

## A QUICK GUIDE TO SLOWPITCH SOFTBALL

### 1. The Basic Gist

Softball is played between two teams of 10 players each. The teams alternate batting (offensive team) and fielding (defensive team).

The pitcher lobs the ball (in an arc from 6 to 12ft high) to the batter who hits the ball and runs around as many bases (1st → 2nd → 3rd → home) as possible before the ball is retrieved and returned under control by the defensive team. The aim of the game is to score more runs than the opposing team. A run is scored when a batter/runner successfully rounds all three bases and reaches home plate safely.

Unless you hit a home run (i.e. an enormous hit where you can run all the bases in one go and reach home safely), you will most likely need to stop at a base and wait for subsequent batters to hit you around the diamond.

Meanwhile, the defensive team's job is to get batter's and runner's 'out'. As soon as three offensive players are out, or when the offensive team score 6 runs (except for the final inning – see by-laws and the rule book for more detail), the two teams switch: the defensive team gets to bat, and the batting team gets to field.

An inning is completed when each team has batted. Players bat in a prearranged order (as organised by your team captain) that is followed throughout the game (e.g. if the final batter in the 3rd inning is listed 8th in the batting order, then batter #9 will be first up in the 4th inning).

### 2. The Playing Area

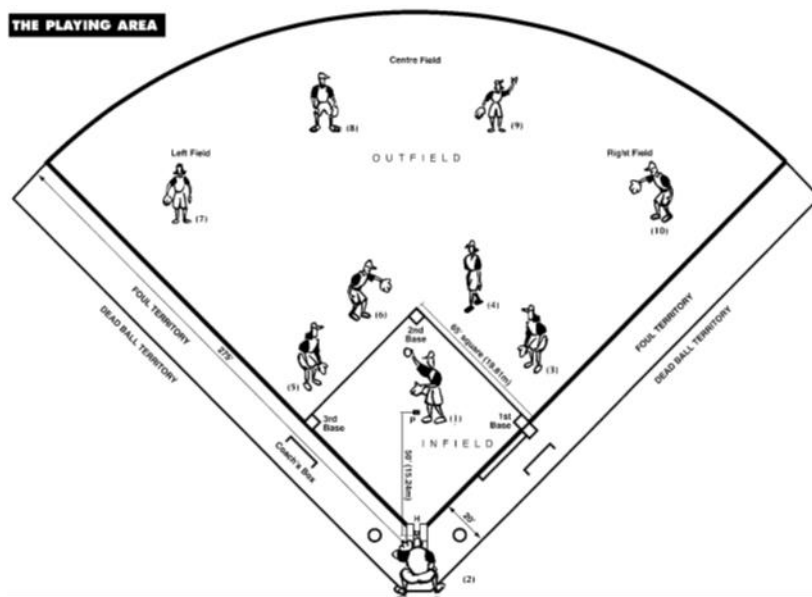
The softball playing area is contained within a 90-degree angle. The inner part of the field (between the bases) is called the 'infield', and the outer part of the field is called the 'outfield'. See Figure 1 for an illustration.

Everything inside the thick black line is 'fair territory', which is where most of the action takes place.

The area outside this, but within the field, is called 'foul territory', which is where some action can take place.

Everything beyond the marked lines is 'dead ball territory', and if the ball enters this area, everything stops.

The batter needs to hit the ball into 'fair territory' for them to advance to the next base.



Note: fielders are positioned to cover as much field as possible.

### 3. Fielding

The defensive team's job is to catch or stop any ball hit in the playing field and limit the offensive team from advancing bases. Each fielder has the following duties:

**Pitcher:** the pitcher starts at the pitching plate (roughly in the middle of the infield) and lobs the ball up into the air for the batter to hit. They also field any balls hit near them.

**Catcher:** the catcher stands around 3-5 metres behind home plate and a) catches and returns the ball to the pitcher if it is not hit, b) catches any fly balls hit into the air toward them, and c) takes throws to home plate to try and prevent base runners from scoring.

First Base: this is a busy position that requires good catching skills. The first base player will be located around 3 metres from the base to a) field any hits made by the batter, and b) catch any throws to first base to try and get the batter out.

Second Base: the second base player guards the right side of the infield, roughly situated between 1st and 2nd base. Their first priority is to field any batted ball to get the batter and/or runner out, and to often take throws at second base from the 3rd base player and shortstop.

