



Softball

Softball is a variant of [baseball](#) played with a larger ball on a smaller field. It was invented in 1887 in [Chicago](#) as an indoor game. It was at various times called indoor baseball, mush ball, playground, soft bund ball, kitten ball, and, because it was also played by women, ladies' baseball. The name *softball* was given to the game in 1926. A tournament held in 1933 at the [Chicago World's Fair](#) spurred interest in the game. The [Amateur Softball Association](#) (ASA) of America (founded 1933) governs the game in the United States and sponsors annual sectional and World Series championships. The [World Baseball Softball Confederation](#) (WBSC) regulates rules of play in more than 110 countries, including the United States and Canada; before the WBSC was formed in 2013, the [International Softball Federation](#) filled this role. Women's fast-pitch softball became a [Summer Olympic sport](#) in 1996, but it (and baseball) were dropped in 2005 from the 2012 games. There are two types of softball. In the most common type, **slow-pitch softball**, the ball, which can measure either 11 or 12 inches in circumference depending on the league, must arch on its path to the batter, there are 10 players in a team. In [fast pitch softball](#), the pitch is fast, there are nine players on the field at one time, and bunting and stealing are permitted. Softball rules vary somewhat from those of

baseball. Two major differences are that the ball must be pitched underhand—from 46 ft. (14 m) for men or 43 ft(13.1 m)^[1] for women as compared with 60.5 ft. (18.4 m) in baseball—and that seven innings instead of nine constitute a regulation game.^[2]

Despite the name, the ball used in softball is not very soft. It is about 12 in. (30.5 cm) in circumference (11 or 12 in. for slow-pitch), which is 3 in. (8 cm) larger than a [baseball](#). The infield in softball is smaller than on an adult or high school [baseball diamond](#) but identical to that used by [Little League Baseball](#); each base is 60 ft (18 m) from the next, as opposed to baseball's 90 ft. (27 m).

Overview

Fast-pitch softball is played between two teams on a large field, with nine players from one team on the field at a time. Slow-pitch softball is played with ten fielders. The field is usually composed of a dirt or brick-dust [infield](#) that contains the quadrilateral shape and running areas, and a grass [outfield](#). However, the field can consist of other solid and dry surfaces such as artificial turf or asphalt. There are four (4) [bases](#) on the infield ([first base](#), [second base](#), [third base](#), and [home plate](#)); the bases are arranged in a square and are typically 45 to 65 feet (13,7 to 19,8 meters) apart. Near the center of this square is the [pitcher's circle](#), and within the circle is the "rubber", a small flat rectangular piece of rubber about a foot and a half in length. The rubber can be 40 or 43 feet away from home plate, depending on age level and the league one is playing in.

The object of the game is to score more runs (points) than the other team by [batting](#) (hitting) a ball into play and running around the bases, touching each one in succession. The ball is a sphere of light material, covered with leather or synthetic material. It is 10 to 12 inches (or rarely, 16 inches^[13]) (28 to 30.5 [centimeters](#)) in circumference. The game is officiated by one or more neutral [umpires](#). Players and umpires are generally free to ask for a brief stoppage at any time when the ball is not in play (called a time out), or immediately following a play once its outcome is clear.

The game is played in usually seven [innings](#). Each inning is divided into a [top half](#), in which the away team bats and tries to score runs, while the home team occupies the field and tries to record three [outs](#); then a [bottom half](#), when the teams' roles are reversed. Some leagues play with

a reduced number of innings or with a time limit, rather than the traditional seven innings.

To start play, the offense sends a [batter](#) to [home plate](#). The [batting order](#) must be fixed at the start of the game, and players may not bat out of turn. The defense's [pitcher](#) stands atop the rubber and throws "[pitches](#)" the ball towards home plate using an underhanded motion. In fast-pitch, the pitcher must have both feet in contact with the pitching rubber at all times. In slow-pitch, the pitcher is allowed to take one step back prior to releasing the ball during the forward movement. The batter attempts to hit the pitched ball with a [bat](#), a long, round, smooth stick made of [wood](#), [metal](#) or [composite](#). If the pitcher throws three [strikes](#) against a batter, then the batter is out and the next batter in the order comes up to bat. A strike is recorded any time a batter swings at and misses a pitch or when a batter hits a ball [foul](#) (out of play). A strike is also recorded any time the batter does not swing at a [pitch](#) that crosses home plate within an area known as the [strike zone](#). To be within the strike zone, the pitch must cross over home plate, and as it crosses it must be above the knees and slightly below the shoulders (roughly the armpit or the shirt logo). The strike zone therefore varies from batter to batter. A pitch outside the strike zone is a [ball](#). If the batter reaches four balls, the batter is awarded the first base in what is known as a "walk". The umpire behind home plate is the sole arbiter of balls and strikes. A foul ball may or may not result in a strikeout dependent upon what association and local league rules. However, [bunting](#) a foul ball does result in a strikeout. In some associations and leagues, bunting is not allowed and results in an out.

The batter attempts to swing the bat and hit the ball [fair](#) (into the field of play). After a successful hit the batter becomes a [baserunner](#) (or [runner](#)) and must run to first base. The defense attempts to [field](#) the ball and may throw the ball freely between players, so one player can field the ball while another moves to a position to put out the runner. The defense can [tag](#) the runner, by touching the runner with the ball while the runner is not on a base. The defense can also touch first base while in possession of the ball; in this case it is sufficient to beat the batter to first base and an actual tag of the batter is unnecessary. A runner is said to be "thrown out" when the play involves two or more defensive players. Runners generally cannot be put out when touching a base, but only one runner may occupy a base at any time and runners may not pass each other. When a ball is batted into play, runners generally must

attempt to advance if there are no open bases behind them; for example, a runner on first base must run to second base if the batter puts the ball in play. In such a situation, the defense can throw to the base that the lead runner is attempting to take (a [force out](#)), and the defense can then also throw to the previous base. This can result in a multiple-out play: a [double play](#) is two outs, while a [triple play](#), a very rare occurrence, is three outs. Runners with an open base behind them are not forced to advance and do so at their own risk; the defense must tag such runners directly to put them out rather than tagging the base.

A ball hit in the air and caught before hitting the ground, in fair or foul territory, puts the batter out. A fly ball is a ball hit high and deep, a [pop fly](#) is a ball hit high but short, and a [line drive](#) is a ball hit close to the horizontal. After the catch, runners must return to their original bases; if the defense throws the ball to that base before the runner returns, the runner is out as well, resulting in a double play. A runner who remains on the base until the ball is touched, or returns to the base ([tags up](#)) after the catch, may try to advance to the next base, at the risk of being tagged out between bases. As in baseball, the [infield fly rule](#) applies in some game situations to prevent the defense from recording multiple force outs by deliberately dropping an easy catch.

Offensive strategy is mostly just to hit the ball skillfully to let the batter reach base and advance other runners around the bases to score runs. The count of balls and strikes indicates how aggressive the batter should be. The offense may try to [sacrifice](#), with the batter deliberately making an out in order to advance runners. Defensive strategy is more complex, as particular situations (number of outs and positions of base runners) and particular batters call for different positioning of fielders and different tactical decisions. The defense may decide to allow a run if it can achieve one or multiple outs.