



BAKERSFIELD
RECREATION & PARKS

Update: PITCHING SCREENS

“As adults, we play softball for many of the same reasons that children do. We like to compete, have fun, and continue to share the excitement of playing a sport we love with friends. However, just as youth players play against others in their own age group to achieve a relatively fair and safe playing field, adults have to make certain considerations regarding fair and safe play.”

(U.S.A. Softball 2023)

I hope this letter finds you well and enjoying your time on the softball field. As we all know, softball is a fantastic sport that brings people together for fun, camaraderie, and healthy competition. However, in any game, emotions can sometimes run high, leading to unfortunate situations.

Starting this season, we will be implementing a **Pitching Screen Pilot Program** to prevent and respond to aggressiveness, retaliation, and unwanted disputes related to "going middle", where batters intentionally hit the ball back toward the pitcher with the potential to inflict injury or used as a tactic to intimidate opponents.

We recognize that "going middle" is a legitimate technique within the game, and it is not our intention to eliminate or prohibit this aspect of play. However, we have noticed that, on occasion, it has led to negative interactions between teams and players.

Our primary goal is to ensure that every player feels safe on the field while promoting a positive and respectful atmosphere during each game. Retaliation, whether intentional or not, is never acceptable and can lead to serious consequences for individuals and the team as a whole. To prevent such occurrences and foster a more enjoyable playing experience for everyone, we are implementing the following guidelines regarding the use of pitching screens:

- The pitching screens will only be on the field at **the beginning of each game during pre-season "evaluation games"**.
- **Once the regular season starts, there will be no pitching screens**; however, upon the judgment of the umpire, he/she will have the authority to apply the pitching screen during play as a de-escalating tool. Players and teams are required to comply with their decisions promptly and without argument to maintain order and respect on the field.
- If the umpire enforces the pitching screen the following rules will apply.

2023 Fall Updated League Rules

1. The screen will directly face the home plate no further than one foot in front of the pitching rubber.
2. The screen must be positioned anywhere between the outer left side of the pitching rubber for a right-handed pitcher to the outer right side of the pitching rubber for a left-handed pitcher.

3. Any batted ball striking any portion of the screen as observed by the umpire will be declared a dead ball/strike. If a batted ball hits the screen with a count of one strike, then the ball is dead and a strike is added to the count. If a batted ball hits the screen with a two-strike count the batter is out. All thrown balls hitting the screen are considered live and in play. The pitcher may choose to play any ball hit.
4. If the pitcher hits the screen while throwing a pitch, the ball is dead, and a ball will be added to the count. Any pitch delivered with the screen not in a legal position will be declared “no pitch.” If a pitcher refuses to place the screen in the correct position, the umpire will notify the player’s manager which can lead up to the removal of the pitcher from the pitching position.
5. Once the screen is in position it becomes part of the field and may not be tipped over or thrown aside to accommodate a throw from the outfield. The screen may be moved each inning before the first pitch.

We understand that emotions can run high in competitive environments, but it is essential to remember that softball is ultimately a game meant to be enjoyed by all. Let us come together as a community of sports enthusiasts to create an atmosphere that is welcoming, inclusive, and free from hostility.

The pitching screens may never have to be inserted into the game. We leave it up to the good judgment of the players and teams to create a respectful atmosphere.

These rules will come into effect immediately, and we trust that all players will take them seriously. We appreciate your cooperation in making our softball league a safe and enjoyable place for everyone involved.

Thank you for being part of our softball community and for your commitment to fair play and good sportsmanship.

Sincerely,