

Baseball Rules Changes

Compiled by Stew Thornley from annual rule books, annual guides (Reach, Spalding's, *The Sporting News*), a lot of other helpful people (see below), and numerous sources, including:

- 1990 Macmillan Baseball Encyclopedia: Appendix C—Major Changes in Playing Rules and Scoring Rules
- Baseball Almanac, <https://www.baseball-almanac.com/rulechng.shtml>
- Bevis, Charlie, “The Evolution of World Series Scheduling,” *Baseball Research Journal*, Society for American Baseball Research, 2002, pp. 21-28
- Cliff Blau League Operating Rules, <http://cliff-blau.great-site.net/rules.htm>
- Gietschier, Steven P., *Baseball: The Turbulent Midcentury Years*, Omaha: University of Nebraska Press, 2023
- Hershberger, Richard, “How Bases on Balls were Scored: 1864–1888,” *Baseball Research Journal*, Society for American Baseball Research, Spring 2018, pp. 99-106, <https://sabr.org/journal/article/how-bases-on-balls-were-scored-1864-1888>
- Heitz, Tom, “Rules and Scoring,” *Total Baseball*, John Thorn and Pete Palmer, editors, Warner Books, 1989, pp. 2,217-2,261
- Lanigan, Ernest J., *The Baseball Cyclopedia*, New York: The Baseball Magazine Company, 1922
- Marazzi, Rich, *The Rules and Lore of Baseball*, New York: Stein and Day Publishers, 1980
- Metzler, Peter E., *So You Think You Know Baseball? A Fan's Guide to the Official Rules*, New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2013
- Miklich, Eric, *A Compilation of the Rules of Baseball 1845-1900*, 2005, <https://19cbaseball.com>
- Morris, Peter, *A Game of Inches: The Stories Behind the Innovations that Shaped Baseball, Vol. 1, The Game on the Field*, Chicago: Ivan R. Dee Publishers, 2006
- Morris, Peter, *A Game of Inches: The Stories Behind the Innovations that Shaped Baseball, Vol. 2, The Game Behind the Scenes*, Chicago: Ivan R. Dee Publishers, 2006
- Nemeč, David, *The Great Encyclopedia of 19th Century Major League Baseball*, New York: Donald I. Fine Books, 1997
- Nemeč, David, *The Rules of Baseball*, New York: Lyons & Burford, Publishers, 1994
- Olbermann, Keith, “Why Is the Shortstop ‘6’?” *Baseball Research Journal*, Society for American Baseball Research, Fall 2017, pp. 5-9, 2005, pp. 16-18, <https://sabr.org/journal/article/why-is-the-shortstop-6>
- Schwartz, John, “The Sacrifice Fly,” *Baseball Research Journal*, Society for American Baseball Research, 1981, pp. 150-158, <https://sabr.org/journal/article/the-sacrifice-fly>
- Tholkes, Robert and Stew Thornley, “From Recorder to Judge: The Evolution of the Scorer in the Nineteenth Century,” *Baseball Research Journal*, Society for American Baseball Research, Fall 2017, pp. 5-9, <https://sabr.org/journal/article/from-recorder-to-judge-the-evolution-of-the-scorer-in-the-nineteenth-century>
- Wayman, Joseph M., “The Game's Rules,” *Grandstand Baseball Annual*, 2003, pp. 134-136
- Williams, Frank J., “All the Record Books Are Wrong,” *The National Pastime*, Society for American Baseball Research, 1982, pp. 50-62 (pitching decisions during the Deadball Era)

Click on an entry in the table of contents to go to that entry

Table of Contents

Equipment and Field.....	6
Base Size	6
Bats	6
Pine Tar.....	6
Catcher’s Box.....	8
Field Dimensions	8
Minimum Distances for a Home Run	8
Minimum Distances to Fences and Grandstands.....	8
Gloves	8
Gloves on Field	9
Helmets-Ear Flaps Protective Equipment.....	9
Home Plate	10
Mound Height and Slope.....	10
Pitching Distance	10
Runner’s Lane.....	11
Shoes/Spikes.....	11
Uniforms.....	11
Called, Suspended, Protested, Tie Game/Erased Performances.....	11
Protested Games.....	13
Reverting to Last Full Inning	13
Tied-Suspended Games.....	14
Rules on Suspended Games	14
Rules on Tie Games	15
Major Changes.....	16
Designated Hitter	16
Pace of Play/Pitch Clock	16
Mound Visits.....	17
Pitch Clock	17
Past Rules on Pitcher Time Limits.....	18
Disengagements	19
Pandemic Changes	19
Postseason Formats	19
Replay Challenges.....	20
Roster Sizes.....	20
Roster limits for pitchers	20

Spitball Outlawed	21
Shift Restrictions.....	21
Umpires	21
Umpire Reversing Call	21
Playing Rules.....	22
Abandoning Bases after Strikeout.....	22
Ambidextrous Pitchers	23
Appeals	23
Inadvertent Appeal.....	23
Impact of an Out from an Appeal.....	23
Double Merkle Not Allowed	24
Balk	24
Baserunning.....	25
Batter Calling for Height of Pitch.....	25
Batting First – Visiting or Home Team.....	25
Bottom of the Ninth/Extra Inning Played Out Only if Necessary	26
Collisions/Obstruction	26
Detached Equipment.....	26
Double/Triple Plays	26
Dropped Third Strike Exception	26
Fair or Foul Balls	27
Fake to Third, Throw to First Outlawed	27
Fielders in Fair Territory	27
Flying Starts Outlawed	27
Forfeit Score	27
Foul Ball Caught on Bound	27
Foul Balls Counting as Strikes	28
Foul Tip	28
Hit by Pitch	29
Home Runs	29
All Runs Counting on Game-Ending Home Run.....	29
Batted Balls Judged Fair or Foul According to Where They Leave the Playing Field.....	29
Bounce Home Runs Eliminated	29
Infield Fly Rule	30
Intentional Walk	30
Intentionally Dropped a Fly Ball	31

Intentionally Pitching at a Batter.....	31
Interference.....	31
Distraction by Fielder	32
Intentional interference by runner	32
Interference by Catcher.....	32
Interference by Coach	32
Minimum Number of Batters Faced by a Pitcher.....	32
Order of Batting.....	33
Overhand Pitching.....	33
Runner Pushed off Base	33
Revoking Manager Decision after Reversed Call.....	33
Strike Zone.....	33
Strikeouts.....	34
Four Strikes Needed for Strikeout.....	34
Strikeout Warning on Third Strike.....	34
Substitutions.....	34
Substitutes/Courtesy Runners Allowed	34
Announcement of Substitutes.....	36
Tagging Up after Fly Out.....	36
Transfer Rule Interpretation of 2014	36
Walks – Number of Balls Needed.....	36
Scoring Rules.....	36
Appeal of Official Scorer’s Call	37
Assists	37
Benefit of the Doubt.....	37
Defensive Indifference	38
Double Plays – Triple Plays.....	38
Earned Runs.....	38
Earned Runs Charged to Team Rather than Pitcher.....	38
Earned Run Average	39
Errors	40
Ball Need Not Touch Fielder.....	40
Bases on Balls Charged as Errors.....	40
Completing Double Play	40
Hits.....	40
Hit for Batted Ball Striking Runner	40

Hit Instead of Fielder’s Choice on a Feint.....	40
Hits Credited for Walks.....	41
Home Run to End Game	41
Informing Umpire if Teams Switch Sides before Three Outs	41
Interference/Obstruction.....	41
Intervening Errors/Misplays	41
Mental Mistakes.....	42
Numbering Convention for Field Positions	42
Ordinary Effort.....	42
Oversliding.....	43
Runs Batted In (RBIs)	43
Sacrifice	43
Sacrifice Fly.....	44
Sacrifice Fly for Any Advancement.....	44
Sacrifice Fly Abandoned and Eventually Reinstated	44
Saves.....	45
Shift Violation	46
Shutouts	46
Stolen Bases/Caught Stealing.....	47
Stolen Bases for Additional Advancement on Hits or Outs.....	47
Caught Stealing.....	48
Strikeout Charged to Outgoing or Substitute Batter?	48
Total Bases Run	48
Tripleheaders Outlawed.....	49
Team Error: Early Attempt at the Concept with Unaccepted Chances.....	49
Value of Game-Ending Hit	49
Walk Charged to Outgoing or to Substitute Pitcher?.....	49
Walks	49
Walks Charged as At Bats	49
Walks Counting as Hits	50
Wild Pitches/Passed Balls.....	50
Wild Pitches/Passed Balls Instead of Errors When Batter Reaches Base after a Strikeout	50
Fielder’s Choice Rather than Wild Pitch/Passed Ball on a Strikeout When Batter Still Needs to be Put Out.....	51
Winning and Losing Pitchers	52
Winning and Losing Pitchers in a Forfeit.....	52
Statistics	52

Minimum Standards	52
Batters	52
Fielders	53
Pitchers	53
Exceptions/Addition of Hitless At-Bats	53
Other	53
Format Changes	54
Changes Noted in Rule Books	55
Pending Rules	56

Equipment and Field

Base Size

The size of the bases was increased from 15 to 18 square inches and was noted in the 2023 rule book with Rule 2.03 and Appendix 2.

Bats

1876 – Rule 5, Section 5. 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.

1885 – 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.

1893 – 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.

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.

1954 – Experimental rule added as an option to one piece of solid wood: (2) formed from a block of wood consisting of two or more pieces of wood bonded together with an adhesive in such a way that the grain direction of all pieces is essentially parallel to the length of the bat. Any such laminated bat shall contain only wood or adhesive, except for a clear finish.

1975 – Rule 1.10(c) added (3) to allow cupped bats.

2010 – Rule 1.10(a) was revised to reduce maximum diameter of the thickest part of the bat to 2.61 inches (had been 2¾ inches).

Pine Tar

The issue of pine tar came up several times in 1975. On July 6 in a San Francisco at Los Angeles game, Dave Lopes bunted for a hit but was called out by John Kibler for using an illegal bat because it had pine tar more than 18 inches up the bat in violation of 1.10(b). Dodgers manager Walter Alston lodged a protest because Kibler enforced the rule after, not before, Lopes batted. “If the bat was illegal, the umpire should not have allowed him to use it before the play.” Because the Dodgers won the game, the protest was never filed.

In a New York at Minnesota game July 19, 1975 (the full game, which followed the completion of a game suspended in New York the previous weekend) in the top of the first, Thurman Munson singled home

Roy White, but the hit was nullified and White returned to second base because Munson was called out for having pine tar too far up the bat.

In a Kansas City at California game September 7, 1975, John Mayberry of the Royals homered in the fourth inning. The Angels claimed Mayberry's bat had pine tar beyond the limit. When the umpires let the call stand, the Angels lodged a protest. American League president Lee MacPhail rejected the protest a few days later, citing "the spirit of the rule" rather than a technicality.

Rule 1.10(b) was amended in the 1976 rules to make sure pine tar was specified as a material, perhaps in response to the 1975 games when the issue came up. The definitions in Rule 2.00 for an illegally batted ball remained as before with one of the actions being a ball hit with a bat that does not conform to Rule 1.10. Rule 1.10(b) had read, "The bat handle, for not more than 18 inches from the end, may be covered or treated with any material to improve the grip. No such material shall improve the reaction or distance factor of the bat."

The 1976 rule had a parenthetical addition of "including pine tar" after the word "material" in the first sentence and added this sentence: "Any such material, including pine tar, which extends past the 18-inch limitation, in the umpire's judgment, shall cause the bat to be removed from the game."

The combination of 6.06(a) [A batter is out for illegal action when he hits an illegally batted ball], the definition in 2.00, and 1.10(b) called for a batter to be out when having a bat covered or treated with a material, including pine tar, more than 18 inches from the end.

The rules remained through 1983 and were applied when George Brett of Kansas City had a two-run homer nullified in New York July 24, 1984. Brett's home run had put the Royals ahead 5-4 with two out in the top of the ninth, but Brett being called out for hitting an illegally batted ball ended the game with New York winning 4-3. Kansas City protested the decision, which was upheld (Lee MacPhail again citing the spirit of the rules), and the game resumed a few weeks later from the point of protest and Kansas City leading 5-4, which was the final score when the game was resumed and finished.

The 1984 rules were changed so that a batter would not be out for having too much pine tar on the bat. [This is different from the penalty for using an altered or tampered bat in 6.06(d).] The rule changes:

- 1.10(c) [previously 1.10(d)] no longer specified pine tar and instead said "substance." More significantly, this note was added: If the umpire discovers that the bat does not conform to (c) above until a time during or after which the bat has been used in play, it shall not be grounds for declaring the batter out, or ejected from the game."
- The definitions in 2.00 no longer had an entry for Illegally Batted Ball.
- Rule 6.06 no longer listed an illegally batted ball as a reason for the batter to be out for illegal action.

Rule 6.06(d) was added in 1975 for the batter to be out for illegal action (as well as ejected and suspended) if "He hits a fair ball with a filled, doctored or flat surfaced bat in which even he shall be immediately ejected from the game and suspended by his League President for three days."

In 1976 6.06(d) was expanded to being out for illegal action when – "He uses or attempts to use a bat that, in the umpire's judgement, has been altered or tampered with in such a way to improve the distance factor or cause an unusual reactions on the baseball. This includes bats that are filled, flat-surfaced, nailed, hollowed, grooved or covered with a substance such as paraffin [*sic*], wax, etc. This includes bats that are filled, flat-surfaced, nailed, hollowed, grooved or covered with a substance such as paraffin [*sic*], wax, etc. (Paraffin was eventually spelled correctly in ensuing rule books.)

"No advancement on the bases will be allowed and any out or outs made during the play shall stand.

"In addition to being called out, the player shall be ejected from the game and may be subject to addition to being called out, the player shall be ejected from the game and may be subject to additional penalties as determined by his League President."

[Rule 6.06(d) dealt with bats, such as corked bats, that had been doctored. The issue of being out for illegal action for hitting an illegally batted ball – which could be one hit with a nonconforming bat – was already in the book and had some modifications made after enforcement of the rule because a bat had too much pine tar in 1975 and 1983.]

Catcher's Box

The dimensions were changed in 1955. Previously, it had been triangular. 1.10

1954 Rule 1.00 – The Catcher's Lines. The back of the Catcher's box is 8' back of Home Base and 8' each side of Home Base Line.

1955 Rule 1.07 – The catcher's box is laid out as shown in diagram (which shows it eight feet deep and 43 inches wide in a rectangular shape).

Field Dimensions

Minimum Distances for a Home Run

In 1889, Rule 40 addressed "Balls Batted Outside the Grounds" and mandated that fair batted balls hit over the fence had to be at a point at least 210 feet from home base to be a home run and that a distinctive line had to be marked on the fence at this point.

