

SOFTBALL: SLOW AND FAST PITCH

Fifth Edition

Kneer / McCord



WCB

SPORTS AND FITNESS SERIES

SOFTBALL: SLOW AND FAST PITCH

Fifth Edition

Marian E. Kneer

**Professor Emeritus, University of Illinois
at Chicago**

Charles L. McCord

**Chairman, National Softball Hall of Fame
Committee**



Wm. C. Brown Publishers

Book Team

Editor *Chris Rogers*

Developmental Editor *Cindy Kuhrasch*

Production Coordinator *Peggy Selle*



Wm. C. Brown Publishers

President *G. Franklin Lewis*

Vice President, Publisher *George Wm. Bergquist*

Vice President, Publisher *Thomas E. Doran*

Vice President, Operations and Production *Beverly Kolz*

National Sales Manager *Virginia S. Moffat*

Advertising Manager *Ann M. Knepper*

Marketing Manager *Kathy Law Laube*

Production Editorial Manager *Colleen A. Yonda*

Production Editorial Manager *Julie A. Kennedy*

Publishing Services Manager *Karen J. Slaght*

Manager of Visuals and Design *Faye M. Schilling*

Consulting Editor

Physical Education

Aileene Lockhart

Texas Women's University

Sports and Fitness Series Evaluation Materials Editor

Jane A. Mott

Texas Women's University

Cover photo by *Bob Coyle*

Cover design by *Jeanne Marie Regan*

Copyright © 1966, 1976, 1980, 1987, 1991 by Wm. C. Brown Publishers. All rights reserved

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 89-81101

ISBN 0-697-10120-7

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

Printed in the United States of America by Wm. C. Brown Publishers,
2460 Kerper Boulevard, Dubuque, IA 52001

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Preface

Although softball is a well-established game, rules, equipment and strategies do slowly change over time. The fifth edition of *Softball Slow and Fast Pitch* reflects these changes. In addition the text has been refined and illustrations improved.

The purposes of this book are to assist all softball players of any age, beginners to advanced, to acquire knowledge and skills necessary for playing fast- or slow-pitch softball; to provide instructors, coaches and managers with substantive information about softball and suggestions for structuring meaningful and productive learning experiences; and to aid students of the game to learn how to umpire and keep score. Emphasis has been placed on skill analysis, error correction, values of softball and its place in our culture. Individual and group practice suggestions are included to foster improvement in performance.

Self-evaluation questions are distributed throughout the text. They afford the reader typical examples of the kinds of understanding and levels of skill that should be acquired as progress is made toward mastery of softball. The player should not only answer the printed questions but should pose additional ones as a self-check on learning. Since the order in which the content of the text is read and the teaching progression of the instructor are matters of individual choice, the evaluative materials are not positioned according to the presentation of given topics. In some instances the reader may find that he or she cannot respond fully and accurately to a question without more extensive reading or more playing experience. From time to time the reader should return to such troublesome questions until he or she is sure of the answers or has developed the skills called for, as the case may be.

Acknowledgments

I wish to thank the reviewers for this text: Robert Gwyn (North Carolina State University), Cheryl A. Kennedy (Slippery Rock University), M. Gene Lee (Metropolitan State College), Richard Raklovits (Western Michigan University), Beverly R. Sullivan (Pensacola Christian College), and Ron Peter (Windham, CT).

Contents

Preface vii

What Softball Is Like 1

1

Facts for Enthusiasts 7

2

Language and Lore of the
Game 13

3

Offensive Skills 21

4

Defensive Skills 41

5

Defensive Position Play 63

6

Patterns of Play 89

7

**Teaching, Coaching, and
Managing 101**

8

**Rules and Unwritten Laws of the
Game 107**

9

Playing the Game 117

10

**Umpiring and Scorekeeping
123**

11

Questions and Answers 133
Index 141

What Softball Is Like

1

You will be able to—

1. distinguish softball from baseball,
2. differentiate between fast-pitch and slow-pitch softball,
3. understand the general conduct of a softball game,
4. identify the playing areas of an official field,
5. identify equipment necessary for playing softball.

Softball is the largest participatory sport in the United States. Over thirty million Americans of all ages, size, ability and sex enjoy playing it informally at picnics, parks and recreation areas, and formally in a variety of leagues, conferences and tournaments at interscholastic, intercollegiate recreational, industrial and professional levels.

Softball is a variation of baseball that was originated by George Hancock of Chicago, Illinois, in 1887 to permit the popular game of baseball to be played indoors. He devised smaller playing dimensions to accommodate the larger and softer ball. The variation became so popular that the indoor game was brought outdoors and became known by a variety of names such as kittenball or mushball. Recreation agencies found the adaptation to be better suited and more appealing to all ages and both sexes than baseball, which required a heavier bat, smaller and harder ball, and a larger playing area. Softball, on the other hand, is played on a smaller diamond with a larger ball and a lighter bat. The pitcher pitches underhand instead of overhand. Base runners may not lead off base in some variations of the game, and a game consists of seven instead of nine innings. These changes provide a sport that is like baseball but can be played in a smaller area by men, women and children. It has become basically an amateur sport, whereas baseball includes professional as well as amateur play.¹

Softball is a game for everyone. Power is required to hit the ball, yet accuracy in placing the ball so that a fielder cannot reach it can make up for lack of power. The varied playing situations require quick, intelligent decisions. The game calls for individual and team effort. Basic skills are throwing, catching, running and hitting. The game demands strenuous effort and yet provides sufficient rest periods. The equipment is relatively inexpensive, and the rules are easily adapted to various playing situations. Softball is one of the safest sports for participants of any age.

1. *Softball, A Game for Everyone* (Oklahoma City: Amateur Softball Association of America, 1977), p. 2.

Informal softball is played extensively with rules modified by the participants to suit the situation at picnics, in parks, in backyards or on the streets. The thrill of catching a ball or striking a ball with a bat is sought by many. The game is most often played officially by leagues comprised of several teams. These leagues may be sponsored by schools, playgrounds, recreation departments, churches or industrial organizations. The highly skilled players perform on teams that are usually sponsored by a business or industrial organization. The teams often travel considerable distances to seek comparable competition. The Amateur Softball Association (ASA) is the main governing body for softball in the United States. They have drawn up rules governing play for teams that wish to affiliate and to compete in metropolitan, state, regional, national and international competition. Many organizations sponsor softball leagues and adopt special rules for their play only.

Playing Field

The softball playing field is the space within which the ball may be legally played and fielded. This space must be clear and unobstructed within the prescribed fence distances and sidelines, which are called *foul lines*. This space is divided into two major areas, the *infield* and the *outfield*. The infield is the area containing the diamond formed by the placement of the bases. There are three bases and a home plate in the infield or diamond. The home plate is the starting point for play. The foul lines extend from home plate through first and third base to the fences. The outfield is the area between the infield and the fences. The distances between home plate and fences and from home plate to the bases vary between slow- and fast-pitch softball, between age levels of play and even between the gender of the participants. In general, there are four types of softball: 11- and 12-inch slow- and fast-pitch softball and 14- and 16-inch slow-pitch softball. The playing field, pitching distances and rules vary for each type of play and for youth, co-ed, collegiate and adult play.

Fast Pitch

The game of fast-pitch softball requires nine players on a team and ten if a designated hitter is to be used. Each team assigns players to certain defensive positions. These are pitcher, catcher, first baseman, second baseman, third baseman, shortstop, left fielder, center fielder and right fielder. The designated hitter does not play a defensive position but rather is assigned to bat for one of the defensive players who does not then bat. The players are stationed on a playing field that has a clear and unobstructed area within a radius of 225 feet for adult males, 200 feet for adult females, and a minimum of 175 feet from home plate between the foul lines for girls and boys under 15 years old. The batter stands at home plate and tries to hit a ball that is delivered by the pitcher. If the batter succeeds,

