



**PRIOR LAKE ATHLETICS FOR YOUTH**



**PRIOR LAKE FASTPITCH SOFTBALL**

**POLICIES HANDBOOK**

# PRIOR LAKE FAST PITCH SOFTBALL PROGRAM POLICIES HANDBOOK

<b>Welcome</b>	
Mission	3
Objectives	4
Volunteer Hours	4
Team Formation Philosophy	4
Age Level Coordinators	5
Fee Breakdown	5
<b>Player Selection and Team Level Assignment</b>	
Player Eligibility	6
Player Tryouts	6
Player Registration Refunds	7
“A”, “B” and “C” Teams	7
Team Formation Process	7
Team Formation Criteria: 10U, 12U, 14U, 16U	8
Team Formation Philosophy: 10U, 12U, 14U, 16U	9
Evaluation of Pitchers	10
Evaluation of Catchers	11
Playing up an Age Level	11
<b>Minimum Standards of Performance</b>	
8U	
10U	
12U	
14U and 16U	12
<b>Player Expectations</b>	
Practice	13
Player and Coach Relations	13
Batting	13
Fielding Position	14
Playing Time	14
Development of Pitchers and Catchers	15
Travel	16
Uniforms, Equipment and Spirit Wear	16
Equipment Orders	17
Home Playing Fields	18
Length of Season	19
Prior Lake Fastpitch Player National Tournament Policy	20
<b>Fall League</b>	20
<b>Coaching Qualifications</b>	
Purpose	20
Head Coach Qualifications	20
Assistance Coach Qualifications	21
Reasons for Dismissal	21
<b>Coaching Selection Process</b>	
Background	21
Objectives	21
Head Coach Selection Process	21
Assistant Coach Selection Process	22
Methods and Procedures to Dismiss a Coach	23
<b>Commitments</b>	
Player Rights	23
Player Pledge	24
Parent/Guardian Pledge	25
Coach Commitment	26

## WELCOME

Prior Lake Fastpitch Softball, affiliated with P.L.A.Y., is a community-based, non-profit volunteer organization that sponsors girls traveling fastpitch in School District 719. Each year, the organization has the ability to be sanctioned under national organizations: (1) American Softball Association, which governs Junior Olympic softball, (2) North American Fastpitch Association (NAFA), and (3) United States Specialty Sports Association (USSSA).

Prior Lake Fastpitch competes in the Suburban League, which covers the following areas: North, West and South twin cities metro areas. Whenever possible, teams are divided into geographic divisions; however, players may travel some distance for a few of the league games. Summer leagues are our primary focus, with a fall league also part of our program.

As shown below, Prior Lake Fastpitch Softball sponsors teams in five age groups, based on the player's age as of January 1 of the current year. Teams are comprised of 10-12 players.

Age Group	Emphasis
8 and under (8U)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Early development on game fundamentals</li><li>● Early development on basic mechanics</li><li>● Having fun!</li></ul>
10 and under (10U)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Learning game fundamentals and rules</li><li>● Continued development on mechanics</li><li>● Playing on and as a team</li><li>● Having fun!</li></ul>
12 and under 12U	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Continued focus on game fundamentals</li><li>● Continued development on mechanics</li><li>● Early development of game strategy</li><li>● Having fun!</li></ul>
14 and under (14U)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Refining mechanics and more focus on execution</li></ul>
16 and under (16U)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Strategy and advanced skills</li><li>● Having fun!</li></ul>

Coaches in the Prior Lake Fastpitch organization are volunteers. All receive training through our organization or by attending authorized training clinics.

### Mission

*The mission of Prior Lake Fastpitch Softball is to create a healthy, competitive, drug-free environment where young girls and women can build their skills as athletes and people. We strive to afford opportunities to develop and enhance softball skills to compete at the high school level and beyond. Our athletes are encouraged to develop confidence, high self-esteem, and respect for the game to better support their future roles as quality citizens.*

### Objectives

1. Assist in the development of quality young girls and women.
2. Manage participation in order to create a fun, competitive environment that encourages girls to return each year.

3. Emphasize fundamentals for both individual and team play in order to best prepare girls to compete in high school and beyond.
4. Perform at our best while focusing on achieving success at all tournaments
5. Win and lose with dignity while maintaining respect for all players, coaches, and umpires

The importance of winning varies with the team's age level and classification. As noted, at the 8U, 10U, and 12U levels, the primary objectives are learning the fundamentals and developing a love the game (especially important in league games and early season tournaments).

Winning grows in importance for older "B" level teams, even as fun and fundamentals remain primary objectives. "A" level teams are the most competitive, as their well developed skills allow greater focus on team success.

We believe that...

- When players are given a safe environment in which to practice and play, they develop more rapidly without the risk of injury.
- When players are taught and encouraged to enjoy the games and practices, their excitement and commitment to their team grows, as does their ability to understand new skill techniques.
- When players are provided skilled instruction that allows them to learn and practice the fundamentals, their overall ability as players will be enhanced and sustained if regularly applied.
- As individual players succeed, the potential for team success increases: *the whole is greater than the sum of its parts!*

## **Volunteer Deposit**

The volunteer deposit is a \$200.00 check submitted to PLAY. Only one deposit per traveling softball family is required. Your child will not be placed on a team if your deposit has not been turned in. The deposit check is not cashed, but remains in the Softball board's custody until the end of the season. At that time if your volunteer requirement has been fulfilled the check will be shredded, if not the check is cashed and the funds are absorbed into the traveling softballs general fund.

There is a required 10 volunteer hours per family each season. Out of those 10 hours, 4 mandatory hours will be required at the Prior Lake Softball Tournament. All parents will be required to contribute volunteer hours during the Prior Lake Softball Tournament.

The remaining 6 hours can be filled at events like the traveling softball booth at PLAY Fest, open gyms, clinics, pancake breakfast, Laker night at the varsity softball game, and board sponsored committee projects. Volunteer hours are intended to serve the overall organization. Thus helping out with specific team activities, such, practices, racking or chalking fields, score keeping etc... while valuable and important to your daughters team, would not count towards you volunteer hours.

