Girls Softball Terms and Conditions

2026-2027

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Changes and items of clarification from last school year to this school year are highlighted.

Some sections have been reorganized/renumbered.

New this year – Teams that fail to rank will be assessed a $50 penalty to their school.

I. School Classification

A. Seventh and eighth grade enrollment from the previous school year as reported to the IESA by the member schools through the IESA Member Center shall determine the classification of each school for girls' softball.

B. The teams will be divided equally into three classes each containing 1/3 of the participating schools. The smallest 1/3 of the schools will be designated as Class 1A, the next smallest 1/3 will be designated as Class 2A, and the largest 1/3 of the schools will be designated as Class 3A. If two or more schools have the same enrollment number and that number happens to be where a split occurs, all schools with the same enrollment number shall be placed in the smaller class.

II. Softball Season Calendar

	Softball Calendar
Entry Deadline	June 8, 2026
Final Entry Deadline	July 1, 2026
Cooperative Agreement Due	July 30, 2026
Practice/Tryouts May Begin	July 27, 2026
Season Schedule Due	August 5, 2026
Games May Begin	August 5, 2026
Online Roster/Record Deadline	September 1, 2026
Online Ranking	September 2, 2026
Rosters Closed	September 7, 2026 @ 4pm
Regionals	Sept. 7 or 8 (qtr. finals) Sept. 9 or 10 (semifinals) Sept. 12 (championships)
Sectionals	Sept. 15 @ 4:30pm
State Finals	Sept. 18 (Quarterfinals) Sept 19 *(Semifinals,* *3rd place & Championship)*
Season Must End	October 24, 2026

III. Entry Fees and Withdrawal from Softball

A. Entry Fees

1. Schools must pay an entry fee by the initial entry deadline.
2. Schools may enter the activity after the initial entry deadline but must do so prior to the final entry deadline and the school may be subject to paying double fees.
    - Late entry fees will be waived for schools designated as new members, or for current member schools entering an activity for the first time, which petition to participate in an activity after the initial entry deadline.
3. Entry fees will be refunded only upon written request prior to the initial entry deadline.

B. Withdrawal Fees

1. The penalty fee assessed to a school which does not participate in an athletic activity for which it is registered without notifying the IESA office or withdraws from the state series after the online ranking deadline for a given activity shall pay a $50.00 penalty, the cost of the officials for the contest which they forfeited, and that school's share for one contest for any deficit, and any other penalties (including monetary) as deemed appropriate by the Executive Director. The $50.00 penalty fee shall be paid directly to the host school.

IV. Student and Coach Eligibility

A. A student must be eligible under all of the eligibility rules and conditions of competition of the IESA. These rules and conditions are outlined in Sections 2 and 3 of the IESA Handbook and include but are not limited to:

1. Scholastic Standing - IESA By-Law 2.040
2. Residence and Transfer - IESA By-Laws 2.050 and 2.060
3. Participation Limitations - IESA By-Law 3.040
4. Age Qualifications - IESA By-Law 3.050
5. Physical Examination - IESA By-Law 3.060
6. Amateurism - IESA By-Law 3.070
7. Participating Under an Assumed Name - IESA By-Law 3.080
8. All-Star Participation - IESA By-Law 3.100

B. To serve as a head coach, assistant coach, unpaid volunteer coach, and/or serve in any coaching capacity, the individual must meet the IESA requirements outlined in IESA By-Law 2.110.

V. Limitations

A. Season Limitations

1. No member school participating in the girls' softball state tournament series shall organize, hold tryouts, or practice prior to Monday of Week 4 in the IESA standardized calendar.
2. A member school may conduct its first interscholastic contest in softball no earlier than Wednesday of Week 5 and its last interscholastic contest in softball no later than Saturday of Week 16 in the IESA standardized calendar.
3. While there is not a maximum number of contests a school may participate in, only schools which have an established school team which has played at least three (3) interscholastic contests prior to the online roster and record deadline in that sport during the current season may participate in team competition in Association-sponsored games or tournaments.

