



SOFTBALL ULSTER

Guide to Starting a Softball Team

SOFTBALL ULSTER Guide to Starting a Team (2017)

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1. INTRODUCTION

Setting up a softball team may seem like a daunting task, but Softball Ulster (SU) exists in part to help expand and nurture the Ulster league. The purpose of this document is to provide prospective new teams with a basic guide to setting up their team and/or club in the Ulster region. This information is designed to supplement, not to replace, the support of the SU Council and volunteers from within the SU Membership.

A number of key elements are required to establish a new softball team, some of which include:

- Forming your softball team (team name, members, uniform etc.)
- Forming an organising committee (president, treasurer, secretary etc.)
- Finances (bank account, membership fees, insurance etc.)
- Home grounds
- Equipment
- Coaching
- Recruitment

Other considerations, which may influence the establishment of your new softball team, may include:

- Team spirit and etiquette
- Sponsorship and fundraising

Please be aware that this document is intended only as a guide and your team may wish to deviate somewhat from the template laid out below.

2. FORMING A SOFTBALL TEAM

A softball team is likely to form when a group of like-minded individuals come together and discuss their interest in the sport. The common ways in which a new softball team may form include:

- A group of friends or colleagues coming together who have never played softball before but are interested in playing the sport
- Existing softball players who have left their previous team and wish to start a new team (either within the same club or as a new club)

- Individuals who hold an open day in an area where they intend to have their home grounds, producing awareness and enthusiasm for a new team

3. FORMING AN ORGANISING COMMITTEE

Once the decision has been made to form a team the group should call an inaugural meeting. It is recommended that the agenda follow a format similar to **Appendix 1**. The main focus of this meeting is to:

- Nominate and elect an organising committee (president, secretary, treasurer)
- Provide the organising committee with the power to act on behalf of the membership
- Agree a team and/or club name
- Agree on uniform colours
- Adopt a constitution
- Nominate and elect a coach
- Arrange the time, day and place for training sessions
- Agree a home ground for league games
- Adopt an annual subscription
- Agree fundraising and sponsorship opportunities
- Adopt a date for the Annual General Meeting (AGM)

It is important to assign an individual to liaise between your team and/or club and the Softball Ulster Council. This will make the most out of your relationship with Softball Ulster. Your team and/or club may wish to nominate the same individual for a position within the Softball Ulster Council at the next Softball Ulster AGM.

4. FINANCES

4.1 Bank Account

It is important for a new team to open a bank account with a **minimum of two** signatories as early as possible. This allows the members to feel secure in where their team and/or club subscriptions are going. An account will usually be required to accept external funding or grants.

4.2 Softball Ulster Membership

All teams wishing to participate in the Softball Ulster League or Tournaments must be affiliated with SU. In 2017 the requisite fees for SU membership are:

- £25 for existing members
- £10 for rookie members

These costs should be incorporated into the team fee decided by your organising committee each year. The fee paid to SU covers the administrative costs of the Softball Ulster League and Tournaments in Ulster, and developmental costs for the region.

4.3 Softball Ireland Membership

Softball Ulster is affiliated with Softball Ireland (SI). In 2017 the requisite fee for SI membership is:

- €23 for all members

These fees are paid to SI directly from SU and are included in the annual SU membership fees. The fee to SI covers insurance costs, administrative fees for all-Ireland competitions and developmental costs for the whole of the island of Ireland.

4.4 Outline Costs

When agreeing a team and/or club membership fee, the outlines costs for a full season of softball should be considered. Specific costs will include:

- Pitch hire for training (weekly)
- Pitch hire for league games (5-7 home games a year)
- One-off equipment purchases (e.g. bases, bats, uniforms)
- Recurring equipment purchases (e.g. balls, gloves)
- Coaching (e.g. training a member or hiring an external coach)
- Softball Ulster/Ireland membership fees
- Entrance fee for Softball Ulster and Softball Ireland tournaments

An example of the expected costs can be found in **Appendix 4**.

4.5 Sponsorship and Fundraising

Financial support is key to a successful team. Softball is a relatively new sport to many in Ulster and keeping the cost of joining or trying out the sport low is important in encouraging new members. To help your team and/or club keep its costs down SU encourage all teams to actively search for sponsorship and hold fundraising events.