Third Base: situated a few metres from 3rd base, this player needs quick reflexes to take (often) sharp hits down the 3rd base line. They will often a) field the batted ball and make plays at 1st or 2nd base, b) touch their own base to get out an advancing runner, or c) take throws from other fielders when a player is advancing to their base.

Shortstop: the shortstop protects the area between 2nd base and 3rd base. The shortstop generally a) fields the ball and throws to either 1st, 2nd, 3rd, or home (often whichever is easily/most likely to get an out), b) takes catches at 2nd base (often from the pitcher, 1st base, or 2nd base player), or c) occasionally may take catches at 3rd when the 3rd base player is pulled into a play elsewhere. It is also often the role of the shortstop to move towards the outfield on big hits to take throws from the outfielders.

Outfielders: there should be four outfielders evenly spread in the outfield (left fielder, left centre fielder, right centre fielder, and right fielder). They may move in or back depending on the perceived skills of the batter, and may swing right or left depending on the batter's stance (i.e. left or right-hander).

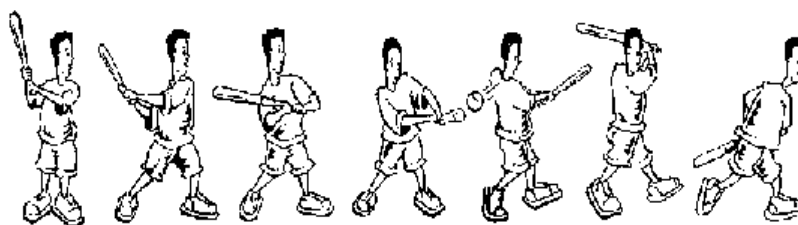
#### 4. Pitching

The pitcher generally starts with both feet on the pitching plate and takes one step forward as they lob the ball underarm in the batter's direction for them to hit. The pitched ball must have an arc somewhere between 6ft and 12ft from the ground and land on the strike plate (on the full) to be called a 'strike'. Anything the batter takes at swing and misses (or fouls) is also a 'strike'. Anything not landing on the strike plate, or below 6ft and above 12 ft, will be called a 'ball'. If the batter received three strikes during their turn at bat they are 'out', and if they receive four balls they receive a walk to 1st base.

Pitching can be daunting and difficult, especially when the speed is slow and the batter has a good chance of hitting it. It can also be difficult to hit the strike plate, so a could strategy is to aim for the batter the ball (i.e. lobbing it up for them). As your skills progress, you will find that mixing height, location, and spin can make the offensive team's task more difficult.

#### 5. Batting

A right-handed batter will stand to the right side of the strike plate and a left-handed batter will stand to the left side of the strike plate (from the pitcher's point of view). Your job is to swing at and hit the strikes, and once you hit the ball into fair territory, you advance counter-clockwise around the bases.



If the batter hits the ball into fair territory, they must drop (not throw) the bat, and run to 1st base (or more bases if they think they can make them safely). The batter/runner must touch every base with their foot as they pass it (stepping over or around it is insufficient). After hitting the ball, the batter can safely run through 1st base (by touching the orange portion or 'safety base') and home, but if they want to stop at 2nd or 3rd base, they must stop on the base and not run past it (if you run past it, you can be tagged out).

A batted ball is 'fair' if:

- It lands in fair territory in the outfield (even if it then rolls foul)
- It contacts a player in fair territory (even if it then rolls foul)
- It touches 1st or 3rd base (even if it then rolls foul)
- It bounces in fair territory within any aspect of 1st or 3rd base (even if it then bounces in foul territory beyond 1st or 3rd base).

A batted ball is 'foul' if:

- It is hit in fair territory but rolls into foul territory before it passes first or third base
- It first lands in foul territory in the outfield (even if it then rolls into fair territory)
- It hits a fielder standing in foul territory (but if it is caught, the batter is out).

Note: any part of the ball on the white line, called the foul line, is (ironically) fair territory.

## **6. Base Running**

If the batter hits the ball, and it has not been caught by a fielder, they must run. They are a 'batter-runner' until they reach 1st base, and a 'base runner' thereafter. If the batter hits the ball and it is caught, they are out, and any runners must return to the base they held at the time of the pitch otherwise they are liable to be put out.

