

Baseball Playing Rules Changes Year by Year before 1950

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Selected Rules in Place in 1876

Rule II, *The Materials of the Game*, Section 5, *The Bat*. The bat must be round, and must not exceed two and one-half inches in diameter in the thickest part. It must be wholly of wood, and shall not exceed forty-two inches in length.

Rule II, *The Game*, Section 1, *The innings*. The game shall consist of nine innings to each side, but should the score then be a tie, play shall be continued until a majority of runs for one side, upon an equal number of innings, shall be declared, when the game shall end. All innings shall be concluded when the third hand is put out.

Rule II *The Game*, Section 2 *Positions of players*. Positions of players and choice of first innings shall be determined by the two captains. The fielders of each club each shall take any position in the field their captain may assign them, with the exception of pitcher, who must deliver the ball from his appointed position.

Rule II *The Game*, Section 3 *Substitutes*. No player taking part in a game shall be replaced by another after the commencement of the fourth innings, except as provided in Section 14 of Rule VI [which is *Substitutes in running bases*. (see below)].

Rule II *The Game*, Section 4 *Five innings necessary*. No game shall be considered as played under five innings on each side shall be completed. Should darkness or rain intervene before the third hand is put out in the closing part of the fifth innings of a game, the umpire shall declare "No game."

Rule II *The Game*, Section 5 *Drawn games*. Whenever a game of five or more innings is stopped by rain or darkness, and the score at the time is equal on the even innings played, the game shall be declared drawn, but, under no other circumstances, shall a drawn game be declared.

Rule IV *Pitching*, Section 1 *The pitcher's position*. The pitcher's position shall be within a space of ground six feet square, the front line of which shall be distant forty-five feet from the centre of the home base, and the centre of the square shall be equidistant from the first and the third bases. Each corner of the square shall be marked by a flat iron plate or stone six inches square fixed in the ground even with the surface.

Rule IV *Pitching*, Section 2 *Delivering the ball*. The player who delivers the ball to the bat must do so while within the lines of the pitcher's position. He must remain within them until the ball has left his hand, and he shall not make any motion to deliver the ball to the bat while any part of his person is outside the lines of the pitcher's position. The ball must be delivered to the bat with the arm swinging nearly perpendicular at the side of the body, and the hand in swinging forward must pass below the hip.

Rule IV *Pitching*, Section 7 *Called Balls*. All balls delivered to the bat which are not sent in over the home base and at the height called for by the batsman, shall be considered unfair balls, and every third ball so delivered must be called. When "three balls" have been called, the striker shall take first base, and all players who are thereby forced to leave a base shall take one base. No "ball" shall be called until the ball has passed the home base.

Rule V *Batting Department*, Section 2, *The Order of Striking*. The batsmen must take their positions in the order in which they are named on the score-book. After the first innings, the first striker in each innings shall be the batsman whose name follows that of the third man out in the preceding inning.

Rule V *Batting Department*, Section 5, *Good balls to the bat*. The batsman, on taking his position, must call for either a “high ball,” a “low ball,” or a “fair ball,” and the umpire shall notify the pitcher to deliver the ball as required; such call shall not be changed after the first ball delivered.

Rule V *Batting Department*, Section 6, *Good balls to the bat*. A “high ball” shall be one sent in above the waist of the batsman but not higher than his shoulder. A “low ball” shall be one sent in not lower than within one foot of the ground, but not higher than his waist. A “fair ball” shall be one between the range of shoulder high and one foot from the ground. All the above must be over the home base, and when fairly delivered, shall be considered good balls to the bat.

Rule V *Batting Department*, Section 7, *Calling strikes*. Should the batsman fail to strike at a “good ball,” or should he strike and fail to hit the ball, the umpire shall call “one strike,” and “two strikes,” should he again fail. When two strikes have been called, should the batsman not strike at the next “good ball” the umpire shall warn him by calling “good ball.” But should he strike at it and fail to hit the ball, or should he fail to strike at or to hit the next good ball, “three strikes” must be called, and the batsman must run to first base as in the case of hitting a fair ball.

Rule V *Batting Department*, Section 9 *A foul strike*. Should the batsman step outside the lines of his position, when he strikes the ball, the umpire shall call “foul strike and out,” and baserunners shall return to the bases they occupied when the ball was hit.

Rule V *Batting Department*, Section 11 *A fair hit ball*. If the ball from a fair stroke of the bat first touches the ground, the person of a player, or any other object, either in front of, or on the foul ball lines, it shall be considered fair.

Rule V *Batting Department*, Section 12 *A foul hit ball*. If the ball from a fair stroke of the bat that touches the ground, the person of a player, or any other object behind the foul ball lines, it shall be declared foul, and the ball so hit shall be called foul by the umpire even before touching the ground, if it be seen falling foul.

Rule V *Batting Department*, Section 13 *Hitting called balls*. Should the batsman strike at or hit any ball on which a “ball” has been called, the umpire shall disregard the call of such “ball,” and render his decision simply on the strike or hit made.

Rule V *Batting Department*, Section 15, *How batsmen are put out*. The batsman shall be declared out by the umpire as follows:

- If after three strikes have been called, he fails to touch first base before the ball is legally held there; If after three strikes have been called, the ball be caught before touching the ground but once.
- If a fair or foul ball be caught before touching the ground, provided it be not caught in a player’s hat or cap.
- If a foul ball be similarly held, or after touching the ground but once.

Rule VI *Running the Bases*, Section 11, *Returning to bases on foul ground balls*. No run or base can be made upon a foul ball that shall touch the ground before being caught or held by a fielder, and any player running bases shall return, without being put out, to the base he occupied when the ball was struck, and remain on such base until the ball is held by the pitcher.

Rule VI *Running the Bases*, Section 14, *Substitutes in running bases*. No player shall be allowed a substitute in running the bases, except for illness or injury, unless by special consent of the captain of the opposing nine; in such case the latter shall select the player to run as substitute. The substitute in question shall take his position so as to cross the batsman's position, and in front of the home base, and he shall not start to run until the ball is struck at or hit. The substitute shall be the player running the bases.

Rule VI *Running the Bases*, Section 15, *How Baserunners are put out – Failing to touch a base*. Any baserunner failing to touch the base he runs for, shall be declared out if the ball be held by a fielder, while touching said base, before the baserunner returns and touches it.

