

## **INSTRUCTIONS**

This Learning Packet has two parts: (1) text to read and (2) questions to answer.

The text describes a particular sport or physical activity, and relates its history, rules, playing techniques, scoring and popularity.

The Response Forms (questions and puzzles) check your understanding and appreciation of the sport or physical activity.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Softball is a very popular sport in North America. Millions of children and adults play and enjoy this game. Softball has been played in the United States and Canada since the late 1800's. An International Softball Federation was formed in 1952. This organization coordinates international competition and regular regional and world championship tournaments for men and women. In 1996 softball was added as an Olympic sport. In that same year the United States became the first gold medal winner of this new Olympic sport.



The fundamentals of softball are the same as those of baseball. Batting and fielding is similar in both games. Softball is played on a smaller field, however, and the game is seven innings long instead of nine. In softball, the ball is pitched underhand, whereas in baseball the pitch is overhand or sidearm. Base stealing is permitted in both games, but in softball the runner must keep in contact with the base until the pitcher throws a pitch.

There are many variations to the game of softball; some are officially recognized and others are not. In Chicago, for example, Windy City or Cabbage Ball is played with a 16-inch ball and without gloves. In Maine and Alaska, people play softball in the snow. In California, a game has developed called Over the Line: OTL players don't use gloves and they don't run bases. These variations of the game exist in many regions, however, fast-pitch



and slow-pitch softball are the two dominate the games in North America.

## **HISTORY OF THE GAME**

The game of softball began in Chicago, Illinois on Thanksgiving Day in 1887. Several young men at the Farragut Boat Club were waiting for a telegraph to see who won a Yale-Harvard football game. While waiting, one man threw an old boxing glove at a friend. He in turn hit it with a broom handle. Another friend, George Hancock, grabbed the glove, tied it into a sphere and said, "Let's play ball!" The friends chose up sides, and the first game of softball began.

After the game, Hancock created a crude ball that was larger than a baseball. He then drew up a list of rules and decided that the game could be played in a field much smaller than a regular baseball field. He thought an area like a school gym would be just right for this new game of softball.

In 1887 several softball teams were formed in Chicago. It was not long before the game spread to other parts of the country. Hancock wrote the first set of rules in 1889. As new teams formed, they adopted new rules. One of the obvious differences between the teams was the lack of a standard bat or ball size.

Eventually, a committee of the Amateur Softball Association was formed and met in 1933 to set standard rules. Today the game of softball is played worldwide with standard sets of rules. There are still three sizes of balls in use: 12-inch, 14-inch, and 16-inch. The 12-inch ball is the most popular.

The first softball fast-pitch national tournament for both men and women was held in 1933 in Chicago. More than 350,000 people attended the three days of playoffs. In later years the national tournament was held in a variety of large cities. Today the Amateur Softball Association crowns national champions in both fast-pitch and slow-pitch, with fast-pitch dominating international competition.



## **HOW THE GAME IS PLAYED**

The game starts as the batter steps into one of the batter boxes on either side of the home plate. The pitcher then tries to throw the ball through the batter's strike zone using an underhand motion. For slow pitch, the strike zone is between the shoulders and the knees. For fast pitch it is between the armpits and the knees.

If the batter doesn't swing and the ball passes through the strike zone, the umpire will call a "strike." But if the ball pitched is outside the strike zone and the batter doesn't swing, the umpire calls the pitch a "ball." The batter can get a strike if he swings at a pitch and misses. He can also get a strike if the ball is hit into foul territory. A batter remains at the plate until she hits a ball into fair territory, takes four balls for a walk to first base, or gets three strikes for an out. If the count is already at two strikes, a foul ball will not be called a strike unless it's a "three fouls and you're out" league.



If the batter hits a fair ball, the defense can make a force-out by throwing the ball to first base before the runner gets there. The umpire will call the runner out as long as the first base player has control of the ball and a foot on the bag. If another runner is already on base, the defense will often choose to pick off the lead runner. It's important to remember that if the lead runner doesn't have to run, a fielder must tag the runner to get an out. For example, a runner on second base doesn't have to go to third if first base is empty. If the runner heads to third, the person playing third will place the ball in his glove and touch the runner with it to get the runner out. The defense can tag an offensive player who overruns second or third base.



The defense can also get the batter out by catching a fair or foul ball on a fly. After a fly ball for an out, all runners on base must tag up (they must be touching their original base until the ball is caught). When a fly ball is hit deep into the outfield, a runner may tag up and then run to the next base. Since the runner doesn't have to run, he or she must be tagged out.

The offense scores a run when a person makes it all the way around the bases without being tagged or forced out. Each team bats until there are three outs. An inning is completed when both teams have batted. The visiting team bats first. This is called the top of the inning. The home team bats second, or in the bottom of the inning. Softball games last seven innings unless there is a tie or the game is rained out. The team with the most runs wins.

