



# 32

## Softball

**S**oftball was first played in Chicago in 1887, indoors, with a 17-inch ball. An outdoor version of the game was played with a 12-inch ball in Minneapolis in 1895. The game was standardized in 1923, and today there are many variations, including fastpitch, slowpitch, 16-inch slowpitch, and coed play. These variations make softball a widely accessible sport, played by young and old alike. More than 4 million people play softball, 2.5 million of them in adult leagues.

The bulk of this chapter focuses on slowpitch rules. Most of these rules apply also to fastpitch and 16-inch slowpitch; for differences, see the "Modifications" section near the end of the chapter.

**Objective:** To score the most runs.

**Scoring:** A player scores a run when she safely touches first, second, third, and home before her team makes three outs.

**Number of Players:** 10 per team (11 if using an extra player, who bats but does not field; only 10 are on the field).

**Number of Innings:** Seven.

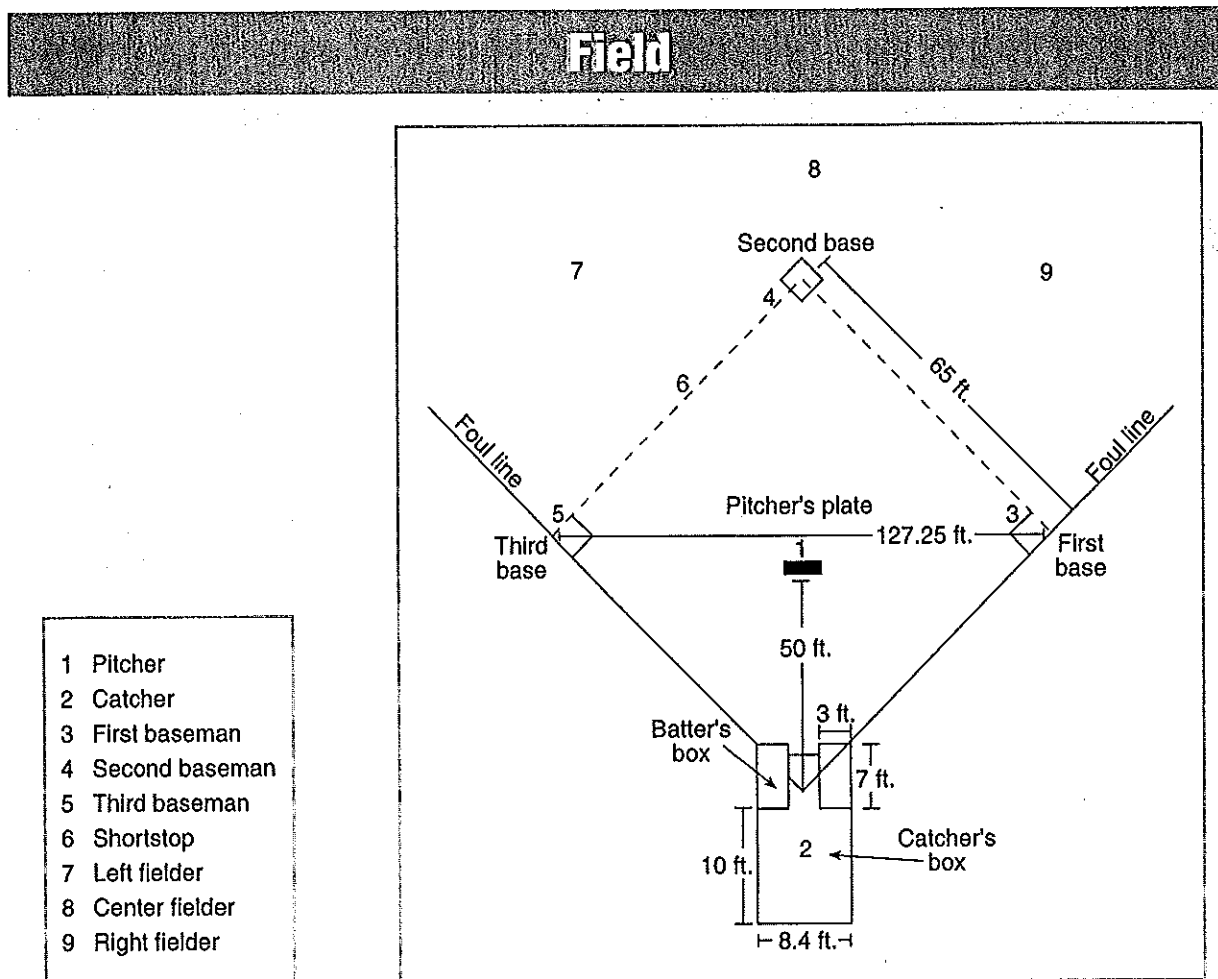
**Number of Outs per Inning:** Three outs for each team.

