

High-Scoring SOFTBALL



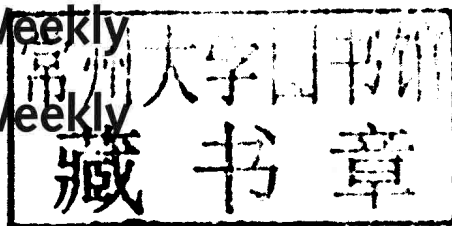
- ***Hitting***
- ***Bunting***
- ***Baserunning***
- ***Offensive Strategies***

alph Weekly • Karen Weekly

High-Scoring Softball

Ralph Weekly

Karen Weekly



运动训练

High-Scoring Softball



Human Kinetics

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In loving memory of my parents, Chuck and Ruthann Kvale, who attended every game I played but never questioned the coach or stressed over my performance. Because of their example and unconditional love, softball is what I do and not who I am.

And to Ralph, my husband, friend, and mentor. My deepest thanks for your love and encouragement.

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Ralph

Drill Finder

Drills	SOFTBALL SKILLS						Page
	Bunting	Slap hitting	Baserunning	Hitting for average	Hitting for power	Bat speed	
Front Toss With Wiffle Balls or Softies	✓	✓		✓			20
Bat With Catch Net	✓						20
Bunt Skills off a Machine	✓						21
Bunt Skills off Live Pitching	✓						21
Cones for Placement Targets	✓						22
Drag Bunt Contact	✓	✓					33
Drag Bunt Contact and Footwork		✓					34
Drag Bunt—Put It All Together		✓					34
Soft Slap Contact		✓					38
Soft Slap Contact and Footwork		✓					39
Soft Slap—Put It All Together		✓					39
Toss and Catch		✓					40
Wall Swing		✓		✓	✓		41
Hard Slap Contact		✓					44
Hard Slap Contact and Footwork		✓					45
Hard Slap—Put It All Together		✓					45
High-Chop Bounce		✓					47
Home to First With Breakdowns			✓				64
Home to Second With Cones			✓				65
Runners at Home, First, and Third			✓				66
Leadoff Drill			✓				67

Drills	SOFTBALL SKILLS						Page
	Bunting	Slap hitting	Baserunning	Hitting for average	Hitting for power	Bat speed	
Two-Machine Drill			✓				68
Small Bat and Ball-Side Toss				✓	✓		74
Quick Toss				✓	✓	✓	75
Pitch Recognition				✓	✓		75
Overhead Toss				✓	✓		76
Balance Beam				✓	✓		77
Bouncing Tennis Balls				✓	✓		78
Tee With String or Tee to Target				✓	✓		80
Front Toss or Live Pitching Into a Net				✓	✓		81
Triple Tee				✓	✓		82
Tennessee Zones				✓	✓		83
Tee Drill for Opposite Field				✓	✓		84
Front Toss From Close Range				✓	✓		85
No Pop, No Pull				✓	✓		85
Double Tee				✓	✓		86
1-2-3 Drill				✓	✓		96
Hip Rotation Drill				✓	✓		98
High Tee on Home Plate					✓		99
Machine and Cage Drill					✓		100
Full-Field Power Drill					✓		101
Pitching Machine at 33 Feet						✓	108
Hitting Tube						✓	108
Woofin Stix Drill						✓	109
Quick Toss With Weighted Balls						✓	109
Tee With Weighted Balls or 16-Inch Softballs						✓	110

(continued) ➡

Drill Finder *(continued)*








Drills	SOFTBALL SKILLS						Page
	Bunting	Slap hitting	Baserunning	Hitting for average	Hitting for power	Bat speed	
High Tee, Weighted Bats, and Weighted Balls						✓	111
Throwing Bats				✓	✓	✓	112
Hit-and-Run				✓	✓		119
Favorite Pitch				✓	✓		119
Two Strikes				✓	✓		119
Tee Drill, Standing				✓	✓		170
Tee Drill, Kneeling				✓	✓		170
High Tee				✓	✓		171
Z-Line Drive				✓	✓		172
Small Wiffle Balls and Broomstick				✓	✓		173
Kneeling Wall Drill				✓	✓		175
One-Arm, Kneeling Backhand Drill				✓	✓		176
One-Arm, Kneeling Forehand Drill				✓	✓		176
Kneeling Two-Hand Drill				✓	✓		176
Standing Tee With Normal Swing				✓	✓		176

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Key to Diagrams

P	_____	Pitcher
C	_____	Catcher
1B	_____	1 st base player
2B	_____	2 nd base player
3B	_____	3 rd base player
SS	_____	Shortstop
LF	_____	Left fielder
CF	_____	Center fielder
RF	_____	Right fielder
B	_____	Batter
RHB	_____	Right-handed batter
LHB	_____	Left-handed batter
R	_____	Runner

