

DEVELOPING YOUR SOFTBALL TEAM OR CLUB

The information set out in the companion document *Starting a Softball Team*, which can be found in this section of the website, is mainly to do with getting a new softball team started, learning the game and finding a way to play.

The information below is more to do with ensuring that your new team can grow and remain viable over time through acquiring a structure, a committee, a Constitution, a bank account and other elements that sound boring but are at the heart of any successful sporting enterprise.

Until your new team is off the ground, much of the information below may not seem particularly relevant, but you will find it provides useful reference material later on.

Please also see the other document in this section: *Fastpitch and Slowpitch Softball Differences*.

TEAM TO CLUB

In many cases, the term “team” can be used interchangeably with “club”. Often, a single team can grow into a club with multiple teams in different formats or at different age and ability levels. In slowpitch softball, teams are often formed, at least initially, without the typical governance expected in a well-run club, but the hope is that as a team becomes more established, it can look to expand into a club structure and put relevant governance elements in place.

For the purpose of this document, a **club** is any group of people that have come together with the common aim of playing softball. Hopefully, they will want to organise themselves with a sound committee structure, policies and procedures in place so the club can function efficiently and within the requirements of the law.

Unless set up as a company, which is very rare in softball, the legal status of a team or club is that of an unincorporated association, which means that the individuals involved are personally responsible for the club, rather than the organisation being a legal entity in its own right.

As soon as you know you're interested in setting up a club, you should contact your local BSUK Development Manager (see list above), who will support you through the process and help you navigate any issues you might face.

He or she will also help with introductions to your Local Authority Sports Development Team and your County Sports Partnership, as well introducing you to other relevant organisations in your area.

Once the decision has been made to set up a club as opposed to a single team, there are three important ideas that need to be explored.

- Can we find enough club members/players?
- Can we find enough potential volunteers?
- Is there another club in the same locality that is already meeting local needs?

These questions will help determine the best way of setting up the club. To consider them, it's advisable to call a meeting of everyone you know who has expressed an interest in being part of the club. At this meeting, a number of issues will need to be addressed and decisions will need to be taken.

CLUB NAME

You can call your club whatever you choose, although it is wise to choose a name that is not too similar to that of another local club. The name needs to be agreed on quickly, as it will be used to draw up formal documents, open a bank account etc.

Although the club name can be changed with relative ease, it's usually advisable to differentiate between the club and its team or teams. So if you want call your team the Shropshire Panthers, the club might be called the Shropshire Softball Club. The Shropshire Panthers will then be your first (or only) team. This will prepare your club for future development and growth should the interest or need arise.

CLUB CONSTITUTION

This should be a simple document that sets out the functions of the club, and there are a number of “off the shelf” club Constitutions that can be adapted for the purpose. It should include topics such as membership, meetings, committees and finance and should make reference to other formal procedures such as dissolution. The Constitution needs to be formally signed and dated on its agreement.

It is extremely important in today's political climate that your Constitution is “open and non-discriminatory” and reflects the need for Sports Equity and Child Protection as defined by BaseballSoftballUK.

A Constitution is often a requirement before other organisations will interact with the club and is a prerequisite for interaction with funding agencies and for completing the process of club accreditation.

One of the most important clauses in club Constitutions as far as funders are concerned is the dissolution clause. Here are some tips to add credibility to your Constitution in the eyes of potential funders:

- Make sure that your Constitution specifies that any surplus funds or assets will be passed on to an organisation with similar aims and objectives should you need to dissolve the organisation.
- State clearly that your organisation is “not-for-profit”.
- It is advisable to include a clause referring to the National Governing Body of your sport (in this case the British Softball Federation) and maintaining affiliation to it.

Templates for a Club Constitution can be accessed on the Internet and assistance in adapting it to your needs can be requested from BSUK staff.

CLUB OFFICERS

A club needs a number of officers to run the organisation and to meet legal requirements. It is unwise for a club to depend on a single individual; such clubs often fail when the founder and driving force stops playing or leaves.

As noted above, a Chairperson, Treasurer and Secretary are the minimum requirement to operate a club. There is a need for these posts to be elected and this process should be referred to in the Constitution.

There may be a need for other officers to meet other requirements and your club Committee may initially or eventually include such positions such as Child Welfare Officer, Volunteer Co-ordinator, Junior Co-ordinator, Press and Media Officer, Coaching Director etc. It is advisable that these positions should have clear tasks and responsibilities, with job descriptions available. It is advantageous to spread the workload

and to ensure that everyone is aware of the requirements of their position.

