



SOFTBALL. MY GAME.

The Base Path forward....

## From the Dugout – a letter from the President

The following document is an analysis of Softball BC's current programs and our renewed focus on meeting all the requirements of the Long Term Player Development Model (LTPD).

We have seen the benefits of the "Own the Podium" program and if, through the efforts of members, we can put the same amount of energy into our Long Term Player Development program there is no telling how great the rewards may be. I encouraged you last year to "give the LTPD model a chance to influence the way we are structuring our league and Association schedules to allow for more time to learn the sport of Softball and less time trying to compete to win a place on the Podium." Did we succeed? In some areas yes we did. In the majority of the area there was little or no change. It is very hard at the Board level to alter the way Leagues and Associations run their programs. The Board can offer new directions that have proven to be successful however if not endorsed and supported by the Membership our chance of succeeding are limited at best.



Why change? Do we define our sport by competition or do we use competition to achieve our core purpose, vision values and strategic objectives which at the core is about player development? Implementation of Softball's Long Term Player Development model is crucial for Softball Canada, Softball BC and our partners to achieve our organizations' stated vision and strategic objectives. If we are to serve the long-term interest of all participants, the objective(s) for each stage of development must be considered in defining events/competitions and establishing benchmarks of success.

I invite you to familiarize yourself with the Vision, Mission and Value statements of the organization and to consider the strategic priorities of the Board of Directors reviewed with the members at the Annual General Meeting in October 2010.

The success of meeting our strategic priorities can only be achieved with the commitment of Volunteers, Coaches and Parents.

Dennis Bidin  
President – Softball BC

### ***Vision Statement***

Softball BC is committed to being the most successful amateur sport association in British Columbia

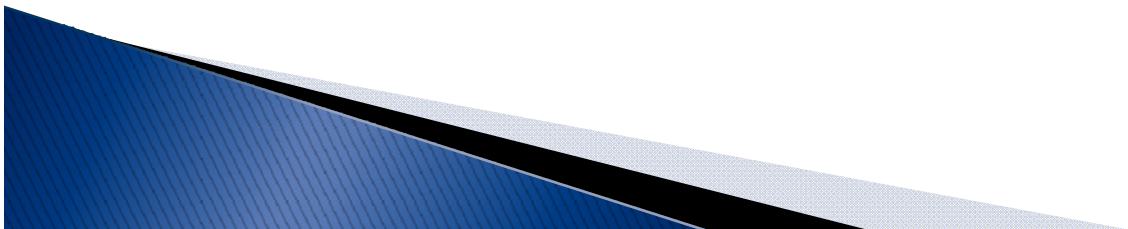
### ***Mission Statement***

To build, promote and govern the sport of softball throughout the Province of British Columbia.

### ***Value Statements***

Creating an environment whereby athletes, coaches and officials will achieve their potential.

Programs are structured to provide an opportunity for participation in all levels and are designed to meet the needs of the membership and the community.





## The first strategic priority identified by the Board of Directors was to build Softball BC by:

### *Develop and Implement a Recruitment Strategy*

- Priority is Entry Level ages 5 to 7 and then ages 8 to 10
- Reintroduce Learn to Play
- Province-wide delivery non-negotiable

### *Develop and Implement a Retention Strategy*

- Expand existing programs
- Identify benefits of membership
- Develop and implement a Membership Benefits package
- Province-wide delivery non-negotiable

*Note: Improved technology seen as an important means to achieving these goals*



There are still many people in the softball community that are being introduced to the whole concept of long-term player development and the implications for softball. Information, communication and education are needed across the province to ensure that all members and stakeholders have ample opportunity to review the many facets of LTAD. It is critical that Softball BC take a proactive role in communicating and educating members in all part of the province. To date, we have only scratched the surface.

Softball Canada has undertaken a competition review to ensure that the softball community can make the best possible decisions. These principles should be the foundation for all program decisions.

These guiding principles stipulate that events/competitions should:

- Reflect Softball Canada's (*Softball BC*) values.
- Provide quality experiences.
- Be properly periodized for optimal training and performance.
- Be a significant part of the Canadian sport delivery/youth development system.
- Adjust to changes in society.
- Provide a development pathway towards personal and sport excellence for all levels of participants.
- Be meaningful for all participants (players, coaches, officials, parents, and volunteers).
- Be fun, safe, attractive, affordable, and accessible to people of all ages, of all skill levels, and from all different backgrounds.
- Recognize the impact/influence of climate and geography on the competition system.
- Utilize the basic characteristics identified in softball's LTPD model and other research in the selection of event/competition activities and skills for each stage of development.
- Define and celebrate success in relation to the goals and objectives of the stage of development of all participants.
- Support a strong developmental club, team, and league system.
- Promote system alignment.
- Continually improve the competitive level of softball within Canada.



