



## **Baseball/Softball Safety Guidelines**

There is an inherent risk of injury involved with any athletic activity. Baseball and Softball programs have risks that place participants in physical harm. The following guidelines should be followed when participating in the sport of baseball or softball.

### **Facility & Equipment**

- Field dimensions need to meet WIAA regulations for play/safety.
- Adding screens or fencing to the dugout and eliminating the on-deck circle can protect players from wild pitches, foul balls, and flying bats.
- Protect on deck batting area with extra fencing.
- Separate spectators from playing field with protective fencing; inspect fencing for defects.
- Inspect outfield fences; pad non-flexible fences.
- Use regulation bases and plates only. Encourage the use of breakaway bases. These bases, which detach when someone slides into them, can prevent many ankle and knee injuries<sup>1</sup>.
- Use regulation bats only; inspect bats before use.
- Use a certified pitching machine only; inspect and test machine before use.
- Make sure athletes wear all the required safety gear every time he or she plays and practices.
- Insist players wear a NOCSAE2 helmet when batting, waiting to bat, or running the bases.
- Inspect helmets for defects and proper fit.
- Shoes must meet WIAA regulations. Shoes with molded cleats are recommended.
- The catcher will need additional safety gear: catcher's mitt, face mask, throat guard, long-model chest protector, and shin guards. A catcher's helmet must meet NOCSAE specifications and standards.
- Keep infield and outfield clear of trip hazards including balls, bats, gloves, rakes and other equipment.
- Provide appropriate safety equipment: mat for cleaning footwear, extra towels, ball bags, mops, racks for bats, ice packs, first aid kit.

### **Supervision & Instruction**

- Teach players to pay attention to the game at all times, including on deck and in the dugout.
- Teach players how to slide properly.
- Teach players how to tag players out safely.
- Enforce rule batting players are in dugout if not on deck/at bat.
- Monitor pitchers for overuse -- pitching too long or too many innings. Baseball/softball can lead to injuries caused by overusing a certain body part. To prevent these injuries set a limit of six innings of pitching per week and requires pitchers to rest between appearances. Teaching proper pitching mechanics can also prevent serious overuse injuries.
- Monitor weather conditions.
- Use a whistle.

- Make sure all players warm up and cool down.
- Ensure proper hydration of athletes.

## **BALL FIELD MAINTENANCE**

Softball and baseball are two of the most widely played recreational activities in America. Softball, alone, has over 60 million participants worldwide and is played by more people than any other team sport. With this kind of popularity, school district ball facilities are used constantly to keep up with the growing demand for these popular sports.

Accompanying the increased participation of these sports is a growth in the number of injury-related lawsuits. Many of these lawsuits are based on school district negligence, due to inadequate maintenance. This trend has caused higher costs to the school district and, in some cases, the elimination of ball programs altogether.

**Maintenance and Risk Management:** A good risk management program will help you identify and correct hazardous conditions which may exist on your softball or baseball facility. In order to set up maintenance procedures for your ball fields, start with a review of your current maintenance program and the current condition of your fields.

Consider issues of player safety. Review past incidents to determine where injuries have occurred in the past, why they occurred and what needs to be done to prevent them from happening again. Field maintenance is only one of the factors involved in a risk management program. The Washington Schools Risk Management Pool (WSRMP) can review your current programs and assist you in developing a risk management plan for your ball fields.

**Maintenance of Skinned Areas:** Providing an even surface that allows the players to run and slide safely is a crucial part of the maintenance program. Problems with wet areas, dusty or loose running paths and abrasive soil composition could lead to injury to players. Other problems associated with the maintenance of the infields and running paths are worn areas near bases, soil buildup between the turf and skinned areas.

**Soil Composition:** Having the right soil composition has an important impact on player safety. The soil of a good skinned area should be firm enough to provide running traction, porous enough to drain well and be non-abrasive and loose enough to prevent hazardous sliding. Adjustments can be made to correct problem soils by using soil amendments. Solid soil types such as clay will provide firm footing, but compact too easily. Sand provides good drainage but provides poor running traction. Contact a local soil supply specialist to assist in determining the needs of your skinned areas.

Based on field use, it is important to level off certain high-use areas at scheduled intervals, so the players may perform safely. These areas include running paths, sliding zones, pitcher's mound and the batter's box. Rake loose material back into low spots to bring the surface back to the original level grades. Finish by packing the soil with a tamper or landscaping rake to the desired density. The repetitive activity around these high-use areas will often cause unsafe holes or depressions, so it is important to check these areas prior to each use and re-grade as necessary.

**Selection and Anchoring of Bases:** Sliding is one of the most potentially hazardous activities attempted by players. The type of base and the anchoring used can influence sliding-related

injuries. There are many reasons for deciding to use one type of base over another, such as the regulation of the league, the skill of the players and past sliding injuries. Regardless of the criteria used, player safety must be of primary concern. There should be no open areas between the surface and base. Home plate should be level with the playing surface and have flat edges. The pitcher's rubber should be level with the surrounding area and firmly anchored. Replace all bases and rubber when signs of severe wear are evident.

**Maintenance of Fencing and Backstops:** Fences provide an enclosure around the ball facility to keep the ball within the boundary of play and protect spectators from being hit. Fence posts should be sturdy and firmly set in the ground. Locate posts on the outside of the play area. Make sure the footings are below ground-level and not exposed. There should be a level elevation under the fence with no unsafe gaps to slide under. Attach chain link fences with heavy gauge wire, and a top rail is usually required with no wire ends exposed. Keep gates closed during games.

Backstops take considerable punishment from the frequent pounding of oncoming balls. Since they provide protection for spectators, inspect them regularly to make sure they are safe and secure. Look for loose ties, stretched fencing, holes in the fencing, splintered or worn out boards and gaps in protective netting.

**Turf Management:** A good turf playing field provides reliable running traction, added shock absorption and a pleasing appearance. Important turf management practices include irrigation, soil cultivation, mowing, fertilizing, thatch control, weed control, pest control and renovation. Avoid operating equipment while soil is too wet, as it may cause unseen tire ruts that could lead to tripping hazards.

*Ball field maintenance is a responsibility that goes beyond making your field look good. So remember, your efforts towards a safe field of play will be appreciated by the many people who will have fun and play safely because of a job well done.*

## **Loss Control Bulletin #05a**

1 *Sliding into the base causes more than 70 percent of recreational softball injuries and nearly one-third of baseball injuries. Using bases that break away upon impact can prevent 1.7 million injuries per year.*

2 Verify newest standards for helmet certification and recertification at <http://www.nocsae.org/standards/documents.html>

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