

The history of softball media essay



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As you may know softball has changed drastically since it first started. When softball first started they used a 16-inch softball compared to our 12-inch softball that we use now. Even the gloves, bats, bases, and some rules have changed with in time. To think that softball got started with a boxing glove, football game, and a boating club. You will see all the changes in this report that you are about to read.

Since I was about six years old I have been playing softball, and it's amazing how I am now 21 and still have the same love for the game. It amazes me on how much of a team sport softball really is, you have to have trust in your teammates in order to play the game. Everyone has to help everyone else out especially since it is such a fast playing game. Now that I am older and understand the game a lot better it made me wonder how in the world someone came up with such a mentally and physically challenging game. So I started my research.

Believe it or not softball started from three different sports, boating, boxing, and football. Although when you think about none of these sports really have anything to do with softball but they have a huge part in how softball came about. Softball was actually introduced on Thanksgiving Day in 1887 in Chicago. After a Harvard and Yale football game a man from the Yale jokingly threw a boxing glove at the Harvard grads. Then a fan from Harvard hit the glove with a broom handle, and the game of softball began! George Hancock was at the Farragut Boat

Club to hear the final score of the annual football game. In the picture below you will see the Farragut Boat Club, where softball began.

Figure 1- Farragut Boat Club

Hancock made a large ball by tying a boxing glove into a ball shape, and then drew a small baseball diamond with chalk on the floor of the boat club. Since the ball was a boxing glove at the time they fielded it with their bare hands. After they played for an hour and ended with a score of 40-41, Hancock wrote down the rules and came up with the big softball. Hancock also came up with a bat that had a rubber tip that was good for indoors, since that is where they were playing.

Indoor baseball, which was the name of softball at the time, became very popular in Chicago in the winter time. At the time the sport was used just to keep the baseball players in shape for baseball season. Once the weather had gotten warmer the game of softball was taken outdoors on a smaller baseball diamond. They still used a large softball that were anywhere from 10-20 inches in diameter.

Lewis Rober, a fireman, had a very big role in developing the game. Rober, who was from Minneapolis, needed something to keep his firemen occupied while waiting for calls. Rober used a field next to the fire station to mark out a softball diamond, and got a softer ball for his firemen to use. Since softball uses a smaller field and softer ball than baseball, it gives more action to the field unlike baseball. Rober was actually the one who came up with the seven inning rule; he did this because it allowed the game to be done in about an hour and still kept it active and competitive. They started to have contests between the different firehouses which drew as many as 3, 000 audiences. The game now known as softball was officially adopted by the

Minneapolis Park Board in 1913, and played in parks as well as on playgrounds all over the city.

As the game and rules changed from place to place so did the name. Before it was called softball in 1962 the game had a few other names. A few different names were cabbage ball, mush ball, and pumpkin ball. The sizes of the ball and bat changed just as much.

As I stated before Hancock started the game of softball by using a tied up boxing glove, well since the ball has changed drastically. While Robe, had used a small medicine ball for his game. Then in the first few decades of the 20th century during a 55-team tournament they were using a 14-inch softball. The standard 12-inch softball made with an interior of long-fiber kapok, cork, rubber or polyurethane came about by the end of the 20th century. In Chicago they still use a 16-inch ball and no gloves, they game is either called kapok ball or mush ball. In the pictures below on the left you will see a 16-inch softball that they used in the beginning compared to the standard 12-inch softball we use today.

Figure 3- On the left is a Chicago 16-inch softball and on the right is a standard 12-inch softball

In the first game of softball the bat that was used was a broken off broom handle. In the picture below you will see a standard broom handle that was used as the first bat for softball compared to the standard bats that we use today.

Figure 4- Standard broom handle (left), and the standard bat that we use today (right)!

