

# WUSA Fastpitch Equipment Information

## Required Equipment

Each player needs their own glove and mouth guard. It is strongly recommended that each player get their own batting helmet for personal hygiene reasons. Softball (or baseball) cleats are also recommended. The league provides bats and balls, catcher's equipment and team uniforms. Most of the girls have their own bats and equipment bags. It is also recommended that older girls wear sliding shorts and knee pads (or shin guards) - some coaches make these a requirement. Infield face masks are required for pitchers that pitch in the Intermediate, Sophomore and Junior divisions and should be considered for 1st base and 3rd base positions in the Intermediate, Sophomore and Junior levels.

## Batting Helmets

The most important factor in purchasing a batting helmet is the fit. Make sure there is no wobble (no matter how cool the color is and how much she wants it, if it wobbles its going to be a problem). Have her run up and down the aisle in the store and check to make sure there is no wobble. Girls head sizes change very little with time, so it is very unlikely that she will "grow into it" if it's too big. Be aware that "one size fits all" is a lie. If you check the "one size fits all" ranges you will note a variance, 6 5/8 to 7 5/8, 6 7/8 to 7 1/2, etc. Many of the younger girls have 6 1/2 head sizes or smaller. Note that head size does not always correlate to body size. Two girls of the same height may have very different head sizes.

There is a head size chart shown below.

You may need to but a specialized "fit kit" that consists of extra foam pads (Budget and Barcelona carry these) or special order an XS or XXS helmet to get one that fits properly. "Fit Kits" are a great way to save the helmet that she loves that is too big. **Fit Kits are helmet-specific; make sure that you get the one that is made for your particular helmet.** You can also order these on-line.

If you purchase a helmet without a face guard attached ask at the store for them to attach it or show you exactly how to do it. It normally takes only a screw driver and patience but make sure that you see how to do it before you try.

**Make sure that you get an NOCSAE-approved helmet** (there will be an embossed stamp on the back or the bill of the helmet) with an NOCSAE faceguard attached (there will be a plate or a sticker on the faceguard). ASA rules now require NOCSAE helmets and faceguards.

The best place to purchase a batting helmet is Budget Sporting Goods on Wescott near the rear exit of Memorial Park. They carry most major brands and lots of sizes. They can also special order smaller sizes.

The most popular helmets are Worth Liberty (the white ones with metallic trim), Schutt "Pony Tail" and Easton Two-Toned. **Wilson helmets tend to wobble.**

Hats & Caps Size Chart	
Hat Size	Head Circumference - Inches
6	18 3/4 in
6 1/8	19 1/4 in
6 1/4	19 5/8 in
6 3/8	20 in
6 1/2	20 3/8 in
6 5/8	20 3/4 in
6 3/4	21 1/4 in
6 7/8	21 5/8 in
7	22 in
7 1/8	22 3/8 in
7 1/4	22 3/4 in
7 3/8	23 1/8 in
7 1/2	23 5/8 in
7 5/8	24 in
7 3/4	24 3/8 in
7 7/8	24 3/4 in
8	25 in

## Gloves

The first rule of buying a fastpitch glove is, "don't spend a lot of money but get as big a glove as your daughter can handle." A standard joke among coaches is that girls show up with "glove's too small and bat's too big." Well known, quality brands such as Louisville Slugger, Mizuno, Rawlings and Nike all offer reasonably priced fastpitch softball gloves (\$25-50 at Academy). For younger girls (Pixies and Freshman) you want a glove with soft leather that is easy to manipulate. **Expensive gloves are actually hard for most girls to use because of the stiffness and thickness of the leather. Breaking in an expensive, stiff glove can take up to one full year** (unless you are willing play catch every day). Try to get one with a large back strap or inner glove that firmly secures the glove around the wrist. A firmly secured, larger glove is superior to a loose fitting, smaller glove. **T-ball gloves and baseball gloves are NOT recommended** because of their small size relative to the size of a softball. Fastpitch gloves are sized for softballs. **Buy a Fastpitch glove.**

Division	Typical Glove Size
Pixie	10-11.5 inch
Freshman	11.5-12 inch
Intermediate	11.5-12.5 inch
Sophomore	12-13 inch
Junior	12-13 inch

## Bats

Bats are provided by the league but many of the girls, especially at the Intermediate level and up, have their own bats.

### Get a Fastpitch Bat

Make sure that you buy a bat marked "Fastpitch Softball" with an ASA stamp on it. Pixies can use bats marked "T-ball." Fastpitch bats are generally "bottle bats" with a big barrel that is preferred for players that are learning to hit softballs. Baseball bats and Slowpitch softball bats are not permitted in Fastpitch softball.