## Touching all the Bases: the Lineup

### Improvement

- ▶ Softball's LTPD model argues for a more sensible practice to game ratio so players have more time to develop skills necessary to play the game. Skill development does not occur in competitive environments. During games, players rely on the skills they have ingrained. They do not try new skills because they do not wish to fail or lose the game.

### Long-Term Player Development (LTPD)

- ▶ The Canadian Sport for Life (LTAD) model has provided an excellent model for providing appropriate activities at each developmental stage. Fundamental to the long-term development of individuals is ensuring that competition is compatible with objectives of each stage.



## **“Competition is a good servant – but a poor master”**

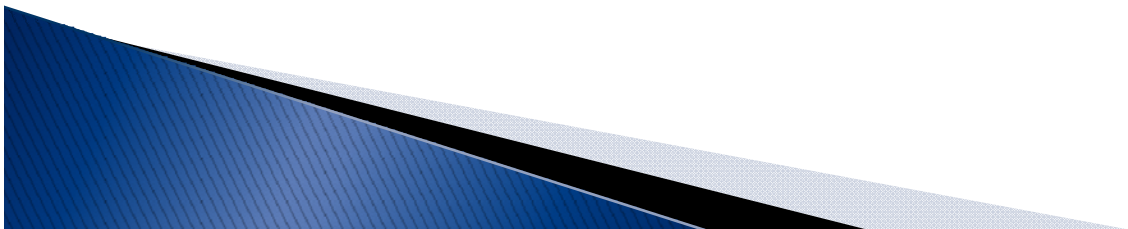
- ▶ At the developmental stages, physical and sport literacy goals are more appropriate than “winning” for long-term development as both a person and an athlete. For a competition to be meaningful, it has to have clear goals linked to the player’s stage of development. The competition format should be structured to allow all players to compete in a way that supports their physical, tactical, technical, mental and social development. Each player must have a reasonable chance of succeeding (for young players this means meeting challenges besides just winning the game).



### **Sports Science & Research**

Softball’s current competition structure has evolved somewhat haphazardly without benefit of current sport science knowledge and expertise or the latest understanding of athletic development. It is known that the current competition structure does not provide meaningful competition for every player at each LTPD stage.

The current structure encourages early specialization to a position with an early emphasis being put on players who physically mature earlier and are thought to have an athletic gift, often to the detriment of the development of all. Leaders have an ethical responsibility to make the changes that optimizes the softball experience for ALL.



## **Coach & Parent Education**

Integral to the implementation of LTPD principles will be the education of the coach and parents. The activities of the coach cannot be monitored on a daily basis. The type of competition will drive the practice, dictating what skills are taught and emphasized. Coaches will coach to whatever is being measured. If success is based on wins, that is what they will coach to attain. Change is necessary. Therefore, what is measured must be changed to ensure meaningful competition and to encourage behaviour that will lead to those changes.

## **Process vs. Outcomes**

Examples of process goal that are needed from coaches are:

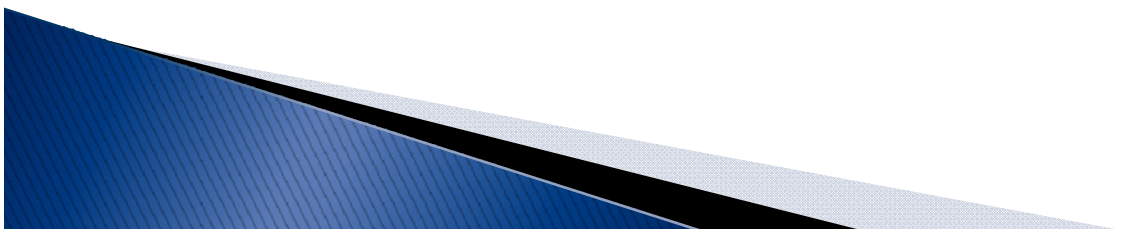
- increased individual skill development
- increased development of “all round” players who are capable of playing a variety of positions
- player retention (satisfaction, fun, learning)

Desired process goals are what must be measured to determine the success of a program

## **Meaningful Competition**

Creating competitive situations that contribute to development, are fun, present an equal challenge for all, make more participants feel as though they belong and have an equal opportunity to succeed are “meaningful”.

