



2009 Sting Guidelines



The Official Guidelines and General Operation of the Summer and Fall Competitive Fastpitch Softball “B” Program of the Albany Berkeley Girls Softball League

Overview:

This year marks the fourteenth season of the ABGSL Summer Sting program and the eighth year of the Fall Sting program. These guidelines are written to help define the operation of the summer and fall Sting softball programs for all interested parties. They also serve as a guide to coaches, parents, and players for their summer and fall season expectations.

Program Objectives:

- Develop advanced softball skills
- Foster teamwork in a competitive environment
- Create a positive experience for each participant

ASA Classification and Eligibility:

The purpose of the Junior Olympic program is to provide a program of championship tournaments for teams registered with the American Softball Association (ASA). Depending on the number and skill level of the players, Sting will field teams that play ASA ‘B’ and ‘C’ tournaments for 10U and 12U. The requirement of all players rostered on an ASA ‘B’ or ‘C’ team is that they have participated in a recreational league in the spring, and have not participated in ASA ‘A’ level after the last full weekend in April. In some cases, particularly in the fall, Sting teams may also play in United States Specialty Sports Association (USSSA) sponsored tournaments where different ‘B’ and ‘C’ team eligibility restrictions apply.

ABGSL policy requires full participation in the recreational season in order to be eligible for the Sting program. If a player misses ABGSL recreational season events in order to play with a non-ABGSL team (other than a high school team) they may jeopardize their eligibility for the Sting program. Anyone interested in trying out for the Sting program who has participated, or is considering participating, on an ‘A’ team in any way during any time in the calendar year should contact a Sting Commissioner. Girls playing on High School teams should specifically refer to the appendix for additional participation guidelines.

Tournament Play:

The ABGSL Summer Sting teams typically play in four or five ASA sanctioned tournaments from the middle of June through the end of July. Additional tournaments, at an additional cost, may be added. This may include the possibility of extended play into the first week of August for teams that advance to the National Championships. Tournaments generally guarantee two or four games over a tournament weekend, usually on Saturday and Sunday. At Sting tryouts parents will inform the coaches of their daughter's availability. Tournaments are selected based on the coaches and players' availability and the competitiveness of the tournaments.

While all team members will see playing time, there will be starters and substitutes. Equal playing time is not guaranteed. The head coach, in their sole discretion, determines playing time. The head coach is charged with developing each player so that she has the skills to play at this level. The head coach is encouraged to play all girls during each tournament. If a player misses a practice before a tournament, she may receive reduced playing time in that tournament.

[Policy Note: only the Sting commissioner, or their designee, may register the team for a tournament or contact the tournament officials directly.]

Summer Season:

The season begins with Sting tryouts in early May on a date announced in the season calendar and on the ABGSL web page, and usually ends on the last weekend in July. During the recreational season, practices are on Sundays. After the recreational season ends there are two weekday practices and one weekend practice or tournament per week. Practices may be on fields not normally used by ABGSL for recreational play, and may be further away.

[Policy Note: So that every girl in our league is comfortable and feels respected, including those that have chosen to have a recreational rather than advanced competitive experience with softball, it is imperative that all parents and players involved with Sting follow the “keep Sting out of recreational ball” rule. That is, there should be no Sting clothing and no “Sting talk” mixed into the recreational team experience or at events intended for all players (beginning of year assessments, the Bat-A-Que, clinics, practices, rec games). By no “sting talk” we mean no discussion among Sting players that can cause cliques or divisions on the rec teams. We certainly want all coaches, parents and experienced Sting players to encourage every rec player to give Sting a try. But “Sting talk” not related to trying to get players out to Sting tryouts is for Sting practices and events only (like Sting wear). During the recreation season, all players are rec players and “Sting talk” just distracts from the rec experience and can imply that the rec program is not as important as Sting. It is every bit as important and that’s why during the rec season we only talk about rec. Your sensitivity to this issue is crucial for our league to maintain an open, all are welcome, atmosphere. It is also crucial behavior so that ABGSL can continue to serve the needs of its entire population without fundamental conflicts of interest between the recreational and competitive programs.]