Fundraising events are a good way of encouraging team spirit and socialising across teams while also raising money. Whilst fundraising events won't cover the cost of a full season, they will bring in much-needed funds to subsidise pitch hire or equipment purchases. Some examples of fundraising events in the past have included:

- A pub quiz (a popular choice amongst the Ulster teams)
- A raffle (often held during a pub quiz or social event)
- A Belfast Marathon relay team

Funding opportunities are also available from the city councils. Many of the councils have support grants for teams and it is worthwhile visiting their websites to see if your team and/or club may benefit.

5. HOME GROUNDS

Your team and/or club will be required to find a venue for training and to play league games. As most public parks in Ulster do not allow organised sports to play you will be required to find a venue that is happy for softball to be played. Most council-owned pitches are available for hire and can be adapted to serve as a softball diamond. In addition, some private sports clubs will allow softball teams to use their grounds for a fee. SU will be able to help source a home ground for you if you are struggling to source one yourself.

In the past ten years the following pitches have been successfully used for softball:

- Henry-Jones Playing Fields, Belfast (Lisburn and Castlereagh Borough Council)
- Shorts Playing Fields, Belfast (Shorts Sports and Recreational Club)
- Wedderburn Park Playing Fields, Belfast (Belfast City Council)
- Dixon Park Playing Fields, Belfast (Belfast City Council)
- Hydebank Playing Fields, Belfast (Belfast City Council)
- Newforge Country Club, Belfast (RUC Athletics Association)
- Strandtown Primary School, Belfast (Strandtown Primary School)
- Bloomfield Playing Fields, Bangor (North Down and Ards Borough Council)
- Bangor Rugby Club, Bangor (Bangor Rugby Club)
- Donaghadee Rugby Club, Donaghadee (Donaghadee Rugby Club)

Fees for pitches will vary greatly between the different councils as well as private clubs. It would be useful to speak with more than one venue and shop around for a location that suits you at an affordable price. You may also benefit from discussing your choice with Softball Ulster, as they may be able to give you additional advice when selecting a home ground.

When considering a home ground, make sure the pitches are appropriate for a diamond setup. In Ulster softball diamonds are 65 feet for the infield and 275-300 feet for the end of the outfield. All distances are measured from the home plate. A schematic is included in **Appendix 3**. Make sure that your diamond is well away from car parks, buildings, trees and other obstacles that might leave to unnecessary

injury, damage or loss of equipment. We recommend a dead ball territory of approximately 25-30 feet.

6. EQUIPMENT

SU will, where possible, loan an equipment pack for up to six months to anyone wishing to start a softball team. This will allow the team and/or club to start training before they have the funds to purchase their own equipment. All equipment will be required to be returned to SU upon request.

The equipment essential to starting a softball team includes:

- A set of bases, including a safety first base and pitchers plate
- At least one or two ASA approved bats (consider a 27oz 34' balanced bat for boys and a 24/25oz 33/34' balanced bat for girls as a minimum starting point)
- 12' balls: 52/300 (a minimum of two for games, plus extra for training)
- 11' balls: 44/375 (a minimum of two for games, plus extra for training)
- Gloves (a minimum of ten; a mixture of right and left hand gloves recommended; players usually buy their own with spares for new players)
- At least four softball/baseball helmets (currently optional to wear, but must be available for all games)

Other equipment you might find useful includes:

- A plastic bucket for ball storage and pitching
- A batting tee or batting stick
- A first aid kit
- A scorebook (scoring sheets can be downloaded from SU website)

7. COACHING

Your team should nominate a coach early in the season so as to get the most out of training sessions. Each team in Ulster is recommended have a coach and a deputy coach to help organise infield and outfield drills. The coach is usually responsible for planning training sessions but in some instances the coach also functions as the team captain.

SU will usually run at least one coach-the-coach course per season with the help of SI. Initial training sessions can also be supported by SU until your team has nominated a coach and is confident with running drills.

8. RECRUITMENT

Softball Ulster is able to provide equipment, volunteers and vital experience should you wish to organise an open day. Adequate notice is required for this to be effective.

9. TEAM SPIRIT AND ETIQUETTE

Slow pitch softball is a mixed gender sport and attracts individuals from a variety of backgrounds. SU is committed to the principle of equality, irrespective of gender, age, disability, ethnic origin, race, religion, belief system, social status or sexual orientation. All teams are encouraged to be inclusive, respectful and uphold the principles of equality during all games, training sessions and meetings. Failure to do so discourages new members discriminates against our diverse membership and degrades the name of Softball Ulster.

All teams are encouraged to play with five men and five women and only to resort to playing with six/four or four/six if a fifth man or woman is not available.

