

SEP Rams Softball Club – Select Program Handbook

Mission Statement

The SEP Rams Softball Club Select Program is designed to offer players a higher level of competitive softball while upholding the values of sportsmanship, player development, and community pride established by GAGSA and the SEP Rams Softball Club. The Select Program exists to primarily serve athletes within the Southeast Polk community who have demonstrated elevated skill, commitment, and a desire to compete at advanced tournament levels. While expectations may differ from the traditional SEP Rams Softball Club program, the Select Program remains grounded in the same core principles that define the SEP Rams identity.

Why We Created the Select Program

In recent years, the landscape of tournament softball in the greater Des Moines area has changed dramatically. What was once a smaller community with limited competitive options has expanded into a highly competitive environment with more programs offering tournament-level play than ever before. In response to this evolution, the SEP Rams Softball Club created the Select Program to offer players a higher level of competitive softball while remaining true to our established values. While expectations may differ from the traditional SEP Rams Softball Club program in terms of commitment and competition, the Select Program remains firmly grounded in the core principles of sportsmanship, player development, and community pride that define GAGSA and the SEP Rams Softball Club.

Relationship to GAGSA and SEP Rams Softball Club Policies

The SEP Rams Softball Club Select Program operates under the broader governance of GAGSA and the SEP Rams Softball Club. The Select program will leverage the SEP Rams Softball Clubs “core” infrastructure, while offering approved coaches and teams flexibility in their roster formation to align players with similar elevated skills and levels of commitment while keeping with GAGSA and the SEP Rams Softball Club core principles.

This Select Program Handbook is intended to highlight additional expectations, commitments, and operational differences specific to the Select Program.

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Eligibility Requirements for Formation of Select Teams

Team and Coach Eligibility Requirements

Minimum Age Division for Select Teams

To preserve the developmental integrity of the SEP Rams Softball Club and protect the long-term success of young athletes, the SEP Rams Select Program will begin at the **10U age division**.

- **No Select teams may be formed at the 6U – 9U levels**, regardless of player skill level or parent interest.
- Players in the 6U - 9U divisions are encouraged to participate in the traditional SEP Rams Softball Club program to build foundational skills, teamwork, and love for the game.
- This policy ensures that the Select Program remains age-appropriate, competition-ready, and aligned with GAGSA's long-term player development goals.

Residency Requirements

The permanent roster for each Select team must consist of at least **65% players who reside within the Southeast Polk Community School District**.

Example compliance breakdowns:

- If rostering 10 or 11 total players, 3 players may be from out-of-district.
- If rostering 12 total players, 4 players may be from out-of-district.

Appeals for Additional Out-of-District Players

Approved Select Program coaches may submit a formal request to the GAGSA Tournament Director and Executive Board to roster **one additional out-of-district player**, falling below the 65% cap, if:

- The coach can demonstrate that no eligible in-district player was passed over to fill the roster spot, **and**
- The addition of the out-of-district player supports competitive balance, roster depth, or positional need (e.g., no available in-district catcher or pitcher).

All such appeals must be submitted in writing and will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis. Approval is not guaranteed and is granted solely at the discretion of the GAGSA Tournament Director and Executive Board.

Residency Grandfathering Exception

- In the traditional SEP Rams Softball Club program, a player who resides out-of-district may be considered "in-district" if they have completed at least one full season of continuous participation **and** maintain consecutive enrollment without a break in registration.
- **This grandfathering policy does not apply to the SEP Rams Select Program.**
All Select Program players are evaluated based on **current legal residency at the time of roster submission**, regardless of past participation in GAGSA or SEP Rams traditional teams.

Guest Player Requirements

- **Guest Players (In-District):**
 - Guest players from within the Southeast Polk district are permitted on a **temporary basis (single tournament)** without prior approval.
- **Guest Players (Out-of-District):**
 - Guest players from outside the Southeast Polk district are permitted on a **temporary basis (single tournament)** with prior written approval from the GAGSA Tournament Director via **email or text message**.
- **Long-Term Guest Players:**
 - Defined as a player participating in **more than two consecutive tournaments**.
 - Long-term guest players from outside the district are **prohibited**, except in cases of extended absence by a permanently rostered player (injury, extended travel).
 - **Written approval via email** from the GAGSA Tournament Director is required for all long-term guest player exceptions.
- **Enforcement:**
 - Abuse of the guest player policy may result in removal of the team from the Select Program at the discretion of the GAGSA Tournament Director and Executive Board.

