

Softball - Overview

Softball is an outdoor game that demands robust physical strength and stamina in addition to good strategy. The ball used in this game is larger as compared to baseball but the game is played in a smaller ground. That's the reason it is often termed as **indoor baseball**. It is also known as **kitten ball**, **mush ball**, **softbund ball**, etc.



As a team, you can either do **pitching** or **batting**. If your turn is to bat then your objective is to hit the ball as soon as the pitcher pitches it. After hitting the ball, you have to run around the bases and return home safely without getting out. Similarly, if your team is pitching, then your aim is to get the other team out so that your team will get the chance to bat.

History of Softball

According to records, the first ever softball match was played in Chicago, Illinois. It was played on a thanksgiving day in the second last decade of nineteenth century i.e. around 1887. Thanksgiving day is celebrated across the USA and Canada. It is celebrated on fourth Thursday of November in the USA and second Monday of October in Canada. Its main purpose is to give thanks to the almighty for the blessings of the harvest and prosperity.

George Hancock is credited with inventing this sport and designing the ball and the bat. Softball is inspired from baseball. This sport was initially called as indoor baseball. But virtually the game was moved outside. As an exercise for the fire fighters, Lewis Robersrin organized outdoor softball games in Minneapolis and called the game kitten ball.

The name softball was given to this sport in the year 1926. It was coined by Walter Hankanson. In Chicago, normally, 16 inch circumference softball is used during matches. This 16 inch ball is called as mush ball. Fast pitch softball has gained popularity more than slow-pitch softball matches in the 40's.

Participating Countries

Softball was introduced in the Summer Olympics after a century of its invention. According to records, it was first played in 1887 and in 1996 it was introduced in Atlanta Olympics in the USA. America has tried to introduce softball in 1984 Olympics which was hosted by Los Angeles. But it was not possible at that time. After 1996, softball was played in 2000 Sydney and 2004 Athens Olympics. But in 2005 a committee was formed to drop this game in 2012 Olympics.

List of some of the dominating countries in the medal list of softball in the international sports are United States, Japan, Australia, China, and Netherland.

Softball - Equipment

A number of equipment is required for playing softball. A helmet, chest protector, and shin guards are the main equipment required for safety and to play softball, we require a ball, a bat, gloves, and uniforms.

Bat



The batsmen use bat to hit the ball and score runs for team. The bat is made up of wood, aluminium or from metals. The shape of the bat is like a cylinder and its diameter is 6 inches. The length of the bat varies but it cannot be greater than 86 cm.

The diameter of the barrel is 2¼ inches. Normally, players prefer smaller barrel bat because they can swing the bat easily. Bats having smaller barrel also reduces weight. The weight of the bat is 1.2 kilograms.

Ball



As the name of the sport is softball, a ball is the centre of the game. But despite its name, the ball which is used is not soft. Softball is derived from the famous American sport baseball which is mainly played by men. But softball is meant for women. As this sport is mainly dominated by women, the name of the game is softball.

Gloves



In American Softball Association, the size of the gloves cannot exceed 36 centimetres. In softball matches, all defensive players wear fielding gloves. But there are normally different size of gloves available for players at different positions on the field.

Uniform



To increase bond among a players in a team, uniforms are provided. Each team wears different uniforms. Uniforms include helmets, head bands, visors, caps, shoes, shocks, shirt and pant, tight sliding undershorts etc.

For female players, uniforms like headbands and caps are optional. These are mandatory for male players but those who wear a helmet are not required to wear headbands or caps.

Important Facts about Softball

We have listed here some important facts to note about softball –

- Amateur Softball Association of America has the authority to check the size of bats of the players. They also have the power to reject if they find it illegal. If they find any performance enhancers in the bat then it is an illegal bat. These bats can give an unfair advantage to the batting team.
- This sport is mainly of two types one is **fast pitch** and another one is **slow pitch**. In fast pitch game, the circumference of the ball is 12 inches and the mass of the ball is in between 178 gram and 194 gram. The circumference of the ball may increase or decrease by 0.125 inches.

In slow pitch game, the circumference of the ball is 11 inches and mass of the ball varies in between 166.5 gram to 173.6 gram. From 2004 onwards, high visibility yellow optic cover is being used for balls. For NAIA and NCAA softballs, yellow is the official colour.