A “meaningful” competition should challenge players, give them the opportunity to push themselves and test their abilities.





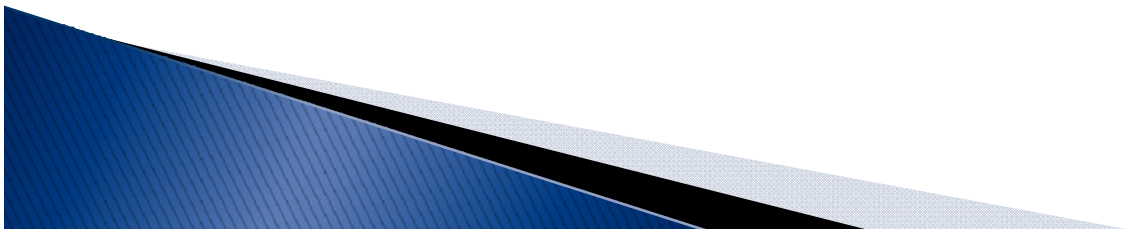
**The competition system can have unintended consequences.**

The Birth Date Effect or Relative Age can have an effect in softball.

**Kaizen:**

The concept of Kaizen has evolved from meaning simply “improvement” to embodying a belief system that propels continual, incremental improvement, regardless of achievement. Those who practice it see the process of striving both as the goal, and the means to a goal. The concept of Kaizen underlies the progression of games. Each step on the competition pathway should be about the player striving to improve and evolve in their development. At each level, the athlete needs to develop new skills to meet the challenge presented in a higher level of competition.

*In considering the changes that have been recommended in Softball Canada's Competition Review, it is important to recognize that many of these changes will not be easy and will take time. It is, however, important that we move forward on the relatively 'easy' recommendations and make the changes that are within the control of Softball BC.*



# Active Start

## *Starting Lineup*

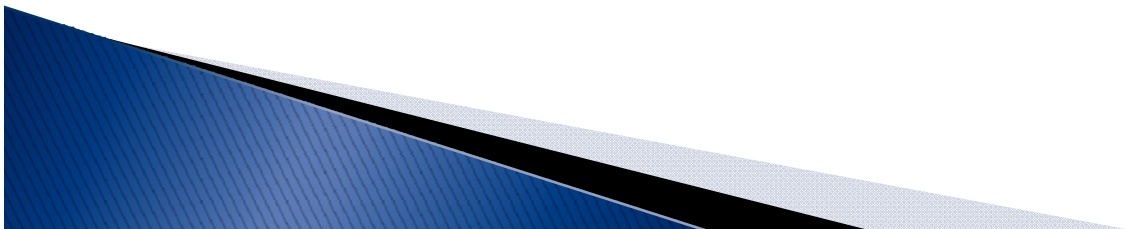
Children typically become involved in softball towards the end of the Active Start stage (Ages 5 – 6). Introduced by Softball Canada in 2004 the Learn to Play Program uses fun playground activities to develop fundamental movement skills like running, throwing, catching, striking a object, agility, balance, coordination and speed.

## *Strikeouts*

- Parents expect to see a game played with score kept and a winning and losing team. Parents need to be educated that children need to develop as athletes before they become specialized as players.
- Coaches are typically volunteer parents who have little or no coaching experience. There are not enough NCCP Learning Facilitators to provide education province wide.
- There is no audit or accountability of associations on what is being taught.
- The cost of providing program materials may be a barrier.

## *Home Runs*

The Learn to Play Level 1 program introduces participants to an hour of activities and lead-up games patterned after informal playground games. Volunteer coaches are given prepared lesson plans with easy to follow instructions and progressions for teaching basic skills. The coach is provided with a basic skills checklist which can used to develop self esteem and confidence in a player as their skills improve.