Fall Season:

The fall season will have one weekday and one weekend practice with typically four tournaments in September and October.

Sting Coaches:

ABGSL strives to hire young women with previous college level softball experience as Sting Coaches for the summer season because we have found this approach to offer a unique and valuable experience to the players. In many cases, these young women also have years of ABGSL experience coaching clinics or past Sting seasons. There will be one head coach per Sting team, and in some cases an assistant Sting coach may also be hired.

Head coaches are solely responsible for lineups, substitutions, and all other decisions involved in running the team. Parents may be asked to assist the coach, and will serve as manager, plus fill other important team support roles. Sting coaches may be asked to return for the fall season. If summer coaches are not available, parents will coach fall teams. Parent head coaches have the same authority as the summer coach, with the exception of team selection (see Fall Team Selection below.)

Commissioners:

The commissioner (or co-commissioners) is the individual in charge of the summer and fall competitive programs. The ABGSL board of directors has vested this individual with authority to make decisions on behalf of the ABGSL. The commissioner's job entails making sure that the Sting Guidelines are carried out, helping with the team selection, registering the competitive teams for tournaments, recruiting coaches, fielding complaints from coaches, parents and players, and carrying out the ABGSL Board of Directors' mandates. The commissioner reports directly to the president (or their designee) and keeps the president informed of all relevant information.

In the event of a disagreement between co-commissioners, the president (or their designee) will break the deadlock.

Player and Team Selection:

The 'B' and 'C' summer Sting teams are chosen by all of the Sting coaches with appropriate input from the commissioner/s as set forth below. Selection methods for the fall teams are described after the summer selection information.

[Policy Note: All summer Sting coaches participate in the selections for all teams to ensure a broad view of each girl's skill and ability level.]

1. Sting tryouts are typically held the first Sunday in May, and advance notice is provided to each team of ABGSL through the recreational teams' parent manager. For 2009, two equal tryouts will be held, with the first tryout on the first Sunday in May and the second on the following Friday. Notice will also be posted on the league's web site, and is listed on the ABGSL Spring Calendar. This tryout schedule is being treated as an experiment and may change in subsequent years. Players who cannot make the Sting tryouts must notify the Sting commissioner prior to Sting tryouts that they want to play, but cannot attend. There are extremely limited reasons why a girl who did not attend a tryout will be placed on a team over a girl who did attend the tryouts; the league expects to only make such an exception in the event of a temporary injury or illness that prevents a girl from participating during the time of the tryout but will be resolved by the start of the tournament season, or because placing the girl on a team will provide playing opportunity for others.

[Policy Note: The league recognizes that the timing of some events are outside of a child or family's control, such as end of year performances that include a large number of people. Because we are providing two tryout opportunities for 2009 we believe such events can be accommodated through careful scheduling.]

Sick child: the parents must notify the commissioner or their representative before the start of the tryout for the girl's age group that the child planned to attend, but is sick that day. If parents are unable to contact the commissioner, a message may be left on the ABGSL hotline (before the scheduled start of the tryout). If the girl is sick the day of the first tryout but is well on the day of the second tryout she is expected to attend.

2. The commissioner will obtain information about the skills of any missing player. However, attendance at the tryouts is considered a strong indication of willingness to commit the time necessary to have a successful Sting experience, and failure to attend will significantly reduce the chance of the child being selected for a Sting team (see item 1 above.)

3. At the conclusion of the Sting tryouts, the Sting coaches and the commissioner meet and form the teams using the following criteria. Sting coaches, with appropriate input from the commissioners, will have complete authority to form the teams and to place players on teams so as to build the strongest teams while ensuring the most girls possible get to participate in the Sting experience. Sting coaches may seek input from other sources, including rec coaches, in evaluating a girl's skills, while retaining final authority over team placement.

a. Players from outside ABGSL must have played in a league affiliated with ABGSL in the interleague program. Affiliated leagues are part of the Oakland A.S.A. Association. These typically include the Alameda, Lafayette, Oakland, Piedmont, Rodeo and San Lorenzo Girls Softball Leagues. A listing of the affiliated leagues can be found at www.oaklandasa.com.

b. At least nine players on any Sting team must be ABGSL players participating in the current recreational league season.

c. In the event that a non-ABGSL player and an ABGSL player are of comparable skill, the ABGSL player will be selected.

d. Players may be asked to move up to the next age group if the talent is needed and the coaches and commissioner are in agreement.

e. There will be a one-week period given to the commissioner and coaches to contact players to resolve any questionable situations.