**Overview:** The defense fields 10 players. The extra player is optional, but if one is used, he must be in the starting lineup and be used for the entire game. Each team has a batting order it must adhere to, though substitutions may be made. Once a player is removed from the game, she can reenter the game once. The visiting team bats first, in the top half of the *inning*; the home team bats in the bottom half of the *inning*. The pitcher pitches and attempts to get the batter out; the batter attempts to get on base and eventually score. The most common ways to record outs are by *strikeout*, *force out*, *tag out*, and *fly out*.

## FIELD

Figure 32.1 shows the dimensions of a softball field for adult slowpitch.

*Home plate* is five-sided, 17 inches wide across the edge facing the pitcher, 8.5 inches long on sides parallel to the batter's box, and 12 inches long on the sides of the point facing the catcher. *Bases* are 15 inches square, not more than 5 inches thick. A *double base*, 15 inches by 30 inches, can be used at first base. Half the base is in fair territory and is white; the other half is in foul territory and is orange. The *pitcher's plate* is 24 inches long by 6 inches wide; its front is 50 feet from the back point of home plate. The *outfield fence*



► Figure 32.1 The dimensions, components, and player positions of a softball field.

Adapted from White 1990.

varies in distance, from 265 to 275 feet for women to 275 to 325 feet for men. In coed play the fences are 275 to 300 feet. A *dead ball area* is drawn with chalk outside the field of play. The line itself is in play, but if a fielder has either foot on the ground completely over the line, the ball is dead and no play can be made. If a fielder intentionally carries a live ball into the dead ball area, any runners are awarded two bases beyond the last bases they legally touched. If the act is unintentional, each runner is awarded one base.

## TERMS

Note: The following list includes terms that are specific to fastpitch as well as slowpitch.

An **altered bat** is illegal. This includes inserting material inside the bat, applying more than two layers of tape to the grip, or attaching a "flare" or "cone" grip to the bat.

An **appeal play** is one in which the umpire does not have to make a decision unless requested by a coach or player. The appeal must be made before the next pitch or before the pitcher and infielders have crossed the foul line on their way to the bench.

An **assist** is credited to a fielder when her throw leads to the putout of a runner. Two or more fielders can receive assists on the same play.

A batter is credited with a **base hit** ("single") when he reaches first base safely on a hit without aid of an *error*, or by way of a fielder's choice or force play at another base.

A batter receives a **base on balls** when the umpire calls four pitches "balls" (outside the strike zone and not swung at by the batter). This allows the batter to reach first base safely. In slowpitch, the pitcher can notify the umpire if he wants to issue an intentional base on balls (also called a "walk"); the batter then may go to first base without getting any pitches.

The **base path** extends three feet on either side of a direct line between bases. A runner is out when she runs outside the base path,

except to avoid interfering with a fielder fielding a batted ball.

A **catch** means a fielder has secured the ball with his hands or glove. Regarding a catch that results in a putout—such as an outfielder catching a fly ball or a first baseman catching a throw on a force out from an infielder—the catch is good if the player has complete control of the ball but then drops it in the act of removing it from his glove or throwing it. A fly ball is not considered caught if the fielder simultaneously falls or collides with another player or the fence and the ball is dislodged.