A batter is liable to be put out until they reach first base safely (i.e. before a fielder touches first base with any part of their body while in possession of the ball). The batter can run through first base (touching the orange 'safety base') to ensure safety and avoid collision.

Once a runner, they can proceed to the next base when the ball is in play in one of two ways:

- Force plays – runners must advance to the next base if a batter-runner or runner must come to occupy your current base (e.g. if you are a runner on 1st base, and the batter hits the ball safely into the fair playing field, you must run to second base because the batter is forced to run to 1st base). If the runner is forced to advance, the fielding team can get the runner out by throwing the ball to a player standing on the base to which they are advancing). This is called a 'force out'. The fielder does not need to tag the runner, but they can if they wish (they can also tag them while the runner is running between bases).
- Tag plays – if a runner does not need to advance to the next base, but chooses to do so anyway, the fielding team must tag the runner before they reach the next base safely. For example, if there is a runner on 2nd base, and the ball is hit fairly into the infield, the defensive team must tag the runner (with their glove, while the ball is in the glove) before they reach third base if the runner attempts third base. Another example: if the batter hits the ball to the outfield and heads towards 2nd base, the fielding team must tag them before they reach 2nd base (because the batter-runner did not need to advance to 2nd base; it is optional).

Please consult the rule book for more information and detail. Also feel free to ask your team captains or the committee for any questions you may have.

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**Base on Balls (or Walk):** when the batter received four balls during their turn at bat and is awarded first base.

**Bunt:** a batted ball not swung at but intentionally met with the ball and tapped slowly within the playing field. Bunting is not allowed. The batter will be called 'out'.

**Coaches Box:** the area in foul territory on the first base and third base side of the playing field. One member of the offensive team should occupy each box to instruct/support the offensive team (e.g. telling the runners when to run and/or 'tag up').

**Defensive Team:** the team in the field.

**Double Play:** a play by the defence in which two offensive players are legally put out as a result of continuous action.

**Fair Territory:** that part of the playing field within and including the first and third base foul lines from home plate to the bottom of the outfield fence and perpendicularly upwards.

**Fly Ball:** a ball batted into the air.

**Foul Territory:** any part of the playing field that is not fair territory.

**Grand Slam:** a homerun with bases loaded.

**Homerun:** a hit that allows the batter to make a complete circuit of the bases and score a run.

**Infield:** the area of the field in fair territory normally covered by infielders.

**Infield Fly:** a fair fly ball (not including a line drive) that can be caught by an infielder with ordinary effort when first and second, or first, second, and third bases are occupied, before two outs. In such circumstances the batter is automatically out (this is to prevent the fielders deliberately dropping the ball and forcing a double or triple play).

**Inning:** a part of the game where both teams have batted and fielded. The 'top-half' of the inning is when the away team is batting, and the 'bottom-half' of the inning is when the home team is batting.

**Interference:** commonly occurs when an offensive player impedes, hinders, or confuses a defensive player attempting to execute a play. Generally the offending player is called out and all runners must return to the base they held at the time of the interference.

**Line Drive:** a ball in flight that is batted sharply and directly into the playing field.

**Obstruction:** typically occurs when a fielder impedes the progress of a runner when they a) are not in possession of the ball or b) not in the act of fielding the ball. In such circumstances the runner is safe and will be awarded the base they would have achieved had the obstruction not occurred. Note: it is the responsibility of fielders to move out of the way when they are not involved in a play and do not have the ball. Players cannot stand on their bases when no play is happening (e.g. the first base player must move out of the way when the batter-runner is rounding first base on a hit to the outfield).

**Offensive Team:** the team at bat.

**On-Deck Batter:** the batter who is next in the batting line-up after the current batter. They should have their helmet on and be ready to bat.

**Outfield:** that portion of the playing field that is beyond the infield.

**Sliding:** the action of a batter-runner or runner who drops their body leg- or head-first and slides into a base or plate. Sliding is prohibited and the batter-runner or runner will be 'out'.

**Stealing:** stealing is the prohibited act of a runner attempting to advance during or after a pitch to the batter. Runners may not attempt to advance when a pitched ball is not batted.

**Tagging Up:** The action of a runner returning to their base, or remaining on their base, before they legally advance on a batted fly ball that is first touched by a fielder.

**Triple Play:** A continuous action play by the defence in which three offensive players are put out.