

National Wiffle League Association National Tournament 2025 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, except where otherwise specified in the following rules.

Tournament Rules

Team Eligibility

To be eligible for the National Wiffle League Association (NWLA) National Tournament, teams must meet the following requirements and submit all necessary documentation to the host committee. Failure to meet these requirements or to submit the required information will result in the team being declared **ineligible** and replaced by a qualifying team. The final determination of team eligibility rests with the **Rules Committee**.

Qualifications for Team Eligibility:

1. **League Eligibility**

A league will be deemed eligible if it meets the following criteria:

- Recognized by National Wiffle®.
- Has a minimum of 4 teams.
- Has scheduled at least 10 games per team.
- Games must occur on non-consecutive days. Two-day schedules are not allowed; however, three-day schedules are acceptable.
- The league must have an active website/social media with up-to-date content, including a publicly available schedule and statistic database.
- Ideally, the league will also have video content available, such as live streams or uploaded game footage.

2. **Player Eligibility**

An individual player is deemed eligible if:

- They have participated in at least 5 league games (including statistics and video).
- The player must be 16 years old before the first game of the tournament.
- Players aged 16-17 must have a parent/guardian signature on their waiver.

Tournament Format

1. **Pool Play**

Each team will play three pool play games. Teams will be randomly drawn into pools based on a tiered system established by the National Committee.

- Pool play games will consist of **5 innings** (with no new inning starting after 60 minutes of play).
- There will be **no extra innings** in pool play.
- Ties are allowed in pool play, even if the game is completed before the time limit.
- Pool Play Points: 2 points for a win | 1 point for a tie | 0 points for a loss

2. **Tournament Round**

After pool play, all 16 teams will advance to the Tournament Round which features four double-elimination brackets and culminates with a single-elimination semifinal and championship round. Teams will be seeded based on their total pool play points. In the event of a tie between teams with identical point totals, the tie will be broken in the following order:

- Head-to-head results
- Final pool position
- Run differential (**maximum differential of +10 per game**)
- Runs allowed
- Coin flip or wheel spin

Tournament round games will be **5 innings** with **no time limit**.

Rosters

- Rosters must be officially submitted to the tournament by the manager no later than 12 PM on the Sunday before pool play begins.
- Rosters must contain a minimum of 4 players and a maximum of 8 players.
- No loud or offensive music is permitted from the bench area during games.

Commissioner or League President

- Whenever the rules refer to the League President or Commissioner of Baseball, this refers to the Rules Committee of the tournament.
- The Rules Committee will consist of one voting member from each team, designated by each team's manager.

Playing Equipment

1.1 : Ball

Only unaltered, regulation-sized Wiffle® balls with eight slots on one side are permitted.

- No scuffing, cutting, heating, taping, or altering in any way is allowed.
- Balls will be provided by the tournament and replaced as needed by umpires.

PENALTY: First offense: The altered ball will be removed immediately from play.

Second and ensuing offense: The altered ball will be removed and the offending player will be ejected from the game.

1.2 : Bases and Pitcher's Plate

- Bases will be 45 feet apart.
- The front edge of the pitcher's rubber is set 45 feet from the back point of home plate.

1.3 : Strike Board

- The EasyCall Strike Zone consists of a board measuring 20 inches wide by 30 inches tall.
- The bottom of the strike zone is positioned 13 inches off the ground.
- The board is placed 2.5 feet behind the back point of home plate, measuring 47 feet, 6 inches from the pitcher's rubber.

1.4 : Bat

- Only unaltered Wiffle® branded bats may be used.
- Tape is only allowed on the molded grip area (the handle), and may not extend past the first curvature.
- The hole at the base of the bat must remain uncovered.
- All bats are subject to inspection by umpires or the tournament committee at any time.

PENALTY: First offense: The altered bat will be removed immediately from play.

Second and ensuing offense: The altered bat will be removed and the offending player will be ejected from the game.

1.5 : Gloves

- Baseball gloves are not permitted while playing defense.

1.6 : Footwear

- Metal cleats are prohibited.
- Plastic cleats, molded cleats, or turf shoes are permitted.

Section 2: Team & Game Regulation

2.1 : Team Player Requirements & Lineup Construction

- Each team must have a minimum of 4 players to begin and continue a regulation game.
 - A maximum of 6 players may be in the batting lineup at any one time.
 - Lineups may include:
 - Defensive players (up to 3 on the field at once: 1 pitcher, 2 outfielders)
 - Extra Hitters (EHs): Batters not currently playing defense
 - Designated Hitters (DHs): Batters hitting in place of a fielder
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2.1.1: Extra Hitters (EH)

- Extra Hitters are treated the same as fielders for substitution purposes and may rotate freely into the field.
 - There is no limit to the number of EHs, provided the total lineup does not exceed 6 active batters.
 - EHs are considered fielding positions and can be subbed in/out like any other player.
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2.1.2: Designated Hitter (DH) Rules

- Up to three (3) DHs may be used per team. Each DH may bat in place of a different defensive player.
- The DH may be used for any fielding position, not just the pitcher.
- All DHs must be declared on the lineup card before the game begins. No DHs may be added once the game has started.
- Each DH is locked into one lineup spot and may not be double-switched with another player.