B. Team Limitations

1. Each State Series team shall consist of a maximum of 18 uniformed girls whose names appear on the school's regional entry form.
2. All tournament play shall be single elimination with the winning opponent advancing from regional to sectional and from sectional to state level competition. If an opponent incurs a violation in the state series that requires a contest or contests to be forfeited, the following policy will be followed:
    a. If the violation affects only one round of competition, the opponent within that round will advance on to the next round of competition within the state tournament series.
    b. If the violation affects more than one round of competition, no opponent from the preceding rounds of competition shall be advanced to the next round of competition within the state tournament series.
    c. The advancement of opponents shall be determined by the IESA.

VI. Rules of Play and IESA Policies

A. Authority

1. By authority of the IESA Constitution and By-Laws, the Board of Directors shall interpret and enforce the IESA Softball Terms and Conditions.
2. IESA Softball follows the National Federation of State High School Associations Softball Rules Book with the IESA Exceptions to NFHS Rules as noted in Section VIII of these Terms and Conditions.

B. Facilities and Bench Personnel

1. In regional, sectional, and state final tournament play, the host school shall not make its playing fields available to the visiting teams for practice sessions.
2. In the state series, the individual assigned by the host school to keep the official scorebook must be a minimum of 17 years old.

C. Team Personnel and Warm-up Procedures

1. Team personnel are defined as those individuals listed on the regional entry form.
    a. No team will be allowed more than 18 players in uniform and those individuals' names must appear on the regional entry form to be considered team personnel.
    b. These individuals are allowed on the field during warm-ups and introductions, and they are allowed on the team bench during the state series games.
    c. Only team personnel listed on the regional entry form are permitted in the playing area (on the field).
    d. Non-team personnel may be present on the field when properly equipped, not in uniform to help shag balls during the warm-up. (No feather boas, tutus, sunglasses, pom poms, or other paraphernalia are allowed on the team personnel)
    e. When teams are off the court, ball handling is allowed as space allows.
    f. If space is limited teams shall be restricted to ball handling behind the end line.
    g. After the conclusion of shared warm-up time, practice jerseys or warm-ups with or without numbers should be removed.

D. Special Awareness Night Policy

1. The following guidelines give each member schools guidance when wishing to hold a special awareness night in the activity of softball:
    a. All uniforms worn during the special awareness match must meet the standard uniform regulations:
        i. This includes having the number on the front and back of the shirt/jersey.
        ii. Headband colors are not required to be the same for team members.
        iii. A school may put their school’s name on the shirt/jersey as they would any other uniform.
        iv. There can be no logo endorsement on the shirt other than that of the uniform manufacturer.

v. There can only be a single manufacturer's logo on the uniform and undergarment. A commemorative patch may be worn but must adhere to NFHS rules.

b. Any equipment that in the judgement of the umpire increases a player's advantage or presents a safety concern is prohibited.

E. Varsity and Non-Varsity Contests Policy

1. Both Varsity and Non-Varsity
   a. Designation of Contest - The level of competition for a contest is regularly specified on the contract which schools enter into for a given contest. Unless otherwise mutually agreed upon by the principals/official representatives of all competing schools prior to the contest, the level of competition specified on the contract designates the level of the competition. Season, Team, and Individual Limitations and Eligibility Standards - The school season ends for varsity athletes and non-varsity athletes on the date of the school's last contest at their level in the particular sport. Team limitations apply to varsity and non-varsity teams. Individual player limitations apply to both varsity and non-varsity teams. Eligibility standards and requirements apply to both varsity and non-varsity athletes.
2. Varsity Only
   a. A varsity contest may be played only if the required number of licensed officials can be obtained.
   b. Only varsity contests count toward a team's required minimum number of contests. The varsity team is identified by the school at the start of the season and that team fulfills a schedule of contests arranged for the varsity team. This team is considered to be the team that comprises the most skilled competitors in the sport and is the team which is the school's representative at its highest level of competition, including the state series.
3. Non-Varsity Only
   a. A non-varsity contest may be officiated by members of the coaching staff, faculty and/or administrative staff from any of the competing schools if the contracted official does not show or the school could not obtain a licensed official for the contest.
   b. By agreement of the participating schools, the format of the contest may be altered.