Rule VII *The Umpire and His Duties*, Section 4, *Reversing Decisions*. No decision rendered by the umpire on any point of play shall be reversed by the testimony of any of the players. But if it shall be shown by the two captains of the contesting clubs that the umpire has palpably misinterpreted the rules, or given an erroneous decision, he shall reverse said decision.

Rule VII *The Umpire and His Duties*, Section 5, *Decisions on catches*. Should the umpire be unable to see whether a catch has been made or not, he shall be at liberty to appeal to the bystanders, and to render his decision according to the fairest testimony at command.

Rule VII *The Umpire and His Duties*, Section 7, *Appealing to the umpire*. The umpire shall render no decision in the game except when appealed to by a player, unless expressly required to do so by the rules of the game, as in calling "balls," etc.

1877

Rule II *The Game*, Section 2 *Position of Players*. The home club shall first take the bat.

Rule II *The Game*, Section 3 *Substitutes*. No player taking part in a game shall be replaced by another after the commencement of the second inning, except for reason of illness or injury.

Rule V, *Batting Department*, Section 6, *Good balls to the bat*. Rather than "waist," the rule referred to the "belt." The lower limit for a "low ball" was the knee rather than within one foot of the ground.

Rule V, *Batting Department*, Section 11, *A fair hit ball and A foul hit ball* added, "The following exceptions to the foregoing section [about a batted ball being fair or foul depending on where it first touches the ground]: All balls batted directly to the ground that bound or roll within the foul lines between home and first or home and third base, without first touching the person of a player, shall be considered fair. All balls batted directly to the ground that bound or roll outside the foul lines between home and first or home and third bases, without first touching the person of a player, shall be considered foul. In either of these cases the first point of contact between the batted ball and the ground shall not be regarded.

Rule VI *Running the Bases*. Section 14 modified the rule about substitutes running the bases and deleted "The substitute in question shall take his position so as to cross the batsman's position, and in front of the home base, and he shall not start to run until the ball is struck at or hit. The substitute shall be the player running the bases," thus requiring the batter to reach base before a substitute runner could be used.

1878

Rule II *The Game*, Section 2, *Position of Players*. The choice of first innings shall be determined by the two captains.

1879

Rule III *Pitching*, Section 7, *Called Balls*. All balls delivered to the bat which are not sent in over the home base and at the height called for by the batsman shall be considered unfair balls, and every ball so delivered must be called. When “nine balls” have been called, the striker shall take first base, and all players who are thereby forced to leave a base shall take one base. Neither a “ball” nor a “strike” shall be called until the ball has passed the home base. [The nine balls for a walk is the same as before except that it is no longer a matter of three unfair pitches for a ball times three balls for a walk.]

Rule III *Pitching*, Section 8, *Dead Balls*. If the umpire shall be satisfied that the pitcher, in delivering the ball, shall have so delivered it as to have intentionally caused the same to strike the batter, the umpire shall fine the pitcher therefor [*sic*] in a sum not less than ten dollars nor more than fifty dollars.

Rule IV *Batting Department*, Section 2, *The Order of Striking*. After the first inning, the first striker in each inning shall be the batsman whose name follows that of the last man who has completed his turn (time) at bat in the preceding inning. [Prior to 1879, the first striker in each inning was the batsman “whose name follows that of the third man out in the preceding inning.”]

Rule IV *Batting Department*, Section 13, *How Batsmen Are Put Out*. A batter is out if a foul ball is caught before touching the ground. [Previously, a batter was out if a foul ball was caught on the fly or on one bounce.]

1880

The rule book is now categorized by Classes (7 Classes) and Rules (62 Rules).

Class IV *The Game*, Rule 33(1-2), regarding a game consisting of nine innings, added “If the side first at bat scores less runs in nine innings than the other side has scored in eight innings, the game shall then terminate,” and “If the side last at bat in the ninth innings scores the winning run before the third man is out, the game shall then terminate.” In addition, (3) regarding an extra-inning game, added a clause, “or until the other side shall score one more run than the side first at bat.” These changes/additions obviated the need to continue playing until three hands were out in situations in the last of the ninth or extra inning when the game was already decided.

Class IV *The Game*, Rule 33(4), added an exception to the rule that a game called by darkness or rain after five innings with the score being that of the last equal innings played. Added to the sentence was “unless the side second at bat shall have scored one or more runs than the side first at bat, in which case the score of the game shall be the total number of runs made.”

Rule 34. The same exception was added to a drawn game, which, “after five equal innings have been played, if the score at the time is equal on the last even innings played; but (*Exception*) if the side that went second to bat is then at the bat, and has scored the same number of runs as the other side, the Umpire shall declare the game drawn, without regard to the score of the last equal innings.”

Note: No exception was yet made in Rule 36: “No Game” shall be declared by the Umpire if he shall terminate play, on account of rain or darkness, before five innings on each side are completed.” It wasn’t until 1892 that a regulation game was one in which the team second at bat had scored more runs in four innings than the team first at bat had scored in five innings.

Class IV *The Game*, Rule 41 regarding when a batsman is out no longer contained a provision that a batter could not received a called third strike until he had first been warned by the umpire for not swinging at a “good ball” (Rule V, Section 7 in the original 1876 National League rules.)

Class IV *The Game*, Rule 41(3) restored the rule on a foul fly, the batter once again being out if it is “held by a fielder before touching the ground, or after touching the ground but once.”

Class IV *The Game*, Rule 42(2). The Batsman becomes a Base Runner . . . When eight balls have been called by the Umpire.

Class IV, *The Game*, Rule 33 added exceptions to the rule that a non-tied game consisted of nine innings (had been Rule II, Section 1 in 1879): (1) If the side first at bat scores less runs in nine innings than the other side has scored in eight innings, the game shall then terminate. (2) if the side last at bat in the ninth innings scores the winning run before the third man is out, the game shall then terminate.

Class IV, *The Game*, Rule 46(14) *The Base-Runner is out* . . . If, when running to a base or forced to return to a base, he fail to touch the intervening base or bases, if any, in the order prescribed in Rule 42 [regarding when the batsman becomes a base runner]; provided, That he shall not be declared out unless the Captain of the fielding side claim such decision before the ball is delivered to the bat by the Pitcher.