With all these opportunities, 10 hours per family are easy to fill. Volunteer opportunities will be posted on the PLAY web site under the traveling softball volunteers tab.

## **Who is exempt?**

The Head Coach, the 1<sup>st</sup> Assistant Coach, and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Assistant Coach and/or Team Parent are exempt. If there two assistant coaches on the team, one of them can act as the team parent. The team parent is only

exempt if there are only two coaches on the team, a head coach and one assistant coach. Traveling softball Board & Committee members are also exempt.

## **Team Formation Philosophy**

### 1. Manage participation:

- Establish Minimum Standards of Performance (MSPs), in conjunction with high school coaches.
- Provide appropriate practice time to help teach, develop training outlines, and list sample drills for players to meet the minimum standards.
- Ensure that mastering the above skills is the primary focus for coaches

### 2. Encourage girls to return each year:

- Form teams to provide a “like” competitive experience, incorporate Minimum Standards of Performance (MSP), and provide an opportunity to strive for a higher age level classification.

## **Age Level Coordinators**

Player age level coordinators are parents’ and players’ direct line of communication to the Prior Lake Fastpitch Committee. Parents and players should feel free to discuss questions or conflicts with the team’s coach. The Age Level Coordinator is a valuable resource in the following circumstances:

- If, for any reason, the player or parent is uncomfortable raising any issue with the coach.
- If the coach has been approached and the result is unsatisfactory to the player or parent.
- If the player or parent has any issues or concerns they believe should be brought before the Traveling Director, Vice President of Softball, or the entire Board of Directors.

## **Fee Breakdown**

Below is an estimation of how registration fees are used to cover the cost of the program.

- League fees
- City field rental/usage fees
- Tournaments entry and gate fees (up to 3 per team)
- Umpire fees
- Equipment (training aids, bats, & catchers gear)
- Help offset tryout costs
- Open gyms (walk up fees only cover a small portion of costs)
- PLAY administrative fees including
  - participant and team insurance
  - administrative office and staff costs

## **Calendar**

The calendar is an important tool for the players, parents, and volunteers to identify key dates for the softball program. The calendar can be found on the website at [www.playinfo.org](http://www.playinfo.org).

## PLAYER SELECTION AND TEAM LEVEL ASSIGNMENT

### Player Eligibility

All players must live or attend school in the Prior Lake community. A “waived player” from another community may be eligible to participate, but only if she does not take the place of a Prior Lake players. Some exceptions to this policy may apply, depending on the numbers of players and registration cut off dates. Exceptions are intended where a Prior Lake Fastpitch team coach believes he/she needs to add a pitcher to achieve a basic level of competitiveness. In those cases, a Prior Lake player may be cut or the coach may carry more players. The Prior Lake Fastpitch softball board must approve all exceptions to this policy before a “waived” player is accepted on a team. All players must provide a copy of their Birth Certificate and complete a Prior Lake Fastpitch Registration Form before participating in league or tournament games.

A player’s age on January 1 of the current year determines the age classification at which the player is eligible to participate. This age rule governs all players starting out at the 8U level.

### Player Tryouts

All Prior Lake Fastpitch Teams participate in tryouts. Tryouts for 10U and 12U age groups are held annually in the Spring for the summer season. 14U and 16U age levels will have tryouts in the Fall, although final team formations will not take place until registration closes in the Spring. Tryouts consist of throwing, fielding, running, catching and batting evaluations. All players planning to participate in the summer season are evaluated in all tryout sessions. *Players should also expect to provide information at tryouts on their availability during the season; for example, vacations, camps, dance, soccer or basketball may affect time spent on fastpitch.*

### Player Registration Refunds

Registration refunds are made to players if Prior Lake Fastpitch cannot field a team due to unavailability of coaches, insufficient number of player registrations and/or if cuts are required. **No refunds are made once a player has been placed on a team.**

### “A”, “B” and “C” Teams

“A”, “B” and “C” teams are selected at 10U, 12U, 14U, and 16U age levels, participation permitting.

- “A” teams are selected by drafting the entire team from the pool of eligible players, ahead of any of the “B” teams. This generally results in the “A” team having the most fundamentally sound players, allowing them to play at a higher competitive level.
- “B” teams are more focused on the development of every player on the team. Early in the season, winning is secondary, as players have opportunities to improve their skills and the team becomes more competitive.
- “C” teams are focused on the development of every player on the team. Winning is secondary, as players have opportunities to improve their skills.
- During State Qualifiers, State Tournaments and Regional Tournaments, playing to win becomes more of a focus, coaches are still expected to balance play time as much as possible but stronger or more experienced player may see more playing time. At certain age levels, teams may be limited to only batting 9 players and exercising the DP flex rule as part of tournament rules.

## **Team Formation Process**

The team formation process is one of the most important functions of the Prior Lake Fastpitch program. Our goal is to provide a tryout environment that is fair to all players and allows them to demonstrate their abilities to a group of qualified evaluators. Our evaluators have fastpitch experience and are screened for conflicts of interests (real or perceived). Those individuals on the running tryout drills that are not evaluators may be parents of players in other age levels. Age Level Coordinators may be present during all tryouts.

The tryout drills are predetermined and intended to demonstrate specific skills to the evaluators. Evaluators rate various skills on a predetermined point scale. Points are accumulated and ranked by a Board member and All tryout results are confidential. Nobody outside the Softball board is allowed to see the final results. Age Level Coordinators will receive a summary of scores for players in that age group to develop the team formation recommendations. Not even the evaluators see the score sheets of other evaluators or the final results. Tryout evaluation numbers are entered into spreadsheet by at least two people who are from different age levels. This is to ensure accurate transfer of numbers from paper to computer.

The Age Level Coordinator facilitates the team selection process, and presents the recommendations to the Traveling Softball Board. All Age Level Coordinators will be present.