## ***Plate Conference***

- Parent education is an essential ingredient to running a successful program. Softball BC will provide downloadable material on the website for associations to distribute to parents. Incentive to associations needs to be provided.
- Softball BC will add a 'Shared Best Practices' to the website
- New coaches need to have access to the NCCP Community Initiation clinic for education AND to give them confidence. Softball BC will train community Learning Facilitators to deliver the Coaching Community Initiation stream province wide.
- Softball BC will provide associations with the program materials for each team registered in the Learn to Play Program.
- Softball BC will Introduce the SAFE (Softball Association Fundamental Excellence' Star program developed by Softball Ontario
- Softball will pursue a grant to provide incentive for taking part in the SAFE star program



# Fundamentals

## *Starting Lineup*

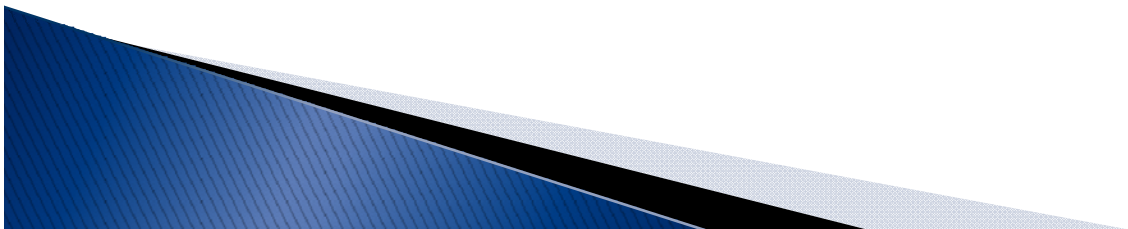
Most softball programming begins at the FUNdamentals stage for children 6 to 9. The primary focus is fun, participation and fundamental movement skills before fundamental softball skills are introduced. At this stage children should take part in a wide range of sports – developing all-round athletes at this age is far better. Children this age have a strong sense of what is “fair” and should be introduced to the simple rules and ethics of sports.

## *Strikeouts*

- Players are expected to play games too early without having developed the necessary fundamental movement skills or softball fundamental skills to make the game possible and enjoyable
- Players are being assigned to teams and Associations are scheduling ‘games’ vs other teams. This indicates that Level 2 of the Learn to Play program is not being delivered.

## *Home Runs*

- The Learn to Play Level 2 program provides activities and progressions that allow the player to experience success – not frustration. Children will learn new skills and play lead up games. Hundreds of repetitions are necessary to develop the skills to play a full game of softball and these will be obtained through the games approach.





## ***Plate Conference***

- Provide model of season for associations to ensure that focus of competition is to reward process NOT outcome of games.
- As in Active Start:
- New coaches need to have access to the NCCP Community Initiation clinic for education AND to give them confidence. Softball BC will train community Learning Facilitators to deliver the Coaching Community Initiation stream province wide.
- Softball BC will provide associations with the program materials for each team registered in the Learn to Play Program.
- Softball BC will add a 'Shared Best Practices' to the website



# Learning to Train

## *Starting Lineup*

This is the most important stage for children ages 8 to 10 for the development of fundamental softball-specific skills and tactics. While competition is important, it is learning to compete that should be the focus – not winning.

## *Strikeouts*

- There is little room for younger, less skilled or underdeveloped players
- Young people are prematurely exposed to adult competition instead of age-appropriate competition
- There should no tiering or select teams in this category
- Minor Associations need to assign both practice and competition schedules



## *Home Runs*

CANpitch is Softball Canada's national pitching program created to provide a standardized curriculum to introduce and develop the skill of windmill pitching to children and youth. The primary objective of the program is to provide a vehicle to enhance the development of pitching skills and knowledge of players across Canada especially at the grassroots level. Everyone from Softball Canada to the Provincial/Territorial Softball Associations to the local coach has an important role to play in the development of pitchers. At this level, pitchers should learn two basic concepts: proper grip and how to deliver the ball towards the target. Emphasis is also placed on smooth, rhythmic wrist and arm action.



## ***Plate Conference***

- Introduce clinics for Learn to Play Level 1 for Children ages 8 –10 to be run indoors prior to the season. Lesson plans need to be reviewed for age appropriateness. Can be done with Community Learning Facilitators or work with associations to acquire facilities. The success or failure of the program will depend on access to recreational or school facilities
- Do not endorse on the Softball BC website tournaments that do not conform to the LTPD model.

- Promote the CANPitch program in outlying communities by sponsoring introduction sessions. Work with the Master Pitching Instructors to identify coaches to be trained as Regional Pitching Instructors and provide training for same.



