

The background of the cover features a series of vertical stripes in shades of orange and yellow. Overlaid on these stripes are several large, semi-transparent circles in various shades of orange and yellow, creating a layered, geometric effect.

TEACHING SOFTBALL

**N. Sue Whiddon
Linda T. Hall**

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Linda T. Hall**

University of Florida

Illustrated by Andrea Goldberg
University of Florida

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1

Introduction

Teaching Softball provides a comprehensive approach to teaching the skills and strategies of slow and fast-pitch softball. It is designed to serve primarily as a reference for physical education students preparing to teach and/or coach, softball teachers and clinicians, recreational leaders directing softball activities, and coaches in organized competitive softball programs.

Many teachers and coaches lack adequate training and sufficient sources of information to assist their players in attaining maximal skill and enjoyment. Other instructors tend to perpetuate the theories and techniques which they have personally experienced in classes or competition. Frequently, novice teachers seek methodological assistance in conducting well-organized classes and alleviating attitudinal and safety problems. Similarly, experienced educators and coaches are constantly searching for new ideas and motivational devices. Recognizing the need for relevant organizational and instructional information, the authors formulated this guidebook to facilitate optimal player participation, skill, and enjoyment.

The text is organized into nine sections. Chapter 1 introduces the reader to the content and design of the text.

Material to assist the teacher and coach in planning softball facilities and selecting equipment, as well as suggestions for making and caring for equipment, are discussed in Chapter 2.

Included in Chapter 3 are numerous conditioning exercises and activities designed to promote strength, flexibility, endurance, speed, and power. Each exercise is classified according to the components of fitness it promotes and its suitability for class or competitive purposes.

Techniques of class organization that facilitate instruction are presented in Chapter 4. A sample circuit practice is furnished to illustrate efficient class management.

Chapter 5 presents the program, objectives, class projects, and techniques for teaching basic offensive and defensive skills and strategies to beginning-level players. Many of the suggested drills were tested in pilot programs and were found helpful in developing skills and creating more effective class sessions. Obviously time will not permit usage of all of the described drills within a particular unit of instruction. Instead, the instructor must choose the most appropriate activities from the variety offered.

Objectives, performance descriptions of skills, teaching tips, and projects appropriate for advanced level players are offered in Chapter 6. The drills and activities in this chapter require prerequisite skills due to their complexity.

Lead-up activities and variations of the official game which, because of their adaptability, have proven to be popular in school and recreational settings, are presented in Chapter 7.

Procedures for evaluating player knowledge and skill are given in Chapter 8. Designed to assist the teacher in objective class assessment, the chapter presents appropriate skill tests and suggests content for written evaluations for both levels of player experience.

The administrative and organizational responsibilities of a competent coach are described in Chapter 9. Suggestions are included for pre-season and during-season game procedures and motivational techniques. Also presented are a sample practice schedule and pre-game warm ups which may have psychological as well as physiological value for the players and the team.

Performance objectives for each experience level appear in the appropriate chapters. Throughout the text, drill diagrams are provided, when necessary, to clarify player movement and group organization. The symbols used in the diagrams are explained in the legend that appears below. There is a glossary of terms at the end of the book. The rule guides mentioned in the Annotated Bibliography would be useful supplements to *Teaching Softball*.

