

Softball

Softball is a variant of baseball played with a larger ball on a smaller field. The Amateur Softball Association of America (founded 1933) governs the game in the United States and sponsors annual sectional and World Series championships. The International Softball Federation regulates rules of play in more than 110 countries, including the United States and Canada. Women's fast-pitch softball became an Olympic sport in 1996, but it (and baseball) was dropped in 2005 from the 2012 games.

Despite the name, the ball used is not soft. It is about 12 in. (30 cm) in circumference (sometimes larger for slow-pitch), which is 3 in. (8 cm) larger than a baseball. The infield in softball is smaller than in baseball; each base is 60 ft. (18 m) from the next, as opposed to baseball's 90 ft. (27 m). There are two types of softball: in the most common, slow-pitch softball, the ball, sometimes larger than the standard 12 in, must arch on its path to the batter, 10 players make up a team, and bunting and stealing are prohibited; in fast-pitch softball the pitch is fast, there are 9 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. (12 m) for women as compared with 60.5 ft. (18.4 m) in baseball—and that seven innings instead of nine constitute a regulation game.

Overview

Softball is played between two teams on a large field, with 9 players from one team on the field at a time. The field is usually composed of a dirt or brickdust infield which contains the quadrilateral shape and running areas, and a grass outfield. However, the field also can consist of all dirt, grass, artificial turf, or, in areas such as New York City, asphalt. There are 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 also 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) (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, or immediately following a play once its outcome is clear.

The game is played in a series of innings, usually 7 (youth leagues may play 6). There is no time limit or clock as in other sports, although amateur leagues often impose a time limit for practical reasons. An inning is one series of both teams playing offense and defense. Each inning is divided into a top half and a bottom half indicating which team is playing which role. The offense bats and attempts to score runs, while the defense occupies the field and attempts to record outs in a variety of ways. After the defense records 3 outs, the half inning is over and the teams switch roles.

Gameplay

The playing field is divided into 'fair territory' and 'foul territory'. Fair territory is further divided into the 'infield', and the 'outfield', and the territory beyond the outfield fence.

The field is defined by 'foul lines' that meet at a right angle at 'home plate'. The minimum length of the baselines varies classification of play (see below for official measurements). A fence running between the baselines defines the limits of the field; distance from home plate to the fence varies by field.

Behind home plate is a 'backstop'. It must be between 25 and 30 feet (7.62 and 9.14 meters) behind home plate depending on the type of division that is playing.

'Home Plate' is one corner of a diamond with 'bases' at each corner. The bases other than home plate are 15 in. (38 cm) square, of canvas or a similar material, and not more than 5 in. (13 cm) thick. The bases are usually securely fastened to the ground. The bases are numbered counter clockwise as first base, second base, and third base. Often, but not always, outside first base (that is, in foul territory) and adjacent and connected to it, there is a contrast-colored "double base" or "safety base". It is intended to prevent collisions between the first baseman and the runner. The runner runs for the foul portion of the double base after hitting the ball while the fielding team tries to throw the ball to the regular first base before the runner reaches the safety base. However, not all softball diamonds have these safety bases and they are much more common in women's softball than in men's. The double base is required in ISF championships.

The infield consists of the diamond and the adjacent space in which the infielders (see below) normally play. The outfield is the remaining space between the baselines and between the outfield fence and the infield. The infield is usually "skinned" (dirt), while the outfield has grass in regulation competitions.

Near the center of the diamond is the pitching plate. In fast pitch, a skinned circle 16 feet (4.88 meters) in diameter known as the pitching circle is around the pitching plate.^[13]

A field is officially required to have a warning track between 15 and 12 feet (5 and 4 meters) from the outfield fence. However, if the game is being played on a field larger than required, no warning track is required before the temporary outfield fencing.

Located in foul territory outside both baselines are two 'Coach's Boxes'. Each box is behind a line 15 feet (5 meters) long located 12 feet (3 meters) from each baseline.

Equipment

Equipment required in softball includes a ball, a bat, gloves, uniforms and protective gear: for example, helmets for the offensive team and a helmet, shin guards and chest protector for the defensive catcher. Also cleats, sliding shorts, face masks and knee sliders may be worn for softball.

Ending the game

The team with the most runs after seven innings wins the game. The last (bottom) half of the seventh inning or any remaining part of the seventh inning is not played if the team batting second is leading.

If the game is tied, play usually continues until a decision is reached, by using the international tie-breaker rule. Starting in the top of the eighth inning, the batting team starts with a base-runner on second base, which is the player who is the last available to bat (in other words, the batter who last took their position in the batter's box; regardless whether they were the last out or another runner was put out).

In games where one team leads by a large margin, the run ahead rule may come into play in order to avoid embarrassing weaker teams. In fast pitch and modified pitch, a margin of 15 runs after three innings, 10 after four, or 7 after five is sufficient for a win to be declared for the leading team. In slow pitch, the margin is 20 runs after four innings or 15 after five innings. A game may be lost due to a "forfeit". A score of 7-0 for the team not at fault is recorded (generally one run is awarded for each inning that would have been played). A forfeit may be called due to any of these circumstances: if a team does not show up to play; if one side refuses to continue play; if a team fails to resume play after a suspension of play ends; if a team uses tactics intended to unfairly delay or hasten the game; if a player removed from the game does not leave within one minute of being instructed to do so; if a player that cannot play enters the game and one pitch has been thrown; if a team does not have, for whatever reason, enough players to continue; or if after warning by the umpire, a player continues to intentionally break the rules of the game. This last rule is rarely enforced as players who break rules after being warned are usually removed.

The plate umpire may suspend play because of darkness or anything that puts players or spectators in danger. If five innings have been played, the game is recorded as it stands. This includes ties. If fewer than four innings have been played, the game is not considered a "regulation" game.

Games that are not regulation or are regulation ties are resumed from the point of suspension. If it is a championship game, it is replayed from the beginning. Team rosters may be changed.

Positions

There are nine players out on the field at one time. Although the pitcher and catcher have the ball the most, each person has a specific job. In the infield there is the pitcher, catcher, first baseman, second baseman, shortstop, and third baseman. In the outfield there is left fielder, center fielder, and right fielder. In slow pitch softball there is an extra outfielder in the out field, who is specified as a roamer. Normally, the defensive team will play with four outfielders, meaning there is a left fielder, left-center fielder, right-center fielder, and right fielder.

International competition

The International Softball Federation holds world championships in several categories. The ISF is the international governing body. The Amateur Softball Association is the National Governing Body of Softball for the United States pursuant to the 1976 Amateur Sports Act. Due to the popularity of the sport, there are a multitude of governing bodies such as the United States Specialty Sports Association, International Softball Congress and the National Softball Association.

The ISF holds world championship tournaments in several categories. New Zealand are the current Men's World Champions, having won the title in 2013. Prior to that, Australia won the World Championship in 2009 and New Zealand had won the previous three tournaments before that. In the Women's World Championships the United States is the most dominant team, having won three of the past four Olympic tournaments and the past seven World Championships.

Source: Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia.