

SOFTBALL

TOURNAMENT DATES

Divisional Tournaments

Classes A and B-C May 21-23

State Tournaments

Classes AA, A and B-C May 28-30

I - GENERAL RULES AND REGULATIONS

- (1) The Montana High School Association will promote, provide for and control all interschool softball activities among the member schools.
- (2) The playing rules as authorized and published by the National Federation of State High School Associations for the current year shall be followed for all games. By National Federation Rule, Montana has adopted the following:
 - a. Any game will end when, after four and a half or five innings, when a team is ten (10) or more runs behind and has completed its turn at bat.
 - b. Any game will end when, after two and a half or three innings, when a team is fifteen (15) or more runs behind and has completed its turn at bat.
 - c. Games suspended before 4 1/2 or 5 innings because of weather – resume from the point of interruption.
 - d. Games suspended before 4 1/2 or 5 innings that are tied – resume from the point of interruption.
 - e. Games suspended before 4 1/2 or 5 innings because of darkness – resume from the point of interruption.
 - f. **Junior varsity games played prior to varsity games, the following time limit shall apply: No new inning shall begin more than 1 hour and 45 minutes after the conclusion of the pre-game plate meeting.**
 - g. Double first bases are mandatory.
 - h. Using a maximum time limit of 1 1/2 hours can end games played at invitational tournaments. The game can be called if there is five minutes or less before the maximum time limit or officials should not start a new inning after one hour and twenty minutes of play, except if a tie exists where NFHS Softball Rules for tiebreaking would be followed.
 - i. Invitational tournaments which use tie-breaking procedure shall use the National Federation procedure: beginning in the top of the eighth inning or upon reaching the predetermined time limit, the last batter from the previous inning will be placed on second base at the beginning of each half inning with the game then proceeding in a normal manner until a winner is decided.
- (3) Pitcher limitation from JV to Varsity: the starting pitcher in a varsity game cannot pitch in a JV contest unless there is an injury or for other out of the ordinary circumstances, which must be approved by the Executive Director.
- (4) On defense, the positions of pitcher third (3rd) base and first (1st) base must wear a protective mask. The mask must be single solid color (excluding padding) and unadorned.
- (5) The Montana High School Association Executive Board shall establish the starting date for practice and the first allowable date when any contests may be played. No individual shall play in any Association softball contest until he/she has a minimum of eight (8) days of softball practice of at least one practice session per day on ten different days (no practice permitted on Sunday), prior to the date of the first allowable game.

The initial eight (8) practices for each individual must be completed as a comprehensive, regularly scheduled team practice with the full coaching staff.

When determining what constitutes a MHS A practice that satisfies the language above in (5), the following criteria must be applied:

1. Practice must be at least one (1) hour long.
2. At least one full squad (varsity team/J.V. team/C squad) and their coaching staff must be present.
3. The athlete must participate in the entire practice.
4. Practice should include the majority of drills and conditioning that are the norm for that team or squad.
5. A practice the day of a game does not count (unless an athlete is practicing with another squad that does not have a game that day, i.e. a varsity team member who stays home and practices with the JV team that does not have a game that day).
6. Warm-ups or walk-throughs with the team prior to a game does not constitute a practice.

If a student begins his/her initial eight (8) days of required practices and that period of days is interrupted by sickness, injury, academic ineligibility, or any other reason for a period of two weeks, then the student shall be required to practice an additional four (4) days and in cases of sickness or injury to produce a doctor's release.

Athletes participating on teams competing in MHS A post season play, which overlaps the beginning of the next MHS A sanctioned activity starting practice date, may be credited for practices during the overlap period toward meeting the minimum practice requirement of the overlapped activity season.

If a student transfers to a new school after completing the required days of preseason practices for their sport or activity, the student must complete an additional number of practices (equal to half the # of required practices for that sport or activity) at their new school.

- (6) Twenty-two (22) games with no more than three (3) games on one date will be the maximum for schools excluding Association sponsored tournaments.

