

**TEXAS BLAZE
GIRLS FASTPITCH SOFTBALL CLUB**



PLAYER/PARENT HANDBOOK

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Texas Blaze organization!

The Blaze, a section 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, is one of the most dynamic and up-and-coming girls' fastpitch softball clubs in the State of Texas. Blaze teams play an exciting brand of highly competitive softball. Each Blaze player—whether 10U or 18U Gold—is an integral part of this excitement.

Since our creation, Blaze teams and players have achieved some impressive accomplishments. Our flagship team, the 18U Gold—managed by founder, Chairman of the Board, and Club President, JB Slimp—is the first team in central Texas to ever qualify in back-to-back years to play at ASA 18U Gold Nationals, the premier national tournament of its type. Several former Blaze players have gone on to play, or are currently committed to play, at Division I college softball programs, including the University of Texas, the University of Alabama, Georgia Tech, the University of Houston, Texas State, Stephen F. Austin, North Texas, Mary Hardin Baylor, and Concordia—to name just some. And success has not been limited to only the Gold team. Other Blaze teams have distinguished themselves, too. Blaze Prinzo, to take just one example, has also made back-to-back appearances at ASA 16U “A” Nationals, finishing in a tie for 25th out of more than 160 teams in 2009.

These are just some of the Blaze's accomplishments; many other Blaze teams have also competed—and placed—in local, regional, state, and national tournaments, not to mention national exposure tournaments and college showcases. All of these teams have done well for themselves and helped to create the Blaze's well-deserved, stellar reputation. The Blaze fully expects to continue building on these successes in the seasons to come.

To help acquaint our players and their parents with the Blaze vision and perpetuate its record of success, the Board of Directors has compiled this handbook. It will introduce you to the club's philosophy and expectations regarding its players, their parents, the coaches, and the teams. It provides rules and guidelines, as well as gives general information about the club and its policies. So please familiarize yourself with its contents.

The Blaze looks forward to working with each player and their parents towards having an exciting and successful season and a satisfying softball experience.

ORIGINS AND BRIEF HISTORY

The Texas Blaze has its roots in 2001 when Joe Lucas began the first 10U Round Rock Blaze team, which was very successful. In 2003, Joe decided to stop coaching, but he wanted the Blaze's name and its winning tradition to continue. So Joe looked for someone to hand over the reigns of the team. It so happens that, at that time, JB Slimp—along with another current Blaze coach and member of the Blaze Board of Directors, Jeff Kirk—was completing his first season as coach of his daughter's select softball team, the Round Rock Raptors. Joe offered JB the Blaze, and JB accepted. JB kept the Blaze name, logo, and sterling reputation, and started the 14U Round Rock Blaze, assisted by another current Blaze coach and member of the Blaze Board of Directors, Gary Weseman. Thus began the current incarnation of the Texas Blaze.

While building that team, JB began to formulate his long-range vision of where he wanted to take the Blaze. Early on, JB became attuned to the realities of the college softball recruiting process. And he was dismayed that top collegiate softball programs were overlooking many talented central Texas softball players, even though these players were in several schools' own back yards. JB concluded that the under-representation of central Texas softball players at top-flight college softball programs was due to the fact that, as a region, Centex was not training its athletes at a high enough level to compete with other areas of the State. So JB made it his mission to change the face of central Texas softball by providing colleges and universities with an alternative to Houston and Dallas in recruiting the top talent in the State. Based on these early impressions and experiences, JB came to believe that the Blaze could be not only a place where young ladies could come to enjoy the fun of playing fastpitch softball, but also a place that could develop and produce players who could play college softball at a high level, if they so desired.

With this focus in mind, JB, and others, began to build and grow the Blaze organization. As the organization has developed, its mission has expanded and been refined. In 2009, the Blaze organization reached a major milestone—it attained I.R.S. Code section 501(c)(3) status, which helps in attracting sponsorships and charitable donations. Over the years, the Blaze has added many great new people and teams, which run the gamut from 10U to 18U Gold, and every age-level in between. The Blaze has also seen many of its players go on to play major college softball, fulfilling JB's vision. Throughout this time, one constant has always been present: the Blaze is an amazing collection of passionate and dedicated players, parents, board members, and supporters who are united in their desire to bring the best softball experience possible to central Texas and create a nationally recognized softball program that puts out a quality softball product for the right reason—to help the kids.

MISSION STATEMENT

Our mission is to be the premier girls' fastpitch organization in the State of Texas and to compete on the national level with other premier girls fastpitch organizations throughout the country.