4. The selection of players on each team is determined as follows:

a. When there are only enough players to form one team in an age group, the Sting coaches will select the strongest team possible. Building the strongest team possible is not always the same as choosing the strongest players available. For example, a team may not need two power hitting first basemen but might need a fast outfielder who isn't as strong a hitter. Also, a player who has very good skills but who the coaches feel will be disruptive to the functioning and morale of the team may not be selected.

b. If there are enough players to field two teams at an age level, the coaches will try to build the strongest possible first team while ensuring the viability of the second team. The Sting coaches will select the first team based on the needs of the team as well as all the skills of each player including hitting, fielding, running, pitching, catching, attitude and coachability. Players are encouraged to demonstrate all of their skills during Sting tryouts because players who are more versatile are more valuable. Regardless of whether or not a player tries out for a position such as pitcher or catcher, the coaches may place them on a team in those positions. In short, the coaches will decide on what team players get placed and at what positions they will play. Players who are not willing to play whatever position the coach asks them to play, or to play on whatever team they are selected for, should not try out for Sting.

c. The Sting coaches will then attempt to select a second team from the remaining players. During this selection, the coaches will ensure that the second team is viable by giving it the pitching and catching that will allow the team to compete at its age level -- even though we recognize that it may not be a "successful" team when measured just by wins and losses. Creating the second team may sometimes mean that a player may be placed on the second team who feels their other skills should have placed them on the first team. Sometimes that may be true, other times it won't be. Sting coaches will not substantially reduce the quality of the first team during the selection of the second team. It is, however, a goal of the program to have as many players as possible have a Sting experience, so coaches will create teams that help us achieve that goal.

d. The coaches, with appropriate input from the Sting commissioners, will make these decisions. There is no appeal process to change individual team placements.

[Policy Note: We recognize that while it may be initially frustrating for a player to be placed on the second team, it usually is much better for their development to be a “key” player on that team rather than a “contributing” player on the first team. Dividing teams equally has been tried and determined to produce an unsatisfactory experience for the players at all levels. Rules related to the ranking of pitchers and catchers have been tried and also produced unsatisfactory results.]

5. Once the Sting coaches select final teams, the commissioner gives the okay, and the ABGSL president (or a designated ABGSL Board member who does not have a child in the program) concurs, team selections will be posted on the ABGSL website. The goal is to post notices within one week of the Sting tryout. Because we are holding two tryouts, team placement will be posted the Saturday after the Friday tryout, so that practice can begin on Sunday.

6. The ABGSL Board reserves the right to make any changes to the selection process.

Fall Team Selection:

Fall team selection differs from the methods used for the summer due to the large number of variables involved. The teams will be formed with the following two goals in mind: (1) the teams must be capable of competing at their competition level; and (2) the teams will be selected with the goal of maximizing the number of girls who can participate. The commissioner is vested with the authority to constitute the team(s) following these steps:

1. After choosing the summer teams the summer Sting coaches will rank the remainder of the Sting tryout candidates who indicate they want to play Fall Ball. The coaches will also indicate to the commissioner players they do not believe are ready to play at a competitive level.

2. Summer players will be given first choice to continue on their team in the fall. If their team does not continue in the fall, but another team at the same age group continues, they will have priority for that team over players who did not play in the summer program.

3. Late in the summer season the commissioner will ask each player whether she intends to return in the fall. (A player who indicates she will not return, but later changes her mind, may lose her spot on the team.)