F. Softballs

1. Each IESA-designated Regional and Sectional host will receive Rawlings softballs (model #RIESASB) to be used in the respective tournament. There will be enough for two (2) softballs per regional semifinal, regional championship and sectional contest scheduled; however, host schools must have some identical balls on hand in case the 2 balls are not enough to complete the game.
   a. For the regional quarterfinal game, the higher-seeded team in each regional quarterfinal game will be sent the regulation softballs after brackets are posted. These should be brought to and used in the quarterfinal game. The intention is that the softballs will have arrived at the higher-seeded team's school prior to the first regional game, but if they have not yet arrived, regional quarterfinal hosts shall have the appropriate number of softballs on hand.

VII. Exceptions

A. IESA Exceptions to National Federation Softball Rules

1. For regular season play only, no inning shall start 2 hours after the first pitch of the game. Any inning in progress shall be completed. If teams are tied after the time limit has been reached, it shall be considered a tie game. The home plate umpire will keep the time. [4-2-2] The 10-run, 12-run and 15-run rules are still in effect.
2. The 10-run rule is in effect and the game shall end when the visiting team is behind 10 runs or more after 4 ½ innings, or after the 5th inning, if either team is 10 runs behind and both teams have had an equal number of times at bat. A 12-run rule is in effect and the game shall end when the visiting team is behind 12 runs or more after 3 ½ innings, or after the 4th inning, if either team is 12 runs behind and both teams have had an equal number of times at bat. A 15-run rule is also in effect and the game shall end when the visiting team is behind 15 runs or more after 2 ½ innings, or after the 3rd inning, if either team is 15 runs behind and both teams have had an equal number of times at bat. [4-2-3]
3. The use of Safe-Base, or a manufactured reproduction thereof, shall be mandatory in all regular season and tournament play. No game shall be played unless the Safe-Base is in use. The application of the Safe-Base rule shall follow NFHS guidelines. [1-2-1 Note]
4. Adult coaches are not required to be in the uniform of the team, but it is recommended that coaches be attired in school colors. [3-4-3]
5. Any state series game that is suspended for reasons of weather, darkness, or mechanical failure (i.e. lighting problems, power outage, water system problems) will be treated as a suspended game and continued from the point of suspension when the game is able to resume provided it is not a completed regulation game. The coach of the team trailing at the time of the suspension may forfeit the contest at which time the game will be considered a complete game. [4-2-2; 4-2-3]
6. When a regular season game is stopped for any reason, the school administration of the participating schools may choose to do one of the following:
    a. suspend the game and mutually agree to resume the game at the point of suspension at a later date and time; or
    b. the team losing at the time of the suspension can forfeit and the team winning at this time would claim this as a win on their record; or
    c. the team winning at the time of the suspension can forfeit and thus the team losing at this time would claim this as a win on their record; or the schools mutually agree to record the game as a "no game." [4-2-3]
7. The pitching distance shall be set at 40 ft. [1-2b]
8. The international tie breaker rule may be used any time after the 7th inning upon agreement of both coaches prior to the start of the contest. The international tie breaker rule will not be used in the state series. If used in a regular season contest, the following tiebreaker rules shall be in effect:
    a. The last batter from the previous inning is placed on 2nd base and play then continues under regular rules;
    b. It is not sudden death;
    c. Each team has the opportunity to bat each inning;
    d. The game is over when one team has the lead at the end of an inning. [4-2-5]

9. First and last names must be included on the line-up card presented to the umpire prior to the start of the contest. [3-1-3]
10. The on-deck batter may use either on-deck circle. The on-deck batter may only take their position during a dead-ball. [1-1-6]

