

# Introduction Covid-19 Return to Play

BaseballSoftballUK's full Return to Play Plan and resource bank for Softball is hosted on the [Return to Play online hub](#).

Most of protocols originally established for Softball played outdoors remain in effect for Indoor Softball comprising games, training and coaching. At this time, up to 30 Participants are permitted to engage in Indoor Softball in Wales and Scotland although numbers are restricted to six adults (over 18) in England, with organised disability sport exempt. Activity Providers should continue to follow the steps laid out in the Return to Play Plan to ensure their event is conducted as safely as possible by:

1. Appointing a Covid-19 Officer
2. Undertaking Risk Assessments – paying particular attention to venue protocols
3. Respecting social distancing, hygiene and equipment measures – equipment protocols are recapped below
4. Undertaking Participant Registration – including collecting Opt-in and Participant Attendance information

As with Outdoor Softball, ensuring that everyone involved understands and adheres to the guidance provided is vital to keeping our community as safe as possible.

The format for Indoor Softball detailed below is shared as an example based on BaseballSoftballUK's own Indoor Leagues and London in particular, of how Indoor Softball might be played and within the context of Return to Play.

## Part 1 The Basic Game

TWO TYPES OF OUTDOOR SOFTBALL are played in the UK: Fastpitch and Slowpitch.

Indoor Softball is a hybrid version of Fastpitch and Slowpitch created in the UK by BaseballSoftballUK to allow the sport to be played year round. There is no standard Rulebook for Indoors and, because of this, the game usually evolves to fit the site or the requirements of the particular players. In short, you can take the framework for Indoors and adapt it to suit your needs. This guidance deals with Indoor Softball based on indoor leagues run by BaseballSoftballUK and assumes a knowledge of Slowpitch softball, and Fastpitch softball to a lesser extent.

Indoor Softball is played by two teams with a minimum of eight players each. The maximum number of participants involved in a game or session should be 30, likely creating two full teams, and including substitutes, managers, coaches and umpires. Only eight players will take the field at one time, but you can have a greater number of batters. Indoors is seen as a mixed gender game and the only cap is that a maximum of 5 male players on one team are permitted.

The basics of Indoors are simply a variation on Slowpitch. The **PITCHER** pitches the ball to a **BATTER** who hits it and runs around as many bases as possible before the ball is brought under the control of the defensive team. The aim of the game is to score more **POINTS** than the opposition.

Meanwhile, the defensive team is trying to get batters and baserunners **OUT** in all the same ways they do in Slowpitch:

- **Strike outs**
- **Fly outs (balls that are hit in the air and caught – including, in Indoors, balls caught off the walls)**
- **Force outs**
- **Tag plays**

There is more information on all of these at the end of this guidance. If you would like to familiarise yourself with the complete outdoor rules, please refer to the [World Baseball Softball Confederation Slow Pitch Softball Playing Rules 2018-2021](#). Information on Batting and Baserunning (including Interference and Obstruction) are detailed in section 5, for instance.

Indoors is two innings long and innings are not defined by the number of outs, but rather by time. Each half inning is usually four to six minutes long – the duration is flexible as long as it is applied evenly to each half inning. Players still bat in a pre-arranged order and in mixed gender games, the batting order should alternate between genders as evenly as possible. Batters continue to bat in that order for the inning timing, regardless of any outs being made. During the game, there may be consecutive players of the same gender when the next batter is still on base and has not yet returned home. The overall batting order should be maintained in this circumstance.

## Part 2 The Playing Area

The Indoor Softball area is usually defined by its venue. Indoors can be played in gyms, sports halls or similar. The key point is that the playing area should be contained by four sides and a ceiling as the ball continues to be 'live' (in play) off these surfaces, including the side walls. However, if the batted ball hits the **CEILING or any ceiling fixtures at any height** then the batter is out and the ball called dead (players do not advance).

A Softball diamond should be laid out within the parameters of the venue with Home Plate, First Base, Second Base and Third Base as usual. There are no hard and fast rules about distances except that bases should be a 'reasonable' distance apart – 12 metres is fairly standard – although there doesn't have to be as much space left for the **OUTFIELD**.

With regards to court size and Covid-19, **physical distancing should inform how many people can safely be in each activity space or court for your activity**, while never exceeding the overall maximum venue capacity. We recommend allowing a **minimum of 9 square metres (sqm) per person** to maintain 2m between players. This figure is based on a physical footprint of 1sqm per person and the requirement to maintain 2m between one another. For instance, BSUK hires four badminton courts for each softball court, creating a total playing area of 328 sqm. 17 participants playing a game (based on two teams with a minimum of 8 players + 1 umpire) equates to an average of 19 sqm each, thus supporting physical distancing.

From the front of Home Plate, a straight line is drawn across the court (see diagram) and the area behind the line is the only **FOUL BALL** territory – everything else is **FAIR TERRITORY!** The foul ball territory is where batters line up preceding their turn at bat. Given the limitations of gyms and storage, this can lead to **DEAD BALL** situations.

