

Condensed Rules of Base Ball  
Adapted from Reach's 1883 American Association Base Ball Rulebook

General Rules

The game was played without gloves and the catcher did not wear protective gear.

The game was generally played at a faster pace than the modern game. (*There were fewer delays for conferences, warm-ups, pitching changes and signals, and players took and left the field quickly.*)

Ground rules were permitted, provided they were announced at the outset of the game.

The Umpire:

There was only one umpire. He stood anywhere he wished, and was allowed to ask for the opinion of the players if he could not tell how a play went. This represented a recent change, as previously, the umpire was allowed to ask the opinion of the spectators. It was understood that gentlemen and ladies would answer honestly.

Fines could be levied against players and fans by the umpire for improper language or behavior. Arguing with the umpire carried a \$10 fine.

Hurling and Striking:

The ball was pitched with the hurler's arm passing at or below the level of the shoulder, while remaining within the 6x4 foot square pitcher's box.

Strikers (*batters*) were expected to designate which zone they wanted their pitches in: high (shoulders to waist) or low (waist to knees). If they failed to specify a zone, any pitch delivered between the shoulders and the knees could be called fair.

The object was to make the batsman swing for a strike, or hit the ball so that he may be put out running bases.

There were no called strikes or balls (*An umpire may give a warning to the batsman, then begin calling strikes if he felt that the batsman was deliberately failing to swing at well pitched balls so as to wear out the pitcher.*)

After three strikes, the batsman ran to first base, where the fielders attempted to throw him out.

Seven balls resulted in awarding the batsman a "walk" to first base.

Foul balls were not considered strikes.

Baserunning:

Home runs could be made by simply hitting the ball where it could not be returned before the striker made his four bases. There was not always a designated fence or boundary.

Base tenders (basemen) must remain within two paces of their base. A runner's lead is limited to two paces.

Stealing was not generally done until after the pitcher released the ball. Sliding was considered undignified.

A hit batsman was not awarded first base. (*But deliberately hitting him might bring about a fine.*)

After the first inning, the first batsman up was not the next player in order, but rather the player following the last man put out in the previous inning.

A Batsman is out:

If a fair or foul ball is caught before it hits the ground, provided it is not caught in a hat or cap.

If a foul ball is caught after one bounce.

If after three strikes, the ball is caught before touching the ground or after one bounce, or he hinders the catcher from making a catch.

He is thrown out at first, either after a fair hit or after three strikes (when he must run to first).

Fielding:

Whether the ball was fair or foul depended on where it struck the ground first, not where it ends up. (A ball landing within bounds, then bouncing or rolling out of bounds before it passed first or third base was still a fair ball).

Foul balls caught after only one bounce were counted as outs.

The short scout (*shortstop*) could play either side of second base.

Position players could be moved as needed, but the pitcher could only be taken out after the third inning or if injured.

General Conduct of Players and Spectators:

Gentlemanly conduct was expected by players and spectators. Spectators could be seated in the outfield areas, provided they did not interfere with play.

Nicknames were common for players and were often encouraged. Players might jeer opponents, but would still cheer a particularly good play. Following a game, opposing teams would often congratulate each other (offering rounds of huzzahs) for a well played contest, and pass by each other in a line shaking hands. The "game ball" was then awarded to the winning team.