

2027 DIVISION REVIEW

WESA
WEST END SLO-PITCH ASSOCIATION

Two Seasons into the Three-Division Pilot

What two seasons taught us about
building a better WESA experience.

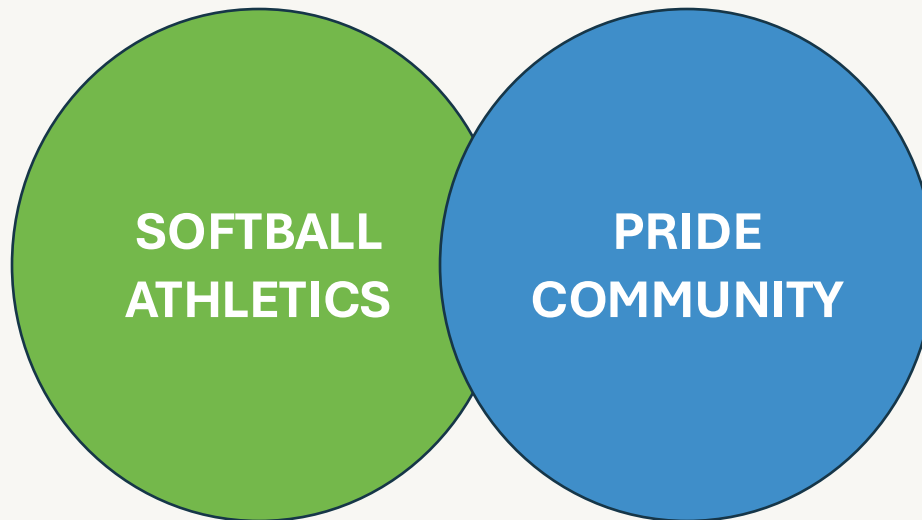
2027 DIVISION REVIEW

Two Seasons into the Three-Division Pilot

The scheduled two-year review is now underway. This proposal draws on two seasons of evidence, observations, and conversations with members and coaches. Feedback continues to shape the model.

This report was prepared by the League Commissioner and presented to the WESA Commission and membership as a proposal & discussion paper.

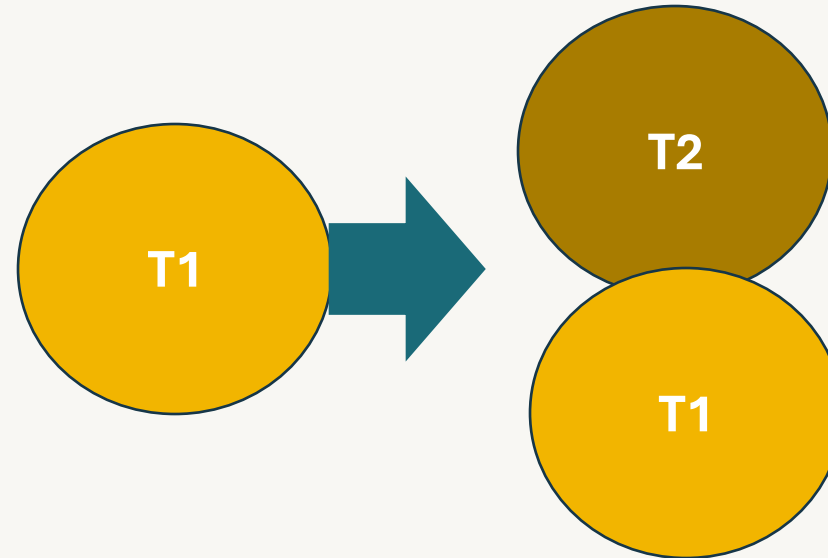
Our divisions must serve both softball and community outcomes



- SPORTSMANSHIP
- SUSTAINABILITY
- COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS
- INCLUSION
- MEMBER EXPERIENCE

Why we changed in 2025

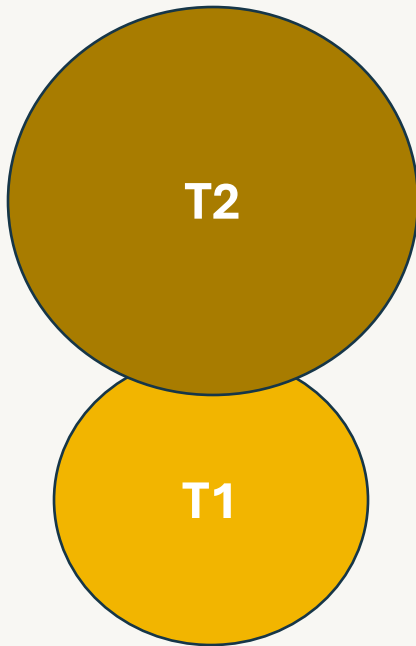
WESA split Tier 1 (T1) into two E-level experiences while continuing to move the more advanced/competitive players into Tier 3 (T3).



