# 12U and Below Tournament Rules

Cincinnati Defenders Ball Fields | 2026 season

## How these rules work

- Unless a rule below says otherwise, games follow the current **NFHS** baseball rulebook.
- The tournament director has the last word on anything unclear, and that decision cannot be appealed.
- **There are no protests.** The umpire's ruling on the field is final.

## Before your first game

- Email your roster and proof of insurance to the tournament director before you arrive. Both must be on file before the first pitch, and a team that has not done so can forfeit.
- The schedule is posted ahead of time. If weather forces changes, the director may reformat the event.
- Your team manager must carry a copy (paper or digital) of every player's birth certificate, plus a current report card for anyone playing under the grade exception. If a player's age or grade is questioned and the copy cannot be shown on the spot, the team forfeits the game(s) involved and can be removed from the tournament.

## Game flow and timing

- **Start time is forfeit time**, unless your team is arriving from another field. If the field ahead of you finishes early, your game can begin as much as 30 minutes ahead of schedule, so be warmed up and ready.
- A game is **6 innings** or the time limit, whichever comes first. No new inning starts once 1 hour 45 minutes have passed (2 hours in championship games). The umpire's watch is the official clock.
- **Tie in bracket play:** extra innings begin with a runner on second base, one out, and the next scheduled batter up with a 1-1 count. Repeat until there is a winner. Pool play games can finish tied.
- **Mercy rule:** the game ends when a team leads by 15 after 3 innings, by 10 after 4, or by 8 after 5.
- **Home team:** a coin toss in pool play and between teams of equal seed. In bracket play the higher seed is home.
- **8U only:** no stealing. A runner may take a two-step shuffle lead but there are no pickoff attempts, and runners advance only on batted balls, walks, hit batters and the like. A dropped third strike is always an out. Games are 5 innings or 1 hour 45 minutes, and a pitcher is limited to 5 innings over the weekend.

## Pitching

- A pitcher may throw at most **6 innings in one day** and **8 innings in the whole tournament**. Reaching 6 innings in a day ends that pitcher's tournament.
- Any pitcher who throws even one pitch in an inning is charged with that full inning.
- A pitcher who reaches the limit must leave the mound at once. This is a safety measure, not a penalty.
- Once removed from the mound, a pitcher may not pitch again in that game, but may play any other position.

## Lineups and substitutions

- You may bat 9, 10, or your whole roster.
- Batting the whole roster: if a player is hurt and leaves, no out is charged for that spot. Just skip it.
- Batting 9 or 10: if a player is hurt and cannot be replaced, an out is recorded each time that spot comes up.

- Starters may re-enter once, but only in the same batting position they started in.
- A courtesy runner is allowed for the catcher and pitcher. Use a player who is not in the lineup; if everyone is batting, use the player who made the last out.

## Conduct and safety

- On a play at a base with a tag coming, the runner must slide or otherwise avoid the fielder. Malicious contact, as judged by the umpire, means ejection and possibly a one-game suspension.
- A coach or manager who is ejected also sits out the team's next game.
- No infield practice on the field before a game. Ground balls may be hit in foul territory on your side, and fly balls in the outfield if time allows. No batting practice; wiffle balls in the outfield are fine when there is time.
- Four game balls are supplied per game. Bring spares and have players retrieve foul balls.
- When your game ends, clear and clean the dugout and the area around it and leave promptly so the next game starts on time.

## Seeding tiebreakers

- Teams tied in pool play are separated in this order: (1) head-to-head result; if three or more teams are tied, go to runs allowed unless one team beat every other team in the tie; (2) fewest runs allowed; (3) most runs scored; (4) coin toss.

## Age and grade limits by division

Each team may carry up to **two** players who fall outside the normal age line under the grade exception. Everyone on a roster must otherwise fit the division they play in.

| Division | Too old if the player turns this age before May 1 | Exception | Never eligible if the player turns this age before August 1 |
|---|---|---|---|
| 12U | 13, unless the player is in 6th grade | Players turning 13 before May 1 may play only if in 6th grade. | 14 |

A player in a younger division than the one listed is always eligible for that division, whatever grade they are in.