A **chopped ball** occurs in slowpitch when the batter strikes the ball downward to bounce the ball high in the air intentionally. This is illegal and the batter is ruled out.

A **crow hop** is executed in fastpitch play by a pitcher who steps or hops off the front of the pitcher's plate, replants her pivot foot, and pushes off from this new starting point as she completes her delivery.

A **dead ball** is a ball that is not in play. A **delayed dead ball** remains live until the play is finished; at that point the proper call is made. A delayed dead ball may be called for an illegal pitch, catcher's obstruction, plate umpire interference, obstruction, or a batted or thrown ball hit with detached equipment.

A **double play** is recorded by the defense when two outs are made on the same play.

A **double** is a hit in which the batter safely reaches second base.

An **error** is charged to a fielder who misplays a ball (e.g., dropping a fly ball or throw, or fumbling a ground ball), thus prolonging an at-bat for the batter or the life of a base runner, or permitting a runner to advance one or more bases. An error may be charged even if the fielder does not touch the ball (e.g., for a ground ball that goes between the legs).

**Fair territory** and **foul territory** are marked by two foul lines. Each line extends from home plate. One line creates a third baseline and left field line, stopping at the left field fence; the other creates a first baseline and

right field line, stopping at the right field fence. Anything on or in between the foul lines is considered fair territory; anything outside the foul lines is considered foul territory.

A **fake tag** is a form of obstruction of a runner by a fielder who neither has the ball nor is about to receive it. The umpire will award the runner the base he would have made, in the umpire's judgment, had the obstruction not occurred.

A **force play** occurs when a runner is forced to advance to the next base because the batter becomes a runner. When a batter hits a ground ball with a runner on first, the runner is forced to run to second. If a fielder touches second base with the ball in her possession before the runner reaches second, the runner is "forced out" at second. If a runner is on second when a ground ball is hit, she is not forced to advance if first base is unoccupied.

A **foul ball** is any ball hit into foul territory.

A **ground rule double** is awarded a batter when his fair ball bounces over or passes through or under the fence.

A **home run** is recorded when a batter hits a fair ball over the fence or circles the bases on an inside-the-park hit without being thrown out.

An **illegally batted ball** occurs when a ball is hit and the batter's entire foot is on the ground completely outside the lines of the batter's box, or when any part of the foot is touching home plate. It also occurs when an illegal bat is used.

The **infield** refers to that portion of the field containing the four bases. In terms of players, the infield is made up of the first, second, and third basemen and the shortstop. The pitcher and the catcher (called the "battery") also are positioned in the infield.

The **infield fly rule** prohibits an infielder from intentionally dropping a fair fly ball that can be caught with normal effort. This rule is in effect with first and second, or first, second, and third bases occupied before two are out.

When an umpire calls an infield fly rule, the batter is automatically out and runners may advance at their own risk. Any defensive player positioned in the infield at the start of the play is considered an infielder for the purpose of this rule.

**Interference** occurs when an offensive player impedes or confuses a defensive player as she is trying to make a play. Interference can be physical or verbal. Defensive players must be given the chance to play the ball. In fastpitch, a batter may be called for interference if he impedes the catcher in his throw on an attempted steal. A base runner may be called for interference if she is hit by a batted ball while she is not on a base and the ball has not passed an infielder, excluding the pitcher. It is not interference, however, if the batted ball was first touched by a defensive player or if no infielder had a chance to make an out on the ball.

A runner may **lead off** a base in fastpitch, once the ball has left the pitcher's hand. In slowpitch, a runner may not leave her base until the ball is batted, touches the ground, or reaches home plate, and she must return to her base if the ball is not hit.

"**Leaping**" is the term used in fastpitch when the pitcher goes airborne as he delivers the ball. With this delivery, the ball is released as the pitcher's feet return to the ground. This is legal in men's fastpitch, but illegal in women's fastpitch.

