

2018 Machine Pitch 8 yr olds Softball Rules

Introduction

We want this to be fun for all the children, so both sides should try to keep it that way for both teams. Remember, this league is still instructional. This division of Little League Softball is a program of service to the youth. It is geared to provide an outlet of healthy activity and training, under good leadership in the atmosphere of wholesome community participation. It establishes for the children the rudiments of teamwork and fair play.

The 8 year old Machine Pitch division is an instructional league that transitions from a coach pitch division (sometimes called "munchkins" to a kid pitch division (sometimes called "minors" or "pony" depending on your local league). The Machine Pitch division is structured to resemble the traditional softball game with the major difference being the use of the machine. In this division, fielders are assigned to traditional positions, outs and run rules are in effect, and the score is kept during the game. It is an excellent progression from coach pitch softball which typically is for girls ages 5-7.

At 8 years old, many of these players are too young or too inexperienced to play with 9-10 year olds, especially when some of those 10 year olds have turned into solid players and pitchers. In this division, the 8 year olds will significantly develop their hitting abilities. Every pitch is hittable, and they do not have to worry about being hit by a pitch. The pitches are also coming in with a little more speed and less lob than in coach pitch. Again, this will significantly improve their hitting skills and confidence as well as prepare them for kid pitch softball the following year.

In addition to developing hitting skills, the Machine Pitch division significantly develops fielding skills. With every pitch being hittable, the ball is put into play much more frequently, and the ball is often struck well so that the fielders are getting plenty of experience in handling well hit balls. More action keeps everyone focused. There are games in kid pitch in which a pitcher may struggle. In those innings, fielders lose focus quickly as the walks begin to accumulate. In machine pitch, this does not happen.

All of the traditional rules are in effect with some adjustments (see below). The combination of the traditional rules and plenty of action helps the players develop their knowledge of the game. They will come to understand the difference between a ground ball and fly ball and when to run. They will understand the

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difference between a force out and a put out. They will learn the difference between running with two outs and running with less than two outs and many other aspects of the game.

The Machine Pitch division provides a comfortable atmosphere for the 8 year old players. One in which they will learn about the game and develop their overall skills and love for the game. It will also make a big difference in your coach pitch and kid pitch leagues. The younger children growing out of coach pitch will have something exciting to look forward to. And your kid pitch division will benefit in future years by having experienced, knowledgeable, and confident 9 year old players entering the division. The division helps to eradicate the common complaint of softball not being active enough or interesting enough to keep the players attention and continued participation in softball.

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2018 Playing Rules

Play Ball:

- If a team is short players they may borrow from another team. If you get to a game and find out you are short players, use rotating players from the opposing team to play the field only. Have them play the outfield. They will still bat and play the field for their normal team.
- Games are limited to 6 innings with a maximum duration of 2 hours. No inning should start after 1 hour and 45 minutes of play.
- **Each inning is played with three outs or four runs. Whichever comes first.**
- An 11" Jugs softie ball or similar will be used.
- Some towns may provide a kid umpire to call plays in the field. If no official umpire is provided, the defensive team's coach will be the umpire in the field.
- At the end of each game, both teams line up and give each other "high five's".
- Keep score during the game to keep the kids engaged in playing their best.
- There will be no standings.
- There will be a round of playoffs at the end of the season.

The Field:

- The field will be a regulation softball field. Bases are 60 ft. apart.
- Pitcher's Mound is 35 ft. from home plate. Place the pitching machine just inside 35' or just inside the pitching plate (towards home plate).
- You may field up to 10 players, which allows for the use of 4 outfielders. Outfielders, play the outfield. There is no short center fielder, space the outfielders apart equally. They may not fill in the infield. There is no player assigned to stand on second base.
- You put only one player at the pitcher position. They stand on either side of the pitching coach and machine. See safety tips below.
- Use a catcher if you have enough players. The catcher must wear all the gear. Make sure they have a throat protector on the helmet. Keep the catcher back from the plate and let them catch the ball on a bounce.
 - During the playoffs, each team must field a catcher (not an adult).
- If you are shorthanded, a coach may be the catcher, but they may not field the ball or make plays at the plate.
- No player should play more than 3 innings at one position in a game. No permanent assignments.
- All players should get playing time in the infield each game.
- The team at bat shall provide the pitching coach.

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- If a coach interferes with a ball, it is dead. All runners go to the closest base. If they are more than halfway to the next base, they are awarded that base. If they are less than halfway to the next base, they return to previous base.
- *When calling close plays, the tie goes to the fielders.* Hitting and running skills develop much faster. Fielding a ball, making the correct decision where to go with it, and then making the throw, catch, and tag or put out requires more effort at this age. *As such, ties are called in favor of the fielding team.*
- Safety Base: If a safety base is used at first base, the runner should use the safety (orange) base, and the fielder should use the white base.

