06 : RAIN OUTS: Games become official after the 4 innings, or after 3.5 innings if the home team is ahead. MLB Rule 4.12a does not apply to any NWLA Tournament games.

2.07 : TEAM TARTYNESS: If a team does not have enough players to field a team 15 minutes past the scheduled start time of the game, the umpire shall forfeit the game to the team present, at a score of 6-0. Any team that forfeits a game will be suspended for up to one year and also fined an amount up to a maximum of \$180.

2.08 : INJURED OR LEAVING PLAYERS: If a player starts the game, they must finish the game, or they are considered an automatic out when they are due up. If the Team has a substitute not in the current lineup, but on the roster, they can sub him into the game in place of the leaving or hurt player.

2.09 : EJECTIONS: If a player is ejected by the umpires, he will be issued a minimum one game suspension, and will not be allowed in the bench area during that game.

Pitching

3.00 : SPEED LIMITS: Pitch speed for this tournament is unrestricted.

3.01 : GRIPS AND THROW: Any type of throw, overhand or underhand is allowed. Any type of grip is allowed, but no deforming or altering the ball. No “loading” the ball with rocks, dirt or other debris.

3.02 : BALKS: Balks are legal. Pitchers must have their foot in contact with the pitching rubber when they release the ball.

3.03 : ROTATION: Pitcher rotation is required. A pitcher who pitches 2 or fewer Innings Pitched in a game shall be eligible to pitch in the next game played for that team. A pitcher who pitches more than 2 Innings Pitched in a game shall not be eligible to pitch in the next game played for that team. One pitch thrown in the third inning on the rubber is considered to be more than 2 innings.

The rotation requirement will be reset and start fresh when moving from the pool play games to tournament games. For the purposes of this rule, a “bye” game does not count as a game played, but a forfeited game does count as a game played. Managers shall indicate on the lineup card for each game any pitchers who are NOT eligible to pitch in that game before providing a copy to the umpire and opposing manager.

Batting

4.00 : BUNTING: Bunting is not allowed.

4.01 : STRIKES: Batters will be charged with a called strike when 1) a legally delivered pitch hits the strike board without first touching any other object, including the ground, 2) a batter, intentionally or unintentionally, extends any part of his body outside of the batter's box and interferes with a pitched ball before it has passed the strike board.

4.02 : HIT BY PITCH: Batters that are hit with a pitch and do not swing will be awarded a ball, but will not be awarded first base for the reason of being hit with a pitch.

4.03 : FOUL BALL ARC: An arc between the first and third base foul lines shall be drawn 20' from home plate. This line will be treated as a foul line in the exact same manner as the other foul lines between home and first or third base.

4.04 : DROPPED THIRD STRIKE: Batters may not advance to first base on a dropped third strike.

4.05 : DESIGNATED HITTER: We will use the MLB Designated Hitter rule with one exception: the "DH" can be used for any position. The designated hitter may be replaced as DH only by a player who has not entered the game. Also, the player who is "being hit for" may be replaced in that role only by a player who has not entered the game. Any substitution involving the DH moving to a position will result in the loss of the DH, meaning the pitcher or position player that was being "hit for" will now have to bat. The DH is locked into the lineup spot, meaning you cannot use a double-switch in order to change the lineup spot of the DH. If you forfeit the DH, the double-switch becomes available.

COMMENT: The lineup consists of 4 players, but the RF is being "DH'ed for". There are also 4 players on the bench. During the game, both the DH and RF can be substituted using players who have not yet entered the game. The players who have been subbed out cannot return unless the DH is forfeited, at which point the RF would have to hit. Then, players can be freely substituted.

Walks and Strikeouts

5.00: COUNT: A count of five balls and three strikes will be used.

5.01: FOUL TIP: A ball which is fouled off the bat and then hits the strike board without first touching any other object, including the ground is a foul tip. A foul tip is dead the moment it touches the strike board. A foul tip on strike three will result in a strikeout.

Base running

6.00 : LEADING OFF BASE OR STEALING: There shall be no leading off or stealing. A runner must remain in contact with the base until the batter makes contact with the ball, unless time has been called by the umpire. A runner that is ruled to have stepped off the base inadvertently will be given a warning. One off base warning will be given per team per game. After the warning, a runner leaving the base inadvertently will be called out. A runner attempting to gain an advantage by leaving the base early will be called out.

COMMENT: A baserunner who leaves base before the batter makes contact with the ball shall be called out. If a runner leaves base at all on a swing and a miss, if the umpire has not clearly called time following the swing and miss and before the runner left base, shall be called out. Only baserunners who leave the base inadvertently will be given a warning.

6.01 : COURTESY RUNNERS: In the event that a batter is due up to bat in the batting order and is still on base, another player from the player's team may run in their place without being counted as a substitution. This player can be any player, including those who are not in the lineup at that time.

6.02 : MISSED PEGGING ATTEMPTS: Runners may advance at will, as long as the overthrown ball stays inside the fenced area of the field. Any ball thrown into the bench area or in/around/beyond the backstop will be considered out of play, and an out-of-play line will be drawn to aid these calls. If the ball continues into out-of-play territory, the lead runner is awarded the base they were headed plus one base.

