

A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO BASEBALL



Part 1: The Basic Game

Baseball is played by two teams of nine players each. The teams take turns batting and fielding. The batting team is called the **OFFENSIVE** team and the fielding team is called the **DEFENSIVE** team.

The basics of Baseball are very simple. A player, known appropriately enough as the **PITCHER**, pitches the ball to a **CATCHER**, who crouches behind a base called home plate, a **BATTER** stands next to home plate then swings to try to hit the ball. If he makes fair contact he runs around as many bases as possible before the ball is retrieved and returned under control by the defensive team. The aim of the game is to score more **RUNS** than the opposition. A run is scored when a player on the batting team advances around all three bases and back to where he started (**HOME PLATE**), from whence he started.

Unless you hit the ball so far that you can run around all the bases before it's returned (a **HOME RUN**), you'll probably have to stop at first, second or

third on your way around and wait for the next batter to hit. Alternatively the runner can take a risk at "stealing" a base and therefore can advance further. (Stealing a base will be explained later).

The defensive teams objective is to get batters and base runners **OUT**, either by catching balls hit in the air, as in cricket, or in various other ways we'll get to later. Once three players on the offensive team have made outs, the two teams switch: the defensive team comes in to bat and the batting team goes out to the field to defend.

An inning is completed when each team has batted, and a full game consists of nine innings. A game usually takes between 45 and 90 minutes to play.

Players bat in a pre-arranged order. After the last batter in the order has hit, the first batter comes up again. If the final out in an inning is made by, say the fourth batter in the order, then the fifth batter will be the first to hit when the team comes in to bat again.

Part 2: The Playing Area

A Baseball playing area is contained within a 90-degree angle, and is usually called a **DIAMOND**, because of the central part of the playing field – the **INFIELD** – is diamond shaped. The **OUTFIELD** extends outward from the

infield to a boundary, either actual or notional. From above, the playing area looks like the illustration below.

Everything inside the thick black lines are known as **FAIR TERRITORY** and is where most of the action takes place. The shaded area outside these lines is called **FOUL TERRITORY**, where

some action can take place. Everything beyond this is called **DEAD BALL TERRITORY** because if this ball goes into this area, all action stops. As a basic rule, the batter must hit the ball into fair territory.

Unfortunately, Baseball diamonds are not always marked out and you may have to imagine (and agree with the other team!) where Fair, Foul and Dead Ball Territory is located.

You will often hear people referring to **LEFT FIELD, CENTRE FIELD** and **RIGHT FIELD**. These terms mean exactly what they say. Left field is that part of the outfield which is to the left as you look at the field diagram; centre field is the outfield area behind second

base; and right field is the outfield area to the right on the diagram.

The pitcher stands on the **PITCHER'S PLATE (P)** and pitches the ball to the batter, who stands beside **HOME PLATE (H)**, 60 feet 6 inches away. A right handed batter will stand to the right side of home plate (from the pitcher's point of view) and a left-handed batter to the left of home plate. Once a batter hits the ball into fair territory, he advances counter-clockwise around the bases.

