

How to Play Softball

General

The standard pitch layout is;

- The diamond is 20 paces square (65 feet).
- The pitcher's plate is 16 paces (50 feet) from home plate towards 2nd Base. As a guide this will be slightly behind the diagonal line between first and third bases.
- The foul ball area is 10 paces wide behind the diamond
- 'No crowding' lines are in place (but not marked) for the infield and outfield. Outfield players may not come past the outfield line, infield players may not come past the infield line. The infield no crowding line is the diagonal between first and third base. The outfield no crowding line is 10 paces past the diamond. These are only relevant at the time of pitching.

Team Makeup

A team consists of ten players, of which 5 must be female and 5 male. Teams may play with Extra Players (EPs) if both an extra male and an extra female player are available; this is known as "batting twelve". EPs are additional players who bat in the line-up but do not necessarily field; they must play the entire game and be declared in the batting line-up prior to the start of the game. When a team plays with EPs, any 10 of the 12 players may field but the batting order must remain the same throughout the game. Teams may play with less than 5 girls under the following circumstances:

- If a team is short of one or two girls they must play with only 9 or 8 players; an automatic out will occur in the batting order where the missing female player should have batted, meaning two male players may bat back to back.
- If a team is short of female players they must field with less than ten players, a male cannot play instead (i.e. they can only play with a maximum of 8 if they have 3 girls). If both teams are short of equal numbers of girls, then they can agree to play without the automatic out, at the umpire's discretion.

A team must have a minimum of 7 players, of which a minimum of 3 must be girls, if they do not have 7 players it is assumed to be a cancellation. A friendly can be played but it will not be a valid match result.

Regardless of the number of female players, a team may only put a maximum of two male players in the outfield and a maximum of 3 male players in the infield at any one time.

Each game consists of 5 innings, an innings is both teams batting and fielding once each. The exception to this is the Cup Final, where 7 innings will be played. A minimum of 3 innings constitutes a match, if less than 3 innings are played the result does not stand. The batting team is out when 3 outs have been made against them.

At end of 5 innings if it is a tie, then no extra innings are played to determine a winner with the exception of the Cup competition, where a tie breaker must be played until a winner is found.

Mercy rule: No more than 15 runs can be scored by the batting team in any one innings, with the exception of the fifth (or seventh) innings where there is no limitation. If, after 3 full innings have been played, there is a run difference of 30 or more runs, then the game is declared over and the result stands.

In the fifth innings, when the team batting second has won, even if this is during or before the final innings, it is the end of the match, i.e. teams do not continue to bat out the innings once the match is effectively won.

Batting

The first team to bat is decided by the fixtures officer when allocating Home and Away fixtures prior to the start of the season, except for Cup games, where it is decided with the toss of a coin, the winner chooses to bat or field first.

Both teams must set their batting order before the match commences, once set, it is fixed for the whole match (substitutes are allowed, see below).

The batting order must alternate men and women at the start of the batting order, i.e. MFMFMFMFMF or FMFMFMFMFM. The batting order must continue to alternate M, F or F, M as far as possible.

If there are one or more women short in the team, then the batting order must include a slot that would have been occupied by the missing women (i.e. the alternating slot that would have been allocated under the rule above). When it is the 'turn' of the missing women, an automatic out is given unless one of the other female players is batting in her place, as under the rules for team makeup above. A man cannot play in the place of the missing women.

If a batter comes to the plate in the wrong order, the batter can be called out by the umpire.

When a person is out (caught, tagged, run out or struck out) they continue to bat in the order within that innings, therefore the same person can be out more than once in any one innings.

At the start of the second or subsequent innings the batting order must recommence where it left off in the previous innings.

Substitutes are allowed, however a sub must participate in a full innings (both bat and field once as a minimum). Substitutes can only be made at the start of a new full innings except where the substitution is for an injury, which can be done at any time. Only 10 people can be playing for one team in any one innings and there can only be a maximum of 5 male players. The exception to this is when a team is "batting twelve", where there are 6 male and 6 female players, as described under the rules for team makeup above.

Getting a player out

A player can be caught out, tagged, run out or struck out.

To catch a player out the fielder must catch the ball after it is hit, before it hits the ground. A player can be caught out even if the ball goes foul as long as the ball has not gone into the dead ball area (see later). If the ball is hit backwards, the batter can be caught out only if the ball has gone above 6 feet up in the air off the bat.

