

Playing Up During the Spring Season

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Allowing players to “play up” a division higher than their natural league age has been widely discussed both among the NCYB board, as well as throughout PONY baseball. Only recently has PONY even allowed it, and then only at the discretion of each individual league.

On the one hand, there are legitimate concerns about player safety, physical ability, emotional readiness, and dilution of play impacting the entire league.

On the other hand, with the proliferation of year-round baseball there are certain players who are ready to play up a level, and some leagues want to encourage those players to continue to play recreational baseball and not default to year-round travel teams.

Most PONY leagues do not allow children to play up during the Spring Season. However, the NCYB board has adopted the following specific situations in which a child is allowed to play up.

Limitations:

Players attempting to play up a division are limited to a 1 year age gap to the next closest age group – no more. I.E. an 8U player may assess to play Mustang (9-10) as an age 9U player. A 7U player is not allowed to assess for Mustang.

A 10U player may assess to play Bronco (11-12) as an 11U player. A 9U player is not allowed to assess for Bronco.

A 12U player may assess to play Pony Division (13-14) as an 13U player. A 11U player is not allowed to assess for Pony Division.

Notification

Following the player assessments and the process outlined below, the player agent will contact the parent/guardian to notify them of the decision regarding whether the league will allow the child to play up.

For players wanting to play up to Mustang, Bronco, or Pony, the following process will apply:

To be considered to play up, parents must directly notify the Player Agent prior to player assessments – This should be noted in the notes section of the player’s on-line registration.

Players wanting to play up during the Spring Season must take part in player assessments for both their natural age-group division, as well as the division in which they desire to play up. This is because the decision will likely not be made on their status until after all player assessments are complete. For example, a league age 8 player must take part in both Mustang assessments as well as Pinto.

Exception: Applies to returning league players ONLY – NCYB would prefer that all players requesting to play up, would participate in both their league age and “playing up” age assessments. If a returning league age player is not approved to “play up” and is returned to their league age group and did not participate in their league age assessments, that player will be placed into their league age draft and ranked accordingly based on prior manager/coach input.

The evaluation team will consist of:

1. The NCYB President
2. The Vice President
3. The Player Agent
4. The Division Representative of the division player would like to play up (example: the Mustang representative evaluates a league-age 8 player hoping to play up)
5. The Division Representative of the division player would naturally play (example: the Pinto representative would also take part in the decision for that same player)

All known elements of the player will be taken into consideration, and includes but is not limited to knowledge of the player via:

- Player assessments
- Fall Ball
- Travel ball
- The last Spring Season
- Etc.

The player will be evaluated against the next league age up from their own. For example, a league age 8 player wanting to play Mustang will be evaluated against all league age 9 players. That player’s comparison to their league age 8 peers will not be considered, nor will they be compared to league age 10 players.

Four of the five league officials must agree that the player meets each of the three following requirements. In the event a family member is one of those five members, that official will not take part in the process and three of the remaining four must agree on all of the following:

1. The player is emotionally ready for the next level. This includes but is not limited to:
 - a. Able to handle the increased pressure and intensity that comes with play at the next level
 - b. Mature enough to be around older players day in and day out

- c. Will be coachable at the next level up (able to handle and process the direction and feedback coaches will provide)
- 2. The player has average, to above-average “baseball IQ” relative to the division they are attempting to play up to. This includes but is not limited to:
 - a. Understanding the rules of the game
 - b. Ability to learn signs
 - c. Has the capacity to quickly learn and apply situational play such as:
 - i. Lead-offs and steals
 - ii. Holding runners on and pick-offs
 - iii. Situational defense
- 3. **The player is considered to be among the top 8 players of the next higher age group (group they are assessing for)** in terms of overall physical play. Their total physical game will be considered, which includes but is not limited to:
 - a. Hitting for average
 - b. Hitting for power
 - c. Speed/baserunning
 - d. Throwing ability
 - e. Fielding ability

For players wanting to play up to Pinto the following process will apply:

Because of safety considerations at the Shetland level and ensuring truly beginning players are not overwhelmed by more advanced beginning players, NCYB has a somewhat more liberal approach to allowing players play up to Pinto (compared to older divisions).

To be considered to play up, parents must notify the Player Agent prior to player assessments -- see Events page on the NCYB website for details.