APPROXIMATE AREAS
COVERED BY
EACH FIELDER

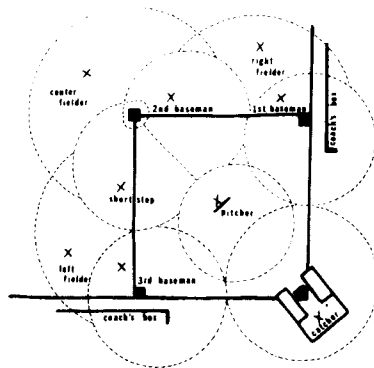


Figure 1.1
Diamond and defensive stations (fast pitch).

he or she tries to reach first base and eventually advance around the diamond until he or she returns to home plate. The players in the field try to prevent runners from scoring. Each time a runner crosses home plate, a run is scored. The team with the most runs after seven innings of play is the winner. Pitching dominates fast-pitch softball when it is played by highly skilled players.

The pitcher must deliver the ball underhand. The batter must decide whether or not to swing at the pitch. If the batter does not swing at it, the umpire judges whether the ball was delivered over the plate and between the batter's armpits and the top of his or her knees when the batter assumes a natural batting stance. This area is called the strike zone. If the pitch is in the strike zone, a strike is called. If it is not, a ball is called. If three strikes are called, the batter is declared out. If four balls are called, the batter is allowed to take first base. The batter attempts to hit the ball so that it will settle on fair ground in the infield or strike fair ground in the outfield. If the batted ball is hit outside of this area it is in foul territory and is called a foul ball. The first two are counted as strikes. When the ball is hit into fair territory, the batter and all other base runners try to reach as many bases as possible.

The defensive team members play positions within the boundary lines of the field and attempt to put batters and base runners out before they are able to complete the circuit of the bases.

Figure 1.1 illustrates the diamond and the defensive areas covered by each player. Outs occur when the batter strikes out, when a fly ball is caught, when the base is touched with the ball before the runner reaches it when forced to run because of a succeeding runner and when a runner is touched with the ball before reaching a base. Three outs retire the batting team. The fielding team is then given a chance to bat and to score runs. When each team has had a turn at bat, an inning has been completed.

Slow Pitch

Slow-pitch softball has in recent years shown tremendous growth. The major difference from fast-pitch softball is evident in the name itself. The pitcher is restricted to delivering the ball at a moderate speed with a perceptible arc from the time it leaves his or her hand until it reaches approximately 3 feet in front of home plate. Base runners may not steal bases, and a team consists of ten or eleven players. The extra players are called short fielder and extra hitter. The short fielder may play anywhere on the field. Extra hitters may not play on defense and may not be used in co-ed slow-pitch game. Bunting is illegal. Slow-pitch softball attracts more participants than fast-pitch softball because it is less physically demanding in terms of hitting, throwing and baserunning.

Slow-pitch was designed to permit more offensive action by making batting easier. However, the tenth player, the short fielder, is usually placed in the outfield to make place hitting more difficult. Although fast-pitch softball may make batting more difficult, a faster pitched ball goes farther when hit, and bunting a pitched ball and stealing bases are allowed, which increases offensive action. The two types of play result in differences in strategy, challenge and player interests. The major throwing, batting, catching and fielding techniques are used in both slow-pitch and fast-pitch softball.

Equipment

The minimum equipment necessary to play softball officially is a ball and a bat. However, players usually wear gloves or mitts depending upon their position. Fast-pitch adult catchers must wear a mask with a throat protector, and Junior Olympic catchers must wear a mask, throat protector, helmet, shinguards and body protector. However, in slow-pitch softball the only protection required of catchers is an approved batting helmet for players in Junior Olympic competition. Body protectors and shinguards are recommended for all catchers in fast-pitch play. All adult fast pitch and Junior Olympic fast- and slow-pitch offensive players must wear approved batting helmets.

What is the minimum equipment needed to play fast- or slow-pitch softball?

Shoes that provide traction with metal or rubber spikes attached to the sole and heel of the shoes are considered essential. However, no metal, hard plastic or polyurethane spikes are allowed in youth and co-ed play. Uniforms are optional but are often worn by teams in leagues and in highly skilled competition. More information about equipment is provided in Chapter Two.