- Yellow balls are becoming popular in this sport. The matches in softball are mainly played in yellow balls. White balls are also used in this sport but it is not as famous as yellow balls. White balls are mainly used in slow pitches rather than fast pitches.

- Softball is invented in Chicago so one of its variants is called Chicago ball. It is played with the ball whose circumference is 16 inches. The fielders normally do not wear gloves. Chicago ball is also known as mush ball, cabbage ball, and blooper ball.
- Between thumb and forefinger of the gloves, there is webbing which is known as **pocket**. The colouring on the gloves should be in such a way that no part is same as that of the ball.
- The pitchers are also not allowed to have any white colour on their gloves including seams as it may create problem for the batsmen in seeing the ball clearly.
- Among all the equipment, helmets and sliding shorts are very important for the players. Helmets provide security to the head and sliding shorts to the upper thigh. The sliding shorts are basically shin guards that extend usually from the ankle to the knee of the player and it covers the leg. It protects ankle, knee, shin, calf and thigh from getting hurt or bruised while sliding. In fact, wearing sliding shorts helps the players to slide on the ground easily.
- On the back of the uniform player's names are optional but Arabic numerals must be visible.

Softball - Playing Environment

Softball is a variant of baseball in which the ball is comparatively larger and the ground is smaller. This game is mostly played by female players. The game has three variants namely **fast-pitch softball, slow-pitch softball, and Chicago ball**.

The field of softball is smaller in size in comparison to baseball. The details of the field is as follows –

- The two parts of a softball field are **foul territory** and **fair territory**.
- This fair territory is divided into infield, outfield, and territory beyond outfield fence. The field that meets at a right angle at home plate is defined as **foul territory**.
- To indicate the limits of the field, a fence runs between the baselines.
- The backstop, which is behind home plate, must be between 25 and 30 feet.
- The home plate has bases at each corner and it is on one corner of a diamond.
- Other than home plate, the bases are 38 cm square of canvas and is not more than 13 cm thick.



- The numbering of the bases is in counter clockwise as first base, second base and third base. These bases are normally fastened to the ground.
- To prevent collision among the players, there is a contrast coloured **double base** or **safety base**. It is mainly intended to lessen collision between the first baseman and the runner.
- Softball has some similarities with baseball. The runner runs after hitting the ball to the foul portion of the double base and at the same time the fielding team tries to collect the ball and throw it to the regular first base accurately before the runner reaches the safety base.
- Women's softball usually have safety bases. But in case of men, softball diamonds don't have these safety bases.
- The infield consists of infielders and the diamond. The remaining space between the baselines and between the outfield fence and infield is called as the outfield.
- A pitching plate is positioned near the centre of the diamond. Normally, a circle of 16 feet diameter is known as the pitching circle in fast-pitch softball. This is drawn around the pitching plate.