4. The commissioner, in consultation with the summer Sting coaches, will fill open spots on each team. These spots will be filled by some combination of girls who attended the spring Sting tryouts, were deemed qualified, but did not play in the summer, and promoting players from other Sting teams. The commissioner retains sole discretion in how to equitably reformulate the teams.

5. In the event there are additional openings after all girls meeting the above criteria are offered a place on an appropriate team, the commissioner may recruit girls who played in ABGSL's recreational season to fill out the team. If positions are still open, the commissioner may then recruit other eligible girls.

6. In general, no more than five players who do not have prior Sting experience will be added to a team. This is done to insure the competitiveness and coachability of the team.

7. Once the commissioner forms the fall teams, and the ABGSL president (or a designated ABGSL Board member who does not have a child in the program) concurs, team selections will be posted on the ABGSL website.

8. The ABGSL Board reserves the right to make any changes to the selection process.

Uniform Numbers:

All efforts are made to honor players preferences for specific uniform numbers. When a number requested conflicts with another player on the same team, or a player who could be placed on the same team in the next season, then the player with seniority will get the number. Seniority is determined by number of prior seasons on the current Sting team, then number of seasons playing Sting, then the number of years playing ABGSL, then by age.

Parent Responsibilities:

Parent participation in Sting is greater than that in the ABGSL spring recreational season. For example, the team business manager has a number of responsibilities and will rely on other parents to help run the team in support of the coach. Other parent jobs include: Scorekeepers (2), Snack/Water Coordinator, Ice/First Aid, Trophies/Award, Party Planner, Travel/Chaperone Coordinator, Photographer/Reporter and Field Maintenance. Coaches can, and often will, ask for additional help from the parents at both practices and games. Parents are expected to cheerfully help when requested. All families will have some responsibility for helping run the team.

The costs of participating on Sting are also greater than that in the ABGSL spring recreational season. In addition to program fees and uniform costs, parents pay significant costs for tournaments, which may include meals, transportation, lodging and incidentals.

Each team will have a parent meeting held in early May (summer) or September (fall) to introduce the head coach, distribute information, and organize parent support for the team. At least one adult representative for each family must attend this start-of-season parent meeting.

Parents should tell managers about absences from practices and games in advance. Failure to do so may result in loss of playing time. Additionally, the coach may choose to exclude players who miss practices and/or games from the starting roster for a tournament even with advance notice of absences.

During a game, the dugout is only for coaches and players. Parents should not enter the dugout unless requested to do so by a coach, the dugout parent, or the commissioner. Similarly, at practices, except as stated by the head coach, the dugout and field are for players and coaches only.

Parents shall not initiate talk with the Sting coaches about the game lineup, coaching decisions, coaching judgment, or other coaching issues. Parents with concerns or questions regarding any aspect of their team must first speak with their team manager, who will discuss the issue with the coaches. The team manager will communicate the results of the conversation to the parent. The coaches may or may not respond directly to the parent. If issues cannot be resolved, parents may bring them to the attention of the Sting commissioner, who will discuss the issue with the coaches. The Commissioner will communicate the results of the conversation to the parent.

Parents who do not follow these Sting guidelines, the ABGSL guidelines, or direct requests from the commissioner or president may be precluded from attending their child's games and/or practices. With the consent of the president, the commissioner may drop a child from the team if a child's parent cannot follow the guidelines and/or direct requests. In this circumstance player registration fees will not be refunded.

Player Responsibilities:

- Players will take responsibility for properly representing ABGSL at tournaments including cleaning the dugout at the end of each game and showing good sportsmanship.
- Players will treat the entire coaching staff with respect (including your own parent/coach).

- Players will treat each other and the opposing team respectfully.
- Players will follow dress code: proper uniform with shirts tucked in, visor, sliders and undershirts to match, no jewelry, etc. Uniforms should be washed after each tournament.
- Players will hustle on and off the field during drills, at practice, and especially during games.
- Players will not eat food of any kind during and between games unless approved by the coach.
- Players will take responsibility for team equipment at practices and tournaments, including transporting equipment from cars to the field and back. Dugouts will be organized: balls in ball bag, helmets in rack, bats arranged in rack, etc.
- Players must arrive on time, dressed in gear, and fully ready to practice or play. Being tardy may result in a loss of playing time.
- Players must notify the coach if they know they are going to be late or absent from a practice or game.