In 1892 the distance was changed to 235 feet. Fair batted balls clearing the fence at distances under these limits were doubles.

In 1926 the minimum distance for a home run was changed from 235 to 250 feet.

The minimum distance of 250 feet for a home run – with a ball passing out of the playing field at a point less than 250 feet being worth two bases only – remains in the rule book [Rule 5.05(a)(5) in 2024] even though as far back as 1920, the editor of the *Spalding's Official Base Ball Guide* added this note to the rule: If there were a ground rule that a home run could be batted into a stand or over a fence at a distance less than 235 feet [the minimum distance in 1920) from the home plate it would be observed, but such "home runs" are about like a squib as compared with a cannon cracker.

Minimum Distances to Fences and Grandstands

In 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).

In 1931 Rule 1 changed the minimum distance to 60 feet from home base to the grandstand.

In 1940 Rule 1 changed the minimum distance from a fence or stand in fair territory to the home base to 250 feet from 235 feet.

In 1959 a note was added to 1.04: (a) Any Playing Field constructed by a professional club after June 1, 1958, shall provide a minimum distance of 325 feet from home base to the nearest fence, stand or other obstruction on the right and left field foul lines, and a minimum distance of 400 feet to the center field fence. (b) No existing playing fields shall be remodeled after June 1, 1958 in such manner to reduce the distance from home base to the foul poles and to the center field fence below the minimum specified in paragraph (a) above.

The Los Angeles Coliseum, which was the home field of the Los Angeles Dodgers starting in 1958, prompted this rule addition because the left-field fence was barely 250 feet from home plate. Numerous exemptions have been granted to these requirements.

Gloves

In 1895 Rule 16, Section 2 noted that no restrictions applied for the catcher or first baseman for glove/mitt size, shape, or weight but that other players were restricted to a glove or mitt that was not over 10 ounces nor more than 14 inches in circumference around the palm of the hand.

Rule 21 in 1939 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).

In 1965 1.12 added specifics to the existing rule that the catcher may wear a leather glove or mitt of any size, shape or weight. The 1965 rule set limits of no more than 38 inches in circumference nor more than 15½ inches from top to bottom.

Rule 1.14 in 1973 included copious details on gloves other than those worn by catchers and first basemen. Rule 1.15(a) in 1973: The pitcher's glove shall be uniform in color, including all stitching, lacing and webbing. The pitcher's glove may not be white or gray.

The 1980 rule book added 1.17 addressed "undue commercialization" of equipment: "Designations by the manufacturer on any such equipment must be in good taste as to the manufacturer's logo or the brand name of the item." A note added that manufacturers who plan innovative changes should contact the rules committee prior to production.

Rules 3.05 and 3.06 in 2013 increased the length of a first baseman's glove or mitt to a maximum of 13 inches and the measurement of a fielder's glove to a maximum of 13 inches from top to bottom.

Gloves on Field

New in 1954 rules – Rule 3.16. Members of the offensive team shall carry all gloves and other equipment off the field and to the dugout while their team is at bat. No equipment shall be left lying on the field, either in fair or foul territory.

The rule was among several adopted by the rules committee in November 1953 and seemed generally well received. However, a letter from Jack Orr of New York in the November 18, 1953 *The Sporting News* (page 16) indicated that the sentiment wasn't unanimous. Orr, who described himself "as progressive as the next fellow," was not pleased with some of the rule changes, including the restoration of the sacrifice fly rule.

"But another ruling came out of that meeting which broke me down completely," Orr wrote. "I must rise in protest. When owners legislated that ball players must bring their gloves into the dugout at the end of each half inning of play, I say we must fight.

"This is too much. This is shattering the very foundation of the game. This is downright revolutionary. It's un-American. I am writing a firm letter to Senator McCarthy in the morning."

Helmets-Ear Flaps Protective Equipment

Gietschier, on page 390 of *Baseball*, said the National League began requiring a protective liner in 1957 and the American League did the same in 1958.

1971 – Rule 1.16 was added and read "A Professional League shall adopt the following rules to the use of helmets" added (a) All players shall use some type of protective helmets while at bat and (b) Starting in 1971 all players in the Class A and rookie leagues shall wear ear-flap helmets while at bat. Prior to this, there was no mention of a helmet; some players used a protective liner in their caps.

In ensuing years, 1.16(b) began including other classifications where the ear flap was required. In the 1972 rules, it encompassed Class AA with a note that Class AAA would be required to wear them in 1973. The 1973 rules read, "All players in National Association leagues shall wear ear-flap helmets while at bat." In 1974, Rule 10.16(b): "All players in National Association Leagues and those players in the Major Leagues who played with a National Association club the previous year shall wear ear-flap helmets while at bat. Also included are those players without previous professional experience."

Added in the 1983 rule book for 1.16 regarding helmets:

(b) All players in National Association Leagues shall wear a double ear-flap helmet while at bat.

(c) All players entering the Major Leagues commencing with the 1973 championship season and every succeeding season thereafter must wear a single ear-flap helmet (or at the player's option, a double ear-flap helmet), except those players who were in the Major Leagues during the 1982 season, and who, as recorded in that season, objected to wearing a single ear-flap helmet.

1988 – 1.16(d) and (e): All catchers shall wear a catcher’s protective helmet and all bat/ball boys or girls shall wear a protective helmet while performing their duties. (The rule about catchers required the approval of the Players Association for implementation of the rule in the major leagues in 1988.)

2010 – Added to Rule 1.16 that all base coaches must wear a protective helmet.

Home Plate

In 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.

Mound Height and Slope

With the replacement of the pitcher’s box with a rubber plate (as well as the distance moved back from 50 feet to 60 feet, 6 inches) in 1893, 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 with Rule 1, Section 2, which still referred to the “pitcher’s box.” In 1904, Rule 9, Section 1 changed the term to “pitcher’s plate.”

Rule 9, The Pitcher’s Plate, in the 1949 rule book stated that the pitcher’s plate “shall not be more than 15 inches higher than the base line or home plate” with a gradual slope.

In the reorganized 1950 rules, Rule 1.00 had a detailed list about laying out a baseball field and stated that the pitcher’s plate had to be 15 inches above the base lines (not no more than 15 inches).

In *Baseball: The Turbulent Midcentury Years*, Steve Gietschier wrote, “The most visible clarification regulated the height of pitching mounds to 15 inches higher than home plate. Only five major-league ballparks complied with this. Eight others were too flat and one, Wrigley Field, was too high. Griffith Stadium had special problems because of the peculiar slope of the ground, making the mound seven inches higher than home plate but 15 inches higher than first and third bases. Washington was given a year’s dispensation to raise the level of the bases and adjust the mound.”

1968 Rule 1.04 – The infield shall be graded so that the base lines and home plate are level, with a gradual slope from the baselines up to the pitcher’s plate, which shall be 15 inches above the baseline level.

1969 – “The infield shall be graded so that the base lines and home plate are level. The pitcher’s plate shall be ten inches above the level of home plate. 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 shall be uniform.”

Pitching Distance

The distance from the pitcher’s position to home base was 45 feet in 1876. “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.”

In 1881 the distance was changed to 50 feet.

In 1893 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.]

The 1893 *Spalding’s Official Base Ball Guide*, starting on page 150, included an explanation on the change of the 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.”

Runner’s Lane

In December 2023 Major League Baseball’s joint Competition Committee approved a widening of the runner’s lane to include the dirt between the foul line and the infield grass. Rule 5.09 (a)(11) had required a batter to run the last half of the distance between home plate and first base between the foul line and a three-foot line drawn on the right-hand side of the dirt.

Shoes/Spikes

Rule 1.11(g) in 1976 added, “Shoes with pointed spikes similar to golf or track shoes shall not be worn” after “No player shall attach anything to the heel or toe of his shoe other than the ordinary shoe plate or toe plate.” The issue of shoes came up in May 1976 when officials at the new Aloha Stadium in Hawaii tried to ban all metal cleats or spikes on shoes.

Uniforms

In 1984, 1.11(i) was added that a league may provide that the uniforms of its member teams include the names of its players on their backs and that any name other than the last name of the player must be approved by the league president. In the past, some players (such as Ken Harrelson with “Hawk”) had a nickname.

Called, Suspended, Protested, Tie Game/Erased Performances

Often games and individual performances were erased for various reasons, the most common being a game called by darkness or weather before it became a regulation game. Such games were called “No Game,” and none of the team or individual statistics made it into the official records. The game was replayed in its entirety although often such games were not made up.

Other situations caused events to be erased. Sometimes games reverted back to the last full inning, and sometimes a game was protested and the protest upheld, requiring the game to be resumed at the point of protest.

Through a variety of rules changes, erased performances have virtually been eliminated.

The basic definition of a regulation game (or official game, one that made your rain check worthless) has been five innings unless the team batting second is ahead after 4½ innings or ties or takes the lead in the bottom of the fifth.

When the National League began in 1876, the rule called for five innings with no exception for the team batting second being ahead in the last of the fifth.

In 1892 Rule 27 added an 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.”

Exceptions had already been made, in 1880, about reverting to the last equal innings played in regulation games. (See “Reverting to Last Full Inning” below.)

More tinkering with the definition occurred through the ensuing decades. (See the indented paragraphs below about modifications in 1920, which created an inconsistency in the definition of a regulation game, along with an explanation.)

Here are the rules in place in 1950, at the time of the major reorganization of the rule book:

4.10 IT IS A REGULATION GAME WHEN –

(d) Terminated by the umpire on account of rain, or darkness, or other cause which makes further play impossible, provided five or more innings have been played, or the home team has scored more runs in four innings, or before the completion of its fifth inning, than the visiting has scored in five completed innings; (23-3)

(e) The umpire terminates play after five full innings have been completed, and the score of such game shall be that at the end of the last completed inning. If, however, the home team shall have scored more total runs than the visiting team when the game is terminated while the home team is at bat, the score of such game shall be the total runs scored by each team. (23-2)

4.10(e) relates to uncompleted innings of a regulation game. The issue of uncompleted innings and the reversion to the last full inning had been Rule 23, Sections 5 and 6 in the previous rule book, not (23-2) as indicated in the 1950 rule book. The 1949 rule had read, “If the team that went second to bat is at bat when the game is terminated, and has scored in the incomplete [*sic*] inning the same number of runs as the other team, the umpire shall declare the game drawn without regard to the score of the last equal inning.

4.11 A REGULATION DRAWN GAME shall be declared by the umpire-in-chief if he terminates play because of rain, darkness, or any other cause that makes further play impossible –

(c) If the home team shall score, in its incomplete fifth inning, a run or runs equal to the visiting team’s total score in its five complete innings. [This loops back to 4.10 that a regulation game is at least five innings, or 4½ innings if the home team is ahead, or if the home team ties the score in the last of the fifth. It is the same procedure, though cobbled together through different sections of Rule 23, as had existed in 1949. This procedure continued in ensuing years, although a rule change prior to 2007 dictated that tie games would become suspended games and eventually, starting in the pandemic year of 2020, that games started would be suspended if they were called before becoming regulation games.]

In 1984 4.11(d) was added to allow National Association Leagues (minor leagues) to adopt rules for suspended games for games that otherwise would have been declared no game (rained out before becoming a regulation game) or a tie game. The rule had an exception, that it would not apply during the last scheduled game between the two teams during the regular season or during the playoffs and that any scheduled game not completed prior to the last scheduled game between the two teams during the regular season would become a called game.

Comments to 4.01 4.10, 4.12(a), and 4.12(b) were added in 2009 that games called before their natural conclusion would be suspended games rather than called games in all postseason and tiebreaker games. This came after a suspended game in the 2008 World Series that almost ended up as a called game. Also starting in 2009, the site of a tiebreaker game would be determined by which team had a better regular-season record rather than a coin toss.

Through 2019, however, major-league regular-season games terminated by weather before they became regulation games were replayed in their entirety with all performances erased. With the pandemic in 2020, the practice became to suspend such games, and it became permanent in 2022 with Rule 7.02(a).

(Rules have already been changed regarding tie games and games reverting to the last full inning and are noted below.)

The longstanding definition of a regulation (official) game has been a game of at least five innings or four-and-a-half innings if the home team (team second at bat in the game) were ahead or if the home team scored to tie the game or take in the lead in the last of the fifth inning. The rule appears inconsistent since a game tied after four-and-a-half innings was not a regulation game (and, prior to 2020, a “No Game” in which all team and individual performances for erased), but a game in which the team second at bat tied the game in the last of the fifth inning was a regulation game.

Rules changes in 1920 created this situation. The 1920 rules also began including explanatory notes, including this one to explain the rationale on the seeming inconsistency:

“The change which has been made in Rule 24 [in the 1920 rules] 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.”

Protested Games

A sentence was added to Rule 4.19 in the 1980 rule book, although it had been adopted by the Playing Rules Committee at the 1978 winter meetings and was in effect in 1979: “Even if it is held that the protested decision violated the rules, no replay of the game will be ordered unless in the opinion of the League president the violation adversely affected the protesting team’s chances of winning the game.”

In 2019 Rule 7.04 (4.19 in the pre-2015 rule book reorganization) read, “Each league shall adopt rules governing procedures for protesting a game.”

A team could announce it was protesting a game based on a misapplication of the rules. If the protest was upheld, the game would be resumed at the point of protest with any play after that point being erased. (See “Erased Performances” in the Baseball – Sports folder.) A rules change after the 1978 season said no replay of a game would be ordered unless it’s deemed that the violation adversely affected the protesting team’s chances of winning.

Starting in the 2020 rules, 7.04 read, “Protesting a game shall never be permitted.” This ended the practice of replaying games at the point of protest. Instead, a manager could challenge a rule through the replay/review system that had been in effect since 2014.

Reverting to Last Full Inning

In 1880 Class IV, 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.”

That year, 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.”

Eventually [Rule 23, Section 6 in 1935, for example] the exception to reverting to the last full inning in a regulation game read, “except that if the team second at bat shall have scored in an unequal number of innings more runs than the team first at bat, or if the team second at bat is at bat when the game is called, and has scored in the uncompleted inning the same number of runs, or at least one run more, than the team first at bat, the score of the game shall be the total number of runs that each team has made.”

The reversion rule was quirky in that if the visiting team was behind and scored enough runs to take the lead in the top of an uncompleted inning, the game would revert unless the home team scored enough in the bottom of an inning to retake the lead or tie the game. Thus, if the home team – leading at the end of the last full inning – fell behind and did not score in an inning that wasn’t completed, the score would revert, and the home team would win. However, if the home team scored to tie the game in an uncompleted inning, the game would then end in a tie and be replayed in its entirety.

Although the intent may have been to not erase performances in uncompleted innings unless the outcome of the game was altered from the last previous completed inning, the rule created a situation, as noted above, in which the home team could preclude a reversion to the last previous completed inning, when it was ahead, by tying the game in the bottom of an uncompleted inning.

