

# WESA's Beginners Guide to Equipment

## Introduction

So, you're thinking of getting some equipment for the WESA season? This will be a quick, no nonsense guide to some of the basic equipment that you might be interested in buying for yourself. All write ups here will be short because we want to make it easy to understand without all the technical talk.

## Gloves

When choosing a glove, the first thing you want to consider is the size. We play softball so you will need a glove big enough to catch a softball. Glove sizes are in inches (measured from the heel to the tip of the finger) so consider starting from at least a 12.75 inch glove for softball. Sizes go up to 14 inches. To find the size look for the stamping on the glove.



If you're playing infield maybe a 12.75 inch glove is good. If you're playing outfield a larger 13 to 14 inch glove would work well. If you are not sure which size to choose a 13 inch glove for softball is a good all around glove size. If you are in the store looking for a glove make sure to grab a softball and see how it fits in the glove.

### Types of gloves

Most gloves look like a glove with 5 fingers. There is a webbing connecting the thumb and index finger. This is the standard glove.



The only other type of glove allowed for softball is a trapper or first baseman's glove. It looks more like a mitt and usually has a deeper pocket and more area along the fingers. This glove is allowed only if you are playing first base, catcher or pitcher.



### Differences in leather and cost

Next thing you may look at is the cost. When it comes to gloves, you definitely get what you pay for. Cheaper types of leather or synthetic leather will be used in cheaper gloves (about \$80) while the professional types of gloves can cost as much as \$300-400. Consider how much you plan to play but also your future in the sport. Budget at least \$100 for a glove that will last. I have had a \$120 glove that played through 10 seasons.

The quality and type of leather is a large reason for the differences in cost but also the quality of the build contributes as well. No machine can make a baseball glove so there is a lot of human craftsmanship in every glove.

### Breaking in a glove

At the beginning (or at the store) you will notice that the glove feels very stiff. A very stiff glove means that it will be harder to catch and keep the ball in the glove without it bouncing out. Plus, it takes more effort for you to close the glove to grip the ball. "Breaking in a glove" means softens it up a little bit. There are many methods on the internet about how to break in a glove like using shaving cream, Vaseline, baking the glove in an oven or microwave (don't do this), hot water, steaming, pounding the glove with a mallet, applying glove oil, crushing it... there are lots but some of these methods can shorten the life of your glove. The best way is just to play catch and use the glove. The more you use the glove the more it softens up and shapes to the way you like it.

### What is a pocket?

When you are breaking in a glove you are trying to form a pocket in the lower web area of the glove. The pocket is the location in the glove where you would best like to catch a ball. It is like making a softball sized indentation in the glove so that any ball going into the glove will settle into that spot or indentation. If the ball bounces out of your glove a lot perhaps getting a glove broken in and having a pocket will help.

### Caring for a glove

Clean your glove with a damp towel and wait for the glove to dry. You can use a leather cleaner if you like. Once dry, use a little glove conditioner on all parts of the glove. Do this a couple times a year. Your glove is leather. Leather is skin and over time, if not cared for, can dry out, crack and break.

### Well-known brands of gloves

Rawlings, Easton, Mizuno, Wilson, Louisville and Miken.

# Bats

Buying a bat is a larger investment and once again, as with gloves, you usually get what you pay for. Bats are typically made of aluminum and you should look to start from at least \$100. High end bats can be as much as \$350-400. Look for a slo-pitch bat. Not a baseball bat (the barrel is different) and not a softball bat (the weight is different).

You would think that a formed piece of stretched aluminum cannot be any different from another but the performance you get from a \$300 bat is considerably different than from a \$80 bat.

## Legal Bats

Any bat used for play in WESA must have certain stamps on the bat which will attest to the legality of the bat. A legal bat basically means a ball being hit with that bat will not exceed 98 mph in velocity. Being in a recreational league, especially with beginners, anything faster can be dangerous to infield players. Look for these stamps on the bat.

Any one of these stamps on the bat means it is legal for WESA play.



## Illegal bats

Do not use an illegal bat in our league. If you step into the batters' box with an illegal bat you will be ejected from the game, and your coach will be ejected as well. Using an illegal bat is also dangerous to other players if the ball hits another player.

## Weight

How heavy the bat feels to you is likely the first thing you notice when swinging a bat. This is pretty much personal preference as you might like a lighter/heavier bat than others. Typically, bats are weighted between 26oz to 30oz. Which is better is again personal preference, and physics.

A heavier bat has more mass. If you can move that mass fast and hit the ball then the ball goes farther. But if you cannot move that mass fast then the opposite will be true. Choosing a lighter bat means less mass and potentially the ball doesn't go as far. But you might make up for that because you can move the bat faster to create more force. It's a balancing act. To make it easier, start by choosing a weight that feels comfortable to your swing.

## Balance – Balanced vs End Loaded

Where a manufacturer puts those weighted ounces in the bat will make it a balanced bat or an end loaded bat. A balanced bat will have the weight distributed along the barrel while an end loaded bat will have the weight near the tip of the bat. This makes the bat feel just a little heavier. Where you like the weight is mostly personal preference. Try some bats from teammates to find out where you like your bat weighted.

## Breaking in a Bat

A new bat will still need some breaking in. This means that it needs a few hits on the bat before the aluminum wall of the bat becomes springy enough to give your hits some distance. You may hear a change in the sound of your bat as you hit the ball when this happens. Some brands of bats take longer than others to break in but most bats will need somewhere around 50 good hits on the barrel to break in well. Once a bat is broken in and has a bit of flex to launch a ball a good distance we call it having Pop!

### Hit the “Sweet Spot”

The “sweet spot” is the part of the hitting area on the barrel of the bat that creates the most pop on a ball. If you hit the ball on this part of the bat you won’t feel much vibration in your hands. Miss this spot and the ball won’t go far and you may also feel a lot of feedback in your hands. Slo-pitch bats have larger hitting areas because the ball is larger.



### Caring for a bat

If you have invested \$300 in a bat, you might want to start paying attention to the temperature. To make bats lightweight, but allow them to flex when hitting, manufacturers make the aluminum wall of a bat thin. This means the temperature can affect the longevity of a bat. Bats are best to work at temperatures above 11-13C. In the offseason, it is a good idea not to store your bats in cold environments as, over time, it weakens the metal making it more prone to cracking when impacted by hitting a ball.

### Well-known brands of slo-pitch bats

Easton, DeMarini, Louisville, Mizuno, Miken, Worth and Combat.

## Cleats

A pair of cleats is something that is essential for having traction when running any time in a game. Cleats are sports shoes that have protrusions on the sole of the shoe. ***The only requirement in the WESA league is that you cannot wear metal cleats.*** Otherwise, any type of cleat is acceptable.

### What about soccer cleats, football cleats?

You can use soccer cleats or football cleats for softball without much problem but you will find that these types of cleats will wear faster as softball is played on gravel dirt and grass while soccer and football is played only on grass. You might find the gravel dirt fields are more abrasive to soccer and football cleats and they may not last as long as you expect.

Softball also needs players to sometimes pivot on one spot and you may find that soccer cleats do not do as good a job in this one aspect.

When buying cleats find a pair of molded baseball cleats that are most comfortable for you. Simple as that.

## Links

Learn more about gloves

<https://www.baseballmonkey.com/baseball-softball-glove-buying-guide#measure>

Learn more about how gloves are made

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PtySoTctqmk>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D77oe8ZzXWo>

Learn more about how aluminum bats are made

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GKI0UEanreA>