## **THE PLAYING FIELD**

Softball is played on a diamond-shaped field with bases located at each corner of the diamond. The field is divided into an infield and an outfield.

The dimensions of the field vary with the type of softball being played and the age and sex of the players. These differences ensure that the field is appropriate for the strength and skill level of the players using it. For example, in a ten-year-old boys' game the pitcher stands 35 feet from the batter. In order to hit a home run the batter must hit the ball over a fence 175 feet away.

In a men's slow pitch league, on the other hand, the pitcher throws from 65 feet away and the outfield fence is 300 feet away. Most field dimensions, including distance from the pitching rubber to home plate, length between the bases, and distance to the outfield fence, will be slightly smaller for a fast pitch game than for a game of slow pitch.



## **THE VARIOUS FORMS OF SOFTBALL**

Although the many games of softball have similarities, they also have some basic differences. Each type has a number of rules that regulate the style and speed of pitching.

For example, modified pitch eliminates two of the fastest and most difficult-to-hit pitches (the “windmill” and the “slingshot”) that are used in straight fast-pitch softball. Slow-pitch rules require, among other things, that the ball travel within minimum and

maximum limits of arc when pitched. One form of slow pitch is played with a ball that is 16 inches in diameter, which is much larger than the standard 12-inch ball.

Since slow pitch has a larger field, it uses more players than fast pitch. Fast pitch is played with nine people while slow pitch adds an extra player to the outfield to make ten. Slow pitch, unlike baseball or fast pitch, sets limits on the number of out-of-the-park home runs allowed per inning. Depending on the league's classification, this number can range from zero to 12. The batter will be called out for any home runs hit in excess of the limit.



## **THE PITCHER**

Rules for the pitcher differ for each type of softball. An obvious reason for pitching rules is to make certain that a certain speed of pitch is thrown to the batter. Another reason is to ensure that the pitcher doesn't confuse the batter and base runners with "fake" pitches.

Failure to follow the pitching rules will result in an "illegal pitch." In fast pitch, the penalty for an illegal pitch is a ball called for the batter and an extra base for any base runners. In slow pitch, a ball is called for the batter but the runners do not advance automatically.

Men's and women's fast pitch softball have rule variations that determine the stance of the pitcher. Both games require the pitcher and the catcher to be in position before the pitcher is considered ready to pitch. The catcher must stay inside the catcher's box until the ball has left the pitcher's hand. When stepping up to the pitcher's rubber, the pitcher should approach with both hands separated. The ball may be held in either the glove or the throwing hand. For men, one foot must be placed on the pitching rubber and the other may be on or behind the pitching rubber. Women must have both feet on the pitching rubber. In either case, the shoulders should be squarely facing



the batter. Only at this time may the pitcher receive signals from the catcher. When the pitcher is ready, both hands must be brought together holding the ball still in front of the body, for from one to ten seconds. The moment the pitcher takes one hand off the ball, the pitch proper has begun.

The pitcher may use any windup, but it is illegal to reverse the forward motion of the windup before the pitch is released. This will prevent the pitcher from throwing “fakes.”

In men’s play, the ball must be thrown with an underhanded motion with the hand below the hip. The wrist may not be further from the body than the elbow. When the pitcher takes a step forward, it must be taken at the same time as the delivery of the ball. The pitcher’s other foot must remain on the pitching rubber until the forward stepping foot has touched the ground. Women start with a different ready-to-pitch stance; the pitcher may allow her pivot foot to drag forward, off the pitching rubber, before her other foot touches the ground. She must make sure that her pivot foot, in leaving the pitching rubber, remains in contact with the ground.



Unless there are base runners that may be stealing the next base, the catcher should return the ball only to the pitcher. This eliminates wasting time and the danger that a ball could actually be called for this infraction.

The pitching in modified pitch softball is very similar to fast pitch, but the ball is released a little lower, since the pitchers begin with both feet on the pitching rubber. In modified ball, the pitcher may not use the windmill or sling-shot pitches.

Slow pitching regulations are a simplified version of the fast pitch regulations. To start, a pitcher must simply pause with the ball held in front of his body, keeping a foot on the pitching rubber. When pitching, the pivot foot must be kept in contact with the rubber but the other foot may step either forward, or backward during the pitch. In slow pitch softball the ball must not be delivered at excessive speed: two such offenses could result in the removal of the pitcher from the pitching position. After leaving the pitcher’s hand, the ball must arc at least six feet from the ground



before crossing home plate. A pitch's maximum height off the ground in slow pitch is 12 feet.

## **EQUIPMENT**

Bats come in a variety of lengths, weights and shapes. Usually a player has a good chance of finding a bat that meets her needs. The bat used should be an official softball bat that is clearly marked "Official Softball" by the manufacturer.