The rules about runs scored in an uncompleted inning eventually changed regarding runs scored by the visiting team that did not alter the outcome of the game. Examples would be the visiting team, trailing by three runs, scoring one or two; or a visiting team leading and scoring additional runs in an uncompleted inning. In 1962, the rules were changed to not revert if runs scored in an uncompleted inning did not alter the outcome of the game. Prior to that, such innings were sometimes left alone and sometimes erased. In 1959 Mike McCormick of the Giants had a no-hitter resurrected by the reversion to the last completed inning, even though the run scored (along with a hit) in an uncompleted sixth inning did not affect the outcome.

In 1962 (d) was added to 4.11 to have reversions take place only when what happened in the top of an uncompleted inning affected the outcome of the game with this exception: If the game is called during an uncompleted inning, the game ends at the end of the last previous completed inning in each of the following situations: (1) The visiting team scores one or more runs to tie the score in the uncompleted inning, and the home team does not score; (2) The visiting team scores one or more runs to take the lead in the uncompleted inning, and the home team does not tie the score or re-take the lead.

The practice of reverting to the last full inning was virtually eliminated in 1980. A rule change for 4.11(d) was adopted in December 1978 to suspend such games rather than revert to the last full inning but was not included in the official rule book until 1980 since approval was needed by the Players Association.

In 2013 (with 15 teams in each league calling for more interleague play and more teams of either league playing other teams only once at home and on the road), 4.12(b)(4) was added to deal with a suspended game not completed prior to the last scheduled game between the two teams. The new rule made such games called games and could apply to tie games (see below) and/or games in which a visiting team scored one or more runs in the top of an inning of a regulation game and the home team not retaking the lead in an inning that is not completed because of weather. Instead of the game being suspended and resumed at the point of interruption, the game reverts to the last full inning. This also applies if the visiting team ties the game in the top of an uncompleted inning, and the home team does not retake the lead. A game that has not progressed far enough to become a regulation game shall be declared “No Game” and replayed in its entirety, unless the league president determines that playing the rescheduled game is not necessary to affect the league championship.

A September 28, 2023 Miami Marlins at New York Mets game reverted back to the last full inning. Miami had scored two runs in the top of the ninth for a 2-1 lead, but the inning wasn't completed because of rain, and the game was suspended. However, it was the last game scheduled between the teams, and the regular season wrapped up over the weekend. The game would not be resumed unless the outcome was needed to determine a playoff spot. When that wasn't the case and it was determined that the game would not be resumed, the score reverted to the last full inning with the Mets winning 1-0.

Tied-Suspended Games

Tie games were virtually eliminated in 2007. Pending rules 4.10(d) and 4.12(a)(6) were added to or changed in the 2006 rule book although the rules did not take effect until 2007.

See the above section (*Reverting to last full inning*) for the rule addition in 2013 regarding a suspended game that is never resumed. In addition to creating situations in which a game can revert to the last full inning, it can create a tie game.

Rules on Suspended Games

1954– 4.12 – SUSPENDED GAMES – A league may establish rules providing for completion on a future date of games terminated before nine innings have been completed, for any of the following reasons: light failure; a curfew imposed by law; a time limit legal under league rules; darkness in the second game of a Sunday doubleheader when the lights may not be turned on.

1968 – 4.12(b) SUSPENDED GAMES – Note: “A game called at the end of a completed inning with the score tied after nine innings shall be a tie game, not a suspended game.”

1969 – Rule changed to make such a game a suspended game, not a tied game.

1975 – Note on rule that a game called after a completed inning after nine innings is a suspended game.

From 1969 through 1974, the rules dictated that a called game that was tied after nine innings was a suspended game, rather than a tie game to be replayed as had been the case prior to 1969. The note starting in 1969 about the rule formerly being that such games were tie rather than suspended games remained in each of the rule books through 1974, prior to these games being changed back to tie games starting in 1975. (See above – in 2006 all regulation games called when tied became suspended rather than tie games that needed to be replayed.)

In 1983, Rule 4.12(c) [7.02(c) starting in 2015] If a reliever is announced but has not completed his requirement to be relieved (completing the inning or facing a batter – three batters starting in 2020) because the game was suspended, the pitcher is not required to start the resumed portion of the game. However, if this happens, the pitcher is considered to have been in the game and may not be used in the game.

The 1984 rule book contained an addition to 4.10: (f) Rain checks will not be honored for any regulation or suspended game which has progressed to or beyond a point of play described in 4.10(c), (which defined a regulation game).

The 1984 rule book also had a section at the end of 4.11 that National Association Leagues may adopt rules for suspended games if a game had not become a regulation game. If such a game is (not yet a regulation game) is suspended and continued prior to another regularly scheduled game, the regularly scheduled game will be limited to seven innings.

A league may also have a regulation game that is tied become suspended rather than called and replayed in its entirety if it is stopped because of weather, curfew, or other reason. If a regulation game is suspended and resumed before another regularly scheduled game, the regularly scheduled game will be nine innings.

This will not apply for games stopped before they are regulation games and a regulation game that is stopped when it is tied. “Any suspended game not completed prior to the last scheduled game between the two teams during the championship season will become a called game.”

Rules on Tie Games

Starting in the 2006 and 2007 rule books, this is the rule for suspended games and the virtual elimination of tie games:

4.10(d): If a regulation game is called with the score tied, it shall become a suspended game. See Rule 4.12.

[Note: This was first listed in the 2006 rule book, with an asterisk to indicate it needed approval of the Players Association, but it was not implemented in the majors until 2007.]

4.12 (a): A game shall become a suspended game that must be completed at a future date if the game is terminated for any of the following reasons:

(1-4) Curfew imposed by law; time limit permissible under league rules; light failure or malfunction of a mechanical device under control of the home club (such as an automatic tarpaulin); darkness, when a law prevents the lights from being turned on.

(5) Weather, if a regulation game is called while an inning is in progress and before the inning is completed, and the visiting team has scored one or more runs to take the lead, and the home team has not retaken the lead.

(6) It is a regulation game that is called with the score tied.

The 2013 rule changes, noted above regarding reversion to the last full inning, can also apply to tie games as they did in a September 29, 2016 Chicago Cubs at Pittsburgh Pirates game. It was suspended by rain with the score 1-1 in the last of the sixth inning. The game was suspended, but, since it never resumed, it ended as a tie game.

In the early years of baseball, games could be called before their natural completion by weather, darkness, curfews, or other reasons, such as shortening a game to allow a team to catch a train. Eventually, only weather became a factor as most stadiums had lights and darkness would not stop a game. (Events such as a power failure or an outage of the lights for some other reason dictated a suspended game.) Until 1988 Wrigley Field in Chicago was the only ballpark without lights, but in 1969 the rules were changed to so that a second game of a doubleheader stopped by darkness would be a suspended game.

On June 22, 1969 the Chicago Cubs, playing at home, lost to the Montreal Expos 5-4 in the second game of a doubleheader that had been called by darkness after six innings. Within a few days, the National League held a vote of its teams to change the rule that if the second game of a doubleheader was stopped by darkness, it would be a suspended game. The vote was unanimous to make the change, which took effect June 27.

Major Changes

Designated Hitter

The designated hitter began in the American League in 1973, although it did not appear in the rule book – as Rule 6.10 – until 1976, when it was changed from “experimental” to “optional,” meaning any league can adopt the rule by a majority rule, rather than a three-fourths majority as had been the case before.

Its usage varied in All-Star Games and the World Series. When regular-season inter-league play began in 1997, the home team used its league’s rules for the designated hitter for such games.

The 1978 rule book addressed interleague play. For exhibition games the designated hitter would be used or not used as is the practice of the home team. In All-Star games, the designated hitter would be used if both teams and leagues agree. For the World Series, the designated hitter would be used every other year. It had first been used in 1976 and then was used in even-numbered years and not used in odd-numbered years through 1985.

1986 – 6.10(a)(1) changed to “In World Series or exhibition games, the [designated hitter] rule will be used or not used as is the practice of the home team.”

The 1981 rule added, “The designated hitter named in the starting lineup must come to bat at least one time, unless the opposing club changes pitchers.”

The designated hitter was first used in the All-Star Game in 1989, when it was hosted by an American League team. Through 2010, the designated hitter was used or not used depending on which league’s team was hosting the game. It has been used in all All-Star Games beginning in 2011.

The 2010 rule, in 6.10(b), had several adjustments and clarifications regarding the designated hitter, including that the designated hitter may not sit in the bullpen during the game unless serving as a bullpen catcher. In 2014, the rule was amended to allow the game pitcher to pinch run only for the designated hitter.

Rule 5.11(b) in 2022 called for the designated hitter to be used in both leagues (it had been in 2020 during the pandemic but only in the American League in 2021) and to allow a starting pitcher to also assume the designated-hitter role. (With Shohei Ohtani often hitting for himself when he was pitching, this allowed him and others to remain in the game as the designated hitter even after being relieved as a pitcher.)

Pace of Play/Pitch Clock

In 2006, 6.02(d) added an experimental pace-of-game rule for National Association play. With certain exceptions (swinging at a pitch, being forced out of batter’s box by a pitch, wild pitch or passed ball, et al.) the batter must keep at least one foot in the batter’s box throughout the time at bat. If one of the exceptions occurs, the batter may leave the batter’s box but not the dirt circle.

A three-batter minimum (or finishing an inning) became effective in the major leagues in 2020 in 5.10(g). The rule took effect in the minor leagues in 2019. (See also “Minimum Number of Batters Faced by a Pitcher” for more on the history of this rule.)

Mound Visits

1967 – 8.06 was added to limit mound visits from a manager or a coach to one per inning per pitcher (second visit would require a pitching change) and one per pitcher per batter (cannot make a second visit to a pitcher with the same batter up) unless there is a pinch-hitter.

2018 – 5.10(m)(1) Mound visits shall be limited to six per team per nine innings. For any extra-innings played, each team shall be entitled to one additional non-pitching change mound visit per inning. (3) Cross up in signs. If a team is out of mound visits, a catcher is permitted to make a brief mound visit to clarify signs with the pitcher to avoid a cross up. In 2019 the limit for mound visits was changed from six to five.

In 2024, the limit was changed to four. These included any mound visits, including by a catcher and/or infielder, not just a visit from the dugout. A limit remained on dugout visits of one per inning per pitcher without having to change pitchers. A dugout visit without a pitching change is counted as a mound visit for the team.

Related to this is the so-called Sam Fuld Rule:

In 2012 3.05(d) was added (without the underlined sentence in the rule below; the underlined sentence was added in 2013).

3.05(d) – If a pitcher who is already in the game crosses the foul line on his way to take his place on the pitcher’s plate to start an inning, he shall pitch to the first batter until such batter is put out or reaches first base, unless the batter is substituted for, or the pitcher sustains an injury or illness which, in the judgment of the umpire-in-chief, incapacitates him from pitching. If the pitcher ends the previous inning on base or at bat and does not return to the dugout after the inning is completed, the pitcher is not required to pitch to the first batter of the inning until he makes contact with the pitcher’s plate to begin his warm-up pitches.

In the past, a pitcher already in the game was allowed to take the mound to start another inning and then be relieved before throwing a pitch. On June 20, 2011 Sam Fuld of Tampa Bay took the mound as a new pitcher after a pinch-hitter had hit for the Tampa Bay pitcher. Tampa Bay manager Joe Maddon did this to give another reliever additional time to warm up. Maddon then claimed Fuld was injured, allowing him to remove Fuld without having faced a batter. (The rules then required a new pitcher to face one batter rather than three, which is now the rule.) The 2012 “Sam Fuld Rule” did not change the requirement for a new pitcher having to face a batter nor did it change the ability for such a pitcher to not have to meet this requirement if he was injured.

In 2024, Rule 5.10(g)(2) no longer allowed for a pinch hitter as a means to relieve a pitcher who returned to the mound at the start of an inning. In 2023 5.10(i) allowed a returning pitcher, after taking the mound, to be changed if there was a pinch hitter, as long as this pitcher had satisfied the three-batter minimum already.

Pitch Clock

A field-timing coordinator (FTC) was hired by Major League Baseball in 2014 and sat by one of the dugouts, signaling the umpires between innings with colored cards to indicate how much time was left in the inning break. Eventually, the FTC was moved into the press box and had a console to indicate time between innings and time between batters. Beginning in 2018 a visible clock was in the stadium to show the time counting down although there were no penalties for violations.

Full pitch clocks were being used in the minor leagues and finally implemented in the major leagues in 2023 with a limit on the pitchers of 15 seconds with the bases empty and 20 seconds (changed to 18 seconds in 2024) with runners on base. Between batters was 30 seconds. A batter had to be in the batter’s box and alert to the pitcher with 8 seconds left. A violation by the pitcher or the batter would result in an automatic strike or ball, respectively. Times were established for pitching changes, including when a new pitcher came in at the beginning of an inning. The time limits were 2:15 for a non-nationally televised game, 2:40 for a nationally televised game during the regular season and the wild-card round of the playoffs, and 3:10 for playoff games beyond the wild-card series. (If the players were ready, the game could resume 15 seconds ahead of these limits.)

Mound visits were limited to 30 seconds, although there was no penalty for an expiration of the clock. Manager holds to make a decision on whether or not to challenge an umpire's call were 15 seconds; the penalty for expiration of this clock was that the manager could not challenge a call.

Except for mound visits, the expiration of the time resulted in the umpires being alerted with a haptic device that vibrates.

Besides the reduction from 20 to 18 seconds to pitch with runners on base, a change was made to when the clock would start between pitches. In 2023, the timing between pitches started when the pitcher had possession of the ball except if there had been a dead ball, including foul balls. In this case – in addition to waiting until the ball was retrieved and runners, batter, and fielder back in their spots – the timing did not begin until the pitcher had the ball and was on the mound. In 2024, the pitch clock was restarted when the pitcher had possession of the ball whether or not he was on the mound. (The start of the clock could still be delayed for the same reasons as before – retrieval of a foul ball, other players back in their spots.)

Past Rules on Pitcher Time Limits

In 1884 Rule 29(2) was changed to “A Balk is . . . The ball be held by the Pitcher so long as to delay the game unnecessarily.”

In 1891 Rule 32, Section 2 was reworded to “A balk is . . . The holding of the ball by the pitcher so long as to delay the game unnecessarily.”

Batsman and runners were awarded a base on a balk.

In 1901, Rule 32, 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.”