VIII. Hosts – Regionals, Sectionals & State Finals

A. Host Selection

1. Schools interested in hosting a regional, sectional or the state finals should complete the "Host Interest" survey in the school's member center and/or email the IESA Softball administrator in order to be considered.
2. Regional and sectional assignments for each school are designated by the IESA and will be posted to the IESA website.
3. State finals hosts are approved by the IESA Board of Directors. Host schools are required to hang official IESA and Rawlings® banners.
4. Schools serving as a host must have signage in accordance with the Concealed Carry Act 430 ILCS66 - this includes an IESA event held on school property and IESA events held off school property.

B. Regional Tournament

1. Each school hosting a regional will receive Rawlings® softballs at no charge.
2. **The higher-seeded team will host the quarterfinal game unless both schools mutually agree to switch sites.** The semifinals and finals will be played at the site determined by the host school as designated by IESA as the overall regional host. The regional quarterfinal hosts and the IESA-designated regional hosts set the playing times; weekdays between 4pm and 5:30 (if the field has lights), Saturday between 10am and noon. Regional games that are played on fields without lights cannot start any later than 5:00pm.
3. The playing schedule for regionals is determined by the host school but must be played within the dates outlined in the season calendar in Section II.
4. The regional host is responsible for contracting 2 IHSA-licensed officials for each game in the regional tournament.
    a. The payment is provided to these regional tournament officials by the regional host.
    b. The payment to the officials is considered an allowable expenditure on the regional financial report form.
5. In regionals, the higher-seeded team is automatically the home team even if the game is held somewhere other than the higher-seeded team's traditional home field.
6. Regional hosts shall update the scores for each round online by 9:00 am of the following school day.

C. Sectional Game

1. Each school hosting a sectional game will receive Rawlings® softballs at no charge.
2. Sectional contests will begin at 4:30 pm.
3. In sectional play, the odd-numbered regional will call the coin flip to determine who will be the home team.

4. When a sectional site is undetermined, the two regional winners shall make contact, determine the sectional site, and notify the IESA as soon as possible.
5. If no school offers to host a sectional, the regional winners for the unset sectional will be determined by a coin flip in the IESA office if both schools wish to host the sectional.
6. IESA contracts 2 IHSA-licensed sectional officials for each sectional game.
7. Sectional host schools shall update the score of the sectional game immediately following the conclusion of the game.

D. State Finals

1. At the State Finals, the home team shall be determined by a coin flip. At the State Finals, the visiting team will take infield warm-up first.
2. The IESA Softball Advisory Committee randomly draws the pairings for the Class 1A, 2A and 3A state finals at its fall meeting. The time schedule can be found online at www.iesa.org/activities/gsb

E. Awards

1. A championship plaque shall be awarded to regional and sectional winners.
2. A trophy is awarded to each state champion, runner-up, and third and fourth place team finishers at the state finals.
3. 26 individual medallions will be presented to each state champion, runner-up, and third and fourth place team finishers at the state finals.

F. Failure to Appear and Forfeiture of Contest

1. Any team which fails to play a scheduled state tournament series match and forfeits such match is subject to action of the Board of Directors, including penalty, assessments, suspension, or expulsion.
2. A team failing to field the required number of starting players (9) in softball within thirty (30) minutes of the scheduled game time shall forfeit the game. A game that is played even though the school failed to field the required number of starters within thirty (30) minutes of the scheduled match time cannot be protested for that reason.
3. No state tournament series contest shall be forfeited due to weather conditions. If the administrator of any participating school determines he or she cannot reach the tournament site due to weather conditions, the host school shall reschedule that particular game as soon as possible. The IESA and the opposing schools shall be notified of the rescheduling; other contests scheduled on that particular date may still be held.
4. Any coach or school official who withdraws a team from the field of play under any circumstances prior to the official completion of the game shall forfeit all rights to protest, except when the principal of the forfeiting school believes circumstances which affected the health, safety, or welfare of the students required such action, he or she may file a protest.