To tag a player out the fielder must physically touch them with the ball or with the hand that is carrying the ball. It is not out if the ball is thrown at the runner! If the tagger drops the ball in the process of tagging, it is not out, unless it is deliberately knocked out of the tagger's hand by the runner. The umpire will have discretion over whether to call the out, the key is that the ball must be under control at the time of the tag.

A player can be tagged out at any time during 'play', if they are off the base.

For a player to be run out at a base, they must be forced to run to that base (see below). The fielder must be holding the ball and make contact with the base. In addition if a runner overtakes another runner in front of them, the overtaken runner is run out.

There is often confusion with "forced" or "unforced" runners. A runner is "forced" when they have to run to the next base, this is due to a runner behind them 'pushing' them around the diamond.

When a runner is "forced" the base can be tagged (as discussed above). If the runner is not forced, tagging the base does not count, you must tag the player.

An example is;

- A runner is stood at 2nd base, there is no one at 1st base because a batter was out and the runner made it to 2nd, so the runner at 2nd is not forced. To get the runner at 2nd out, the fielding side must tag him when he off the base. This is because the runner can set off to 3rd base but can also run back to 2nd base, as it will be unoccupied.
- If there is a runner stood at 2nd base but there is also a runner stood at 1st base, both the runners at 1st and 2nd base are "forced" when the next batter comes up to bat, so the bases can be tagged against any of these runners.

Three strikes against the batter is a strike out. This applies even if the ball is hit foul on the 3rd strike (i.e. different to baseball rules)

A strike is when:

- The batter swings for a pitch, whether they hit it or not and regardless of whether the pitch was good or not.
- A ball hit foul (see later).
- If the batter does not swing and the pitch is good, a strike is called.
- If the batter hits the ball but it then hits the body of the batter the ball is dead and this counts as a strike against the batter.

"Bunting" is not allowed, i.e. when the batter intentionally taps the ball down onto the ground just in front of them. A 'foul' is called against this, which is a strike against the batter who must re-take the batter's plate and all runners must return to the base they were on. Bunting is deemed to be when the batter does not take a full swing.

If a runner is off the base at the time the ball is hit by the batter, the runner can be called out IF the fielding team appeals to the umpire before the next pitch is thrown (and the umpire has seen the offence).

If the batter when running to 1st base does not run over the orange section of the bag, the runner can be called out at the discretion of the umpire. The exception to this is if the ball is thrown to the first base fielder from the "foul" territory next to first base (see later), in which case the fielder and the runner may use either portion of the base. They sensibly should try to avoid collisions! If the runner does not touch each of the bases when running around the diamond, the runner can be called out IF the fielding team appeals to the umpire before the next pitch is thrown.

If the bases have moved, the runner should still step on the bag, if the bag is obviously too far away it is then up to the umpire's discretion whether to call the out when/if the fielding team appeal against the offence.

Foul Ball\ Dead Ball

The foul area is the area behind the playing diamond, bounded by the home-plate to 1st base line and the home-plate to 3rd base line. These lines extend out into to the distance. The foul ball line is only relevant during the batter's hit, after that the dead ball line comes into play.

The dead ball boundary is approximately 10ft from the foul ball line (i.e. 10ft behind the home-plate to 1st base and 3rd base lines), if the ball goes into this

area play stops and the dead ball rules apply (see later).

A foul ball is called if the batter hits the ball and it goes foul, this counts as a strike against the batter but they cannot run.

Common situations of a foul ball are described below;

1. The ball goes directly into the foul area without bouncing in the diamond first – this is FOUL.
2. The ball bounces inside the diamond but then rolls or bounces out into the foul area – this is FOUL
3. The ball bounces in beyond the diamond before rolling or bouncing into the foul area – this is FAIR
4. The ball is initially hit into the foul area but rolls into the diamond – this is FAIR.

If the ball hits a fielder and then goes foul, it is NOT a foul ball, play continues unless the ball goes dead.

If the ball is touched by a fielder who is standing in the foul ball area then the ball is foul wherever it drops. A fielder can catch a ball in the foul ball area, and this catch will count as an out, however if the ball is caught in the dead ball area it does not count.