A player or parent may make a request in writing to the Age Level Coordinator to not have the player participate on a specific coach's team. The Age Level Coordinator will do his/her best to accommodate the request; however, there is no guarantee the request will be granted.

Players are notified by a posting on the website, coordinated so all players are notified at the same time, unless otherwise advised.

### **Team Formation Criteria: 8U, 10U, 12U, 14U, 16U**

- Tryouts for 8U,10U and 12U groups are held annually in the Spring for the summer season.
- Tryouts for 14U and 16U groups are held in the Fall, but final team formations will not take place until Spring registration closes.
- 14U and 16U players that are new to the organization or those who were unable to make the fall evaluation will be allowed to tryout in the Spring
- General tryouts consist of throwing, batting, fielding, and catching.
- All players planning to participate in the summer season must be evaluated in a tryout session.
- Pitchers and Catchers will tryout in separate sessions.
- Tryout performance is confidential, but player feedback will be discussed with any parent/player who feels they have not been placed in the appropriate level of competition.
- If consensus on moving a player up to the next age level cannot be met by the Softball Board, the Traveling Director will have final approval. Appeals will be handled by the VP of Softball and if needed elevated to the Executive Board.
- Age Level Coordinators will facilitate the team and coaches selection process and make recommendations to the Softball Board for approval. If censuses cannot be met, the Traveling Director will have final approval. Appeals will be handled by the VP of Softball and if needed elevated to the Executive Board.
- If a decision has to be made which has a direct affect on the child and/or team involving the child of any board member: input and consultation will be sought from other committee members not directly impacted.

- A player/parent who has a conflict with a specific coach should submit the request to the Age Level Coordinator. The request will be given the appropriate consideration by the Age Level Coordinator, and the Softball board, but there is no guarantee the request will be granted.

## **Team Formation Philosophy: 8U, 10U, 12U, 14U, 16U**

### 8U/10U

- For 8U/10U, the primary focus is on fundamentals and development of Minimum Standards of Performance
- Every effort will be made to create one “A” level team.
- 8U will typically have only one team.
- The overall talent of the group is the final determinant of the appropriate level of play: “A”, “B”, “C”, etc.
- The policy for selecting teams includes: former coaches’ evaluations, tryout information, Age Level Coordinator observations, parent/player requests, and overall team requirements.
- Players are evaluated based on performance from the past summer, fall, and/or tryout information.
- For new players entering into the traveling program, more emphasis will be placed on the tryouts.
- The information accumulated helps determine the number of teams, the level of play, and how to split up pitchers and catchers to best support the program.

### 12U

- For 12U, continuing development on fundamentals and development of Minimum Standards of Performance
- Every effort will be made to create one “A” level team.
- The overall talent of the group is the final determinant of the appropriate level of play: “A”=Gold, “B”=Silver, “C”=Blue, etc.
- The policy for selecting teams includes: former coaches’ evaluations, tryout information, Age Level Coordinator observations, parent/player requests, and overall team requirements.
- Players are evaluated based on performance from the past summer, fall, and/or tryout information.
- The information accumulated helps determine the number of teams, the level of play, and how to split up pitchers and catchers to best support the program.

### 14U & 16U

- Every effort will be made to create one “A” level team.
- More importance will be placed on winning at the “A” level, with emphasis on developing advanced skills to play in high school and beyond.
- The overall talent of the group is the final determinant of the appropriate level of play: “A”=Gold, “B”=Silver, “C”=Blue, etc.
- The policy for selecting teams includes: former coaches’ evaluations, tryout information, Age Level Coordinator observations, parent/player requests, and overall team requirements.
- Players are evaluated based on performance from the past summer, fall, and/or tryout information.
- The Age Level Coordinator will work with the coordinator team, Traveling Director, and VP of Softball to discuss the pool of information.
- The information accumulated helps determine the number of teams, the level of play, and how to split up pitchers and catchers to best support the program.

## Elite Teams

### Team Formation Philosophy:

Consistent with a component of our mission statement, we want to develop talent within our community. To that end, flexibility needs to be incorporated into our program to provide an environment for players who want to compete at a higher level.

The Elite/A team will compete at a higher level; significant importance will be placed on winning and advancing to higher levels of play, with emphasis on developing advanced skills to play in HS and beyond.

Team formation will follow much of the same principles, but additional flexibility and discretion by the softball board can be used to meet unique requirements to field a competitive team. This may include but is not limited to roster size, skill set or position specific tryouts, allowing players from outside the community to fill positions, and maintaining roster continuity from year to year if teams play year around.

The overall talent of the group of eligible players and availability of qualified coaches will determine Elite/A team's formation. A team may not be formed every year. The policy for selecting the Elite/A team will include coach's evaluations, tryout information, age level coordinator observations, input from the Elite/A level coach (if named), ability at certain positions and commitment to softball.

Registration fees for Elite team may be higher and may vary depending on the tournament schedules and other factors.

### Coach Selection Process:

The process will be the same as the one outlined in the handbook.

## Evaluation of Pitchers: 10U, 12U, 14U, 16U

### 10U & 12U

- Pitchers are not required to declare themselves as pitchers for the tryouts.
  - Girls that tryout as pitchers, and are placed on teams as such, will often get the majority of initial innings
  - Pitchers need game situations to continue to develop their skills
  - Coaches will be responsible for managing the pitching rotation.
- Prior to tryouts, parents/pitchers will be informed of their options within their respective age group.
- If a player wants to pitch as a primary position, she should declare herself a pitcher and attend the pitcher tryout session. If she is not ranked in the top two or three pitchers, she will be placed on the team at the most appropriate level of play so she can gain more pitching experience.
- If a player pitches, but has a primary goal of playing on a higher level team and feels that her pitching skills may not be strong enough, she may choose to rely on the general tryout and not attend the pitching session. **Those players who select this option should expect minimal pitching time unless they earn the opportunity during the season.**
- A player's desire to be a pitcher will only affect her team selection if she chooses to take that option.
- The decision to continue to develop pitching skills will be at the discretion of the player and her parents.