Substitution and Forfeiture of the DH Role:

- The DH and the fielder they are hitting for may only be replaced by players who have not yet entered the game.
 - If a DH takes the field on defense, or if the player being hit for takes a turn at bat, the DH role is forfeited. The fielder must now remain in the batting lineup, and the DH may not be reinstated.
 - Once a DH role is forfeited, free substitution is allowed for those two lineup spots for the rest of the game.
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2.1.3: Pitcher/Designated Hitter (P/DH) Rule

- A P/DH is only allowed for the starting pitcher.
 - A player may be listed as both starting pitcher and designated hitter.
 - If the starting pitcher is later removed from the mound:
 - They may continue as the DH only if a substitute takes over defensively in the field.
 - If no substitute is brought in to field, the DH role is forfeited and may not be reinstated.
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2.2 : Pitcher Defensive Substitutions

- Once a player is removed from the pitcher's position, they may not return to pitch again in that game.
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2.3 : Age Requirement

- All players must be at least 16 years old before their team's first game.
 - Players aged 16–17 must have a signed parent/guardian waiver on file.
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2.4 : Fielding Requirement

- Each team must field exactly 3 defensive players:
 - 1 pitcher
 - 2 outfielders

Fielding and Substitution Rules for DH & EH:

- The Designated Hitter (DH) cannot play defense. If the DH enters the field, the DH role is forfeited for the remainder of the game. Once the DH is forfeited, the team loses the ability to use a DH for the rest of the game, and no other player may assume the DH role.
 - The fielder being hit for (the player for whom the DH is batting) must remain on the field unless substituted out. If the fielder being hit for is substituted out during the game, a substitute player may take their place in the field and still be DH'd for. The DH role is not forfeited as long as the substitute fielder continues to be hit for by the DH.
 - The DH position remains intact even if a fielder is substituted, and the substitute fielder will continue to be DH'd for.
 - If the fielder being hit for leaves the field and is not substituted, the DH role is forfeited, and the player who was being hit for becomes an Extra Hitter (EH). The DH will no longer be used for the remainder of the game.
 - Extra Hitters (EH) can be rotated freely between fielding positions without losing their batting status.
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2.5 : Game Length – Pool Play

- Pool play games are 5 innings with 3 outs per half inning.
 - No extra innings are permitted.
 - No new inning may begin after 60 minutes of elapsed game time.
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2.6 : Game Length – Tournament Round

- Tournament round games are 5 innings with 3 outs per half inning.
 - No time limit.
 - Games must be played until a winner is determined, with extra innings allowed as needed.
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2.7 : Mercy Rule

- A game ends if:
 - A team leads by 20+ runs after 3 innings (or 2.5 if home team leads)
 - A team leads by 10+ runs after 4 innings (or 3.5 if home team leads)
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2.8 : Rainouts & Weather Policy

- The tournament will not be rescheduled due to weather.
 - Games will be played through rain and poor conditions, when safely possible.
 - The Tournament Host Committee reserves the right to:
 - Shorten games
 - Adjust the tournament format
 - Call games early or cancel as needed
 - A game becomes official after 4 full innings, or 3.5 if the home team is ahead.
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2.9 : Team Tardiness

- If a team cannot field at least 4 players within 15 minutes of the scheduled start time, the game is forfeited.
 - The final score will be 6–0 in favor of the team present.
 - Forfeiting teams may face a 1-year suspension and a fine up to \$180.
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2.10 : Injured or Leaving Players

- If a player exits the game and there is no eligible substitute, their spot becomes an automatic out in the lineup.
 - If a rostered player not in the current lineup is available, they may enter the game as a legal substitute.
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2.11 : Ejections

- Players ejected by the umpire must leave the bench area and are automatically suspended for at least one game.
- The Rules Committee may issue additional discipline depending on the severity of the offense.

Pitching

3.1 Speed Limits:

Pitch speed for this tournament is unrestricted.

3.2 Grips and Throw:

Any type of throw (overhand or underhand) is allowed. Any type of grip is allowed, but no deforming, altering, or scuffing the ball is permitted. Additionally, loading the ball with rocks, dirt, or other debris is prohibited.