Diagram Symbols

.....➔	Direction of fly ball
-----➔	Direction of thrown ball
————➔	Path of runner
~~~~~➔	Direction of ground ball
X	Players
B-U	Back-up
F	Fielder
B	Batter
C	Catcher
R	Runner
I	Infielder
RL	Relay player



# 2

## *Facilities and Equipment*

Physical educators and athletic coaches recognize the importance of desirable facilities and equipment in conducting safe and effective programs. Whether designing new facilities or modifying existing fields, teaching and coaching personnel should collaborate with architects and facility administrators. Likewise, teachers and coaches should have knowledge of the proper selection of equipment. Frequently, considerations such as cost, playing regulations, safety, and durability will dictate the type of equipment for a particular situation.

### **FACILITIES**

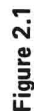
Figure 2.1 illustrates the official dimensions and layout of a softball field. A softball diamond needs a smooth playing surface, a level outfield, and proper drainage. If space is available (a minimum of 4.65 acres), four softball fields are ideal for a school/recreational complex. Two fields, providing adequate space and facilitating supervision for a large physical education class, require a layout area of 2.32 acres. Fences are desirable, but not mandatory for school use.

Soil content should be tested prior to field construction. Large amounts of clay (over 15 percent) prevent proper drainage. A suggested mixture for playing fields is 75 percent soil, 15 percent silt, and 10 percent clay.¹ Fields should drain toward the foul lines with a 1 percent slope. The best grasses for general purpose fields are bluegrass and bermuda grass.

Ideal maintenance includes annual fertilizing of the grass, frequent repair of damaged areas on the field, installing built-in watering systems, and keeping turf about one and one-half to two inches high. Raking the soil smooths and levels the infield area and helps eliminate the hazards of the “bad bounce.” This process generally requires expensive machinery. For proper maintenance, raking must be done regularly and also before each competitive event. Synthetic surfaces reduce maintenance and provide an attractive playing area. However, the synthetics have definite disadvantages. The hard, rug-like surface absorbs heat and causes sliding burns, sore legs, and difficulty in handling hard ground balls. It requires special shoes for play. Furthermore, the initial cost of laying the surface is a major inhibitor for most programs.

¹ Kenneth Penman, *Planning Physical Education and Athletic Facilities in Schools* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1977), p. 156.

## Prepared by International Joint Rules Committee on Softball



Lines may be applied to the fields with paint or chalk. Plastic paint is durable and requires less effort to maintain. On the other hand chalk is cheaper, but requires relining, especially during frequent use of the playing field and after rainy weather. Also, it is desirable to freshly line fields before each official game.

Portable backstops and benches are frequently used to convert multipurpose fields into softball fields. Auxiliary facilities include scoreboards, batting cages, drinking fountains, bleachers, and lighting. Storage and maintenance provisions are desirable for competitive play, but not necessary for class use.

## EQUIPMENT

In teaching situations, equipment of good quality should be purchased (Fig. 2.2). Considerations for purchasing equipment include accommodating right- and left-handed players, and providing equipment appropriate for the size of the participants. In coaching situations, players can have more choice in the selection of bats and gloves.

Purchasing the proper amount of equipment is important to any program and is frequently a problem for inexperienced teachers. A rule of thumb suggests that approximately one-fourth of the gloves and mitts ordered should be left-handed. The following ratio of items to the number of participants is recommended by the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance² for class purposes:

Balls $\frac{1}{4}$	Mitts (first baseman's) $\frac{1}{10}$
Bases (set) $\frac{1}{20}$	Mitts (catcher's) $\frac{1}{10}$
Bats $\frac{1}{3}$	Protector $\frac{1}{20}$
Gloves $\frac{7}{20}$	Batting tees $\frac{1}{10}$
Mask $\frac{1}{20}$	

The official softball is a 12-inch ball weighing between six and one-fourth and seven ounces. It is composed of a kapok or cork core, wound with cotton, dipped in rubber cement and coated with horsehide. The exterior of the ball is smoothly seamed. When purchasing official balls, the buyer should be sure that all specifications are met. The Amateur Softball Association endorses certain manufacturers' brands, which conform to the association's high standards, and allows the ASA trademark to appear on the ball covers. Differences between brands are generally in size, seam construction, smoothness, and weights; all fall within the standards. Frequently official softballs with slight flaws in the leather are marked "seconds" by manufacturers and may be purchased at sizable discounts.

