

# Essential Baseball Rules

Originally by Brent McLaren

## OBJECTIVES OF THE GAME.

Rule 1.01 : Baseball is a game between two teams of nine players each, played on an enclosed field, **under the jurisdiction of one or more umpires.**

The term "umpire" comes from an early French word meaning "**not equal to**" or a "**non-peer.**" This accurately defines the role of the umpire in relation to the game. You are a skilled observer of the game, entering only when an impartial decision or interpretation of the rules must be made.

**THE PLAYING FIELD:** The field shall be laid out according to the instructions below with all measurements being taken from the back of home plate. The distances to the fence are recommended guidelines. In professional parks there are corners often as near as 260'.

	Base Paths	To Mound	To 2 <sup>nd</sup> Base	To Fence
<b>Tee Ball (Optional)</b>	50'		70'-9"	N/A
<b>Major and under</b>	60'	46'	84'-10"	200' min
<b>Junior (Optional)</b>	80'	54'	113'-1 ½"	250' min
<b>Junior, Senior and Big League</b>	90'	60'-6"	127'-3 3/8"	320 min

The **INFIELD** shall be the square defined by the base paths. The infield shall be graded so that the base lines and home plate are level.

The **OUTFIELD** shall be the area between two foul lines formed by extending two sides of the square from home plate.

The **PITCHER'S PLATE** (or RUBBER) shall be 6 inches above the level of home plate in Majors and under (10 inches in Junior/Senior/Big League). The degree of slope from a point 6 inches in front of the pitcher's plate to a point 6 feet toward home plate shall be 1 inch to 1 foot, and such degree of slope shall be uniform. The infield and outfield, including the boundary lines, are fair territory and all other area is foul territory.

All **BASES** are positioned entirely in fair territory. The distance from home plate to first or third base is measured from the back tip of home plate to the farthest or back edge of the base. Distances to second base are measured to the centre of the base.

The **BALL** is a sphere formed by yarn wound around a small core of cork, rubber or similar material, covered with two stripes of white horsehide or cowhide, tightly stitched together. It weighs 5 1/4 ounces avoirdupois and is between 9 and 9 1/4 inches in circumference.

The **BAT** is a smooth, round stick not more than 2 1/4 inches in diameter at the thickest part and not more than 33 inches in length. (In Junior/Senior leagues the maximum length of the bat is 34", while it is 38" in Big League. Bats in these divisions can have a diameter of not more than 2 3/4".)

"The hands are never part of the bat" despite what coaches will attempt to tell you. No bat has ever been offered for sale which includes hands.

A **FIELDER** is any defensive player. Each fielder, may use or wear a leather glove. Only the catcher may use a catcher's mitt and at first base the player may use a first base glove.

At the start of each inning count the number of players on the field. If there are not nine defensive players and a coach at first and third base do not allow the inning to start.

An **INFIELDER** is a fielder who occupies a position in the infield. (Pitcher, Catcher, 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> base and Shortstop) Similarly an **OUTFIELDER** occupies a position in the outfield. (Left, Center and Right Field)

The objective of each team is to **WIN** by scoring more runs than the opponent.

A **RUN** (or SCORE) is the score made by an offensive player who advances from batter to runner and touches first, second, third and home bases in that order. The order of the bases is in a counter-clockwise direction around the square from home to first, etc.

A **BATTER** is an offensive player who takes his position in the batter's box and attempts to hit a ball thrown to him by the pitcher.

A **PITCHER** is the fielder designated to deliver the pitch to the batter.

The pitcher pitches the ball to the batter and the batter attempts to hit the pitch and become a runner. The defense attempts to catch the ball after it is hit and put the batter and/or runners out.

A **PITCH** is a ball delivered to the batter by the pitcher.

The **CATCHER** is the fielder who takes his position back of the home base and catches the pitcher's pitch when the batter does not hit the pitch.

A **RUNNER** is an offensive player who is advancing toward, or touching, or returning to any base.

The winner of the game shall be that team which shall have scored, in accordance with these rules, the greater number of runs at the conclusion of a regulation game.

A regulation game consists of a set number of **INNINGS**, unless extended because of a tie score, or shortened (1) because the home team needs none of its half of the final inning or only a fraction of it.

In Majors division and under, the game usually consists of SIX innings. In Junior, Senior or Big League, the number of innings is SEVEN.