In 1903 Rule 32, Section 1 added the italicized sentence to the rule on delaying the game: “The umpire shall call a ball on the pitcher each time he delays the game by failing to deliver the ball to the batsman for a longer period than twenty seconds. *Excepting that in the case of the first batsman in each inning, the pitcher may occupy not more than one minute in delivering not to exceed 5 balls to a baseman.*”

1935 Rule Book RULE 30 – Delaying the Game: Sec. 2. The umpire shall call a ball on the pitcher each time he delays the game by failing to deliver the ball to the batsman for a longer period than 20 seconds, excepting that at the commencement of each inning, or when a pitcher relieves another, the pitcher may occupy one minute in delivery not to exceed five balls to the catcher or an infielder, during which time play shall be suspended.

There is a very severe penalty against the pitcher if he throws to a base as one might say “for fun” or to delay a game. Willful delay on the part of the pitcher in delivering the ball, especially when storm threatens, should be punished by the umpire as Section 2 provides.

At the beginning of each inning the pitcher is allowed to throw five balls to the catcher or to an infielder for “warming up” practice, the batsman refraining from occupying his position in the “box” at home plate.

1949 Rule Book RULE 30 – Delaying the Game: Section 2: The umpire shall call a ball on the pitcher each time he delays the game by failing to deliver the ball to the batsman for a longer period than 20 seconds, excepting that at the commencement of each inning, or when a pitcher relieves another, the pitcher may occupy one minute in delivery not to exceed five balls to the catcher or an infielder, during which time play shall be suspended.

With the 1950 overhaul of the rules, Rule 8.04 kept the 20-seconds but limited it to only when the bases were empty. It also noted that the 20 seconds started “after taking his pitching position.”

Rule 8.03 allowed eight preparatory pitches, not to consume more than one inning, at the beginning of each inning.

1957 rule book: When the bases are unoccupied, the pitcher shall deliver the ball to the batter within 20 seconds after he receives the ball. Each time the pitcher delays the game by violating this rule, the umpire shall call “Ball.” Previously, the pitcher had to deliver the ball within 20 seconds after taking his pitching position.

2006: 8.04 When the bases are unoccupied, the pitcher shall deliver the ball to the batter within 12 seconds after he receives the ball. Each time the pitcher delays the game by violating this rule, the umpire shall call “Ball.” The 12-second timing starts when the pitcher is in possession of the ball and the batter is in the box, alert to the pitcher. The timing stops when the pitcher releases the ball. The intent of this rule is to avoid unnecessary delays. The umpire shall insist that the catcher return the ball promptly to the pitcher, and that the pitcher take his position on the rubber promptly. Obvious delay by the pitcher should instantly be penalized by the umpire. (Note: The 2006 rule book listed this as a change with an asterisk, noting that approval from the Players Association was needed; the 2007 rule book repeated the new timing in its list of changed rules and said it would be in effect in 2007.)

Rule 8.04 was changed to 5.07(c) in the reformatted book in 2015. The 2023 book is the same as 2022 regarding 5.07(c), but it will be reworded to reflect the new procedures in 2024.]

(The 2006 rule book listed an experimental rule (made permanent in the 2007 rule book) for the minor leagues for the batter to keep one foot in the batter’s box for the entire plate appearance with certain exceptions, in which case he could leave the batter’s box but not the dirt circle. The exceptions include swinging at a pitch, feinting a bunt, being driven out of the box by a pitch, the pitcher leaving the mound after receiving the ball, and the catcher leaving the box to give defensive signals. [Rule 6.02(d)])

Disengagements

A limit on pitcher disengagements (primarily pickoff attempts and step offs) was established in 2023 with the full pitch clock to prevent circumventions to the pitch clock. A pitcher is limited to two disengagements per batter. If a third disengagement does not result in an out, a balk is called.

Pandemic Changes

Seven-inning doubleheaders were used in 2020 and 2021. This did not make it into the rule book for the major leagues although an option remained for minor leagues to have seven-inning games for a doubleheader.

The start-of-inning runner in extra innings began during the pandemic in 2020, continued in ensuing years, and became permanent with the addition of 7.01(b)(2) in 2023. The runner would be the player in the spot of the last batter of the previous inning. If a pitcher was in this spot, the team had the option of using the player in the previous batting spot instead.

With the expansion of the playoffs from 10 to 12 teams in 2022, tiebreaker games will no longer be played. Ties will be determined by a series of circumstances starting with head-to-head competition.

Interleague play in the regular season began in 1997. Teams from a division in one league were generally playing teams from a particular division in the other league. Eventually the concept of natural rivalries was formed with teams, such as the Yankees and Mets, playing every year with two series, one at each site.

In 2023 teams began playing all the other teams in the major leagues. The natural rivalries were kept with a home-and-home series. With the other 14 teams in the opposite league, a team played a series against half of the teams at home and half of the teams on the road with the home team switched for such series in the next year.

Postseason Formats

The Official Baseball Rules rarely address such issues as postseason formats although the rule books between 2009 and 2013, primarily in a comment with Rule 4.12 regarding suspended games, covers exceptions to regular-season rules in the post season.

For more on changes in championship criteria for teams and formats for postseason championships, see [Formats of Baseball Postseason Championship Series](#). For example, in the first eight years of the National League (1876 to 1883), the champion and standings were determined by which team had the most wins, not by winning percentage. In 1884 the National League amended its constitution and joined the American Association (which had formed in 1882) in using winning percentage rather than wins alone to determine the

pennant winner. In 1883, that National League, in Section 79 of its constitution, added a provision to break a tie for first place: “In the event that two or more clubs have won the same number of games, then the club which shall have lost the smallest number shall be declared the champion, and in case two or more clubs be tied for first place on games won and lost, the Board shall at once arrange a special series of five games between any two of such clubs, and the games so played shall be included in determining the award of the championship.” The language for breaking a tie remained in 1884 other than calling for the tie to be based on winning percentage than on the number of games won.

By the time a first-place tie occurred in the National League, in 1946, the league went with a best-of-three playoff. All games and individual statistics counted as regular-season performances.

Replay Challenges

Video replay for home runs was implemented on August 28, 2008 with the first use of replay coming six days later in a game at Tampa Bay. Teams could request the umpires use video to determine if a ball had cleared the fence or not or if a potential home run was fair or foul.

Challenges of other plays began in 2014 with teams getting a certain number of challenges a game.

Initially, there was no time limit for a manager to indicate a challenge. Eventually there was. The amount of time to decide on a challenge was reduced from 30 to 20 seconds in 2020. With a full pitch clock implemented in 2023, the “manager hold” time was reduced to 15 seconds (with a countdown clock on the scoreboard visible).

Roster Sizes

Cliff Blau on roster sizes: <http://cliff-blau.great-site.net/rosters.htm>

Through 1967 teams could start the season with a certain number of players on the active roster but had to cut down to a smaller number about a month into the season. In 1967, teams could start with 28 players and then cut down to 25. Starting in 1968 teams had to start the season with a limit of 25 on the active roster rather than start with a larger roster and then cut down.

For many years teams could expand the active roster to a maximum of 40 starting September 1. This continued through 2018.

In 2019 the active roster went from 25 to 26 (with the minimum going from 24 to 25) through August 31 and then 28 starting September 1. Teams continued to be allowed to add an extra player for doubleheaders.

Roster limits for pitchers

The 2020 rules added this to 4.03(c): “In accordance with Major League Rule 2(b)(2), each Major League Club must designate on its lineup card in advance of that game each player eligible to play in the game as a pitcher, a position player, or a ‘Two-Way Player.’”

Through August 31, a maximum of 13 pitchers were allowed (maximum of 14 starting September 1). Players qualifying as “Two-Way Players” under Major League Rule 2(b)(2) may appear as pitchers during a game without counting toward a Club’s pitcher limitations.

With 4.03(c)(4), the 2020 rule book was the first to restrict the ability of position players to pitch. In 2020, position players could not pitch until extra innings or unless their team was behind or ahead by at least six runs. In 2023 4.03(c)(4) was amended to allow position players to pitch only in extra innings, if their team was behind by at least eight runs, or if their team was winning by at least 10 runs in the ninth inning. This was to avoid work-arounds to a limit to the number of pitchers a team could have on its active roster.

Although teams were to be limited to 13 pitchers starting in 2020, the limit was delayed a few years because of the pandemic. A definition of a two-way player was established.

Spitball Outlawed

In 1920 doctored balls were prohibited with Rule 14, *The Ball*, Section 4, *Discolored or Damaged Balls*; and with Section 2 to Rule 30, *The Pitching Rules: Delivery of the Ball to the Bat*, the latter reading, “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.”

A note to Rule 30, Section 2 in the *Spalding’s Official Base Ball Guide* that existing “bona-fide spit-ball pitchers” would be exempted from the rule.

Shift Restrictions

Rule 5.02(c) in 2023 required a team to have two players on each side of second base and that the players could not be on the outfield grass. A violation called for a ball to be called on the batter and the ball to be dead, unless all runners, including the batter-runner, advanced at least one base. If a play happened after a violation without all runners advancing a base (such as a sacrifice or sacrifice fly), the manager of the batting team may elect to decline the penalty and accept the play.

In 2025 5.02(c) added a penalty if an infielder who violated the rule was the first to touch the ball after the pitch. In such a case, the batter was awarded first base and all runners, regardless of whether or not they were in a force situation, were awarded a base. As with the 2023 rule, if all runners, including the batter-runner, advanced on a play, the play would prevail over the penalty for the violation.

In addition, a comment was added to 5.02 in 2025: If a penalty of Rule 5.02(c) is called with a play in progress the umpire will allow the play to continue because the manager may elect to take the play. If the batter-runner missed first base, or a runner misses his next base.

Umpires

In 1887 Rule 66 dictated a summary, which must be kept by the official scorer, with the name of the umpire included.

In 1909, 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.”

Also in 1909 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.”

Umpire Reversing Call

Until 1881 umpires could consult bystanders on whether a catch had been made or not. The rule [Rule 55(3) in 1880 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.”

In 1881, Rule 60(2) read, “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.”

Playing Rules

Abandoning Bases after Strikeout

In the second game of the 2005 American League playoffs, A. J. Pierzynski of the White Sox was up in the top of the ninth with two out and nobody on in a 1-1 game. He swung and missed for a strikeout. Catcher Josh Paul rolled the ball to the mound. After starting toward the dugout, Pierzynski took off for first and reached it safely. Umpire Doug Eddings ruled that Paul had not caught the ball cleanly, and Pierzynski was allowed to stay at first on a strikeout-error by Paul. Pinch-runner Pablo Ozuna ran for Pierzynski, stole second, and scored the winning run on a single. The rule was changed in 2006 so that a batter was out for abandoning the bases if he left the dirt circle and wasn't heading to first. Prior to this, a player would have had to reach the dugout before being ruled out for abandoning the bases.

2006 6.09(b) Comment: A batter who does not realize his situation on a third strike not caught, and who is not in the process of running to first base, shall be declared out once he leaves the dirt circle surrounding home plate.

[Note: This was first listed in the 2006 rule book, with an asterisk to indicate it needed approval of the Players Association, but it was not implemented in the majors until 2007.]

Ambidextrous Pitchers

The 2009 rule book added 8.01(f) to require an ambidextrous pitcher to indicate which hand he intends to pitch with.

Appeals

An appeal was addressed in the 1876 rule book in Rule VI *Running the Bases – 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.

In 1958, 7.10, regarding appeals, added: Any appeal under this rule must be made before the next legal pitch. If the appeal occurs during a play which ends a half-inning, the appeal must be made before the defensive team leaves the field. An added note addresses an apparent “fourth out, which allows a team to appeal for an out that will take precedence over an out made previously. For the purposes of this rule, the defensive team has “left the field” when the pitchers and all infielders have left fair territory on their way to the bench or clubhouse.

A situation in a Boston at Cleveland game August 22, 1957 prompted this change. When Cleveland left the field at the end of a half-inning without an appeal that would have been the “fourth out,” umpire Hank Soar had to wait for the first pitch of the next half-inning to declare that a run had scored for Boston. The 1958 rule addition prohibits an appeal after a team leaves the field in an inning-ending situation rather than after the next pitch or play.

Rule 7.08(d) noted that an appeal cannot be made after the “first following pitch.” In 1969 “or any play or attempted play” was added to the end of the sentence.

1972 addition – 7.10: An appeal is not to be interpreted as a play or attempted play. Also added was (d): Successful appeals may not be made on a runner at the same base. If the defensive team on its first appeal errs, a request for a second appeal on the same runner at the same base shall not be allowed by the umpire.

1975 addition to 7.10(a) – Underlined words added: After a fly ball is caught, he fails to return to his original base before he or his original base is tagged. [This apparently clarifies that tagging an intermediate base does not constitute an appeal. Example: Runner from first scores on a batted ball to the outfield but misses second base. Tagging third base will not result in the runner being called out. Second base, the one missed by the runner, must be tagged.]

Inadvertent Appeal

Inadvertent appeals were addressed by the addition of 7.10 in the Notes – Case Book – Comment section in 1976: “7.10 – An appeal should be clearly intended as an appeal, either by a verbal request by the player or an act that unmistakably indicates an appeal to the umpire. A player, inadvertently stepping on the base with a ball in his hand, would not constitute an appeal. Time is not out when an appeal is being made.”

Impact of an Out from an Appeal

Until 1931, a following runner could score on a play in which a preceding runner was called out on appeal, even with two out. In a “Knotty Problems” section in the 1929 *Spalding’s Official Base Ball Guide* (on page 62), editor John B. Foster responded to a question regarding a batter hitting a home run with the bases loaded and two out; however, the runner from first missed third base and was called out on appeal. The question was how many runs scored.

Foster responded, “A ruling has been made on this play in conformity with Rule 52, Section 4. This section reads ‘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.’ Therefore three runs scored.”

In 1931, the rule added language to the end, “*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.*”

Regarding the situation noted above, starting in 1931 only two runs (the runners who had been on second and third at the start of the play) would count, not the batter since the runner from first who missed third became the third out on appeal (this out being made after the preceding runners had scored). Note: the third out was not a force out since the runner from first had reached second and was called out for missing third. Had the runner from first been called out for missing second, the third out would have been a force out and no runs would score on the play.

Double Merkle Not Allowed

The 1951 rule book, in 4.09, added these sentences: “When the winning run is scored in the last half-inning of a regulation game, or in the last half of an extra inning, as the result of a base of balls, hit batter, or any other play with the bases full which forces the runner on third to advance, the umpire shall not declare the game ended until the runner forced to advance from third has touched home base and the batter-runner has touched first base.”

Although a runner could still be forced out to nullify a run by not going to second in a game-ending situation, such as what happened to Fred Merkle September 23, 1908, the 1951 rule took away the ability to nullify a run with two forces if the bases were loaded.

This rule came up in an August 9, 2015 Cincinnati at Arizona game when, with the bases loaded and one out in the bottom of the 10th of a tie game, Arizona runners from first and second abandoned the bases as the winning run came home from third on a single by Chris Owings. Cincinnati was not allowed to appeal and force out the runners at third and second to nullify the run. [Now Rule 5.08(b)].