In striving to be this type of program, all of the members of the Blaze community, including the Blaze coaches, managers, directors, officers, board members, volunteers, parents, and players, are expected to be committed to providing opportunities to each of the players in this organization to achieve their softball goals, no matter how modest or lofty they may be, and in the process, attain life lessons that will carry over and help them to succeed in all aspects of their lives and other relationships.

This commitment includes, but is not limited to: providing scholarship opportunities to our players; promoting a healthy lifestyle through fitness and friendships; training our players in the physical skills, softball and otherwise, and mental processes necessary to compete at the highest possible levels; presenting positive role models to our players and others; facilitating the development of strong leaders and teammates, both on the field and off the field; and bettering our community through civic outreach efforts.

We believe that such a commitment will allow us to provide the best value possible for a private softball organization. We recognize that fulfilling this mission will require dedication and lots of hard work, and we enthusiastically accept the challenge.

OUR PHILOSOPHY

The Texas Blaze philosophy is simple: we are dedicated to fielding the most competitive, fundamentally sound, and exciting girls' fastpitch softball teams possible. The focus of all Blaze players and coaches, as well as every member of the Blaze community, is the attainment of excellence in everything that we do.

We understand that this philosophy must be flexible enough to adapt to the varying skill sets and levels of experience that each of the different Blaze teams, and their players, bring to the game. Nevertheless, even the youngest and least experienced of players, regardless of their skill set, can be expected to perform to the best of their abilities and strive for excellence relative to other players their own age.

At the 10U, 12U, and 14U levels, the primary goal is to introduce the players to the basics of the game and develop their abilities in the fundamental skills necessary to compete at higher levels.

For our high-school-age players, the goal is to further develop and fine tune their skills so that they may compete and perform well against other top-notch players and teams at the 16U, 18U, and 18U Gold levels. This goal goes hand-in-hand with the further goal of assisting players to play fastpitch softball at the collegiate level.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

The Blaze's Board of Directors (BOD) oversees and guides the organization. It makes decisions for the organization as a whole. It provides ideas, structure, and assistance in fundraising, team organization, tournaments, uniforms, hotels, and promotion of the club. The board takes no part, however, in making decisions on the softball field. That role belongs exclusively to the coaches.

The BOD consists of seven members. Current members are:

- J.B. Slimp, Chairman
- Mike Prinzo, Vice-Chairman
- Philip Lionberger, Secretary
- John Dzienkowski, Member
- Jeffrey Kirk, Member
- Gary Weseman, Member
- Kevin Womble, Member

PARENT REPRESENTATIVE

Coaching a travel softball team is a time-consuming and intense task. To help ease the coach's burden, each Blaze team may appoint a parent representative, or representatives, to assist the coaching staff with any off-the-field, administrative tasks. Coaches, within their discretion, may assign to the parent representative those duties and tasks that are deemed delegable. For example, a parent representative may act as a formal point of contact, team secretary, and conduit for communications between the team's parents, the coaches, and the Blaze organization.

COMMUNICATION

Effective communication is a must for any organization. The Blaze is no exception. Open channels of communication are needed not just vertically, but horizontally, too. Blaze players, their parents, and the coaches should openly discuss, through respectful discourse and appropriate channels of communication, any issues or concerns that might arise concerning the team.

A team's parent representative, if one is appointed, is the immediate contact for communicating any concerns that a parent might have about the team, the players, or the coaches. The parent representative, in turn, should relay those concerns to the team's head coach. While it is unrealistic to think that parents will never directly approach the coaches to discuss their child, any such communication must be respectful and should never occur immediately before, during, or after a game, unless there is a safety concern about a player. If a meeting is desired with the head coach, every effort should be made to schedule such a meeting at a mutually convenient time and away from the softball field.

If these typical channels of communication prove ineffective, players and their parents may take their concerns directly to the Club President. It is almost never appropriate in the first instance, however, to bypass the parent representative, if any, or the coach and go directly to the Club President, unless there is a safety concern about a player. Furthermore, only in extraordinary circumstances may a player, parent, or coach bypass the Club President and request an immediate hearing before the BOD. If a hearing is granted, all decisions of the BOD shall be final.

STANDARDS OF CONDUCT

All Blaze players are expected to conduct themselves in a manner that comports with the Blaze philosophy described above. A player must never do anything to deliberately undermine her team, teammates, the coaches, and/or the Blaze organization. Generally speaking, there is one simple rule that all members of the Blaze organization, the players, and their parents, are expected to follow: treat others with the same respect that you would like others to treat you.