	_____	Path of runner or fielder
	_____	Path of hit
	_____	Path of throw
	_____	Softball
	_____	Cone
	_____	Portable backstop
	_____	Batting tee

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Introduction: Offensive Evolution

There is an old saying in sports: “Offense sells tickets, but defense wins games.” In fastpitch softball, people have always believed that good pitching will beat good hitting. Never have those theories been challenged quite as they were in 2010, when the Women’s College World Series (WCWS) included several high-scoring games and a number of teams set program records in many offensive statistical categories. Twenty years ago, a 1-0 extra-inning pitchers’ duel was common; today it is almost unheard of. Over the years, fans clamored for more offensive action and excitement. Changes in rules, equipment, and coaching philosophy helped the game keep pace with these demands. Let’s take a closer look at this evolution and the changes that have created high-octane offenses like never before seen in the game.

CHANGES IN RULES, EQUIPMENT, AND STRATEGY

Over the past 30 years, rule changes have been made in an effort to increase offensive production in softball, thereby making the game more entertaining for the fans. These changes have included increasing the pitching distance and requiring ball fields to be fenced. In addition, the balls used in the collegiate game—as well as the bats available to players—have become more lively. This also contributes to a more offensive game. As teams looked for strategies to counter the pitching dominance that was common in softball, the slap game evolved, and it remains a popular component of an exciting offense. Statistical trends in softball prove that these changes have had a significant impact on offensive production.

Pitching Distance

For many years, the pitching distance at the collegiate and adult level was 40 feet. Pitching dominated the game, and it was not unusual for games to go into extra innings with a scoreless tie at the end of regulation. In 1988 the pitching distance increased from 40 feet to 43 feet. Here are a few statistical facts that demonstrate how this rule change helped to increase offensive numbers: In the NCAA Division I record book, the top 5 single-season individual earned run averages (minimum 100 innings pitched) all occurred before 1988. Of the top 20 single-season individual earned run averages, 16 occurred before 1988.

Similarly, of the top 20 individual single-season batting averages, 19 occurred after 1988. In fact, a review of the record book reveals that 97 percent of the top single-season performances in virtually every offensive category (batting average, runs scored, hits, doubles, triples, home runs, slugging percentage, and runs batted in) occurred in the years after 1987.

Recommended Fences and Distances

In the early years of collegiate softball, not every team played on an enclosed field. For games played on a field without a fence, a double in the gap could potentially become a home run for a fast hitter; however, true power hitters had a more difficult time hitting home runs because the outfield could play as deep as they wanted in order to prevent the ball from going over their head. As more colleges sponsored fastpitch teams and built modern facilities for competition, enclosed fields became more common.

The NCAA recommends that all Division I softball programs have enclosed fields with fences no more than 235 feet from home plate. If the outfield fence is 4 feet high, the NCAA recommends that the fence distances be a minimum of 210 feet in left and right field and 230 feet in center field. If the outfield fence is at least 6 feet high, the NCAA recommends that fence distances be a minimum of 190 feet in left and right fields and 220 feet in center field. The prevalence of enclosed fields with fences meeting these recommended standards has made the home run a much bigger part of the game in the past 20 years.

Optic Yellow Ball

In 1993, another change occurred that was designed to add more offense to the game—the optic yellow ball with red stitches became the standard ball used in collegiate fastpitch, replacing the softer white ball. Not only was the yellow ball easier to see, but performance was enhanced because the traditional 88 double stitch was changed to 120 stitches, which allowed for greater spin and speed. The yellow ball was also made with a harder and more lively poly core rather than the kapok center of the traditional white ball. Statistics after 1992 suggest that the optic yellow ball was a big factor in the offensive explosion in collegiate fastpitch softball—even bigger than the increased pitching distance. In the offensive categories mentioned previously, 93 percent of the top single-season performances occurred after 1992.

Another statistic that suggests a greater impact from the introduction of the optic yellow ball is earned run average per game per team. In 1987, the earned run average per game per team was 1.86. In 1988, the first season pitching from 43 feet, that number only increased to 1.91. During the next five seasons, earned run average per game per team fluctuated from 1.82 (1989) to 2.04 (1991). However, a significant increase occurred from 1992

to 1993. The earned run average per game per team in 1992 (the last year of using the softer white ball) was 2.03. In 1993, that number jumped to 2.37, an increase of 14 percent. In the ensuing seasons, the number has never been lower than 2.44.

Composite Bats

After years of swinging aluminum bats, fastpitch players at the college level began using composite bats sometime in the early 2000s. Although we don't have hard statistics on the number of programs and players using composite bats (and when they began using them), the majority of collegiate Division I players have clearly been using composite bats in the latter half of the decade. Composite bats require a longer break-in period than aluminum bats (about 150 to 200 swings), but once broken in, these bats will outperform an aluminum bat in both distance and batted ball speed. Composite bats also become "hotter" over the life of the bat. We may end up looking back on the period of 2005 to 2010 as the "hot bat era" in college softball.