An official bat must be round and can be made from wood, metal, bamboo, plastic or laminated wood. It must not exceed 38 ounces in weight. Metal bats must be free of burrs and any rough or sharp corners. Wooden bats must be made either from one piece of hard wood or from a block of laminated wood.

An official softball bat must not be longer than 34 inches or have a diameter greater than 29/32 inches. All bats must have some type of safety grip of cork, tape, or composition material. A batter can be called out for using an illegal bat and ejected for using an altered bat.

The official softball measures between 11 and 7/8 and 12 and 1/8 inches in circumference, weighs between 6 and 1/2 and 7 ounces. It has a center made of fiber kapok or of a cork-rubber mixture. The ball is covered in chrome-tanned horsehide or cowhide sewed in a seamless stitch with waxed thread. Cement applied to the underside of the covering holds it to the ball.

Each player normally would furnish his own shoes and glove. Molded plastic cleated or metal cleated shoes are worn by softball players. Metal cleated shoes offer the most traction. Before wearing metal cleats check with your league to make sure they are allowed. Rounded metal spikes, such as track or golf spikes, are not allowed.



A ball player's glove or mitt is her most important personal furnishing. A good player keeps her glove or mitt in fine condition, keeping it free from dirt. Only the catcher and the first baseman are allowed to wear a mitt. The other players wear gloves.

The rules require a catcher to wear a mask in fast pitch and recommend one for slow pitch. Other catching equipment includes a chest protector and shin guards. In most cases the team sponsor will furnish the catcher's equipment as well as the batting helmets. Batting helmets must be worn in fast-pitch games, not only by the batter but also by the base runners and the on-deck batter as she warms up.

Uniforms for all players must be identical in color, trim and fit. Undershirts that are exposed to view and worn by more than one team player should be of the same color. Ragged or torn sleeves on uniform shirts or undershirts are not permitted. Caps are also part of the official uniform.





**SOFTBALL NOTES**

Softball is competitive at several levels. Most middle and high schools offer competitions for girls. Fast-pitch softball is the fifth most popular sport for girls at the high school level with some 362,000 participants in over 15,000 schools. At the college and university level the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) sponsors women competitions and championship tournaments.

A recent rule change for high school softball focused on safety: “the batting helmet and catcher’s helmet shall have a non-glare surface and not mirror-like.”

Softball was an Olympic sport until 2012 when it was dropped from the participation list for the 2012 Olympics in London. Prior to this one of the greatest victories for softball enthusiasts occurred in 1996 (Atlanta) when the USA defeated China 3-1 to capture softball’s first Olympic gold Medal. On that July 30, day a capacity crowd of over 8,700 witnessed the USA win behind the pitching of Michele Granger of Anchorage, Alaska, and Lisa Fernandez of Long Beach, California, and the hitting of Dot Richardson of Orlando, Florida.

Currently there is strong support to have softball returned to the Olympics. Proponents for its return say, “softball connects with women of all ages and backgrounds and has huge sponsorship and broadcast appeal; the recent World Cup of Softball was broadcast in 140 countries.” If the sport returns to the Olympic Games it will not be until 2020.

The Amateur Softball Association (ASA) founded in 1933, serves as the national governing body. The ASA provides people of all ages the opportunity to play the game at a variety of levels. The ASA offers recreational, league, tournament and National Championship play for fast pitch, slow-pitch and modified pitch and sponsors annually, over 100 national championships.

There are many levels of softball competition. Most cities and towns offer softball programs. Some are sponsored by such organizations as YMCA’s or local park districts.

**Find out more about softball by visiting these websites:**

[www.teamusa.org](http://www.teamusa.org)

[www.asasoftball.com](http://www.asasoftball.com)

## STUDENT RESPONSE PACKET SOFTBALL

## STUDENT RESPONSE PACKET SOFTBALL

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

## WHAT TO DO

The following questions will help you to have a greater appreciation and understanding of softball. Write your answers in the spaces below the questions. If there is not enough room, write on the backs of these sheets. Be neat, spell correctly, and write in complete sentences.

1. How is softball different than baseball?
2. How did the game of softball get started?
3. Describe the strike zones in softball.
4. What are the official regulations for a bat?

5. What are the official regulations for an official ball?
6. In fast-pitch games which players must wear helmets?
7. What is considered to be one of the greatest victories for softball enthusiasts?
8. When were standard rules for softball developed and by whom?

