

# Classification Guidelines for USSSA C & Recreational/All-Stars Divisions

## Key Points

USSSA hosts C and Rec/All-Stars divisions to provide competition where teams can enjoy a more balanced and developmental level of play.

To reach this goal:

- Teams must go through a vetting process to enter the C or Rec/All-Stars Divisions in an attempt to permit only the right teams into these divisions and in hopes of avoiding mid-season re-classifications.
- Teams schedules must adhere to one deemed appropriate for these levels. Those teams from areas with a full C or Rec/All-Stars schedule, we expect that 80% of the team's scheduled tournaments (all events regardless of sanctioning group) are at their sanctioned level. Teams from areas that do not host a full schedule of C or Rec/All-Stars tournaments are permitted to deviate from this guideline under USSSA oversight.
- Teams may play up in class, but typically not up in age (excluding 16U where the 16U and 18U age divisions are often combined).
- Teams' performance on the field is periodically reviewed and, if USSSA deems appropriate, a change in classification may be made for the betterment of the entire program.
- Teams must understand that classifications may be changed when situations prove that such changes are justified. These situations typically involve roster and/or player availability changes that teams may experience throughout the year.
- C and Rec/All-Stars teams may participate in our C Nationals and World Series events without winning a berth. All C and Rec/All-Stars teams are eligible for these event by playing in 3 or more USSSA events and maintaining C eligibility. For those teams from areas that may not have a schedule of local events, USSSA will work with the team to determine if they may be eligible for the C Nationals and World Series.
- Teams at the 10U age division play with a few rule exceptions from the USSSA rulebook.
- The key difference between C and Rec/All-Stars teams is simply about the formation of the team, not the level of play – aka Rec/All-Stars is not the D Division.

The rest of this document provides more details of these key points about the C and Rec/All-Stars divisions.

Please direct questions to your local USSSA director.

# The Unabridged Version

## Overview

USSSA's goal is to provide levels of play appropriate for the various levels of teams and thus create a more enjoyable and rewarding experience for everyone involved playing USSSA events.

USSSA classifies teams as A, B, C or Recreational/All-Stars (Rec/All-Stars). The level of play from highest level to lowest level is A, then B, and then C. Rec/All-Stars is more about the formation of the team than its level of play, though in most cases Rec/All-Stars are the lowest level.

With four classes of play, the boundaries between each class are not always clear and/or distinct. Some overlap may occur. Although USSSA does not have explicitly defined rules that determine classifications, USSSA does have some time tested guidelines that USSSA has used over many seasons to determine C and Rec/All-Stars Division eligibility. Please see the section **Eligibility and Classification Changes**.

USSSA tries to ensure teams understand the classification structure, USSSA's goals for the C and Rec/All-Stars Divisions, and that USSSA continuously (before, during, and after the season) review all teams' eligibility for their respective classes.

**The goal of the C & Rec/All-Stars Divisions is to provide an environment where teams can be introduced to travel softball, have an enjoyable experience, and develop as players. It is USSSA's hope that the team will, at a point in its future, move up in level of play. However, USSSA does not forbid a team from playing at these classifications, if the team continues to fit the model, for their length of time as a youth fastpitch team.**

Ultimately the team's development and resulting performance on the field may require that the team moves up to the B or A Divisions as they are no longer eligible for the lower levels of play.

## Becoming a C or Rec/All-Stars team with USSSA:

A team manager may choose to register their team with USSSA at either the A or B Division.

Once a team is registered as an A or B team, the team may request a classification change to the C or Rec/All-Stars division.

1. The team must first load their team's roster online.
2. Then contact their local USSSA director and provide the following information so that the director can fully understand the level of the team and the team's intention for the season:
  - number of USSSA C or Rec/All-Stars (as applicable) tournaments the team will play over the course of the USSSA year (8/1-7/31).
  - number of USSSA non-C or Rec-All/Stars tournaments the team will play over the course of the USSSA year

- number of non-USSSA tournaments the team will play over the course of the year (8/1-7/31)
  - any other information that the coach thinks might help the USSSA classification committee make the appropriate decision on the team's classification.
3. The USSSA Classification Committee then reviews the information, may ask the team manager some questions for clarification, and then will make a decision either to move the team to the requested division or deny the request.
  4. For teams that are playing at a higher level of play, but due to various circumstances (injuries, roster changes, and other) are showing that they are a better fit for the C or Rec/All-Stars Division, the request for a change may be made by the team manager at anytime during the season. The same process as for initial classification as a C or Rec/All-Stars team applies.