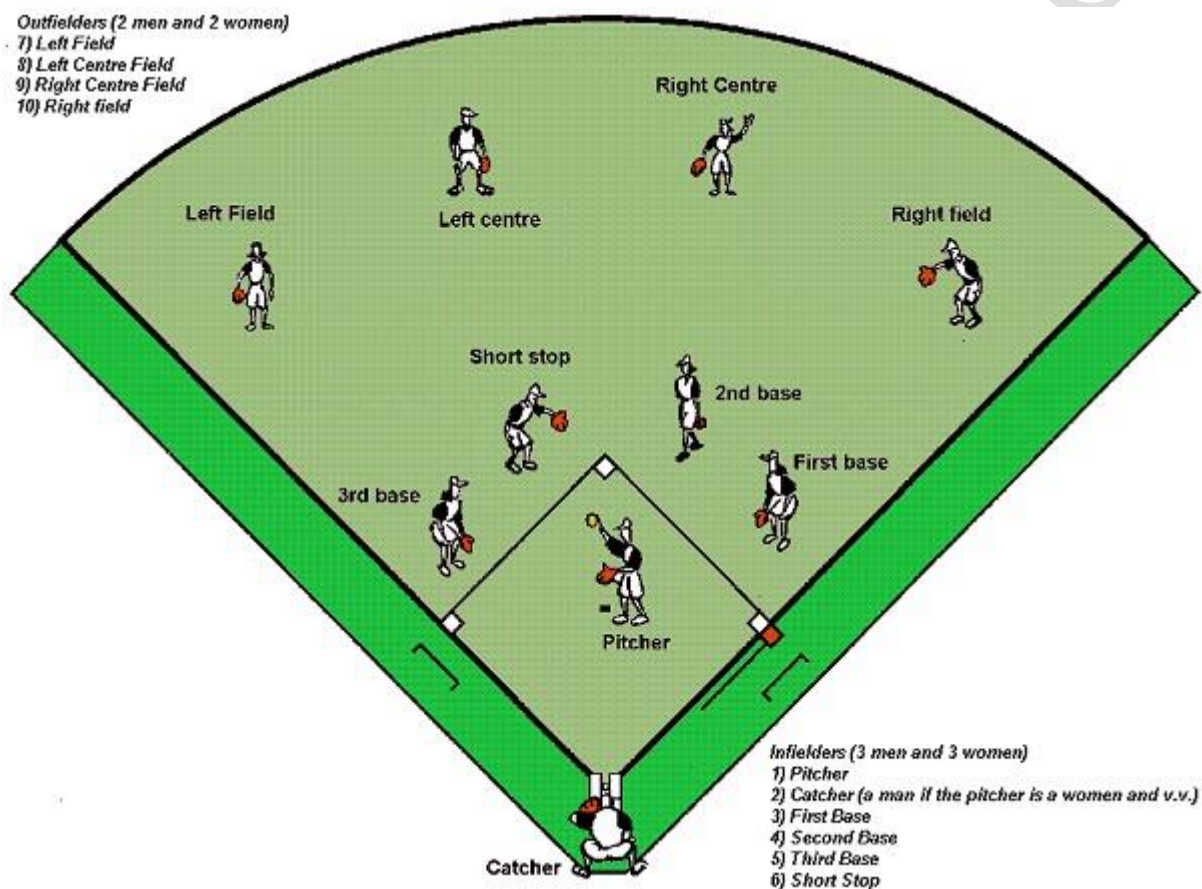
Softball - Basics

Softball was invented in Chicago in 1887. It is also called as **ladies' baseball**, **indoor baseball**, **mush ball**, **kitten ball** and **softbund ball**. Currently, World

Baseball Softball Confederation (WBSC) is the highest governing authority of softball. It was formed in 2013. It regulates the rules of softball in more than 100 countries including the United States of America.

Softball is derived from a famous American sport baseball. The basic difference between baseball and softball is that in softball, the size of the ball is bigger. Another major difference is that the field of softball is smaller.

Before WBSC, International Softball Federation was the highest governing authority. In America, Amateur Softball Association (ASA) is the highest authority which was formed in 1933. Softball was introduced in Atlanta Summer Olympics in 1996 but it was later dropped from Olympics.



Softball is of three types which include –

- **Slow Pitch** – In slow pitch softball, the circumference of the ball is 11 or 12 inches. This ball will arch on its path to the batsman. There are 10 players in a team.
- **Fast Pitch** – In fast pitch matches, the pitch is fast and there are nine players on the ground at a time. In fast-pitch matches bunting and stealing are permitted.
- **Chicago Ball** – In Chicago Ball, the size of the ball is 16 inch. Each team has five players.

In all the three types of softball, there are seven innings to be played.

Despite its name softball, the ball which is used is not soft. In fast pitch, the circumference of the ball is 12 inches and the mass is in between 178 gram and 194 gram.