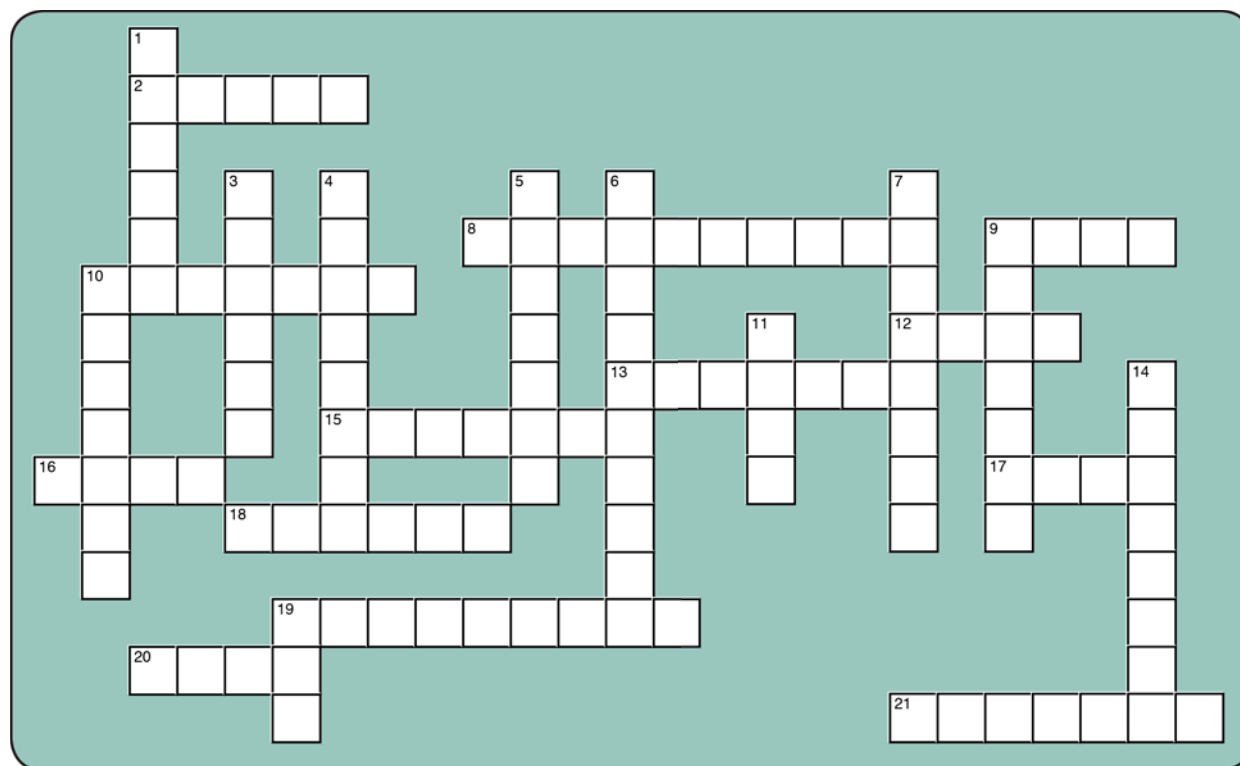
9. What are the three sizes of balls that are used in softball?

10. What are the ways a batter can get a strike called on her?

## CROSSWORD

## SOFTBALL

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_



### Across:

2. Each team bats until there are this many outs
8. Where "Over the Line" softball was developed
9. This team bats in the bottom of an inning
10. The team that is fielding is playing \_\_\_\_\_
12. The team with the most number of these wins the game
13. The 1996 Olympic Games were held here
15. In 1933 this softball association set standard rules
16. Number of called "balls" before a player walks to first base
17. These are considered part of the official uniform
18. The batter must wear one
19. How a softball is pitched
20. These come in a variety of shapes, lengths and weights
21. The city where softball began

### Down:

1. The zone where the pitcher tries to throw her pitches
3. The most popular size softball in inches
4. The fundamentals of softball are the same as this game
5. The player who wears a mask
6. She played for the 1996 USA Olympic team
7. The boat club where softball is said to have started
9. The person who wrote the first set of rules for softball
10. The shape of a playing field
11. In fast pitch, the catcher must wear one
14. This team bats first in a game
19. A 1996 gold medal winner in softball

---

## WORD SEARCH

## SOFTBALL

---

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_



Find these words in the above puzzle. Circle the words.

Softball

Pitcher

Runner

Innings

Strike

Bats

Cabbage

Ball

Field

OTL

Fouls

Bases

Hancock

Umpire

Bats

Chicago

Fielder

Bamboo

Playoffs



**COMMON CORE QUESTIONS / ACTIVITIES (AT TEACHER'S DIRECTION)**

1. If you were trying to convince the Olympic governing body that softball should be returned to the Olympic Games what arguments would you make?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Compare and contrast fast pitch with slow pitch softball.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. What would be your job if you were asked to play second base? What skills would you need?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. Research what college won the latest NCAA Division 1 softball championship. Write a paragraph about how they won the game.