Generally, the regulation 12-inch ball is preferred for intermediate and advanced-players. However, official softballs may not be necessary or desirable for all class purposes. Elementary students may use the fleece balls or rubber playground balls. Twelve or 14-inch "super-soft" or restricted-flight balls are appropriate for teaching skills to young and inexperienced players. The softness decreases player fear in fielding batted balls, and permits balls to be caught easily with or without gloves.

The 16-inch ball is popular in secondary and college-level co-recreational leagues and co-education classes. Primarily used to offset differences in skill, the larger ball also allows advanced players to participate in limited space. One problem with using the larger balls, however, is that inexperienced players have difficulty throwing with sufficient power.

² American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, and Recreation, *Equipment and Supplies for Athletics, Physical Education and Recreation* (Washington, D.C.: AAHPER, 1960), p. 23.



**Figure 2.2**  
**Proper equipment is important.**

Rubber-covered balls are suggested for damp playing surfaces, thus eliminating the possibility of water-saturated balls. Although quite durable, these balls are harder than those covered with leather.

Ideally, each player should have a properly fitting glove of good quality. The glove is an important teaching and learning aid, as it protects the hand and reduces the player's fear of injury. The school or recreation department should attempt to provide gloves for all players whenever feasible. If the department cannot afford to purchase gloves, players should be encouraged to bring their own. Whenever personal items are used in class, certain precautions should be taken to protect the equipment from loss or theft. Students should print their names with indelible ink inside their gloves. Personal equipment should be stored in personal lockers or checked in and out of the equipment room. Teachers may approach recreational teams, individuals, or business people in the community to obtain new or discarded gloves suitable for class use. Fund-raising projects may provide another means of obtaining equipment.

The official rules distinguish between glove and mitt construction. Mitts, gloves without separate fingers, are permitted for the catcher and first baseman only. The first baseman's mitt is more flexible and less padded than the catcher's mitt. For slow-pitch softball, catchers may use a regular glove. Before purchasing any gloves, several styles should be tested for pocket suitability and leather pliability.

In the interest of safety, the catcher should be required to wear a face mask and body protector during class play. Although not required by all official softball rules, this equipment is also recommended for recreational play and athletic competition. Certainly the wearing of a catcher's mask should be a minimal requirement for any player behind the plate.

In order to accommodate individual needs and preferences, a variety of bats should be available. Selections should include different weights and grip sizes. Bats may not exceed 34 inches in length and must have a safety grip. Most wooden bats are composed of northern white ash, while most metal bats are aluminum. Generally speaking, one bat for every five players will suffice for instructional purposes. Competitive teams may desire at least 20 bats to allow for breakage and to offer players a choice of weight and grip sizes. Players may also have preferences regarding the shape and style of the bat. Some bats are bottle shaped with the weight distribution close to the center; others are thin and tapered with the weight closer to the end. Shorter bats, with more mass in the hitting portion, are recommended for beginners. For liability and safety reasons, all bats should be checked daily for breaks, and discarded, not taped, if any breaks are discovered.

For competitive players desiring additional traction, shoes with metal or rubber cleats may be purchased in a variety of styles. Special rubber-cleated shoes are available for play on synthetic surfaces. Although the rubber cleats reduce the chance of injury to others, they do not offer the footing that the metal cleat provides. It should be noted that metal cleats may not be legal for high school competition and are not recommended for class play.

