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Equipment for softball

While most people probably know what basic equipment is needed to play softball – bat, ball, helmet, etc. –, informing your customers about exactly why they need one type of product over the other, can be a bit more tricky.

There are three types of softball. The main difference between the equipment used is the size of the ball.

- Slow pitch is the most common type. The ball is bigger than fast pitch: 30cm in circumference and weighs 178-198g. The size makes the ball slightly harder to throw and slows the game down, compared to the fast pitch game.
 - o A flat seamed ball must have a minimum of 88 stitches in each cover that are sewn by the two-needle method.
- Fast pitch, as the name suggests, is played on a quicker pitch. The ball is 27.9cm in circumference and weighs 166.5-173.6g.
 - o A flat seamed ball must have a minimum of 80 stitches in each cover that are sewn by the two-needle method.
- Modified-pitch (aka Chicago-style): players don't use gloves. The ball is larger (about 41cm circumference) and softer than in the other forms of the game. The ball size limits the distance that the ball can travel.

Ball construction

Balls with a white cover and stitching are used in adult men's and women's fast pitch, junior men's fast and slow pitch, and junior women's fast pitch games.

Balls with the red stitching are used in adult men's and women's, junior girls' and co-ed slow pitch games.

The ball must be smooth-seamed, concealed-stitched or have a flat surface.

It may be hand- or machine-wound with a fine quality twisted yarn and covered with latex or rubber cement.

The core must be made of either long fibre kapok, a mixture of cork and rubber, a polyurethane mixture, or other ISF (International Softball Federation) approved materials.

The cover is made of chrome tanned horse- or cowhide, synthetic material, or other ISF approved materials.

- It is attached by cement and sewn with waxed thread (cotton or linen), or have a molded cover bonded or molded integrally with the core, and have an authentic likeness of stitching.

Our cut-out-and-keep series to assist retailers with product knowledge

Words: CARIN HARDISTY. Compiled with the help of www.isfsoftball.org, www.mizfastpitchdiamonds.com and hyper-textbook.com



Bat specifications

Bats must be smooth and round. A bat may not exceed the following maximum dimensions:

- Length: 86.4cm
 - Weight: 1 077g
 - Diameter (at largest part): 5.7cm
- Bats may not have any protrusions, which might present a hazard. These include exposed rivets, pins, rough or sharp edges, or any form of exterior fastener.

Bats must have a safety knob (minimum 0.6cm) protruding at a 90° angle from the handle. It may be molded, lathed, welded, or permanently fastened.

They must have a safety grip of cork, tape (not smooth, plastic tape) or composite material.

- Minimum length: 25.4cm
- May not extend further than 38.1cm from the small end of the bat.
- Substances to enhance the grip (resin, pine

tar, sprays) may only be on the grip.

- Tape must be applied in a spiral. It does not have to be a solid layer, but may not exceed two layers.

Bat construction

A bat may be made in one piece, may be assembled as a multi-piece, or as an interchangeable two-piece bat.

- If designed with interchangeable components, the components must have a unique locking key (to prevent uncertified combinations) and, when combined, all the component combinations must meet the same standards as a one-piece bat.
- May be made of metal, bamboo, plastic, graphite, carbon, magnesium, fiberglass, ceramic, or any other material approved by the ISF.
 - o If laminated, it may contain only wood or adhesive.

Metal bats may be angular, may not have a wooden handle and may not have burrs or cracks.

- If it's not made in one piece with the barrel end closed, the bat must have an approved insert (rubber, vinyl plastic, etc.) firmly secured at the large end of the bat.
 - o The end cap must be firmly and permanently sealed, so that it cannot be removed without damaging the cap or barrel.
- The bat may not have rattles.
- There may be no signs of tampering. May only be altered (for example to mark it as someone's property) on the knob end, and not on the barrel end. The ISF does not consider laser markings as altering the bat.

A warm-up bat must have a one-piece construction. The barrel end must be larger than 5.7cm and it must comply with the same safety grip and knob requirements as other bats.

Glove regulations

Gloves may be worn by any person playing, but only the catcher and first baseman may use mitts.

- The main difference between a glove and mitt is that gloves have individual fingers, while mitts do not.
- The top lacing, webbing, etc. between the thumb and body of the glove or mitt may not be longer than 12.7cm.
- The catcher's mitt usually has thicker padding in the finger areas and the first baseman's mitt is bigger than the infielders' gloves.

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- There is a difference between in- and outfield gloves: infield gloves have a shallower pocket than their outfield counterparts (allows players to scoop the ball out quickly to the throwing hand) and outfield gloves have longer fingers than those of infield gloves.
- The glove and lacing may be any combination of colours, as long as none of the colours are the same as that of the ball.
- Gloves may not have circles on the outside that resemble a ball in colour or appearance.

Protective equipment

It is important to convince your customers that they should invest in protective equipment.

Masks, throat protectors and helmets help to protect the player's face and head.

- Fast pitch catchers (adult and youth) must wear masks, throat protectors and helmets.
- Slow pitch youth catchers must wear a mask with a helmet.
 - o It is recommended that adult slow pitch catchers wear a mask.
- During warm-up pitches, catchers (adult and youth) and defensive players must wear masks, throat protectors and helmets.

Face masks and guards may not have cracks, be deformed or have missing padding.

- Any defensive or offensive player may wear

a plastic face mask or guard.

- Fast-pitch catchers may not wear plastic face masks or guards, apart from a regular one with throat protector.

All fast-pitch catchers (adult and youth) must wear **body protectors**. Slow-pitch female catchers may wear body protectors.

Fast pitch catchers (adult and youth) must wear **shin guards** that protect the knee caps.

Helmets

A helmet must have an ear flap on each side. The safety level must be the same – or better – than that provided by a full plastic cap with inside padding.

- Catchers and defensive players may wear helmets without earflaps.
- Defensive players may wear a cap, or approved helmet, in their team colours.
- Fast pitch offensive and on-deck batters, batter-runners and runners must wear helmets.
- Fast and slow pitch youth players who coach in the first and third base coach's boxes and youth representatives that act as a bat boy or girl while on the field or in the dugout must wear a helmet.

Footwear

Shoe uppers may be made of canvas, leather

or similar materials. Soles must be smooth, or have rubber (soft or hard) cleats.

- Players may not use detachable cleats that screw onto the shoe.
- Shoes may have a metal sole and heel plates, as long as the spikes on the plates do not extend more than 1.9cm from the sole or heel of the shoe.
- Rounded metal, hard plastic, nylon or polyurethane spikes may not be used.

Caps

All players on a team must wear the same colour caps. Caps are mandatory for male players, but for female players caps, visors and headbands are optional and may be mixed.

- Defensive players are allowed to wear helmets in the same colour as the team caps.
- Players are not allowed to wear plastic or hard visors.

Clothing

Individual players may wear **undershirts** and **sliding pants**, even if the rest of the team does not.

- All undershirts and sliding pants worn in a team have to be the same style and colour.
- Numbers must be visible on the back of all **uniform shirts** and none may be identical.
- Names may also be worn on the backs of the shirts, above the numbers.

