



STARTING A SOFTBALL TEAM

Below are some ideas and advice on starting a new softball team, learning the rules and basic skills and then joining a league or finding other ways to begin playing games.

Please also see the two companion documents in this section on the website: *Developing Your Softball Team or Club* and *Fastpitch and Slowpitch Softball Differences*.

SLOWPITCH OR FASTPITCH?

You need to start with a basic decision. There are two main softball formats in the UK, called **slowpitch** and **fastpitch**. Which does your new team want to play?

If you're just starting out, and have no previous experience of softball, chances are you'll want to form a **co-ed slowpitch team**. Over 95% of softball played in the UK is slowpitch, and over 90% of slowpitch teams are mixed (co-ed) teams, where men and women play together, usually in a 50:50 ratio – though some leagues have a slightly higher proportion of men to women on the field.

Slowpitch softball is generally seen as a recreational and social format of the game and is easy to access and play – though when it comes to the very best slowpitch teams in the country, they are certainly both competitive and highly skilled! Slowpitch softball is particularly welcoming for women players who may not have had much experience with team sport in the past – or didn't enjoy the experience they when they had it!

Co-ed slowpitch teams in the UK are graded in four categories accordingly to ability – A, B, C and D – and the majority of teams are at C and D level. Most C and D teams play in local recreational leagues on week-night evenings after work, but some occasionally play in weekend tournaments, which take place on virtually every weekend from late April through late September at locations around the country.

B-grade teams tend to play in the upper divisions of local leagues but many also play in weekend tournaments. Most A-grade teams only play in competitive weekend tournaments.

There are also a few tournaments every year where slowpitch is played by men's and women's teams, usually formed from players on co-ed teams.

You can get contact details for your local league by emailing info@britishsoftball.org. These leagues will always welcome new teams and can usually offer coaching and other support to help you get going.

Help can also be accessed through BaseballSoftballUK (BSUK), the development agency for the two sports. A list of BSUK regional Development Managers and ways in which they can help can be found below.

Finally, there are funding sources that can help your team to get started (for example, to help you buy equipment and playing uniforms, hire pitches for training and games etc). Suggestions for funding sources are also set out below.

THE FASTPITCH ALTERNATIVE

Fastpitch softball is very much a minority format in the UK, but is a more challenging form of the game, and is the format used in most international competition. Women's fastpitch was the Olympic format when softball was in the Olympic Games from 1996-2008 – and will be again at the Tokyo Olympics in 2021.

Fastpitch is usually played by women's and men's teams.

At the moment, there is one fastpitch league in the UK. The Great Britain Fastpitch League plays on a number of dates throughout the summer at the Farnham Park Baseball and Softball Complex near Slough and the league has a Women's and a Men's Division. New players and new teams are always welcome, regardless of previous softball or fastpitch experience.

A companion document in this section of the BSF website – ***Fastpitch and Slowpitch Softball Differences*** – provides a more detailed description of the major differences between slowpitch and fastpitch softball. But the names of the two formats tell you most of what you need to know.

For more information on fastpitch softball, including how a new fastpitch team can get coaching support and get involved in league competition, email David Morris on admin@fastpitchsoftball.co.uk.

For now, though, we will concentrate on what you need to know to help you form a **co-ed slowpitch team**.

FINDING PLAYERS

If you want to form a softball team, you're going to need players. Where will you find them?

Most teams are formed from colleagues at the same company, school, college or organisation or from an extended group of friends. If you're short of players, social media can be one of the best ways to advertise your new team and find more people to join it. But you can recruit the old-fashioned way, by putting up notices at your local Sports Centre, gym, college or library and in newsagents' shops. You can also advertise for players in your local newspaper or free sheet (ask them if they will run a story on your new team) or on local radio.

A softball team on the field, as you probably know, consists of 10 players.

But in order to get 10 players on the field for an entire league schedule, you probably need a squad of 15-20 players. Not everyone can play all the time: holidays or family and work commitments can claim a surprising number of players on a given day. So make sure you have enough players on your books – and remember that you'll need a roughly equal balance of men and women on the squad.