1881

Class I, *The Materials of the Game*, Rule 5, *The Pitcher’s Lines* must be straight lines forming the boundaries of a space of ground, in the infield, six feet long by four feet wide, distant fifty feet from the center of the Home Base, and so placed that the six feet lines would each be two feet distant from and parallel with, a straight line passing through the center of the Home and Second Bases.

Class V *The Game*, Rule 49(2). The Batsman becomes a Base Runner . . . When seven balls have been called by the Umpire.

Class V *The Game*, Rule 52. The Base Runner shall not have a substitute run for him.

Class VI, *The Umpire*, Rule 60(2). The Umpire shall not reverse his decision on any point of play upon the testimony of any player engaged in the game, or upon the testimony of any bystander. [Rule 55(3) in 1880 had read, “Should the umpire be unable to see whether a catch has been fairly made or not, he shall be at liberty to appeal to the bystanders, and to render his decision according to the fairest testimony at command.”]

1883

National League: Class V *The Game*, Rule 51(3). The Batsman is out . . . If he makes a Foul Hit, and the ball be momentarily held by a fielder before touching the ground, provided it be not caught in a fielder’s hat or cap, or touch some object other than the fielder before being caught.

The American Association, with Class V *The Game* Rule 46(3) retained the language of the batter being out on a foul hit held by a fielder “before touching the ground, or after touching a fielder but once . . .”

1884

Deletion in Class IV *Definitions*, Rule 27. A Fair Ball is a ball delivered by the Pitcher, while wholly within the lines of his position and facing the Batsman, ~~with the ball passing below his shoulder~~, and the ball passing over the Home Base at the height called for by the batter. [With the removal of the restriction of the ball passing below the pitcher’s shoulder, overhand pitching was allowed.]

Addition to Class IV *Definitions*, Rule 29(2) A Balk is . . . The ball be held by the Pitcher so long as to delay the game unnecessarily.

Class V *The Game*, Rule 52(2). The Batsman becomes a Base Runner . . . Instantly after six Balls have been called by the Umpire. [National League only]; Rule 47(2) in the Union Association and Rule 46(2) in the American Association have seven balls needed for a walk.

1885

Class I, *The Materials of the Game*, Rule 14(2), *The Bat* added a clause (indicated in italics) to allow for a partially flat bat: The bat must be round, *except that a portion of the surface may be flat on one side*, must not exceed two and one-half inches in diameter in the thickest part of the bat, and must not exceed forty-two inches in length.

1886

Rule 15 [American Association] added, “Every club shall be required to adopt uniforms for its players, and, in no case shall less than nine men be allowed to play on each side.”

With Rule 42(3) the American Association joined the National League regarding a batter being out if a foul fly was caught/held by a fielder before touching the ground (no longer for “after touching the ground but once”).

Class V *The Game*, Rule 52(2). The Batsman becomes a Base Runner . . . Instantly after seven Balls have been called by the Umpire. [National League only]; Rule 45(1) in the American Association has 6 balls.

1887

In 1887 the National League and American Association adopted a common rule book.

Rule 21 in the common rule book adopted the 1886 American Association rules that clubs had to adopt uniforms for its players and did not allow fewer than nine players to play on each side.

Rule 23, under Definitions, defined a *Fair Ball* rather than a *High Ball* or a *Low Ball* (since the 1887 rules no longer allowed batters to call for the height of a pitch). Overall, the definition remained as it had been since 1877, with the ball to be not lower than the batter’s knee nor higher than his shoulder. Rule 50 in 1886 had read, “*The Batsman, on taking his position*, must call for a ‘High Ball,’ a ‘Low Ball,’ or a ‘High or Low Ball,’ and the Umpire shall notify the Pitcher to deliver the first ball as required; such call shall not be changed after the first ball delivered.” This sentence was deleted in 1887 (in what became Rule 46).

Rule 31(3), under Definitions, was added that a strike is “any obvious attempt to make a foul hit.”

Rule 44(1) provided the choice of innings (which team batted first) to the captain of the home club. The choice had been up to the captains.

Four strikes rather than three were needed for a strikeout. Four strikes were referenced in Rules 47(6) and 48(3). A strikeout went back to requiring only three strikes in 1888.

An exception was included to a batter becoming a runner if the final strike was not held (four strikes in 1887) with the addition of Rule 47(6), “The batsman is out . . . If, while First Base be occupied by a base runner, four strikes be called on him by the Umpire, except when two hands are already out.” Before the exception, catchers were able to start double or even triple plays by intentionally not holding a final strike.

Rule 48(2): The Batsman becomes a Base Runner . . . Instantly after five Balls have been called by the Umpire.

Rule 48(4): The Batsman becomes a Base Runner . . . If, while he be a batsman his person or clothing be hit by a ball from the Pitcher, unless in the opinion of the Umpire he intentionally permits himself to be hit.

1888

A strikeout went back to only three strikes being needed [Rules 47(6) and 48(3)]. Additional ways under Rule 47 were added to how a batsman is out: (7) If, while making the third strike the ball hits his person or clothing; (8) If, after two strikes have been called, the Batsman obviously attempts to make a foul hit as in Section 3, Rule 31 [Any obvious attempt to make a foul hit]. Foul balls, other than intentional attempts and bunts (included starting in 1894), did not count as strikes until 1901 in the National League and 1903 in the American League.]

1889

Rule 28, Sections 1-3: (1) In every championship game each team shall be required to have present on the field, in uniform, at least one or more substitute players. (2) One player, whose name shall be printed on the scorecard as an extra player, may be substituted at the end of any completed innings by either club, but the player retired shall not thereafter participate in the game. In addition thereto a substitute may be allowed at any time in place of a player disabled in the game then being played by reason of illness or injury, of the nature and extent of which the Umpire shall be the sole judge. (3) The Base Runner shall not have a substitute run for him, except by consent of the Captains of the contesting teams. [Section 3 restored the opportunity for a substitute runner with consent of the opposing team; since 1881 in the National League, the rule prohibited a substitute for a runner regardless of consent of the other team.]

Rule 38 added this sentence to the Foul Hit rule [Rule 29 in 1888]: Provided that a Foul Hit not rising above the Batsman's head and caught by the Catcher playing within ten feet of the Home Base, shall be termed a Foul Tip.

