

## Softball: Just a different version of baseball or something unique ?

**Softball** is an interesting sport. On the outset, the sport is similar to baseball but with subtle differences. However, it is interesting is the fact that softball has managed to become very popular alongside baseball.

One reason for its soaring popularity is that the game is much more popular amongst women than men. It is because traditionally, even though both men and women played softball, men started playing baseball while women continued to play softball. But the fortunes for this sport have overturned. This interesting sport is on the verge of extinction in America and around the world as people have stopped playing it. But can it be revived and will it become as popular as it once was?

**Softball** has a history that stretches back to many years. The origins of the sport can be traced back to Thanksgiving Day 1887 in Chicago. Its originator, George Hancock, decided to tie a baseball glove to resemble a ball and took a broom and chalked out a small diamond in a gym. Soon, he went back and worked on the rules of the game and returned to the gym with an oversized softer baseball and a shorter bat. The diamond that was used was quite smaller because of space constraints in the gym. Soon, the game moved outdoors and started to gain popularity.

In 1897, softball's first official league was created in Toronto. The women's version of the sport started to gather audiences in 1895. Over the years, the women's version became more popular while the men's version slowly disappeared. Women's softball became an Olympic sport in 1996 and it seemed the sport was here to stay.

There are only four major differences in the game of softball and baseball. The biggest difference is that the ball is always pitched underarm to a batter unlike baseball where the ball is pitched overhand. The second difference is that the ball used is much larger and softer than the one used in baseball. The field that the game is played on is smaller than the one for baseball and a game of softball has seven innings instead of nine. So why is it that the sport is so popular if it is very similar to baseball? Well there are a few reasons. Some people say that softball is a game that can be adapted to be played by all age groups and at all skill levels. Others say that the game is not all about raw strength like baseball where the objective is to pitch the ball as fast as you can and to hit it as hard as you can. In softball, the player has to think of strategies and devise plans. Finally some people say that big egos and arrogance have tainted baseball and at the amateur and professional level, softball is a much more exciting sport to watch.

**Softball** has been seeing a decline in recent years. It was removed as an Olympic sport recently and many reasons were speculated as to why this happened. People thought that maybe the Olympic Committee thought that softball is dominated by America that won gold on the first three occasions when the sport was played at the Games. Some have said that the Olympic committee might think the game is too American and not international enough. But whatever the reason may be, the sport is gone from the biggest sporting stage in the world and no one is sure when it will return. Professional softball is in decline in America as well with the number of teams' falling from 8 a few years ago to only 4 this year. Many teams have cited funding issues due to low attendance in stadiums. This is sad and some drastic actions will be needed to save a sport that is 123 years old. If not, it will slowly wither away and die. Many future softball stars will choose other sports to pursue and the sport will never be able to recover.