**USSSA reserves the right to change the class/division and/or limit the level of tournaments a team may compete in (either up or down in class).**

## **C Division Overview**

A regular season C or Rec/All-Stars Division tournament typically features a 3 game format, most often played as two pool games into a single elimination bracket where occasionally the first bracket game may be played on the same day as pool play. Other formats may be used as dictated by number of teams, fields, and time.

The C and Rec/All-Stars Divisions have some rule exceptions for the 10 & Under age division. The other age divisions play by the same rules as the A and B classes.

When numbers and schedule layouts require, the 16U and 18U age divisions may be combined in C and Rec/All-Stars Division tournaments.

### **Characteristics of C teams (in some cases in comparison to A/B teams):**

- C Division teams are generally teams playing a smaller number of events than the top select teams. However, with the growth of the C Division schedule, some C Division teams may play in just as many or more tournaments as the higher division teams.
- C Division teams typically have a more local recruiting area than the top select teams. Often the roster is mostly comprised of players from a small community, a small set of schools and/or the same local league. However, that is not always the case due to population density, maturity of the softball programs in the area, and other unique situations.
- C Division teams tend to be less demanding on the commitment of their players – practice less, play less, etc. Again with the maturation of the C Division in many areas, this aspect is changing.
- C Division teams tend to require less of a financial obligation (player registration, uniforms, equipment and travel) than higher division teams.

- C Division teams tend to travel less to more distant tournaments.
- C Division teams tend to carry a smaller number of pitchers – thus the normal C Division tournament includes only a 3 game format.
- C Division teams tend to be more focused on the fun and recreation portion of play and less on the winning/losing portion.
- C Division teams play almost entirely C Division or equivalent level tournaments. USSSA does permit C Division teams to play in higher level events so that coaches may challenge their teams to improve and develop and to experience the higher level of play. USSSA also permits C Division teams to play in higher level events when teams do not have a lot of C Division events in their geographic location. However, USSSA scrutinizes teams' performance in these events even more closely than when the teams play in C Division or equivalent level events. In areas where a full featured C Division schedule is presented by USSSA, USSSA expects C teams to play 75%-80% C Division tournaments.
- USSSA only under rare circumstances permits B teams to play up in age but down in the C Division.
- USSSA only under rare circumstances permits a C team to play up in age and at the C Division.
- **A C Division team that meets all of the criteria above may still be declared ineligible for the C Division tournaments if USSSA deems the team's play to be higher than that expected of C Division teams.**
- **Ultimately performance on the field is the #1 contributing factor to a team's classification.**

## Recreational/All-Stars Division Overview

USSSA has a growing/developing Recreational/All-Stars program. USSSA wants to continue to foster this portion of the program and it is an important goal to keep the Rec/All-Stars program for purely recreational caliber teams.

The Rec/All-Stars tournaments play by the same rules as the C Division tournaments.

**Characteristics of Rec/All-Stars teams** (in some cases in comparison to C teams):

- Rec/All-Stars is a classification designed specifically for teams made up of players from a house league and selected to play a short schedule at the conclusion of the house league, which typically ends sometime in mid to late June. Hence, Rec/All-Stars tournaments are typically held from the end of June through the beginning of August.
- Rec/All-Stars teams are much like C Division teams as described above, but participate purely for the fun aspect of the game and to introduce their team to tournament softball.
- In Maryland & Delaware, Rec/All-Stars tournaments are hosted at 10, 12, and 14 & Under age divisions only. Other areas may host more or less age divisions for their Rec/All-Stars tournaments.
- Players on Rec/All-Stars teams all come from the same house league. Pick up players

from other leagues or from other higher class teams are very closely monitored.

- Rec/All-Stars teams typically do not participate in any other classification of tournament. USSSA does permit such teams to play at a higher class, but the team's performance in these events is very closely watched.
- **Rec/All-Stars teams that meet all of the criteria above may still be declared ineligible for the Rec/All-Stars tournaments if USSSA deems the team's play to be higher than that expected of Rec/All-Stars teams.**
- **Ultimately performance on the field is the #1 contributing factor to a team's classification.**

## Eligibility and Classifications Changes

USSSA reviews team eligibility for the C and Rec/All-Stars division, before, during and at the conclusion of the season.

Entries into C and Rec/All-Stars Division tournaments are continually reviewed by a committee to determine the team's eligibility.

This review process occurs first when a team registers with USSSA and then for a C or Rec/All-Stars Division event.

As the season progresses the review process of all teams is performed periodically to determine if a team has maintained C and Rec/All-Stars Division eligibility.