COMMENT: A runner is trying to stretch a single into a double, and the fielder throws the ball to try to peg the runner as he's sliding into second base. The ball misses the runner, and rolls past the pitcher and past the out-of-play line so that it is in the bench/backstop area. The runner has passed second base by the time the ball rolls past the out-of-play line, the ball is dead, and the runner is award home plate, because they were heading toward third, plus one additional base.

6.03 : PEGGING: Fielders may throw the ball at runners. Runners struck will be out. Runners struck with a thrown ball which first hits any player, a base, or the ground first, will be out. Any balls that strike a runner, regardless of whether the runner is safe or out, will cause an immediate dead ball situation.

COMMENT: It does not matter if the ball is knocked loose on the tag, as long as the ball "strikes" the runner, the runner is out. On a peg or a tag, if a defensive player maintains possession of the ball, the ball is live, if a defensive player loses possession of the ball, the ball is dead.

Fielding and Outs

7.00 : PITCHERS CIRCLE FORCE OUT: In addition to any other method of putting out runners, the force out of the lead runner or the batter-runner may be made if any player obtains control of the live, batted or thrown ball, in a circle that is 10' in diameter and centered on the midpoint of pitcher's rubber, before the runner reaches a base. Should there be more than one force out in play, only one force out shall be made on a single play. The lead force shall be the first one affected, but should it not have been in time, it will go directly to the batter-runner force at first base. All force outs other than the lead force and batter-runner will not be considered.

COMMENT: Runners on first and second. Batter grounds a ball to the fielder, who throws it to the pitcher. The runner going from second to third is the lead force, but he gets to base before the pitcher has the ball in the circle, so he is safe. The play then goes to the batter-runner, who then is determined to be safe or out at first.

7.01 PITCHERS CIRCLE DEAD BALL: Once a player has obtained control of the ball in the circle, the play shall be immediately dead and any runners between bases shall return or advance to the base they are closest to at the time of the dead ball.

COMMENT: Runners on first and second. Batter grounds a ball to the fielder, who throws it to the pitcher. The runner going from second to third is the lead force, but he gets to base before the pitcher has the ball in the circle, so he is safe. The batter-runner is then determined to be safe or out at first. If the runner at third was past third base when the pitcher caught the ball, the runner would be awarded the base they are closest to at the time. All other force outs are not considered.

COMMENT: Again, the situation if a fly ball or line drive that is caught inside the pitcher's circle creates a unique situation in regards to this rule. If runners are on base, they may usually tag and advance on a caught fly ball. However, in this situation, in which a player is already in the pitcher's circle when they catch the ball, runners may not advance, and are not awarded the next base on the dead ball.

7.02 : INFIELD FLY: There shall be no infield fly rule.

7.03 : BUCKET: A five-gallon bucket of balls shall be allowed to be placed near the pitcher's circle, but not in front of the pitchers' plate. Any batted ball that hits the bucket, or any balls that have fallen out of the bucket, shall result in an immediate dead ball, and all runners including the batter-runner shall advance one base. A thrown ball that hits the bucket, or any balls that have fallen out of the bucket, shall be live and in play. A thrown ball that stays inside the bucket, shall result in an immediate dead ball and runners advance or return based on the pitcher's hand rule.

COMMENT: Teams will have the option to remove the bucket and have it on their sideline, in which case a designated player on the team's bench will be required to throw the pitcher a ball after each pitch. If pace of play is affected, umpires may require the bucket to be at the rubber.

MLB Rules to Note:

Official Baseball Rule 5.09(a)(1) Comment, no fielder may step into any out-of-play area to make a catch. However, if a fielder, after making a legal catch, steps or falls into any out-of-play area at any point while in possession of the ball, the base runners shall be entitled to advance one base and the ball shall be dead.

- A fielder may not jump over any fence, railing, or rope marking the limits of the playing field in order to catch the ball. A fielder may (1) reach over such fence, railing, or rope to make a catch; (2) fall over the same after completing the catch; (3) jump on top of a railing or fence marking the boundary of the field to make a catch; or (4) climb onto a fence or on a field canvas and catch the ball. In all four cases the catch would be legal, as dictated by the best judgment of the umpire.

Fielder's Right of Way: Fielders have a right to occupy any space needed to catch or field a batted ball and also must not be hindered while attempting to field a thrown ball. If any member of the batting team (including the coaches) interferes with a fielder's right of way to field a batted ball, the batter shall be declared out. If any member of the batting team (including the coaches) interferes with a fielder's right of way to field a thrown ball, the runner on whom the play is being made shall be ruled out. In both cases, the ball will be declared dead and all runners must return to their last legally occupied base at the time of the interference. However, a runner is not obligated to vacate a base he is legally permitted to occupy to allow a defender the space to field a batted or thrown ball in the proximity of said base.

Substitutions: Teams are permitted to substitute players any time the ball is dead. The manager must immediately notify the umpire of the switch and substitutes must bat in the replaced player's batting-order position. Once removed, players are not permitted to return to the game in any capacity. Types of substitutions include pinch-hitting, pinch-running, a pitching change and a defensive replacement.

Barring injury or illness, the starting pitcher must pitch until at least one batter reaches base or is put out. Any substitute pitcher must pitch until at least one batter reaches base or is put out, or the offensive team is put out in some other manner.

MLB 2023 rule changes with pitch clocks, minimum 3 batters faced by a relief pitcher, and restrictions on defensive positioning are not applicable to the NWLA Tournament.