A safety line extending 2m from home plate (front corner) should also be marked out with masking tape. This will avoid unnecessary collisions with the catcher, as well as facilitating social distancing. As with Softball played outdoors, other measures to include:

- Fielders should remain 2m away from an offensive player who is occupying a base, unless in a tag play situation.
- Catchers and umpires should be positioned >1 metres apart, using tape to mark out positions.
- Batters waiting to take their turn should be 2m apart.

Note, other than when actively playing sport, face coverings must now be worn in all areas of an indoor facility (common areas, changing facilities, hospitality area, etc) in Scotland and Wales, whilst this is strongly recommended in England. Exemptions apply for medical conditions.

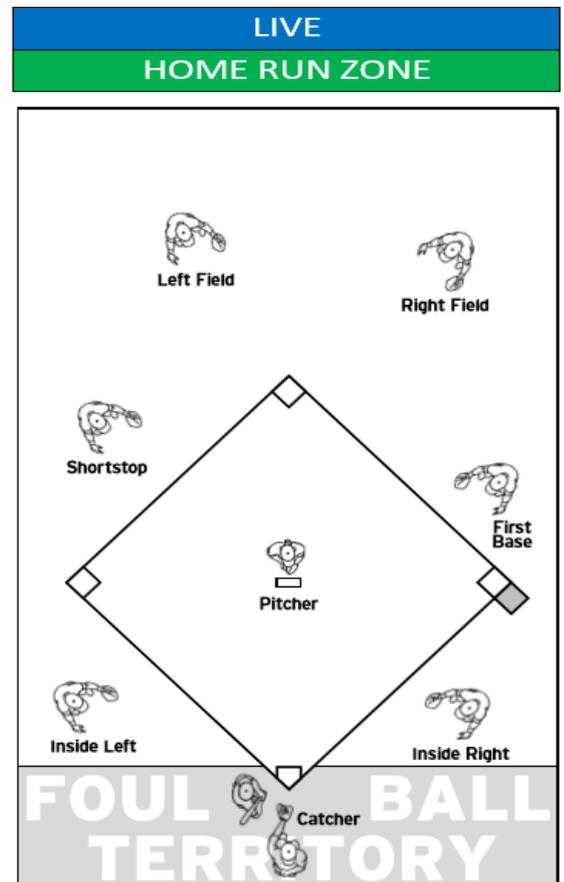
## Part 3 The Defensive Team

Unlike Slowpitch, in Indoors there is little point in referring to Infielders and Outfielders. Instead, there are essentially eight fielding positions (see Playing Area for placement):

- |           |              |               |                |
|-----------|--------------|---------------|----------------|
| • PITCHER | • FIRST BASE | • LEFT FIELD  | • INSIDE LEFT  |
| • CATCHER | • SHORTSTOP  | • RIGHT FIELD | • INSIDE RIGHT |

Like everything else in Indoors, nothing is hard and fast, and you can place your fielders where you want. However, following the diagram is a good way of ensuring that you cover the court and once you are familiar with the game you can tailor fielding positions accordingly. There are no instances whereby fielders are regularly positioned within 2m of one another during play.

Throws to **Second Base** are usually taken by the **Left** or **Right Field** positions, throws to **Third Base** by **Inside Left** or **Shortstop**, and, when a left-handed batter comes to the Plate, **Inside Right** often takes throws to **First Base**.



## Part 4 Playing the Game

- Each batter receives only one pitch from the Pitcher. The pitch is a Slowpitch pitch with an arc between 6' and 12' from the ground. If the batter does not swing and the pitch is a **STRIKE**, the batter is out. If the batter does not swing and the pitch is a **BALL**, the batter advances to First Base. If the batter swings and hits the ball into Foul Ball territory, the batter or if it rolls back into Foul Ball territory without any defensive player touching the ball, the batter is out. The batter is also out if they step on Home Plate in the process of hitting the ball or if the batted balls hits the batter runner off the bat or the bat hits the ball.
- During the game, there may be consecutive players of the same gender if the (potential) batter is still on base and has not yet returned home. The overall batting order should be maintained in this circumstance.
- Any baserunners are out if a batted ball hits them when they are not in contact with a base and the ball has not been in contact with a fielder.
- Baserunners are also out if tagged by a fielder's hand or glove that is holding the ball. Note, balls used in tagged plays should be taken out of play and disinfected immediately by the defensive team (or offensive) before being returned to play.
- The batting team continues to bat in order for a set time and then the fielding team comes into bat for the same time (one inning). Each game is two innings long. **OUTS** are made in all the ways listed above.
- A **HOMERUN** is scored if the batter hits the back wall below a specified height which depends on the venue and may be a feature on the back wall or marked by tape. For instance, at Osterley (London), this is below the piping running along the back wall and at Brentford (London), this is the change in the brickwork. A homerun can still be caught off the back wall. A homerun has the effect of scoring all runners on base, they simply return to the end of the batting line-up (they do not have to touch all the bases). A homerun still counts if it touches a fielder prior to hitting the back wall.
- It should be noted that all the variations on the original game of Slowpitch have significance in terms of how the game is scored. Please refer to Part 5: Scoring the Game for this information.
- It is also worth noting that Indoors by its very nature is a fast, energetic game. The emphasis is on hitting and running which means that the umpire is much less likely to call a pitch a ball! Also, it is a game that lends itself to significant baserunning and the umpire will not call **TIME** until it is clear that no baserunners have a chance for further advance. If the ball is hit into Fair Territory, it remains live at all times even if overthrown into Foul Ball Territory (unless it becomes tangled in the general team debris or obstructed by the offensive team waiting to bat – then the play will be called **DEAD BALL** and all baserunners will be awarded the base they were running to at the time of the overthrow).
- The other key difference from Slowpitch is that **BUNTING** is allowed, although leading off from bases before the pitch is hit is not. Batters must NOT deliberately chop (either from a bunt position or from normal batting) which will result in being called **OUT**. Once a bunt has been indicated, the batter must NOT change to a normal bat. If the Defensive team is short of fielders and a bunt position remains without a fielder, it remains the discretion of the Offensive team if they choose to hit in that direction though we would encourage a sportsmanlike approach in this situation.
- **HOME PLATE:** for safety reasons and to avoid collisions, players should run past Home Plate without touching it. A 'safety line' should be extended from the plate with masking tape. The Catcher can still touch Home Plate when they have the ball on a forced play and the runner will be called out, or tag the player running through the 'safety zone' who will also be called out.