### Get the Right Length

A good rule of thumb is that the bat should be no longer than the distance from the center of the chest to the tip of the player's outstretched finger tips (with the arm held out to the side). A standard joke among experienced coaches is that young girls show up with "glove's too small and bat's too big."

Division	Typical Bat Length
Pixie	24-27 inch
Freshman	26-28 inch
Intermediate	27-30 inch
Sophomore	28-31 inch
Junior	30+ inch

### Get the Right Weight

Bats vary in weight using the designations -8, -10, -11, -12, etc. meaning the difference between length and weight. A 27 inch (-10) bat will weigh 17 oz. and a 27 inch (-12) bat will weigh 15 oz; those two ounces will generally make a lot of difference in swing speed. The lighter the bat, the higher the "minus number" with -13 generally being the lightest bats available. **Lighter bats are generally preferable because swing speed is the most important factor in hitting the ball, not bat mass.** Lighter bats are also more expensive (-12, -13). For girls struggling to make contact, this can be due to the bat being too heavy (or too long or both). For younger girls, lighter bats are recommended if within your budget (-12, -13). For older girls with powerful swings, you may want to get slightly heavier bats (-8, -9, -10).

## Recommended Bats

Some good all-around choices are:

- Louisville Slugger TPS Catalyst TBall -12.5 \$39.95
- Louisville Slugger TPS Warrior -12 \$49.95 (Aluminum)
- Demarini Cat Osterman DCXAT -13 \$99.95 (Hybrid)

If these are outside your budget, some less expensive models are listed in the table below. You can see that price is pretty much directly related to weight (the higher the "minus" number, the more expensive the bat) and material. You can also find "last year's model" on the web for much lower prices.

## Get Batting Gloves

Unfortunately, most light-weight bats tend to vibrate a lot when they hit the ball, especially when the ball is hit slightly off-center (which happens a lot) and during batting practice in cooler weather. This will cause the girls to complain about the bat "stinging" when they hit the ball. Batting gloves lessen the sting considerably and provide more grip and control. They also help avoid scrapes to the heel of the hand when sliding on the basepaths. Plus, you look really cool when you wear them. Buy an inexpensive pair, they get lost a lot.

## Where to Buy One

Academy carries decent low-price bats. For lighter, higher-end bats, especially in the smaller sizes like 28 (-13) and 29 (-13), go to Budget Sporting Goods on Wescott near Memorial park or Barcelona Sporting Goods on I-10 near Beltway 8. You can also order one online from these sources:

[www.justbats.com](http://www.justbats.com)  
[www.directsports.com](http://www.directsports.com)  
[www.softballjunk.com](http://www.softballjunk.com)  
[www.linedrive.com](http://www.linedrive.com)

## Bat Materials

Bats are generally made of aluminum but composite bats are now available down to 28 inches in length. Composite bats have the advantage of superior weight distribution but are more expensive and higher-maintenance than aluminum bats (\$100+). The latest and greatest technology is "hybrid" which uses a combination of a composite handle with an aluminum barrel offering maximum "whip" and "rebound" in addition to balanced weight distribution. Hybrid bats are similar to graphite drivers in golf. Hybrid bats have the best resistance to "sting" in the handle (best vibration dampening). Be aware that composite bats may crack when used below 65F (some manufacturers say 70F) - this is actually due to the hardness of fastpitch balls increasing at cold temperatures (the balls have plastic cores that harden at cold temperatures). Many advanced batters like the feel of composite bats.

Composite bats (other than the “little girl” models) reach maximum stiffness after 100-200 ball impacts. Hence, you may want to break them in by hitting 100-200 real softballs off a tee or hitting real softballs in a batting cage (don’t hit above 45 mph with real softballs in the cage). Make sure the outside air temperature is above 65F-70F before attempting to break-in a new composite bat. The fibers in the bat actually reach maximum strength after 100-200 impacts. Composite bats also tend to have a limited lifespan and can lose strength after several thousand ball impacts (some think the limit is around 5,000 impacts). Some composite bat manufacturer’s warranties may prohibit use in a batting cage.

### Bat Catalog

The table below shows some of the low-to-mid range models available (2010 Models). At the high-end for older girls you can spend \$200-300. Be aware that to leverage the capabilities of expensive bats your daughter must have enough bat-speed to drive the ball into the outfield on a line.