The ball goes dead during play from the following

1. The ball is thrown beyond the dead ball line by a fielder during a 'play'
2. If the ball is thrown in and hits a runner and then goes dead. When the ball goes dead due to the above, runners are allowed to walk to the base that they were going to at the time the ball was thrown plus one more, i.e. If a runner was stood on 1st base at the time of the over throw, then they only go to 2nd base, however, if the runner had already set off from 1st base at the time of the over-throw, they get to go to second plus third.

If the ball is thrown in and hits a runner and does not go dead, play continues with no interruption, the runner is not out unless they purposefully interfere with the ball.

Pitching rules

Pitching is slow pitch. The umpire has discretion if they feel that the ball is being pitched too fast. This can often be easily identified, as the pitch will come in very flat.

The pitcher must pitch from the pitcher's plate, retaining contact with it whilst making the pitch. Contact can be maintained with either foot.

The ball when pitched must loop between 6 and 12ft in the air before falling for the batter (this is to ensure that the pitch is slow and not fast)

The ball should cross the home plate between shoulder and knee height of the batter.

If the ball falls short of the home plate or hits the home plate, it is a no ball. Please note, if the batter swings it is a strike against them even if the ball was a no ball.

If 4 no balls are pitched to the batter, the batter gets to walk to first base. If the batter is male and 4 consecutive no balls are pitched (i.e. no strikes against the batter) then the batter walks to 2nd base. If this occurs on the 3rd out (2 players already out in the batting team) then the batting team has the choice of walking

the following girl (must be a girl) to 1st base or letting her bat. The other runners on bases only walk to the next base if they are forced.

On a 'ball' or a foul ball all runners must return the base they were on when the batter first came up to bat.

Scoring Rules

To score a run, a player must get back to the home plate after having gone round all the bases. This doesn't have to be done in one go, a batter who goes all the way around in one go gets a home run, but this does not score any differently than someone who gets one base at a time.

On a forced third out any runs coming in on that out do not count. If the third out is not a forced out, runs in do count if they are scored before the third out occurs.

Other Rules

To avoid collisions on first base between the fielder and runner a safety base is used by the runner. This is part of the first base and is coloured orange. The runner must touch the safety base when they run to first base if they do not intend to continue running to second base and they cannot then be tagged out. If the runner is running onto second they should touch only the white portion of the base. The umpire has discretion to allow fielders to tag out the runner if they appear to have been continuing to second base, even if they ran over the orange safety base. The fielder should not use the orange safety base. Runners must not slide in on first base. Safety bases are provided to remove the need for sliding.

A commitment line for runners is not used.

If the ball hits a runner directly from a batter's hit, the runner is out, even if this is accidental. This is a strike against the batter who must then bat again. The umpire should use discretion in this area.

If a runner interferes with the ball at any point (e.g. kicks it when it comes to them on the floor) then the runner is out.

Fielders cannot obstruct runners running to a base if they do not have the ball, if they do, the umpire has discretion of whether to award an extra base to the runner obstructed. Obstructed runners should not attempt to "barge" fielders out of the way or otherwise interfere with fielders, but should slide into bases or pull up from running when an obstruction has occurred and appeal to the umpire. Obstruction and interference calls are at the umpire's discretion. If a runner is running to a base and the fielder is standing on it when the ball is not being played into the base, the runner is not at fault if they accidentally knock into the fielder whilst running past as the fielder is obstructing the base. The umpire will use discretion as to whether the runner was being purposefully dangerous.

Any player displaying dangerous or abusive play can be called out or ejected from the game by the umpire.

Runners cannot run outside a 'sensible arc' between bases, i.e. the runner cannot run well off the line of running between bases in order to avoid a tag. They are out if they do this.

When running to a base where the ball is being thrown to, the runner must slide into the base (except on first as discussed above), running in upright and

crashing into a fielder attempting to take a catch is deemed dangerous play (obstruction). The runner can be called out for this offence.

The 'Infield Fly' rule does not apply in 2nd and 3rd Divisions; it is applied only if the umpire calls it in the 1st Division.

'No crowding' is allowed, i.e. during a pitch and an attempted hit, no fielders can come in front of a line drawn between first and third base. In addition no out-fielders can come within 10 paces of the diamond. Once the ball has been hit then this rule ceases to apply.

The umpire's decisions are final in the game.

Leeds Softball Association follows the ISF Rules, with exceptions as outlined above and in the Standing Orders and Rules of Leeds Softball Association. For further details on ISF rules please refer to http://www.internationalsoftball.com/english/rules_standards/playing_rules.asp