The upward trend in home runs per game in NCAA Division I softball from 2001 to 2010 supports the theory that composite bats have had a significant impact on offense. In 2001, the average number of home runs per game per team was 0.32. By 2005, when composite bats were generally available and in use by most Division I programs, that number had jumped to 0.52. Since then, home runs per game per team has not dropped below 0.55, and it reached a record high of 0.64 in the 2010 season. Average runs scored per game per team reached a new record of 4.19 in 2010 as well.

Earned run average has increased along with home runs per game. From 1982 to 1992, the earned run average per game per team ranged from a low of 1.35 (1984) to a high of 2.04 (1991). The first year of the optic yellow ball, 1993, saw this number jump to 2.37, a .34 increase from the 2.03 average in 1992. From 1994 to 2004, earned run averages fluctuated, but there was no single-season increase greater than .15. The years 2004 to 2005, however, marked a significant increase in earned run average per game per team when the number jumped from 2.62 in 2004 to 2.92 in 2005. Since 2005, the earned run average per game per team has not been below 3.00, and the high of 3.40 occurred in 2010. These numbers certainly suggest that composite bats are a major contributing factor to the record number of home runs hit and runs scored.

Note that batting averages have remained fairly steady over the same period of time. The last significant jump in team batting averages occurred from 1992 (.251) to 1993 (.265), the year the optic yellow ball was introduced. Since then, no statistically noteworthy trends either way have occurred in batting average, and the record of .272 was set in 1996, before the composite bat era. In fact, the average batting average per team was the same in 2009 as in 1993 (.265).

In 2011, the NCAA launched a mandatory bat-testing program. All bats were tested before each level of postseason competition and were required to comply with a 98 mph batted ball speed (exit speed). The 98 mph requirement had been in place before 2011, and manufacturers had to certify that each bat they produced met the 98 mph limit when it left the factory. However bat testing was conducted only after the completion of the Women's College World Series (WCWS) and only on bats used by the teams participating in the WCWS. Because composite bats become "hotter" over time, it was possible and even likely that a bat that left the factory performing at 98 mph would test higher than that during the life of the bat. Of the 24 bats tested after the 2010 WCWS, 17 exceeded the 98 mph standard. In 2011 when precompetition bat testing became mandatory during postseason play, only 1 bat of the 24 tested following completion of the WCWS exceeded the 98 mph standard. It will be interesting to see if the more stringent bat standards and testing protocols have an effect on the offensive numbers, especially home runs and runs scored.

Left-Handed Slap Game

The left-handed slap game evolved as a way to counteract the pitching dominance that was prevalent in softball for many years. The idea behind slapping is to shorten the swing and simply "touch and run." The batter is not trying to hit for power; rather, her goal is to put the ball in play and force the defense to make a defensive out. At least this puts more pressure on a defense than a strikeout! Slapping added a new and exciting element to softball, and it is now a common component of most offenses. Fans enjoy watching the speed and aggressiveness that slappers bring to an offense.

GENERAL TRENDS

When I played travel and college softball (late 1970s to mid-1980s), pitchers threw three pitches in addition to a fastball—the drop, the rise, and the changeup. The pitchers' goal was always to change planes or speeds with their pitches. The curve and screwball were unheard of; nobody threw a pitch that stayed on the same plane. After I began coaching in 1988, I observed that most umpires called a wide strike zone—calling strikes off the edges of the plate as long as the pitch was inside the chalk line. Over the next several years, I witnessed a huge increase in the number of pitchers who threw primarily screwballs and curveballs (pitches that move side to side but don't change planes). I have often wondered if the wide strike zone helped to create an era of average pitchers who were not able to change planes with their pitches but achieved success in part because of generous strike zones.

Over the last few years (since about 2009), a point of emphasis among Division I softball umpires has been to more accurately call balls and strikes. This has likely contributed to the increased offensive numbers. In 2009, umpires also increased their focus on enforcing the pitching rules, and many illegal pitch calls were made against pitchers who had never been called on it before. On an illegal pitch call, the pitch is called a ball on the batter, and any base runners are allowed to advance one base. These consequences are certain to assist the offensive team.

Coaches have also been placing a greater emphasis on hitting, especially hitting for power, in the last several years. Whether this emphasis occurred before or after the improvements in bat technology and the decline in pitching is difficult to determine. Was it a cause or an effect? An attempt to answer that would be nothing more than an opinion. Suffice it to say that offense seems to be the engine driving the game at the current time. In 2009, five of the top seven home-run hitting teams in Division I qualified for the Women's College World Series. So regardless of the reason, offense is certainly a large part of a winning formula.

This book discusses the elements of a high-scoring offense. It provides details on the skills involved in offense, the strategies that can be used to increase run production, and the mental tactics that help players perform up to their potential on offense. We hope you are as passionate about offensive softball as we are. Now, let's go score some runs!