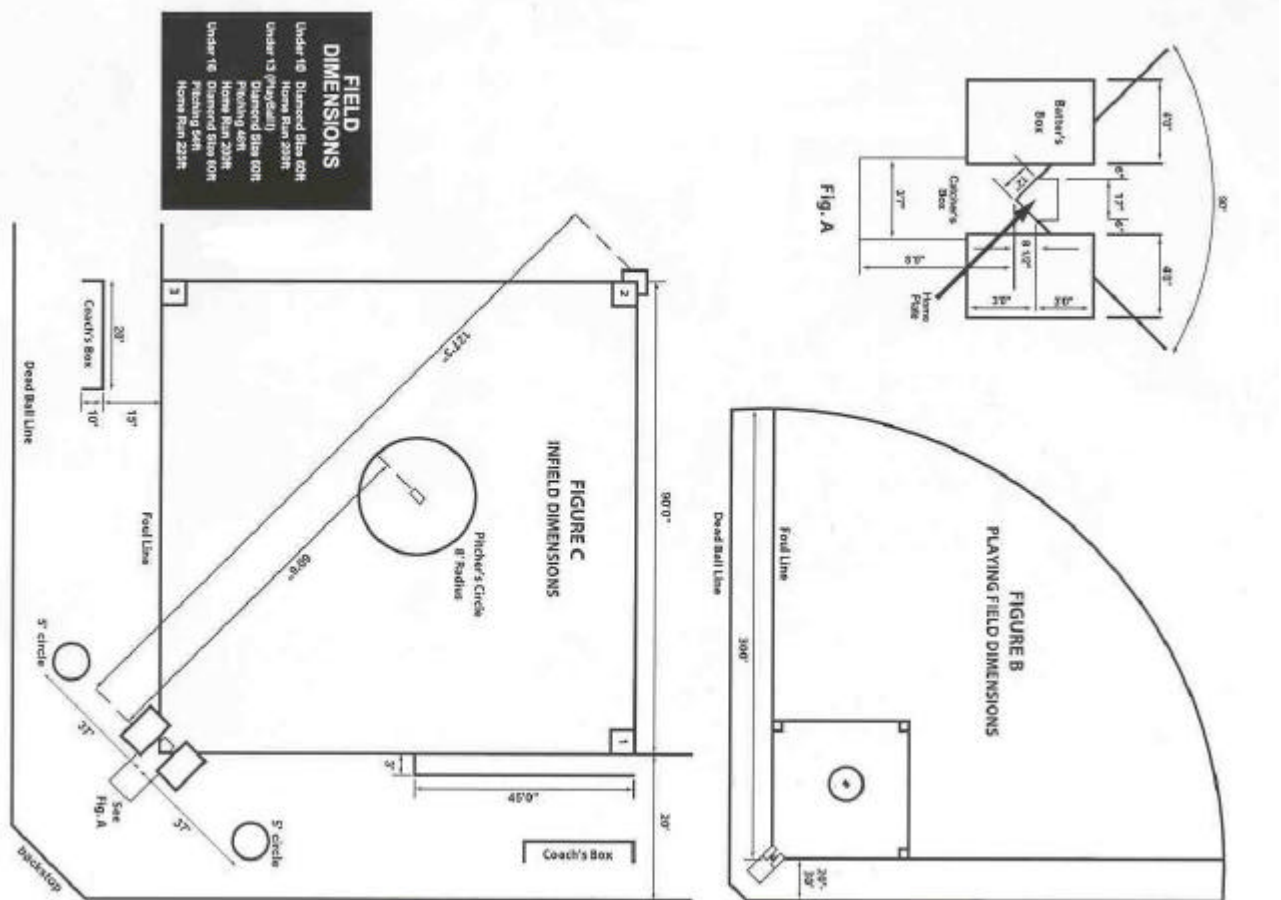
Each **BASE** (First Base, Second Base, and Third Base) is marked, usually with a 17" square plastic bag filled with foam. The distance between each base is 90 feet (quite a long way!). In the absence of proper bases, players will sometimes

put down clothing or similar items to mark base positions.

For safety reasons, **FIRST BASE** often (but not always) consists of a double base, half white and half orange, with the orange section in foul territory and the white section in fair territory. The batter heads for the orange part, the fielder uses the white part, and collisions are avoided.

HOME PLATE is a five-sided piece of heavy rubber measuring 17" across.

The **PITCHER'S PLATE** is a rectangular piece of heavy rubber measuring 6" by 24". The pitcher must have one foot in contact with this plate when delivering a pitch to the batter.



The job of the defensive team, known as **FIELDERS**, is to catch or stop any balls hit, with the aim of preventing offensive players from advancing around the bases and scoring runs. Towards this end, each fielder has specific duties (and also a specific number which is used as a form of shorthand in scorekeeping):

PITCHER (1): The pitcher pitches the ball to the batter from the pitcher's plate and then becomes another infielder, ready to catch or stop batted balls and throw to bases as required. The pitcher will often take throws at first base on balls hit to the first base player, or back up other infielders on throws coming in from the outfield.

CATCHER (2): The catcher kneels or squats behind home plate and

batter swings and misses or fails to swing. The catcher also guards home plate against incoming base runners and tries to tag them out before they can reach the base and score a run.