Sportsmanship and Behavior (Coaches and Teams)

- Head coaches and assistant coaches must **not have been ejected** from any tournament games during the previous season.
 - The GAGSA Tournament Director reserves the right to verify conduct records through Central Iowa Sports (CIS), IA USSSA, or other tournament sanctioning bodies.
- Teams must maintain a record of good sportsmanship consistent with the GAGSA and SEP Rams Softball Club Code of Conduct.
- **During the Season:**
 - If any coach or assistant coach is issued an ejection during the Select season, the team may be removed from the Select Program for the remainder of the current season and future seasons at the discretion of the GAGSA Tournament Director and Executive Board.

Coaching Experience and Performance

- **Background Checks:**
 - Head coaches must complete a USSSA background check and be SafeSport certified.
 - All Head Coaches must complete and pass their background check prior to initial Head Coach approval.
 - Assistant coaches, practice coaches, and all other coaching staff must complete a GAGSA background check.
- **Coaching Experience:**
 - Head Coach Applicants must have prior experience coaching in tournament-level softball.
 - Experience should be recent (within the last 1–2 years) and at a comparable or adjacent age division to the team they wish to coach.
 - For example:
 - A coach with experience at 10U may be considered for 12U.

- A coach with only 8U/9U experience applying to coach a 12U Select team will be subject to **additional review** by the GAGSA Tournament Director and Executive Board.
 - Head Coach applicants must have previously coached within the SEP Rams Softball Club (traditional or Select program) within the past three (3) years prior to their application.
 - Eligible coaching experience may include serving as either:
 - A Head Coach, or
 - An Assistant Coach with significant team leadership responsibilities (as determined by the GAGSA Tournament Director and/or Executive Board).
 - “Practice Coaches” will not be considered.
 - Applicants with **significant playing experience** (e.g., collegiate athletes) or alternative coaching backgrounds may still be considered on a case-by-case basis, provided they demonstrate a clear commitment to player development and alignment with the values of the Select Program.
- **Coaching Competency:**
 - Head coaches must be able to demonstrate the ability to:
 - Develop and execute structured practice plans.
 - Devise in-game strategies for various situations.
- **Coaching Record Standards:**
 - **.650 or higher** win percentage if coaching primarily in the USSSA “C” division the previous season.
 - **.500 or higher** win percentage if coaching primarily in the USSSA “A” or “B” divisions.
- *Demonstration of coaching ability may include verbal explanations, presentation of written plans, or observation by the GAGSA Tournament Committee.*

Player Eligibility Requirements

Tournament Experience

- All players assigned to the permanent roster of a Select team must have prior tournament experience.
 - The GAGSA Tournament Director reserves the right to verify player’s prior tournament experience.

Tryout Attendance

- Once approved, SEP Rams Select coaches may conduct private tryouts for roster selection.
 - Private tryouts **must not** involve a player evaluation fee.
 - GAGSA will assist with field space and equipment when possible.
- **All players** must register for and participate in the **SEP Rams Softball Club Tryouts** hosted by GAGSA.
 - Participation in SEP Rams Club Tryouts is mandatory for Select roster eligibility, regardless of any private evaluations.

Sportsmanship and Conduct

- All coaches, players, parents, and spectators must agree to and adhere to the SEP Rams Softball Club Code of Conduct upon registration and acceptance.
- **Player Ejections:**
 - Players must not have been ejected from any tournaments during the prior season.
- **Parent/Guardian Ejections:**
 - Parents or guardians may not have incurred more than **one ejection** during the prior season.
- The GAGSA Tournament Director reserves the right to verify conduct records through Central Iowa Sports (CIS), IA USSSA, or other sanctioning bodies.