Rule 40, under Balls Batted Outside the Grounds: A fair batted ball that goes over the fence at a less distance than two hundred and ten feet from Home Base shall entitle the Batsman to two bases and a distinctive line shall be marked on the fence at this point. [The following year a parenthetical comment was added to indicate that the rule "is intended to govern the batting on ball grounds not sufficiently large in the out-field for ordinary out-field play."]

Rule 44, Section 2: The Batsman becomes a Base Runner . . . Instantly after four Balls have been called by the Umpire.

1890

Rule 28, Sections 1-2: (1) In every championship game each team shall be required to have present on the field, in uniform, at least two of more substitute players. (2) Two players, whose names shall be printed on the scorecard as an extra player, may be substituted at the end of any completed innings by either club, but the player retired shall not thereafter participate in the game. In addition thereto a substitute may be allowed at any time in place of a player disabled in the game then being played by reason of illness or injury, of the nature and extent of which the Umpire shall be the sole judge.

Added in parentheses:

(This is a very important rule, and the changes introduced require to be well understood. Under this rule as it now is the Captain of either nine is given the power to introduce three distinct pitchers in the game, viz., the one originally named in the batting order, and two extra men. Or he can change his battery entire by substituting a pitcher and catcher. This too, is independent of any substitution of players for those who may be disabled by illness or injury. These changes of players in putting in extra men, too, can be made at any period of innings or of a game.)

Section 3 remained the same, but this was added in parentheses: (A substitute for a Base Runner – and he only – can be introduced by consent of the opposing nine’s Captain. If he refuses, that ends it. He can of course, designate the particular substitute he allows to run.)

The Players’ League Rule 41, Section 9 had a provision, “The Batsman is out . . . If, where there is a Base Runner on the First Base and less than two players on the side at bat have been put out in the inning then being played, the Batsman make a fair hit so that the ball falls within the infield, and the ball touches any Fielder whether held by him or not before it touches the ground.”

This precursor to the Infield Fly Rule was used only by the Players’ League in its only season of operation. It was adopted by the National League in 1894 and expanded the following year.

1891

Rule 28, Sections 1-2: (1) In every championship game each team shall be required to have present on the field, in uniform, one or more substitute players. (2) Any such player may be substituted at any time, by either club; but no player thereby retired shall thereafter participate in the game.

Added in parentheses:

(This is a new rule, and it admits of the Captain’s placing in the field, at any period of the game, any player of the reserved corps – who is in uniform – in any position he sees fit to place him, so that he may have a “right short” in position as well as the regular “left short,” or two men behind the bat, one standing back and the other close up behind the bat, as he may think the position of the contest calls for; but the pitcher must always occupy the “box” in delivering the ball to the bat. No player retired from the nine can resume his place in the game then being played. This rule is independent of the one which follows it, which latter refers only to substitutes for disabled base runners.)

Rule 32, *Balking*, Section 2 was reworded to “A balk is . . . The holding of the ball by the pitcher so long as to delay the game unnecessarily.”

1892

Rule 27 added the exception to No Game being declared if five innings on each side had not been completed. The exception was that “the club second at bat shall have more runs at the end of its fourth inning than the club first at bat has made in its five innings.”

Rule 40, *Balls Batted Outside the Grounds*, changed the distance from less than 210 feet to less than 235 feet for fair batted balls over the fence to be doubles instead of home runs. A parenthetical comment with the rule rationale was dropped from the rule.

1893

Groundskeepers were allowed to elevate the area around the pitcher’s plate/rubber (the beginning of the pitcher’s mound).

Rule 13, *The Bat*, prohibited flat bats with the deletion of a clause in Section 2, indicated by the strikethrough: It must be round, ~~except that a portion of the surface may be flat on one side, but~~ it must not exceed two and one-half inches in diameter in the thickest part, and must not exceed forty-two inches in length.

Rule 5 changed the pitching distance to 60 feet, 6 inches and created the pitching rubber: The Pitcher’s Boundary shall be marked by a white rubber plate twelve inches long and four inches wide so fixed in the ground as to be even with the surface at a distance of sixty feet six inches from the outer corner of home plate. [Rule 5 in 1895, had pitcher’s lines five and one-half feet long by four feet wide, distant fifty feet from the center of the Home Base. With Rule 27 in 1893 requiring that the pitcher have one foot in contact with

the pitcher's plate (rubber) instead of the pitcher being required to stand wholly within the lines of his position (Rule 30 in 1892), the effective change in distance was less than 10 feet, 6 inches.]

With the replacement of the pitcher's box with a rubber plate, groundskeepers began elevating the height of the rubber to make a pitcher's mound. It wasn't until 1903 that it was specified in the rules with a maximum height set at 15 inches.

The 1893 *Spalding's Official Base Ball Guide*, starting on page 150, included an explanation on the changes of pitching distance, noting "the expression of a decided opinion on the part of the base ball patrons of the game in favor of giving more advantage to the batting side in the game that has been at command during the past three or four years of baseball history. Two points of the discussion were especially noteworthy, and they were the absolute necessity for doing away with the danger to life and limb incurred under the rule of the 'cyclone' pitching, wild swift pitching, which was especially in vogue during 1892."

1894

Rule 40 was added: A bunt hit is a fair hit to the ground within the infield.

Rule 43, Section 4 was added: A strike is . . . A foul hit, other than a foul tip, made by the batsman while attempting a bunt hit, as defined in Rule 40. [This was in addition to the existing section that a strike is any obvious attempt to make a foul hit.]

The rule for "The Batsman is out" (Rule 45, Section 9) added, "If he hits a fly ball that can be handled by an infielder while first base is occupied with only one out." This addition is the precursor of the infield fly rule. It prevented an infielder from letting a fly drop and starting a double play. With first base only occupied, such a maneuver on a pop up would require the batter to fail to run.

1895

Rule 15, *The Bat*, changed the diameter of the bat from two and one-half inches to two and three-quarter inches in diameter in the thickest part.

Rule 16, *The Players and Their Positions*, Section 2 added, "The catcher and first baseman are permitted to wear a glove or mitt of any, size, shape, or weight. All other players are restricted to the use of a glove or mitt weighing not over ten ounces, and measuring in circumference around the palm of the hand not over fourteen inches."

Rule 45, Section 9 was expanded regarding a batter being out for hitting a fly ball that can be handled by an infielder. Rather than applying only with a runner on first, the situation required runners to be on first and second or first, section and third. The rule still applied only with one out. In 1901 the rule changed so that the rule was in effect with none or one out.

