

# **Batter Up! Fifty Years of Softball in Australia**

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In late July this year the world's best women softball teams will gather in St. John, Newfoundland, to compete in the VIII International Softball Federation Women's World Championship. They will be competing for the prestigious title of World Champion and equally importantly vying to qualify for the 1996 Atlanta Olympic Games when softball will make its inaugural entry as a medal sport.

For the Australian team the long awaited march into the Olympic stadium will be the culmination of 50 years of development through a series of stages: (1) the formative years when the game was introduced into Australia leading to the founding of the Australian Women's Softball Council in 1949; (2) the establishment of the game in each Australian State during which time the host state for the national Championships provided the national office bearers; (3) the inauguration of the International Series in Melbourne in 1965; (4) change of name to the Australian Women's Softball Federation and election of office bearers independent of the national championships; (5) the acceptance of men as players and a further name change to the Australian Softball Federation; and (6) the acceptance of softball at the Australian Institute of Sport following its elevation to an Olympic sport.

The history of softball in Australia provides insights into: (1) the traditions and developments which had lead to the current status of softball as a competitive and recreational activity; (2) the adoption of a North American sport into the traditionally British sports culture in post-World War II Australia; (3) the collaboration between women and men in the establishment of a women's sport in Australia, and the more recent men's competitions; (4) the development of softball in the context of post World War II sports development in Australia, and the general social, economic and political climates; (5) significant landmarks in Australian softball history around which appropriate celebratory events are being planned to promote the game between now and the end of the century; and (6) the media portrayal of softball as an example of coverage of women's sports.

Specifically, this paper focuses on the formative stage and the diffusion of softball from North America to three Australian states; its diffusion to the remaining States and Territories; the diffusion from metropolitan to rural areas within each State/Territory; the affiliation into a national organisation, and briefly

mentions Australia's contribution to the international diffusion of the sport through the hosting of the first truly international series in Melbourne in 1965.