Private Instruction Expectations

- Select Program coaches may **require**:
 - Participation in private hitting instruction.
 - Participation in private pitching or catching instruction (for pitchers and catchers).
- Any such requirements must be communicated clearly to players and families at the time of roster acceptance.

Select Program Team Expectations

Division of Play

- Select teams are expected to compete at the **USSSA "A" or "B" levels**.
 - When participating in tournaments hosted by organizations other than USSSA (such as Perfect Game or other sanctioning bodies), SEP Rams Select teams are expected to register at the "Open," "A," or "B" competitive levels when divisions are offered.
- The Select Program is **not intended for teams competing in the "C" division**.
 - If a Select team requests reclassification from "B" to "C," it will disqualify them from reapplying to the Select Program for the following season.

Tournament Registrations

- While registered with USSSA, Select teams may participate in non-USSSA sanctioned tournaments (e.g., Perfect Game, other organizations) with approval.

Roster Requirements

- Each Select team must permanently roster at least:
 - **Ten (10) total players** consisting of a minimum of **two (2) pitchers** and **two (2) catchers**.
- **Preferred Roster Configuration:**
 - **Three (3) pitchers** and **two (2) catchers** for optimal team flexibility.
- **Dual Role Exception:**
 - If three or more pitchers are rostered, one player may serve as both a pitcher and one of the two primary catchers.

Application and Approval Process for Select Teams

Coaches wishing to form a Select team must submit a **written application** to the GAGSA Tournament Director (tournamentdirector@gagsa.org) for review and approval.

SEP Rams Select Application Process:

To ensure consistent standards across all SEP Rams Softball Club Select teams, the following approval process must be followed:

1. Head Coach Application Submission

- The prospective Select Head Coach must submit a complete application to the GAGSA Tournament Director, including all required information:
 - Coaching history
 - Team formation plan
 - Intended competitive level
 - Coaching philosophy
 - (Optional) Practice and development plan

2. Preliminary Application Review

- The GAGSA Tournament Director will conduct a preliminary review of the coach's application.
- **Preliminary acceptance may be granted**, pending final roster evaluation.
- Preliminary acceptance does **not** guarantee final Select team approval.

3. Roster Presentation

- Once preliminary acceptance is granted, the Head Coach must submit a proposed team roster to the GAGSA Tournament Director.
 - Roster must meet all residency requirements.
 - Roster must satisfy minimum roster sizes and pitcher/catcher requirements.
 - Guest player policy must be followed.

4. Final Application and Roster Review

- The GAGSA Tournament Director, with consultation from the GAGSA Executive Board if necessary, will review the final roster.
- GAGSA reserves the right to:
 - Approve the team fully,
 - Request adjustments to the roster,
 - Or deny final Select team approval if eligibility standards are not met.

5. Official Team Approval

- Only after final roster approval will the Select team be officially registered under the SEP Rams Softball Club Select Program.
- Official approval will be communicated in writing to the Head Coach.
- Upon official approval, roster building must cease except for GAGSA-approved guest player additions.

Coaching Application Requirements:

Coaching History

- The name of the last USSSA tournament team the coach managed or assisted.
- If the coach's name is not listed as a manager or assistant on the USSSA website, the GAGSA Tournament Director reserves the right to confirm coaching involvement through:
 - The USSSA State Director,
 - Tournament organization staff,
 - Or the listed Team Manager.

Team Formation Plan

- Proposed age division (e.g., 10U, 12U, 14U)
- Approximate number of players anticipated for roster formation.
- General description of how the roster will be built (e.g., open tryouts, invitations from within SEP Rams Softball Club, etc.).

Competition Level Intent

- Indicate intended competitive level for tournament play:
 - USSSA "A" or "B" division.
- Indicate if the team plans to compete in non-USSSA events (e.g., Top Gun, Perfect Game tournaments, etc).

Coaching Philosophy (Short Statement)

- Provide a 1–2 sentence description of the coach's approach to:
 - Player development,
 - Competitive mindset,
 - Team culture expectations.