### 14U & 16U

- Pitchers are not required to declare themselves as pitchers for the tryouts.
  - On the "A" Team the top pitcher will often get the majority of the innings

- The second pitcher will often get the majority of the remaining innings
- The third pitcher will likely pitch more in practice, but may get minimal game time
- Coaches will be responsible for managing the pitching rotation.
- Prior to tryouts, parents/pitchers will be informed of their options within their respective age group.
- If a player wants to pitch as a primary position, she should declare herself a pitcher and attend the pitcher tryout session. If she is not ranked in the top two or three pitchers, she will be placed on the team at the most appropriate level of play so she can gain more pitching experience.
- If a player pitches, but has a primary goal of playing on a higher level team and feels that her pitching skills may not be strong enough, she may choose to rely on the general tryout and not attend the pitching session. **Those players who select this option should expect minimal pitching time unless they earn the opportunity during the season.**
- A player's desire to be a pitcher will only affect her team selection if she chooses to take that option.
- The decision to continue to develop pitching skills will be at the discretion of the player and her parents

### **Evaluation of Catchers: 10U, 12U, 14U, 16U**

The same principles as described above apply to the evaluation of catchers.

### **Playing up an Age Level**

- The Softball board reserves the right to move any player up to the next level to cover any specialized needs in accordance with program objectives.
- Requests from a player to play-up to the next level, must be submitted in writing to the Age Level Coordinator and copy the Director of Traveling Softball
- The player must have approval from all legal guardians
- Request must be received 7 days before the tryout date.
- Player must attend the tryout with her current age level unless written authorization is provided by a board representative to attend the higher age level tryout.
- The player must achieve tryout scores that place her in the top 3 of her current age.
- The player will be notified by the Director of Traveling Softball whether to attend the second tryout with the next age level.
- The player must place in the top 50% of the next age level in order to qualify to play up.
- The Softball Board, will discuss the appropriate team assignment of the player once all conditions above are met giving consideration to the following:
  - Impact other players at the play up level, including negative impact to other position players
  - Emotional acceptance by players at the play up level
  - Maturity of player
  - Specialized position needs including impact next age level pitchers and catchers
- If consensus on moving a player up to the next age level cannot be met by the Softball Board, the Traveling Director will have final approval. Appeals will be handled by the VP of Softball and if needed elevated to the Executive Board.
- If a decision that has to be made which has a direct affect on the child and/or team of the child of the Traveling Softball Board/Committee member, input and consultation will be sought by other committee members not directly affected by the final decision.

## MINIMUM STANDARDS OF PERFORMANCE (MSP)

One of our primary objectives is to create a fun, competitive environment that encourages girls to return each year, and one way to accomplish this is to focus on teaching the fundamentals of fastpitch softball. Since coaches cannot always properly cover all the needed skills, the MSPs provide a guide on the most important skills the highest number of players at each age level should have mastered. Appropriate practice time should be committed to these areas during and in the “off” season to insure the highest success rate. Resources will be made available through the Softball board for the Coaches, and Age Level Coordinators to help teach these skills.

The primary focus of players, parents, and coaches should be to master the following skills:

### 8U/10U

- Proper overhand throwing
- Proper catching mechanics
- Basic base running skills
- Basic hitting and bunting skills
- Sliding
- Basic softball rules (force out, non-force outs, basic situations, throwing)

### 12U

- Proper overhand throwing mechanics
  - Wrist snap
  - Hand and elbow position
  - Ball rotation
- Proper catching mechanics
  - Elbow and hand position for target
  - Two hands: when and why
  - Fly ball catching
- Ground ball fielding – body and hand position
- Hitting mechanics
  - Understanding and further development of a basic swing
  - Further development of bunting skills

### 14U & 16U

- Refine throwing mechanics for position play
- Develop catching skills that position the body properly
- Teach crow hop for outfield throw
- Teach advanced running, stealing, and sliding techniques
- Refine hitting mechanics
- Develop advanced bunting skills

## PLAYER EXPECTATIONS

### Practice

Practice is critical. Prior Lake Fastpitch teams have an aggressive approach to practice: the minimum recommended schedule is eight 90-minute outdoor practices (pre-season) and two nights/week on the

field plus a batting cage time slot for 10Us and three nights/week on the field plus a batting cage time slot for 12Us and older. Practices are organized to accomplish specific objectives and coaches have the flexibility to adjust these requirements while school is still in session.

## **Player and Coach Relations**

A top priority for Prior Lake Fastpitch is that each coach and player be treated with dignity and respect. This includes using positive reinforcement and working out issues in private conversations. Any player who feels she is not being treated appropriately should discuss the issue with her coach. **If for any reason the player is uncomfortable raising the issue with her coach, she should address her concerns to her Age Level Coordinator.** The coach should strive to compliment in public and constructively criticize in private.

Coaches must understand and take into account each player's level of skill development, and refrain from labeling players as "starters", bench players", "best player on the team", since such labels inhibit the growth of all players. For example, being labeled may cause above average players to take their skills for granted and diminish the drive to learn more while below average players may tend to give up.

Coaches must also understand the impact of non-verbal communication. Patterns of actions are powerful forms of communication.

## **Batting**

The minimum number of plate appearances for every player should be at least 50% of the team average number of appearances (total team appearances on the season divided by the number of players on the team). This applies only to players who attend the vast majority of games and practices. Part-time players who frequently miss practices or games should not expect to play as often.

To ensure that all players meet this requirement, the team statistician (commonly a parent volunteer) should track total plate appearances each game and summarize the season-to-date results every two weeks. At no time should the statistics of an individual player be shared with the team or anyone outside the team unless approved by that player. An exception to this would be sharing the stats with the Fastpitch Committee as part of the review process.