Games are often played with TIME LIMITS. A typical limit may be that “no inning may start after 2 hours (120 minutes) of play.” As the umpire you are responsible for tracking the start and end time of the game and notifying the coaches of this rule. These games can end in a tie if the time limit has been reached.

If the score is tied after the regulation number of completed INNINGS, play shall continue until (1) the visiting team has scored more total runs than the home team at the end of a completed inning, or (2) the home team scores the winning run in an uncompleted inning.

An **INNING** is that portion of a game within which the teams alternate on offense and defense and in which there are three OUTS for each team. Each team's time at bat is a half-inning. A new inning or half-inning begins the moment the third out is made.

Once underway games may be **CALLED** or **SUSPENDED**. A **SUSPENDED** game is resumed at a future time from the exact point at which the game was suspended. If a game is **CALLED** it means sufficient innings have been played to make the game an official game, usually half of the total innings + one half inning, and the score is not tied. Play is terminated.

An **OUT** is one of the three required retirements of an offensive team during its time at bat.

When three offensive players are legally put out, that team takes the field and the opposing team becomes the offensive team. There can be four or even more outs in an inning.

You have heard the old expression “tie goes to the runner”.... **Don't believe it!** In baseball there are no ties. The runner must beat the ball to the base. If the runner and the ball arrive at exactly the same moment then the runner did not beat the ball. The runner is **OUT**.

**"SAFE"** is a declaration by the umpire that a runner is entitled to the base for which he was trying.

### HOW A TEAM SCORES

One run shall be scored each time a runner legally advances to and touches first, second, third and home base before three men are put out to end the inning.

**EXCEPTION:** A run is not scored if the runner advances to home base during a play in which the third out is made (1) by the batter-runner before he touches first base; (2) by any runner being forced out; or (3) by a preceding runner who is declared out because he failed to touch one of the bases.

It is important for the umpire to be especially vigilant anytime a run is in scoring position and to know if and when the run can score. For example, with runners on first and second the batter hits a fly ball that is caught for the second out. Both runners tag up and try to advance. A run-down takes place on the runner going from first to second, meanwhile the runner from second scores then the runner in the rundown is tagged out for the third out. You would score this run, because the runner going to second is not a force play and the runner from second scored before the out was made. This is what umpires call a **TIME PLAY**.

## HOW THE GAME IS PLAYED

The players of the home team shall take their defensive positions, the first batter of the visiting team shall take his position in the batter's box, the umpire shall call "**PLAY**" and the game shall start. The ball is now **LIVE** or "in play."

A **DEAD BALL** is a ball out of play because of a legally created temporary suspension of play.

Make a special point of signalling and saying "PLAY" every time the ball is put back into play. This is a very important signal to the teams and to every member of the umpire crew. Nothing can happen on a **DEAD** ball except for the ordered results of the previous play that happened when the ball was **LIVE**.

When the ball is put in play at the start of, or during a game, all fielders other than the catcher shall be on fair territory.

After the ball is **DEAD**, play shall be resumed when: (1) the pitcher takes his place on the pitcher's plate with a new ball or the same ball in his possession, (2) the catcher is in position ready to receive the ball, and (3) the plate umpire calls "PLAY." (The plate umpire may call "PLAY" as soon as the pitcher takes his place on his plate with the ball in his possession. May times, however, the plate umpire will wait until the batter enters the batter's box and is ready for delivery of the pitch).

The batting order shall be followed throughout the game unless a player is substituted for another. In that case the substitute shall take the place of the replaced player in the batting order.

Each player of the offensive team shall bat in the order that his name appears in his team's batting order.

The first batter in each inning after the first inning shall be the player whose name follows that of the last player who legally completed his time at bat in the preceding inning.

A batter has legally completed his time at bat when he is put out or becomes a runner.

### **A batter may be put out in any of the following ways:**

- His fair or foul **FLY BALL** is legally caught by a fielder (catch);
- A **FLY BALL** is a batted ball that goes high in the air in-flight straight from the bat without first touching the ground.
- A **CATCH** is the act of a fielder in getting secure possession in his hand or glove of a ball in flight and firmly holding it; providing he does not use his cap, protector, pocket or any other part of his uniform in getting possession.

