



## Basic Rules of Softball and Baseball

### 1. Basics

- The objective of the game is to win by scoring more runs than the opponent.
- There are nine innings in a regulation baseball game and seven in a regulation softball game, though if the game is tied at the end of regulation play, extra innings are usually played until there is a winner. However, depending on the context, the ages of players and the amount of time available, any number of innings can be played.
- The top of the inning is when the visiting (away) team bats. The bottom of the inning is when the home team bats. The away team always bats first.
- During each inning the team at bat tries to score runs, while the team in the field tries to stop them by getting batters out.
- The batting team continues to bat until three outs have been made.
- One full inning is over when both teams have batted and fielded.
- The team with the most runs at the end of the game is the winner.

### 2. The Field

- There are four bases on a baseball and softball field: first base, second base, third base and home plate, where batters stand to hit balls thrown (pitched) by the pitcher. The area including and around the bases is known as the infield.
- Beyond the infield is the large area known as the outfield. The outfield may be bordered at the back by an outfield fence, which represents the edge of the playing area.
- Together, the infield and outfield make up what is known as fair territory. Batters want to hit the ball into this area as it allows them to start running the bases (and hopefully end up scoring a run for their team).
- Straight lines drawn on the field from home plate to the outfield fence are known as foul lines and they separate fair territory from foul territory.
- If a batter hits a ball behind or outside of fair territory it is called a foul ball. A batter cannot start running the bases on a foul ball.
- On a regulation slowpitch softball field, the distance from home plate to the outfield fence is usually between 275 and 300 feet. On a women's fastpitch softball field, the distance is usually around 200 feet, and 225 feet for men's fastpitch. On a regulation baseball field, the distance from home plate to the outfield fence down the foul lines is usually 310-330 feet, with a greater distance in centre field.

### 3. Fielding Positions

- There are nine fielding positions on a baseball and fastpitch softball team and 10

fielding positions on a slowpitch softball team.

- Each base has a fielder – the first baseman, second baseman and third baseman, whose basic fielding position is near (but not on) the base. There is also a fielder who stands between second and third base known as the shortstop. These players are all known as infielders.
- In baseball and fastpitch softball, there are three players spread across the outfield: the left fielder, centre fielder and right fielder. In slowpitch softball, there are four players spread across the outfield – a left fielder, left-centre fielder, right-centre fielder and right fielder. They are all known as outfielders.
- The final two players are the pitcher and the catcher. The pitcher stands on the pitcher's mound in baseball or in the pitcher's circle in fastpitch or slowpitch softball, which are both positioned in the middle of the infield. The catcher crouches or stands behind home plate.

#### **4. Equipment**

- Every fielder wears a fielder's glove to help them field the ball. The glove is worn on the non-throwing hand, which leaves the fielder free to throw the ball after they catch it.
- Fielders at different positions wear slightly different types of gloves to help them field the ball more easily at their position.
- Softball gloves are generally larger than baseball gloves as the ball used in both slowpitch and fastpitch softball is bigger than a baseball.
- The catcher wears protective gear in baseball and fastpitch softball, which includes a chest protector, a helmet, a face mask and leg guards. In slowpitch, a face mask (known as a catcher's mask) is required for all players under 18 who are playing the position of catcher, and is recommended for adult players.
- In baseball and fastpitch softball, the batter must always wear a protective helmet when batting and running the bases. In slowpitch softball a protective helmet is required for all batters under 18, and recommended for adult players.
- A wooden bat is used in professional and adult baseball. In fastpitch and slowpitch softball, as well as in youth baseball, players hit with a metal, aluminium or composite bat.

#### **5. The Batter and the Pitcher**

- Generally speaking, every player who fields in baseball or softball also gets to bat, though with some exceptions, especially in baseball and fastpitch softball. Throughout the game, all the players take their turn at bat in an order decided by the team's manager or coach at the start of the game.
- In co-ed slowpitch softball, the format most often played in the UK, the batting line-up must alternate between male and female players.
- When a player is at bat they stand in the batter's box beside home plate and side-on to the pitcher.
- When all players are ready the pitcher throws (pitches) to the batter to get the game going. In baseball the pitcher throws overhand at speed, while in softball the pitcher throws underhand.
- In fastpitch softball, the ball is delivered underhand at speed using a technique called the windmill pitch. Slowpitch softball has a much gentler delivery, with the ball thrown in a slow arc of between 6ft-12ft.
- The batter's job is to get on base and not make an out.

