

Softball Rules - Slowpitch

Objective: Softball is played by two teams of nine or ten players. The object of the game is to hit the ball and score runs by running around the four bases in turn.

Softball as a game is essentially very similar to baseball. The playing area is smaller for softball, and the ball is bigger and heavier than for baseball, and it must always be pitched underarm. Softball can be played indoors or outdoors, with nine players on a fast-pitch team, ten players on a slow-pitch team.

When the batter has run around all four bases, this is a run. A player may run around in one go, or may run from base to base. If the batter gets around on one hit of the ball, this is called a home run (sometimes called a homer).

A game of softball consists of seven innings. An inning ends when three players on the batting team are out. The team which has scored the most runs at the end of the seven innings wins.

The **strike zone** is the area between the top of the batter's knees and highest part of the shoulder when in batting stance. The ball must go into this area to give the batter a fair chance of hitting it.

If the ball is not pitched into the strike zone and the batter does not swing at it, the umpire (softball referee) will call a **ball**.

A batter may pitch up to three balls. If the fourth pitch is also a ball, the batter may proceed to first base without hitting it. This is called a **walk**. If there are other players on bases, they also advance. In this case there is no chance of any of them being put out.

Strikes

The batter also has a set number of chances. These are called **strikes**. If a legal ball is pitched, and one of the following happens, that is a strike. The batter does not have to try and hit every ball (they may allow a strike against them). A batter may have two strikes against them. On the third, they are **out**.

- the batter swings at the pitch and misses

- the ball goes into the strike zone whether the batter tries to hit it or not
- the ball touches the batter as they swing
- the ball touches the batter within the strike zone
- the batter plays a *foul tip*, where the ball is hit into the hands of the catcher
- a **bunted** ball is played into foul territory
- the ball is played into foul territory

Note that if the ball is played (not bunted) into foul territory, the player is **not out** if they have already had two strikes against them.

The defensive team can put out more than one player from one play. If a fielder makes a tag and throws the ball to another fielder in time for them to make a tag also, then it would be called a *double play* or *triple play* depending on whether two or three players are put out in one go.

Stealing bases is not allowed in slow-pitch softball. The fielding team must assume every batter is going to hit the ball.

Players out

There are several ways a player can be out in softball.

- Three strikes against them
- if they hit a ball into the air (*a fly ball*) and it is caught by a fielder, whether the ball is in fair or foul territory
- a runner can be tagged (if the fielder touches the runner with the ball or with the hand or glove holding the ball), or the base they are running to can be tagged. The base must be tagged by a fielder. If the ball simply hits the base, it does not count

- the batter must have both feet within the batter's box when the ball is hit

Rules for bases

If a runner leaves their base when a ball has been hit which becomes a foul ball, they must return to their original base. They cannot be put out.

When batting, the bat should be held over the home base.

If a runner leaves their base when a fly ball has been caught, they must return to their original base. They can be put out when returning.

If a runner tries to steal a base, the fielder must tag the runner, not the base, to get them out.

When running between bases, runners must run close to the lines within a distance of 0.9 metres (3 feet), unless they are running around a fielder.

If the base is moved, the runner must aim for the original position of the base. A fielder cannot put a player out by tagging the base in its new position.

When a batter hits the ball, all runners advance and if there are runs scored, the runs are credited to the player who hit the ball, as well as the player who has made it all the way around, although each run scored counts as one.

Fair and foul balls

If a player hits a ball into foul territory, this counts as a strike. *Unless* that player has already had two strikes called against them, in which case it would not be a strike. If the player bunts the ball into foul territory, even if two strikes have been called, it counts as a strike.

Q: If a fly ball is hit into fair territory and it hits the ground and then goes out into foul territory, is it a fair or a foul ball?

A: If the ball lands on the ground between home and first, or home and third base, and then goes into foul territory in front of first or third base, without hitting a fielder or an umpire, it is a foul ball. If it first lands on or beyond first or third base in fair territory, then goes into foul territory, it is a fair hit.

Players

1 - Pitcher

Delivers the ball to the batters.

2 - Catcher

Catches strike balls, and advises pitcher what type of pitch to use, by making hand signals as the pitcher is preparing to throw the ball.

3 - First base

Has the most balls thrown to them than any other base player, and tags out runners from the home plate.

4 - Second base

Stands nearer to first base than third, because the shortstop covers the area between second and third base.

5 - Third base

Throws the ball to either the pitcher or other base players, and tags players out generally less than the other bases.

6 - Shortstop

Retrieves a lot of balls, tags runners, and throws to base players.

7 - Left fielder

Has to be quick at getting balls, and returning them to base players.

8 - Centre fielder

Has to be quick at getting balls, and returning them to base players.

9 - Right fielder

Has to be quick at getting balls, and returning them to base players.

Glossary

Bunt - the ball is tapped gently into the infield

Double - when a batter reaches second base from one hit

Error - when a fielder makes a mistake that would normally have put a runner out

Force play - when a batter becomes a runner, so all runners are forced to advance

Grand slam - when a batter scores a home run with a player on each base, scoring four runs in one go

Ground ball - a batted ball that travels along or close to the ground

Line drive - a ball hit hard in a straight line

Safe - an umpire call when a runner has made a base

Single - when a batter reaches first base from one hit

Triple - when a batter reaches third base from one hit