At Bat:

- Each batter gets 6 pitches. There are no walks. **If a batter has not put the ball in play after 6 pitches, the batter is considered out and returns to the dugout.** The batting order continues, and that kid bats again when their turn comes up.
- A hit ball that strikes the pitching machine or that stops inside the circle around the machine is a dead ball single. All runners advance one base.
- A hit that touches or coach or is caught by a coach is a dead ball. Award the batters and runners the appropriate bases based on the quality of the hit.
- No taking extra bases on an overthrow to **first base.**
- On an overthrow to any other base, the runner may take **one additional base only.**
- If there is a good hit, the base runners may take as many bases as the hit yields. That includes a homerun. Base running is not station to station in this league.
- No bunting.
- No leading and no stealing bases.
- Runner for The Catcher: When there are 2 outs a pinch runner for the catcher is allowed. The pinch runner should be the last player who was out.
- At Bat: All players from a team who are present at the game must be in the batting order, no matter how many are present.
- **ALL CHILDREN MUST ALWAYS WEAR A HELMET WITH A FACE MASK WHEN BATTING AND RUNNING THE BASES.**
- No on deck batters ever.

Manager and Coach:

- Only coaches in the dugout and on the field.
- Base coaches allowed. They may be kids, but they must wear a helmet.

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Rainouts and re-scheduling:

- Contact the opposing coach if you must cancel a game. Work out a makeup date and field assignment with that coach. Make sure a pitching machine is available.
- If it rains during a game, the coaches should decide when to call the game and if it should be rescheduled.

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Tips and Concepts:

General

- Try to simulate a traditional softball atmosphere as much as possible. If you need a coach in the field for the defensive players, use one, but try to limit it especially as the season progresses. Next year, there will not be a coach behind the fielders telling them where to throw the ball. This should be the year the players begin to learn and think on their own.
- Play with 10 fielders in traditional positions. Do not fill infield gaps with players. If you have more players, sit them on the bench and rotate them into the game.
- Enforce the 4 run / 3 out rule. This is not T-ball or coach pitch where everyone gets an at bat each inning. This division teaches the rules of the game and develops skills at the plate and in the field. It is time for the players to learn that 3 outs ends the inning. So if you have 10 girls in the lineup and only 9 get to bat in an inning, the inning is over. Make sure the 10th batter knows that she will lead off the next inning.
- Follow the time limit. The two hour limit is not just because another game is following yours. It is the appropriate amount of time on the field for kids this age. If you try to extend the game you will find players start to get tired, lose focus, and their performance will slip. You may undo all the positive things you did in the first two hours by playing an extra inning or an extra 15 minutes.
- Keep score during the game. At this age, the girls should be able to handle winning and losing. Keeping score gives them goals as well. Standings are not kept but there will be an inter-town playoff at the end

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Pitching

- The suggested speed setting on the machine is 25-30 mph. This may vary with each machine. This speed is slow enough to be hit regularly and fast enough to simulate an average pitch in the 9-10 year old division. The kid pitch distance from home plate to the pitching plate is 35'. Place the pitching machine just inside 35' or just inside the pitching plate. The release point of the machine should be approximately where a real pitcher release the ball, which is one full stride in front of the 35' pitching plate.
- Before each inning starts, test the machine for accuracy before the batter and catcher get set. The machine may move during the course of the game and you may need to make adjustments.
- Use Jugs 11" softie balls. They are the most accurate off the machine. Regular balls can come off the machine inside and outside if the seams are not dropped onto the wheel the same way each pitch.
- When pitching, the coach will show the batter the ball, always keep the ball visible to the batter, then simulate a windmill motion and place the ball into the machine.
- The fielder playing the pitcher's position must be kept clear of the machine. Mark a circle around the machine, and do not allow any fielder into the circle. This is to protect the kids from the moving parts on the machine. Keep this player alert at all times.
- The coach operating machine should be the coach of the team that is batting.
- When a ball is hit hard right back at the pitching coach, try not to touch it. Let the hitter enjoy it and see how far it goes. Let your players chase it down and throw it back in. You may of course just react to this and catch or deflect the ball. If a coach on the field interferes with a ball, call a dead ball and award the batter and runners the appropriate bases.