Based on the foregoing general principles, here are some specific rules and guidelines to be followed:

- Players are expected to participate in all scheduled team practices, scrimmages, tournaments, and games. Participation is mandatory, unless a coach or health-care professional excuses your absence for good cause.

“Good cause” includes, but is not limited to, an injury, a medical condition, family or medical emergencies, or a prior scheduled school academic or athletic event that directly conflicts with a Blaze event. Whether excused or unexcused, the failure to participate in team events may result in a loss of playing time or such other discipline as the head coach sees fit.

- Players must be on time for all team events, whether it is a practice, a game, a tournament, team meeting, Blaze community-service project, or team fundraiser. Violators will be subject to discipline.
- Players must notify their coaches and/or parent representatives if they are going to be late or absent from a team event. Notice of a player’s absence must be given reasonably in advance of the team event. What is considered reasonable depends on the totality of the circumstances; but *seven days* advance notice is presumptively reasonable.
- Players must report all injuries, medical conditions, and/or illnesses to their coaches immediately. This includes reporting preexisting medical conditions including, but not limited to, cardiac and respiratory illnesses such as arrhythmias and asthma; potentially life-threatening allergies such as allergic reactions to penicillin and certain foods; and chronic musculoskeletal injuries or conditions such as a surgically repaired joint, scoliosis, or a non-acute back injury.
- Players must keep their coaches apprised of their whereabouts while at tournaments. Coaches should be provided with and keep with them each player’s contact information and emergency-contact information.
- Players, parents, and coaches are expected to treat umpires and opponents with courtesy and respect. Good sportsmanship is expected, even in the most intense of competitive situations.
- Parents and players must refrain from critical, disrespectful, and/or abusive conduct towards the Blaze coaches and other Blaze players.
- Players must not use alcohol, illicit drugs, and/or tobacco products. Violation of this rule is cause for immediate dismissal from the team and the Blaze organization.
- Players must not violate any team curfew imposed by the coaches while at out-of-town tournaments. Violators are subject to discipline, up to and including suspension. Repeat violations may result in dismissal from the team and the Blaze organization.

- Players must refrain from using cell phones, texting, or ipods in the dugout. Violators are subject to discipline, up to and including suspension. Repeat violations may result in dismissal from the team and the Blaze organization.
- Parents must refrain from doing anything that interferes with or undermines the coaches' authority over the team.
- Absent extraordinary circumstances, parents must not enter the dugout or go onto the field, unless your presence is requested by a coach, tournament official, or health-care professional.

TOURNAMENTS

Tournament start and finish times typically vary depending on many factors. Invariably, some tournaments get off schedule and run late. Players and parents are expected to be flexible and roll with it. Players and parents should attempt to anticipate any foreseeable contingencies and make any necessary arrangements to meet fluid tournament schedules, no matter how last minute they may be.

Parents should also expect that travel costs will vary from tournament to tournament depending on its location and proximity to their home. Meals and lodging are generally the biggest expenses associated with out-of-town travel, as well as other entertainment costs such as team-building outings between games. Participation in team meals and other team activities while at tournaments is encouraged, but not required. They are entirely voluntary and up to each individual family. Each family is responsible for their own travel expenses and incidentals.

If a player is unable to attend all or part of a tournament for any reason, the head coach and/or parent representative, if any, must be notified. For tournaments that have been scheduled more than a week in advance, any notice of a player absence that is *not* more than *seven days* in advance is presumptively *unreasonable*.

PLAYING TIME

Playing time is earned. **NOBODY IS GUARANTEED A SET AMOUNT OF PLAYING TIME.** The amount of playing time each player receives depends on many factors, including, but not limited to: performance in practice, injuries, team needs based on each player's abilities, past performance in game situations, hustle and enthusiasm, sportsmanship, game match-ups, and performance in the game at hand. The head coach has the final say on the

amount of each player's playing time. Coaches determine playing time based on their best judgment. Playing time is often a game-time decision.

TRAVEL

During out-of-town trips, players are expected to observe the standards of conduct, rules, and guidelines discussed above. Players who fail to comply with these regulations may be sent home and/or dismissed from the team.

In particular, absolutely no boys (except for a parent, sibling, relative, or guardian) are allowed in a player's hotel room. It is never acceptable for a player to share a hotel room with a coach, unless the coach is the player's parent. If, in the judgment of the coaching staff, a curfew would be appropriate, one may be imposed. If it is, players are not allowed to leave their rooms, unless it is an emergency or they otherwise receive the coach's permission to do so.