Practice and Development Plan (Optional but Encouraged)

- A brief overview of intended practice structure:
 - Anticipated practice frequency & resource requirements
 - Desired field space, batting cage, and pitching lanes
 - Development priorities

Character and Sportsmanship Acknowledgment

- Coaches must acknowledge in writing that:
 - They and their staff are subject to the SEP Rams Softball Club Codes of Conduct,
 - They are subject to the sportsmanship standards outlined for the Select Program,
 - Violations may result in removal from the Select Program.

Application Review Process:

- Applications will be reviewed by the GAGSA Tournament Director and Executive Board, if necessary.
- Approval will be based on:
 - The coaches' and players' qualifications,
 - Proposed team structure,
 - Conduct history,
 - Alignment with SEP Rams Softball Club values and Select Program expectations.
- Decisions regarding acceptance or rejection into the Select Program are **final**. There is **no formal appeals process** for coach or team application decisions.
- Applicants who are not accepted may submit a written request for feedback regarding their application.

Roster Formation Guidelines

Roster formation for SEP Rams Select teams must reflect the integrity and player-first values of the program. Final rosters are subject to approval by the GAGSA Tournament Director and the GAGSA Executive Board.

Program Branding and Name Usage

Only coaches and teams officially approved for the SEP Rams Select Program by the GAGSA Tournament Director may represent themselves as part of the SEP Rams Softball Club or GAGSA.

Coaches who have not received formal approval are prohibited from using the "SEP Rams Softball Club," "SEP Rams Select," "GAGSA," or any associated names, logos, or branding in **any communications**, including but not limited to recruiting future players, hosting private tryouts, or promoting team activities.

Unauthorized use of the SEP Rams Softball Club or GAGSA names or branding may result in disciplinary action, including immediate removal from future GAGSA programs and notification to tournament sanctioning bodies, if necessary.

Roster-Building Period

The Roster-Building Period for SEP Rams Select teams begins during the first week of June and ends when GAGSA concludes its tryouts for the upcoming season's traditional SEP Rams Softball Club teams.

During this period, approved Select coaches may evaluate and recruit players, subject to the guidelines outlined below. After this period ends, further recruiting from finalized traditional SEP Rams Softball Club teams is prohibited.

Select Teams that do not have a complete roster following the guidelines may continue to search for players outside of the SEP Rams Softball Club after the conclusion of the Roster-Building Period, if necessary.

Roster Conduct Expectations

- **Respectful Recruitment:**
 - Coaches must conduct all roster-building activities in a respectful and transparent manner.
- **Recruitment of players from traditional SEP Rams Softball Club Teams:**
 - During the Select roster-building period, recruiting players from current SEP Rams Softball Club teams is permitted to build new Select rosters for the following season.
 - **Once GAGSA finalizes the traditional SEP Rams Softball Club rosters for the upcoming season, further recruiting from these teams is prohibited.**
- **Recruitment of players from existing Select Program Teams:**
 - Recruiting players from active Select Program rosters is prohibited unless:
 - The player initiates contact with the new coach, **and**
 - The player has formally notified their current coach **and**
 - The parent/guardian of the player has informed the GAGSA Tournament Director of their intent to explore other opportunities.
- **Recruitment of players from Outside Organizations**

Recruitment of players from organizations outside of the SEP Rams Softball Club is permitted but must be conducted in a respectful and professional manner that reflects positively on GAGSA and the SEP Rams Softball Club.

The following guidelines apply:

- **Voluntary Participation:**

Players must express independent interest in joining the SEP Rams Select Program. Coaches may advertise tryouts and team opportunities publicly but may not directly pressure players rostered with other active organizations.
- **Respectful Communication:**

Coaches must avoid negative comments about players' current organizations, teams, or coaches when recruiting. Recruitment efforts must focus on promoting the positive values and opportunities within the SEP Rams Select Program.
- **Recruitment Timing:**

Recruitment from outside programs must occur during the defined **Roster-Building Period**
- **No Mid-Season Recruiting:**

Recruiting players from other organizations is permitted for future seasons only. Recruiting players actively rostered during their current season is prohibited unless:

 - The player has notified their current organization of their intent to leave, **and**

- The player's parent/guardian initiates contact with the SEP Rams Softball Club Select coach.
- **Recruitment of Players from Outside Organizations**
All players recruited from outside organizations seeking to join a Select roster must be reported to the GAGSA Tournament Director for roster tracking and compliance.

