

THE INS AND OUTS OF USA/ASA FAST PITCH SOFTBALL BATS

TSA plays by USA/ASA rules (the rules will be slightly modified by age group). As a general rule, all fast pitch softball bats must have a 2 1/4 inch barrel diameter and must not be over 34 inches in length and 31 1/2 oz in weight. Bats must also be marked with the USA/ASA Certified stamp.



These bats should perform within the limits of the 98 mph batted ball speed standard. Bats can be made from aluminum or other metals; fiberglass, graphite or other composite material; or wood. The TSA softball division will NOT use wooden bats, although approved by USA/ASA. Bats can be made from one or multiple pieces. There are strict regulations on what bats can be used depending on the age level of your ball player. Buying a new bat can be overwhelming, so I've put together a short guide to make the process easier. For seasoned parents and players, this will be known information, but for the new comers, I hope this information will be helpful.

HOW TO MEASURE THE BAT FOR YOUR CHILD

HEIGHT & WEIGHT

If your daughter is between 3' to 3'4", start with a 26-inch bat, and increase the bat size 1 inch for every 4-to-5 inches that she grows. Here's a few more tips:

- Measure her height with her cleats on.
- Compare the height of the bat to her height. Stand a bat up next to your daughter. It should not exceed her hip. If it reaches past her hip area, it's going to be too long to swing.
- Weigh your daughter. As a general rule, if she is under 60 pounds, she should swing a bat between 26 and 29 inches long. If she weighs more than 70 pounds, her bat should range from 28 to 32 inches in length.

DROP WEIGHT

Weight is important, but there's more to it than how heavy a bat weighs:

- Bat weight is measured by the drop weight.
- Drop weight is the difference between the length and the weight of the bat. For example, if a bat is 28 inches long and weighs 18 ounces, it has a drop weight of -10.
- The bigger the drop weight, the lighter the bat will weigh.

Choosing the right balance between length and weight is important because it will make a difference in your daughter's swing.

- If you have a long, light bat, she will be able to swing it very fast, but it will not give her the extra momentum to hit the ball far

- If you have a short, heavy bat, she will not have a quick bat speed, but when the bat connects with the ball, it will travel further

Deciding on which is important to her in a bat is a personal choice. If she wants to be a contact player, she'll want to go with option 1, if she wants to be a power hitter, she'll want to go with option 2. The chart below will give you a general idea on what bat drop you'll want to look for in your daughter's bat.

FASTPITCH 2 1/4" SOFTBALL BATS

AGE	UNDER 7	8 - 9	10 - 11	12 - 13	14 AND OVER
LENGTH	24" to 26"	26" to 29"	28" to 31"	29" to 33"	31" to 34"
DROP	(-13.5) to (-10)	(-13.5) to (-10)	(-13) to (-8)	(-12) to (-8)	(-10) to (-8)

COMPOSITE BATS VS. ALLOY BATS

BAT MATERIAL

This is probably more information than you'll need at this point, but none the less, a little information about composite and alloy bats.

COMPOSITE BATS

Composite bats provide manufacturers the ability to control the weight distribution in the bat which will affect the end result of a ball hitting the bat. Bats can either be balanced (weight is evenly distributed) or end-loaded (the bat has more weight at the end of the barrel, giving it a heavier swing weight). Depending on the type of hitter your daughter wants to be, would determine the type of composite bat she would want.

Pros of Composite Bats

- Reduced vibration to the hands, minimizing sting from a miss-hit ball
- Typically have a larger sweet spot and more "pop"

Cons of Composite Bats

- Often more expensive than alloy bats, since the manufacturing process is more complex
- Require a break-in time

Composite bats will not "pop" or have peak performance, until it's been broken in. To break a composite bat:

- It's recommended that you hit between 150-200 hits with a regular softball
- It's important to slightly rotate the bat each time you hit the ball, so you evenly break it in - this ensures your bat lasts longer

ALLOY BATS

Alloy bats, also called metal and aluminum bats, have been around longer than composite bats, and can easily be found at any sporting goods store.

Pros of Alloy Bats

- Are usually less expensive than composite bats

- Do not require a break-in time; can be used immediately in a game
- Often last longer – if damaged, they'll usually dent instead of crack like a composite bat.

Cons of Alloy Bats

- Tend to have a smaller sweet spot and less "pop"

A good rule of thumb is, the more expensive the alloy, the longer the sweet spot is and the better balanced the bat will be.

You can also find hybrid bats that combine composite and alloy materials.

The chart below gives you a quick breakdown comparison of the different types of bats.

COMPOSITE	vs	HYBRID	vs	ALLOY
COST Brand new, Adult \$200 - \$400+		COST Brand new, Adult \$200 - \$300		COST Brand new, Adult \$50 - \$300
BREAK IN Requires ~150 - 200 hits to break in		BREAK IN Ready out of the wrapper		BREAK IN Ready out of the wrapper
CONDITIONS Not recommended for use in temperatures below 65°F		CONDITIONS Can be used in any temperature		CONDITIONS Can be used in any temperature
SWEET SPOT Larger sweet spot and more "pop"		SWEET SPOT Larger sweet spot than pure alloy, smaller sweet spot than pure composite		SWEET SPOT Smaller sweet spot
VIBRATION Reduced vibration and less sting with miss-hit balls		VIBRATION Reduced vibration and less sting with miss-hit balls		VIBRATION More vibration and intense sting from miss-hit balls
SOUND Sounds like the "crack" of a tree branch		SOUND Satisfaction of the classic "ping" sound		SOUND Satisfaction of the classic "ping" sound

At this level, I don't recommend going out and spending a fortune on a bat. If you want to invest in a really good bat for your daughter, I would start by checking out used bats. You can find really good, expensive bats, still in good condition on Ebay, Sideline Swap, Closeout Bats, and Just Bats, to name a few. Good luck!