

STARTING A TEAM

So You Want to Start a Team?

Here are some ideas and advice on getting a team together, learning the game, starting to play and then joining a league or finding other ways to begin playing matches.

First, let's talk about getting your team together. You should start with a basic decision: do you want to play Slowpitch or Fastpitch Softball?

Only men's and women's teams play Fastpitch, whereas men's, women's and especially Co-ed (Mixed) teams all play Slowpitch. Over 90% of Slowpitch teams are mixed – which means that both men and women play together in the same team, usually in a 50: 50 ratio.

You'll find more information on Slowpitch and Fastpitch Softball in the paper titled **An Introduction to Softball** that forms part of this Starter Pack. Fastpitch is the more competitive form of the game and Slowpitch is more recreational and easier to access and play – although the best Slowpitch teams are certainly both competitive and highly skilled!

If you're just starting out, chances are you'll want to form a Co-ed Slowpitch team.

Finding Players

Where will you find your players? Well, most teams are formed from colleagues at the same company or organisation or by groups of friends. But if you're short of players, you can always put an ad in your local paper or notices at your local Sports Centre, college or newsagents' shops.

A Softball team on the field, as you probably know, consists of 10 players. But in order to get 10 players on the field for an entire league schedule, you probably need a squad of 15-20 players. Not everyone can play all the time: holidays or family and work commitments can claim a surprising number of players on a given day. So make sure you have enough players on your books – and remember that you'll need a roughly equal balance of men and women on the squad.



Even if you're forming a recreational team, make sure that the word "commitment" is mentioned. Players must be aware that if they do not turn up for a game, they could be letting down at least 19 other people who have made the effort to get there and who want to play. In short, your team will collapse if your players aren't committed to turning out as often as they can and to giving the team a certain amount of priority in their lives.

Learning the Game

Once you've got your team together, you may want help to learn the rules and skills of the game.

The Solent Softball League have trained coaches who would be willing to come along and run some beginners sessions for you and your team.

They will also be able to bring along enough spare equipment to get your team started.

Another good idea is to find an experienced player locally who would be willing to act as your team's coach, or at least run a few sessions with your team until you've picked up the

basics. The Solent League may be able to suggest some possibilities.

And remember – as a way to learn both the skills and tactics of Softball, there's no substitute for actually playing!

Joining a League

Once you know a bit about how to play, you may want to join an existing league, or put a toe in the water by playing friendly matches against local league teams. Many leagues have separate divisions, ranked by ability, and are happy for beginners' teams to start at the bottom.

For information about the **SOLENT SOFTBALL LEAGUE** (Hampshire / West Sussex areas) contact:

ANDY BURGESS
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Once you have phone numbers for your local league, ring up the Director or Secretary and have a chat about how to join, how you might arrange some friendly matches and what the league can do to help your team. Don't forget to ask whether the league runs any indoor Softball activities during the winter.

Patterns of Play

The outdoor version of Softball is played

roughly from mid-April through mid-September, and Softball competition around the country tends to fall into two basic patterns. Most Mixed Slowpitch league matches take place on weekday evenings after work. Sometimes these are played at one or more central locations, but some leagues require each team to find a home pitch in a public park or private sports ground.

Local Authorities are much more knowledgeable about Softball than they used to be and will usually be willing to mark out a Softball diamond in a local park – especially if you can supply a copy of the Pitch Layout Diagram which is available from the Solent League

Most weekends are taken up with an increasing variety of tournaments, which attract teams from all over the UK. Some of these are closed league tournaments and a few are invitational, but most are open for any team to enter, and usually include both competitive and recreational divisions. A Calendar of tournaments other events can be found on the BSUK website (www.baseballsoftballuk.com). Most tournaments have sections for "recreational" teams.

The intensity of tournament play, and the opportunity to compete against teams of widely varying standards, can be an extremely valuable learning experience for beginning teams – even if you don't win many games your first few times out!