## Part 5 Scoring

Indoor Softball scoring may differ from outdoor, however, the scoring system is not prescriptive and the format below is used for BSUK's London Indoor Softball League where points are scored for the following:

- **1 point** for each batter who safely reaches First Base – the batter gets 1 additional point for each base they reach on their turn at bat (even if they stop at each base before advancing on an overthrow or misfielded ball, etc.). Baserunners do not get points as they advance to the next base on another batter's turn at bat, except for the following circumstance:
- **1 point** is given for each baserunner who safely comes home. Baserunners can either touch the plate or run through the marked out safety line.
- **5 points** are scored for a Homerun + 1 point for each runner on base when the Homerun was hit (a point is subtracted if the batter is caught off the back wall).
- **1 point** is deducted for each OUT made by the defensive team.
- **2 points** are deducted if the catcher (no other fielder) makes a forced or tag play at home.

Note that these rules make it possible for a team to have a negative points score.

All teams must provide an umpire and scorer to cover games designated to that team per session.

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## Part 6 Equipment

The standard equipment for Slowpitch softball is used, i.e., a set of throw-down bases (including the safety First Base). Often, bases may be substituted with brightly coloured masking tape depending on the playing surface.

Bats and fielders' gloves are the same. It is, however, worth remembering that gyms are usually a hard surface such as concrete with a thin covering of green 'carpet' and you probably don't want to be chucking your expensive bats down in this environment! The only equipment that is different from the outdoor game is the ball. Indoor balls are 12', the same size as a standard softball, but are softer and more 'squidgy' for safety reasons – most equipment suppliers refer to them as practice balls. Bats should have an ASA or ISF marking.

The Return to Play guidance, including social distancing and hygiene protocols, for Outdoor Softball published on BSUK's [Return to Play online hub](#), apply to Indoor. The game-specific protocols relating to equipment are recapped here:

- Players must use hand sanitiser prior to warming up with equipment or the game itself.
- Disinfect all personal and team equipment before and after warming up and before games.
- Sharing of equipment is discouraged and items disinfected between use if shared.
- Scotland only: helmets to only ever be shared with one other person in extended household (reflected in batting line up) and with an extra cap or head covering worn underneath.
- Umpires must not share indicators, counters or other equipment.

### Bat handling

- If a player fails to reach base while batting, they must pick up their own bat (by the handle) upon leaving the field.
- If a player gets on base while batting, the on-deck batter must remove the bat (by the barrel).
- Sharing bats is discouraged. If shared, they must be disinfected between uses, and batting gloves worn.

### Ball handling

- Each team must bring (or be provided with) two game balls for use during defensive innings (ideally new and unopened).
- Each team must disinfect balls after warm up and prior to each inning.
- Tag plays: these remain permitted and must be conducted and concluded quickly, noting the mitigation protocol below:
  - Balls used in tagged plays should be taken out of play and disinfected immediately by the defensive team (or an offensive player if short) before being returned to play.
- Umpires should not handle balls.

## Part 7 Eligibility

Player eligibility is largely self-determined as rosters are not required to be submitted for verification beforehand to BSUK or your affiliating body. Nevertheless, we encourage a sensible approach to the league you choose to play in. Concerns during play should be raised with relevant umpires and captains. For BSUK-run leagues, concerns post-play should be referred to [indoor@bsuk.com](mailto:indoor@bsuk.com).

- London Indoor Softball – Recreational League: NSL1 (National Softball League) players or national team/elite players are not permitted to play in this league for safety reasons.
- London Indoor Softball – Competitive League: there are presently no restrictions.