2024 began the application of Skills Questions (SQ) as the criteria for placing players by skill level.

What happened?

Coaches and experienced players migrated to the middle.



Over two seasons, coaches and experienced players increasingly gravitated to T2.

T1 was left without enough depth to sustain coaching, pitching, mentorship, and community connection.

What that meant by 2026.

T1 — LOWER E	T2 — UPPER E	T3 — D+
Rookie & Novice (SQ 0-5)	Novice & intermediate (SQ 5-7)	Advanced (SQ 8+)
High demand for development on coaches	Lower demand for development coaching	Increased effort for positive communications, equitable playing time, and development opportunities
8 of 12 Coaches will likely not return	High demand by players and coaches for the middle	We successfully migrated more advanced and competitive members to the Advanced division
4 of 6 teams used a designated pitcher through season-end	Very little development activity to prepare players for D level	Apprehension remains for some members that are assessed at a D skill level
Too few experienced players to transfer knowledge and build connection	-	-

Every division now faces a distinct sustainability risk

2026

ONE LEAGUE. THREE EXPERIENCES.
OUT OF BALANCE.

WESA
WEST END SLO-PITCH ASSOCIATION

TIER 1

ROOKIE & NOVICE | SQ 1-5



High rookie share



Coaches stretched



Pitching gaps



Fewer experienced players

TIER 2

NOVICE & INTERMEDIATE | SQ 5-7



Most players and coaches end up here



More experienced players gravitate to the middle



Fewer rookies limit cross-experience



Lower demand for development coaching

TIER 3

ADVANCED | SQ 8+ (INCLUDES C PLAYERS)



Fewer new players enter



Can feel like a closed club



D-level players hesitant to make the move



Competitive culture can feel intimidating

**EXPERIENCE
CONCENTRATED
IN THE MIDDLE**



Coaching stretched



Pitching gaps



Uneven mentorship



Limited movement between divisions



Weaker community connection

Sustainable divisions need five things

PLAYERS

COACHES

KNOWLEDGE

DEVELOPMENT

CONNECTION

Concentrating rookies also concentrated the burden on a few volunteers

When new-to-softball Rookies were concentrated in one division, the established members who normally welcome them were elsewhere.

We removed more than softball knowledge—we removed

- relationships
- institutional memory
- and social bridges.

Skill level alone does not define the experience players want.

The player experience has two indicators.

OBJECTIVE

Individual skill level (WESA SQ)

SUBJECTIVE

Individual approach to the game

Let's review what that means to the WESA experience.

Is the player primarily seeking recreation—or a development pathway?

WESA's Sister leagues also experimented with preserving an entry level division for players with a lower skill level and found a 1–7 entry division fairer and more sustainable.

- iPride Softball did not go as far as WESA when it lowered the E Division maximum to SIX questions when WESA effectively used FIVE in T1
- Both WESA and our sister leagues experienced the same coaching, pitching, management, and rookie-mentorship pressures.
- After testing a lower cap, iPride Softball E division is returning to 1–7.
- **Their conclusion:** a 1–7 entry division is the best balance between **Fair** and **Sustainable**.

E division: 1-7

D division: 8-10

C division: 11+

72% of WESA members fit the standard E division

E division: 1-7

D division: 8-10

C division:
11+

212

(72%)

69

(23%)

15

(5%)

Source: 2026 season-ending WESA Skills Assessments

Build on what worked. Fix what didn't.

- **Restore a sustainable E division.**

Bring experienced E players, pitchers, coaches, and mentors back into the simple recreational experience.

- **Preserve Development.**

Create a deliberate pathway for E players who are open to progressing toward D-level skills and game knowledge.

- **Strengthen Advanced.**

Give D+ players a clearly defined higher-paced home.

Ratings define skill. Divisions define experience.

Step 1: Restore the objective softball language



Use familiar softball language to connect Skills Assessments with the experience each division is designed to provide.