A competitive team should be outfitted in numbered uniforms of identical color and style which comply with league regulations. In addition, the governing association may require batting helmets for player protection.

### Homemade Equipment

After purchasing the essential class or team equipment, the teacher or coach can reduce program costs by making other desirable items.

Ball and bat bags can be made by sewing together heavy pieces of canvas material and inserting a drawstring in a hem sewn across the top. Burlap or feed sacks sewn into one-and-a-half-foot squares and stuffed with sawdust make adequate bases when anchored to the ground. Resin bags can be similarly made by machine or hand.

Yarn wound into balls can be used by beginners for indoor skill practice and novelty games. Portable and permanent bat racks may be constructed for use on the playing field and in the equipment room.

A batting tee (Fig. 2.3) can be constructed from the following materials:³

1. One 1 × 12-inch base board, preferably with the end cut in the shape of home plate
2. One 1 × 10-inch top board about 10 inches in length
3. One pipe flange
4. One piece of 1¼-inch water pipe approximately 30-36 inches long with six holes drilled three inches apart starting at one end of the pipe
5. One piece of corded radiator hose, capable of sliding up and down over the water pipe
6. One nail
7. Four to six 1¼-inch screws

The steps in constructing the batting tee are:

1. Nail the flat top board to the center of the base board.
2. With screws, attach the pipe flange to the center of the top board.

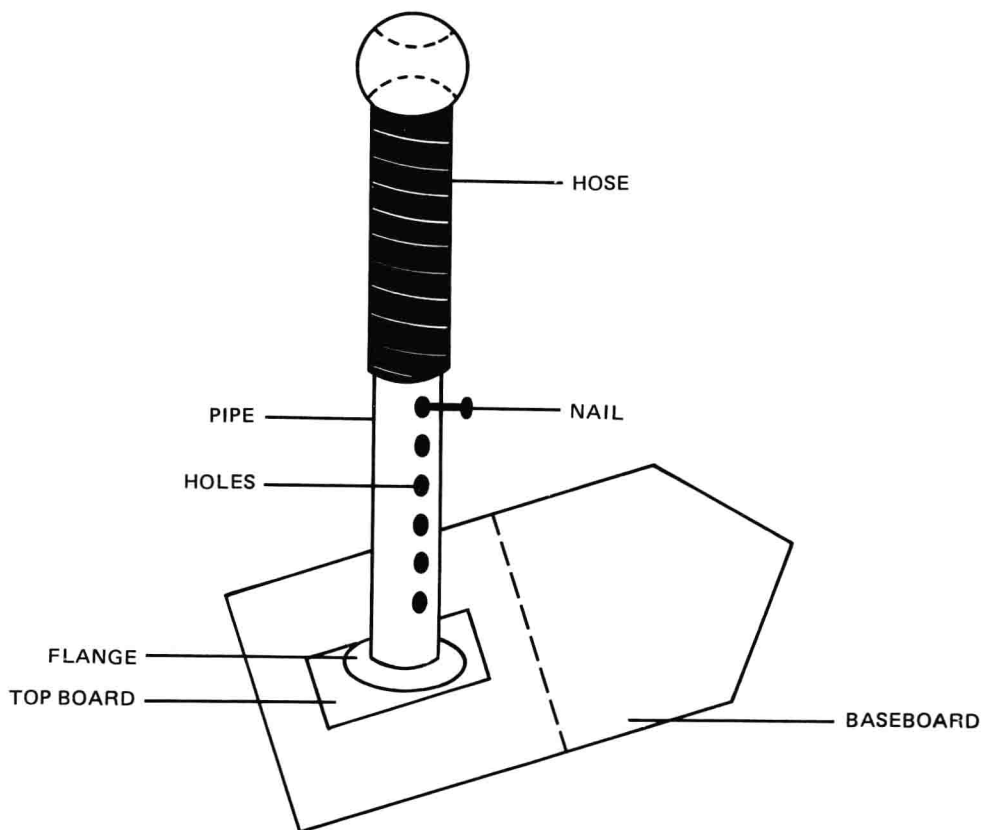
³ Margaret Dobson and Becky Sisley, *Softball for Girls* (New York: Ronald Press Co., 1971), pp. 13-15.

3. Screw the water pipe into the flange, with the holes at the bottom end of the pipe.
4. Slide the hose down over the top of the pipe, with the drilled holes exposed below the hose.
5. Insert the nail in one of the holes to act as a stopper for the hose. The selection of holes allows the batter to adjust the hose up and down the pipe to a preferred height.

Scoreboards may be as simple as a chalkboard, with innings marked off in paint and attachable number plates, or as elaborate as a lighted scoreboard. The former may be constructed easily and placed in a visible, out of bounds location along one sideline or in deep center field.

### Care of Equipment

**Gloves.** Gloves may be cleaned with leather-cleaning products or with saddle soap and a small amount of water. To keep the leather supple and retain the desired shape of the glove, neatsfoot oil may be applied and a ball placed in the pocket. A string is wrapped around the glove tightly to support the ball in this position.



**Figure 2.3**

**Batting tee.** Adapted from Margaret Dobson and Becky Sisley, *Softball for Girls* (New York: Ronald Press Co., 1971).

**Balls.** Leather balls may be cleaned of mud, dirt, and grass stain by using saddle soap or a ball cleaner. Rubber-covered balls can be washed with soap and water.

**Bats.** Bats should be cleaned thoroughly following practices and games. A light oil should be applied periodically to prevent drying of wooden bats. Aluminum bats may be wiped off with a damp cloth and mild soap. Cracked or split bats should be discarded. No attempt should be made to repair broken bats. However, rough areas may be sanded and grips may be replaced. Bat handles must be checked for loose or unraveling tape. For storage, bats may be hung from bat racks or stored flat on shelves.

**Shoes.** When leather shoes are damp from wet playing surfaces, stuffing with paper and drying at room temperature maintains the shape. Oil applied to the leather tops and soles of the shoes helps prevent cracking. Canvas shoes can be washed with lukewarm water and soap. Laces and cleats should be checked before each practice and game and repaired if necessary. Insoles may be sprayed with disinfectant or powdered to prevent athlete's foot.

### PROJECTS FOR THE PROSPECTIVE TEACHER/COACH

1. Visit a softball field and evaluate the condition of the facilities for safety.
2. With a partner, measure the various distances on a softball field to note its conformity to regulations.
3. Observe a maintenance crew preparing a field for play and explain in writing the technique employed.
4. Construct bat racks, ball bags, and batting tees.