Private Tryouts and Player Evaluations

- Private tryouts or player workouts for Select teams **may not begin until the Roster-Building Period.**
- Coaches wishing to conduct private tryouts must:
 - Notify the GAGSA Tournament Director prior to scheduling.
 - Ensure that no evaluations, tryouts, or roster invitations occur before the "Roster-Building Period".
 - Conduct private tryouts at facilities approved by GAGSA.
 - If other facilities will be utilized, coordination with the GAGSA Tournament Director is required.

Tryout Participation

- All players, regardless of private evaluation, must register for and attend the **SEP Rams Softball Club tryouts** hosted by GAGSA.
- Participation in SEP Rams Softball Club tryouts is mandatory for Select roster eligibility unless granted a written exception by the GAGSA Tournament Director.

Season Expectations and Timeline

The SEP Rams Softball Club Select Program follows the general season structure of GAGSA and the SEP Rams Softball Club but with additional commitments appropriate to a higher level of competition.

General Season Outline

- **Roster-Building Period:**
 - Begins the first week of June and ends upon the conclusion of the SEP Rams Softball Club tryouts (typically late July/early August).
 - SEP Rams Select Coaches may continue to recruit players after this period if their rosters are not finalized provided their finalized roster meets the residency requirements upon completion.
- **Fall Season:**
 - August – November
 - Select team practices may not begin until all the following milestones have been completed:
 1. All players have attended the SEP Rams Softball Club Tryouts (unless a written exemption was granted).
 2. All rostered players have completed their SEP Rams Softball Club registration, accepted their team placement, and agreed to the SEP Rams Softball Club Code of Conduct.

3. The team has been registered with USSSA by GAGSA, all players have been added to the roster, and team insurance has been secured.
 - *The GAGSA Tournament Director will coordinate with Select team Head Coaches to expedite this process once rosters have been finalized.*
4. The official start of the new USSSA Fall season.
 - Select teams may participate in fall tournaments at the discretion of the Select Head Coach.
 - Fall tournaments are not included in the SEP Rams Select Program registration fees and may incur additional costs to participating families.
- **Winter Development Period:**
 - January – March
 - Teams are expected to hold bi-weekly 1-hour structured practices but are not required to compete in winter tournaments.
 - Teams will be granted the same indoor amenities as the traditional SEP Rams Softball Club participants.
 - If teams choose to hold additional practices or require additional indoor space; the fees for the additional time or space will not be included in the SEP Rams Softball Club registration fees and will be an additional cost to families.
 - Select Head Coaches are expected to communicate with their families about these additional costs BEFORE their invites are extended.
 - GAGSA, the SEP Rams Softball Club and the SEP Rams Select Program will continue to support and encourage multi-sport athletes. No Select Coach shall punish players for attendance due to conflicting sports or activities in the softball “off-season”.
- **Spring/Summer Competitive Season:**
 - March – July (Primary tournament season)
 - Teams are expected to hold bi-weekly 2-hour structured practices
 - Teams will be granted the same outdoor amenities as the traditional SEP Rams Softball Club participants. Additional field, cage, or pitching lane time at Sam Wise Sports Complex will be on a space-available basis only.
 - Select teams are expected to participate in competitive tournaments primarily at the USSSA "A" or "B" level or equivalent levels in other sanctioning bodies.

Select Program-Specific Expectations

- **Tournament Schedule Submission:**
 - A key differentiator between the SEP Rams Select program and the SEP Rams Softball Club traditional programs is the number of tournaments teams will likely play in during the Fall and Spring/Summer seasons.
 - In the Fall Season, coaches are responsible for registering in their desired tournaments.
 - The cost of Fall tournaments is an additional expense not included in the registration fees for the SEP Rams Select Program. Coaches must communicate this with their families transparently.
 - Select Head Coaches must submit a proposed Spring/Summer tournament schedule to the GAGSA Tournament Director no later than **January 31st** for review and registration.

