

## 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, notes and news.

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.

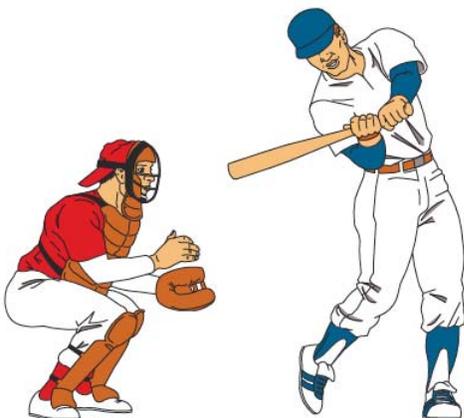
After the game, Hancock created a crude ball that was larger than a baseball. He then drew up a list of rules and decided that the game could be played in a field much smaller than a regular baseball field. He thought an area like a school gym would be just right for this new game of softball.

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.

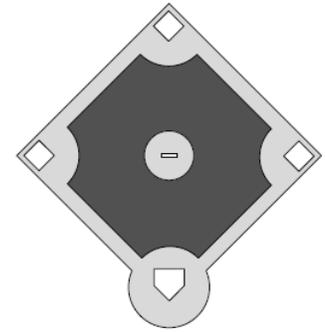
The defense can also get the batter out by catching a fair or foul ball on a fly. After a fly ball for an out, all runners on base must tag up (they must be touching their original base until the ball is caught). When a fly ball is hit deep into the outfield, a runner may tag up and then run to the next 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 bat-

ter 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  $\frac{29}{32}$  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  $\frac{7}{8}$  and 12 and  $\frac{1}{8}$  inches in circumference, weighs between 6 and  $\frac{1}{2}$  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. Metal shoe spikes may be used if the spikes are no longer than three-fourths of an inch. 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 AND NEWS (Information taken from a variety of sources including ESPN, NCAA, Wikipedia and newspapers)

The Amateur Softball Association registers over 260,000 softball teams annually. Today there are also more than 73,500 Junior Olympic Youth Softball Teams.

One of the greatest victories for softball enthusiasts occurred in 1991 with the addition of women's fast pitch softball to the program of the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta, Georgia. In fact, 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.

Dot Richardson played shortstop for the 1996 U.S. Gold Medal Team. Dot was fully

committed to this team since she was willing to put her medical training on hold for a year. By profession Dot is an orthopedic surgeon. She is no stranger to international competition after playing on three Pan Am Games teams and in three International Federation world championships.

Fifteen women represented the United States in the 2000 Olympic Games in Sydney, Australia. The U.S. rebounded from a three-game losing streak to repeat as softball gold medalists, beating Japan 2-1. At age 39, Dot Richardson saw Olympic action again. She was the oldest team member.

The American women once again raised the bar for excellence in softball by claiming their third straight gold medal with a 5-1 win over Australia in the 2004 Olympics at Athens. If not for the Aussies scoring a run in the sixth inning of the final game, the U.S. team would have thrown up nine zeros in nine games--a perfect Olympics. The U.S. team broke virtually every team record and set individual marks in offensive, defensive and pitching categories. "This team got it done," said pitcher Lisa Fernandez, who now has three gold medals.

In the Beijing 2008 Olympics the U.S. Olympic softball team was denied a fourth straight gold medal, losing 3-1 to Japan in the sport's final appearance in the games for at least eight years.

The Americans had their 22-game Olympic winning streak snapped as Japan pitcher Yukiko Ueno handed them their first loss since Sept. 21, 2000 at Sydney.

Ueno pitched seven innings, one day after she pitched 21 to get the Japanese into the gold-medal game.



## 2011 Division I NCAA Softball

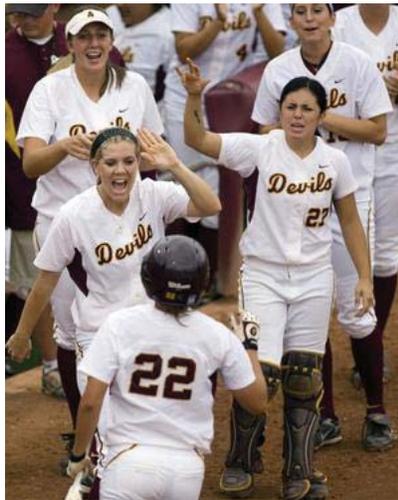
In pitching Arizona State to a national championship in softball, Dallas Escobedo did something few freshman have ever accomplished - and none had done for more than two decades.

Katelyn Boyd and freshman Alix Johnson each drove in three runs to back Escobedo's four-hitter, and Arizona State beat Florida 7-2 to win its second NCAA title in four years.

"I feel lucky, I guess," Escobedo said. "It's just a whole bunch of emotions right now."

Escobedo (37-3) won her 19th consecutive decision, in the process becoming the first freshman pitcher to win the title-clinching game since UCLA's Heather Compton in 1990.

"There's a reason why it takes 20 years or 30 years for a freshman to lead a club to a national championship, because it's such a rarity," coach Clint Myers said. "It just doesn't happen. Only a unique, special type person can have that."



Escobedo had regular reminders of the Sun Devils' championship past on either side of her -- with Mandy Urfer at first base and Krista Donnenwirth at third providing constant encouragement and advice along the way.