The game of fast-pitch or slow-pitch softball provides enjoyment and challenge for persons of both sexes, all ages and varied skill levels. A great deal of force and control is necessary to hit or throw the ball within the limits of the

playing space. Players must learn to absorb that force in order to catch or stop the ball. Timing and flow are integral aspects of the game. Timing is needed for executing plays or swinging at the pitched ball. Flow of movement is essential for combining a series of skills for a single execution, such as pitching or executing a double play.

How do slow- and fast-pitch softball compare in the following: number of players; amount of action in the game; delivery of pitches; baserunning; and hunting regulations?

References

- Houseworth, Steven D. and Rivkin, Francine. *Coaching Softball Effectively*. Champaign, Illinois: Human Kinetic Press, 1985.
- Meyer, Robert G. *The Complete Book of Softball*. New York, New York: Leisure Press, 1984, Chapter 1.
- National Association for Girls' and Women's Sports. *Softball Guide*. Reston, Virginia.: American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance (published biannually).
- Official Guide and Rule Book*. Oklahoma City, Oklahoma: Amateur Softball Association (published yearly).
- Official's Manual: Softball*. Rittler, Kathy. West Point, New York: Leisure Press, 1982, Chapter 3.
- Softball, A Game for Everyone*. Oklahoma City, Oklahoma: Amateur Softball Association, 1977.

Enthusiasts need to know the kind of equipment to purchase and how to care for it. In addition, information about the possibilities of participation in tournaments will enhance a player's appreciation of the game. You will be able to—

1. select and care for equipment, and
2. appreciate the wide acceptance of softball.

Selection and Care of Equipment

The minimum equipment necessary to play softball officially is a ball and a bat. Bases may be makeshift, and official dimensions modified.

Bats

The rules permit a variety of materials to be used in manufacturing official bats: wood, laminated wood, plastic, bamboo and metal. In addition, there are several unofficial plastic bats that are hollow, lightweight and do not present a hazard to students or to gym floors. A wide selection of bats with differing size grips and barrels should be available. The bat is made of one piece of hardwood or formed from woods bonded together with plastic, bamboo or metal. The surface must be smooth and free of burrs, rivets or other hazards. It is not more than 34 inches long or more than $2\frac{1}{8}$ inches in diameter at its largest part and has a safety grip of cork, tape or composition material. A safety knob of a minimum of $\frac{1}{4}$ inch protruding at a 90-degree angle from the handle must be included on all bats.

Choose a bat that feels balanced and seems to be the proper weight for you to swing with power and whip. A heavy, tapered bat is often used by power hitters. The "bottleneck" bat is used for sharp hits out of the infield or for bunting. Bats made from ash woods tend to be lighter than hickory bats. The aluminum bat is now the most preferred bat because of its durability and low cost. It is often used by players because off-center contacts seem to maintain more power. On the other hand, many players still prefer the wooden bat because they believe they can "whip" it better and it sounds more solid upon contact with the ball.

Balls

Softballs vary in size according to type of play. The 12-inch ball is used in fast- and slow-pitch softball and must be a minimum of $11\frac{7}{8}$ inches and a maximum of $12\frac{1}{8}$ inches in circumference and be a minimum of $6\frac{1}{4}$ ounces and a maximum of 7 ounces in weight. Fast-pitch play uses a ball with white stitches and slow-pitch, red stitches. Sixteen-inch slow-pitch play uses a 16-inch ball circumference, which may range from $15\frac{3}{4}$ to $16\frac{1}{4}$ inches and be 9 to 10 ounces in weight. An 11-inch ball is used in women's slow-pitch, co-ed slow-pitch (for women batters only), and all girls' Junior Olympic slow-pitch play. The core of the ball is made of long fiber kapok, a mixture of cork and rubber, a polyurethane mixture, or other materials approved by the ASA. It may be hand- or machine-wound, with fine quality twisted yards, and covered with latex or rubber cement. The cover is made from either horsehide, cowhide, synthetic material or other material approved by the ASA.