In signalling a **CATCH** the umpire will clearly say "That's A Catch" but will only give the **OUT** signal if the catch was difficult (usually diving or made below the knee)

- After he hits a fair ball, he or first base is tagged before he touches first base;

A **TAG** is the action of a fielder in touching a base with his body while holding the ball securely and firmly in his hand or glove; or touching a runner with the ball, or with his hand or glove holding the ball, while holding the ball securely and firmly in his hand or glove.

- A third strike is legally caught by the catcher;

In Majors and lower divisions this DROPPED THIRD STRIKE rule does not apply. The batter would be called out regardless of the catch being made by the catcher.

A **STRIKE** is a legal pitch when so called by the umpire, which

- Is struck at by the batter and is missed;
- Is not struck at, but any part of the ball passes through any part of the STRIKE ZONE

The **STRIKE ZONE** is that area over home plate the upper limit of which is a horizontal line at the midpoint between the top of the shoulders and the top of the uniform pants, and the lower level is a line at the top of the knees. The Strike Zone shall be determined from the batter's stance as the batter is prepared to swing at a pitched ball.

**Every PITCH is a STRIKE until you are convinced otherwise.** In the youngest leagues your personal strike zone may be defined by something as simple as "could the batter have hit the ball." As you progress to higher quality of play you begin to refine your strike zone to the expectations and balance of the game.

- An **INFIELD FLY** is declared.

The INFIELD FLY is a game situation whose purpose is to prevent the defence from making more than one out when a fair fly ball could be caught by an infielder. There **must** be runners on first and second, or first, second and third base. Once called the BATTER is OUT regardless of whether or not the ball is caught and all runners are no longer forced to leave their bases, but may elect to do so at their own peril. The runners must tag up as they would on a normal fly ball. This is a **JUDGEMENT** call.

Umpires must be careful to always signal OUT when required. A quick relay throw over to first to easily retire the runner will not be signed with as much enthusiasm as a bang-bang tight double play but a crisp OUT signal must be given nonetheless.

**The batter becomes a runner and is entitled to first base without liability to be put out when:**

- Four "balls" have been called by the umpire;

A **BALL** is a pitch which does not enter the strike zone in flight and is not struck at by the batter.

A **BASE ON BALLS** is an award of first base granted to a batter who, during his time at bat, receives four pitches outside the strike zone.

He is touched by a pitched ball which he is not attempting to hit unless (1) The ball is in the strike zone when it touches the batter, or (2) The batter makes no attempt to avoid being touched by the ball;

A good umpire clearly says STRIKE or BALL after each pitch whenever appropriate. It is appropriate to say BALL on every pitch that is being so called. It is important to say STRIKE only on pitches that are not swung at. The appropriate STRIKE motion should be used on every STRIKE whether called or swinging.

**The batter becomes a runner and is liable to be put out when -**

- He hits a **FAIR BALL**:

A FAIR BALL is a batted ball that settles on fair ground between home and first base, or between home and third base, or that is on or over fair territory when bounding to the outfield past first or third base, or that touches first, second or third base, or that first falls on fair territory on or beyond first base or third base, or that, while on or over fair territory touches the person of an umpire or player, or that, while over fair territory, passes out of the playing field in flight.

A **FAIR FLY** shall be judged according to the relative position of the ball and the foul line, including the foul pole, and not as to whether the fielder is on fair or foul territory at the time he touches the ball.

If a fly ball lands in the infield between home and first base, or home and third base, and then bounces to foul territory without touching a player or umpire and before passing first or third base, it is a foul ball; or if the ball settles on foul territory or is touched by a player on foul territory, it is a foul ball. If a fly ball lands on or beyond first or third base and then bounces to foul territory, it is a fair hit.

**FAIR TERRITORY** is that part of the playing field within, and including the first base and third base lines, from home base to the bottom of the playing field fence and perpendicularly upwards. All foul lines are in fair territory.

**A good umpire gives the count after every pitch.** The count is given as “# Balls, # Strikes” with the fingers used to reinforce the signal. **On a full count the umpire would say “3 Balls, Two Strikes”** On the fourth ball clearly say “Ball Four.”

### **THE RUNNER**

A runner acquires the right to an unoccupied base when he touches it before he is put out. He is then entitled to it until he is put out, or forced to vacate it for another runner legally entitled to that base.

