



BackSoftball



BackSoftball Campaign Needs Everyone's Support!

After a 25-year struggle to convince the International Olympic Committee (IOC) that softball was worthy of a place in the Olympic Games, **WOMEN'S FASTPITCH** became an Olympic medal sport at the 1996 Games in Atlanta. Since then, softball has been a highly successful Olympic sport in terms of exciting competition on the field, spectator attendance and coverage by press and television.

However, when the IOC met in Singapore in 2005 – the same meeting at which they awarded the 2012 Olympics to London – members unexpectedly voted to remove softball (and baseball) from the Olympic programme after the 2008 Games in Beijing.

Exclusion came on a tied vote when a majority of 50% plus one was needed. In other words, just one more "Yes" vote would have kept softball in the Olympics!

The IOC decision in Singapore was particularly cruel for Britain, because it deprived the GB Women's Fastpitch Team of the opportunity to participate in the 2012 Olympics in London and show the great strides that GB Softball has made on the international stage. In September 2006, the GB Women's Team finished in tenth place at the ISF World Championships in Beijing, an astonishing result for a country that has only had a serious national team

programme for less than a decade.

Many people feel that the exclusion of softball from the Olympics after 2008 is unfair. The main charge against the sport seems to be that it is not sufficiently "global" in nature. But softball is played in over 130 countries, and in a comprehensive study by the IOC in 2005 on how all 28 Olympic sports rated across a range of criteria, softball came nowhere near the bottom.

What's more, one of the goals set out in the Olympic Charter requires the IOC to increase participation by women in the Olympic Games. But by voting out softball, the IOC will be excluding 120 women athletes from the Olympics – not to mention crushing the aspirations and dreams of millions of women and girls who play the game worldwide.

So the International Softball Federation (ISF) is doing everything it can to get softball reinstated to the Olympic programme for 2016 and beyond. Last year, the ISF launched an international campaign called **BackSoftball** and has pledged to present a strong case to IOC members when they meet in Denmark in October 2009 to decide the programme for the 2016 Games.

To reinforce its case, the ISF has committed itself to the achievement of a

ten-point programme between now and the IOC Congress in 2009 that includes increasing the number of people playing the sport (especially young people under 15), developing the game for people with disabilities, providing more opportunities for women to access the sport (especially from Muslim countries), providing equipment and coaching wherever it's most needed and increasing exposure for softball on television.

But the key to the success of the reinstatement campaign lies in Europe.

This is because there are more IOC members from Europe than from any other continent – but their knowledge of softball may be less than that of members from the Americas, Asia and other regions of the world where the game is more prominent. European IOC members may need help to understand that softball is a great sport that deserves to be restored to the Olympic programme – and that softball is a sport in its own right, not simply a female version of baseball.





BackSoftball



What can you do?

The best way to ensure the success of the BackSoftball campaign is to help keep the issue in the public eye and to help make softball's case in as many public forums as possible between now and the 2009 IOC Congress in Copenhagen. But do not attempt to talk to IOC members directly – that is forbidden by IOC rules and could harm the reinstatement campaign.

Instead, talk to your friends about Olympic reinstatement for softball, and ask them to talk to their friends, especially in other European countries. Raise the issue with your local newspaper or your MP. Visit the BackSoftball website (www.backsoftball.com) regularly for more information about the campaign and how you can help. Every individual effort is important.



What are the chances of reinstatement?

Although there is some confusion about the IOC's plans for the Olympics after London 2012, it seems that the idea is to move to a system of 25 core sports, plus three additional sports at each Games on some kind of rotational basis.

So a number of sports will be considered in Copenhagen for the additional places on the 2016 programme. These will include softball and baseball, because they were in the Olympics recently; and sports such as rugby 7s, squash, golf, street hockey, netball and others that have applied to be added to the programme.

This is the competition that softball will face if we hope to get back on the

Olympic programme for 2016. But even if reinstatement for 2016 is as a rotational rather than a core sport, it will be a lot easier to stay on the programme once we're there than to compete for a place in future when the ISF will have fewer resources with which to campaign and when softball as an Olympic sport will be a fading memory.

Softball's reinstatement to the Olympics is not just the ISF's struggle – the consequences of failure will be grave for softball federations and players around the world.

The consequences of success will be renewed hope for the sport and renewed aspirations for its players.

Please help in any way you can!