## **Fielding Position**

A player may choose to pursue a starting spot at any position on the field (coaches may not pigeon-hole players). Every effort is made to develop the skills necessary for every player to play at her preferred position. This applies only to players who have shown a firm commitment to the team by attending the vast majority of practices and games. The following process is used to develop and determine players at each position:

At the first practice: ask players where they want to play and explain the skills necessary at each position.

During pre-season practices: evaluate the players at each position against the required skill set, tell each player which skills need practice, and work with each player on weaknesses.

At the end of the pre-season: tell each player individually where she is likely to play given her skills and those of her teammates at that point in time, and explain which skills need improvement and how to improve them.

At mid-season: tell each player individually where she is likely to play given her skills and those of her teammates (by now each player should have enough exposure to every position to have a general idea of the responsibility and skills required to play—except for pitcher, catcher or any position for which a safety concern exists), and explain which skills need improvement and how to improve them. An assessment of each player’s abilities to play her preferred position and balancing the needs of the team determines the starting players at each position. In most cases, the highest skilled players play where they prefer, although some players may be asked to play in a non-preferred position for the overall good of the team.

## **Playing Time**

For all 8U, 10U, 12U and 14U “B” and “C” teams: the minimum number of innings played in the field for every player should be at least 50% of the team season average per player (total innings played, multiplied by 9, divided by the number of full-time players on the team). This applies only to players who attend the vast majority of games and practices. Part-time players who frequently miss practices or games should not expect to play as often.

To ensure that all players meet this requirement, team coaches trace the normal and ordinary game statistics and attendance records. Game statistics should show innings played and at bats by game and for the entire season for each player. If requested by the Committee, the coach may be asked to provide statistics to verify compliance to this policy. At no time should the statistics of an individual player be shared with the team or anyone outside the team unless approved by that player. An exception to this would be sharing the stats with the Fastpitch Committee as part of the review process.

## **Development of Pitchers and Catchers**

### Understanding Pitcher Development

Most people involved in fastpitch understand that pitching is *one* of the key positions for fielding a team at any age level and those most successful teams has more than one pitcher. Although there are many different opinions as to what is required to develop a pitcher, most agree on the importance of commitment from the player, parent and coach. Players and parents should understand that becoming a pitcher requires additional time and effort. Most “A” level pitchers work on their skills throughout the year, attend pitching clinics and practice on their own during the off-season. Although game time is important in developing pitchers, most pitcher’s skills are made during the off-season and non-game time. Depending on the age (usually at 10U), players and parents should realize that it might take up to two years to develop a skilled pitcher. Also parents should be aware that being a parent of a pitcher is significantly different than that of a player in other positions.

In addition, coaches should realize they could help a pitcher develop if they take time to learn the fundamentals to pitching and correcting pitching problems. Although it might be considered advanced, coaches can take a lot of pressure off a pitcher and catcher by learning the skill of “calling the pitch”. Prior Lake Fastpitch recognizes this additional time and effort and will assist players, parents and coaches in achieving their goals.

### Prior Lake Fastpitch Commitment

To assist players, parents and coaches, Prior Lake Fastpitch will:

- Make every effort to engage an experienced pitching coach during the winter to work with interested players.

- Make every effort to communicate to players, parents and coaches any additional pitching clinics that might be available.
- Make every effort to have additional pitching clinics for players during the summer season.
- Make resources available to players, parents and coaches on the fundamentals of pitching and correcting pitching problems.

#### Player, Parent, Coach Commitment

Prior Lake Fastpitch is also asking players, parents and coaches to make a commitment to the organization in the following manner:

- Players interested in becoming pitchers will attend Prior Lake Fastpitch-sponsored pitching clinics, both in the winter and during the summer.
- Coaches will attend and participate in at least 50% of the Prior Lake Fastpitch-sponsored clinics, both in the winter and during the summer.
- Players and parents will continue to work on developing skills during the season and off-season by practicing their skills at home or at a field. (Parents of pitchers must understand that they will be providing assistance as a catcher.)
- Players, parents and coaches will study material on the fundamentals of pitching and correcting pitching problems.

#### Pitching Time Guidelines

Although the following guidelines are written primarily for the 10U and 12U levels, they can also apply to the 14U level. It is never too late to give a player an opportunity to become a pitcher and our coaches should know what to do. For players at the 14U and 16U level, please refer to the section on *Evaluation of Pitchers*.

Prior Lake Fastpitch requires coaches to provide game time opportunities for all developing pitchers using the following guidelines:

- (1) Coaches will provide, at least bi-weekly, one additional hour before or after a regular practice for players to work on their skills (to allow players not to lose valuable time to work on other position skills).
- (2) Coaches will allow developing pitchers to pitch in league games at their discretion. If there is more than one developing pitcher, they should split the game with another developing pitcher. A coach should use his/her discretion during the game if it becomes detrimental to the pitcher's well-being and the team loses their attentiveness.
- (3) If there is more than one experienced pitcher on a team, they should split one game of the double-header league games.
- (4) Coaches are required to keep track of the number of innings a player has pitched.
- (5) If a coach cannot provide enough game pitching opportunities as stated above, or if a player wants to pitch, but not in a game, then the coach should allow that player to pitch in a scrimmage or batting practice.
- (6) Game pitching opportunity during a tournament is at the discretion of the coach. However, coaches should allow less experienced pitchers to pitch against less experienced teams.
- (7) Experienced pitchers should pitch against more experienced teams.
- (8) Game pitching opportunity during state qualifiers and beyond is at the discretion of the coach.

#### Development of Catchers

Development of catchers applies the same principles and guidelines as for Development of Pitchers.

## **Travel**

All Prior Lake Fastpitch teams and will be required to travel to different communities to participate in league games and tournaments. Parents and players having conflicts in schedules or transportation should make arrangements with other parents or players to ensure participation.