A **legal touch**, resulting in an out, is made by a defensive player who tags a runner with the ball while the runner is not on a base. The ball may not be juggled or dropped by the fielder, unless the runner knocks the ball from the fielder's hands or glove after the tag.

A defensive player may be called for **obstruction** if she hinders a batter from hitting the ball or impedes a base runner while the fielder does not have the ball and is not about to receive the ball.

An **out** may be recorded in a variety of ways, including strikeout, force out, tag out, and fly out.

The **outfield** is that portion of fair territory between the infield and the fence. In terms of players, the outfield consists of the left fielder, the center fielder, the right fielder, and, in slowpitch, an extra fielder.

A batter-runner may **overslide** first base and not be put out, but a runner oversliding second or third base is in jeopardy of being tagged out.

In fastpitch, a **passed ball** is charged to the catcher when she fails to control a pitch that should have been caught or contained with normal effort and a base runner or base runners advance.

A **quick return pitch** is one made by a pitcher before the batter is set.

A batter is credited with the appropriate number of **runs batted in** (RBIs) when his hit is responsible for one or more runners' scoring. RBIs are not tallied for runs scored as a result of **errors** or if a run scores as the batter grounds into a **double play**.

A **sacrifice fly** is credited to a batter whose caught fly ball results in a runner on third base tagging up and scoring. A sacrifice fly does not count as a time at bat. A run must score for a sacrifice fly to be recorded.

In fastpitch, a runner may attempt to **steal** a base during a pitch to the batter. In slowpitch, no stealing is allowed.

A pitched ball is in a batter's **strike zone** when it is over any part of home plate between her armpits and the top of her knees in fastpitch play, or between her back shoulder and front knee in slowpitch play.

A batter is credited with a **triple** when he reaches third base safely on his hit.

A **triple play** is credited to the defense when it records three outs on the same play.

In fastpitch, a **wild pitch** occurs when a pitch eludes the catcher, allowing one or more runners to advance a base. A wild pitch is judged to be the pitcher's fault, not the catcher's. A ball that bounces in the dirt and allows any

base runners to advance is automatically a wild pitch.

## PLAYERS

In slowpitch, a team has 10 fielders:

- Pitcher
- Catcher
- First baseman
- Second baseman
- Third baseman
- Shortstop
- Left fielder
- Center fielder
- Right fielder
- Extra fielder

A team may also have an extra player (EP) who bats but does not field. The EP is optional, but if one is used, he must be in the starting lineup and must be used for the entire game. With an EP, all 11 players must bat, and any 10 may play defense. Defensive positions may be switched, but the batting order must remain constant.

All players, including the EP, may be replaced and may reenter the game once. The starting player and the substitute cannot be in the lineup at the same time; each player must occupy his same position in the batting order. A substitute may enter a game only once. A starting pitcher who is removed from the game may reenter the game once at any position except pitcher.

Under the *short-handed rule*, a team may start with 10 or 11 players and continue with one less player when a player leaves a game for any reason other than ejection. If the player leaving the game is a base runner, she is called out; when her turn at bat comes, an automatic out is declared. The player may not return to the lineup unless she has left for the *blood rule*, which stipulates that a player who is bleeding or who has blood on her uniform must receive appropriate treatment before continuing to play. Play may be momentarily suspended

while the player receives treatment, or the player may be required to at least temporarily leave the game.

A player or coach who is ejected may stay on the bench, unless the offense is flagrant, in which case the ejected person must leave the grounds. If an ejected player continues to participate or reenters the game, the contest is forfeited to the other team.

## PLAY

The basics of softball are found in the rules for pitching, batting, base running, runners advancing safely, runners being put out, and recording wins.

### Pitching

The pitcher must come to a complete stop for at least one second while facing the batter and then release the ball within 10 seconds. One foot must be in contact with the pitcher's plate throughout the delivery. A pitcher may use any continuous windup but must deliver the ball on the first forward swing of the arm past the hip and toward home plate. All pitches must be thrown underhand and must reach an arc between 6 and 12 feet. The pitcher may not continue her windup after releasing the ball.