1897

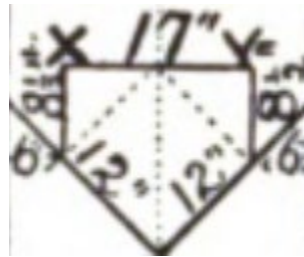
Rule XXXIX redefined a foul tip as "a ball batted by the batsman while standing within the lines of his position that goes foul sharp from the bat to the catcher's hands."

1899

Rule 46, Section 6 added to the rule of when a batsman becomes a base-runner: If, while he be a batsman, the catcher interferes with him, preventing him from striking the ball. [The scoring rules did not address catcher's interference nor note it as one of the outcomes for which a batter is not charged with an at-bat until 1907.]

1900

Rule 9, *The Bases*, changed the shape of home base from “a square the sides of which shall be 12 inches” to a five-sided figure 17 inches wide, which was described with lines and angles and points to correspond to an accompanying diagram. The upshot of the change transformed a square into the five-sided home plate. This diagram from page 172 of the 1900 *Spalding’s Official Baseball Guide* shows the new five-sided home base over the previous 12x12-inch square:



1901

Rule 32, *Delaying the Game*, Section 2 was changed to “The umpire shall call a ball on the pitcher each time he delays the game by failing to deliver the ball to the batsman when in position for a longer period than twenty seconds.”

Rule 44, Section 3 added that a strike is “A foul hit ball not caught on the fly, unless two strikes have already been called.”

The foul strike rule applied only in the National League. The 1902 *Spalding’s Official Baseball Guide*, on page 234, listed the rules defining a strike in the National League and American League. The only difference was that the National League included a foul ball not caught on the fly unless two strikes had already been called, and the American League did not. The American League added this provision in 1903.

The National League rule also deleted the section from 1900 [which was Rule 43, Section 3] of “A strike is . . . Any intentional effort to hit the ball to foul ground, also in the case of a ‘bunt hit,’ which sends the ball to foul ground.” In its place in 1901 [Rule 44, Section 4] was, “A strike is . . . A ‘bunt hit’ which sends the ball to foul ground.” With the rules now counting foul balls as strikes on the first two strikes, the only way a foul ball was counted as a strike after the first two strikes was on a bunt rather than intentional effort to hit the ball to foul ground. The rule went back and forth the next two years (see below).

Rule 46, Section 8, changed the situation in what became known as the infield fly rule changed “with only one out” to “unless two are out.”

1902

A Joint Playing Rules Congress – with representatives of the American League, National Association (minor leagues), and National League (appointed by A. G. Spalding) – met in Buffalo, New York, February 11-12, 1902. American League representatives: J. F. Kilfoyl, Cleveland; Connie Mack, Philadelphia; Frank Dwyer, Detroit. National Association representatives; T. H. Murnane, Boston; M. H. Sexton, Rock Island, Illinois; J. H. Farrell, Auburn, New York. A. G. Spalding Committee representatives: James H. Hart, Chicago; A. J. Reach, Philadelphia; Henry Chadwick, Brooklyn. Reach was snow-bound and did not arrive until the second day. Kilfoyl was appointed chairman, Hart secretary, Farrell assistant secretary. Each of the committees was allowed one vote.

The fullest and freest discussion revolved around the foul strike rule, which the National League and National Association had adopted in 1901. The American League continued to resist the rule. Rule 31 included a section listing the rules defining a strike in the National League and American League. The only

difference was that the National League included a foul ball not caught on the fly unless two strikes had already been called, and the American League did not.

Alterations to the 1902 rules included the following:

Rule 31, *Strikes*, added extensive language to Section 3, a strike being a foul hit ball not caught on the fly, unless two strikes have already been called. The additional material was a lengthy (and probably unnecessary) clause defining a foul ball as one “which falls or settles on foul ground inside or on the line of the territory described by lines drawn with an imaginary line drawn from home to second base and extending on each side to the limit of the playing field.”

Of greater substance in Rule 31 was the addition of Section 4, which once again provided a general description (rather than a bunt, specifically) of a strike with, “Any intention or effort to hit the ball to foul ground outside of the lines of the territory described by lines drawn from first and third bases at right angles with an imaginary line drawn from home to second base and extending to each side to the limit of the playing field.”

1903

Rule 1, Section 2 added, “The pitcher’s box shall be no more than 15 inches higher than the base lines, and home plate. The base lines, and home plate, shall be on a perfect level, and the slope from the pitcher’s box towards the base lines, and home plate, shall be gradual.”

Rule 44, Section 3, that a strike is a foul hit ball not caught on the fly, unless two strikes have already been called, is now part of the rule for both the National League and the American League. Addressing the issue of what happens after two strikes, the rule switched back from the general “intention or effort to hit the ball to foul ground” to, in Section 4, “A ‘bunt hit’ which sends the ball to foul ground.”

1904

Rule 1 added minimum distances from home base to a fence or stand on fair territory (235 feet) and from home base to the grandstand (90 feet).

Rule 9, Section 1 referred to the “pitcher’s plate” rather than the “pitcher’s box,” which had been in Rule 1, Section 2 in the 1903 rules (although the heading for Rule 8 in previous years had been *The Pitcher’s Plate*).

Rule 28, *Substitutes*, Section 3 changed to, “A base-runner shall not have another player whose name appears in the batting order of his team run for him except by the consent of the captain of the other team.” The rule had read, “The base-runner shall not have a substitute run for him except by consent of the captains of the contesting teams.”

Rule 47 added a definition of a bunt hit as, “a legally batted ball, not swung at, but met with the bat and tapped slowly within the infield by the batsman with the expectation of reaching first base before the ball can be fielded to that base. If the attempt to bunt result [*sic*] in a foul, a strike shall be called by the umpire.”

1906

Rule 4, *The Foul Lines*, added that the lines “shall be clearly visible from any part of the diamond, and no wood or other hard substance shall be used in the construction of such lines.”

1907

Rule 14, Section 4, *Discolored or Damaged Balls*, exempted the pitcher from being among the players being forbidden to intentionally discolor or damage the ball. The exemption lasted only one year.