INTERPRETATIONS

1. Any softball team that receives a forfeit may be allowed to schedule and play a make-up game but the team that gives the forfeit must count the forfeited game as one of the season's game limit for its school and that team will not be allowed to schedule another game in place of the forfeited game(s).
 2. Definition of "squad" — An athletic squad is determined by union of "act and intent" by grouping together a number of students to play as a unit to represent the school, under the direction of a designated coach or coaches. A school must have at least fourteen (14) players participating to be able to schedule sub varsity games or play a sub varsity schedule. At least five (5) players must be designated as varsity only and cannot play in the sub varsity contest whether on the same or different day of the varsity contest.
 3. Club team participation – During the MHS A softball season, no more than four (4) rostered participants in a school's program can compete in an outside softball event on the same team.
- (7) Each classification can hold a softball jamboree. Requirements for a jamboree are:
 - a. A jamboree consists of four five-inning games.
 - b. Each game has a one hour maximum time limit, and a game can be called if there is five minutes or less before the maximum limit.
 - c. Games may end in a tie in a jamboree.
 - d. The five-inning, one hour time limit must be followed during the entire jamboree.
 - e. The inning total would be less than three full games.
 - f. The jamboree counts as two games towards the season total of twenty-two. At the AA and A level, the jamboree counts as one game towards the season total of twenty-two.

- g. The jamboree must be played within the first twenty-one days of eligible competition competitive dates of each season.
 - h. The current pitching rule remains in effect.
- (8) Dudley (WT-12-Y-FP) softballs shall be utilized at all MHSAs sponsored softball tournaments.
 - (9) The ball shall be optic yellow and the COR specification shall be identical for each ball used in each game.
 - (10) Walk-up music may be played in the regular season by the home team only if approved by the school's administration. Each team can choose their own approved music. Administrators should review the music to determine its appropriateness. Walk-up music should stop the moment the batter steps into the batter's box. Officials may order the music turned down or off if the music is inappropriate or is interfering with the orderly administration of the game.
 - (11) No school is required to take part in any contests or athletic events, but once entered, teams are obligated to participate in a contest or athletic event to its normal conclusion unless the contest is terminated by mutual consent of the school officials involved due to unusual weather or game conditions, or situations which could be hazardous to participants or spectators. Any coach is prohibited from unilaterally refusing to play.

If a school fails to complete contests or athletic events that they have entered, the violating school would be subject to penalties as deemed appropriate and necessary by the Executive Director.

No school is required to take part in any game or tournament, but when once entered under the plan outlined, schools shall carry out their part of the program in fairness to all other schools represented. Any team taking part in season play is automatically entered into the first tournament held in that district or in that division. That team shall not be allowed to withdraw from playing in such a tournament without the specific approval of the Executive Director. The penalty for violation shall be as outlined under Penalties Article VIII, Section (2).

- (12) The softball season officially closes with the end of the state tournament for the classification of the school concerned.
- (13) The MHSAs prohibits any use and/or possession of tobacco, alcohol or other mood-altering drugs during competition. Violation will cause the coach or participant to be disqualified from further participation in that event.

II - STATE CHAMPIONSHIP PARTICIPATION AND PLAYOFF

- (1) Schools in each classification will be charged with the responsibility of drawing the conference schedules each season and determining the number of conference games the schools must play to be eligible for tournament seeding. Tournament seeding will be determined by each classification.
- (2) The site(s) and manager(s) for the state tournament(s) will be determined by the MHSAs Executive Board.
- (3) No all-state teams or players shall be picked or announced at the state tournament site by either the Executive Board or tournament officials. This applies to playoffs, divisional and state competition.
- (4) The game balls for the State Tournament shall be provided by the Montana High School Association.
- (5) First round games at state tournaments will have the team with the higher seed being designated as home team. A coin flip determines home team in all future rounds.

- (6) The state softball tournaments shall be double elimination formats. Game times shall be established by the tournament manager.
- (7) State tournament games suspended because of weather and/or darkness will be resumed from the point of interruption.
- (8) State tournament games suspended because of weather and/or darkness after 4 1/2 - 5 innings of play will be resumed from the point of interruption and 7 innings completed unless the 10 run rule is reached.
- (9) Any game will end when, after two and a half or three innings, when a team is fifteen (15) or more runs behind and has completed its turn at bat.
- (10) Bat Testing – Class AA, Class A and Class B/C will compression test all softball bats prior to competition at the state tournament. The testing will be completed by the state tournament managers.
- (11) ***Championship Game Home and Away Determination-The undefeated team will be the home team for game one of the state championships. If a second game is needed, the winning team from game number one will be the home team for the second game. Approved for Class AA, Class A and Class B/C will conduct a coin toss to determine the championship and if game is as needed.***

III - ELIGIBILITY OF PLAYERS

Teams and players recognized as eligible to participate in interscholastic softball in Montana under the rules of the Montana High School Association will be eligible to participate in the tournaments arranged. All schools are cautioned to carefully check over their list of potential players and make certain that each student whose name is submitted is fully qualified under the rules.