At the beginning of each half inning, and when a relief pitcher enters the game, the pitcher has one minute to complete not more than three warm-up pitches. A pitcher must be removed on the second conference in an inning. Shouting instructions from the bench is not considered a conference. A starting pitcher is credited with a win when she has pitched at least four innings and her team has a lead that it does not give up when she leaves the game. In a game shortened to five innings, the pitcher must pitch at least three innings to be credited with a victory. A pitcher is charged with a loss when he leaves the game with his team trailing, and his team fails to tie the score or gain the lead.

An umpire calls "no pitch" when play is suspended, when a runner leaves his base before the pitch reaches home or is hit, when a runner has not yet retouched her base after

a foul or dead ball, or when the ball slips from the pitcher's hand during his windup or backswing.

### Batting

Players must hit in the batting order on their lineup card. The batter must stand in the batter's box (the lines are part of the box); no part of her feet may be outside the lines. The batter may not hinder the catcher from throwing while standing in the batter's box.

### Batter Out

A batter is out when he swings and misses at a third strike, or fouls a third strike; when his fair or foul fly ball is caught in the air by a fielder; when, on a ground ball, a defensive player who possesses the ball touches first base before he does; or when he switches boxes after the pitcher begins to pitch.

A batter is also out when he has an entire foot on the ground out of the batter's box and he hits a fair or foul ball; when any part of his foot touches home plate and he hits a fair or foul ball; when he is caught using an illegal or altered bat; or when he bunts or chops the ball.

Other instances in which batters are out include these:

- After the batter hits the ball in fair territory, the bat strikes the ball again (unless the umpire rules this contact was unintentional).
- A batted ball in fair territory strikes the batter outside of the batter's box.
- A base runner interferes with a fielder before the batter reaches first base.
- The batter-runner runs outside the 3-foot lane after hitting a fair ball and interferes with the fielder taking the throw at first base. (The batter-runner may, however, run outside the 3-foot lane to avoid a fielder attempting to field a ball.)
- The batter-runner interferes with a fielder attempting to field the ball.
- The batter-runner rounds first base on a hit, turns toward second, and is tagged.

## Base Running

A base runner must touch the bases in legal order. A runner is entitled to an unoccupied base if she reaches it before she is put out. Two runners may not occupy the same base. The runner who arrives first is entitled to the base, unless forced to advance; the other runner may be tagged out with the ball. If the first runner was forced to advance, she may be tagged out.

A run does not count if the third out is made by the batter or a runner being forced out at a base, or by a runner being tagged out before another runner touches home plate.

A runner must tag up before advancing on a caught fly ball. The runner may not leave her base until the ball is touched by the fielder. In slowpitch play, a runner may not steal. A runner hit by a batted ball is out, unless she is on a base when the ball hits her. If the closest defensive player is in front of the base the runner is on, the ball is live. If the closest defender is behind the base, the ball is dead.

## Runner Advancement

A runner may advance, without the risk of being put out, when he is forced to vacate a base because the batter is walked, when a fielder is called for obstructing the runner, when the ball is overthrown (runners advance two bases from where they were when the ball left the thrower's hand), and when the ball is blocked by equipment not involved in the game (unless it is blocked by the offensive team's equipment, in which case the runner closest to home is called out).

Other situations in which runners may advance without the risk of being put out include when the batter hits an over-the-fence home run, when the batter hits a ground-rule double, when a fielder unintentionally carries a live ball into dead ball territory (one base), or when a fielder intentionally causes a live ball to go into dead ball territory (two bases).

A runner may advance, but risks being put out, when the batter hits the ball, when a fly ball is first touched, or when a fair ball strikes the umpire or another runner after having passed an infielder other than the pitcher.

A runner must return to his base when the batter hits a foul ball, when an illegal hit is declared by the umpire, when the batter or another runner is called for interference, when a pitch is not hit by the batter, or when the umpire rules that a fielder intentionally dropped a ball.

