

## Softball Rules

The aim of this unit is to acquaint you with the basic structure and organisation of the Rule Book.

An understanding of the rules is necessary to be an effective coach as it:

- raises a coach's level of confidence in his/her ability to participate in a game
- increases the players and umpires level of respect for a coach
- enables the coach to develop game situations to his/her team's advantage
- will clarify situations that arise during a game and enable the coach to explain these to his/her players

Rule 1, Section 16 states that a coach is only permitted to have a score book, pen or pencil and an indicator in the coach's box, which means that a Rule Book is not allowed. This adds to the importance of every coach learning and understanding the rules of the game.

**Note:** The Rule Book covers the rules for international play and Softball Australia tournaments/competitions. The Association in which you participate may conduct their local competition according to ground, or competition, rules which are different to some of the rules in the rule book. Please refer to the rules for your local competition.

### Rule Book structure

The rule book consists of six rules and nine Appendices each one covering a separate part of the game. Each rule is further divided into a number of sections and subsections which provide the detailed coverage of the rule and its interpretations, where applicable.

Rule 1:	The game
Rule 2:	The playing field and equipment
Rule 3:	Participants
Rule 4:	Pitching
Rule 5:	The Game
Rule 6:	Batting and base running
Appendix 1:	Playing field and diamond layout
Appendix 2:	Bat specifications
Appendix 3:	Ball standards
Appendix 4:	Glove specifications
Appendix 5:	Umpires
Appendix 6:	Scoring
Appendix 7:	Australian Championships
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### Index

The Rule Book contains an index to help the reader locate particular problems or situations. Learning to use the index efficiently will save you time and help you understand how the rule book is structured.

## **Rule 1: Definitions**

This is in alphabetical order for ease of reference.

### **Sequencing**

The rules tend to be organised in chronological order in terms of how they occur in a game, eg Pitching is covered before batting, and batting before baserunning.

### **Game variations**

The rules for Softball Batter Up, Tee Ball, Mod Ball or any of the junior games and Recreational Slow Pitch, do not appear in the Rule Book. These rules are contained in separate Softball Australia brochures.

### **Basic rules**

Following are some of the basic concepts of the game of Fastpitch softball that often lead to controversy through misunderstanding.

### **Ball/strike**

The strike zone is that space over any part of home plate between the batter's armpits and the top of his/her knees when the batter assumes his/her natural batting stance.

A 'strike' is called by the umpire:

- (a) When any part of a legally pitched ball passes through any part of the strike zone before touching the ground.
- (b) For each legally pitched ball that does not pass through this strike zone but is swung at and missed by the batter.
- (c) For each foul ball not legally caught on the fly when the batter has less than two strikes.
- (d) For each pitched ball struck at and missed which touches any part of the batter.
- (e) When any part of the batter's person or clothing is hit with his/her own batted ball when the batter is in the batting box and has less than two strikes.
- (f) When a pitched ball hits the batter when he/she is in the strike zone
- (g) When the batter fails to enter the batter's box within ten seconds after the umpire calls 'Play Ball'.

A 'ball' is called by the umpire:

- (a) For each legally pitched ball that does not pass through any part of the strike zone and is not swung at by the batter.
- (b) For each legally pitched ball that touches the ground before reaching home plate and is not swung at by the batter.
- (c) For each legally pitched ball that touches home plate and is not swung at by the batter.
- (d) For each illegally pitched ball.
- (e) When a legally pitched ball hits the batter outside of the strike zone.
- (f) When the pitcher fails to pitch the ball within 20 seconds.
- (g) For each excessive warm up pitch.

- (h) When the catcher fails to return the ball directly to the pitcher when there are no runners on base except after a strike out or put out by the catcher or when the batter becomes a baserunner.

### **Fair/foul**

A 'fair ball' is a legally batted ball which:

- (a) Settles on fair territory between home and 1st Base or between home and 3rd Base.
- (b) Bounds past 1st or 3<sup>rd</sup> Base on or over fair territory.
- (c) Touches 1st, 2nd or 3rd Base.
- (d) While on or over fair territory touches the person or clothing of an umpire or player.
- (e) First falls on fair territory beyond 1st Base or 3rd Base.
- (f) While over fair territory, passes out of the playing field beyond the outfield fence.
- (g) Hits a foul line pole on the fly. If the ball hits the pole above the fence level, it will be a home run.

A 'foul ball' is a legally batted ball which:

- (a) Settles on foul territory between home and 1st Base or home and 3rd Base.
- (b) Bounds past 1st or 3rd Base on or over foul territory.
- (c) First falls on foul territory beyond 1st or 3rd Base.
- (d) While on or over foul territory touches the person or clothing of an umpire or player or any object foreign to the natural ground.
- (e) Touches the batter whilst in the batter's box.
- (f) Immediately rebounds up from the ground and touches the bat a second time while the batter is in the batter's box.

### **Forced/free runners**

A forced runner is a runner who must run to the next base because the batter has hit a fair ball, so that not more than one runner is on a base.

For example:

- When there is a runner at 1st Base and the batter hits a fair hit, the runner at 1st is a forced runner.
- When there are runners at 1st and 2nd Bases and the batter hits a fair hit, both runners are forced runners.
- When bases are loaded (runners at 1st, 2nd and 3rd Bases) when the batter hits a fair hit, all runners are forced runners.
- A forced runner may be played out at the base to which he/she is advancing or legally tagged off base.

**Note:** A batter is always a forced runner after he/she hits a fair hit.

A free runner is a runner who does not have to run to the next base when the batter hits a fair hit. A free runner may run to the next base if he/she wishes.

For example:

- When there is only a runner at 2nd Base when the batter hits a fair hit, the runner is a free runner as 1st Base is not occupied.
- When there are runners on 2nd and 3rd Bases when the batter hits a fair hit, both runners are free runners as 1st Base is not occupied.
- When there is a runner at 3rd Base and the batter hits a fair hit, the runner at 3rd Base is a free runner as 2nd Base is not occupied.
- A free runner must be legally tagged off base to be put out.

For a complete set of interpretations, please refer to Softball Australia's Official Playing Rules and Casebook as this provides a comprehensive account of the official rules of softball. You can also purchase the Softball Rules in Pictures' from Softball Australia or your Member State.