Balk

The National League used the term “foul balk” for a pitch delivered with the pitcher’s hand rising above his shoulder until the league allowed overhanded pitching in 1884. Repeated foul balks could lead to a forfeit although by 1883, the penalty for a foul balk was the batter being awarded first and existing runners the next base after two foul balks. The term was dropped in 1884 when the National League allowed overhanded pitching, but it came back in 1885 when a new restriction was put on pitchers. In June of 1885, National League president Nick Young rescinded the restriction, and the term “foul balk” was dropped. (The American Association and the Union Association of 1884 did not use the term “foul balk.”)

Rules varied in the 19th century on the penalty for a balk/illegal delivery regarding whether the batter was awarded first base in addition to runners advancing. The National League called for only existing baserunners advancing on a balk, not the batter being awarded first base, until 1887 when it developed a common rule book with the American Association. The term “illegal delivery” was used instead of “balk” for a batter being awarded first base until 1899, when “balk” replaced “illegal delivery.”

The American Association called for an award of first base for a batter through 1885, dropped it in 1886, and reinstated it with the common rule book in 1887. The rule for the batter being awarded first base remained through 1900 and was no longer in the rules in 1901.

Even though the rules through 1900 called for a batter to be awarded first on a balk, researchers Cliff Blau and Dick Cramer found different effects for a balk/illegal delivery – sometimes the batter being awarded first base in addition to the advancement of baserunners and sometimes the batter not getting the base. Cramer noted that in 1897, 1898, 1900 balks were treated as they are now: runners advance but the batter is not awarded first base.

In 1914, the American League adopted the National League interpretation of a balk, calling for a balk when the pitcher drops the ball. (Source: 1914 Reach Guide, page 541, Playing Rule Changes)

In 1920, Rule 34, Section 12 added, “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.”

The rules had no provision to nullify a balk if a pitch was put in play until Rule 8.05 in 1954, regarding the penalty of runners advancing, included, “Unless the batter hits the pitch. . . . Manager may elect to accept either the balk penalty or the result of the batter’s action.”

In 1955 the provision in 8.05 was changed to have the play override the balk if all runners, including the batter-runner, advance at least one base. It contained no provision for the manager having a choice of accepting the play or the balk.

1950: The “one second” stop was first in the 1950 rules, the year that the rules were overhauled. Prior to 1950, Rule 27 said the pitcher, with a runner on first or second, must stop. In 1950, Rule 8.01(b) called for a “complete stop of at least one second.” The one-second requirement remained through the 1963 rules; it was dropped in 1964 when the rule called for merely a “complete stop” while in the set position.

1988: In the 1988 rule book, 8.01(b) for Balk Rule-Set Position was altered. The result was a lot of balks in spring training and the early part of the season. The balks declined as the 1988 season progressed, possibly because of a combination of pitchers adjusting and umpires being more lenient. Many of the balks were for pitchers not coming to a complete stop, and some of the stories in 1988 implied that the pitcher had to stop in a set position for one second. However, the 1988 rule stated that the pitcher, in a set position, must make a “complete and discernable stop.” The 1987 rules called for a “complete stop.”

The 1950 season began with an increase of balks as did the 1988.

Balk totals in years prior, during, and after stricter rules in 1950 and 1988:

1949: 56	1950: 123	1951: 65
1987: 356	1988: 924	1989: 407

The 1989 rule book opened with, “After discussion with the American and National League Presidents and the Player Relations Committee, and in accordance with the terms of the Basic Agreement, the Major leagues 8.01(b) Balk Rule-Set Position. As a result, for the 1989 season, the Official Playing Rules will revert to the language used in 1987.

A “forced balk” was added in 2023 with the addition of a pitch clock. To keep a pitcher from circumventing the pitch clock, in addition to trying to make it easier to steal bases as well as to speed up the game, a pitcher was limited to two disengagements (primarily a pickoff attempt or a step off) per batter. If a third disengagement did not result in an out, a balk was called.

Baserunning

In 1920 Rule 52 outlawed running the bases in reverse order for the purpose of making a travesty of the game. It also addressed two runners being on the same base with the following runner not being entitled to it.

Batter Calling for Height of Pitch

Through 1886, batters were able to call for the location of a pitch height-wise. Rule 50 in 1886 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).

Batting First – Visiting or Home Team

In 1876 (the first year of the National League) Rule II *The Game, Section 2 Position of Players* stated, “Position of players and choice of first innings shall be determined by the two captains.”

In 1877 the same rule read, “The home club shall first take the bat.”

In 1878 the rule reverted to pre-1877, “The choice of first innings shall be determined by the two captains.”

In 1875 American Association Rule 42 provided the choice of innings to the captain of the home club. The National League made this change in 1877 with Rule 44(1).

In 1950 Rule 4.02 required that, “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 proceed.” Even before this rule, it had been the custom for years for the home team to take the field first.

Bottom of the Ninth/Extra Inning Played Out Only if Necessary

Rules had called for a game to be played out, even if the outcome had been decided.

In 1880 Class IV, *The Game*, Rule 33 added exceptions to the rule that a non-tied game consisted of nine innings on each side (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.

Regarding an extra-inning game, a clause was added, 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.

Collisions/Obstruction

In 1969 10.13(f) added a note regarding obstruction: “Do not charge an error if obstruction does not change the play in the opinion of the scorer.”

Rule 7.13 was added in 2014 [it became 6.01(i) starting in 2015] on an experimental basis. Informally known as the Buster Posey Rule, it added and clarified rules related to runner collisions with the catcher and catchers blocking the plate without the ball.

A Comment to 6.01(i) was added in 2014 and noted that the rule shall not apply to force plays at home plate.

In 2016, 6.02(j) was added regarding slides into bases to break up double-play attempts and calls for a “bona fide slide.”

Stricter procedures on fielders blocking or being in front of a base before having possession of the ball were implemented in 2024 although 2024 rule book did not contain anything about it.

Detached Equipment

In 1914, an addition was made to Rule 54, Section 6, that called for the awarding of three bases to the batter and runners if a fielder stopped or caught a ball with a cap or glove detached or other equipment detached from its proper position. The updated rule specified that three bases applied only to batted balls, not thrown balls. Throws that were caught or stopped in this manner called for two bases for the batter and any runners.

In 2006, 7.05(j) was added to the rule book relating to a pitched ball touched by detached equipment, the penalty being one base. (Although it first appeared in a rule book in 2006, it was marked as one of the rules that required approval from the Players Association and did not go into effect until 1997.)

Double/Triple Plays

In 1969, 10.12 added “or misplay” to this sentence: “No double or triple play would be scored if an error or misplay intervenes between putouts.”

Dropped Third Strike Exception

Until 1887, the batter became a runner if the final strike was not held (four strikes in 1887) with no exception for when a runner or runners were on base in a force situation with fewer than two out. Catchers were able to start double or even triple plays by intentionally not holding a final strike. Rule 47(6) was added to prevent this practice: The batsman is out . . . If, while the First Base be occupied by a base runner, four strikes will be called on him by the Umpire, except when two hands are already out.

The rule remained, the only change in 1888 being “three strikes” instead of “four strikes.” (1887 was the only year in which four, rather than three, strikes were required for a strikeout.)

Fair or Foul Balls

In 1877 an exception was added to Rule V, Section 11 regarding 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.

The rule change ended the practice of the fair-foul hit, intentionally hitting the ball in such a manner to strike in fair territory and then go into foul territory. Notable practitioners of such hits were Dickey Pearce and Ross Barnes.

Fake to Third, Throw to First Outlawed

Amended Rule 8.05(b) in 2013 so that the pitcher, while in contact with the pitcher’s rubber, is prohibited from faking a throw to third base. Penalty: Balk when runners are on base. Amended Rule 8.05(c) Comment to agree with amended Rule 8.05(b):

“A pitcher is to step directly toward a base before throwing to that base and is required to throw (except to second base) because he steps. It is a balk if, with runners on first and third, the pitcher steps toward third and does not throw, merely to bluff the runner back to third, then seeing the runner on first start for second, turn and step to first base. It is legal for a pitcher to feint a throw to second base.”]

Fielders in Fair Territory

In 1920 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).

Flying Starts Outlawed

Flying starts when tagging up (or retouching a base) on a fly out were outlawed with this addition in the 1954 rule book to 7.10(a) in the Case Book-Comments section: “‘Retouch,’ in this rule, means to tag up and start from a contact with the base after the ball is caught. A runner is not permitted to take a flying start from a position in back of the base.” Eventually this was made an appeal play.

[Hy Turkin, writing in the November 11, 1953 (pp. 1, 6) *The Sporting News* said the flying starts had been practiced by Al Dark and Bobby Thomson, adding, “The possibility of collision and brawl, caused by a third baseman stationing himself on the bag to foil this stratagem, caused the solons to force runners to take the conventional standing start from a base.”]

Forfeit Score

In 1940, Rule 24 added that the score of a forfeited game “shall be recorded as 9-0” in favor of the club not at fault.

Foul Ball Caught on Bound

Through 1865 a batter was out if a fly ball was caught by a fielder on one bound.

The one-bounce rule continued to be applied to foul balls, the batter being out if it was caught on the fly or on one bound/bounce.

In 1879 Rule IV *Batting Department*, Section 13, *How Batsmen Are Put Out* dictated that a batter was out on a foul fly only if it were caught on the fly (no longer on one bounce). 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.]

In 1880 Class IV *The Game*, Rule 41(3) restored the rule on a foul fly, the batter once again being out if it is “momentarily held by a fielder before touching the ground, or after touching the ground but once.”

In 1883 the National League, in Class V *The Game*, Rule 51(3), went back to a batter being out only if a foul fly were caught in the fly, not on one bounce, with “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.”

However, the American Association, with Class V *The Game* Rule 46(3) in 1883, 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 . . .”

In 1886 the American Association, with Rule 42(3), 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”).

Foul Balls Counting as Strikes

Until 1901 in the National League and 1903 in the American League foul balls were normally not counted as strikes, even until the third strike.

Starting in 1887, however, with Rule 31(3), a strike was called for “any obvious attempt to make a foul hit.” Rule 47(8) in 1888 clarified that a batter was out if, with two strikes, he “obviously attempts to make a foul hit.”

In 1894, Rule 40 addressed bunts as, “A bunt hit is a fair hit to the ground within the infield,” and 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.]

Other than bunts, foul tips, and obvious attempts to make a foul hit, foul balls did not count as strikes in the National League until the addition in 1901 of Rule 44, Section 3 that a strike is “A foul hit ball not caught on the fly, unless two strikes have already been called.”

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.

During the period that fouls counted as strikes, except after two strikes, in the National and then the American League, the descriptions varied on what constituted a strike after two strikes. In the National League Rules in 1901, such a strike was limited to a bunt rather than the general term of an intentional effort. In 1902, the provision went back to “Any intention or effort to hit the ball to foul ground,” with no mention made of a bunt. In 1903, with both leagues treating foul balls as strikes, except after two strikes, Rule 44, Section 4, switched back from the general “intention or effort to hit the ball to foul ground” to “A ‘bunt hit’ which sends the ball to foul ground.”

In 1904 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.”

Foul Tip

In 1889 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.

In 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.”

Through 2019, a foul tip (in 2.00, Definitions, until the definitions were put at the end of the rules starting with the 2015 rule-book reorganization) was defined as “a batted ball that goes sharp and direct from the bat to the catcher’s hands and is legally caught. . . . It is not a catch if it is a rebound, unless the ball has first touched the catcher’s glove or hand.” In 2020, the definition was changed to, “A foul tip is a batted ball that goes sharp and direct from the bat to the catcher and is legally caught.” The rule no longer required the ball to first touch the catcher’s glove or hand.

2019 5.09(a)(2) Comment: If a foul tip strikes the catcher’s glove and then goes on through and is caught by both hands against his body or protector, before the ball touches the ground, it is a strike, and if third strike, batter is out. If smothered against his body or protector, it is a catch provided the ball struck the catcher’s glove or hand first.

2020 5.09(a)(2) Comment: If a foul tip strikes any part of the catcher’s body or paraphernalia and is caught by hand or glove against his body or protector, before the ball touches the ground, it is a strike, and if third strike, batter is out.

Hit by Pitch

In 1887, Rule 48(4) added, “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.” Prior to 1887, a batter was not awarded first base when hit by a pitch.

Home Runs

All Runs Counting on Game-Ending Home Run

In 1920 Rule 22, Section 2 added a provision 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.

Batted Balls Judged Fair or Foul According to Where They Leave the Playing Field

In 1920 Rule 48, *Balls Batted Outside the Ground*, 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.”

[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 resumed using the boundary rule rather than where it disappeared from the umpire’s view. At that time, John B. Foster, editor of the *Spalding Official Base Ball Guide*, noted, “This change had been made in the rules once before, but it was dropped by mutual consent because of a dispute after a game.”]

Bounce Home Runs Eliminated

In 1931 the National League joined the American League in eliminating the bounce home run with Rule 41, Section 3, “A fair hit ball that bounds into a stand or over a fence shall be a two-base hit.” John B. Foster, editor of the 1931 *Spalding’s Official Base Ball Guide*, wrote, “Section 3 is all new and is the first universal ground rule of that kind that has ever been adopted in base ball.”

An item on page 6 of the December 18, 1930 *The Sporting News* read, “Another change limits the runner to two bases when the ball bounces off the playing field, designed to prevent trick home runs made when the ball took a hop into the stands. This rule has been in effect in the American League and is said to have cost Base Ruth nearly a score of homers last season [clearly an exaggeration]. It is claimed 12 of Hack Wilson’s circuit clouts last year resulted from such hits.” [Playing for the Chicago Cubs in the National League, which still allowed bounce home runs in 1930, Wilson set a league record with 56 home runs.]

Infield Fly Rule

In 1890 the Players’ League had a provision in Rule 41, Section 9, “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.”

In 1894 Rule 45, Section 9 (National League) added, “The Batsman is out . . . If he hits a fly ball that can be handled by an infielder while first base is occupied with only one out.”

This was a precursor of the infield fly rule. It prevented an infielder from letting a fly ball 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.

In 1895, the situation was expanded to require runners on first and second or first, second, and third. This protected runners in situations in which at least two force outs existed. In such cases, runners had to hold up on a pop up so as to not be doubled off their base if the ball was caught. By the runners holding up, however, a fielder could let the ball drop and then force out two or even three of the runners. The rule in 1895 still applied only with one out. In 1901 Rule 46, Section 8 changed “with only one out” to “unless two are out.”

In 1914, the National League adopted the American League’s interpretation of the infield fly rule, which does not permit a runner to run on an infield fly. (Source: 1914 Reach Guide, page 541, Playing Rule Changes)

In 1920 Rule 51 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.”