**Each team depends on all players attending every game and every practice.**

## **Uniforms, Equipment and Spirit Wear**

Prior Lake Fastpitch does not provide uniforms for players. Each player will be required to purchase one uniform (top and pants), a visor and a pair of softball socks. Additional items are also required to play and are the responsibility of the family.

These include:

- Sliding shorts (Optional if wearing pants)
- Sliding pad (Optional if wearing pants)
- Fielding glove
- Softball shoes with ASA-approved softball cleats (no metal spikes allowed at any age level)
- Batting helmet with face mask and chin strap (equipment without the NOCSAE sticker attached will not be used on the game or practice fields)
- Team bats are available for use by players. Any player who wishes to purchase her own bat must be aware that all bats must conform to the ASA bat performance standards. (Legal bats listed at [www.asasoftball.com](http://www.asasoftball.com))
- Softball bag to carry equipment and possessions.

Note: Jewelry may not be worn during games. Caps and visors are options, but if worn, must be worn properly with the bill forward.

## **Equipment Orders**

Orders are placed in the spring and fall for personal equipment needed to play in traveling softball. New players will need to arrange for uniform sizing prior to ordering their personalized jersey. Orders are placed on-line via the PLAY website.

**Fall League teams will not be required to purchase uniforms. Loaner jerseys are available or the team will all wear T-Shirts provided by the program.**

## **Equipment ordering link (only active during designated ordering periods)**

<http://www.playinfo.org/page/show/147208-equipment-ordering>

## **Socks**

You may purchase socks through P.L.A.Y. For team consistency, players are expected to wear the gold socks during competition. The new socks are lighter weight and tighter fitting.

## **Batting Helmets**

Players are responsible for furnishing their own batting helmet. The ASA requires all batting helmets to have an attached face guard. We will provide a supplier that you can order the helmet from at a group

discount rate. These will be one-size-fits-most navy helmets with a face guard and air vents. There are very specific standards for the helmet and face guard that must be met to be compliant.

### **Cleats**

Players may purchase cleats from any store. They may not be metal cleats. Cleats are required for outdoor practice and competition.

### **Jerseys**

We will continue to use the same personalized jerseys, but the top will be a tank cut this year. New players must order their jersey through P.L.A.Y. You will be sized for the jersey pants and top, and will pick out your number from the available numbers. This will be your number and your jersey will have your name on it. These jerseys are intended to last many seasons. If you already have a jersey from last year, you do not need to buy another one. However, players who wish to buy another jersey either for size or convenience; you may do so at this time.

### **Compression Shorts**

We will continue to use gold compression shorts as in previous years. These gold shorts have built-in padding to reduce injury during sliding. If you already have a pair, you do not need to purchase another. For your protection, all players are required to wear compression shorts during practice and competition.

### **Sliding Pad and Knee Pads**

We will continue to use the same navy sliding pads as in past years. These sliding pads cover the knee and calf to reduce injury during sliding. If you already have a navy pad, you do not need to purchase another.

New this year we are offering short knee-pads sold in pairs for both knees. These are designed to be worn in place for offensive and defensive purposes, to protect from sliding and diving. For your protection, all players are required to wear either sliding pads or knee-pads during practice and competition.

### **Mouth Guard**

These are not required but strongly encouraged for all players. These can be purchased at any sporting goods store.

### **Visor**

We will continue to use the same visor. This optional attire is strongly recommended for all players in the field. You are not required to wear a visor, and while it is preferred that they are all the same, having a navy visor is acceptable.

### **Home Playing Fields**

Prior Lake Fastpitch plays its home games at the Ponds Athletic Complex or other fields in the Prior Lake Community. We ask for your cooperation in assisting to keep these fields clean. Please observe the rules for park use. Pitching and hitting into fences is not allowed.

## **Length of Season**

8U,10U and 12U teams have more access to the practice facilities in April, as many 14U and 16U players are also playing for their high school teams. Practices for the older levels are limited until the high school season ends.

Weather permitting; Suburban League games typically begin the second week of May for the 8U, 10U and 12U levels. Games begin the third week of May for the 14U teams. Games begin the third week of May for the 16U teams. The Suburban League establishes all game schedules.

League Championship/State Qualifier tournaments are typically scheduled for late June/early July. State tournaments usually follow two weeks later.

National Tournaments are typically the last half of July/early August. This could include significant travel, time and expense.

Over the past few years, many Prior Lake Fastpitch teams have been fortunate enough to qualify for the National Tournaments. Occasionally, those teams have found themselves with not enough players to attend, a situation which might have been anticipated with some contingency planning.

## **Prior Lake Fastpitch Player National Tournament Policy**

- Prior Lake Fastpitch teams can qualify for a National Tournament in a variety of ways. All applicants understand at the time of tryouts that they and/or their parents/guardians are willing and able to attend the tournament should they make an “A” team and then qualify for a sanctioned tournament in any manner.
- If a player cannot attend a national tournament for which her team has qualified, she should notify her coach as soon as possible. The coach has the option to fill the vacated player’s spot with players from inside the Prior Lake Fastpitch program or from outside the program due to specific needs.
- If a 10U or “B” team qualified for a National Tournament, the team’s coaches, with input from parents, determine if the team will attend. If at least eight players from the qualifying team would like to participate, the coach has the sole discretion to invite additional players from inside the Prior Lake Fastpitch program from a team who is not going to the tournament. If all the teams within the program have qualified, the coach may look outside the program to fill the need for additional players.
- If a Prior Lake Fastpitch team earns a berth to a National Tournament as part of the fall program, the berth earned (typically for the following summer season) becomes part of the Prior Lake Fastpitch program and its utilization is at the sole discretion of the Officers of the Prior Lake Fastpitch Committee.
- It is the responsibility of the players/parents to cover the cost associated with travel for a national tournament.