IV - TOURNAMENT PARTICIPANTS

No more than seventeen players can be in uniform for any tournament game.

V - TOURNAMENT POLICING

- (1) The local tournament manager and/or committee must make arrangements for adequate policing at the field during the course of the tournament.
- (2) Special attention must be given to insure that the game officials are afforded proper protection when leaving the field.
- (3) These rules apply for divisional and state tournaments.

VI - VIDEO AT SOFTBALL TOURNAMENTS

The MHSAs Executive Board has given the tournament manager the authority to grant or refuse permission for schools to use video at softball tournaments provided it is within the guidelines of the MHSAs Handbook and National Federation rules.

VII - DETERMINATION OF TOURNAMENT SITES

- (1) The determination of sites, tournament managers and arrangements for state MHSAs tournaments will be made by the Executive Board. This determination will be made at a meeting of the Board after interested schools or communities have been given an opportunity to submit written invitations to host an Association tournament.
- Tournament managers cannot be a coach or an official if that coach or an official is participating in the tournament.
- (2) Following is some of the criteria which will be considered by the Board in making the determination of tournament sites:
 - (1) Adequate field facilities;
 - (2) Adequate community facilities

for team and spectator housing and eating; (3) Reasonable assurance of financial success; (4) Definite invitation showing local community support; (5) Geographical rotation when feasible.

- (3) If the Board locates a tournament by a member school's request, an administrator of that school will normally be named tournament manager. If the tournament is located by a request from other than a member school, the Executive Director, a member of the MHSAA staff or a member of the Executive Board will normally be named manager.
- (4) The concession rights for any tournament held in a non-member school facility shall be awarded by the MHSAA Executive Board.

VIII - TOURNAMENT PROGRAMS, CONCESSIONS AND CORPORATE SPONSORS

- (1) The tournament program rights for all state tournaments will be the responsibility of the MHSAA Executive Board.
- (2) The concession rights for any state tournament must be approved by the Executive Director. Concession rights include but are not limited to t-shirts, other apparel, photos, buttons etc.
- (3) At district and divisional events, concessions where goods and/or services are received would be at the approval of managers of events.
- (4) Corporate sponsorship of any post season event is the responsibility of the MHSAA Executive Board and requires Board approval. Exceptions are a) program advertisements and b) signage or announcements acknowledging the receipt of donated goods including food or beverages for the hospitality room, the use of tents at outdoor events, or the use of other equipment necessary for staging the event. Signage should be placed only in the appropriate areas, i.e. on the tents or in the hospitality room/area.

Established facility sponsorships are not affected provided that MHSAA corporate sponsorship requirements are met.

IX - TOURNAMENT FINANCE PLAN

- (1) After each divisional or state tournament the tournament manager shall submit a financial report of the tournament to the Executive Director of the Montana High School Association within fifteen (15) days following the conclusion of the event.
- (2) The Executive Board wished to point out that the local community definitely profits from the tournaments in three ways: (a) All concessions of the tournaments are normally given to local organizations. (b) Local communities profit considerably through income at hotels, motels, restaurants and stores. (c) The local school is under no expense to send its team to the tournament.
- (3) The host school does not underwrite the expense of the tournament but is obligated to do its best to see to it that the gross receipts are such that allowable expenses are paid in full.

Allowable Tournament Expenses

Charges against the tournament will stand for payment in the following order:

- (1) Referees' fees and expenses.
- (2) The softballs for all state tournaments will be furnished by the MHSAA office at no charge.
- (3) Normal administrative expenses. (Printing tickets, scorebook, advertising, signs, postage, telephone, clerical, scorer and timer.)

- (4) Use of facility charges (rental) shall include all charges, if any, for the following: extra field preparation/maintenance, utilities, ticket sales, ticket takers, police/security, entrance guards, ushers, parking attendants, first aid room and towel service.