Rule 22, Section 3 was added to *A Regulation Game*, calling for a game to be terminated “if the game be called by the umpire on account of darkness, rain, fire, panic, or for other cause which puts patrons or players in peril.” This rule and section was also referenced in Rule 24, *Drawn Games*, Rule 25, *Called Games*, and Rule 27, *No Game*.

1908

Rule book noted amendments to Rule 14, Sec. 4; Rule 85, Sec. 5 (a scoring rule).

Rule 14, Section 4 removed the exemption of the pitcher from being forbidden to intentionally discolor or damage the ball. The rule now read (with the deleted phrase from 1907 noted by a strikethrough), “In the event of a ball being intentionally discolored by rubbing it with the soil or otherwise by any player ~~except the pitcher~~, or otherwise damaged by any player, the umpire shall, upon appeal by the captain of the opposite side, forthwith demand the return of that ball and substitute for it another legal ball, as hereinbefore described, and impose a fine of \$5,00 on the offending player.”

1909

The one-batter minimum for a pitcher was established with two separate rules. Rule 39, *The Order of Batting*, Section 2, mandated, “When the umpire announces the pitcher prior to commencement of game, the player announced must pitch until the first batsman has either been put out or has reached first base.” Rule 33, *Delaying the Game*, Section 3, reads, “In event of the pitcher being taken from the game by either manager or captain, the player substituted for him shall continue to pitch until the batsman then at bat has been put out or has reached first base.”

1910

Rule 17, *Positions of the Players*, added “on fair ground” to where players of the team not at bat may be stationed on the field (other than the pitcher and catcher).

Rule 61, Section 1 defined the Umpire-in-Chief as being the home-plate umpire and the one who will have full charge of the game. The rule said, “With exception of the base decisions to be made by the Field Umpire, the Umpire-in-Chief shall render all the decisions that ordinarily would devolve upon a single umpire.”

Rule 67, *Penalties for Violations of the Rules*, Section 3 granted umpires the authority to clear the bench: “In cases where substitute players show their disapproval of decisions by yelling from the bench, the umpire shall first give warning. If the yelling continues he shall fine each offender \$10.00, and if the disturbance is still persisted in he shall clear the bench of all substitute players; the captain of the team, however, to have the privilege of sending to the club house for such substitutes as are actually needed to replace players in the game.

1914

Rule 54, *Entitled to Bases*, Section 6 added a thrown ball to the penalty for a fielder stopping a ball with his cap, glove, or any part of his uniform while detached to its proper place. Previously the rule addressed only a batted ball stopped in this manner. The penalty for improperly stopping or catching a batted ball remained that the batter was entitled to three bases. For a violation on a thrown ball, the penalty is two bases.

Rule 56, *When Base-Runners Are Out*, Section 17 added, “If a coacher at third base touch or hold a base-runner at third base or a base-runner who is rounding third base for home plate the umpire shall declare such base-runner out.

Rule 58, *Coaching Rules* added, “A coacher may address words of assistance and direction to the base-runners or to the batsman.” Previously, coaches were restricted to addressing runners only.

1915

No rules changes although the 1915 *Spalding's Official Baseball Guide* had a section on "Some Knotty Problems" on page 331, which included this question and answer regarding courtesy runners:

Q: Is it possible for a player to return to the game after another player has run for him?

A: Yes, if it has been agreed up by both captains. If the opposing captain will not permit a player to return to the game after a player has run for him, it is impossible for the player again to resume his place on the field.

Courtesy runners were allowed until they were prohibited, even with the opposing team's consent, in the 1950 overhaul of the rules.

1920

Beginning in 1920 the rules in the *Spalding's Official Base Ball Guide* contain explanatory notes in the margins and/or in smaller type by the editor, John B. Foster. The explanatory notes continued in the annual guides, including those by other publishers, through 1949.

Rule 14, *The Ball*, Section 4, *Discolored or Damaged Balls*, was rewritten and expanded to prohibit doctored balls: In event of the ball being intentionally discolored by any player, either by rubbing it with the soil, or by applying rosin, paraffin, licorice, or any other foreign substance to it, or otherwise intentionally damaging or roughening the same with sand-paper or emery-paper, or other substance, the umpire shall forthwith demand the return of that ball, and substitute for it another legal ball, and the offending player shall be disbarred from further participation in the game. If, however, the umpire cannot detect the violator of this rule, and the ball is delivered to the bat by the pitcher, then the latter shall be at once removed from the game, and as an additional penalty shall be automatically suspended for a period of ten days.

The prohibition of doctored balls was also addressed with the addition of Section 2 to Rule 30, *The Pitching Rules: Delivery of the Ball to the Bat*, with, "At no time during the progress of the game shall the pitcher be allowed to (1) apply a foreign substance of any kind to the ball; (2) expectorate either on the ball or his glove; (3) rub the ball on his glove, person or clothing; (4) deface the ball in any manner; or to deliver what is called the 'shine' ball, 'spit' ball, 'mud' ball or 'emery' ball. For violation of any part of this rule the umpire shall at once order the pitcher from the game, and in addition he shall be automatically suspended for a period of ten days, on notice from the President of the League."

Note added at the end of the section: "Chicago, February 9, 1920 – In adopting the foregoing rule against 'freak' deliveries, it is understood and agreed that all bona-fide spit-ball pitchers shall be certified to the respective Presidents of the National and American Leagues at least ten days prior to April 14, 1920, and that the pitchers so certified shall be exempt from the operation of the rule, as far as it relates to the spit-ball only, during the playing season of 1920. – John A. Heydler, Barney Dreyfuss, William L. Veeck, Clark Griffith, Connie Mack, D. C. P. Ball, Joint Rules Committee). [See 1921 for more details and the names of the exempted pitchers.]

Rule 14, *The Ball*, Section 5, *Home Club to Provide Balls*, changed that the seal of the box with the ball in it shall not be broken by the umpire from "except in the presence of the captains of the contesting teams after 'Play' has been called" to "except prior to game time, and for the purpose of inspecting the ball and removing the gloss therefrom."

Rule 17, *Positions of the Players*, added, "nor shall the catcher leave his natural position immediately and directly back of the plate for the purpose of aiding the pitcher to intentionally give a base on balls to a batsman, as provided by Section 9 of Rule 54."

Related to this, Rule 54, *Entitled to Bases*, Section 9, *The Intentional Pass*, was added to address an intentional walk and specified a penalty to the catcher leaving his natural position "immediately and directly back of the plate for the purpose of aiding the pitcher to intentionally give a base on balls to the batsman."