FIRST BASE (3): This is often a busy posting, as many balls will be thrown to first base in an attempt to put batters out who are running from home to first. The first base player also guards part of the right side of the infield

against batted balls hit on the ground or in the air.

SECOND BASE (4): the second base player will guard much of the right side of the infield and will try to catch balls hit in the air or on the ground. She will often catch throws made to second base, though the shortstop (see below) can do this as well. See how the infielders are positioned on the diagram to cover as much of the infield area as possible. It is a common fault of inexperienced infield players to stand on their base at all times. This isn't necessary and means that they're not covering as much of the field as they could be. It only becomes necessary to touch your base if you are trying to get someone out there.

SHORTSTOP (6): the shortstop stands between second and third base and tries to stop or catch any ball hit towards left field. The shortstop is also in a good posting to take throws at second base or, occasionally, at third.

THIRD BASE (5): the third base player guards the area near third base and will usually take throws made to third. This player needs good reflexes (since the ball is often hit hard in there

direction) and a good throwing arm, since it's a long throw from third to first base.

OUTFIELDERS

Outfield positions are not quite so rigidly defined as infield positions. The team captain or possibly the catcher may position the outfielders, sometimes differently for each batter. For example, if a hard hitting batter is up, the outfielders may all move back, or if a left handed batter comes up, the outfielders may all swing around towards right field.

In general, however, the **LEFT FIELDER (7)** will play in left field, the **CENTRE FIELDER (8)** will play in centre field behind second and the **RIGHT FIELDER (9)** will play in right field. The outfielders' job is to catch or stop balls hit in their direction and return them quickly and accurately to the infield.

GLOVES

Each defensive player, including the pitcher, wears a fielder's glove to stop

and catch balls. These gloves may seem cumbersome at first and even a bit sissy – macho cricket players are often tempted not to use them! But gloves are essential because the glove will allow you to make catches you could never make barehanded and to control the ball quickly in order to throw it, which is an essential part of the game. Besides – it's against the rules not to wear one! Players will usually buy their own gloves to ensure they have one that fits and feels comfortable.

Practice using the glove, catching the ball in the webbing rather than the palm and remembering not to rely on the glove to do everything. Close your fingers on the ball once it goes into the glove and cover the gloved hand with your bare hand to stop the ball popping out.

Another reason to practice with the glove is that it's worn on your weaker hand (i.e., if you're right handed you'll wear a glove on your left hand), and you're probably not used to catching with this hand. The reason for this arrangement is so that your stronger hand is free for throwing.

Part 4: Batting

There are several stages involved in basic batting technique:



Start with your weight mostly on the back foot and the bat drawn back.

Begin the swing by stepping towards the pitcher with the front foot.

Twist the body to open the hips, then the shoulders, which pulls the bat through to meet the ball.

Just before the bat meets the ball, the wrists should snap to accelerate the bat into the ball and to help generate follow through on the swing

BUNTING

There are several types of bunts and situations for using the bunts. In this beginners guide we will only look at the mechanics of a regular bunt.

Stand in your normal hitting stance and just before the ball is about to be released pivot on your feet so that your chest is facing the pitcher. When gripping the bat the top hand should be on the barrel of the bat with only the index and thumb touching and bottom

hand should be further up the bat than normal but still on the grip tape.

With a bunt (unless it is a sacrifice or slap bunt) you want to hold off as long as possible before "squaring around".



FAIR BALLS AND FOUL BALLS

- If a ball is hit into the infield (i.e. in Fair Territory) but then rolls foul before it passes first or third base, it is considered **FOUL**.
- If a ball lands in the outfield (i.e. in Fair Territory), and then rolls foul, it is considered **FAIR**.
- If a ball is hit into Foul Territory but then rolls into Fair Territory before it passes first or third base, it is considered **FAIR**.
- If a ball is hit into Foul Territory outside the outfield and then rolls into Fair Territory, it is considered **FOUL**.
- If a batted ball hits either first or third base, it is considered **FAIR** no matter where it goes afterwards!

Part 5: Pitching

Steps to becoming a great pitcher:

1. Start by standing on the pitchers rubber with both feet facing home plate.
2. Take a small step back and slightly side ways with your glove side foot.
3. Plant your other foot in front of the rubber, while keeping this foot in contact with the rubber.
4. Lift your glove side leg.
5. Break hands as your glove side leg drops.
6. When your front foot hits the ground throw!