Intentional Walk

In 1920 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 addition in 1920, 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 from the editor of the *Spalding’s Official Base Ball Guide* 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.”

Beginning in 2017, an intentional walk could be issued by indicating such desire to the umpire rather than having the pitcher intentionally throw four balls: 5.05(b)(1) and 9.14 (d).

Note from 1935 Spalding’s Guide, page 12: In 1934 the Southern Association tried to eliminate intentional walks with two out and runners on. In these situations, the runners were automatically advanced two bases on a walk. After two weeks, however, the rule was rescinded.

Intentionally Dropped a Fly Ball

In 1939 an addition was made to Rule 49, Section 2: 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. [The rule differentiates itself from the infield fly rule in that it requires a fielder to drop a batted ball rather than allow the ball to drop safely.]

In 1940, Rule 49, Section 2(a) the rule added that the situation 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.”

In 1947, the note in Rule 49, Section 2(a) was changed to “In such cases base-runners are not obliged to ‘tag up’ and may advance at their own risk.”

Until 1975, the ball remained live, which created confusion among runners. Unlike a ball that is dropped or allowed to drop when an infield fly is called while the ball is in the air, a runner in a non-infield-fly situation will not know the ruling until the ball is dropped. In 1975, Rule 6.05(l) was changed to create a dead ball in such situations. Originally, the rule applied to “any fielder” intentionally dropping a fly ball. According to Rich Marazzi in *The Rules and Lore of Baseball*, it was noticed that, under the modified rule, an outfielder could intentionally drop a long fly with a runner on third and fewer than two out, thus making it a dead ball and keeping the runner from tagging and scoring. The amended rule was then changed to have it apply to “an infielder” rather than “any fielder” before the 1975 rule book went to press.

Intentionally Pitching at a Batter

1879 – Rule III *Pitching*, Section 8, *Dead Balls*, added, “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 in a sum not less than ten dollars nor more than fifty dollars.”

1950 – 8.02(c) regarding what the pitcher shall not be allowed to do, added, “PITCH AT A BATTERS HEAD, and if, in the umpire’s opinion, such violation occurs, he shall call ‘Time’ and warn the pitcher and the Manager of the defensive team that another such pitch will me the immediate expulsion from the game. If such pitch is repeated the umpire shall inflict the _PENALTY: The pitcher shall be removed from the game and from the grounds. The President of the League shall impose such fine and suspension as his judgment warrants.” 8.02(c) in the NOTES – CASE BOOK – COMMENT section: To pitch at a batter’s head is unsportsmanlike and highly dangerous. It should be – and is – condemned by everybody. Umpires should act without hesitation in enforcement of this rule.

1978 – 8.02(d) expanded the prohibition of pitchers intentionally pitching at batters. When issuing a warning to the pitcher and his manager, the umpire will issue the same warning to the opposing manager. The umpire, if circumstances warrant it, may issue a warning to both teams before the game.

1988 – 8.02(d) gave an umpire the authority to immediately eject a pitcher and/or manager if, in the umpire’s judgement, the pitcher intentionally pitched at the batter. The umpire could also elect to warn the pitcher and manager of both teams that another such pitch would result in the ejection of that pitcher (or a replacement) and the manager. The umpire, if the circumstances warranted it, could continue to warn both teams before the game and also could issue such a warning at anytime during the game.

Interference

In 1940 Rule 46, Section 5, regarding the batsman becoming a base runner if the catcher interferes with him, added “unless he makes a safe hit.”

In 1964, a sentence was added to 6.08(c) dealing with the manager of the offense having the choice of declining an interference penalty or accepting the play, added this sentence: “However, if the batter reaches first base on a hit, an error, a base on balls, a hit batsman, or otherwise, and all runners advance at least one base, the play proceeds without reference to the interference.”

Two rules were added or modified in 1967 in response to situations from the 1966 season:

7.08(b) in NOTES – CASE BOOK: If a runner has contact with a legally occupied base, no interference will be called unless it is considered intentional.

7.11: Players and coaches of the offensive team must vacate space needed by a fielder attempting to field a batted or thrown ball. In 1967, dugouts were added to the rule as a place where space needed to be vacated. In 2011, bullpens were added.

Distraction by Fielder

In 1954, Rule 4.06 was reshuffled with 4.06(b) reading, “No fielder shall take a position in the batter’s line of vision, and with deliberate unsportsmanlike intent, act in a manner to distract the batter.

Intentional interference by runner

7.08 (f): Any runner is out when—He is touched by a fair ball in fair territory before the ball has touched or passed an infielder. (No mention in the rules through 1963 of intentionally being hit by a batted ball to break up a double play.)

Starting in 1964, 7.09(g) – It is interference by a batter or runner when – If, in the judgment of the umpire, a base runner wilfully [*sic*] and deliberately interferes with a batted ball or a fielder in the act of fielding a batted ball with the obvious intent to break up a double play, the ball is dead. The umpire shall call the runner out for interference and also call out the batter-runner because of the action of his teammate. In no event may bases be run or runs scored because of such action by a runner.

7.09(h) in 1964 addressed a batter-runner interfering with a batted ball or fielder to break up a double play. In addition to the batter-runner, the “next preceding runner” was called out. In 1965 the “next preceding runner” was changed to “the runner who had advanced closest to home plate regardless where the double play may have been possible.”

Interference by Catcher

In 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.]

Interference by Coach

In 1914 Rule 56, 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.

Also in 1914 Rule 58 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.

Minimum Number of Batters Faced by a Pitcher

In 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.”

In 2020 (and in 2019 in the major leagues), 5.10(g) changed the one-batter minimum to a three-batter minimum although a pitcher finishing an inning could be relieved at the beginning of the next inning, regardless of how many batters the pitcher had faced at that point. (See the “Pace of Play” section for more information.)

Order of Batting

In 1879 the practice of the first batter of an inning is the one who follows the last batter to complete his time at bat in the preceding inning: Rule IV *Batting Department*, Section 2, *The Order of Striking*. Before 1879, the first striker/batter was the one “whose name follows that of the third man out in the preceding inning.” While the two were often the same, the order could be different if the third out were made on the bases by a runner who preceded the last batter to complete a time at bat.

Overhand Pitching

In 1884, overhand pitching was allowed in the National League with the removal of the restriction of the pitcher having to have his hand pass below his shoulder. The restriction was last noted in Rule 27 in 1883.

The Union Association and American Association continued to call for a balk if the pitcher delivered the ball with his hand passing over his shoulder in 1884. The Union Association lasted only one year. The American Association kept the restriction in its 1885 rule book. However, at a June 7, 1885 meeting in Philadelphia, the American Association changed the rule to allow overhand pitching.

Runner Pushed off Base

No. 12 in the MLB Umpire Manual - RUNNER PUSHED OFF BASE, Rule 5.06(1): “If in the judgment of an umpire, a runner is pushed or forced off a base by a fielder, intentionally or unintentionally, at which the umpire runner otherwise would have been called safe, the umpire has the authority and discretion under the circumstances to return the runner to the base he was forced off following the conclusion of the play.”

Even before this was added to the manual, rule 9.01(c) [8.01(c) starting in 2015] allowed umpires the authority to rule on any point not specifically covered in the rules.

A notable example took place in Game 2 of the 1991 World Series when Ron Gant of Atlanta was tagged out by Minnesota first-baseman Kent Hrbek. Atlanta claimed Hrbek pulled Gant off the base. Umpire Drew Coble ruled that Gant was not forced off the base. It was a judgment call by Coble although the rule would have allowed Coble to call Gant safe had his judgment been different.

Revoking Manager Decision after Reversed Call

On September 26, 2008, Los Angeles Dodgers at San Francisco Giants, bottom of the sixth: Bengie Molina hit a drive off the fence that was ruled in play. Molina stopped at first and was replaced by pinch-runner Emmanuel Burriss. The umpires reviewed the play with the replay system and overturned the call to a home run. However, the Giants were not able to revoke the pinch runner and allow Molina to stay in the game.

In the 2010 rules, 9.02(c) added additional sentences to allow the umpires after consultation, and a change of the original decision, to reset the runners as would have been the case had they made the final call originally. “If the umpires consult after a play and change a call that had been made, then they have the authority to take all steps that they deem necessary, in their discretion, to eliminate the results and consequences of the earlier call that they are reversing, including placing runners where they think those runners would have been after the play, had the ultimate call been made as the initial call, disregarding interference or obstruction that may have occurred on the field; runners passing other runners or missing bases, etc., all in the discretion of the umpires.” [This became 8.02(c) in 2015.]

This does not directly address the issue for a manager to revoke a decision, such as a pinch runner, that was made before the call was reversed.

Strike Zone

1876 – Rule 5, Section 6, *Good balls to the bat* (when batters could call for the height of a pitch): 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.

1877 – 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.

1887 – Batters were no longer able to call for a pitch height-wise. The overall definition of a “fair ball” remained the same with the ball to be not lower than the batter’s knee nor higher than his shoulder.

1949 – Rule 28: Over any portion of home base, before touching the ground, not lower than the batter’s knees, nor higher than his shoulder.

1950 - 2.63 THE STRIKE ZONE is that space over home plate which is between the batter’s arm-pits and the top of his knees when he assumes his natural stance.

In 2.00 Definitions:

1962 – Between the batter’s armpits and the top of his knees.

1963 – Between the top of the batter’s shoulders and his knees.

1969 – Between the batter’s armpits and the top of his knees.

1988 – Upper limit is a horizontal line at the midpoint of the top of the shoulders and the top of the uniform pants; the lower limit is a line at the top of the knees.

1996 – Same upper limit; the lower limit is a line at the hollow beneath the kneecap.

2015 – Within the list of rules changes in 2015, a note was included that the diagram of the strike zone had been revised, although the diagrams in the 2014 and 2015 rule books are identical.

Strikeouts

Four Strikes Needed for Strikeout

In 1887, 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.

Strikeout Warning on Third Strike

In 1876 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.

In 1880 the provision for a warning before a called third strike had been removed.

Substitutions

Substitutes/Courtesy Runners Allowed

1876 Rule II *The Game, Section 3 Substitutes*, read, “No player taking part in a game shall be replaced by another after the commencement of the fourth innings.” An exception was provided in Rule VI, Section 14 *Running the Bases - 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 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.

In 1877 Rule II *The Game, Section 3 Substitutes*, was changed: 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.

Deleted from Rule VI, Section 14 in 1877 was, “The substitute in question shall take his position so as to cross the batsman’s position, and in front of the home base, 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.” The elimination of this sentence thus required the batter to reach base before a substitute runner could be used.

In 1881 Class V *The Game*, Rule 49(2) added, “The Base Runner shall not have a substitute run for him.” (The prohibition of a substitute runner, even with the consent of the opposing team, remained through 1888 in the National League when once again an exception was made to allow it if the captain of the opposing team consented.)

When the American Association was formed in 1882, rules allowed for a substitute runner “in case of an accident during the game being played, if the contending club consents thereto.” Although no provision was made for a substitute runner for the batter, there are documented instances of this happening. On September 11, 1882, in a game between Cincinnati and the Eclipse Louisville, Cincinnati consented to allow Pete Browning to have Guy Hecker run for him. The *Courier-Journal* of Louisville reported the next day that in the eighth inning, “Browning made a good hit to right and Hecker was to run for him, but the former got excited and ran himself, and Hecker stayed back. The ball was put to first and judgment called, and Browning lost his hit, as Hecker was decided the runner, and he was not there.”

In 1886 in the American Association (Rule 15) and in 1887 (Rule 21 in the common American Association/National League rule book), rules required a team to adopt uniforms for its players and have no fewer than nine players on each side. In the past, teams could play with fewer than nine if a player was injured and no substitute was available. The requirements of a player being in uniform eliminated the opportunity for a shorthanded team to recruit a spectator from the crowd to fill in.

One substitute was allowed starting at the end of a completed inning in 1889 [Rule 28, Section 2] in addition to a substitute for a player because of illness or injury. The rule made clear that the “player retired shall not thereafter participate in the game.” Section 3 of the rule said a base runner may not have a substitute run for him, except by consent of the captains.

In 1890 the rule allowed for two substitute players at the end of a completed inning.

In 1891 Rule 28, Section 2 removed restrictions on the number of substitutes – Any such player may be substituted at any time, by either club; but no player thereby retired shall thereafter participate in the game – although the requirement remained for a substitute for a base runner to require the approval of the opposing captain, who could designate a particular substitute.

In 1904 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.”

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:

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

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. In 1949, the last year such runners were allowed, Rule 17, Section 3 read, “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 manager or captain of the other team.” Rule 3.05 in 1950 read, “A player whose name is on his team’s batting order MAY NOT BECOME A SUBSTITUTE RUNNER for another member of his team.”

According to Retrosheet, the last courtesy runner was at a St. Louis at Cleveland American League game July 2, 1949 in the top of the ninth.

Retrosheet’s page on courtesy runners is at <https://www.retrosheet.org/courtesy.htm>. This page also notes a courtesy fielder in 1952, something done but not supported by the rules, and it also has a list of mid-play runners, such as noted below in “Revoking Manager Decision after Reversed Call.” Note: The cases of mid-play runners are distinct from “courtesy” situations. Runners can be substituted mid-play if the ball is dead because it went out of play.

Announcement of Substitutes

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 Rule 28, Section 4: Provided, however, that if, through oversight, such announcement is not made, the substitute player will be in the game.

Tagging Up after Fly Out

In 1920 Rule 56, Section 10 added, “A base-runner shall have the right to advance the moment such fly ball touches the hands of a fielder.” This no longer allowed a fielder to juggle a ball while running toward the infield to delay a runner in tagging up and trying to advance.

Transfer Rule Interpretation of 2014

Prior to 2014, umpires interpreted A CATCH in Rule 2.00 as, “A ball will be ruled caught when the momentum of the catch is completed and the player voluntarily releases the ball,” as noted in the umpire’s manual. An addition to the manual in 2014 stated, “It shall not be adjudged to be a catch if, while in the act of making a throw during the momentum of the catch, the fielder loses possession of the ball in the transfer (e.g., flip from the glove) before he secures the ball with his throwing hand.”

The new interpretation resulted in many balls not being called legal catches – both with fly balls and with thrown balls caught by a pivot player turning a double play – early in the season. On April 25, 2014, the rule was clarified to bring a catch back to previous standards.

Walks – Number of Balls Needed

Through 1879, 9 balls were needed for a walk. Through 1878, the procedure was for the umpire to call a ball for every “unfair pitch” and for the striker to be awarded after 3 balls. In 1879, Rule III, Section 7 was changed simply to nine balls for a walk – the same as before except that it was no longer a matter of three unfair pitches for a ball times three balls for a walk.