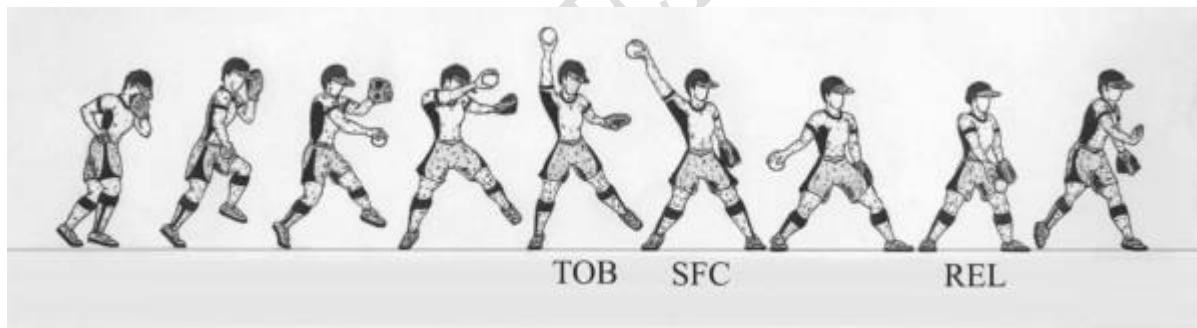
The circumference of the ball may increase or decrease by 0.125 inches. In slow pitch, the circumference of the ball is 11 inches and mass varies between 166.5 gram and 173.6 gram. The ball is pitched underhand in softball and it must be pitched from 13.1 m for women and from 14m for men.

How To Play Softball?

Starting the Game

There are so many techniques involved in softball to win a match. Batting and bowling in every form of this game has got tricks to win the match. The match starts when all hear **play ball** from the umpire. When all the fielders are in fair territory and the batsman is ready, the pitcher stands at the pitching plate to throw the ball.

The main aim of the pitcher should be to throw the ball in such a way that it must pass the batsman to the gloves of catcher who is standing behind the home plate. The throw and pitch is done with an underarm motion.