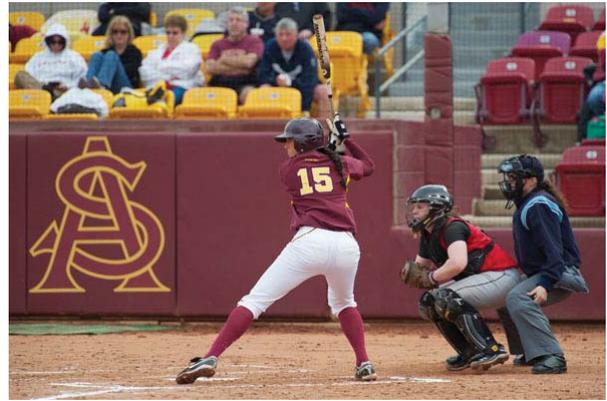
She also got solid defense as a constant, with Arizona State becoming just the third team to win the title without committing an error at the World Series.

Arizona State joined UCLA, Arizona and Texas A&M as the only teams to win multiple softball titles. UCLA with 12 - including one that was vacated for NCAA rules violations - and Arizona with eight are the only programs to win more than two.

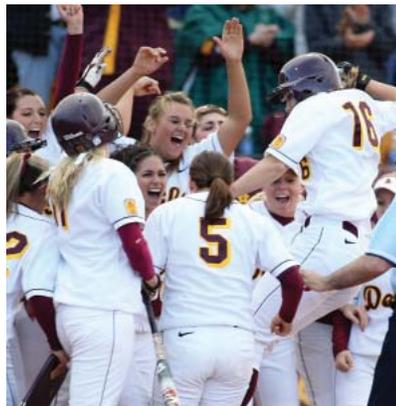
Arizona State won 23 of its last 24 games and had a perfect 10-game run through the NCAA tournament.

The Gators -- the top home run hitting team in the country and the second-highest scoring -- failed to score at least four runs for the first time in seven World Series games.

Escobedo struck out Kelsey Bruder to finish it, and the Sun Devils launched their gloves in the air while mobbing together to celebrate on the infield. Escobedo and Florida's Michelle Moultrie shared Most Outstanding Player honors.



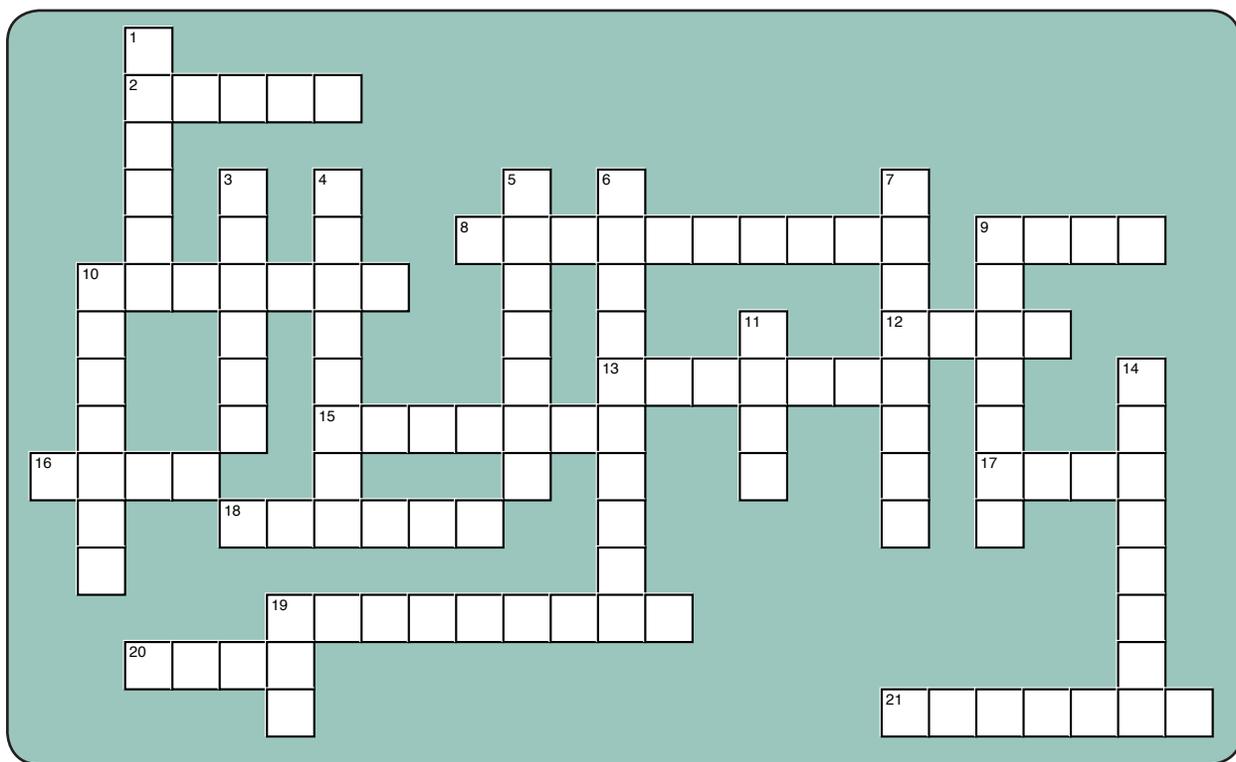
“She is not a freshman anymore. She is a seasoned veteran and there are no surprises,” Myers said. “From this point on, she is just going to grow with leaps and bounds as far as how good she can be. You saw a poised pitcher out there tonight.”







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

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



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

Softball

Pitcher

Bats

Innings

Strike

Field

Cabbage

Ball

Bases

OTL

Fouls

Bats

Hancock

Umpire

Bamboo

Chicago

Fielder

Playoffs

Runner