- (5) Team expenses are to be computed as follows:

- a. In addition to the players on the tournament roster (a maximum of 17) per diem will be allowed for four additional persons at \$45.00 per day for a maximum of 21 persons (17 players, 2 managers, 2 coaches), plus travel expense allowance of \$2.50 per mile for one round trip for each school participating.
- b. The decision to stay at the tournament site or to commute rests with each school. If a school elects to commute to the tournament site, any or all days the tournament is in session, they will be paid expenses as follows:
 1. \$2.50 per mile for each round trip, maximum of one round trip per day, plus \$20.00 a day per person, to a maximum of 21, for meal allowance for each day they commute while the tournament is in session.
 2. For the days when the team stays overnight at the tournament site, the regular schedule of \$45.00 applies.
 3. No expenses are paid for the day following the tournament.
- c. One additional day per diem will be allowed if travel distance is more than 200 miles one way, if the team stays overnight an extra night preceding the tournament dates.
- d. If, after a team is eliminated from tournament play, they leave before the completion of the tournament play, they will receive one day less per diem than they otherwise are entitled to receive under this schedule.
- e. Teams located at the tournament site will not receive any mileage or per diem.
- f. In computing miles traveled the shortest paved route open to travel, as listed on the current official Montana Highway Map published by the Montana Department of Highways, will be the mileage used.

Note: No guarantee is made that teams will receive maximum expense allowance.

Non-Allowable Tournament Expenses

- (1) Proper policing of hotels.
- (2) Proper timing and scoring equipment.
- (3) Adequate dressing room and shower facilities.

Established Ticket Prices for the State Tournaments

The following ticket prices as established by the MHSAA Executive Board will be used for all state tournaments.

	Adult	Student
General Admission (one day)	\$ 10.00	\$ 8.00
All-Session (three day)	\$22.00	\$15.00

X - SELECTION OF OFFICIALS

Refer to the MOA section for procedure for selection of officials to work the softball tournaments.

XI - POLICY FOR TOURNAMENT PASSES

The Association has established the following policy for tournament passes which shall be adhered to by all tournament managers.

- (1) For school administrators - Up to fourteen all-session tickets. If the school co-op the host school will receive the fourteen

administrative tickets and the other school(s) in the co-op will each receive an additional four (4) administrative tickets. These complimentary tickets are for administrators, coaches, spouses, chaperones, bus drivers etc. who actually attend the tournament.

- (2) For players — seventeen passes for players and two for managers — total of nineteen.
- (3) **For spirit, bands and performing groups — they will be allowed free admission at playoff and state championship games when they play or perform.**
- (4) For radio — three passes to each station given permission to broadcast the tournament or game. The game (games) must be broadcast in its (or their) entirety.
- (5) For media other than radio
 - a. Print news media - one pass for Associated Press and passes for working staff of local newspapers of teams in the tournament or newspapers in the marketing area of those teams. Members of the print media are required to show their Montana Newspaper Association press credentials when picking up their passes.
 - b. Television news media - passes for working staff of local stations of teams in the tournament or stations in the marketing area of those teams.
 - c. Commercial photography or broadcast - passes for working staff as contracted by the event manager or MHSА.
 - d. Passes will not be issued for spouses or children who attend the event with working members of the media.
- (6) For umpires — one pass to each umpire working the tournament.

XII - CLASS AA SOFTBALL PROGRAM

- (1) See www.mhsa.org for the detailed alignments for Class AA.
- (2) Class AA Scheduling
 - a. Class AA programs are allowed to schedule varsity and JV contests at the same time a maximum of four times during the regular season.
 - b. Class AA players are allowed to participate in a maximum of 9 innings when JV and varsity contests are played at different times for a one-game series. Programs with low roster numbers may appeal to the MHSА to allow players to participate in more than 9 innings to provide JV opportunities.
- (3) Standings for AA playoffs will be determined by the AA Conference Policy. Seeding to state will be as follows:

Western Conference

#1 and #2 receive byes (1st & 2nd seed at state)
#3 West v. #6 West (at #3's site)
#4 West v. #5 West (at #4's site)

Eastern Conference

#1 and #2 receive byes (1st & 2nd seed at state)
#3 East v. #6 East (at #3's site)
#4 East v. #5 East (at #4's site)
Each division's seeding will be as follows for advancement to the state tournaments:

Seeding for Eastern and Western Divisions

#1 – 1st place in the division
#2 – 2nd place in the division
#3 – Next highest remaining seed in the division
#4 – Last remaining seed in the division

Playoffs will be played in a best of three game series with all games played on the same day.

