

FASTPITCH AND SLOWPITCH SOFTBALL: WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENCES?

In the document *Starting a Softball Team*, we touched on the two main softball formats – fastpitch and slowpitch. Here is a more in-depth look at how softball works, and the differences between the two formats.

In both formats:

- The field of play is enclosed within a right angle, with four bases making a square in the inner portion of the field. Batters stand at the fourth base, called “home plate”, with a bat and attempt to hit a ball pitched to them by a pitcher.
- The defensive team consists of a pitcher, a catcher (equivalent to the wicket-keeper in cricket), four infielders and three or four outfielders (see below). A run is scored by a batter reaching base through a safe hit or in other ways and then proceeding around all the bases and back to home plate without being put out.
- The batting (offensive) and fielding (defensive) sides change places after three offensive players are out. Outs are recorded when a defensive player catches a ball hit into the air or in various other ways.
- An inning is completed when each team has had a turn at bat, and games consist of seven innings. The team that has scored more runs after the last inning has been completed wins the game.

There are a number of variations between fastpitch and slowpitch softball. Here are the main ones:

- **Number of players:** In fastpitch softball, a team consists of nine players. On defense, this is a pitcher, catcher, four infielders and three outfielders. In slowpitch softball, a team consists of 10 players, with one extra outfielder.
- **Gender:** Both sexes can and do play both formats. However, in general in the UK, fastpitch softball is played by separate female and male teams (and most often by female teams) and slowpitch softball is usually played as a mixed or “co-ed” sport in which males and females play together, usually with equal numbers of each on the field.
- **Size of field:** The furthest outfield fence dimension is usually 225 feet for women's fastpitch softball and 275-300 feet for adult co-ed slowpitch softball.
- **Base distances:** The distance between each of the four bases also differs slightly between the two formats. In fastpitch softball, the bases are 60 feet apart, but they are 65 feet apart in slowpitch softball.
- **Pitching style:** In both fastpitch and slowpitch softball, the ball is pitched with an underarm motion – but, as the names imply, it is pitched with considerable speed in fastpitch softball (from a distance of 43 feet for women and 46 feet for men) and in a slow arc in slowpitch softball (from a distance of 50 feet). In slowpitch, the arc must reach a minimum height of six feet and not exceed 12 feet.
- **Bunting and Base-Stealing:** In fastpitch softball, bunting (where a batter taps the ball so it drops down just inside the field of play) and base-stealing (where a base-runner can attempt to advance to the next base without the batter hitting the ball) are part of the tactics and strategy of the game. Neither are allowed in slowpitch softball.