

Ames Girls Softball Association

We participate, believe, and invest in the development and success of all girls at all ages

AGSA Tournament Team mission statement:

The Ames Girls Softball Association tournament team program shall be open to any age eligible girl from Ames or surrounding areas. The purpose of the AGSA tournament teams program is to develop the skills and knowledge necessary for girls to play softball at the next level in a competitive atmosphere; give girls the opportunity to develop self confidence, leadership skills, and self respect through the game of softball; to promote good sportsmanship for all involved; to help girls learn to succeed as a team through respect of coaches, players and other participants, and to develop a love for the game of softball to the high school level and beyond.

Parent Guide for AGSA Traveling Tournament Teams

Thank you for your interest in this highly rewarding experience. Tournament teams provide a unique growth opportunity for girls and young women at a critical stage in their physical, social, and emotional development. This guide will help you understand the purpose and function of tournament teams, and outlines the expectations of players, parents and coaches. In addition, you will receive parent and player contracts (attached) that further clarify AGSA policies and procedures.

What is a tournament team?

AGSA sponsored traveling tournament teams are competitive teams that play other quality teams both in and around Iowa. The primary purpose of these teams is to provide opportunities for players to:

- Develop advanced softball skills and access targeted training to improve performance
- Learn softball strategies that facilitate critical decision making on the field
- Learn how to interact as part of a team to build confidence and self-esteem
- Determine where their own abilities are by focusing on specific positions
- Gain valuable experience by playing in **competitive** tournaments in new environments to measure their skills against a broad spectrum of players

How is a tournament team different from a recreational league team?

AGSA offers two types of playing experiences for girls: recreational league teams and tournament teams. In recreational play, girls share playing times equitably, are encouraged to explore playing all positions, and games are limited to one or two a week. Tournament teams, however, differ from recreational teams as follows:

1. **Emphasis is placed on being competitive and winning:** Tournament teams focus on winning as the outcome as a result of several factors, including
 - Successful team management by qualified coaches
 - Assigning players to positions where they play best
 - Establishing a high level of confidence among team members
 - Building an advanced understanding of strategic play
 - Aligning players' abilities that put the team first
 - Maximizing players' abilities to successfully field, pitch, run, and catch
 - Ensuring a commitment and dedication to being the best

2. **Players demonstrate a high level of commitment and skill:** Tournament teams generally attract players who are interested in a higher level of commitment to the sport in terms of time and skill development. These are players who may be also be interested in preparing for high school or college teams. Girls trying out for these teams typically have demonstrated some talent and ability for the game and are mature enough to take practices and time commitments seriously.
3. **Players compete for spots on a team:** Because emphasis is on building a team that can compete successfully at state-wide tournaments, players are chosen according to their skill level. Often there are enough players to establish an "A" (highest ability) team and a "B" (developmental) team, which increases playing opportunities for girls. *In this case, girls are placed so that they receive the proper targeted training that is best for them, and will also allow them to maximize their playing time as much as possible given their abilities.* (See also, "How are players selected for a team?" on the next page).
4. **Players may compete for positions:** Though coaches consider players' requests to play certain positions, assignment of those positions (especially pitcher and catcher) is dependent upon a player's abilities in comparison to others on the team, as well as the current needs of team. Positions are assigned solely at the discretion of the coaches.
5. **Players receive more intensive training under the direction of softball experts:** Tournament teams focus more on advanced strategy and skill development targeting individual player growth, as well as working within a team. Because of this, AGSA has established a thorough interview process to ensure that head coaches, assistant coaches, and/or co-coaches are well qualified to serve as both role models and softball experts. Prospective parent coaches are evaluated using the same guidelines as for non-parent coaches to ensure quality coaching at all levels.
6. **Playing time is based on skill level:** Playing time depends on a number of factors, but primary among those are skill level and attitude. At this level, emphasis is placed on competition (as opposed to league's focus on learning the fundamentals and general skill development); therefore, *equal playing time is not guaranteed.* However, if a player has not violated any team rules (including those relating to attendance at practice and games) and if the player displays appropriate attitude and sportsmanship, the AGSA *recommends* that girls play **no less than ½ of the games**, though in some cases girls may play more than this. Playing time is not determined by number of active minutes but rather on games and/or innings in which the player participated. The attached player and parent contracts detail the behaviors expected by the AGSA.
7. **Players participate in weekend long tournaments:** The teams will likely play tournaments every weekend from May through July, and we ask every player to make a commitment to attend EVERY tournament. The team practices, expects, and relies on each player to fulfill a specific role. Though illness and emergencies are to be expected, players signing up for traveling teams should plan to play every tournament. Tournaments can start as early as Friday evenings and end as late as Sunday evening (if the team continues to win).