## Runner Out

The runner is out when she runs out of the baseline to avoid being tagged out; when she is tagged with a live ball while not on a base; when a fielder in possession of the ball touches the base to which the runner is forced to advance; when she passes a runner ahead of her; when she leaves her base before a caught fly ball is first touched and the play is appealed; or when she misses a base and the play is appealed.

A runner is also out when she interferes with a fielder attempting to field or throw a ball; when she is hit by a batted ball while not on base; when she purposely kicks the ball or runs the bases backward to confuse the defense; or when the third-base coach runs toward home to draw a throw (the runner closest to home is out).

In addition, a runner is out when a coach or team member intentionally interferes with a thrown ball while in the coach's box; when the runner stays on her feet and deliberately crashes into a fielder who has the ball; when she leaves her base before the pitch reaches home plate, touches the ground, or is hit; or when she doesn't return immediately to her base when the pitcher receives the ball after a pitch while in the 8-foot radius of the pitcher's mound (fastpitch only).

## Runner Safe

A runner is not out when he runs out of the baseline to avoid interfering with a fielder; when he is hit by a fair, untouched batted ball and the umpire rules that no fielder had a chance to make an out; when he cannot avoid contact with a fair ball that is touched by any fielder; when he is tagged with a ball that is not held securely by the fielder; and when he overruns first base and returns to the base without turning toward second.

In addition, a runner is not out when he is on base while hit by a batted ball or when he dislodges a base while sliding into it.

## Recording a Win

A win may be recorded in a variety of ways:

- **Seven-inning win for the visitors:** If the visitors are ahead after seven complete innings, the game is over.

- **Seven-inning win for the home team:** If the home team is ahead after the visitors bat in the top half of the seventh inning, the game is over; if the home team scores the winning run in the bottom of the seventh, the game is over when the run scores.

- **Extra-inning victory:** A game tied at the end of seven innings goes into *extra innings* and is played until one team has scored more than the other at the end of a complete inning or until the home team scores the winning run.

- **Shortened game:** A game stopped by rain or darkness or for other reasons is considered complete if after five innings one team has scored more runs than the other team. The game is considered complete if after four and a half innings the home team has scored more runs than the visitors.

- **Forfeit:** The umpire may call a forfeit for a number of reasons, which include a team's failing to show up or refusing to begin a game, noticeably delaying or hastening the game, or willfully breaking the rules. If an ejected player does not leave within one minute, that, too, is reason to call a forfeit. The score of a forfeited game is always 7-0.

## EQUIPMENT

The ball is smooth-seamed, flat-surfaced, and pebble- or dimple-textured, with concealed stitches. Its core is cork, rubber, or a polyurethane mix, covered with horsehide or cowhide. The 11-inch ball weighs between 5.9 and 6.1 ounces. The 12-inch ball weighs between 6.25 and 7 ounces.

The bat is made of hardwood, metal, graphite, or other approved material. It may not be

longer than 34 inches or weigh more than 38 ounces. It may not exceed 2.25 inches in diameter. A safety grip must be between 10 and 15 inches long and not extend more than 15 inches from the bottom of the bat. Metal bats may be angular.

Gloves may be worn by any player, but only the catcher and first baseman may wear mitts, with thumb and body sections. Webbing on any glove or mitt may not exceed five inches. Pants, sliding pants, and shirts should be of the same design. Caps are optional; if they are worn, they must be of the same design. Exposed jewelry may not be worn. Shoes may have soft or hard rubber cleats or be smooth. In adult play, metal sole or heel plates may be used if the spikes do not extend more than .75 inch. Shoes with round metal spikes are illegal.

## OFFICIALS

Umpires govern the game of softball. The *home plate umpire* stands behind the catcher. She controls the game and calls balls and strikes. She also calls plays involving the batter, fair and foul balls, and plays at the plate. The *base umpire* assists the home plate umpire in making calls and makes decisions at the bases. See figure 32.2 for umpires' signals.

## MODIFICATIONS

The following modifications explain some of the major differences between the rules just presented and the rules for fastpitch, 16-inch slowpitch, coed, and senior play.