Softballs are closely controlled by the rules as to weight, diameter, contents, cover and stitching. Be certain when buying softballs that they are marked "Official Softball." The brand name of the balls you purchase depends upon personal choice. Most players like to play with a ball that "feels" light; however, these balls often are not durable.

Fleece balls and plastic balls are recommended for primary-age children, but in junior high school, regular fast-pitch softballs should be used. If the ball seems too hard, a rubber-covered, soft softball may be more desirable. Teams should use regulation softballs. Tests are made each year by the Amateur Softball Association Equipment Standards Committee to determine conformity to the rules.

Batting Helmets

All adult fast-pitch and Junior Olympic fast- and slow-pitch offensive players must properly wear approved batting helmets. Helmets on a team are to be of similar color with double earflaps. The helmets must have safety features equal to or greater than those provided by the full plastic cap with padding on the inside.

Gloves and Mitts

There are many styles of gloves and mitts. Mitts do not have fingers. Individual differences in hand size and comfort of the glove will determine the style you purchase. Only the catcher and the first baseman may wear mitts, and the rules spell out the specific regulations concerning their pattern. The webbing of the glove may not be more than 5 inches. The pitcher's glove must be of one color and not white or gray. Multicolor gloves are unacceptable.

Most players prefer a baseball glove with a large pocket to gloves specially constructed for softball use. Baseball catchers' mitts do not work well for catchers' mitts. Usually, first basemen's mitts are used by catchers. Padding is not too

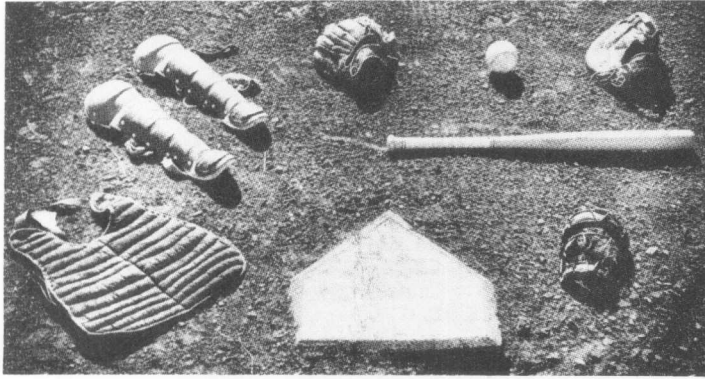


Figure 2.1
Softball equipment.

important in softball gloves or mitts, but the softness of the leather is important. Horse-, cow-, or elkhide are excellent leather coverings. The palms should be oiled or greased. At the end of the season, mitts and gloves should be oiled and stored with a ball or a wad of paper wrapped in the pocket.

Why is the aluminum bat often preferred over the wood bat?

Masks and Protectors

The rules for fast and slow pitch vary concerning the use of masks and protectors. In fast-ball play masks with a throat protector must be worn by all catchers, and youth catchers must also wear a protective helmet, body protector and shin-guards. These protective devices are recommended for slow pitch but not required. Softball masks are made much lighter than baseball masks. They can be purchased with sponge rubber padding or with hair padding covered with leather. Both are excellent, and the selection is a matter of individual preference. Body protectors should be made especially for softball and be only waist long. Light-colored duck filled with kapok is the material commonly used for protectors.

Shoes

Shoes must be worn by all players. A shoe shall be considered official if it is made with either canvas, leather or other similar material. The soles may be smooth or have soft or hard rubber cleats. Adult players in non-co-ed play prefer to wear spiked shoes for better traction on the playing ground. Metal sole and heel cleats must be less than $\frac{3}{4}$ inches. Rounded metal spikes are illegal. No metal, hard plastic or polyurethane spikes are permitted for youth or co-ed play.