3.3 Balks and Delivery:

Balks are legal. Pitchers must begin their delivery with at least one foot in contact with the pitching rubber. The delivery must be continuous and non-deceptive. Replanting — defined as lifting and re-driving off the pivot foot after the initial push — is prohibited. If a pitcher replants or violates the delivery rule in any other way, it will be ruled an illegal pitch, and a ball will be added to the batter's count.

3.4 Pitcher Rotation:

Pitcher rotation is mandatory.

- A pitcher who throws two (2) innings or fewer in a game is eligible to pitch in their team's next game.
- A pitcher who throws more than two (2) innings in a game is not eligible to pitch in their team's next game.

For enforcement purposes:

- A pitcher who throws even one pitch in their third inning is considered to have thrown more than two (2) innings.

The rotation requirement resets at the conclusion of pool play and begins anew for tournament play.

- A bye does not count as a game played.
- A forfeit does count as a game played.

Before each game, managers must clearly identify all ineligible pitchers on their official lineup card and provide notice to both the game umpire and the opposing manager.

Batting

4.1 Bunting

Bunting is not allowed.

4.2 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 their body over top of the strike zone board and interferes with a pitched ball before it has passed the strike board.
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4.3 Hit by Pitch

Batters who 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.

4.4 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. Any ball that touches the line is fair and will be considered in play, in the same manner as the other foul lines between home and first or third base.

4.5 Dropped Third Strike

There is no dropped third strike rule.

4.6 Designated Hitter (DH) Rule

The NWLA Tournament allows the use of a Designated Hitter (DH) in the lineup.

General DH Guidelines:

- The DH can be used for **any defensive position**, not just the pitcher.
- The DH(s) must be **declared at the start of the game** and listed on the lineup card.
- The DH **and** the fielder being hit for (the “defensive player”) may **only be replaced** by players who have **not yet entered** the game.
- The DH is **locked into a single lineup spot**. No **double-switching** is permitted while the DH is active.

Forfeiting the DH:

- If the DH **takes the field**, or if the player being hit for **takes an at-bat**, the team **forfeits the DH** for the remainder of the game.
- Once the DH is forfeited, the fielder must now **bat in that lineup spot**, and **free defensive substitution is allowed** for both positions for the rest of the game.
- A **substitute fielder** may still be DH'd for. Replacing the fielder with a substitute does **not** forfeit the DH.

Extra Hitter (EH) Clarification:

- The EH is treated as a **defensive position**.
- EHs may rotate freely into fielding roles.
- EHs may not play the field **unless officially in the lineup** as one of the permitted players.

P/DH (Pitcher/Designated Hitter) Use:

- A **P/DH** is only applicable to the **starting pitcher**.
- The starting pitcher may be listed as both the **pitcher** and **designated hitter**.
- If the starting pitcher is removed from the mound, he may **continue to DH** if:
 - A **legal substitute** takes over the pitching or any other fielding role.
 - The player remains **in the batting lineup** as DH.
- If the starting pitcher continues to pitch but is later replaced by a new pitcher and takes a fielding position, the DH role is **forfeited**, and the pitcher must now hit.
- If the starting pitcher is removed from both pitching and batting, normal substitution rules apply.

DH Examples:

Example 1 – Basic DH Use:

Team A lists Player X as a DH for Player Y (right fielder). Both players are in the starting lineup. In the 3rd inning, Player Y is subbed out for Player Z (a bench player who hasn't entered the game). Player Z takes over in right field and remains DH'd for by Player X. Legal. The DH remains intact.

Example 2 – Forfeiting the DH:

Team B uses Player M as a DH for Player N (left fielder). In the 5th inning, Player N comes up to bat instead of Player M. The DH is now forfeited. From that point forward, Player N must hit in the DH's spot in the order, and the DH cannot be reinstated.

Example 3 – P/DH:

Team C lists their starting pitcher, Player R, as both pitcher and DH. After two innings, Player R is replaced on the mound by Player S. Player R stays in the lineup as DH for Player S. Legal. The DH remains intact.

Example – Fielder Removed, DH Becomes Extra Hitter (EH):

Team A lists Player 6 as the DH, hitting in place of Player 5, the right fielder. In the 4th inning, Player 5 is removed from the game and not replaced in the field. Since there is no longer a fielder being hit for, the DH role is forfeited. Player 6 is no longer considered a DH and now becomes an Extra Hitter (EH). The DH cannot be reinstated.

Example 5 – DH Takes the Field:

Team E uses Player G as a DH. In the 5th inning, Player G enters the game at catcher. The DH is now forfeited. The catcher must now hit in that spot, and the DH cannot return.

Section 5 – Walks and Strikeouts

5.1 – Count

A standard count of five balls and three strikes will be used.

- Three strikes is an out.
- Five balls results in a walk.