Step 2:
**Place more
focus on the
player experience.**

RECREATIONAL

SQ 1–7

LEARN • PLAY • BELONG



A welcoming
experience
for all players



Build
fundamentals
and skills



Enjoy the
game and
community

DEVELOPMENT

SQ 6–7

PRACTICE • DEVELOP • PROGRESS



Build skills
and game
knowledge



More experienced
players and
coaches



A focused
development
experience

The solution combines both skill progression and choice of experience while balancing with sustainability.

E RECREATIONAL

- Home division for E rated players
- Seeks a recreational playing experience
- Enjoys learning without development toward D being the focus
- Values social connection and recreational competition
- Comfortable with a broad range of E-level teammates

E DEVELOPMENT

- Seeks faster, development-focused play
- Actively building D-level skills and game knowledge
- Is open to progressing to a D-level rating
- Achieved a minimum SQ of 6 and qualified for E Development consideration

Note: For safety considerations, players with Question 3 (high velocity hitting 20% threshold) are restricted from play in E Recreational and would be placed in E Development.

THE DESIGN CHALLENGE

WHY 10 RECREATIONAL TEAMS?
WESA typically welcomes 30–50 newcomers each season.

Recreational teams	30 newcomers	40 newcomers	50 newcomers
7 teams	4–5/team	5–6/team	7+/team
8 teams	3–4/team	5/team	6+/team
9 teams	3–4/team	4–5/team	5–6/team
10 teams	3/team	4/team	5/team

Target: 3–5 newcomers per team
With 20 teams total and five teams required for viable Development and Advanced divisions, 10 / 5 / 5 is the structure that meets all three objectives.

The proposed structure allocates 20 teams across three experiences

E RECREATIONAL

Recreation • Learning
Mentorship • Community

10 TEAMS

50% of the league



E DEVELOPMENT

Skill building • Game knowledge
Preparing for D-level play

5 TEAMS

25% of the league



D+ ADVANCED

Faster-Paced • Higher skill level
Inclusive and challenging

5 TEAMS

25% of the league



E Development is a pathway, not a second recreational choice.

- E Recreational is the home division for all E-rated players.
- E Development is a limited pathway for qualified SQ 6–7 players seeking a development-focused experience.
- Because E Development has limited teams, qualification does not guarantee placement when requests exceed available spaces.

Note: For safety considerations, players with Question 3 must play in E Development.

How would a player qualify for E Development?

SKILL

E-rated player with an SQ of 6 or 7.

PLAYER CHOICE

Identifies development as their preferred experience and is open to progressing to a D-level rating.

DEMONSTRATED PARTICIPATION

Has demonstrated engagement in their development through team game and practice attendance and participation in WESA Athletics development opportunities.

Meeting the qualifications makes a player eligible for E Development. Placement remains subject to available space.

Registration captures both rating and preferred experience

- 1 - Register as E, D, or C based on WESA SQ.
- 2 - E players choose E Recreational or request E Development consideration.
- 3 - WESA Athletics reviews eligible E Development requests against published criteria and recommends placements. The Commission makes final placement decisions within the available spaces.
- 4 - D players may request an eligible Player Inclusion Policy allowance; Commission approval is required.

E RECREATIONAL

Recreation • Learning
Mentorship • Community

10 TEAMS

50% of the league



E DEVELOPMENT

Skill building • Game knowledge
Preparing for D-level play

5 TEAMS

25% of the league



D+ ADVANCED

Faster-Paced • Higher skill level
Inclusive and challenging

5 TEAMS

25% of the league



Pre-draft balancing protects inclusion and competitive integrity

E DEVELOPMENT

Identify approved PIP players with SQ 8+ before the general draft.

Distribute them across teams as evenly as practicable.

Includes 50+, long-term/permanent disability, and Rookie Development allowances.

Safety Note: E Players with Question 3 (high velocity hitting 20% threshold) must play in E Development.

Goal: support inclusion while maintaining competitive balance.

D+ ADVANCED

Draft C-rated players before the general Advanced draft.