Even if you're forming a recreational team, make sure that the word "commitment" is mentioned. Players need to be aware that if they do not turn up for a game, they could be letting down at least 19 other people who have made the effort to get there and who want to play. In short, your team will collapse if your players aren't committed to turning out as often as they can and to giving the team a certain amount of priority in their lives.

ORGANISING YOUR TEAM

New softball teams often form with a single individual as the driving force, but if the team is to be viable and sustainable, more people need to be involved in running it.

Ideally, a new team should soon have a Chairperson, Treasurer and Secretary, elected by the playing members, and there may eventually be a need for other officers to meet other requirements. There are more details on team or club organisation and structure below.

MEMBERSHIP

It is an important requirement in softball that a new team or club should be open to all, regardless of background, ethnicity, religion, gender or sexual orientation.

In thinking about recruitment, new teams will often start with an immediate social group plus friends or families. Where you might go after that will depend on the values and priorities of the team. However, valuing a diverse and inclusive team will greatly extend your recruitment reach.

You will also need to acquire a certain amount of information from your members for club purposes and possibly for league or competition requirements. To this end, the club should produce a club Membership Form that all members should complete.

MONEY

Once you know your team is viable and you have people signed up to play, you will soon need to ask them for money in the form of team fees.

Your new team will soon need money for at least some of the following:

- Playing equipment: bats, balls, gloves.
- A team T-shirt (or full uniform).
- Fees to pay for pitch hire for training or games.
- Fees to join a local league – and through the league, to affiliate to the British Softball Federation.
- Promotions to attract new players.

Getting some money from your players early on will save the team founder from having to spend a lot of his or her own money up front and will emphasise that the team is being established properly. The amount of the team fee charged should be based on an estimate of what the team will need to spend, plus some extra for unforeseen circumstances, divided by the number of signed-up players.

LEARNING THE GAME

Once you've got your team together, you may want help to learn the rules and skills of the game.

There is a document on the British Softball Federation website, called the "Basic Rules of Softball and Baseball", that sets out the basics. You can find it here:

<http://demo.britishsoftball.org/uploads/documents/Basic Rules of Softball and Baseball.pdf>.

The British Association of Softball Umpires (BASU) can usually provide an umpire to give your new team a basic clinic on softball rules and how the game works on the field. BASU also runs a wide range of umpire training courses (and there's no better way to learn the game than by attending an umpire course, which

can also provide your new team with a qualified umpire). Contact BASU Training Officer Pete Saunders on: pete.saunders4@gmail.com.

BaseballSoftballUK can usually provide a coach to give your players a basic skills clinic, and the agency also runs a wide range of coach-training courses. Contact info@baseballsoftballuk.com to ask about either a skills clinic or coach-training.

Your local league (if there is one) may also be able to provide a coach or an experienced player to help you get started and to run a few sessions with your team until you've picked up the basics. Many leagues also run open clinics for beginning players before and/or during the season. Don't be afraid to contact your local league and ask for this kind of help.

Remember – as a way to learn both the skills and tactics of softball, there's no substitute for actually playing! So don't just have your players train or attend clinics – find a way that your new team can actually play some games, even if it's just dividing your players in two and playing each other!

BEGINNERS' CLINICS AND COURSES

A number of slowpitch softball leagues run beginners' sessions before or during the season for new players or teams. You can contact your nearest league to ask for details.

In London, a series of beginners' sessions are run in Regents Park from June through August each year by the London Softball League (LSL), and are open to anyone who wants to attend. In most years, one or more new teams are formed from these sessions and enter the GLSML in the following season. For more information about these sessions, contact development@glsmll.co.uk.

NATIONAL GOVERNING BODY AFFILIATION

Affiliation with the British Softball Federation (BSF) is essential for a new team or club to function fully and take advantage of help and opportunities offered by the UK softball community.

Local Authorities will often require National Governing Body (NGB) affiliation for teams to use their facilities, and BaseballSoftballUK is only able to support those clubs affiliated or intending to affiliate to the Federation.

Affiliation will also qualify the club to participate in competitions organised or sanctioned by the BSF, and as noted below, affiliation will automatically provide Civil and Public Liability insurance cover which protects players, coaches, officials and administrators.