- The pitcher's job is to get the batter out, either by making the batter hit the ball to one of the fielders or by striking the batter out.

## 6. Balls and Strikes

- A strike is when a batter swings and misses at a pitch or doesn't swing at a pitch that goes through the strike zone.
- The strike zone is an imaginary area that is as wide as the home plate and extends from the batter's armpits to their knees.
- It also counts as a strike if a batter hits a pitched ball into foul territory (see 'The Field'). This is called a foul ball.
- A ball, the opposite of a strike, is a pitch that does not go through the strike zone, and that the batter chooses not to swing at.
- To get a strikeout, the pitcher must throw three strikes to the batter before throwing four balls.
- In slowpitch softball, the batter can strike out on a foul ball hit when there are already two strikes against them, but in baseball and fastpitch softball a batter cannot strike out (be given a third strike) on a foul ball.
- If a batter receives four balls before they get three strikes or before they hit the ball into fair territory, that is called a 'walk' and in baseball and fastpitch softball the batter automatically goes to first base. In slowpitch softball, a female batter who receives a walk automatically goes to first base but a male batter goes to second base.

## 7. Getting the Batter Out

- When the batter hits the ball into fair territory they must run to first base.
- When this happens, the fielding team has two basic ways to get the batter out:
  1. A 'catch' – if the batter hits the ball in the air and a fielder catches it before it touches the ground, then the batter is out.
  2. A 'ground out' – If the batter has hit the ball on the ground and it is fielded and thrown to first base before the batter gets there, then the batter is out.

## 8. Getting a Hit

- The batter's job is to try to get on base and there are two main ways to do this:
  1. A 'walk' – the batter automatically gets to go to first base if the pitcher throws four balls (See 'Balls and Strikes').
  2. A 'hit' – a hit is a special term in baseball and softball and does not refer to just any batted ball. For a batter to get a hit, they must bat the ball into fair territory and reach at least first base safely.
- ✧ In baseball and fastpitch softball, but not in slowpitch softball, the batter also gets to go to first base automatically if hit by a pitch.

## 9. Types of Hits

- A hit that gets a batter to first base safely is called a single.
- If the batter makes it to second base safely on a hit it is called a double and if they make it to third base safely it is called a triple. Doubles and triples are usually balls hit past the outfielders, allowing the batter to advance around more bases before the ball can be retrieved.
- Sometimes, a batter makes it around all three bases and back to home plate on one hit into fair territory. This is called a home run.

- But there is a more exciting way to hit a home run. If a batter hits the ball over the outfield fence on the fly it is an automatic home run and is one of the most thrilling moments in a baseball or softball game.
- The ultimate hit in baseball or softball is the 'grand slam', which happens when the batter hits a home run with runners on all three bases ('bases loaded'). A home run in this situation scores all the runners and the batter – four runs from one hit.

#### **10. Baserunners and Scoring Runs**

- If a batter gets on base safely they become a baserunner.
- All baserunners run counter-clockwise around the bases when their teammates (batting after them) also get on base through hits or walks.
- When a baserunner makes his or her way around all the bases and back to home plate safely, the batting team scores a run.
- If a batter hits a home run, he or she scores a run along with every baserunner who is on a base at the time of the home run.
- If a batted ball is caught, then all baserunners must return to the base that they occupied when the ball was hit (this is called 'tagging up') before they can advance to the next base. After the ball is caught and any baserunners have 'tagged up', they may choose to advance to the next base at their own discretion.

#### **11. Getting Baserunners Out**

- The fielding team has two basic ways to get a baserunner out:
  1. 'Force Out' – when a baserunner is on first base they are forced to run to the next base when the batter hits the ball on the ground into fair territory. This is in order to make room for the batter coming to occupy first base.
    - A baserunner is also forced to run from second or third base (when the batter hits the ball) if all the bases behind them have baserunners on them. In these instances, all the baserunners are 'forced' to run in order to make room for the batter running to occupy first base.
    - In both these cases, if the ball is fielded and thrown to the fielder standing on the next base before the baserunner gets there the baserunner is 'forced out'.
  2. 'Tag Out' – a baserunner is not forced to run to the next base when one of the bases behind them is not occupied and can choose to advance at their own discretion. In this case, the fielding team must tag out the baserunner before they reach and makes contact with the base.
    - A fielder can tag out any baserunner during the game who is not touching a base. The fielder tags the baserunner by simply touching them with the ball, either in their glove or in their hand.