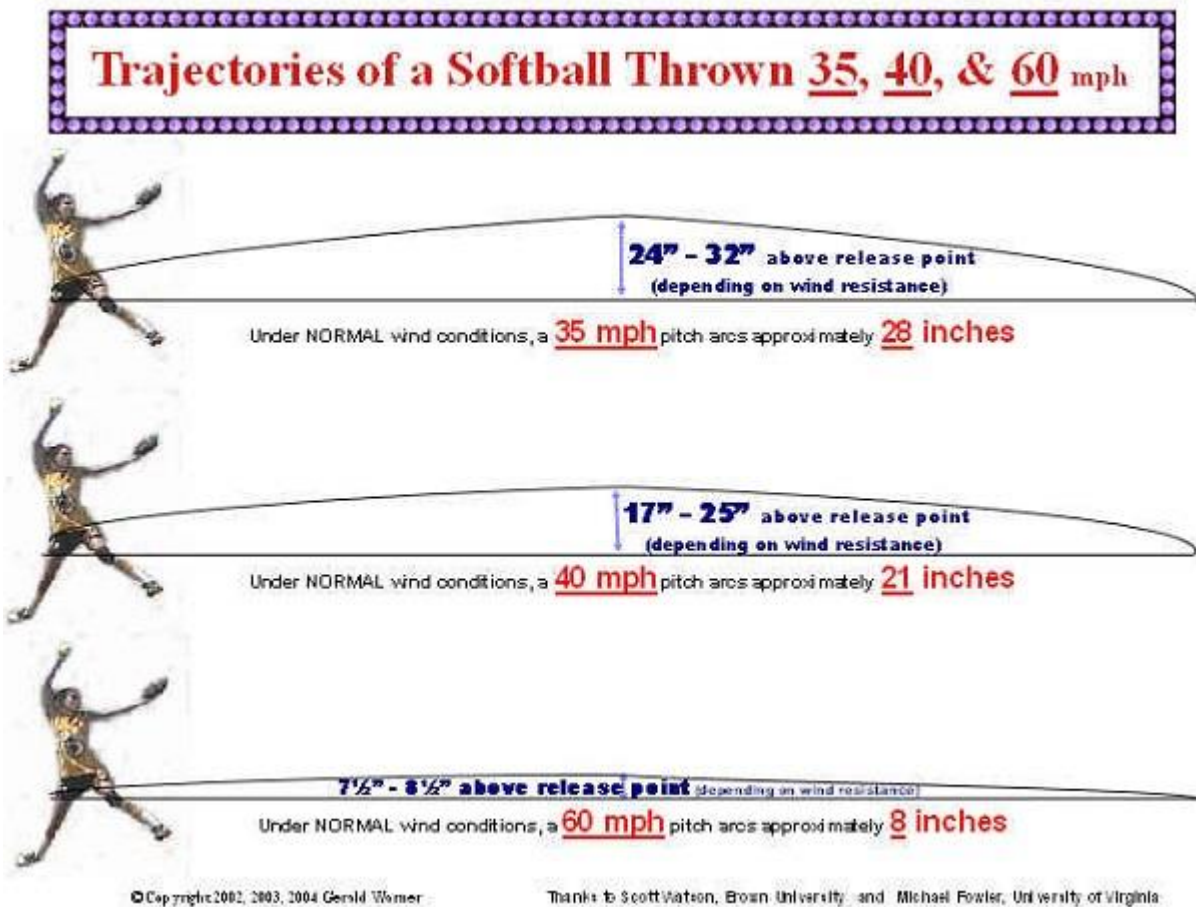
Pitching the Ball

In fast-pitch game, the pitcher throws the ball in a wind mill motion style. Windmill motion is that motion where the pitcher extends the throwing hand around the body and releases the ball at the hip level at maximum speed.

The pitcher normally tries to throw the ball so that it must pass through the strike zone of the batsman. But in some top level competitions, a highly skilled pitcher may throw the ball outside the strike zone if the batsman swings his/her bat.

If the batsman does not swing or if a pitch is not a strike then it is known as a **No Pitch**. A **count** in softball is the number of balls and strikes and here the number of balls is always stated first. A count of 3 and 2 is a full count. In top level matches,

pitchers try to throw the ball at great speed at the inner and outer corners of the plate.



While throwing the ball, the pitcher can vary the height of throwing the ball, so that it may further make it harder for the batsman to strike the ball. A pitcher must try to throw the ball with utmost power. In 1996 Olympics, a pitch has reached up to 118 kilometres per hour in women's matches. In men's matches highest recorded speed is 140 kmph.

The offensive team or the batting team sends one batsman at a time into the field for batting or hitting the ball and the order in which a player goes to bat is called the batting order. Once the batsman hits the ball into a fair territory, he/she must run with full speed. While running to first base, the batter is called a **batter-runner**. She becomes a **base runner** or **runner** when she safely reaches first base.

Fielding

The fielding side must try to get the batsman out and it can be done in three ways which are –

- Force out

- Tagged out
- Fly out

If a fielder, while holding the ball, touches a base which is the only base towards which the batter may run and she does it before the batter arrives there is called force out.

If a fielder touches a base while holding the ball before the batsman reaches it, it is called **force out**.



The time a batsman goes to a base that is already tagged is called as **tagged out**. When the ball hit by the batter is caught by a fielder it is called **fly out**. Like catch out in cricket, fly out is the common in softball.

The gloves of the catcher and the first baseman is called a **mitt** in which the pocket is larger than any other glove. There is much extra padding in the catcher's glove. The difference between a catcher's glove and first baseman's glove is that in the catcher's glove, there are no finger holes to put the fingers in but in first baseman's glove, there are holes to put the fingers in.

An outfielder's gloves are of medium size. It is smaller than the catcher's gloves. The size of a normal outfielder's gloves ranges from 12 to 13 inches. As the size of

the glove is large, this gives an extra advantage to the players to reach to a greater level to take the ball.

Among all the players, the infielders have the smallest glove. Its size ranges from 10 to 12 inches. The reason behind making the glove smaller for the infielder's is that they have to pick the ball in the field quickly and have to throw the ball in the desired direction. So if their gloves will be bigger in size then they may find it difficult to collect the ball quickly and send it to the required position.

Softball - Rules

The rules related to the game of softball are as follows –

- Before pitching the pitcher shall stand firmly on the ground and one or both feet should touch the pitcher plate.
- The pitcher is not allowed to stop or bounce the ball in pitching position as it may prevent the batsman from hitting the ball.
- The pitcher cannot use any kind of tape on the ball. To dry hands he can use powder resin under umpire's supervision.
- The pitch delivery shall be in an arc of six to ten feet.
- **No Pitch** is declared in the following cases
 - The ball is pitched during suspension of the game.
 - The runner leaves the base soon
 - The return pitch is made quickly
 - The ball slips from pitcher's hand
 - The pitching arc is less than six or more than ten feet
- The batting team has to bat in the order given in the scoresheet.
- The batsman is not allowed to prevent the catcher from catching the ball.
- A player is suspended for the current season if he or she is involved in a fight.
- If a player misbehaves with an umpire or pushes, he is ejected from the game.
- A full match consists of seven innings.
- A game is completed before seven innings in the following cases
 - A team is ahead by 20 runs in the third innings
 - A team is ahead by 15 runs in the fourth innings

- A team is ahead by 10 runs in the fifth innings
- If the home team is ahead and one of the above conditions is met
- The full duration of the game is 50 minutes.
- Each team has to provide a scorekeeper.
- Bats and balls are provided to the customers but they have to bring their gloves.
- The runners can leave the base after the batsman has hit the ball.
- Artificial noise makers are not allowed.