In advancing, a runner shall touch first, second, third and home base in order. If forced to return, he shall retouch all bases in reverse order, unless the ball is dead under any provision of Rule 5.09. In such cases, the runner may go directly to his original base.

Two runners may not occupy a base, but if, while the ball is alive, two runners are touching a base, the following runner shall be out when tagged. The preceding runner is entitled to the base.

Therefore, if you somehow had three runners stack up at third base and the fielder tagged all three the runner who should have been at first and the one who should have been at second would be called out. The order of the tag is irrelevant.

Each runner including the batter-runner may, without liability to be put out, advance -

To home base, scoring a run, if a fair ball goes out of the playing field in flight and he touched all bases legally; This is called a **HOMERUN**

**Any runner is out when:**

- He is tagged, when the ball is alive, while off his base.

EXCEPTION: A batter-runner cannot be tagged out after overrunning or oversliding first base if he returns immediately to the base;

A **TAG** is the action of a fielder in touching a base with his body while holding the ball securely and firmly in his hand or glove; or touching a runner with the ball, or with his hand or glove holding the ball, while holding the ball securely and firmly in his hand or glove.

- He fails to retouch his base after a fair or foul fly ball is legally caught before he, or his base, is tagged by a fielder. He shall not be called out for failure to retouch his base after the first following pitch, or any play or attempted play. This is an appeal play;
- He fails to reach the next base before a fielder tags him or the base, after he has been forced to advance by reason of the batter becoming a runner. However, if a following runner is put out on a force play, the force is removed and the runner must be tagged to be put out. The force is removed as soon as the runner touches the base to which he is forced to advance, and if he overslides or overruns the base, the runner must be tagged to be put out. However, if the forced runner, after touching the next base, retreats for any reason towards the base he had last occupied, the force play is reinstated, and he can again be put out if the defence tags the base to which he is forced;

A **FORCE PLAY** is a play in which a runner legally loses his right to occupy a base by reason of the batter becoming a runner.

EXAMPLE of when a runner is forced to run:

When the batter hits a fair ball he must run to first base. If a runner is on first base, that runner is forced to run to second. If a runner is on second and no runner is on first, the runner at second is NOT forced to run when the batter hits a fair ball, because first base is vacant.

- He is touched by a fair ball in fair territory before the ball has touched or passed an infielder. The ball is dead and no runner may score, nor runners advance, except runners forced to advance.
- He passes a preceding runner before such runner is out;
- He fails to return at once to first base after overrunning or oversliding that base. If he attempts to run to second he is out when tagged. If, after overrunning or oversliding first base he starts toward the dugout, or toward his position, and fails to return to first base at once, he is out, on appeal, when he or the base is tagged;
- In running or sliding for home base, he fails to touch home base and makes no attempt to return to the base, when a fielder holds the ball in his hand, while touching home base, and appeals to the umpire for the decision.

First base and home may be overrun, second and third may not. A runner can overrun first base on a BASE ON BALLS without being in jeopardy.

**INTERFERENCE** is an act made by an **offensive** (runner or batter) player that hinders or impedes a defensive player from making a play.

**OBSTRUCTION** is the act of a **defensive** (fielder) player who impedes the base running of an offensive player.

Intent is not an issue. It is possible for a fielder to obstruct a runner without intending to: with R1 the batter hits a ball long out into the right field. As R1 rounds second the shortstop is standing watching the ball comes in. R1's attempt to go to third is now in jeopardy since he has had to slow up considerably, change his stride, even stop to avoid collision. This must be called obstruction and the runner awarded third base even though the fielder did not intend to obstruct the runner.

To call interference, the offensive player need not intend to interfere. The fielder is protected when playing a batted ball. The runner needs only to impede, hinder or prevent the fielder for making a play to be guilty of interference. **(See Rule 7.08(b) note** – “A runner who is adjudged to have hindered a fielder who is attempting to make a play on a batted ball is out whether it was intentional or not.)

Examples of interference:

- A runner slows down between a batted ball and the fielder. The runner, then, takes off and lets the ball go behind him with out being hit. If the fielder is in position but misplay the ball, it is interference.
- A runner is in front of a fielder as a batted ball approaches. The runner leaps over the ball and the fielder positioned behind him misplay it. If the umpire believes the ball could have been fielded with out the runner being there, that runner is guilty of interference.
- A runner is thrown out at second and slides wide or waves his arms in an effort to break up the double play. The runner is guilty of interference.