Balls needed for a walk in ensuing years:

- 8 balls in 1880 [Class IV *The Game*, Rule 42(2)]
- 7 balls in 1881 [Class V *The Game*, Rule 49(2)]
- 6 balls in 1884 [National League: Class V *The Game*, Rule 52(2)]; Rule 47(2) in the Union Association and Rule 46(2) in the American Association have 7 balls needed for a walk.
- 7 balls in 1886 [National League: Class V *The Game*, Rule 52(2).] Rule 45(1) in the American Association has 6 balls.
- 5 balls in 1887 [Rule 48(2) for both National League and American Association, which adopted joint rules in 1887]]
- 4 balls in 1889 [Rule 44(2)]

Scoring Rules

Rule books back to the 19th century had more than 50 rules with only a few of them devoted to scoring. For example, the 1891 book had 67 playing rules plus Rule 68 on Scoring and Rule 69 for The Summary. The 1914 book had 83 playing rules with rules 84-86 devoted to scoring. The 1949 book had 69 rules with Rule 70 for The Rules of Scoring, with had 13 sections, and 71 for The Summary, which had 17 sections on what the official scorer had to list and then a section on determining percentages.

The 1950 rule book had 10 rules, the final one for The Scorer.

In 2015, the rules were reorganized with nine rules, the final one for The Official Scorer.

Appeal of Official Scorer's Call

The 2007 rule book (Rule 10.01) standardized the process for league review of a scorer's judgment call and empowered the league to overrule a clearly erroneous judgment call by a scorer.

10.01(a) – A player or club may request the League President review a judgment call of an official scorer made in a game . . . if the League President concludes that the judgment of the official scorer had been clearly erroneous, may order a change in a judgment call. . . . A league may impose a reasonable fee upon a party requesting such review in the event that the judgment call of the official scorer being reviewed is upheld.”

From 2007 to 2011, the appeal of a scorer's judgment decision had to be made by a team. (Even though “player” is listed in the rule, generally all appeals came from a team on behalf of the player. In 2012, as part of the new collective bargaining agreement, players were able to appeal on their own, and the number of appealed scoring decisions increased greatly.

In 2012, 10.01(a) was amended to have the Executive Vice President for Baseball Operations rule on appeals of scoring decision and, after a warning, impose reasonable sanctions of a club or player if the club or player has abused the appeals process by repeatedly filing frivolous appeals or acting in bad faith.

Assists

Assists were addressed in 1877, the first National League rule book to include scoring (Rule VII).

From the beginning, an assist could be credited even on a play in which no out was recorded because of a subsequent error. Section 5 read, “An assist should be given to a player who makes a play in time to put a runner out, even if the player who should complete the play fails, through no fault of the player assisting.”

The 1877 scoring rules dictated, “An assist should not be given to a player who muffs the ball, or allows it to bound off his body toward a player who then assists or puts out a player.” This sentence was dropped from the 1878 rules. In 1931, the concept of no assist for an error (and eventually a misplay) was reinstated.

In 1904 Rule 85, Section 7 added a clause (in italics) to the sentence, “An assist should be given to each player who handles the ball in aiding in a run out or any other play of the kind, *except the one who completes it.*” The additional clause precludes a fielder from getting an assist along with a putout.

In 1910 Rule 85, Section 7 was modified so that a player could receive an assist in addition to a put out on a play with the addition of the clause indicated in italics, “An assist should be given to each player who handles the ball in aiding in a run-out or any other play of the kind, *even though he completes the play by making the put-out.*” Previously, the rule excluded the player completing the play (with a put out) from receiving an assist.

In 1914 Rule 85, Section 7 called for only one assist for a player handling the ball in aiding an out. A fielder may get an assist and a put out for an out but, even if he handles and throws the ball more than once, he cannot get more than one assist on an out.

In 1931 Rule 70, Section 8 added, “Do not credit an assist to a fielder who makes a bad throw, even when a runner trying to advance on it is subsequently retired. A play that follows an error is a new play and the player making an error is not entitled to an assist unless he takes part in the new play.”

Benefit of the Doubt

The word “doubt” was in the rules regarding batters as early as 1877 with Rule VIII, Section 3: In case of doubt over this class of hits [“hit so sharply”], score a base hit and exempt fielder from the charge of an error.

The word “benefit” was added to the phrase in 1950 with 10.04(g), regarding base hits: Always give the batter the benefit of the doubt. A safe course to follow being to score a hit when exceptionally good fielding of a batted ball fails to result in a putout.

“Benefit of the doubt” regarding pitchers was in the 1917 rule addition of *Definition of Earned Run Off Pitcher* (Rule 85, Section 11) was added with “The pitcher shall be given the benefit of doubt whenever

fielding errors are made and in determining the base to which a runner should have been held with perfect support on part of fielders.”

Defensive Indifference

In 1920 Rule 85, Section 9, *Stolen Bases*, introduced defensive indifference instead of a stolen base: No stolen base shall be credited to a runner who is allowed to advance without any effort being made to stop him.

The definition of defensive indifference [10.08(g) in 2006, 10.07(g) in 2007] added a comment for the official scorer to consider the totality of the circumstances, including if the defensive team as a legitimate strategic motive to not contest a runner’s advancement, such as a runner from first going to second when there was a runner on third, causing the defensive team to not take a chance on the runner on third coming home.

Official scorer Ivy McLemore in 2012 researched the history of defensive indifference and found that, although it had existed as a rule since 1920, it wasn’t until the mid-to-late 1980s that it began being applied with any frequency.

Double Plays – Triple Plays

In 1909 Rule 85, Section 7 added this definition: A double play shall mean any two continuous put-outs that take place between batters between the time the ball leaves the pitcher’s hands until it is returned to him again standing in the pitcher’s box.

Beginning in 1954, the definitions in the rules noted that a play with two or three outs was not a double or triple play if “an error intervenes between putouts.”

In 1955 10.10(c) was reworded from the previous year [then 10.08(c), 1954] with examples of when a wild throw could be scored as an assist could be scored as an assist and not as an error or could be scored with both an assist and an error. In 1955, this section was condensed and mandated no assist to “a fielder whose wild throw permits a runner to advance, even if the runner subsequently is retired as a result of continuous play. A play which follows an error is a new play, and the player making an error is not entitled to an assist unless he takes part in the new play.”

In 1969, “or misplay” was added in addition to an intervening error in 10.12.

Earned Runs

Earned Runs Charged to Team Rather than Pitcher

In 1887 Rule 66 called for a summary to be kept by the official scorer. The summary included, “(1) The number of earned runs made by each side.” In 1897 Rule LXXII, in the summary changed the number of earned runs made “off each side” to “off each pitcher.”

10.18(i) added in 1969: A relief pitcher shall not have the benefit of previous chances for outs not accepted in determining earned runs.

[The 1969 rule change is different from the 19th century rule when earned runs were initially seen as the domain of team and not the pitcher. The 1969 change addressed situations in which runs scored after an inning had been extended because of an error or errors. For example, if a runner reached base on an error, and, with two out, a batter homered, both runs are unearned – the runner who reached on the error and the batter, since the home run occurred only because the inning was extended. Through 1968 a relief pitcher could benefit from the rule even when the error had occurred before he entered. The 1969 rule change created the concept of a “team unearned run.” In the case of a reliever giving up a run in an inning extended because of an error before the reliever came in, the runs allowed by that pitcher are unearned to the team but earned to the pitcher.]

In 1888 Rule 65(7) added, “An earned run shall be scored every time the player reaches the home base unaided by errors before chances have been offered to retire the side, but base on balls though summarized as errors, shall be credited as factors in earned runs.”

In 1939 Rule 70, Section 12, *Definition of Earned Run Off Pitcher*, added “even though the wild pitch be a third strike,” to the definition of an earned run.

In the 1979 rules, this sentence was added to the first paragraph of 10.18: “For the purpose of determining earned runs, an intentional base on balls, regardless of the circumstances, shall be construed in exactly the same manner as any other base on balls.” This had been the application before, but now it was added to the rule.

Earned Run Average

In 1917 Rule 85, Section 11, *Definition of Earned Run Off Pitcher*, was added (although the National League had compiled them starting in 1912 and the American League in 1913):

A run earned off the pitcher shall be scored every time a player reaches home base by the aid of safe hits, sacrifice hits, stolen bases, bases on balls, hit batsman, wild pitches and balks, before fielding chances have been offered to retire the side.

The pitcher shall be given the benefit of doubt whenever fielding errors are made and in determining the base to which a runner should have been held with perfect support on part of fielders. A fielding error made by the pitcher shall be considered the same as any other fielding error. No run can be earned that scores as result of batsman having reached first base on a fielding error or passed ball; nor can any run be earned after the fielding side has failed to accept chances offered to retire the side.

To determine the pitcher’s percentage for the season, the total number of innings he has pitched; then multiplied by nine, to find his average effectiveness for a complete game. The number of runs earned off his pitching shall be divided by the total number of innings he has pitched; then multiplied by nine, to find his average effectiveness for a complete game.

From 1976 to 1981, fractional innings pitched for the purpose of earned-run average were rounded up or down.

A note was added to 10.22(e) in 1976: “For purposes of earned run average calculations and innings pitched totals, innings pitched shall be rounded off to the nearest whole inning. EXAMPLES: 200 1/3 innings becomes 200; 200 2/3 innings becomes 201.

The 1980 rule book has an exception: Do not apply this rule where a pitcher has only 1/3 of an inning for the entire season. In such cases carry his total for innings pitched as 1/3.

The 1982 rule book for 10.22(e) has this note: Earned-run averages shall be calculated on the basis of total innings pitched including fractional innings. EXAMPLE: 9-1/3 innings pitched and 3 earned runs is an earned-run average of 2.89 (3 ER times 9 divided by 9-1/3 equals 2.89).

[The 1982 rule change to eliminate rounding of errors came after Steve McCatty of Oakland was recognized as the earned-run-average leader in 1981, a result only of rounding. McCatty had pitched 185-2/3 innings. By rounding, McCatty was credited with 186 innings for computing his ERA. Sammy Stewart of Baltimore had 112-1/3 innings, which was rounded down to 112. Because of the rounding, Catty had a 2.32 ERA and Stewart 2.33 ERA. Without the rounding down and up of the innings pitched, Stewart would have been at 2.32 and McCatty at 2.33. By the rules in place, however, McCatty was declared the leader. In the 1983 *The Sporting News Official Baseball Guide*, Cliff Kachline wrote, “Late in the year [1981], the Scoring Rules Committee recommended changing the rule so that, starting in 1983, the rounding off of fractional innings would be eliminated for all pitchers.” The change appeared in the 1982 rule book even if, as Kachline wrote, it was not to take effect until 1983. Lyle Spatz and Bill Nowlin wrote about the situation in the Society for American Baseball Research’s Spring 2011 *Baseball Research Journal* (<https://sabr.org/journal/article/choosing-among-winners-of-the-1981-al-era-title>).]

Errors

Errors were addressed in the original scoring rules first published in the 1877 rule book. Rule VIII, Section 7 read, “An error should be given for each mis-play, which allows the striker or base-runner to make one or more bases, when perfect play would have insured his being put out.”

Ball Need Not Touch Fielder

In 1963 10.13 Note (2) was added: It is not necessary that the fielder touch the ball to be charged with an error. If a ground ball goes through a fielder’s legs or a pop fly falls untouched and in the scorer’s judgment the fielder could have handed the ball with ordinary effort, an error shall be charged.

Bases on Balls Charged as Errors

In 1883 Class VII, Rule 70(7) added, “An error should be given to the Pitcher when the batsman is given first base on “called balls.”” In 1887 Rule 65(7) no longer called for an error charged to the pitcher for a walk with the addition of a clause that wild pitches, bases on called balls, bases on the batsman being struck by a pitched ball, illegal pitched ball, balks, and passed balls would not be included in column for errors. The error for a base on balls was back in 1888 as it was not in the list of plays (wild pitches, balks, etc.) exempted from being errors. In addition, Rule 65(7) in 1888, regarding earned runs, said bases on balls “shall be credited as factors in earned runs.” In 1889 Rule 68, Section 7 again exempted bases on balls from being an error, and Rule 68, Section 9, regarding earned runs, removed the clause that bases on balls be credited as factors in earned runs.

Completing Double Play

In 1914 Rule 85, Section 8 added the phrase “or prolongs the life of the base-runner” to the manner in which a fielder can be charged with an error for a misplay. Also in Section 8, the sentence indicated in italics was added regarding potential double plays: An error shall not be scored against the catcher or an infielder who attempts to complete a double play, unless the throw be so wild that an additional base be gained. *This, however, does not exempt from an error a player who drops a thrown ball when by holding it he would have completed a double play.*

Slow Handling

1955 10.11 added a note: Slow handling of the ball which does not involve mechanical misplay shall not be considered an error.

Hits

Hit for Batted Ball Striking Runner

In 1888 Rule 65(3) added to the list of when a base hit should be scored, “That in all cases where a base runner is retired by being hit by a batted ball, the batsman should be credited with a base hit.” The following year (now Rule 68, Section 3) a batted ball hitting the person or clothing of the umpire was also added to when a hit should be scored.

Hit Instead of Fielder’s Choice on a Feint

In 1955 10.04(h) added an exception to when a batter is not credited with a hit when a fielder is unsuccessful in putting out a lead runner but could have retired the batter at first base: This shall not apply if the fielder merely looks toward or feints toward another base before attempting to make the putout at first base.

Side note on this addition: Jack Lang, writing in the June 2002 *New York Mets Inside Pitch*, said he was responsible for the change after not crediting Stan Musial of St. Louis with the hit the previous season on

such a play when Brooklyn's Gil Hodges fielded his grounder, made "several fake throws" as he waited for shortstop Pee Wee Reese to get to second for a force, and then threw too late to the pitcher covering first. Lang scored the play a fielder's choice rather than crediting Musial with a hit.

Retrosheet indicates that Musial reached base on a fielder's choice (a play on which no outs were registered) at Brooklyn in the third inning on May 13, 1954. An item, "Severe Scoring" in the un-bylined game story on page 2D of the May 14 *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* wrote, "Severe official scoring deprived Stan Musial on third-inning grounder fielded by Gil Hodges far to the first baseman's right. Hodges did feint toward second base to see if he had a force-out chance, but Musial then beat the ball and Pitcher Johnny Podres, covering, in a sprint for first base. The lame explanation was that Hodges could have outrun the fleet Musial to the bag."

The *Daily News* of New York – on page 68 of the unbylined "Diamond Dust," also covered with play with, "This one has folks talking: Two on, one out, and Musial grounded wide of first. Hodges cut over for grab, turned and cocked arm for peg to second, then reconsidered and tried first with throw. Podres was late covering bag, and Musial was safe. Scorer ruled it a 'fielder's choice,' reasoning if Hodges had made play immediately, at first, Musial would have been out. Therefore, no hit. It's an intriguing point."