## **FALL LEAGUE**

Fall League game rules allow players an opportunity to learn new aspects of the game in a less intense environment. In most instances, these rules include: a five run limit per inning, the entire line-up must bat and unlimited substitutions are allowed. It is the ideal time for young players moving up to the next age level to see what it is like or for established players to try new positions. Prior Lake Fastpitch has established the following Fall League regulations to encourage a fun, learning experience for all players:

- Registration for Fall League is open. Players from outside Prior Lake school district may be registered on a space-available basis.
- In all ages, the Age Level Coordinator will facilitate the selection of Fall League teams.
- The Traveling Director will approve/reject recommendations.
- If the Age Level Coordinator(s) and Traveling Director, cannot agree on team selections, then the matter will be elevated to the VP of Softball
- Tryouts are not held. Coaches, in discussions with Age Level Coordinators, determine level of play after the players have been divided up and placed on teams
- A player's age on January 1 of the *following* year determines the age level classification at which a player is eligible to participate.

## **COACHING QUALIFICATIONS**

### **Purpose**

In selecting coaches, the Prior Lake Fastpitch program is guided by its mission of creating an atmosphere where each player can learn the game, develop and improve her individual skills and have fun while participating in a team sport.

### **Head Coach Qualifications**

1. At least one year experience as an assistant coach in fastpitch.
2. Completed one or more of the following Level 1 of ASA/JO National Coaching School, Mary Nutter's National Coaching School, or recognized coaching clinic.
3. Attend Prior Lake Fastpitch coach's orientation.
4. No prior record of dismissal from another youth association due to any form of abuse.
5. Must participate in a background check which results in no discrepancies
6. Pledges to keep the rules and regulations of Prior Lake Fastpitch.
7. Attend seminar on prevention and care of injuries.
8. Attend seminar on nutrition, including: pre-game meals, between meal food/drinks, during game eating/drinking, prevention of heat exhaustion.

### **Assistant Coach Qualifications**

1. Attend Prior Lake Fastpitch coach's orientation.
2. No prior record of dismissal from another youth association due to any form of abuse.
3. Must participate in a background check which results in no discrepancies
4. Pledges to keep the rules and regulations of Prior Lake Fastpitch.
5. Assist Head Coach in practices and games.
6. Try to attend coaching clinics put on by various schools

### **Reasons for Dismissal**

1. Failure to follow ASA/JO rules concerning conduct during games/tournaments that lead to the coach and/or team being disqualified.

2. Sexual, physical or verbal abuse of any umpire, parent/spectator or player while conducting the duties of a coach in any capacity.
3. Violating specific P.L.A.Y. and/or Board policies or rules.
4. Inability to control players during a practice or games.
5. Failure to teach skills and strategies of softball relative to the age and classification A,B,C level of play.
6. Regular and consistent missing of games or tournaments.
7. Not scheduling or conducting a reasonable amount of practices.
8. Knowingly putting a player at risk in a game and/or practice.
9. The Prior Lake Fastpitch Committee reserves the right to make changes at the coaching level, including dismissal, at its sole discretion for any violation of the Coaches Commitment

## COACHING SELECTION PROCESS

### BACKGROUND

The Prior Lake Fastpitch Softball program is only as good as our coaches. No other single factor has a greater impact on our young players. For that reason, we strive to recruit and select the best coaches we can.

### OBJECTIVES

There is no perfect process for identifying coaches. However, the Softball Board strongly believes that the process should be open to all interested parents, not just a smaller set with “connections”. We also want to set up our program so that we not only bring in new coaches, but also distribute the best coaches across all the teams, not just within in one age group.

### HEAD COACH DECISION

The age level Coordinators will make coaching recommendations to the softball board for approval. See section on “Team Formation Process above”

Generally, the process follows the timeline listed below:

1. **DEC – JAN:** the Softball Board assigns Age Level Coordinators to each softball / softball age group.
2. **JAN – FEB:** parents express an interest in coaching by signing up thru the P.L.A.Y. online registration system at [www.playinfo.org](http://www.playinfo.org) when they submit their child’s registration. This process consists of filling out the coaches’ application and background check. Interested head coaches should attend a pre-season coaches clinic. The softball committee members also recruit coaching candidates.
3. **Early MARCH:** Candidates are reviewed by the Age Level Coordinators, and the Softball committee. Feedback is captured and considered from multiple sources outlined below:
  - Approved background check
  - Coaches application completed
  - Coaches clinic or other coaches training completed
  - Participation in open gyms
  - Any PLAY sports board member feedback
  - Equipment manager feedback

- Participant feedback
- Parent feedback
  - Candidates who have coached before are reviewed for feedback from previous seasons.

In our experience, almost every coach is the subject of a complaint by somebody. Therefore, the committee tries to understand both the overall pattern of feedback from multiple sources AND the coach's suitability for the age level.

Those Head Coach candidates who have not previously coached for P.L.A.Y. are interviewed informally by one or more selection committee members. The selection committee considers both the interview and any other coaching experience or involvement in youth organizations.

**In late MARCH**, only after team formation is completed, each Age Level Coordinator reviews the coach volunteer list and drafts a proposed slate of Head Coaches (and alternates) for review by the Traveling Softball board.

### **ASSISTANT COACH SELECTION PROCESS**

The specific process by which Assistant Coaches are identified and assigned varies by age group.

In general, Assistant-Coaching selections will be made by the Head Coaches, but only from the approved list of assistant coached as outlined by the previous listed process and are subject to board approval.

### **Methods and Procedure to Dismiss a Coach**

1. A formal complaint in writing is made to the Traveling Softball Director with a time period of one week to remedy the complaint. An immediate suspension occurs for the accusation of sexual or physical abuse pending an investigation of the complaint.
2. Coach is given the opportunity to state his/her side of the complaint in person to the softball board. If a Board member's daughter is on the coach's team, then the Board member can only act as a witness and has no formal vote in the matter.
3. The Board may give a coach a time of probation during which he/she must work under the observation of another qualified head coach or another competent appointed person.