If your team joins a league that is recognised by the British Softball Federation, then you can affiliate to the Federation through the league. Otherwise, you will have to affiliate your team directly to the Federation. Contact details for Federation officials are given below.

INSURANCE

New teams need insurance to cover all eventualities and this insurance should cover players, volunteers, spectators and visiting teams. Public Liability insurance is also a requirement for most funding bodies and is required by Local Authorities or private clubs to hire out pitches.

Public Liability insurance is provided through affiliation to the British Softball Federation, and optional

personal accident and injury insurance can be purchased through the Federation as well. Teams should ensure that the BSF insurance, which fulfils minimum requirements only, is adequate for their needs.

Further insurance can be obtained through an insurance company.

JOINING A LEAGUE

Once you know a bit about the rules and how to play, you may want to join an existing league, or put a toe in the water by playing friendly matches against local league teams. Many leagues have separate divisions, ranked by ability, and are happy for beginners' teams to start at the bottom where they can play against similar opposition.

Contact the Chair or Director of your local league (for details, email info@britishsoftball.org) and have a chat about how and when you might join, how you might arrange some friendly matches and what the league can do to help your team.

Don't forget to ask whether the league runs any indoor softball training or competition activities during the winter. Most leagues do, and this is often the best way for a new team to get ready for the upcoming outdoor season.

COMPETITIONS AND LEAGUES

League and tournament competitions are run – or, in most cases, sanctioned – by the BSF.

Once you have affiliated your club to a local BSF league, you will be affiliated through the league to the BSF and will be eligible to play in BSF-sanctioned competitions. Details of how to register your team and establish a roster for tournament and league play can be found on the BSF website: <http://britishsoftball.org/resources/registration>.

PATTERNS OF PLAY

The outdoor version of slowpitch softball is played roughly from mid-April through late September, and softball competition around the country tends to fall into two basic patterns.

League play. Most co-ed slowpitch league matches take place on weekday evenings after work, although a small number of leagues play on weekends. Sometimes, league matches are played at one or more central locations, but some leagues require each team to find a home pitch in a public park or private sports ground.

Local Authorities are much more knowledgeable about softball than they used to be and will usually be willing to mark out a softball diamond in a local park – especially if you can supply a copy of a pitch layout diagram for them to use. You can download a diagram from the British Softball Federation website: http://www.britishsoftball.org/uploads/documents/Files/Facilities/BSF_field_dimensions_slowpitch.pdf.

Weekend tournaments. On most weekends during the outdoor season, there are an increasing variety of tournaments that attract teams from all over the UK. Some of these are closed league tournaments and a few are invitational, but most are open for any team to enter, and usually include both competitive and recreational divisions. A calendar of tournaments and other softball events can be found on the British Softball Federation website (www.britishsoftball.org/events).

The intensity of tournament play and the opportunity to compete against teams of widely varying standards can be an extremely valuable learning experience for beginning teams and is highly recommended – even if you don't win many games your first few times out!

HOME FIELD

Unless local league play takes place in a centralised facility organised by the league, your team may need to approach your Local Authority to use either a park or school field or other local facility as a home field.

If this is the route you intend to take, contact the Sports Development Office at your Local Authority for advice on how to arrange a field to play on. Your regional BSUK Development Manager can also help with this (info@baseballsoftballuk.com).

START-UP EQUIPMENT AND KIT

Playing equipment and kit (some kind of team clothing) are usually requirements before a team can start playing, though in some cases start-up equipment can be loaned by a local league or by BaseballSoftballUK. BSUK staff can advise on equipment suppliers in the UK or online.

Most new teams will need a couple of bats of different weights, a fielder's glove for each player (plus a couple of spares for new players) and maybe a dozen softballs. While there is no need for each team to have a full set of bases, which can be heavy and expensive, a set of lightweight rubber throwdown bases can be useful.

While new teams don't usually go for full uniforms, the minimum is to design and source team T-shirts so that you look like a team when playing games!

Funding to buy equipment and kit can be applied for from funding bodies such as the Sport England Small Grants Scheme or from local community grants. Sponsorship from local businesses is another avenue to explore. More details on funders are set out below.