Bases, Home Plate, Pitcher's Plate

The regulation home plate is five-sided and made of rubber. The pitcher's plate is constructed of wood or rubber; it is 24 inches long and 6 inches wide. The distance of the pitching plate varies from 46 feet to 35 feet from home plate. Consult the rule book for your type of play. Bases covered with canvas or other suitable material are 15 inches square. They are placed 60 feet apart and are fastened in place.

In official games, home and pitcher's plates are rubber, and the bases are made with a canvas cover. Official play requires that all bases and plates be secured to the ground.

Specific regulations determine whether or not a softball is "official." When is a red-stitched ball used? a ball with a 12-inch circumference? a ball with an 11-inch circumference?

The Game Today

For almost one hundred years softball has been a prime recreational and competitive sport in the United States. Today, it has a home in over fifty countries in the world. Over thirty million adults and youngsters in the United States and over twelve million in other parts of the world play softball. Each summer thousands of tournaments are held sponsored by schools, churches, armed forces, fraternal clubs, recreation agencies, industries, the Amateur Softball Association (ASA), the United States Slow-Pitch Softball Association (USSPSA) and interscholastic and intercollegiate associations. Competition on the international level is growing. Women led the way with the first tournament in Australia in 1965, and men soon followed in 1967 in Mexico. These games are played every four years. It is expected that softball will soon be included as an Olympic sport. Softball is an official sport of the Pan-American Games. Don Porter, executive director of the Amateur Softball Association, states: "There is hardly a man or woman in the United States who didn't at one time play softball."¹ Playing field facilities are insufficient to fill the demand for playing softball, especially slow-pitch softball. Rules are printed in fifteen different languages.

1. Don E. Porter, "Softball—Past, Present and Future," *Journal of Health, Physical Education Recreation* 42 (May 1971):36-37.

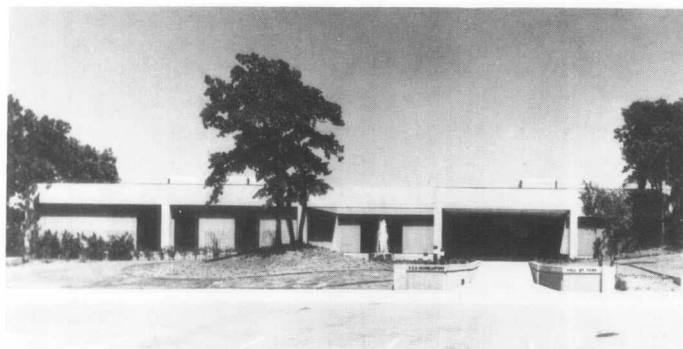


Figure 2.2
Softball Hall of Fame.

The Amateur Softball Association (ASA) is organized to promote softball and to provide clinics and information designed to improve play as well as to organize tournaments on a local, district, state, regional, national and world basis. More than 220,000 teams are involved in ASA adult programs for both fast-pitch and slow-pitch softball. Each year more than a thousand invitational and championship tournaments are conducted at all levels of skill and for both sexes. The ASA Youth Program involves over seven hundred thousand children.

In 1957 the Amateur Softball Association developed a Softball Hall of Fame. Selections are made on the basis of documented evidence of outstanding performance and contributions to the game on a national level. The headquarters for the Amateur Softball Association and the Softball Hall of Fame are located in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. In addition to the above services the ASA provides the following:

- Aids and clinics for umpires, coaches and players
- Assistance in local league organization and play
- Publications (rules, guides, monthly newspaper and national magazine)
- Free literature and instructional films

The International Softball Congress (ISC) is another fast-pitch-only organization. It sponsors tournaments with winners advancing to a world playoff and publishes an annual yearbook. The International Softball Federation (ISF) is composed of a group of national softball organizations that coordinate softball development and international competition. ISF encourages growth of softball on a worldwide basis.

The National Association for Girls and Women's Sports (NAGWS) and the National Association for Sport and Physical Education of the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance promote softball in educational institutions. The NAGWS sponsors a Softball Committee that biannually publishes a Softball Guide with instructional articles, officiating information, rules and media resources. Softball is usually included in the physical education curriculum from elementary school through college.