Safety Rules

- Among all the uniforms that players wear, helmets and sliding shorts are very important. Helmets provide security to the head and sliding shorts to the upper thigh. These sliding shorts are basically shin guards that extend usually from the ankle to the knee of the player and it covers all the way around the leg.
- It protects ankle, knee, shin, calf and thigh from getting hurt or bruised while sliding. In fact, after wearing sliding shorts, players can slide on the ground easily.
- Those players, who don't wear caps, have to wear a helmet. The ball used in softball is not as hard as a cricket ball but still it is mandatory to use helmet.
- As softball is an outdoor sport played under sun and also gives severe physical stress, players have to take sufficient rest before a match day.

Softball - Champions

World Baseball Softball Confederation (WBSC) is the highest governing body of Softball that is organized all over the world. Apart from this, all participating nations have their governing bodies too, that decides the rules for the game. Some of the important internationally recognized softball championships are as follows –

- Summer Olympics
- World Championship
- Asian Games
- World Indoor Championship
- Commonwealth games

Softball is played in many countries and there are many champions who have helped their team to win the match. The champions of the softball with their brief description is as follows –

Alex Hugo



Alex Hugo is a softball player who was raised in Olathe, Kansas. She showed her interest in softball at the age of three. In her childhood, she began to take part in local tournaments. In high school, Michael Allen coached her. He also took part in college-level tournaments. She then entered freshman season where she hit 341 runs which include 25 homers and 64 RBIs.

She has also won All Americans Owner two times. In her first two seasons in Georgia in 2014, she hit 367 runs which included 47 home runs 137 RBIs. In the senior team she could hit only 310 which included 310 with eight home runs.

Bianka Bell



Bianka Bell is a softball player who has started her career in 2013. In her Freshman season, she joined three teams which are All-South Region Second Team, All-SEC Second Team, and All-Louisiana First team. In 2010, she won SEC and Louisiana of the year award.

In this season, she has an average of 0.347 where she hit 25 home runs and 50 RBIs. In the Sophomore season also she performed well. In the starting of the season, she was the starter of 62 games and has the average of 0.666.

Cheridan Hawkins



Cheridan Hawkins is a left hand pitcher in USA national team. At the starting of her career, she was a member of All-Pacific Region First Team, All-Pac 12, and All-Pac-12 Freshman team. In this season she made 19 starts and appeared in 31 games. She was ranked five in NCAA and 18 in ERA.

After that she took part in many games of this season and sometimes ranked two and sometimes three. In 2014 Sophomore season, she appeared 50 times and was the starter in 36 games. Now she is a part of senior team but also played for junior national team in 2016.

Farish Beard



Farish Beard is a softball player and is a pitcher in her team. In her student life, she played softball for Fairhope High School in which she led her team in three tournaments. In 2011, her team got third position in Alabama State Tournament. In 2012 season, she appeared 13 times and was starter in nine of them.

In 2013, she made 28 appearances in which she was the starter for 24 times. She pitched the ball very well and allowed only 34 runs and 67 hits. In 2014, she was the winner of 2014 USA Softball Collegiate Player-of-the-Year award.

Katiyana Mauga



Katiyana Mauga is a softball player from USA who is a right-hand batsman. She is the winner of Freshman of the Year award in 2004. She was one of the ten finalists for NFCA Freshman of the Year. She has been ranked fourth in NCAA in the grand slam season.

She has also won USA Softball Player of the Week award as she struck down three batsmen giving only 46 runs and NFCA Player of the week award as she has struck four batsmen by giving just six runs. In 2015 season, she performed very well and struck many batsmen by giving less runs.