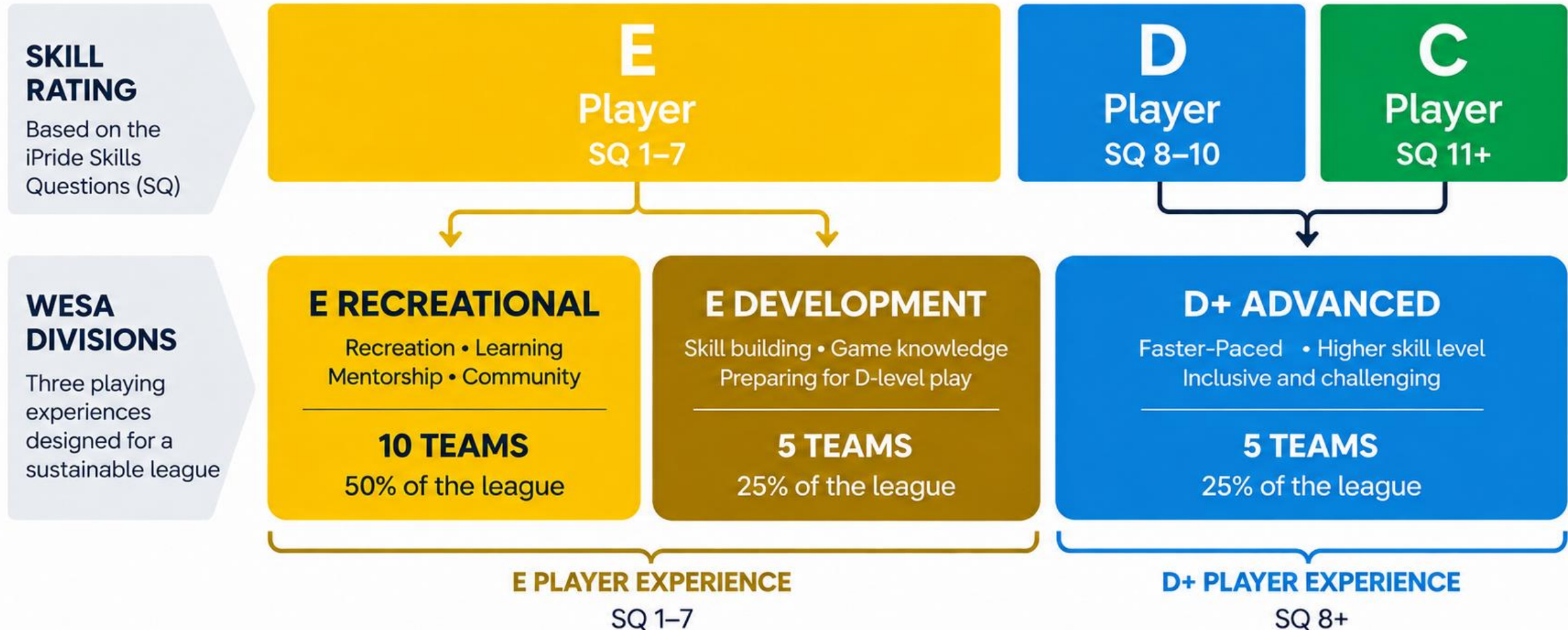
Distribute them across teams as evenly as practicable.

Complete the remaining draft with D-rated players.

Goal: balance top-end skill across teams.

Ratings define skill. Divisions define experience.

The proposed 2027 model uses established E, D, and C ratings to create three sustainable playing experiences.

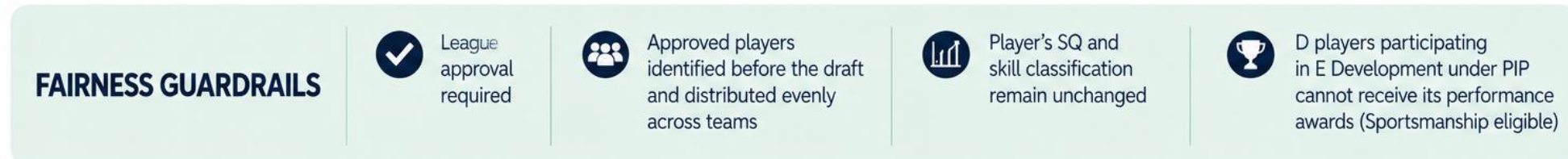
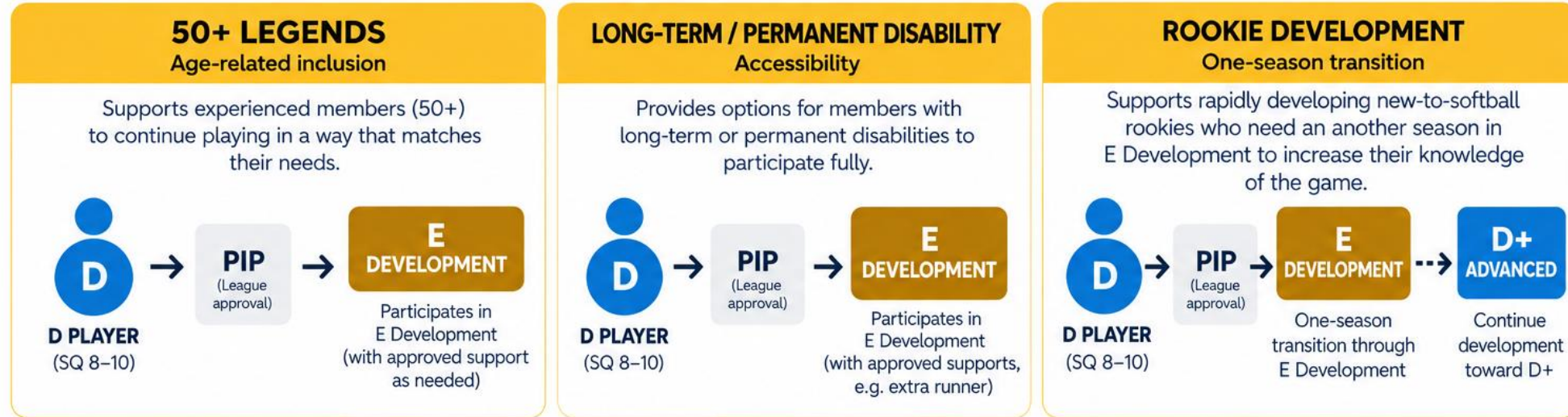