G. Financial Arrangements

1. State Series Contests
    a. **ALLOWABLE EXPENDITURES:** Allowable expenditures shall be detailed on the financial report form and detailed in the host manual.

b. **GROSS RECEIPTS:** Please see the host manual for the receipts retained by the host and the amount due to the IESA.

c. **TOURNAMENT DEFICITS:** WHEN ALLOWED, host schools may recoup state series contest expenses. Please refer to the host manual for specific information on tournament expenses.

d. **CONCESSIONS:** Hosts retain all concession revenue.

e. **STREAMING**: Hosts may allow streaming or provide a streaming option.

f. Completion of the online financial report and submission of the IESA admission share must occur within two weeks of the conclusion of hosting.

2. Tournament Admission

a. When admission is charged at any IESA state series contest, the admission price will be determined by the IESA Board of Directors.

b. The admission price for all attendees is the same. Children younger than kindergarten may enter with no charge.

c. State series hosts must charge the following amounts:

	GoFan (Digital)	Onsite (Cash)	Ages 5 & Under
Regional	NA	NA	NA
Sectional	NA	NA	NA
State	$8 per person	$10 per person	Free

d. **PASSES:** IESA passes, and IHSA media passes are accepted at the State Finals.

e. **PASS GATE:** Please refer to the host manual for those individuals and team personnel allowed complimentary entry.

3. Payments to Officials

a. The quarterfinal host and team playing will pay the officials on the day of the game.

b. The regional host school shall pay the officials on the day of the game – semifinals and championship.

c. The IESA Office will mail a check to the officials that worked the sectional game.

d. Officials are to be paid the following required amount:

Regional	Sectional
$65 per game per official	$75 per game per official

IX. State Series Structure

A. Advancement of Teams

1. In each of the three (3) classes, there shall be 16 regional tournaments.

a. Where possible, at least four (4) schools shall be assigned to each regional tournament.

b. In each class, the winners of the 16 regional tournaments will advance to one of eight (8) sectional contests consisting of two (2) teams in each sectional contest.

c. The winners of the eight (8) sectional tournaments will advance to the state finals.

2. All tournament play shall be single elimination with the exception of the losers of the state semifinal games. Losers of state semifinal games will play a consolation game.
3. All games are to be played in the proper order and shall not be changed unless permission is granted by the IESA - the sample brackets with the correct playing order are available online.
4. Games should not be played during school hours.

B. Regional Tournament Pairings

1. All regional hosts will post brackets online. The host school should enter dates, times and locations for the regional tournament, so the bracket is automatically created.
    a. Sample brackets for regionals with 4, 5, 6, 7 or 8 teams are available on the IESA Softball website under "Documents and Links" and the subsection "Information."
    b. For the regional quarterfinal game, the higher-seeded team (top of the bracket) is the home team, and this school will be responsible for contracting and hiring two (2) IHSA-licensed officials for the regional quarterfinal game(s), the costs of which are to be split by the schools participating in each of those games. Regional officials are paid $65 each per game.
    c. The Regional host designated by the IESA will contract and hire two (2) IHSA-licensed officials for both the regional semifinal and the regional championship game, the costs of which are to be split by the schools participating in each of those individual games.
2. Host schools will enter match result information to advance the winners as regional tournaments and sectional contests are played.

C. Sectional Games

1. The odd-numbered regional team will call the coin flip to determine the home team.
2. All sectional games will begin at 4:30 pm.

D. State Finals

1. All quarterfinal games will be played on Friday.
2. All semifinal games, followed by the third-place game and the championship game, will be played on Saturday.
3. The home team shall be determined by a coin flip. At the State Finals, the visiting team will take infield warm-up first.