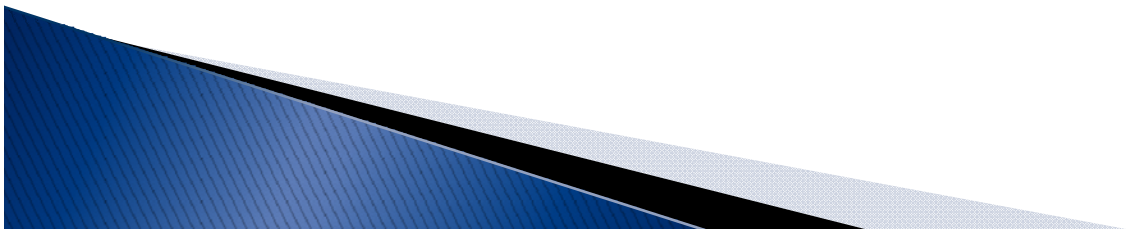
## Training to Train

### *Starting Lineup*

In this stage, players are separated into community or competitive softball programs based on their skill levels and the ratio shifts to 60% training to 40% competition and competition specific training. There becomes subtle distinction of the focus for community and competitive streams as well as the length of the season and number of games. In the early stage (U12) softball specific mental skills are introduced as well as learning to cope with the mental and physical challenges of competition. In the later stage (U14) fundamental softball skills and simple tactics strategies are further consolidated as well as developing more advanced softball skills and tactics/ strategies.

### *Strikeouts*

- Parents often have their own reasons to seeing their children in sports and common problems are placing too much emphasis on winning and pushing children to specialize in one sport too early. Tiering is introduced at the U12 level and is not based on competitive vs recreational but based on ability, giving a challenge to more developed players.
- Softball's LTPD model recommends a longer playing season and that will need to be negotiated with Park and Recreation Departments currently turn fields over to adult programs at the end of June
- The current structure of U12 Provincial Championships administered by Softball BC are not structured correctly





## ***Strikeouts cont'***

- One of the biggest problems facing the game of softball is not enough pitchers being developed and the potential for overwork. More athletes need to be exposed to the position and develop fundamentally sound mechanics which will increase the competitive level and ensure that teams are viable with multiple pitching staff.
- Softball BC has no pitching restrictions for U12 or U14 at Provincial Championships
- There are no offensive or defensive rules for U12 to ensure maximum participation at Softball BC Provincial Championships

## ***Home Runs***

- Softball Canada has modified the structure of the U14 Canadian Championships to a jamboree that includes three tiers. Rules modifications have been introduced that limit pitching to 4 innings and stipulates that all players must play a minimum of two innings per game.
- Softball Canada has released the first of a series of coaching guides. The ***U12 Coaches Guide: Tools for Coaching Success!*** has been created by Softball Canada to increase the knowledge of coaches and improve the development of players. Additional Coaches Guides for other age categories are currently being developed.
- The CANpitch program continues to offer curriculum for developing pitchers. In the U12 stage, pitchers continue to learn fundamental pitching skills. The goal of this stage is to systematically build on the skills learned in the FUNdamentals stage by increasing the speed of the motion and throwing to basic targets while maintaining proper mechanics. At U14 pitchers are beginning to understand the skills associated with being a successful pitcher. Improving velocity, control, and ball movement are the next priorities in the progression of skill development.
- Mandatory coaching certification is required at provincial championships



## ***Plate Conference***

- Through education and literature educate both parents and coaches on the 10 year rule that has shown that it takes a minimum of 10 years and 10,000 hours of training for gifted athletes to achieve the highest level of elite competition. The average age of the Women's Canadian National Team is 25 and the Men's is 28. Overtraining and overwork leads to burnout and injury

- Teams in the lower mainland of BC traditionally start the first week of April and conclude at the end of June. Teams compete in the middle of June for the right to advance to provincial championships. This seasonal schedule does not work for interior and northern teams as their season is not as long. This will be one of the hardest changes to implement.

Challenges include:

- Having access to playing fields later in the season and for a longer period of time
- Associations claim that once school is out, that parents go on holidays and therefore there is limited access to the athletes. There is no empirical data to back up this claim.





- Change the U12 Provincial Championship to multiple provincial festivals to limit travel where geography is a challenge. This will also allow greater participation and keep teams active and together further into the summer. Team scores will include skill activities in addition to winning games that will count in the final standings.

- Introduce motion at the Softball BC Annual General Meeting to introduce pitching restrictions at the U12 and U14 provincial championships.

- Introduce motion at the Softball BC Annual General Meeting to introduce offensive and defensive rules for player participation at U12 and U14 provincial championships

- Promote the CANPitch program in outlying communities by sponsoring introduction sessions. Work with the Master Pitching Instructors to identify coaches to be trained as Regional Pitching Instructors and provide training for same.