STRIKES AND BALLS

A pitched ball will be described (by the umpire) as either a **STRIKE** or a **BALL**. Basically, a strike is pitched across the plate and no lower than the knees or higher than the back shoulder as he

stands at home plate, anything else would be a ball.

A GOOD PITCH

- MUST be pitched from the pitching plate.
- MUST pass between the height of the batter's knees and back shoulder as he stands at home plate in a normal batting stance (you can't make it harder by crouching down!).
- MUST pass across some part of home plate.

A pitched ball which fulfils all these conditions will be called a **STRIKE** because it will have been judged by the umpire to have passed through at least some part of the **STRIKE ZONE**. The strike zone is an imaginary three-dimensional column of space with depth, width and corners corresponding to the shape of home plate. A ball need only

pass through any part of this zone to be called a strike.

If a pitch is good and the batter fails to swing, or swings and misses, or swings and hits the ball into Foul Territory (without it being caught) or into Dead Ball Territory, then the pitch will be called a strike. If three strikes are called against you and you haven't managed to hit the ball into Fair Territory, you are **STRUCK OUT**.

If a pitcher pitches four **BALLS** – bad pitches which are out of the strike zone and which the batter makes no attempt to hit – then the batter will walk to first base. Putting batters on base is dangerous since they are liable to get around to score runs, so the defensive team will hope that the pitcher doesn't do this too often! The basic job of a baseball pitcher is to throw the batter off, mix him up or locate the ball where it will be hit as an easy ground out or pop up.



PART 6: Running the Bases

So you've hit the ball, it's not been caught in the air by a fielder, it lands fair and you're forced to run. You have now become a **BATTER-RUNNER** until you reach first base, and a **BASERUNNER** thereafter.

You are not considered safe – i.e. you can't become a base runner – until you reach first base without being put out. If any defensive player is holding the ball and touches first base with any part of her body, or the ball itself, before you get there, you are **OUT**.

A typical example would be this: you hit the ball along the ground (called a **GROUND BALL**) to the shortstop. You set off for first base. The shortstop picks it up and throws to the first base player, who catches the ball in her glove while her foot is in contact with the base. The ball gets to her before you can reach the base. You're out! You can be put out in the same way at all bases to which you are **FORCED** to run (we'll explain when you're forced to run and when you're not in a moment).

Remember – as a base runner you are never safe until you are touching a base. If at any point you are touched with the ball (whether in or out of the glove) by a fielder and you are not safely in contact with a base, you are out. This is called a **TAG**. There are two exceptions to this rule:

Over-running first base. As a batter runner, you don't have to stop dead on first base. You are allowed to make contact with the base and then run beyond it in a straight line (so you don't

lose speed and momentum), after which you can safely walk back to first without the danger of being tagged out. However, if you pass first base and turn into the field of play with the intent to run on towards second, you can be tagged out. When running to second or third base, however, you must stay in contact with the base once you reach it. Incidentally: you can also over run home plate when scoring a run.

A dead ball situation. An example of a dead ball situation is when the batter swings and hits the ball into Foul Territory. The ball is now considered dead and no play can take place, so if you have left your base on the swing, you are allowed to walk back to it in safety prior to the next pitch. Another common example of a dead ball situation is an **OVERTHROW**. This is where a ball thrown errantly or missed by one of the fielders winds up in Dead Ball Territory. At this point, the umpire will call the play dead. Any base runners are then allowed to walk safely to the base they were attempting to reach at the point when the throw was made, plus one more. Even if a base

runner was standing on a base she will be awarded the next base she might have advanced to, plus one more. Inexperienced players often dispute the

STEALING

Runners may leave a base at any time that the ball is in play. This usually takes the form of taking a walking lead-off from the base when the pitcher has the ball (primary lead). The distance a runner 'cheats' away from the base will vary but is usually about 34 steps - enough to be able to safely return to the base if necessary. When the pitcher pitches the ball to the hitter, the runner may take more of a lead (secondary). Occasionally, runners will attempt to 'steal' a base. The runner will take their primary lead and attempt to run to the next base when the ball is pitched to the batter. It is then up to the catcher to attempt to throw to the base they are running to in an attempt to get them out. When stealing a base, the runner has to be tagged by the fielder holding the ball.