5.2 – Intentional Walks

An intentional walk may be issued verbally at any time in the count by the defensive team.

- No pitches are required.
- The batter will immediately be awarded first base.

5.3 – Foul Tip

A ball that is fouled off the bat and then hits the strike board without first touching any other object, including the ground, is considered a foul tip.

- A foul tip is dead the moment it touches the board.
- A foul tip on strike three results in a strikeout.

Section 6 – Base Running

6.1 – 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 with no prior warning.

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, the runner shall be called out. Only baserunners who leave the base inadvertently will be given a warning.

6.2 – 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 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.

6.3 – 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.

- 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 to, plus one additional 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 into the out-of-play line area (bench/backstop). The runner has passed second base by the time the ball rolls past the line. The ball is dead, and the runner is awarded home plate, because they were headed toward third, plus one additional base.

6.4 – Pegging

Fielders may throw the ball at runners. Runners struck while off a base will be out.

- Runners struck with a thrown ball that first hits any player, a base, or the ground before striking the runner 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.

Section 7 – Fielding and Outs

7.1 – Pitcher's Circle Force Out

In addition to any other method of putting out runners, a force out of the lead runner or the batter-runner may be made if **any defensive** player obtains control of the live batted or thrown ball inside the pitcher's circle (a 10-foot diameter circle centered on the pitching rubber), before the runner reaches a base.

- If multiple force outs are in play, only one force out shall be awarded.
- Priority is given to the lead runner. If the lead runner safely reaches base before control is gained in the circle, the force out then applies to the batter-runner at first base.
 - No other force outs are considered valid on that play.

Comment: Runners on first and second. The batter hits a ground ball. A fielder throws the ball to the pitcher. The runner from second reaches third base before the pitcher gains control inside the circle, so that runner is safe. The force out opportunity now applies to the batter-runner at first base. He is called out or safe based on timing.

7.2 – Pitcher's Circle Dead Ball

Once any defensive player has both control of the live ball and any part of their body or the ball in contact with the ground inside the pitcher's circle, the play is immediately dead.

- A ball caught in the air inside the circle does not trigger a dead ball until the player lands with possession and establishes contact with the ground in the circle.
- A diving fielder entering or reentering the circle must have either the ball or any part of their body touch the ground inside or on the line of the circle to trigger the dead ball.
- The pitcher's circle is a 10-foot diameter circle, centered on the pitcher's rubber.
- The line of the circle is considered in—any ball or body part touching the line qualifies as in the circle.
- Once the play is ruled dead, runners between bases must return to or advance to the base they were closest to at the moment the ball was declared dead.
- To be awarded the next base, a runner must have at least one foot completely past the halfway line, with no foot on the ground behind it at the time of the dead ball.
- No additional outs can be recorded after control is gained in the circle.

Comment 1 – Ground Ball Scenario:

Runner on third. Batter grounds a ball to the fielder, who throws it to the pitcher (or any fielder) who catches the ball and establishes contact with the ground inside the pitcher's circle. The batter-runner is ruled out or safe based on whether the lead force was made in time. The runner at third is awarded home or must return based on the halfway rule.

Comment 2 – Incidental Entry into Circle:

A defender fields a ball and chases a runner. While holding the ball, they step through the pitcher's circle. The play becomes immediately dead at that moment—even if unintentional. All runners will advance or return based on their location relative to the halfway line when the defender touched the ground in the circle.

Comment 3 – Fly Ball Caught Inside Circle:

If a fly ball or line drive is caught by a defender who was already stationed inside the pitcher's circle, it is an immediate dead ball. Runners may not tag up or advance, and no bases will be awarded.

Comment 4 – Tag-Ups from Fly Balls Caught Outside the Circle:

If a fly ball is caught outside the pitcher's circle, runners may legally tag up and attempt to advance. However, if the ball is thrown into the pitcher's circle to stop the play, the play becomes dead, and the halfway rule will apply to determine runner placement.

7.3 – Infield Fly

There is no infield fly rule in this tournament.

7.4 – Bucket

A five-gallon bucket of balls may be placed near the pitcher's circle, but not in front of the pitcher's plate.

- If a batted ball hits the bucket or any loose balls around it, the ball is immediately dead.
→ All runners, including the batter-runner, advance one base.
- If a thrown ball hits the bucket or loose balls, the play remains live.
- If a thrown ball lands and stays inside the bucket, it results in a dead ball, and runners advance or return based on the pitcher's hand rule.

Comment: Teams may choose to remove the bucket and have a designated bench player toss the pitcher a ball after each pitch. However, if this slows the pace of play, umpires may require the bucket to be returned near 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/scorekeeper 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 (lone exception is a courtesy runner in NWLA Tournament). 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.