X. Online Forms

A. Regional Entry Form

1. All information will be entered online - schools must enter the following information online in the IESA member center by the online roster and record deadline. Teams shall be ruled ineligible to compete in any state series contest unless the regional entry form has been completed; penalties will be enforced if the regional entry form information and roster/record is not submitted by the posted deadline.
2. Schools are required to submit their season schedule in the entry center by the date listed in section II of these Terms and Conditions.

3. Schools that fail to submit their season results by the online roster/record deadline will not be allowed to seed the other teams within their regional but the teams in that regional will be allowed to seed the team(s) who fail to list season results.
4. The school/team personnel information entered on this form is what will be used for free entries into the state finals should a school advance to that level.
5. Schools will be asked to submit the coach's name and email address; doing this certifies that each student entered on the roster has a birth certificate on file and she meets the eligibility guidelines as put forth by the IESA. It is the ultimate responsibility of all competing teams for all athletic activities to ensure that each participant listed on its regional entry form is eligible.
6. Changes, additions, and/or substitutions may be made to the regional entry form information until 4:00 pm on the date listed as the "Roster Closed" deadline of the season calendar in Section II of these Terms and Conditions. No roster changes are permitted after this deadline.
7. Components of the Regional Entry Form include:
    a. Athletes and Team Personnel - schools may list up to 18 eligible athletes for the state series.
    b. Regular Season Contests
        i. Submit the full varsity season schedule with results.
        ii. Non-varsity contests do not count as part of the team record.
        iii. A forfeit counts as a game played and the score should be entered as 7-0.
        iv. The team record will automatically be tabulated by the season schedule and results entered.
    c. Special Comments - additional notes schools should consider when ranking.

B. Online Ranking

1. A school that has not completed any of the online seeding steps has no say regarding seed. It is that school's responsibility to enter the appropriate material online by the deadline.
    a. A school that does not rank/seed will be assessed a $50 penalty.
2. After the online roster and record deadline, schools will have one day to rank all participating schools in their regional based on the information each team submitted. The following are factors to consider when ranking other teams in the regional:
    a. Season record and quality of teams' competition
    b. Smaller schools competing against larger schools (i.e. 1A vs. 2A)
    c. Head-to-head competition with common opponents
    d. Record against common opponents
    e. Roster of post-season team
3. The votes will be tabulated and the IESA will view all ranking results, break any ties, and confirm seed results online - if two or more teams are tied for any seed, the IESA administrator will break the tie by a coin flip.
4. All schools in a given regional will be able to see how other schools in the regional ranked them.

XI. Officials

A. General Rules

1. It is required that member schools use Illinois High School Association (IHSA) officials licensed in softball for all regular season contests. Coaches from participating teams should never be the contest officials for a varsity match.
    - A school's first violation for hiring a non-licensed official will result in a written warning. With a second violation, the Executive Director shall have the full authority to determine and impose a monetary penalty equivalent to the cost of one regional official for that activity.
2. A pre-game conference with officials, both team's head coaches is required to take place prior to all contests involving member schools.
3. All contest officials shall be familiar with IESA contest regulations/exceptions and the National Federation Rules for softball.
4. Contest officials shall make all decisions regarding the rules of play. Their judgments and decisions cannot be protested.

B. Contracting and Payment Toward Officials

1. Regular Season - 2 officials shall be hired and paid by the host school for all regular season games, both of whom shall be licensed by the IHSA. The rate of pay is determined by the school.
2. Regionals - 2 IHSA-licensed officials shall be hired for each regional game (neither may have an affiliation with the participating schools). These officials are paid by the regional host at the rate of $65 each per game (no mileage).
3. Sectionals - 2 IHSA-licensed officials shall be hired by the IESA for each sectional game. These officials are paid by the IESA at the rate of $75 each per game (no mileage).
4. State Finals - 3 officials shall be hired by the IESA for each state level game. The officials shall be IHSA-licensed and are paid by the IESA at the rate of $85 each per game. No mileage will be paid. The IESA will also contract and pay an IHSA-licensed official to be the Umpire in Charge for each class. This individual is responsible for coordinating and evaluating all state finals officials.