



MEMO TO: Softball NZ Stakeholders
FROM: Softball New Zealand (SNZ)
DATE: **Thursday 6 May 2021**
SUBJECT: **Sport NZ ‘Balance is Better’ Initiative.**

This memo has been prepared to outline the commitment Softball NZ has made to the Sport NZ initiative ‘Balance is Better.’ Softball NZ and 14 other National sporting bodies in NZ have signed up to the ‘Balance is Better’ statement of intent.

What is Balance is Better?

Balance is Better is an evidence-based philosophy that underpins Sport New Zealand’s overall approach to youth sport. In 2019 five of the country’s largest participation sports – Rugby, Cricket, Football, Hockey and Netball signed a “**Statement of Intent**” with Sport New Zealand. This past month, Athletics NZ, Badminton NZ, Basketball NZ, Golf NZ, Gymnastics NZ, NZ Rugby League, Touch NZ, Volleyball NZ, Waka Ama NZ, and Softball NZ have joined this collective to keep young people in sport.

Part of our commitment as an organisation is to keep young people in sport by putting a stronger focus on fun and development, reviewing existing competition structures, and encouraging youth to play multiple sports rather than specialising too early.

If they stop having fun, they stop playing sport.

Balance is Better will help bring the focus back to why young people play sport – to have fun, be challenged, develop, and improve, be part of a team or group, and enjoy time with friends.

Is this philosophy against winning?

People often think it’s a dumbing down of sport, making kids soft, and that this is a negative thing – but no, it’s very much a winning strategy for participation and performance with the child’s or athlete’s development right at the heart of it.

It is okay for kids to pursue improvement, to get better and to strive for success. We are advocating for this to happen in an environment of development, not one that places all the emphasis on the outcome.

Winning isn't bad – it's the focus on winning 'at all costs' that leads to negative outcomes.

What are the reason kids are dropping out?

Kids are speaking with their feet. National data shows that too many young New Zealanders, especially in their teenage years, are walking away from sport.

Sport NZ recognises there are a variety of reasons kids leave sport. Through research, Sport NZ have identified the main issues contributing to declining participation rates:

- Specialising too early in one sport
- Being expected to play like professionals
- Believing that you have to make the top team or rep' team
- Adult pressure to "be the best" and not make mistakes

What will Softball NZ do as an organisation?

Softball NZ will focus on U15 years down, to ensure these young people in sport have a stronger focus on fun and development. To also provide quality events that will be open to all, irrespective of the level at which they are involved.

Softball NZ are committed to change through the Better is Balance principles and will implement the following actions and initiatives.

Removal of U15 National Tournaments

- Softball NZ will no longer be offering U15 National Tournaments. A framework with alternative local and regional formats will be communicated to all Associations shortly.

Play to Stay Programmes

- Softball NZ will offer Play to Stay pilot programmes. A player-led, unstructured opportunity for local competitions to run programmes providing a fun, relaxed, activity for softball players, where kids make the rules, make the line-ups, and make the calls. The programme will include "Play to Stay" values. Play to Stay Values were derived from a review of best practice initiatives from around the world for youth sport. The review determined that when the Play to Stay Values were delivered successfully there was a decrease in youth dropout. The values were proven to positively impact players, coaches and parents promoting inclusiveness, growth, motivation, friendship, and commitment.

Resilience

- Softball NZ will develop a resource and mobile app to support and educate rangatahi (12-18 years) through resilience, gratitude, empathy, cultural behaviours, and mindfulness. The resource is needed not only to support the wellbeing of our rangatahi but allow them to grow into better people and therefore make a larger contribution to both softball and the community.

We will work with our Associations, parents, whanau, managers, coaches, and volunteers to help all involved understand the 'Balance is Better' messaging, to make sure we are doing our best to have kids develop in a fun and safe environment.

Authorised by:

Softball New Zealand

Date: 6/05/2021