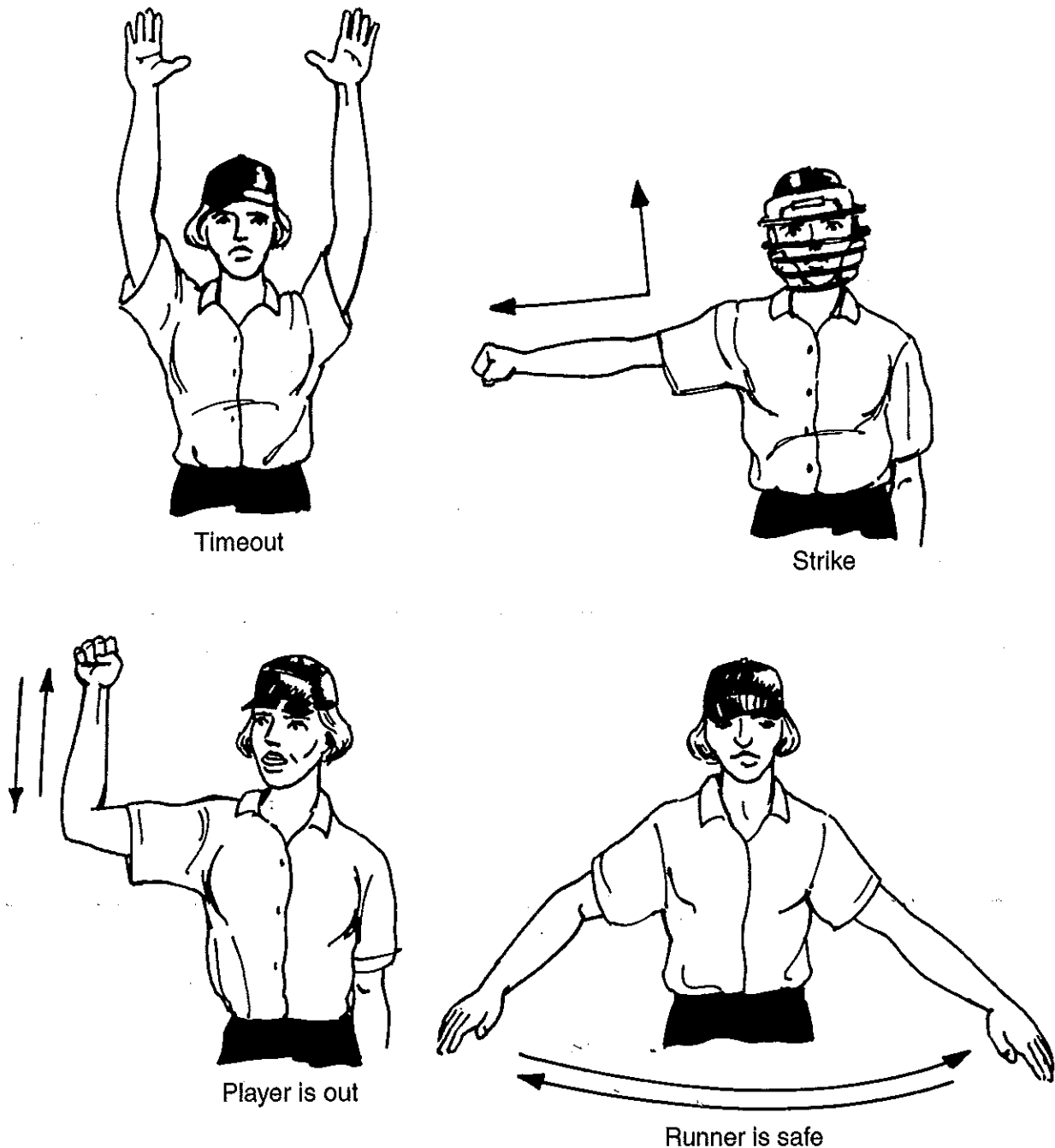
### Fastpitch

A team has nine players, with an optional designated player (DP), who can hit for one of the nine players. If the DP plays defense for the player he's hitting for, that player is considered to have left the game. The DP can play defense for any other player, and that player can still hit.