How are players selected for traveling teams?

The number of teams formed depends on the number and the skill level of the girls who try out. This is especially true for pitchers and catchers. Typically, a team is made up of 12 girls to provide adequate opportunity for playing time. Pitchers and catchers may be assigned to balance teams. To maintain an objective evaluation process, experienced, non-parent evaluators measure players' abilities to throw, field, run, hit, bunt, catch and pitch. Tryouts are closed to everyone but evaluators and players; this allows evaluators to determine a player's ability to function independently and limits interruptions.

Some girls may be asked to move up or down an age bracket to balance teams. This is competitive play and every effort is made to develop the most competitive teams possible. **Parents and players need to know up front that team assignments are final**, and that girls may not be assigned to the same teams as their friends, schoolmates, or even those in their own age bracket. Since girls develop, strengthen and grow at different rates, their assignments may change from year to year. We make every effort not to cut girls. As long as a girl can reasonably be expected to play at least half of the time, she has the opportunity to make a team. Do not be discouraged if tryouts do not result in the assignment you'd hoped for. AGSA can direct girls to outside resources to accelerate skill development and help players meet their long-term goals. AGSA traveling team selection policies and procedures can be found on the association website (www.amesgirlssoftball.org).

What is the role of parents?

It is our coaches' job to create an environment that encourages the girls to bond and rely upon their fellow team members. This is a very difficult task, especially working with girls who may not know each other or the coaches. Even more complicating is that girls in this age group likely have been solely motivated, rewarded, influenced, and supported by their parents. This will be a transition time for girls, and a critical part of the tournament team training relies on building on a girl's individual sense of independence and self-confidence. To be successful at this task, we ask for parents to provide support from the sidelines during games. This means:

- Allowing your daughter to build confidence, develop a sense of self, and establish relationships with team members and coaches at practice without the pressure of being continually observed or evaluated by family members
- Making encouraging remarks during games and directing praise toward the entire team (not just your daughter)
- Letting only the coaches direct the players
- Refraining from coaching from the sidelines
- Ensuring your daughter arrives at practices and games on time
- Encouraging your daughter to advocate for herself by having her constructively approach coaches and other players

Schedules and Expectations

Tentative Schedule

The following is a tentative schedule for the traveling tournament teams for 2009. This schedule is subject to change. We will finalize the schedule by mid March. In addition, the AGSA sponsors a spring league for all girls who make a traveling team. The games will be played on weekends in April, and it is mandatory that your daughter participate in these games as well.

Date	14 & Under	12 & Under	10 & Under
Apr 4,5	Spring League	Spring League	Spring League
Apr 11,12	Spring League	Spring League	Spring League
Apr 18,19	Spring League	Spring League	Spring League
Apr 25,26	Spring League	Spring League	Spring League
May 2,3	Spring League	Spring League	Spring League
May 5,6	Spring League	Spring League	Spring League
May 10	Spring League	Spring League	Spring League
May 15-17	Grimes	Grimes	Off
May 22-24	Ames	Ames	Ames
May 30-31	Off	Off	Off
Jun 5-7	Marshalltown	Marshalltown	Marshalltown
Jun 12-14	State Tourney	State Tourney	Off
Jun 20-21	Off	Off	State Tourney
Jun 26-28	Ames	Ames	Ames
Jul 3-5	Off	Off	Off
Jul 10-12	Ankeny	Ankeny	Off
Jul 18-19	Iowa Games	Iowa Games	Iowa Games
Jul 25-26	Done Ankeny (optional)	Done Ankeny (optional)	Done Ankeny (optional)

