

History and Rules of Softball

Softball is a variant of baseball played with a larger ball on a smaller field. It was invented in 1887 in Chicago as an indoor game. It was at various times called indoor baseball, mush ball, playground, soft-bund ball, kitten ball, and, because it was also played by women, ladies' baseball. The name *softball* was given to the game in 1926. The Amateur Softball Association of America (founded 1933) governs the game in the United States and sponsors annual sectional and World Series championships. The International Softball Federation regulates rules of play in more than 110 countries, including the United States and Canada. Women's fast-pitch softball became an Olympic sport in 1996, but it (and baseball) was dropped in 2005 from the 2012 games.

The earliest known softball game was played in Chicago, Illinois on Thanksgiving Day, 1887. It took place at the Farragut Boat Club to hear the outcome of the Yale and Harvard football game. When the score was announced and bets were settled, a Yale alumnus threw a boxing glove at a Harvard supporter. The other person grabbed a stick and swung at it. George Hancock called out "Play ball!" and the game began, with the boxing glove tightened into a ball, a broom handle serving as a bat. This first contest ended with a score of 41-40. The ball, being soft, was fielded barehanded. George Hancock is credited as the game's inventor for his development of ball and an undersized bat in the next week. The Farragut Club soon set rules for the game, which spread quickly to outsiders. Envisioned as a way for baseball players to maintain their skills during the winter, the sport was called "Indoor Baseball". Under the name of "Indoor-Outdoor", the game moved outside in the next year, and the first rules were published in 1889.

Game play

The playing field is divided into 'fair territory' and 'foul territory'. Fair territory is further divided into the 'infield', and the 'outfield', and the territory beyond the outfield fence. The field is defined by 'foul lines' that meet at a right angle at 'home plate'. The minimum length of the baselines varies classification of play (see below for official measurements). A fence running between the baselines defines the limits of the field; distance from home plate to the fence varies by field. A softball game can last anywhere from 3 to 9 *innings*, depending on the league, rules, and type of softball; however 7 innings is the most common. In each inning, each team bats until three batters have been put out.

Bat

The bat used by the batter can be made of wood, aluminum, or composite materials such as carbon fiber. Sizes may vary but they may be no more than 34 inches (86 cm) long, 2.25 inches (6 cm) in diameter, or 38 oz. (1.2 kilograms) in weight. The standard bat barrel diameter for both slow-pitch and fast-pitch softball is $2\frac{1}{4}$ inches. Many players prefer a smaller barrel, which reduces weight and allows higher swing speed.

Gloves

All defensive players wear fielding gloves, made of leather or similar material. Gloves have webbing between the thumb and forefinger, known as the "pocket."

Pitching

Play begins with the umpire saying "Play Ball". After the batter is ready and all fielders (except the catcher) are in fair territory, the pitcher stands at the pitching plate and attempts to throw the ball past the batter to the catcher behind home plate. A windmill motion is done by extending the throwing hand around the body and releasing the ball at about hip level at maximum speeds. Strength acquired in the

underhand windmill motion is based from the open to close hip motion. Without correct form and hip movement, pitches can be inaccurate and can lose strength and speed.

Positions

- Pitcher - is the individual who throws the ball from the middle of the diamond or the pitcher's mound. In baseball, the mound is elevated, but in softball the mound is not elevated.
- Catcher - is normally behind home plate in a squatted position (some plays may require the catcher to stand at an angle for intentional walks). At the plate the catcher is responsible for catching pitches, keeping mis-pitched balls in front of the plate, calling pitches that are normally done through hand signals, and they are considered the leaders of the field.
- First baseman - is the position to the right side of the diamond when facing the field. The major role of the first baseman is to receive throws from other defensive players in order to get a force play at first base.
- Second baseman - The second baseman plays in between the first baseman and the gap at second. If the ball is hit to the left side of the field, second covers second base. If the ball is hit on their side of the field, they back up the fielder, cover first, or field the ball depending on where it is hit. The second baseman also is the cut off on balls hit to the right side of the outfield. Shortstop - fields all balls hit to the infield between the second and third bases. This individual also helps cover second base, third base and is frequently involved in force plays, double plays and frequently throws the ball to the catcher to throw out runners at home plate.
- Third baseman - The third baseman covers all hits to the third base. The third base person also frequently throws the ball to the catcher trying to throw out the runner at home plate.
- Outfielders - The outfielders are players that cover the grassy area behind the infield. Traditional outfield positions include a left fielder, a center fielder, and a right fielder. These players usually back up the plays made by the infielders and make plays when the ball is hit past or over the infield.