Example of proper play:

A runner is approaching the bounding batted ball as the fielder is in position to field it.

- The runner stops, lets the ball go in front of him and then proceeds to the next base,
- The runner goes around the fielder without altering the fielder's efforts,
- The runner clears the area without hindering the fielder's attempts to play on the ball,
- Or, the runner returns to his last base.

## THE PITCHER

There are two legal pitching positions, the **WINDUP POSITION** and the **SET POSITION**, and either position may be used at any time.

**THE WINDUP POSITION:** The pitcher shall stand facing the batter, his entire pivot foot on, or in front of and touching and not off the end of the pitcher's plate, and the other foot free. From this position any natural movement associated with his delivery of the ball to the batter commits him to the pitch without interruption or alteration. He shall not raise either foot from the ground, except that in his actual delivery of the ball to the batter, he may take one step backward, and one step forward with his free foot.

**THE SET POSITION:** Set Position shall be indicated by the pitcher when he stands facing the batter with his entire pivot foot on, or in front of, and in contact with, and not off the end of the pitcher's plate, and his other foot in front of the pitcher's plate, holding the ball in both hands in front of his body and coming to a complete stop. From such Set Position he may deliver the ball to the batter, throw to a base or step backward off the pitcher's plate with his pivot foot. Before assuming Set Position, the pitcher may elect to make any natural preliminary motion such as that known as "the stretch." But if he so elects, he shall come to Set Position before delivering the ball to the batter. After assuming Set Position, any natural motion associated with his delivery of the ball to the batter commits him to the pitch without alteration or interruption.

In the Major division and lower, the pitcher: (1) may windup from a set position, (2) need not come to a complete stop in a set position and (3) may remove his hand from the ball other than in a pitch or throwing to a base.

Once on the PITCHER'S PLATE from either position the pitcher may:

- (1) Deliver the ball to the batter, or
- (2) Step and throw to a base in an attempt to pick-off a runner
- (3) Disengage the rubber (if he does he must drop his hand to his sides).  
In disengaging the rubber the pitcher must step off with his pivot foot and not his free foot first.

The pitcher may not go from one position to the other without disengaging the rubber. If he does it with runners on the bases it is a **BALK (ILLEGAL PITCH in Majors or below)**.

Only when there are runners on base can a pitcher commit a **BALK (ILLEGAL PITCH in Majors or below)**. The **BALK (ILLEGAL PITCH)** is the delicate line between what a pitcher can do to hold the runner close to a base, the moves by which a pitcher may legally attempt to pick the runner off, and the proper delivery of the ball to the batter.

The **BALK (ILLEGAL PITCH in Majors or below)** is an advanced rule study beyond the scope of this article. If your league requires you to call **BALKS (ILLEGAL PITCHES)**, then you should devote a considerable amount of study to this rule section and its interpretation. One thing remains clear ... if you do call "BALK" (or "ILLEGAL PITCH") call it loud and then the moment the play ends you must also call, with equal force, "TIME"

## THE UMPIRE

The role of the umpire requires **JUDGEMENT**. Anything that requires you to apply your judgement to a situation should not normally be questioned: OUT, SAFE, FAIR, FOUL, STRIKE, BALL are examples of things of this.

As a result you want to strive to make one call and only one call in every situation you encounter. The keys to achieving this are **CONCENTRATION, TIMING** and **COMMUNICATION**.

Umpires have the power to **DISQUALIFY** and then **EJECT** any player, manager, coach or substitute who displays unsportsmanlike conduct or language. This also applies to any person whose duties place him at the park or to spectators.

If an umpire makes a mistake in applying or interpreting the rules, a team may **APPEAL** your decision and ultimately **PROTEST** the game to league authorities.

The simplest APPEAL occurs when you have said BALL and the catcher believes the batter has attempted to hit the ball. This is the **CHECKED SWING APPEAL**. The catcher will ask you to "Get help on the Blue" or "Check to see if he swung" or any other similar phrase. If anyone is asking for this appeal, go for assistance to your field umpire immediately.

Above all **ERROR ON THE SIDE OF SAFETY**. This is the prime directive for umpires at all levels. Nothing should be permitted to take place which compromises the safety and enjoyment of the game by everyone.