- (4) **Class AA 2-game playoff. If the higher seed wins one game, they will advance to state. The lower seed must win both games to advance to state. The host team is the home team for game one and if a second game is needed, the visiting team will be the home team.**

Pairings for the state tournament will be as follows:

Bracket II 1st place Western vs. 4th place Eastern
2nd place Eastern vs. 3rd place Western

Bracket I 1st place Eastern vs. 4th place Western
2nd place Western vs. 3rd place Eastern

Bracket I will begin the State Tournament in odd years and Bracket II will begin State Tournament in even years.

XIII - CLASS A SOFTBALL PROGRAM

- (1) See www.mhsa.org for the detailed alignments for Class A.
- (2) The Class A Softball Conference will be charged with drawing up the conference schedules each season and determining the number of conference games each school must play to be eligible for divisional and/or state tournament seeding including the breaking of any ties in conference standings. A divisional tournament may be conducted to determine state seeding or divisions may choose to seed teams directly to state.
- (3) Each division has the option of conducting a divisional tournament. The top six (6) placing teams at the divisional tournament will advance to the state tournament.

Each division will be responsible for determining the number of conference games each school must play for divisional tournament seeding including the breaking of any ties in conference standings.

If the divisional tournament cannot be played, seeding will be determined by the class A conference. If the tournament cannot be completed, then the six (6) highest seeded teams remaining will advance to the state tournament and be seeded accordingly.

- (4) Six (6) teams will qualify from each division for the state tournament. Seeding for the Class A State Tournament will be as follows:

2025-26

Game #1 2nd place Southwestern vs. 3rd place Northeastern
Game #2 2nd place Northwestern vs. 3rd place Southwestern
Game #3 2nd place Southeastern vs. 3rd place Northwestern
Game #4 2nd place Northeastern vs. 3rd place Southeastern
Game #5 1st place Northwestern vs. Winner of Game #1
Game #6 1st place Southeastern vs. Winner of Game #2
Game #7 1st place Northeastern vs. Winner of Game #3
Game #8 1st place Southwestern vs. Winner of Game #4

2026-27

Game #1 2nd place Northeastern vs. 3rd place Southwestern
Game #2 2nd place Southeastern vs. 3rd place Northwestern
Game #3 2nd place Northwestern vs. 3rd place Southeastern
Game #4 2nd place Southwestern vs. 3rd place Northwestern
Game #5 1st place Southeastern vs. Winner of Game #1
Game #6 1st place Northwestern vs. Winner of Game #2
Game #7 1st place Southwestern vs. Winner of Game #3
Game #8 1st place Northeastern vs. Winner of Game #4

XIV - CLASS B-C SOFTBALL PROGRAM

- (1) See www.mhsa.org for the detailed alignments for Class B-C.
- (2) Each Class B-C Softball Division will be charged with drawing up the conference schedules each season.

- (3) Each division will conduct a divisional tournament. The top four placing teams at the divisional tournament will advance to the state tournament. Seeding at the divisional will be based on conference records. Each division will be responsible for determining the number of conference games each school must play for divisional tournament seeding including the breaking of any ties in conference standings. If the divisional tournament cannot be played, the four highest-seeded teams will advance to the state tournament based on their seeding entering the divisional. If the tournament cannot be completed, the four highest-seeded teams remaining will advance to the state tournament and be seeded accordingly.
- (4) Four teams will qualify from each division for the state tournament. Seeding for the Class B-C State Tournament will be as follows:

2025-2026

Bracket I 1st Place Western vs. 4th Place Eastern
 2nd Place Eastern vs. 3rd Place Western

Bracket II 1st Place Eastern vs. 4th Place Western
 2nd Place Western vs. 3rd Place Eastern

2026-2027

Bracket I 1st Place Eastern vs. 4th Place Western
 2nd Place Western vs. 3rd Place Eastern

Bracket II 1st Place Western vs. 4th Place Eastern
 2nd Place Eastern vs. 3rd Place Western

Brackets I and II shall alternate each year.