The penalty specified, "If the catcher shall move out of position prior to the time of the ball leaving the pitcher's hand, all runners on bases shall be entitled to advance one base."

An explanatory note for the rule added, "This is the exact rule which attempts to put an end to the intentional pass. Note distinctly that if the catcher moves out of position prior to the time that the ball leaves the pitcher's hands, all runners on base are entitled to advance one base each. The intent of this rule is to make quite a radical change in Base Ball strategy. That it will lead up to argument is possible, but it should be given a fair test in order that it may be ascertained whether the intentional base on balls can correctly be ruled against. Some managers regard the intentional base on balls as excellent strategy."

Rule 22, *A Regulation Game*, Section 2 added to the provision that a game ends if the side last at bat in the ninth inning scores the winning run before the third man is out. The added sentence: Provided, that if a batsman, in the last half of the final inning of any game, hit a home run over the fence or into a stand, all runners on the bases at the time, as well as the batsman, shall be entitled to score, and in such event all bases must be touched in order, and the final score of the game shall be the total number of runs made.

Prior to 1920 the game ended immediately in the bottom half of the ninth or extra inning when the winning run scored, even on a home run hit over the fence. The addition is also addressed in the scoring rules (Rule 85, Section 3-a) to ensure that the batter is credited with a home run in such instances.

Rule 24, *Drawn Games*, has an additional passage and explanatory note. The rule specified that a drawn game was declared with the score equal on the last even inning after five or more equal innings have been played although if the side that went second to bat is at bat when the game is terminated, and has scored the same number of runs as the other side, the game is drawn without regard to the score of the last equal inning. An additional sentence was added in 1920: Provided, that if the side last at bat shall, before the completion of its fifth inning, equal the score made by the opposing side in five complete innings, then the game shall be declared as legally drawn, and the individual and team averages shall be incorporated in the Official Playing Rules.

In accordance with Rule 25 regarding called games, a game of fewer than five full innings was a regulation game rather than a called game if the team second at bat were ahead at the end of the first half of the fifth or went ahead in the bottom half of the fifth inning. (This was also addressed with the addition of a clause in Rule 27, *No Game*.) A game tied at the end of the first half of the fifth was not a regulation game. However, the addition to Rule 24 now meant that a regulation game was one of at least five innings unless the team second at bat had scored more runs after four-and-a-half innings or scored one or more runs in the second half of the fifth inning to either tie the game or take the lead. The rules appear inconsistent since a game tied after four-and-a-half innings was a "No Game," but a game in which the team second at bat tied the game in the last of the fifth inning was a regulation game.

A note following Rule 24 explains the rationale: The change which as been made in Rule 24 establishes the fact that a game is legal when the score is tied in the last half of the fifth inning. Furthermore, the records which are made by the players are to be incorporated into the official records. This definition of a legal game in the last half of the fifth inning is sane and sensible. It bears out the contention which was made in 1919, when the question of the legality of a five-inning game was brought up, that equal innings did not mean three hands out on each side but an equal score. In other words, when the score was tied in the last half of the fifth inning, the team second at bat had been given an equal chance with the team which was first at bat. If the side second at bat had scored two runs in the last half of the fifth inning, it would have won. Most assuredly, if it could win in the last half of the fifth inning, it could tie in the last half of the same inning; and if a victory were legal, there seemed to be no reason why a tie should not be legal also, since the team second at bat had removed all possibility of being defeated by scoring an equal number of runs with the team first at bat.

Rule 28, *Substitutes*, Section 4. Rules had called for the captain to each team to notify the umpire of substitutes, with the umpire to announce the change(s) to the spectators. A fine (\$25 in 1920, up from \$5 the previous year) was assessed against the captain for failure to do so. In 1920, the following was added to the

rule: Provided, however, that if, through oversight, such announcement is not made, the substitute player will be in the game.

Rule 34, *Balking*, added several sections. Some had to do with the way a balk could occur. The following affected the outcomes of a balk:

Section 12. In case a “balk” is called, the ball shall be considered “dead” when announcement is made, and no play can be made until the runner or runners reach the base or bases to which they are entitled.

Section 13. If, with one or more runners on bases, the pitcher, in the act of delivering the ball to the batsman or in throwing to first base, drop the ball, either intentionally or accidentally, the umpire shall call it a “balk” and advance runner or runners. No penalty shall be imposed if, with no one on bases, the pitcher drop the ball while delivering it to the batsman.

Section 14. If, with no one on bases, the pitcher deliver the ball while off the rubber, the umpire shall call a “ball” whether it goes over the plate fair or not. If, however, the batsman strikes at such illegally delivered ball it counts either for a strike or whatever play may follow.

Rule 44, *A Fair Hit*; Rule 45, *A Foul Hit*; and Rule 48, *Balls Batted Outside the Ground*, Section 1, added details on whether a ball was fair or foul.

Rule 45 added, “A foul fly must be judged according to the relative position of the ball and the foul line, and not as to whether the fielder is on foul or fair ground at the time he touches the ball.”

Rule 48, Section 1, on whether a batted ball outside the ground is fair or foul, changed from “according to where it disappears from the umpire’s view” to “according to where it passes over the boundary line of the actual playing field.”

A note from the editor of the *Spalding’s Official Base Ball Guide* read, “It is well that a change was made in the home run boundary rule. In the future a batted ball becomes a home run according to where it passes over the boundary line of the actual playing field. The editor of the *GUIDE* has favored the change in the past and believes it will prove more satisfactory. The decisions of a ball game should be made on the playing field and not on what takes place outside of it. Under the old rule in regard to a home run the umpire was compelled to watch the ball until it disappeared completely from his sight. The ball might clear the boundary line of the playing rule safely, but when it disappeared from the field proper it would be foul because it had curved. The umpire had no other alternative than to call it foul, in spite of the fact that the batter and a great many of the spectators were certain that a home run had been made. In the future the batter will get his home run when the ball passes over the fence that separates the outfield from the stands, and that is as it should be.”

[The rule on a batted ball being judged by where it passes the boundary line was changed back and forth in the 1920s and also, at times, varied by leagues. In 1931, Rule 1, Section 1 became common within the leagues as the American League joined the National League, which had used the boundary rule rather than where it disappeared from the umpire’s view since 1929.]