If either a player's parents or legal guardian is unable to attend an out-of-town trip with their player, they should designate an adult parent on the team to be responsible for the player. Such designated parent must be provided, and keep with them, the player's emergency-contact information.

PRACTICE

Blaze practices are held at a location and time to be determined by the team in consultation with the Blaze organization. The conduct of each practice is solely the responsibility of the coaching staff. Players are expected to provide their own liquids to stay properly hydrated. Players must come to practice properly attired, depending on the type of practice (field, batting, or conditioning). Coaches, in their discretion, may designate what is considered to be appropriate practice attire. Players must not be late to practice.

In addition to team practices, each player is encouraged to practice on her own. Pitchers should pitch during the week as appropriate. Hitters are expected to do the same. Players are encouraged to take private lessons to improve their individual skills, but they are not required to do so. Depending on your position, each player should get the repetitions needed to improve her game and/or stay sharp. Every player, regardless of their position, is expected to maintain themselves in good playing shape to meet the rigors of the game. A player's failure to practice on her own time and keep in good physical condition may result in sub par performance and, consequently, a loss of playing time.

DUES

The Blaze is a self-funded organization. Funds are obtained through either dues or contributions and donations. Individual player dues cover coaches' compensation, if any; coaches' travel expenses; tournament-registration fees; practice-field and batting-cage usage fees; umpire fees; equipment and supplies; and other miscellaneous incidental expenses.

The BOD has appointed a treasurer to collect Blaze dues, among other duties, for the entire organization. Blaze dues must be paid directly to the Blaze treasurer, regardless of which Blaze team a player is on. Any questions regarding the payment of dues or requests for payment arrangements shall be directed only to the Blaze treasurer, not to a team's head coach, coaching staff, and/or parent representative, if any. The current Blaze treasurer is Lisa Kirk. Payments may be sent to Ms. Kirk at the following address: 2005 Caspian Cove, Round Rock, TX 78665.

All player dues are due on the 1st of each month. If not received by the 15th of the month, a player/parent will be notified that their payment is late. If payment is still not received by the 20th of the month, a second notice will be given, advising that the outstanding balance, as well as the next month's dues must be paid by the 1st of the next month or the player will not be allowed to practice or play until all dues are current. If payment is still outstanding on the 1st, the Club President will advise the player's coach of the situation and take appropriate action, including suspension of the player from all practices and/or tournaments until all outstanding dues are paid, and/or dismissal from the organization.

The Blaze budget for each season (Spring/Summer and Fall) is based on the previous season's travel expenses and are subject to change. The expenses may be front loaded due to the difficulties of collecting dues and/or coaches' travel expenses at the last minute, thus jeopardizing the various teams' trips. **ALL PAID FEES ARE NON-REFUNDABLE EVEN IF A PLAYER LEAVES THE TEAM OR CHOOSES NOT TO ATTEND A TOURNAMENT AND/OR NATIONALS.**

INSURANCE

Participation in the game of fastpitch softball—whether as a player, coach, or fan—entails some element of risk of personal injury and/or property damage. **NEITHER THE BLAZE ORGANIZATION NOR ITS TEAMS PROVIDE ANY LIABILITY OR EXCESS-ACCIDENT INSURANCE POLICIES TO: (1) COVER A PLAYER IN CASE OF AN ACCIDENT ARISING OUT OF HER TEAM’S AMATEUR SOFTBALL ACTIVITIES THAT RESULT IN PERSONAL INJURY TO THE PLAYER; AND (2) PROTECT A PLAYER’S FAMILY AGAINST ANY PERSONAL LIABILITY FOR BODILY INJURY OR PROPERTY DAMAGE ARISING OUT OF THE TEAM’S AMATEUR SOFTBALL ACTIVITIES. (THE TERM “AMATEUR SOFTBALL ACTIVITIES” INCLUDES PRACTICES, GAMES, EXHIBITIONS, AND TOURNAMENTS.)** Each family is therefore encouraged to determine, for itself, whether to purchase insurance to cover their family in case of an injury to their player and/or a lawsuit brought by another softball participant—whether a player, coach, spectator, or umpire—for a claim of bodily injury and/or property damage.

If your Blaze team is playing in an ASA-sanctioned national-qualifier tournament, it is required to purchase a supplemental insurance policy from the ASA’s preferred carrier, Bollinger Insurance Company. This policy has a \$5,000,000 aggregate limit for bodily-injury or property-damage claims. More information about this requirement and the Bollinger policy can be found on the ASA’s website, at <http://www.softball.org/youth/index.asp>.