Other differences include the following:

- **Pitching:** The pitcher's hand may go past his hip twice if there are not two com-





► Figure 32.2 Common softball officials' signals.

plete revolutions in the windup. In men's and boys' Junior Olympic competition, the pitcher needs to have only one foot in contact with the pitcher's plate. In women's and girls' Junior Olympic competition, both feet must be in contact with the pitcher's plate.

One step must be taken forward in releasing the ball. Male adult and Junior Olympic

pitchers may have both feet in the air during this step. Female adult and Junior Olympic pitchers must drag the foot or push off the pitcher's plate with the pivot foot; the leap is not legal in female competition. For both males and females, the delivery is underhanded, with the hand below the hip and the wrist not farther from the body than the elbow.

After the pitcher has taken her position, she may not throw to a base without stepping back off the pitcher's plate before throwing. Failure to step off the pitcher's plate results in a ball being called and any runners advancing one base. "No pitch" is called when the umpire judges that the pitcher is attempting to "quick pitch" a batter who is not set.

- **Ball in play:** The ball is in play when a ball or strike is called. The ball is also live during an intentional walk.

- **Batter safe:** A batter is not out on a third strike that is a foul ball, unless it is a bunt. A batter hit by a pitch—even if it bounces—that is not a strike and that he attempts to elude is awarded first base.

- **Third strike:** In Junior Olympic 10-and-under play, the batter is out on the third strike, whether the ball is caught or not.

- **Base running:** Runners must maintain contact with their bases until the ball leaves the pitcher's hand or they will be called out. Stealing is allowed at all levels except for Junior Olympic 10-and-under. In Junior Olympic 10-and-under, runners may leave base when the ball leaves the pitcher's hand but must return to the base if the ball is not hit.

A runner off her base after a pitch must advance immediately to the next base or return to her base once the pitcher has the ball within the 8-foot circle. Failure to do so results in her being called out.

Runners advance one base when the umpire calls an illegal pitch. On a wild pitch or passed ball lodged in or under the backstop, runners are entitled to advance one base.

- **Breaking ties:** In Junior Olympic girls' and women's fastpitch, if the score is tied after nine innings, the offensive team begins its half inning with the batter who had made the last out in the previous inning placed on second base.

## 16-Inch Slowpitch

A strike is live, but runners cannot advance. Runners may lead off their bases, but they do risk being picked off by the pitcher or catcher. They may not advance on an overthrown pick-off attempt.

## Coed

The lineup consists of five males and five females, batting in alternating order. Two males and two females play in both the infield and the outfield; one male and one female split duties as pitcher and catcher. The lineups can also have two extra players (EPs), one male and one female. Any 10 players may play defense if the proper mix is kept. If a male batter is walked, whether intentionally or not, the following female batter has the option of walking also. The 11-inch ball is pitched to women; the 12-inch ball is pitched to men.

## Senior

One or two EPs may be used. Unlimited *courtesy runners* are allowed; any player in the batting order may be used as a runner. A player may be used as a courtesy runner only once an inning; if it's his time at bat and he is on base, he is called out. A second home plate is placed 8 feet from the back tip of home plate, on the first base line extended. Runners must touch this second home plate. If the runner touches the original home plate, he may be called out on an appeal play. Once a runner crosses a line 20 feet from home plate, he may not return to third. He will be called out if he does so. A runner may be put out at home in a nonforce situation without being tagged; if a defensive player steps on the original home plate while holding the ball before the runner touches the second home plate, the runner is out.

## ORGANIZATIONS

Amateur Softball Association/USA Softball  
2801 NE 50th Street  
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National Softball Association  
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Lexington, KY 40523  
859-887-4114

United States Specialty Sports Association  
215 Celebration Place, Suite 180  
Celebration, FL 34747  
321-939-7640  
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