Healthy competition is encouraged between teams and members, however not all teams and members are at the same competitive level and may be involved with the league or tournaments for different reasons (e.g. competition, social, fitness etc.). SU will not stand for un-sportsman-like behaviour or disrespect against its members, umpires or officials.

10. SOFTBALL ULSTER LEAGUE

The SU league is based on a round-robin type competition with each team playing one another on two occasions (one 'home' and one 'away' game). At the end of the season, the team at the top of the standings (after any necessary tiebreakers are applied) will be declared league champion. The team finishing last in the league standings (after any necessary tiebreakers are applied) will be awarded the wooden spoon.

The League fixtures will be played as follows:

- Sundays at 2pm (for single games).
- Sunday 1pm and 3pm (for double headers).
- Sunday 12pm, 2pm and 4pm (for triple headers).
- Monday 7pm (single games only).
- Wednesday 7pm, as required (for rescheduled games only).

If any team is expected to travel 40 miles or more to any fixture, the game **must** be played on a Sunday to facilitate players travelling to and from the game.

A points system is currently used to determine the league standings:

- 5 Points for a win
- 2 Points for a loss
- 0 Points for a forfeit

The SU league and tournaments are regulated using the ISF Rules and Regulations (2014-2017), the Softball Ireland Bylaws and the Softball Ulster Bylaws. All rules and regulations are available via the SU website (www.softballulster.com).

11. SOFTBALL ULSTER TOURNAMENTS

SU is responsible for organising a number of tournaments throughout the season. Participation is not mandatory but it is recommended, as the events are often fun, well attended and social in nature. Where full teams cannot enter a tournament, individual players are encouraged to come along and join another team for the day.

The common tournaments run by Softball Ulster include:

- Start of Season Blitz (March/April)
- Carrie Trundle Cup (May/June)
- End of Season Blitz (August/September)

12. SOFTBALL IRELAND TOURNAMENTS

SI also organise a number of tournaments throughout the season that are open to Ulster teams. Attendance at these is encouraged, with a mixed team of Ulster players often attending.

The common tournaments organised by Softball Ireland include:

- The Brian Walshe Cup (March/April)
- IOST (August)

APPENDIX 1. EXAMPLE INAUGURAL MEETING AGENDA

**_____ Softball Club
Inaugural Meeting****Meeting Information**

Date:
Time:
Location:

Agenda

1. Apologies
 2. Approval of agenda
 3. Nominations and election of temporary 'organising committee'
 - 3.1. President
 - 3.2. Secretary
 - 3.3. Treasurer
 - 3.4. Captain
 - 3.5. Coach
 4. Vote to grant the organising committee powers to act on behalf of the membership
 5. Vote for adoption of temporary constitution
 6. New team
 - 6.1. Team name
 - 6.2. Team colours
 - 6.3. Home grounds
 7. Finances
 - 7.1. Costs and future purchases
 - 7.2. Membership fees
 - 7.3. Fundraising
 - 7.4. Sponsorship
 8. A.O.B.
 9. Date of annual general meeting
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APPENDIX 2. EXAMPLE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING (AGM) AGENDA