PIP supports inclusion without changing a player's SQ.

The Player Inclusion Policy (PIP) provides approved accommodations for certain members while keeping their SQ and skill classification the same.



THREE INCLUSION PATHWAYS



2027 | DIVISION REVIEW

ONE LEAGUE. THREE EXPERIENCES. A SUSTAINABLE LEAGUE.

WESA
WEST END SLO-PITCH ASSOCIATION

E RECREATIONAL

E PLAYERS | SQ 0-7

LEARN • PLAY • BELONG



A welcoming experience for all E-level players



Learn, play and build skills



Supportive coaching and team environment

E DEVELOPMENT

E PLAYERS | SQ 6-7

PRACTICE • DEVELOP • PROGRESS



Build skills and game knowledge



Develop with experienced players and coaches



Focused development and mentorship

D+ ADVANCED

D+ PLAYERS | SQ 8+ (INCLUDES C PLAYERS)

COMPETE • CHALLENGE • LEAD



A competitive, higher-paced experience for D+ players



Experienced players and coaches



Higher level of play and game consistency



BETTER BALANCE

More evenly matched teams across all divisions.



SUSTAINABLE COACHING

A more balanced coaching load and stronger support.



CLEARER PATHWAYS

More development and movement between divisions.



STRONGER COMMUNITY

A more welcoming, connected league experience.



A SUSTAINABLE LEAGUE

Healthy players, coaches, and divisions for years to come.

APPENDIX – Policy Updates

Designated Pitcher

Player Awards

Draft Procedures

The Designated Pitcher policy returns to pitcher development

PURPOSE

Help E Recreational teams develop new pitchers.

HOW IT WORKS

Any WESA member may pitch for an E Recreational team for all or part of its defensive play.

A team may use a Designated Pitcher (DP) for all or part of up to 10 regular-season games.

LIMITS

The DP does not bat, coach, base-coach, or otherwise influence play beyond delivering strikes and basic defensive play.

DPs may not be used in the WESA Cup.

Award eligibility will follow the division and rating rules

ELIGIBILITY RULES

- D-rated players playing in E Development under a PIP are ineligible for E Development performance awards.
- All players remain eligible for the E Development Sportsmanship Award.
- C-rated players in D+ Advanced are eligible for Advanced (C) MVP, not Advanced (D) performance awards.
- All players remain eligible for D+ Advanced Sportsmanship.

AWARD SET

E Recreational: MVP • Offence • Defense
• Rookie • Sportsmanship

E Development: MVP • Offence • Defense
• Rookie • Sportsmanship

D+ Advanced: D MVP • Offence • Defense • C MVP • Sportsmanship

The Player Draft updates

PURPOSE

Solidify fairness into the draft process concerning player skill groupings

HOW IT WORKS

All players participating in a category down from their WESA SQ placement on a PIP allowance are drafted first by teams followed by the rest of the members in that division.

ADVANCED

All C Players are drafted first in the D+ Advanced Draft followed by the rest of the members in that division.

Acknowledgements

This report was prepared by the League Commissioner, Seán HC and presented to the WESA Commission and membership as a proposal & discussion paper.

Many thanks to the contributions made by WESA members, coaches, managers, and volunteers for sharing their thoughts and experiences.