Starter kits for softball containing bats, gloves, ball and a set of throw-down bases can be obtained from [The Baseball & Softball Shop](#), which supplies equipment for baseball and softball. BSUK Development Managers (see below) can advise on other suppliers.

PUBLICITY

It is advisable to contact the local press to advise them that your club or team is in existence and to advertise for new players etc.

The local press may also agree to print game results and write-ups which will keep your team in the public eye. The BSF and/or BSUK websites can also promote your club by publishing stories about your activities and development.

To promote your club via these websites, please send relevant information – and photos if you have them – to info@britishsoftball.org.

MORE INFORMATION

The information set out above is mainly to do with getting a new softball team started, learning the game and finding a way to play.

Click here --

http://demo.britishsoftball.org/uploads/documents/Developing_Your_Softball_Team_or_Club.pdf -- for more information that will help your new team to grow and remain viable over time through acquiring a structure, a committee, a Constitution, a bank account and other elements that sound boring but are at the heart of any successful sporting enterprise.

Much of that information may not seem relevant now, but you will find that it useful later on.

USEFUL CONTACT DETAILS

BRITISH SOFTBALL FEDERATION KEY CONTACTS

Information

info@britishsoftball.org

Administrator

Bob Fromer

bob.fromer@britishsoftball.org

Membership Officer

Liz Graham

liz@softball.org.uk

BASEBALLSOFTBALLUK REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT MANAGERS

BSUK Development Managers cover the geographical areas shown below – and if your new team isn't located in one of those areas, you can contact the agency's National Development Manager, Chris Rawlings, for help and advice.

BSUK Development Managers can help a new team in a number of ways:

- They can put you in touch with local agencies and organisations that can provide recruitment and other support for your team.
- They can advise on local sources of funding.
- They can usually find a local coach to do sessions with your new players to help them learn the game.
- They can help you contact your nearest local leagues, and can help you find venues for practices or games.

- They can work with you to find the right kind of structure and organisation that will ensure your new team has a sustainable future.

Contact details are:

London & Essex

Liz Knight

liz.knight@bsuk.com

South East (excluding Essex)

Patrick Knock

patrick.knock@bsuk.com

East and West Midlands

Leah Holmes

leah.holmes@bsuk.com.

North West

Luis Arrevillagas

luis.arrevillagas@bsuk.com

If your team is not in any of the regions above, contact:

Chris Rawlings

National Development Manager

chris.rawlings@bsuk.com

For a list of coaching courses at various levels, go to:

<http://www.baseballsoftballuk.com/coach/courses>.

FUNDING SOURCES

When starting a new team, a bit of money can often come in useful, especially if you don't want to ask your new players to reach too deeply into their pockets until they're sure they want to commit to the team and the sport.

Money is often needed when a new team starts up for things such as playing equipment, team T-shirts, venue hire for training sessions or games, league fees, promotional materials to attract new players etc. Below are some places where you might look for funds.

British Softball Federation

One potential source for start-up funding is the British Softball Federation, which gives out development grants of up to £250. New teams can be eligible. Contact BSF Membership Officer Liz Graham (liz@softball.org.uk) for an application form.

If the BSF gives you a grant to get your new team started, they will understandably want to know that you plan to affiliate to the Federation as soon as you get your feet on the ground, either through a league that you might join or as an Independent Team.

Sport England

Sport England, the government agency that funds grassroots sports development in England (there is also a Sport Scotland, Sport Wales and Sport Northern Ireland), has a number of grant funding streams, but the most relevant for new teams and clubs is its **Small Grants** programme, which operates year-round and offers grants from £300 up to £10,000.

Information about how to apply, what kinds of expenditures are eligible etc can be found on:

<https://www.sportengland.org/how-we-can-help/our-funds/return-play-small-grants>.

Local Sources

Your Local Authority can be a source for help and sometimes financial support to get a new team going.

It's worth exploring local grant-making trusts, which can sometimes provide small amounts of money for new local sports activity. Your local library or community web page should be able to provide a list of these funders.

Finally, there might be local businesses willing to sponsor your team, especially if you plan to play in a local league where your sponsor's name and logo will get exposure. If any of your team members work for or have a connection to a local business, it's worth asking the question.

As the old saying goes: if you don't ask, you don't get!