After the broom handle the next bats were made of wood. Next the aluminum bat marketed by Easton in 1969. Easton is still a huge manufacturer in bats for both fast and slow pitch softball. Today players choose an aluminum bat over a wooden bat since the ball comes off an aluminum bat 3.85 mph faster. Composite bats, which these bats were made of graphite and plastic, came around in 1985. Then the titanium bats showed up in 1993. The titanium bats only had a short period of time in the game of softball. The ASA banned titanium bats because the ball came off them 10mph faster than the aluminum bats, which made the ball go farther at a faster speed and changed how the game was played. By fall of 1993 ASA banned titanium bats from the game.

The game that started in Chicago and Milwaukee became very popular throughout the upper Midwest and even Canada. In 1897 the first league outside of the United States started in Toronto. In 1933 softball made a huge leap when reporter, Leo Fischer, and salesman, Michael Pauley, had 55 teams compete in three different tournament leagues, men's fast pitch, men's slow pitch, and women's. The games were held at the field inside the world's fair grounds, and more than 350,000 came to watch. This tournament was helped softball become so popular, after the tournament teams, leagues, and other tournaments started to pop up all over the US and around the world.

In the fall 1933 the ASA was founded due to the success of the tournament. The Association standardized, and also brought a few more rules to the game that were greatly needed. Softball is a game for all age groups, in order to accommodate this into the game rules needed to be changed according to the age groups. A lot of youth leagues use a 12-inch ball. Between age groups, slow and fast pitch games the dimensions of the field varies. The distance from home plate to the pitching mound varies from 35-50 feet, and the distance from base to base varies from 55-65 feet. In the picture below you will see a standard softball field.

Figure 5- Standard softball field.

A fast pitch pitcher can send the ball over the plate as equally as fast as a major league baseball pitcher. Fast pitch has caught attention internationally.

When softball first started a group of me, who were 75 and older, who called themselves the Kubs wore their suits to play in. While they were touring the United States they had spectators who were amused by their choice of uniform. Today's softball players have a much more comfortable uniform. Shirts that are usually tank tops are made of cotton, polyester or nylon. Also now have their team logo, their last name and their number on them. Now they wear shorts or short breeches, they also have knee high sock to help protect their legs.

Back when softball first started they did not wear cleats or helmets, because then they did not have a ball coming at them close to 60 mph. Now helmets are worn for protection whether you are behind the plate catching, at the

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plate batting or running the bases, the helmet protects your head. They have also started using helmet on the infield to help protect the players from a fast ball coming at their head.

As you know the very first game of softball did not use a glove. Now there are so many different gloves it's hard to figure out what glove you need for your game. The first glove that was ever worn was a fingerless palm covering design. It was mainly used to protect the players' hands from splitting and cracking during the game. In the picture below you will see one of the earlier gloves made.

Figure 2-Early Softball Glove

The first modification to the fingerless glove was more padding for the palm and adding finger covers. The last modification was added in the 1950's and it was the basket that would actually catch the ball. The gloves vary in size and length depending on where you play at on the field. A catchers' glove has the most padding since they are catching a 60 mph ball. The pitchers' glove has a solid ribbing on the back to give it a stable pocket, and it is lighter than an infielders' glove. The infielders' glove is 12-13 inches long and has a little less padding than a catchers' glove. The outfielders' glove is 14 inches long to help with the catching of fly balls.

Softball has come so far since it first began that in 1996 it hit its highest peak when it became an Olympic medal event. Since the Olympics have added softball as one of the events the United States women's team has won three gold medals. This shows how popular this sport is in the United States.

In the United States alone, more than twenty five million people play the game of softball.

Throughout my report I have been explaining how the game of softball has changed since the very first game. If Hancock would not have taken such an interest in the game on Thanksgiving Day in 1887 the game that we now call softball may have never been discovered. From the first game being played in a boat club with a boxing glove and broken broom handle, to now playing on specific softball fields with a 12-inch ball, gloves, and specific softballs bats. Even down to the distance of the bases, and the pitching rubber. Softball is a great sport for all age groups and both men and women. Overall softball was a great sport to be discovered and it will live on more many years to come.