UNIFORMS

The Blaze provides each player with two official Blaze game jerseys. **THESE JERSEYS ARE ONLY LOANED TO THE PLAYER AND, THEREFORE, REMAIN, AT ALL TIMES, THE SOLE PROPERTY OF THE TEXAS BLAZE GIRLS’ FASTPITCH SOFTBALL CLUB.** If a player leaves a Texas Blaze team for any reason, or transfers to a different Blaze team, the player must promptly return both jerseys to the head coach, parent representative, Club President, or his designated agent. All jerseys must be returned to the Blaze in the same condition that they were loaned to the player, subject to ordinary wear and tear. Each player is solely responsible for the proper care and maintenance of her Blaze jerseys. Lost or damaged jerseys are the responsibility of each player and their parents. If a jersey is lost or damaged, it shall be repaired or replaced by the player and/or her parents, and the cost of repair or replacement shall be borne solely by the player and/or her parents. Failure to repair, replace, or return a Blaze jersey when required to do so may lead to discipline or suspension from the team and/or Blaze organization.

Besides jerseys, the Blaze provides no other uniform apparel. Each player is therefore responsible for providing her own uniform pants and/or shorts, socks, shoes, under garments, cold-weather outer garments, *i.e.*, sweat suits, and rain gear. If the player chooses to wear a visor, it must be either red or navy blue and, preferably, adorned with an official Blaze logo such as the Flaming B or the Blaze script insignia.

All Blaze players are required to wear only official Texas Blaze team jerseys. Alternate game jerseys, in addition to the official jerseys provided, may be worn in lieu of the official jerseys only if the team's head coach or parent representative, if any, receives pre-approval from the Club President. In no event, however, may a Blaze team deviate from the organization's team colors or adopt a logo that does not conform to the Blaze's Flaming B logo or Blaze script insignia. If a team chooses to use an additional alternate jersey, each player and/or their parents are responsible for purchasing such jerseys. Under no circumstances is the Texas Blaze responsible for or required to purchase such jerseys.

Subject to the foregoing, decisions regarding the composition of each team's uniform are up to that team's head coach. The head coach's decisions regarding uniform composition are final. Players who do not conform to any uniform regulations directed by the head coach may be subject to discipline, in the discretion of the head coach.

SCHOLARSHIPS

A limited amount of financial aid, in the form of a Blaze "scholarship," may be awarded by the Blaze organization to those players' families and/or single parents and/or legal guardians who qualify. The decision to award a Blaze scholarship and the amount of any financial aid will be made on a case-by-case basis. Generally speaking, consideration shall be given to the particular situation of each family, the reasonableness of the request, and any circumstances relevant to each requestor's need for financial aid.

Anyone who wishes to apply for a Blaze scholarship should direct an inquiry to the Club President. The Club President, in turn, will present the request to the BOD. The BOD, in its discretion, may require the requestor to complete a detailed written application designed to ascertain financial need.

If necessary, the BOD may appoint a scholarship committee to review such a request, determine the requestor's financial need, assess the relative merits of the request, and make a recommendation to the board. The scholarship committee, if one is appointed, must follow the general guidelines set forth

above, as well as the specific criteria set forth in the application for scholarship, if any.

Only the BOD is authorized to decide whether to award a Blaze scholarship and the amount of financial assistance, if any. All scholarship decisions by the BOD are final. Subsequent requests by the same requestor, however, are permitted. Any subsequent request must be based on changed circumstances. If a subsequent request is made, the requestor may be required to submit a new scholarship application, detailing any changed circumstances.

COMMUNITY SERVICE

The Blaze organization is committed to giving back to the community at large through charitable outreach efforts. Community-service projects will be conceived, organized, and directed by the Blaze organization. Each team, however, may organize their own community-service projects, subject to approval by the Club President, in consultation with the BOD. Player participation in Blaze-run, community-service projects is mandatory.

CONSENT FORMS

You are a member of the Blaze organization only when **ALL** of the following consent forms are completed and returned to your coach or parent representative:

- Blaze Player/Parent Agreement & Consent Form;
- Blaze Medical Release and Consent Form; and
- Blaze Parental Waiver, Release of Liability, and Indemnification Form.

Each team's head coach or parent representative should provide the Club President with the originals of the completed forms for each player on that team. It is advisable, but not required, for each team to keep copies of the completed forms on each player, too.