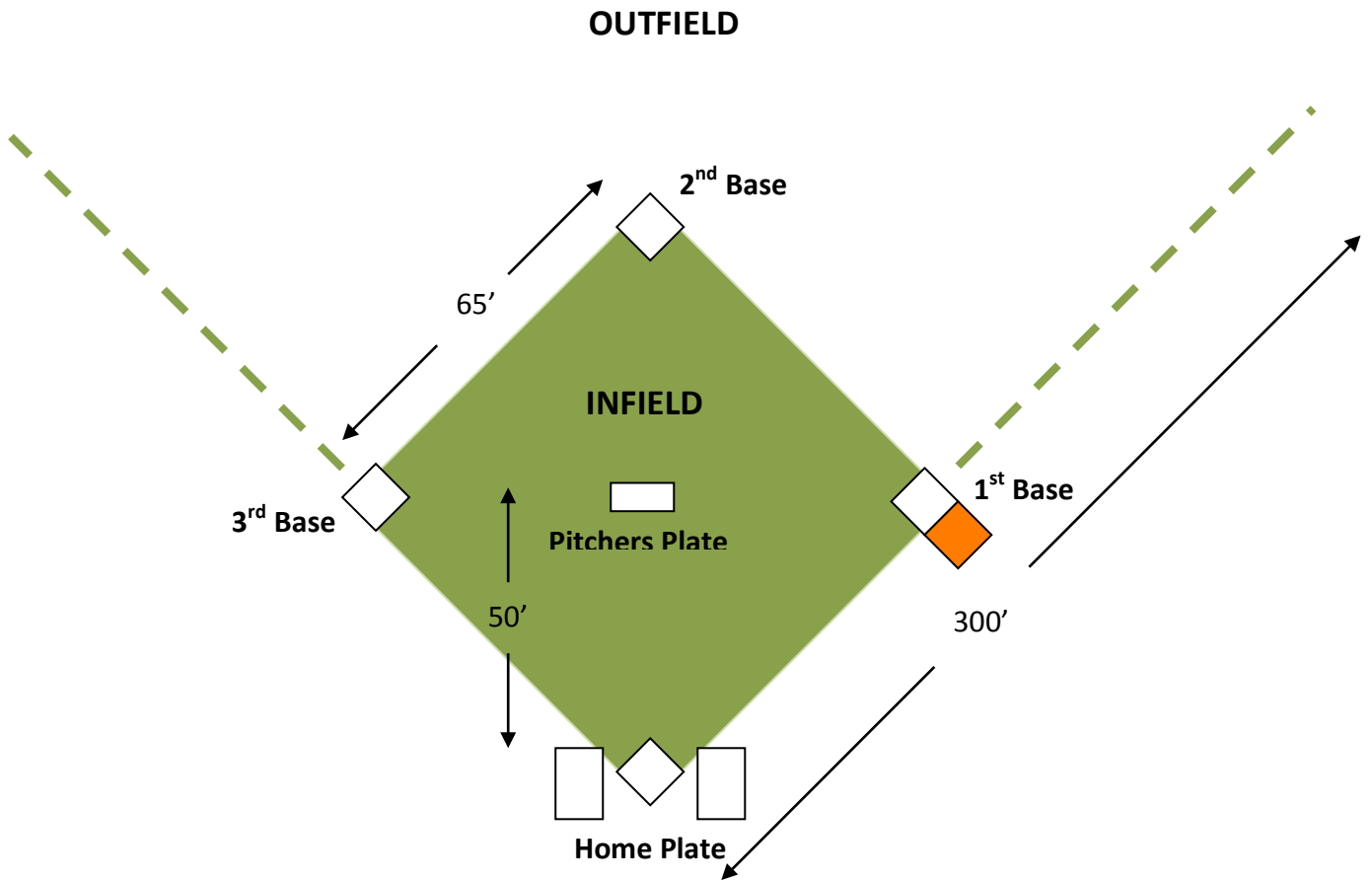
**_____ Softball Club
Annual General Meeting 20__****Meeting Information**

Date:
Time:
Location:

Agenda

1. Apologies
 2. Minutes of last AGM
 3. President's report
 4. Treasurer's report & accounts
 5. Constitution & constitutional amendments
 6. Membership
 - 6.1. Recruitment
 - 6.2. Membership fee
 7. Election of council members
 - 7.1. President
 - 7.2. Secretary
 - 7.3. Treasurer
 - 7.4. Captain
 - 7.5. Coach
 8. Fundraising, grants & sponsorship
 9. A.O.B.
 10. Date of next meeting
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APPENDIX 3. DIAMOND LAYOUT



APPENDIX 4. EXAMPLE FINANCES / SPONSORSHIP REQUEST

This is an example of the costs required for setting up a softball team. This example is adapted from an Ulster team that was attempting to obtain sponsorship for new equipment. Please note that the cost of equipment may vary greatly between vendors and from season to season.

Item		Cost	Reason for Purchase
Pitch Hire (Training)		£200	Necessary for training.
Pitch Hire (Games)		£100	Necessary for league games.
Equipment	Bats	£200	Our team currently only has equipment on loan.
	Bases	£70	
	Balls	£50	
First aid Coaching Umpire Courses	£200 approx.	Our team currently have no trained umpires. We would like to pay for umpire training. We would like to continue coaching training.	
Membership Fees		£300	Membership of Softball Ulster and Softball Ireland for insurance.
Tournament Fees		£100	Entrance fees into Ulster and Ireland tournaments
Uniforms	Caps	£140	£9.50 each – printing included.
	Jerseys	£390	£26.00 each – printing included.
Total for 2017 Season:		£1650	

A smaller sponsorship package of £500 or £1000 is acceptable but the club reserves the right to include other sponsors logo on the teams uniform or website.