- The tournament budget for SEP Rams Select program participants will be the same as the traditional SEP Rams Softball Club.
- Select Head Coaches must communicate all intended tournament schedules and any anticipated additional costs to families in a clear, transparent manner **prior to extending player invitations.**
- **Competitive Level of Play:**
 - Select teams are expected to prioritize tournaments at the "A", "B", or "Open" competitive levels.
- **Practice Standards:**
 - Select teams are expected to maintain a consistent practice schedule during the time frames mentioned above, appropriate for their age group and level of competition.
 - Indoor practice during the winter months is encouraged and supported.
- **Team Communication:**
 - Coaches must maintain clear and consistent communication with players and families regarding schedules, expectations, additional costs, and updates throughout the season.
- **Scheduled Breaks:**
 - Coaches are encouraged to build reasonable breaks into the team calendar, particularly during major holidays or after several back-to-back tournament weekends, to promote player rest and prevent burnout.

Fees and Financial Expectations

The SEP Rams Softball Club Select Program leverages the same foundational registration fee structure as the traditional SEP Rams Softball Club. However, due to the increased level of competition and potential for additional tournaments and activities, participating families must understand that **additional costs may arise beyond the base registration fees.**

Standard Registration Fees

SEP Rams Select Program players will pay the same base registration fee as players participating in the traditional SEP Rams Softball Club program. This fee covers:

- Uniforms
- USSSA Player Registration and Insurance
- Fall/Spring/Summer Outdoor Practice Facilities (Fields, Lighted Cages, Pitching Lanes)
- Winter Indoor Practice Facilities
- Team & Facility Equipment
- 8* (Typical 4GG) Spring/Summer Tournament Registrations
- Player and Coaches' Clinics with SEP High School coaches
- SEP Rams Softball Club - SEP High School Softball Recognition Game entrance

Additional Expenses Not Covered by Registration Fees

Families participating in the Select Program should anticipate potential additional expenses, including but not limited to:

Fall Tournament Costs

- Fall tournaments are outside the scope of the standard registration fees.
- Select Head Coaches are responsible for registering teams into Fall tournaments, and all associated entry fees will be divided among participating families.

Additional Spring/Summer Tournaments

- If the Select team exceeds the tournament budget included in the base registration fees (i.e., participates in more tournaments than budgeted), any overages will be divided among participating families.

Private Instruction

- Some Select teams may require or recommend private hitting, pitching, or catching instruction.
- Costs for private lessons are the responsibility of individual families and are not included in GAGSA or SEP Rams Select Program registration fees.

Additional Indoor Practice Time (Winter Development Period)

- Teams choosing to practice more frequently than the provided practice schedule must independently fund any additional facility rental fees.

Travel Expenses

- Families are responsible for their own travel, lodging, and personal expenses associated with tournament play, including out-of-town tournaments.

Communication of Additional Costs

Select Head Coaches must communicate all known or anticipated additional costs to families **before extending player invitations**.

All tournament schedules, additional practice expectations, and likely overages must be clearly outlined prior to roster acceptance.

Transparent and proactive financial communication is a core expectation of the SEP Rams Select Program.

Sportsmanship Enforcement Policy

- If a Coach or Assistant Coach is issued an ejection during the season rostered under the Select program, the team is at risk to be removed from the Select program for the remainder of the season and following seasons at the discretion of the GAGSA Tournament Director and Executive Board.
- If a player is issued an ejection during the season rostered under the Select program; the player is at risk to be removed from the Select roster for the remainder of the season and may not be considered for the Select program the following season at the discretion of the GAGSA Tournament Director and Executive Board.
- The sportsmanship policies set forth in the SEP Rams Softball Club Code of Conduct, sportsmanship policies of organizing bodies, and partnering organizations will be strictly enforced.