At the conclusion of the season, team eligibility is reviewed one last time to determine if the team returns for the subsequent season and maintains its core group of players, if it should return as a C or Rec/All-Stars Division team.

Below are some of the criteria USSSA uses to determine a team's continuing eligibility for these divisions of play – USSSA considers the composite picture that these markers paint:

- For initial eligibility, prior season classification for teams moving up an age division – teams that played and competed well at the A/B/Open level in the prior season are not looked upon as candidates for the C or Rec/All-Stars division (moving down in class) as they move up an age division the following season. This assumes that the team has kept the core of their team together (pitchers and catchers being the prime positions).
- For initial eligibility, prior season classification for teams staying at the same age division – teams, often with a younger roster, from the prior season that competed well at the C Division (around .400 record or higher) are looked at as candidates for the B Division (moving up in class) the following year. This assumes that the team has kept the core of their team together (mostly pitchers and catchers being the prime positions).
- USSSA Power Ranking system (available via [ussa.com](http://ussa.com) web site) after playing a number of tournaments.
- Top (1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, or 3<sup>rd</sup> place) tournament finishes – this includes non-USSSA sanctioned events and the size of the tournament are also factored into the equation (3<sup>rd</sup> place in a 4 team tournament is one thing, 3<sup>rd</sup> place in a 16 tournament has an entirely different meaning). There is no set limit of top finishes that may force a classification change, but

teams should understand that it does not require two or three 1<sup>st</sup> place finishes for a classification change to be justified.

- Record versus other teams within the same division – this includes non-USSSA sanctioned events
- Run differential versus other teams within the same division – this includes non-USSSA sanctioned events
- Record versus teams regardless of the level of play – this includes non-USSSA sanctioned events
- First hand observation/evaluation of the team by USSSA staff – this includes the **caliber and depth of the pitching and catching positions** to a greater extent, but also the overall caliber of players and the skill and knowledge of the coaching staff.
- Experience level of the players on the roster
- Team history and history of a team's program.
- Schedule – number of in class tournaments versus the number of out of class tournaments and the number of USSSA sanctioned tournaments versus the number of non-USSSA sanctioned tournaments. In areas where USSSA does not regularly schedule C or Rec/All-Stars tournaments or tournaments in general, this feature has less of an impact on the team's eligibility.
- Player ages – this, in and of itself, has much less impact on a team's eligibility than the other criteria, especially the performance related ones. However, teams predominantly made up of older aged players are more likely to be ineligible for the level of play. The converse is not true – teams with mostly younger aged players due to their performance may still be ineligible for the level of play.
- Specifically for the 10 & Under age group, the following **additional** criteria are used to determine eligibility:
  1. Pitcher's ability to throw strikes and rarely require the benefit of the 5-Run Limit per Inning Rule.
  2. Catchers' ability to hold third strikes and rarely require the benefit of the No Dropped Third Strike Rule exception.
  3. Teams that rarely require the benefit of the 5-Run Limit per Inning Rule.
  4. Catchers/Teams that rarely require the benefit of the No Stealing Home Rule exception.
  5. Player experience is not considered as important at this level as this is typically where most players start and most players have little or no tournament softball experience.

**Teams that show they exceed the respective level of play may be denied entry into C division or Rec/All-Stars tournaments and classified as USSSA sees fit.**

Teams must be aware that classification changes may be made at any time, if USSSA deems that the team should participate at another level. This is particularly true for teams near the boundaries of classes.

**USSSA understands that mid-season classification change may have a severe impact on a team's schedule. A classification change may create a hardship for the team, so USSSA**

**attempts to head off and avoid unexpected mid-season classification changes as much and as soon as possible.**

USSSA has the final decision on upward classifications changes.

Not only are teams reclassified up in class, but also down. Teams that show they cannot compete at higher levels of play may request to be reclassified to a lower division of play. USSSA also monitors the performance of teams throughout the season and may offer teams an opportunity to be reclassified down.

Downward classification changes are only made if the team agrees.

In all cases where teams are reclassified, a future reclassification may be done to ensure the team is correctly classified – again this may be up or down.

Teams may have their classification changed multiple times during the season due to the level of play changing for a plethora of reasons.

Team managers should contact their USSSA director when unusual situations occur that have a major impact on the teams level of play. Working with their director can help alleviate hardships caused by a forced reclassification.

## **Conclusion**

Teams that are unsure if they fit the C Division or the Rec/All-Stars Division or have questions about these levels of play should contact their USSSA area director.

For Maryland and Delaware teams, Glen Warholic, [glen@ussa1.com](mailto:glen@ussa1.com) should be contacted.