## **PLAYER RIGHTS**

Every player and parent will be required to read and sign this pledge. Participation in a P.L.A.Y. Sports program is a privilege that should elicit great pride in both the athletes and their family. It is also a responsibility that demands extra commitment once they decide to wear the P.L.A.Y. colors and represent their teammates, coaches, school and community. Standards of behavior are high and a willingness to live up to them is part of being a member of a team.

### **PLAYER RIGHTS**

- 1. Right to participate in sports.**
- 2. Right to play at a level determined to match my maturity and ability**
- 3. Right to have a good role model as a coach.**
- 4. Right to play as a child and not as an adult.**
- 5. Right to express my opinion in a proper manner to my coaches.**
- 6. Right to play in safe and healthy environments.**
- 7. Right to be properly prepared to play in games.**
- 8. Right to equal opportunities to develop my skills.**
- 9. Right to be treated fairly and with respect.**
- 10. Right to have fun in sports.**

## **PLAYER PLEDGE**

**I will promise to conduct myself in accordance to the following Code of Conduct at all times understanding that there will be consequences if abused.**

- 1. I will treat each athlete, coach, parent and official with respect and dignity**
- 2. I will do my best to attend all practices to learn the fundamental skills, and be attentive to coaches to learn game strategies.**
- 3. I will contact my coach if I am unable to attend a practice or game**
- 4. I will accept the calls of the officials and will play the rules of the game**
- 5. I will give my personal best efforts at all times to help my team and coaches.**
- 6. I will treat all equipment, fields, courts and facilities with respect and adhere to all rules of these areas.**
- 7. I will control Emotional and Verbal outbursts that are detrimental to myself or those around me.**
- 8. I will not use profanity.**

### **“Basic Rule”**

**“I will represent Prior Lake Athletics with my personal best efforts, never bringing embarrassment or an unfavorable view to my teammates, coaches, family, school or community.”**

### **Penalty**

**Abuse brings restrictions. A penalty may vary from a minimum of one event suspension from participating on the athletic team to permanent restriction for that season and the following sport season. The penalty will be constant with the School programs for those students in the Middle School and/or High Schools.**

**BY SIGNING THE TEAM AGREEMENT FORM, THIS INDICATES THAT BOTH PARENT AND ATLETE UNDERSTAND AND AGREE TO THIS RESPONSIBILITY.**

### **P.L.A.Y. Sportsmanship Code:**

**I will do my best to remember that youth sports are to be fun and to enjoy competition, and that winning and losing is part of everyone’s experience, respecting both the opponents and my team’s efforts**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Player

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Parent/Guardian

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## PARENT PLEDGE

1. REMAIN IN THE SPECTATOR AREA.
2. LET THE COACH BE THE COACH.
3. PROVIDE ONLY SUPPORTIVE COMMENTS TO COACHES, OFFICIALS, AND PLAYERS OF BOTH TEAMS. AVOID DEROGATORY COMMENTS.
4. DO NOT COACH YOUR SON OR DAUGHTER DURING THE CONTEST.
5. I WILL NOT INDULGE IN THE USE OF TOBACCO, ALCOHOL OR DRUGS WHILE ATTENDING P.L.A.Y. EVENTS.
6. CHEER FOR YOUR TEAM.
7. SHOW INTEREST, ENTHUSIASM, AND SUPPORT FOR YOUR CHILD AND OTHERS ON THAT TEAM.
8. BE IN CONTROL OF YOUR EMOTIONS. (24 HOUR cool down)
9. HELP WHEN ASKED BY COACHES AND/OR OFFICIALS.

**“Basic Responsibility”** \_\_\_\_\_ **“I will represent Prior Lake Athletics with my personal best efforts, never bringing embarrassment or an unfavorable view to my team, coaches, family, P.L.A.Y. or community.”**

### **Penalty**

Abuse brings restrictions. A penalty may vary from a minimum of one event suspension from attending a P.L.A.Y. athletic event to permanent restriction for that season and the following sport season.

**BY SIGNING THE TEAM AGREEMENT FORM, THIS INDICATES THAT BOTH PARENT AND ATLETE UNDERSTAND AND AGREE TO THIS RESPONSIBILITY.**

**P.L.A.Y. Sportsmanship Code:** I will do my best to remember that youth sports are to be fun and to enjoy competition, and that winning and losing is part of everyone’s experience, respecting both the opponents and my team’s efforts.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Parent/Guardian

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## COACH COMMITMENT

### “COACHES PLEDGE”

I will promise to conduct myself in accordance to the following Code of Conduct at all times understanding that there will be consequences if abused.

1. I will treat each athlete, opposing coach, parent and official with respect and dignity.
2. I will do my best to be prepared for all practices and games and teach the fundamental skills, so that all athletes have an opportunity to improve their skills through active participation.
3. I will become thoroughly familiar with the rules of my sport.
4. I will uphold the authority of officials who are assigned to the contests in which I coach and I will assist them in every way to conduct a fair and impartial contest.
5. I will communicate to my athletes and their parents the rights and responsibilities of individual on our team.
6. I will cooperate with the Directors and Administrators of our organization in the enforcement of rule and regulations, and I will report any irregularities that violate sound competitive practices.
7. I will protect the health and safety of my athletes by insisting that all of the activities under my responsibilities are conducted for their psychological and physiological welfare, rather than for the vicarious interests of adults.
8. I will not use profanity.
9. I will not indulge in the use of tobacco, alcohol or drugs while attending P.L.A.Y. events.

### “Basic Responsibility”

“I and my team, will represent Prior Lake Athletics with my personal best efforts, never bringing embarrassment or an unfavorable view to my team, coaches, family, P.L.A.Y. or community.”

### Penalty

Abuse brings restrictions. A penalty may vary from a minimum of one event suspension from coaching the athletic team to permanent restriction for that season and the following sport season.

**EACH COACH WILL SIGN THIS COACH AGREEMENT AND RETURN IT TO THE SPORT DIRECTOR TO INDICATE THAT HE/SHE UNDERSTANDS THIS RESPONSIBILITY.**

---

Signature of Coach

---

Date