# Training to Compete

## *Starting Lineup*

The guiding principles between community and competitive softball become quite distinct with an emphasis on learning to execute when it counts. Players determine the amount of time and energy they are able to devote to the game of softball. There is a shift by the end of this stage from process goals (learning and skill development) to outcome goals (wins/losses)

## *Strikeouts*

- The sharpest decline in registration is from U14 to U16 with a smaller, but significant decline to U19
- At the competitive level finances become an issue as teams travel greater distances for meaningful games.
- The lack of availability of quality pitching also has implications on player retention, as without a pitcher teams will often fold.
- The recommendation of the Softball Canada Competition Review to extend the season for both recreational and competitive programs will be challenging for accessibility of facilities and as well as the climate outside of the lower mainland.
- This stage has the highest incidence of unrealistic coaching demands. The emphasis on early specialization and running programs year round takes away from athletes participating in other sports. The social aspects of the athletes life is stunted due to high commitments to competition and training at early stages.
- Recreational players should not be eliminated from the competitive stream. PHV (especially in males) will have an impact on performance.





## *Home Runs*

- In 2012 the age will change from U19 to U18. This should help with teams staying together as players will not be split up due to athletes who leave the province to attend college and university
- The CANpitch program continues to develop pitchers. Pitchers at this stage are beginning to understand the skills associated with being a successful pitcher. Improving velocity, control, and ball movement are the next priorities in the progression of skill development.
- BC has been successful at both Canada and Western Canada summer games in securing medals in both Male and Female categories.



## ***Plate Conference***

- With the age change for Canada Summer Games changing to U21, the Western Canada Summer Games need to be changed to U18 and the BC Summer Games to U16. This will bring Multi Sport competitions into line with the Softball Canada Competition Review and LTPD. It may also provide incentive to U16 and U18 players to stay involved.
- Continue to seek funds, both government and sponsorship to assist teams with travel to provincial and national competitions
- Provide more education for coaches in addition to skill development on the effect of sport on youth and the ethics of fair play. In 2012 host the Softball Canada Coaching Conference and include workshops on this subject as well as player skill development.
- Develop standards and provide skill evaluations for players that should be completed at the start and end of the season to determine the player's progress.
- Work with Slo Pitch National to develop program for U14 and up designed to be strictly recreational and maintain physical activity in a more social atmosphere.



## Living to Win

### *Starting Lineup*

This stage deals with the competitive athlete only. Players consider themselves full-time athletes and manage and organize their lives accordingly.

### *Strikeouts*

- When they retire, the majority of women do not continue in the game.
- There is no collection of data on the number of athletes who are attending college and university on softball scholarships.
- Canada's in-season is the off-season for players attending college/ university in NCAA/ NAIA. Players are likely to decline to participate in order to recover and regenerate from their demanding college season.





## *Home Runs*

- 5 out the 17 women on the Canadian Women's National Team are from BC and there are 4 men on the Canadian Men's National team.
- Numerous athletes attend college and university on softball scholarships
- Canada Summer Games have been changed to U21
- The Senior Women's Canadian Championship was won by the White Rock Renegades.

## *Plate Conference*

- Develop strategy for the collection of data on the number of athletes who are attending college and university on softball scholarships.
- The age change for the Canada Summer Games should provide an incentive for athletes to compete in the province.





# Active for Life

## *Starting Lineup*

Softball enables everyone to enjoy the outdoors with family or friends. Softball presents a unique opportunity because it allows players to challenge themselves mentally and physically, both in a team environment and as an individual.

## *Home Runs*

- Adult recreational registration accounts for 32% of our membership.
- Since its implementation in 1995 both Men's and Women's teams from BC have competed at each of the World Master Games medaling at all games

## *Strikeouts*

- There is no Learn to Play for Adults! Softball BC's recreational adult leagues are traditionally players who have played all their life.
- Adults can be reluctant to invest money in equipment for sport when they are trying something new

## *Plate Conference*

- Allow for new players to come out and try softball without the financial commitment
- Identify sporting good sponsor who will supply adult start up kit at discounted price



## Resources and References

- Softball Canada – Learn to Play Level 1, 2 & 3 Coaching Manuals
- Softball Canada's – Long Term Development Guide for Softball in Canada
- Canadian Sport Centres – A Sport Parent's Guide
- Canadian Sport Centres – Developing Physical Literacy
- LTAD Implementation Planning Guide for Provincial and Sport Organizations
- Softball Canada's Competition Review
- Softball Canada's CANpitch program

*This is a living document and should be considered a starting point in Softball BC's implementation of Long-Term Player Development. It will evolve with increase in knowledge through updates, and be expanded as needed.*