SLIDING/DIVING



Remember that we said you can overrun first base (or home), but not second and third, where you can be tagged out if you're not in contact with the base. But running hard and then stopping dead on a 17" piece of plastic isn't easy!

One way to do this is to slide or dive the last few feet into the base along the ground, so that you come to rest on or in contact with the base with minimal loss of momentum. Another reason to slide or dive is that you will present a smaller and more difficult target for the

award of two additional bases in this situation, but that's the rule! Now we'll look more closely at when base runners are forced to run and

defensive player who might be waiting to tag you.

TIPS FOR SLIDING

Start your slide about 10 feet from the base. Tuck one leg under the other, lean back into a reclining position, but keep your fists clenched and your arms up off the ground (to avoid injuries). Sliding is most fun and least painful on wet grass; it can be a killer on Astroturf or gravel infields!

FORCE OUTS

Let's suppose that you have made it to first base safely and now the next batter comes up to bat. If the next batter hits the ball into Fair Territory without it being caught in the air, you are forced to run towards second base because the batter runner is coming to occupy first base and no more than one runner per base is allowed. In any situation where you as a base runner are forced to advance, the defensive team can put you out simply by throwing the ball to a player standing on the base to which you're advancing. This is called a **FORCE OUT** (or Force Play). No tag is necessary - although the fielder can choose to tag you while you're between bases if he wishes.

Now, let's suppose you're a base runner on first and the next batter hits a ground ball to the shortstop. You are forced to run to second, the batter runner is forced to run to first, and the defensive team has a choice of two possible **FORCE OUTS** - you or the batter runner. If they're feeling ambitious and there are less than two outs, they can go for both you; if they're successful, this is called a **DOUBLE PLAY**. Typically, the shortstop would throw the ball to the second base player standing on second - that puts you out - and the second base player would throw immediately on to first base. If the throw reaches the first base player before the batter runner reaches the base, they too would be out.

Force plays can apply at any base. For example, if there are base runners on all three bases (this is called **BASES LOADED**), then all the runners are forced to run on the net hit that isn't caught in the air, and the fielders could

when they're not, and what fielders have to do in these situations to put runners out.

get a **FORCE OUT** at any base - including home plate.

TAG OUTS

You have probably already grasped the point that fielders must **TAG OUT** runners who are not forced to run; simply standing on the base with the ball won't do.

Say you are the first batter in the inning and you hit a **DOUBLE** (a hit that allows you to get to second base). When the next batter hits the ball and runs toward first, you don't have to advance if you don't want to, because no one is coming to occupy your base. If you do choose to head for third, you are and to put you out, a fielder must tag you with the ball in hand or glove before you reach your target base. In fact, you can turn around and run back to the base you came from if that seems a wiser choice; no one is coming to occupy that base and it's still yours!

There is a great deal of skill and judgement involved in base running and a good runner can often gain an advantage by forcing the defensive team to panic and make mistakes. So pay attention at all times, run hard and look for chances to take extra bases when the defenders make bad throws or simply aren't paying attention. Never give up on the possibilities until the umpire has called "Time!" and the play is over. Take nice big lead offs and steal as a chance provides.

Suppose you're on first base with less than two outs and the next batter hits a ball in the air towards an outfielder. If it is caught without touching the ground then the batter-runner will be out and you are not forced to advance to second anymore. **Since the batter runner is out then the force is off.**

Instead, you can choose whether to advance to second or not and so the defensive team can't get you out with a Force Play. They can only get you out by tagging you with the ball: a **TAG OUT** or Tag Play. That's why, if the ball is hit in the air towards a fielder when you're a forced runner, you shouldn't automatically take off for the next base, because the catch might be made and the force removed.

AND HERE'S THE KEY POINT: you cannot advance to the next base on a caught fly ball unless your foot is in contact with the base you're already occupying when the catch is made, or afterwards. This is called **TAGGING UP**. You must tag up before you can advance after a caught fly ball. Why? It's a Rule!