Template descriptions for these and other roles can be found on the BSUK website:

<http://www.baseballsoftballuk.com/volunteer/roles/>.

The Committee should meet at least quarterly and should also host an Annual General Meeting (AGM), where the Committee will generally be elected. To start with, however, the Committee should be voted in at the club's first meeting to get the organisation going.

FINANCE

Once your club has been established, it will be important to raise funds to support it. Initially, finance will probably come from subscriptions that the club sets for participants. It will be advisable to draw up a list of anticipated costs and from this organise a budget for the first year to meet these costs.

The club will need to set up a bank/building society account in the name of the club and will need a minimum of two signatories for the account.

The Treasurer will need to maintain either:

- An Account Book recording the financial affairs of the club, or...
- A computer-based programme from which printouts can be obtained in the format of an account book. It is also worth noting that if a computer-based programme is used, a back-up system should be put in place in case of computer malfunction.

Bookkeeping procedures should be observed and entries should never be altered, but corrected by a new entry. A receipt book with numbered pages should also be used to keep a record of received income.

All cheques and money received should be paid into the club's bank account, recorded in the accounts and, where required or in the case of cash being received, a receipt produced.

Where possible, most organisations will seek someone within the club who has a financial background to carry out these tasks, but where this is not possible, financial courses for club treasurers are available.

Voluntary organisations such as the local Community Voluntary Service (CVS) will run such courses.

CLUB ACCREDITATION

BSUK offers Clubmark – a national accreditation scheme for sports clubs that will provide a framework for developing your club's governance. In setting up a club, particularly if the intention is to offer youth play, it would be particularly advisable to consider using this framework to guide your work.

The scheme awards a “kitemark” that indicates that a club is well-run and is as “safe, effective and child-friendly” as possible, with necessary policies and procedures in place. Not only is it good practice to go through the scheme, but it is also highly likely that accreditation will become mandatory for all clubs with junior sections in the near future.

BSUK staff will be able to support the process of accreditation.

COACHING

BSUK offers extensive coach development opportunities through our Coach Education Programme, which has been developed in line with national sportscoachUK requirements.

It is strongly recommended that all clubs and teams should have qualified coaches, but anyone within the club who is coaching young people should be qualified and have had training in Child Protection and Sports Equity issues.

It is also a requirement that all coaches register on the BSUK website. For guidance on how to register, please go to: <http://www.baseballsoftballuk.com/coach/register/>.

SAFEGUARDING

If your club is a junior club or is forming a junior section, it is a requirement that you have a Safeguarding Policy. The BSUK Safeguarding Policy is obtainable from the website and can be used or adapted to suit your club.

It is also a requirement that all junior clubs have a Child Welfare Officer to support young people and their parents. It is strongly recommended that this person should have formalised Child Protection training. As a minimum, this should include the sportscoachUK Safeguarding Young People course. This course is often provided by local County Sports Partnerships or Local Authorities and occasionally by BSUK.

Course dates in each region can be found on the sportscoachUK website under Workshops: <http://www.sportscoachuk.org/workshops/workshop-search>.

Any softball team or club that uses players under 18 years of age, either regularly or occasionally, should follow British Softball Federation requirements regarding young players participating in adult softball. The BSF requirements can be found here: http://www.britishsoftball.org/uploads/_documents/Files/BSF/Exec/BSF%20Requirements%20for%20Under-18s.pdf.

PARTNERSHIPS

Partnerships can be extremely important for a new sports club, and there will be the opportunity to link with a number of organisations to access a variety of resources.

The **Local Authority** will be helpful in locating possible club venues. They will have access to a selection of their own facilities and will have links with local schools and private owners.

The Local Authority's **Sports Development Department** will be able to provide up-to-date information on what is happening in the locality and will have good links with local sporting providers.

The [County Sports Partnership](#) is the central sports body for any area and collates information from a variety of sources. As a result, the CSP is a useful resource for information, funding sources, coaching courses and it links together Local Authorities, school sport and National Governing Bodies.

The area may have a local **Sports Council** that supports local clubs with information. They usually work hand-in-hand with the Local Authority Sports Development Department and can support a new club with specific local needs.

There will be a **Community Foundation Organisation** in the area and it can be very helpful with funding information. CFOs often manage a variety of funding grants and provide applications and support for local

funding.

The **Community Voluntary Service (CVS)** and the area **Voluntary Service Organisation(VSO)** can help with volunteer training and basic support, but they are not sports-specific.

It is important that a new club sets up these links as soon as possible. This will give the club a strong footing in the local community and provide a framework for club operations.