The parent/guardian must agree to be a manager or assistant coach of the team if the player is allowed to play up or have a designated adult to do so in their place, and attend all practices and games. This is to ensure the player receives individual instruction and does not take away from instruction of other players.

The evaluation team will consist of:

1. The NCYB President
2. Vice President

3. The Player Agent

4. The Pinto Division Representative

Three of the four league officials must agree that the player meets all of the requirements outlined below. In the event that a family member is one of those four officials, that official will not take part in the process and two of the remaining three must agree the player meets the criteria.

In the case of Pinto, the comparison point will be to all players in the Pinto division (both 7 and 8 year olds). The candidate player will be allowed to play up if he/she is considered higher than the bottom 33% for both emotional and physical readiness. For example, a league age 6 year old would need to be considered as good or better than one out of every three seven and eight year old Pinto players for the following criteria:

1. Emotional and mental readiness: This includes but is not limited to:

- a. Understanding of the basic rules of the game
- b. Ability to focus and pay attention
- c. Mature enough to be around older players day in and day out

2. Physical ability: This includes but is not limited to:

- a. Consistently catch thrown balls
- b. Able to throw the ball in a consistent manner
- c. Able to track and maneuver to fly balls
- d. Shows the ability to be able to hit off a pitching machine

For 4 year-olds wanting to play up to Shetland the following process will apply:

Shetland is a division of 5 and 6 year-olds. However, NCYB allows 4 year-olds to play ONLY if a parent agrees to be on the coaching staff of the team. That parent does not need to be the manager, but does need to be on the field at all practices and games.

The reason for this is to ensure if their 4 year-old is not ready to play, the parent will actively be involved so as to not distract the manager and other coaches from focusing on 5 and 6 year old players.

Impact on All-Stars

Per national PONY rules, any player that has played up a division during the regular season will not be allowed to play down during all-stars. For example, a league age 8 player who plays up to Mustang during the regular season will not be allowed to play down to Pinto for all-stars. This includes if that player is not selected to a Mustang all-star team.

It is important to note that being selected to play up at the beginning of the season in no way ensures the player will be selected to that all-star team at the end of the season. Therefore, even if allowed to play up, parents and players should carefully weigh all-star implications into the decision process.

NCYB does not allow all star players to play up within their division for all stars. I.e. in Mustang division, a 9U all star player is not allowed to be selected for the 10U all star team.

Exception: A “playing up” player already rostered on the underclass All Star team in the division will be allowed to be rostered on the upper class All Star team in the following season provided the player is selected for that team. **Example:** An 8U player qualified to “play up” in Mustang (9-10) and was selected for the 9U All Star team in that season. The following season, the player will be a 9U player and **eligible** (not guaranteed) to be selected for the 10U All Star team – because they were rostered on the previous 9U All Star team. The player is still eligible for selection to the 9U All Star team if not selected for the 10U All Star team. Parents may also opt to decline the invitation to the upper class team and choose to join the lower class 9U team – if selected.

Graduating to the next age group – for already “playing up” players:

Pinto moving to Mustang –

Players that have already “played up” in Pinto as a 6U player and have completed their second season as a 7U player and would like to move to Mustang (9-10) as an 8U player, will be required to assess and qualify for that age group/division per the stated above criteria.

Mustang moving to Bronco-

Players that have already “played up” in Mustang as an 8U player and have completed their second season as a 9U player and would like to move to Bronco (11-12), as a 10U player, will be required to assess and qualify for that age group/division per the stated above criteria.

Exception: “Playing up” Players that were rostered on the 9U & 10U All Star Team in the previous 2 seasons, may graduate to the next age group/division with their All Star Team peers or continue playing another season with their natural league age group.

Bronco moving to Pony-

Players that have already “played up” in Bronco as a 10U player and have completed their second season as a 11U player and would like to move to Pony (13-14), as a 12U player, will be required to assess and qualify for that age group/division per the stated above criteria.

Exception: “Playing up” Players that were rostered on the 11U & 12U All Star Team from the previous 2 seasons, may graduate to the next age group/division with their All Star Team peers or continue playing another season with their natural league age group.

For extenuating circumstances, a sub committee consisting of :

League president, VP, Player Agent & Division Reps, may review a special case to verify if these guidelines and rules are applied aptly to that circumstance and can rule accordingly as they see fit in the best interest of the player and NCYB.