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Catching

- Use a catcher. Remember you are developing the players at all positions. When using a catcher, do not have them try to catch the pitched ball on a fly. Have them set up far enough behind the plate to catch or stop the ball on one bounce. This keeps them from getting too close to the batter and causing interference or accidents. Young catchers often lunge forward to catch a pitch and this puts their hand and arm in the area of the swinging bat. So for the Machine Pitch division, keep the catcher back. They will develop some of the basic skills and confidence needed, and they will learn how to field balls and make plays at the plate.
- If you do not have a catcher, use a coach. If you have a catcher, put a coach behind her to back her up. Do not have the catcher getting up to track down balls she missed. Keep the game moving along. The coach behind the catcher should be a coach from the team at bat. This way they can help or instruct their batters as needed.
- Bring two buckets to the field. Place 6 balls in a bucket and put it behind the machine. Put an empty bucket behind the catcher. When the catcher gets the ball, she puts it in the bucket behind her. Do not have her throw each pitch back. When the pitcher's bucket is empty, switch buckets. Each batter gets a limit of 6 pitched balls. Using the 6 balls in a bucket helps to enforce this rule by signaling to all that 6 pitches were thrown.

Batting

- The 6 pitch limit is intended to keep the game moving, not to punish the batter. Fielders and base runners will lose focus if the batter is not hitting. The batter will also begin to feel pressure if they are not hitting. Their arms get tired and they begin to have even more difficulty. It is better to sit them down, and let them try again when their turn comes around.
 - Watch out for, and work with, bat throwers.
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Running the Bases

- No taking extra bases on an overthrow to **first base**. We want to encourage fielders to make plays to first even if it isn't close. We don't want to penalize a fielding team for working on these skills by having all runners advance on overthrows to first base. It also keeps the force play alive at second base and may help the fielders to get 3 outs. Again, more knowledge and skill development.
 - Overthrows to bases other than first; runners may advance one base only for the same reasons mentioned above. However, if the fielding team tries to throw the runner out at the next base, the ball is still live and the runners can continue to advance.
 - Basically kids should take the bases earned on the hits, not so much on the errors made by the fielders. Base coaches should not encourage aggressive base running. If an outfielder or infielder is making a throw in to the pitcher, don't send a kid approaching third base on to home.
 - If the team in the field is playing with less than three outfielders, the coaches should use discretion in awarding more than a double for a good hit.
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Safety

- Enforce all safety requirements.
- Catchers must wear all gear including a throat protector. Catchers must wear a catchers helmet, not a batting helmet. Parents may be concerned about sharing the catchers helmet, **but catchers must wear the correct gear**. A batting helmet will not protect the throat area properly, and a batting helmet will not protect the head from a thrown bat in the same way a catcher's helmet will.
- All batters must wear a helmet with a face mask.
- Only the batter is permitted to have a bat in their hand. The on-deck batter may only grab a bat when it is her turn to hit.

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- No fielder may enter the area around the pitching machine. Put a circle around the machine to signal this zone.
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Stick to the Rules

- The 6 pitch rule and 4 run / 3 out rule are intended to keep the game moving. It is better to use these rules and play a 5 or 6 inning game, than to modify the rules, give extra pitches, extra outs, and extra at bats and only play 3 innings. More innings is much more exciting for everyone involved.
- Follow the rules. Often in the instructional divisions there is a temptation to modify a rule for a specific kid or for a specific game. This generally leads to confusion and can create tension between coaches.
 - Example 1: Your team is following the 4 run 3 out rule, and after 5 games, you play a team you haven't met before. Your team makes 3 outs in the field, and the opposing coach wants to bring up one more hitter since she is the only kid who didn't hit. He/she may think this is fair for the hitter. But realize the fielders are trying to get 3 outs. So when a fielding team makes 3 outs, they know the inning is over, and it is their turn to bat. You send a mixed message if you tell them to stay in the field for additional batters. Also, your players and your parents know the inning is over. Perhaps the same thing happened to one of your kids in a game and they weren't permitted to hit.
 - Example 2: You are playing a team you haven't met before, and a kid on their team gets 6 pitches and has not hit the ball. The coach says give her one more, and then asks for one more, and one more.... How many more is enough? This becomes an awkward situation. And again, your players and parents know there is a 6 pitch limit. Perhaps some of your kids have had to sit down after 6 pitches. Now they are wondering why they didn't get extra chances.
 - There are multiple leagues / towns playing in this division. Things will be smoothest if everyone follows the same rules. Once you begin changing them, you will find some coaches agreeable to it and some coaches against it. It is best to follow the rules. No one should be upset with a team or a coach if they are following the rules. It is when you deviate that people become upset or confused.

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- If for any reason you feel a special exception should be made for a specific player or situation, address it before the game starts so both coaches are aware and can determine how to handle the situation if it arises. It will be awkward to ask for some special exception in the middle of a game if it wasn't discussed and agreed to previously. Special circumstances may arise and this is still instructional. Talk before the game if necessary.

HAVE FUN!