

GB SOFTBALL: PRINCIPLES FOR SUPPORTERS ON TOUR AND AT TOURNAMENTS

Introduction

Below are some guidelines regarding time that players on GB Softball Teams might be able to spend with parents and other supporters who have come to a softball tournament overseas or in the UK to support the team and their child or friend, and what types of activity involving players and supporters might be appropriate.

The purpose of these guidelines is to ensure effective communication between team staff, players and parents; maximise player performance, enjoyment and satisfaction; and reduce the potential for misunderstandings and problems during training camps or at tournaments either in the UK or abroad.

These guidelines will be circulated to GB Team staff and to players and parents prior to each tour, and should be read by them in conjunction with our Codes of Conduct for Players, Coaches and Parents (which are also circulated) and our general Safeguarding policies (which can be seen on the BSUK website here: <http://www.baseballsoftballuk.com/safeguarding>).

Basic principles

The partnership and support of parents, families and friends is vital to GB Softball Team programmes, and it is greatly appreciated that so many supporters travel to ESF, ISF and other tournaments, often at considerable extra expense, to support their children and friends and our teams.

As everyone recognises, the main purpose of trips by GB national teams to ESF or ISF competitions, invariably involving residential arrangements, is to play softball, to win and to finish as high as we can in the tournament. Because many GB teams are a mixture of British-based and overseas-based players who only come together as a full team just before the tournament, the focus of players and staff before and during the tournament must be on training, team bonding and competition, with as few distractions as possible.

All staff based within the UK, particularly those involved with youth teams, will be DBS-checked and during the full duration of GB Softball trips will be regarded as “in loco parentis” with respect to the players. In this role, team staff will have medical and other information regarding players that they can use to make decisions in the event of accidents,

injury or illness. In addition, a member of staff will have been appointed as the team's Welfare Officer for the trip, with access to advice and support if necessary from the UK.

Team staff will also be following regulations laid down by the British Softball Federation, based on best safeguarding practice, regarding staff-to-player ratios required in any given situation, and the need for risk assessments to be carried out and acted on for all aspects of the trip.

Because of the responsibilities, information and expertise of team staff, they must have the final say during the course of the trip on what players can and cannot do, both with regard to the competition itself and to any other activities undertaken or suggested.

The perception that players have "free time" during or after a tournament may not necessarily be the case. Such time during the competition is often used for recovery, team bonding, strategy sessions and debriefs. In addition, an important part of GB Softball trips involves coaches having comprehensive 1:1 de-briefs with players at the end of a tournament, which often takes up a fair amount of time.

It must be noted that a parent always has the right to take their child away from the team, though this should only be done after discussion with team staff. If the player's removal could be disruptive to the team, the staff can state that removal by the parent will end the player's participation at the tournament. In this case, the player may also have to leave the team accommodation and take no further part in the tour.

Notwithstanding all of the above, GB Team staff are urged to create an ethos where parents, relatives and friends of the players can spend at least some time with them during the tournament and share to some extent in team activities. Players, particularly youth players, need the support of parents, relatives and friends as well as teammates and staff in what can sometimes be stressful situations.

One staff member – normally but not always the Team Manager – will be responsible for communication with parents and other supporters, and parents will be given contact details for this staff member. Communication with parents and supporters during the tour should be carried out by this staff member at regular intervals, and will generally concern game and training schedules, meal arrangements, sightseeing possibilities and other group activities and opportunities for players to spend time with parents and friends or for parents and other supporters to spend time with the team.

It is also recognised that GB Softball Team trips are often to places of historic and cultural interest, and if time and circumstances allow – bearing in mind the demands of the tournament, safeguarding requirements, risk assessment and common sense – team staff are urged to find ways in which players and supporters can take advantage of opportunities for sightseeing and relaxation.

So what does all this mean in practice?

Some contact time between players and parents or other relatives or friends is desirable on a daily basis during the tournament, as the schedule allows. This will most likely be at the competition field, though at the discretion of staff may be at the team accommodation (but not in players' rooms). During such times, players are still under the supervision of team staff. Arrangements for such contact time should be communicated to parents to keep them "in the loop".

Many GB Teams find the opportunity for team meals during tournaments to which parents, relatives and friends who have travelled in support are invited. The decision on where and whether such meals are possible or viable can only be taken by the team staff. However, this is a joint activity involving players, staff and supporters that tends to happen on a fairly regular basis on GB tours.

When the competition schedule allows, GB Teams have sometimes been able to organise team activities such as swimming, bowling, mini-golf, shopping, a visit to a local attraction etc, where parents and other supporters can also come. Such activities, where possible, will be organised by and under the supervision of team staff, though parents might be asked to help with organisation and logistics if required.

In some circumstances, under-18 players may wish to be taken away from team supervision by their parents for an agreed period of time, or over-18 players may wish to leave team supervision independently for an agreed period. For under-18 players, a risk assessment will first need to be undertaken -- and in either case, the final word on whether this is possible will lie with team staff.

Where some under-18 players have a parent or parents at the competition but others do not, team staff would want to avoid a situation where some players have the opportunity to go off with their parents while others can't. In such cases, parents will often offer to take players whose parents are not at the tournament with them on such excursions. This will only be possible if prior written agreement (by email or otherwise) is obtained from the parents not at the competition – ideally before the trip begins. Even where such agreement is granted, team staff will still have the final say on whether this is possible based on risk assessments and team needs. Parents hosting a child who is not their own will need access to the medical information held by staff in the event of an emergency, and the written agreement referred to above will need to grant access to this information.

In all cases, team staff will try as best they can to balance the needs of the team and the need for players and their family and friends to spend time together during the tournament.