Practice Schedule: The AGSA requires that traveling teams practice at least twice per week at 1.5 hours per contact. All teams should consider this to be a **minimum** requirement. Practices will be held Tuesdays and Thursdays, opposite of the recreational league your daughter will be playing in. The coaching staff will establish a practice schedule soon after the first team meeting. Conflicts with a scheduled practice time should be brought to your coaches' attention as soon as possible. Failure to do so may result in loss of playing time.

Expectations

Despite the increased emphasis placed on winning, we still believe that the purpose of sport is to have fun. The rules set out by the parent and player contracts detail the expectations that the board has with regard to the conduct of the players and their parents. The AGSA strongly supports sportsmanship at all levels, and especially expects the parents and players of our traveling teams to embody this spirit. The only contact many people outside of Ames have is through our traveling teams. Good sportsmanship enables all to have fun.

Resolving and addressing concerns

We recognize that sports bring to the surface many concerns, anxieties and feelings for parents and their children. Often problems are the result of a misunderstanding or failure to identify expectations. We expect that coaches, players, and parents can be reasonable and considerate in approaching problems and work with the understanding that no one intends any ill will. To facilitate the resolution of these concerns, we have established the following procedures:

Emergency Situations: Actions that are inappropriate, or could cause bodily injury or unsafe conditions that could result in injury to a player must be brought to the coach's attention immediately. This can be done by the Parent Representative, or any parent directly. An incident report must be submitted to AGSA Vice President or Director of Coaches.

Game day/tournament issues: Parents are expected to wait 24hrs after the **completion of a tournament** to approach any coach with concerns about a particular tournament and/or game within a tournament. This policy allows all parties time to reflect on the games, and is intended to protect all involved from hurtful words spoken in moments of high emotion.

Action Timelines: AGSA is run by volunteers. All meetings of board members must occur outside of work hours. Therefore, any step requiring a meeting of the Grievance Committee or any members of the AGSA Board of Directors will occur within 72 hours of initiation of a written grievance by the parent/player or coach.

All grievances will be documented at every step and those involved will be asked to sign documentation at each step.

If problems arise during the course of the season the following policy will be followed:

Step 1: Player communicates with the Coach

Players are encouraged to talk directly to the coach and attempt to resolve the problem by themselves. Part of the AGSA experience is for girls to learn to advocate and solve problems for themselves, both on the field and off.

Step 2: Parent and Player communicates with the Coach

Parents may also talk with coaches about a problem but, **the player must accompany the parent during this discussion.** Parents are expected to wait until after a practice to address the coach and are asked to do so privately with the player. At no time are the parents to contact any coach about a possible grievance without their daughter in attendance.

Step 3: Situation is turned over to AGSA Grievance Committee

Parents MUST provide a detailed written document outlining their concerns before this step occurs. In the RARE case that steps 1 and 2 do not resolve the issue, a meeting will be held to determine how to progress further. It may be determined that a member of the Grievance Committee should meet with the player, the coach, or both to resolve the issue. If parents/players are satisfied with recommendations of the Grievance Committee they will be asked to sign off at this point or request the situation be turned over the AGSA Board of Directors. To contact the Grievance Committee, please call Kathy Bloch at 515-233-5130.

Step 4: AGSA Grievance Committee communicates with the AGSA Board

Parents will be asked to provide their concerns in writing (as above). In the EXCEPTIONALLY RARE event that the issue still is unresolved, the Grievance Committee will present the issue to either individual board members, the executive committee, or to the entire AGSA board for review. ***All decisions at this level are final and will be closed door decisions. If a decision requires disciplining of a parent, player, and/or coach this information will not be released by the board due to confidentiality issues.***