<b>Manufacturer</b>	<b>Model</b>	<b>Sizes</b>	<b>Weight</b>	<b>Material</b>	<b>Price</b>
Demarini	Cat Osterman CAT FP	28-33	-11	Aluminum	\$49.95
Demarini	Cat Osterman DXCAT	28-32	-13	Hybrid	\$99.99
Easton	SK25	25-31	-10	Aluminum	\$19.99
Easton	Reflex	28-34	-12	Aluminum	\$69.99
Easton	SV12	30-34	-11.5	Hybrid	\$179.99
Easton	Synergy Crystal	29-34	-11.5	Composite	\$149.99
Louisville Slugger	Kozmo	24-31	-9. -10	Aluminum	\$29.95
Louisville Slugger	Jessica Mendoza	24-27	-13.5	Composite	\$39.95
Louisville Slugger	Mystic	28-34	-13	Aluminum	\$69.99
Louisville Slugger	Zephyr	28-34	-12	Composite	\$149.99
Miken	Halo Lite	28-33	-12	Composite	\$179.99
Mizuno	Jennie Finch	24-26	-10.5	Aluminum	\$29.95
Worth	Storm	28-33	-13	Aluminum	\$59.99
Worth	Mayhem Lite	28-33	-12	Composite	\$179.99

## Balls

Division	Ball	Notes
Pixie	11 inch "soft touch"	"Incrediball" "Flexiball"
Freshman	11 inch "soft touch"	"Incrediball" "Flexiball"
Intermediate	11 inch ASA .47 COR 375 lb	Optic Yellow
Sophomore	12 inch ASA .47 COR 375 lb	Optic Yellow
Junior	12 inch ASA .47 COR 375 lb	Optic Yellow

## Sliding Shorts and Knee Pads

Sliding shorts are padded, lycra shorts worn under regular uniform shorts. They protect the upper legs and posterior from scrapes and bruises during sliding into a base. Sliding shorts are worn generally starting at the Intermediate, Sophomore and Junior levels.

Sliding shorts can be purchased at Academy and Budget Sporting Goods (on Wescott).

Knee pads and shin guards are worn to protect the knees during sliding. If you select shin guards, make sure that they are pulled up over the knee, many of girls tend to wear them too low where the knee is not protected, defeating the purpose of the guard.

## Cleats

Cleats are recommended for softball to ensure good footing on the field. Be sure to purchase softball or baseball cleats. There is a difference between soccer and softball cleats. The most important difference is that softball cleats usually have a toe cleat that is dangerous for soccer play. The toe cleat helps in quick acceleration that is common in softball but is dangerous when kicking at a ball on the ground. Softball cleats have thicker soles made to provide better support and traction during the explosive movements required in stealing bases and chasing hit balls. Softball cleats also have thicker and higher uppers providing more support for the upper foot and ankle to prevent twisting injuries. Soccer cleats are lighter with thinner mid-soles and lower uppers, made for lots of conventional running. Some soccer cleats are lighter than running shoes. Softball cleats are not permitted under soccer rules. Soccer cleats can be worn for softball, but are not recommended.

## Catching Equipment

If you purchase catching equipment, it is critical that it fit correctly. Shin guards come in various lengths and must be sized to fit properly from the knee to the instep. Chest protectors are sized by length and must reach from the waist to the

shoulders. Helmets/masks are sized in the same manner as batting helmets, but may fit differently. Be sure to measure carefully and get the correct size catcher's equipment.

Generally Fastpitch equipment manufacturers now offer "Hockey-type" catcher's masks/helmets. WUSA still provides older-style mask/helmet combination with a throat protector. Both types are approved for play. Hockey-type masks do not require a throat protector, but the older-style mask/helmet combinations require a throat protector.

Fastpitch catcher's mitts are available in Youth sizes. It is best to try on various models and select the one that your daughter feels most comfortable with. Be aware that a stiff catcher's mitt will take up to one year of steady use to break in. It is not a fast process and cannot be short-cut. If the ball is popping out of her glove, you need to spend more time breaking it in.

Most catchers wear "Knee Savers" that provide a cushion when they squat, but these are not required.

Padded Inner forearm sleeves are available provide extra protection for catchers who handle extra-fast pitchers. Extra palm pads are also available but some girls find them too uncomfortable.

Budget Sporting Goods carries all types of catcher's equipment.

## Practice Equipment

Many types of practice equipment are available, and many of them are of dubious value. A great way to practice is to play catch. The best home practice equipment is:

1. A bucket of whiffle or foam balls (foam balls last longer).
2. A batting tee – Easton Deluxe for \$29.99 is a good choice. Cheaper ones break.
3. A net to hit balls into, throw balls into or serve as a backstop – Jugs "Instant Screen" for \$129.99 is strongly recommended, **but don't throw away the folding instructions.**
4. Instructional DVDs – the USA Softball Series is recommended, start with *Fundamentals of Hitting*.