Rule 51, *When Batsman Is Out*, Section 8, added “fair” to fly ball for the infield fly rule and also added “any attempt to bunt which results in a fair fly ball shall not be regarded as an infield fly.”

Rule 52, *Base Running Rules*, made the existing rule Section 1 and added the following sections:

Section 2. A base-runner having acquired legal title to a base cannot run bases in reverse order for the purpose either of confusing the fielders or making a travesty of the game. A runner violating this rule is out if touched with the ball, or the ball held on the base said runner was entitled to hold.

Section 3. In case a runner is being run down between bases, and the following runner occupies the same base the first runner has left, the second man cannot be put out while holding said base. If the first runner, however, returns safely to the base he left, and both runners are then occupying the same base, the second runner is the man out, if touched with the ball.

Section 4. The failure of a preceding runner to touch a base (and who is declared out therefor) shall not affect the status of a succeeding runner who touches each base in proper order.

Rule 56, *When Base-Runners Are Out*, added language to several sections:

Section 9 on when a runner is tagged out: The ball must be firmly held by the fielder after touching the runner. The ball cannot be juggled, even though the fielder may retain possession of the ball and prevent same from dropping to the ground.

Section 10: A base-runner shall have the right to advance the moment such fly ball touches the hands of a fielder.

Section 17: The base-runner is out . . . If, in the judgment of the umpire, the coacher at third base by touching or holding the runner physically assists him in returning to or leaving the third base. The runner, however, should not be declared out if no play is being made.

Section 21: In event a base-runner is trying to score from third base on a pitched ball or the ‘squeeze’ play, a ‘balk’ and also an ‘interference’ should be called if the catcher runs out in front of the plate to catch the ball; and the runner shall be allowed to score and the batsman be entitled to first base. The same penalties must be imposed in case the catcher pushes the batsman out of the way, or tips his bat.

Section 22, *Definition of a “Forced Play”*: A force out can be made only when a base-runner legally loses the right to the base he occupied by reason of the batsman becoming a base-runner, and he is thereby obliged to advance.

A lengthy note from the editor, in which he explained many of the sections, began with, “There is more in Rule 56 than in all the other rules of the base ball decalogue.”

By concurrent action of the National and American Leagues taken at their respective annual meetings held at New York in December 1920, it was agreed that all bona fide spitball pitchers then remaining in the National and American Leagues be exempt from the operation of the rule against the use of the spitball during the balance of their major league careers. The pitchers so exempted were: National League – William Doak, Phil Douglas, Dana Fillingim, Ray Fisher, Marvin Goodwin, Burleigh Grimes, Clarence Mitchell, and Richard Rudolph. American League – A. W. Ayers, Ray Caldwell, Stanley Coveleski [*sic*], Urban Faber, H. B. Leonard, Jack Quinn, Allan Russell, Urban Shocker, and Allan Sothoron.

1926

Rule 1 changed the minimum distance needed for a home run from 235 feet to 250 feet.

1931

Rule 1 changed the minimum distance to 60 feet from home base to the grandstand.

With Rule 41, Section 3, the American League joined the National League in again determining fair or foul on where it last leaves the playing field instead of disappearing from umpire’s view. The boundary rule had first entered the rule book in 1920 but varied by year and by league in the ensuing decade.

With Rule 41, Section 3 the National League joined the American League in eliminating the bounce home run with, “A fair hit ball that bounds into a stand or over a fence shall be a two-base hit.”

Rule 45, Base-Running Rules: Legal Order of Bases, Section 4 added sentences (*in italics*) to what had been Rule 52, Section 4 in 1930: The failure of a preceding runner to touch a base (and who is declared out therefor) shall not affect the status of a succeeding runner who touches each base in proper order; *except that, after two are out, a succeeding runner cannot score a run when a preceding runner is declared out for failing to touch a base . . . This exception also applies to a batsman who hits the ball out of the playing field for an apparent home run.*

1939

Rule 21 limited a first baseman’s glove to no more than 12 inches long from top to bottom and not more than 8 inches wide across the palm, with thumb and palm connected by leather lacing of not more than 4 inches

from thumb to palm. The rule had allowed the first baseman, as well as the catcher, to wear a glove or mitt of any size, shape, or weight. The rules continued to allow a catcher to wear a glove or mitt of any size, shape, or weight and continued to restrict other players to a glove not over 10 ounces and not over 14 inches around the palm (with the rule remaining that the pitcher's glove be uniform in color).

Rule 49, Section 2 added "If, before two are out, while first and second, or first second and third bases are occupied, an outfielder, in the judgment of the umpire, intentionally drops a fly ball or line drive, he shall immediately rule the ball has been caught. NOTE – Base-runners are obliged to 'tag up' after the out has been declared before they can advance."

1940

The 1940 rule book contained a detailed list of rules changes in the beginning and italicized the changes. The preface noted, "Numerous alterations were made in the playing rules effective for the 1940 season. Many of the changes simplified the rules, others were made for uniformity, and some are new provisions made necessary because of changed conditions."

Rule 1 – Changed the shortest distance from a fence or stand on fair territory to home base from 235 feet to 250 feet.

Rule 15 – To the note that a bat loaded with a metal filling is not being legal, a sentence was added that the bat must be one piece entirely of hardwood.

Rule 22, Section 1 – The trainer was added to the list of people who may be on the players' bench.

Rule 23, Section 7 added a sentence to prohibit a team from playing more than two championship games in one day. Section 8 stipulates that no inning of a night game may be started after 11:50 p.m., standard time.

Rule 24 added that the score of a forfeited game "shall be recorded as 9-0" in favor of the club not at fault.

Rule 46, Section 5, regarding the batsman becoming a base runner if the catcher interferes with him, added "unless he makes a safe hit."

Rule 49, Section 2(a) the rule added that the situation included a runner on first base included a runner on first base in addition to first and second or first, second and third. It also changed "an outfielder" to "any player."

1947

Rule 49, Section 2(a), regarding intentionally dropping a fly ball, had the note changed to "In such cases base-runners are not obliged to 'tag up' and may advance at their own risk."

1949

Rule 49, Section 2, regarding intentionally dropped fly balls, changed the note to "In such cases base-runners are not obligated to 'tag up' and may advance at their own risk."