



Babe Ruth Softball

12U ~ 16U ~ 18U

Babe Ruth Softball players are grouped into *12U*, *16U*, and *18U* age divisions. It is strongly encouraged leagues with enough participants offer an optional 14U division within the 16U grouping, and a 10U group within the 12U division. The age determination date for Babe Ruth Softball is **December 31**. A player's age on December 31st will determine her league age for the new season.

Q: What are the benefits of the Babe Ruth Softball age structure?

A: The “and Under” age structure combined with the December 31 age determination date offers maximum flexibility to the league and the community. Some leagues, especially those in small communities, find they need flexibility to be able to offer a softball program to teenage players. With Babe Ruth Softball's 12U, 16U, and 18U structure, a league is not forced to divide its players into rigid age groups. Instead, the league has an expanded number of players available to it, and 16-year-olds, for example, can continue to play either in the 16U program, or in the 18U program, or potentially in both programs. The change benefits both the leagues and the players by providing more opportunities to play. Everyone wins.

Q: Our league is small and we don't have enough players to offer both a 16U and a 14U division.

A: That is the primary reason 14U is optional rather than an “official” division. If 14U were an official division, smaller leagues would be unable to field teams in the two separate brackets. By the official age division being 16U, a league is not required to split out a 14U division. If your league is too small to field both age groups, your 13-14 and 15-16 year-old players can all play in 16U for local season play. This allows you a greater pool of regular season players and makes it easier to offer a softball program beyond 12U.

Q: If our league does not have a separate 14U division during the local season, do the 13- and 14- year-olds have to play with 15- and 16- year-olds at the tournament level?

A: No. If your league offered only 16U during your local season, and your 13- and 14-year olds played on 16U teams, at tournament time you would have the option to field *either* a 14U or a 16U tournament team, or both a 14U and 16U team. Your tournament team structure is decided by your league.

Q: If a league registers all its teams as 16U, then fields both a 16U and a 14U tournament team, are all 14-year-olds required to play on the 14U team, or may some 14-year-olds play on the 16U team?

A: It is permissible to have some 14-year-olds play on the 14U tournament team while others play on the 16U tournament team. Again, your league decides the tournament team selection. However, an individual player may play on only one tournament team during a season. 15- and 16- year-olds are not permitted to play on the 14U tournament team.

Q: Our league still has a number of 17- and 18-year olds who want to play, but not enough for an 18U league. If we bring 16-year-olds up to fill out the league, may those 16-year-olds drop back to play on a 16U tournament team?

A: Yes. This is the only case where a player may drop back from one league (18U) to another (16U) for tournament play. A 13-, 14-, 15-, or 16-year-old player may play her local season on an 18U team. After local season play, provided she has met eligibility requirements for an 18U tournament team, she could actually be selected to her league's 16U tournament team, *provided* the league has a chartered 16U division. She may however, play on one *only* one tournament team; either an 18U or a 16U (or 14U if age-appropriate).

Q: Is it possible for a 12-year-old to play in the 14U, 16U, or 18U division?

A: Yes, at the league's discretion. However, Babe Ruth League discourages having a 12-year-old play up if the league has enough players to field the older division without the 12-year-old. To move 12-year-olds up, even very advanced ones, is normally not in the best interest of the player, or of the team she is leaving, or of the team she is joining. The 12U team she is leaving most likely loses one of its strongest players. The 16U (or 14U) team she is joining most likely gains a player with an ability level lower than most of the other starters on the team. Where the 12-year-old participant was in the spotlight as a 12U player, she may now be in the shadows of the older, more experienced players on her new team. Where she would receive a great deal of playing time as a starter in the 12U division, she may become a substitute in the older division and spend most of the game on the bench. Moving her up prematurely could cause her to lose interest in softball altogether.

Q: If a 12-year-old player moves to an older division, may she return to her age-appropriate division for tournaments?

A: No. A player must meet tournament eligibility requirements in the league (12U, 16U, 18U) where she played her local league season. So, for example, if a 12-year-old player played in the 14U division for her entire local season, she may not drop back down to the 12U tournament team post-season since she did not meet tournament eligibility requirements in the 12U league. The only exception to this rule is in the 18U division. A player whose league age qualifies for 16U tournament competition could play her entire local season on an 18U team, and still be eligible to be selected to a 16U tournament team.

Q: So, if a 10-year-old plays on a 12U Major team during the season, she may *not* be selected to a 10U tournament team?

A: 10U is part of the 12U league. Therefore, if a league determines it must move a 10-year-old player to a 12U team, that player would still be eligible for 10U tournament competition if she meets all other tournament eligibility requirements.

Q: Is the opposite true? Can a player who was on a 10U local season minor team roster be selected to the 12U tournament team?

A: No. To be eligible for 12U tournament competition, a player must be rostered on a "Major" team roster.

Q: Can a player play in two age divisions at the same time if she wants, and if the league allows?

A: At the league's discretion, a player could potentially participate in local season play in more than one division. For example, an experienced 12-year-old may play on both a 12U and a 16U (or 14U) team. Provided she meets tournament eligibility requirements in both divisions, she may participate on either a 12U tournament team, or a 16U (or 14U) tournament team, but not both. If she only meets the requirements in one of the divisions, that is where she must compete in the Babe Ruth tournament trail. See the Babe Ruth Softball rule 11.00 for a complete listing of tournament eligibility requirements.

Q: What comprises the official tournament trail for Babe Ruth Softball?

A: Tournaments should be offered through the Regional level of play for all divisions, including 14U. The 12U and 16U divisions will advance to the World Series. Babe Ruth League, Inc. provides travel and housing to the teams participating in the World Series at no additional cost to their leagues.