[Policy Note: missing two or more tournaments may lead to the player being dropped from the team.]

- During games, players must stay in the dugout, and not leave without the coach's permission.

[Policy Note: this is an A.S.A. rule. The penalty for a violation may be the player's ejection from the game.]

Players shall maintain compliance with the ABGSL code of conduct, which is included below:

As a player in the Albany Berkeley Girls Softball League I hereby pledge to:

- Play safely.
- Try to the best of my ability.
- Work hard to improve my skills.
- Listen to and follow the coaches' instructions.
- Attend all practices and games, or notify my coach if I cannot attend.
- Be a team player - cooperate with my teammates.
- Be a good sport by acknowledging all good plays, whether the player is on my team or the opposing team.
- Respect all players (no "trash talk").
- Learn the rules of the game.
- Cooperate with the umpires; respect their decisions.

Finally, in order to be sure every girl in our league is comfortable and respected, including those that have chosen not to play Sting, it is imperative that all parents and players involved with Sting follow the "keep Sting out of recreational ball" rule. That is, there should be no Sting clothing and no "Sting talk" mixed into the recreational team experience or at events intended for all players (beginning of year assessments, the Bat-A-Que, clinics, practices, rec games). By no "sting talk" we mean no discussion among Sting players that can cause cliques or divisions on the rec teams. We certainly want all coaches, parents and experienced Sting players to encourage every rec player to give Sting a try. But "Sting talk" not related to trying to get players out to Sting tryouts is for Sting practices and events only (like Sting wear).

Appendix – ABGSL Sting Summer and Fall ‘B’ Eligibility Policy

Any ABGSL player who wishes to try out and play on a Sting team must be properly registered and fully participate in that year’s spring recreational ABGSL season.

Players who intend to try out for their high school team must register with ABGSL for the spring recreational season and pay the full registration fees. On the registration form they should indicate they will be trying out for their high school team. They should then inform ABGSL as soon as possible of the try out results. Players who do not make their high school team will immediately be assigned a recreational team.

Players who have made their high school team will receive a partial exemption to the registration rule, since high schools do not allow their players to be on the roster of any other team until their high school season is complete. Those players receiving such a partial exemption will be assigned to a recreational team when their high school season is over. These players are expected to participate fully in the remainder of the recreational season. Players in this circumstance will also receive a pro-rated refund of their registration fee, the amount of which is to be determined annually by the ABGSL board of directors.

Only players with at least one full previous season as an ABGSL recreational player are eligible for this “high school player exemption.” Our goal is to ensure ABGSL players who have made their high school team are not penalized by becoming ineligible to play in our Sting program without making this a back door for other high school players to play in Sting without playing rec. This “partial exemption” may also be applied to injured players.

Since we expect all ABGSL players to fully participate in the spring recreational season to be eligible for Sting, the Sting Commissioner(s) has the authority, with the consent of the ABGSL president, to declare players who have not fully participated to be ineligible for the Sting program. Similarly, the Commissioner(s) may grant eligibility to players who are new to the Albany/Berkeley area but do not have a full season of ABGSL experience. The Sting Commissioners may give any player warning that her lack of spring participation is jeopardizing her summer eligibility and that she will likely be deemed ineligible to play.

Non-ABGSL players from our sister interleague teams may also try out for Sting teams so long as they are properly registered with their recreational leagues and in accordance with other Sting guidelines governing their participation .

ABGSL Sting Guidelines Acknowledgement – Player

As a player in the Albany Berkeley Girls Softball League Sting program, I acknowledge receipt and agreement to abide by the Sting guidelines

Player's signature _____ *Date* _____

ABGSL Sting Guidelines Acknowledgement – Parent

As a parent of player in the Albany Berkeley Girls Softball League Sting program, I acknowledge receipt and agreement to abide by the Sting guidelines

Parent's signature _____ *Date* _____