# 3

## Conditioning

Proper conditioning is a key element in preparing players to perform safely and efficiently. In addition, experienced teachers and coaches recognize the importance of warming up prior to a session of active drill participation. To aid in the physical development and bodily preparedness of a softball player, a conditioning program should stress the following components of fitness: strength, agility, flexibility, and endurance. The exercises presented in this chapter have been selected and organized according to these components. The simplicity and adaptability of the exercises make them suitable for a variety of programs and conditioning levels of the participants. Although an attempt has been made to designate suitability for class or competitive teams, certain exercises may be adaptable to both. Obviously, time will be a factor in determining the number of exercises to be included in each session. However, the instructor should attempt to encompass at least one exercise from each component group. In addition, *vita parcours* and obstacle courses may be designed to promote overall conditioning and challenge participants on all levels.

### EXERCISES FOR CLASS INSTRUCTION

#### Strength

**Pull-ups** (arm and hand). Using an overhand grip, place both hands, shoulder width apart, on a horizontal bar. Raise the body until the chin is above the level of the bar. Lower the body to the starting position. Repeat three to five times.

**Bent knee sit-ups** (abdominal). Assume a bent knee position with hands placed on shoulders. Lower the body to the ground. Raise the body until the nose touches the knees. Do as many as possible in 60 seconds.

**Modified push-ups** (arms). From a hands and knees position, bend the arms and lower trunk to touch the chin to the ground. Raise back up to starting position. Repeat 25 times. Regulation push-ups may be used by assuming a prone position with weight distributed on hands and feet.

#### Agility

**Shuttle run.** Repeat two or three runs to a designated line, 60 feet from the starting line, and back to the start. *Option:* From a fielding position use a side shuffle step (slide) to alternate touches between the two lines. Repeat 50 times.

**Footwork.** Stand with feet shoulder-width apart, knees bent and body weight distributed on the balls of both feet. On the instructor's command move right, left, forward, or backward. Change direction as smoothly and quickly as possible.

**Fielding warm-up drills.** (Explained in chapters 5, 6, and 9.)

### Flexibility

**Straddle sit stretches.** Sitting with legs in straddle position, touch head to left knee and sustain the stretch for approximately five seconds. Repeat the process, touching head to right knee. Perform three times to each side. *Option:* Use hurdle-sitting position to perform stretches.

**Stride standing.** From a standing position, bend trunk to right, left, forward, and backward, holding each position for five seconds.

**Windmill.** From a stride-standing position, twist trunk to the left and touch right hand to left foot. Return to starting position and twist trunk to the right until left hand touches right foot. Repeat this action five times to each side.

**Foot to hand.** Lie on back with arms extended out to sides at shoulder height. Lift right foot and touch to left hand. Keep shoulders and back flat on the ground. Return to starting position and touch left foot to right hand. Repeat five times to each side.

### Endurance

**Arm circles.** With arms extended at sides and palms turned downward, rotate arms forward, making large circles 50 times. Turn palms upward and rotate extended arms backwards 50 times.

**Bench step.** Facing a bench 12-inches high, step up with right foot, left foot, then down with right foot and left foot respectively. Repeat for 60 seconds.

## EXERCISES FOR COMPETITIVE TEAMS

### Strength

**Isometric rope pull** (arms). Tie the end of a five-foot rope to a stationary object at approximately waist height. Tie the other end of the rope to the throwing hand. Sustain a pull against the rope for six seconds from the following positions: in the overarm throw, back, release point, and follow through. Repeat two more times, allowing for rest between effort.

**Isometric squeeze** (hand, wrist, forearm). Squeeze a tennis ball in each hand for eight seconds using maximum effort. Repeat three times.

**Isometric bat drill** (arms). Player assumes a batting stance. At backswing position, resistance is maintained on the bat in the opposite direction of the swing by a teammate. Both individuals maintain opposing pressure for eight seconds. Players rest for five seconds, and the bat is moved to the straight arm position and held at that spot for resistance. Proper wrist position must be maintained throughout the swing. This process is continued with the follow-through phase of the swing. Again, positions are held with resistance for eight seconds.

**Isometric throw** (arms). Player assumes a bent elbow throwing position. Partner places left hand under elbow of player (elbow at shoulder height) and right hand grasps player's wrist. Partner resists and the player holds a maximum contraction for ten seconds attempting to force hand forward and down.