The rule was significant in an August 2, 2006 Philadelphia at St. Louis game. Philadelphia's Chase Utley had a 33-game hitting streak on the line when he came up in the eighth inning and was still hitless in the game. With one out and Shane Victorino on third, Utley grounded to pitcher Randy Flores who looked Victorino back to third and then threw too late to retire Utley at first. The play was first scored a fielder's choice, but when informed of the rule and that Flores had not made an actual play, reversed the call and ruled a hit to extend Utley's hitting streak to 34. (Utley's streak reached 35 before it was broken.)

Hits Credited for Walks

See below, under Walks, for when batters were credited with a hit for a walk.

Home Run to End Game

In 1920 Rule 85, Section 3A added, "If, in the last half of the final inning, with the winning run on base, the batsman drives home that run, credit shall be given him for as many bases on his hit as the runner advances; except, however, in the case of the batsman driving a fair ball out of the playing field, he shall receive credit for a home run." Over-the-fence home runs were no longer not counted as home runs because a game-ending run was on base.

Informing Umpire if Teams Switch Sides before Three Outs

In 1951, this directive was added to 10.01(b)(2): If the teams change sides before three men are put out, the scorer shall immediately inform the umpire of the mistake.

Interference/Obstruction

In 1951, regarding errors, 10.10(i) was added: If a batter is awarded first base by an umpire because of interference by the catcher, charge the catcher with an error; if an umpire awards a runner or runners one or more bases because of interference or obstruction by any defensive player, charge the player who committed the interference or obstruction with one error, no matter how many bases the runner or runners are advanced.

Intervening Errors/Misplays

The rules in 1950, after the major revisions, did not treat a play after an error/misplay as a new play. A player could get an assist on a wild throw or other misplay for error if there was a subsequent out.

2.21 DOUBLE PLAY and 2.68 TRIPLE PLAY are plays by the defense in which two/three offensive players are legally put out as a result of continuous play.

10.09 DOUBLE PLAY – TRIPLE PLAY: Any two/three successive putouts which take place between the time a ball leaves a pitcher's hand and is returned to him while he is standing in the pitcher's box.

[The definition refers to "continuous play" and the rule to "successive putouts." In 1954 the rules dictated that a double play or triple play occurred, "provided there is no error between putouts."]

In 1955 10.10(c) was reworded from the previous year [then 10.08(c)] with examples of when a wild throw could be scored as an assist could be scored as an assist and not as an error or could be scored with both an assist and an error. In 1955, this section was condensed and mandated no assist to "a fielder whose wild throw permits a runner to advance, even if the runner subsequently is retired as a result of continuous play. A play which follows an error is a new play, and the player making an error is not entitled to an assist unless he takes part in the new play."

In 1969 "misplay" was added to "error" regarding a new play for scoring purposes.

Also new to the 1950 rules: 10.08(c) ASSISTS – Situations will arise in which a wild throw shall be scored as an assist and not as an error while on some plays a wild throw shall be scored as an assist and as an error. Examples provided were an overthrow by a catcher on a stolen base with the runner thrown out trying to advance another base; assist, no error for catcher. Runners at first and second, force at second, overthrow on relay, runner from second scores, batter-runner tries for second and thrown out; assist and error for infielder who made the wild relay.

In 1955 10.10(c) was reworded from the previous year [then 10.08(c)] with examples of when a wild throw could be scored as an assist could be scored as an assist and not as an error or could be scored with both an assist and an error. In 1955, this section was condensed and mandated no assist to "a fielder whose wild throw permits a runner to advance, even if the runner subsequently is retired as a result of continuous play. A play which follows an error is a new play, and the player making an error is not entitled to an assist unless he takes part in the new play."

Mental Mistakes

In 1967 Note 3 to 10.13 added, "Mental mistakes or misjudgments are not to be scored as errors unless specifically covered in the rules."

Numbering Convention for Field Positions

Just about anyone alive grew up keeping score with this convention for numbering the positions: 1-pitcher; 2-catcher; 3-first baseman; 4-second baseman; 5-third baseman; 6-shortstop; 7-left fielder; 8-center fielder; 9-right fielder. The question many of us probably asked is, "Why is the shortstop 6?" The answer often offered is that when the numbering system began, the shortstop was a rover and not always positioned between the second and third basemen.

However, Keith Olbermann dug deeper and found that the shortstop had once been 5 and the third baseman 6; not only that, some early scorecards had the numbers of 7 and 9 swapped as the designations for the left and right fielders. From hoary anecdotes that he acknowledges as dubious, Olbermann learned that members of the press corps used one system or the other based on regional differences. By 1909 the numbering had changed to what is familiar to us today.

Ordinary Effort

A definition, in Rule 2.00, for ordinary effort was added in the 2007 rules:

ORDINARY EFFORT is the effort that a fielder of average skill at a position in that league or classification of leagues should exhibit on a play, with due consideration given to the condition of the field and weather conditions.

Comment: This standard . . . is an objective standard in regard to any particular fielder. In other words, even if a fielder makes his best effort, if that effort falls short of what an average fielder at that position in that league would have made in a situation, the official scorer should charge that fielder with an error.

Oversliding

In 1909 Rule 85, Section 9, *Stolen Bases*, added, “In event of a base runner being touched out after sliding over a base, he shall not be regarded as having stolen the base in question.

In 1939, Rule 70, Section 5, regarding the value of a hit specified, that a batter could not get a double or a triple if he overslid second or third, respectively, and was tagged out. The rule indicated the oversliding should be treated the same as a runner oversliding a base on a stolen-base attempt.

Runs Batted In (RBIs)

Historian/statistician Ernie Lanigan, on page 56 of *The Baseball Cyclopedia*, wrote, “As far back as 1879 a Buffalo paper used to include the runs batted in in the summary of the box score of the home game. Henry Chadwick urged the adoption of this feature in the middle 80’s and by 1891 carried his point so that the National League scorers were instructed to report this data. They reported it grudgingly and finally were told they wouldn’t have to report it. The New York Press in 1907 revived the runs batted in feature and the writer worked the figures up annually until the major leagues, on the request of the Baseball Writers’ Association, incorporated the data in the averages in 1920.”

In 1920 Rule 86, Section 8, added, “The Summary shall contain . . . The number of runs batted in by each batsman.” Runs batted in were thus added to the rules although the 1920 rule book had nothing more, such as a detailed definition of an RBI, until 1931

[Even before runs batted in were dictated as a summary item, Lanigan had been tracking RBIs and reporting them in the annual baseball guides, although 1920 is regarded as the year when RBIs became an official statistic.]

In 1931 Rule 70, Section 13 added the definition of runs batted in as “runs scored on safe hits (including home runs), sacrifice hits, outfield put-outs, and when the run is forced over by reason of batsman becoming a base-runner. With less than two out, if an error is made on a play on which a runner from third would ordinarily score, credit the batsman with a Run Batted In.

In 1939 Rule 70, Section 13 added this paragraph to the definition of runs batted in: The batsman shall not be credited with driving in a run when a runner scores as he hits into a force infield double play or a double play in which the first baseman picks up a fair hit ground ball, touches first base and then throws to second retiring the runner who had been on first, said runner not being forced, has to be tagged out.

The second part of the paragraph refers to a reverse-force double play. In ensuing years the wording of reverse-force double play was modified to clarify that a reverse-force double play is one that starts with the batter or any runner being forced out and then a preceding runner who had started the play in a force situation being tagged out before reaching the next base or returning to the original base.

Sacrifice

In 1889 Rule 68, Section 4, Sacrifice Hits, which shall be credited to the batsman, who when but one man is out advances a runner a base on a fly to the outfield or a ground hit, which results in putting out the batsman, or would so result if handled without error. Section 1 of Rule 68 did not call for an exemption from being charged with an at bat for a sacrifice.

In 1894 Rule 70, Section 4 restricted sacrifice hits to bunts, not other ground balls nor flies to the outfield.

No exemption was made in the rule book for a batter to be charged with a time at bat until, in 1897, Rule LXXI, Section 1, added “has made a sacrifice hit which was manifestly intentional” to the events for which an at bat would not be charged.

In 1967: 10.09(d), No sacrifice if, in the judgment of the official scorer, the batter was bunting for a hit rather than to advance a runner.

In 1969 10.09(d) added the word “primarily” for not awarding a sacrifice if the scorer was determined that a batter was bunting for a base hit. Now the batter must be judged to be bunting *primarily* for a base hit to be denied a sacrifice.

Sacrifice Fly

The original sacrifice rule in 1889 included advancements on fly balls. In 1894 sacrifices were limited to bunts.

The issue regarding fly balls emerged again during the winter meetings December 10-12, 1907, when Cincinnati Reds part-owner Max Fleischmann suggested that a batter who advanced by means of a fly ball be credited with a sacrifice.

In 1908 Rule 85, *Sacrifice Hits*, Section 5(a) added, “A sacrifice hit shall also be credited to a batsman who, when no one is out or when but one man is out, hits a fly ball that is caught but results in a run being scored.” No “Time at Bat” was charged the batter for this per Rule 82, that an at bat is not charged for a sacrifice hit. In 1909, the rule added that the sacrifice hit (later known as a sacrifice fly) would be awarded on a fly that was not caught (muffed) if, in the judgment of the scorer, it would have resulted in a run had it been caught.

[Page 196 of the 1909 *Spalding’s Official Base Ball Record* had an item, “Outfield Sacrifice Hits” in which it was claimed, “The new-fangled sacrifices were not included in the official batting records of the National League.” The *Guide* noted that run-scoring fly balls were recorded by official scorers and listed those in the National League, although league president Harry Pulliam was skeptical that all had been counted and, as quoted in the *Guide* from an interview appeared in the December 3, 1908 *New York Press*, said, “I think the National League scorers made some mistakes last season. The official records show only 250 suicides of this kind, and I believe there ought to have been at least forty more.” Pulliam’s choice of a synonym for Outfield Sacrifice Hits took on irony when, the following July, he died by shooting himself in the head.]

Sacrifice Fly for Any Advancement

The original sacrifice rule of 1889 called for a sacrifice hit on any advancement from a ground ball or fly ball

In 1926 Rule 85, Section 5 expanded the sacrifice rule to include any fly ball that to be credited for any advancement by a baserunner, not just a runner who scores.

Sacrifice Fly Abandoned and Eventually Reinstated

As a means of eliminating a sacrifice fly for advancement for any runner, not just runners who scored, the entire rule for sacrifices on fly balls was eliminated after the 1930 season, it being deleted from Rule 70, Section 6 in the 1931 rules. A batter scoring a runner with a fly ball would get a run batted in but would be charged with an at-bat.

John B. Foster, in the 1931 *Spalding’s Official Base Ball Guide* (page 16) wrote, “Argument over this play has been interminable, and always could be, but the Rules Committee wisely concluded that a sacrifice meant something more than swinging for a home run and knocking a fly long enough to permit a runner to score from third. The batter undoubtedly might mean to bat the long fly, but he would not decline a home run if he could get one, and batting home runs hardly comes under the category of sacrifices.”

The sacrifice fly was reinstated in 1939 but for only one year; Rule 70, Section 6 included a paragraph for awarding a sacrifice on a fly ball that scored a run or that would have scored a runner (in the judgment of the official scorer) if the fly ball was dropped for an error. In 1940 the rule did not have a provision for a sacrifice on a fly ball and included, “EXPLANATION – Eliminates sacrifice hit on a fly ball.”

[In the February 22, 1940 (page 3) *The Sporting News*, Edgar G. Brands wrote that changes, including the sacrifice fly, in 1939 had been made without a formal meeting of the rules committee. Brand added that, “It was stated that it [the sacrifice fly] was put back into the code for last season upon request of baseball writers, who, it appeared did not represent a majority and that it gave the batter credit for something he did not intend to do.”]

The sacrifice fly was reinstated in 1954 with an addition to Rule 10.06(a) calling for a sacrifice on a fair fly ball that was caught with fewer than two out and that allowed a runner to score. Chicago Cubs business manager Jimmy Gallagher, who chaired the scoring rules committee that restored the sacrifice fly in November 1953, recalled the history of the rule at the meeting and claimed that its elimination after 1930 was a mistake. “From 1926 through ’30,” he said, “they called it a sacrifice when a runner advanced any base after a fly. “The legislators wanted to get rid of the unfair portion that granted a sacrifice after a long fly sent a man from first to second or second or third – so they mistakenly killed the whole sacrifice fly rule.”

Dan Daniel, in the November 18, 1953 *The Sporting News* (page 10), wrote that the “sacrifice fly rule was brought back with the primary plan of assisting in the growth of the list of .300 hitters, which is suffering alarming attrition.”

A follow-up meeting of the rules committee in December 1953 agreed to word the revived rule “so that a time at bat is remitted only when it is a fair fly ball which enables a runner to score.” (*The Sporting News*, December 9, 1953, page 12.)

The requirement for a sacrifice fly to be a fair fly remained through 1960. In 1961, “fair” was removed, and a batter could be credited with a sacrifice fly whether it was fair or foul.

In 1958, a Note was added to Rule 10.08(d)(2) [now 9.08(d) Comment] regarding an uncaught fly that is deemed deep enough to score a runner from third but that turns into a force out: Score a sacrifice fly if the ball is not caught “but another runner is forced out by reason of the batter becoming a runner.” Even though the 1957 rules had no provision for a sacrifice fly in such a situation, Cleveland official scorer Harry Jones credited Roger Maris with a sacrifice fly on such a play in a Detroit at Cleveland game April 27, 1957.

In 1975, “an infielder running in the outfield” was added to Rule 10.09 as a way that a sacrifice fly could be credited. Prior to 1975, the rules allowed for a sacrifice fly only on a fly ball handled by an outfielder – no mention made of an infielder catching the ball.

Saves

First added, as Rule 10.20, in 1969. Note: The 1968 *The Sporting News* Official Baseball Guide on page 259 had an item on a new save rule for relief pitchers. It was stricter than the official rule adopted in 1969. It may have been a modification of an unofficial standard *The Sporting News* had adopted in 1968.

1969 – Rule 10.20 added

(a) Credit a save to a relief pitcher who enters a game with his team in the lead if he holds the lead the remainder of the game, provided he is not credited with the victory.

(b) A relief pitcher cannot be credited with a save if he does not finish the game unless he is removed for a pinch-hitter or pinch-runner.

(c) When more than one relief pitcher qualifies for a save under the provisions of this rule, credit the save to the relief pitcher judged by the scorer to have been the most effective. Only one save can be credited in any game.

1974 – Rule 10.20 amended

(a) A pitcher shall be credited with a save when, in entering the game as a relief pitcher, he finds the potential tying or winning run either on base or at the plate or pitches at least three or more effective innings and in either case, preserves the lead.

(b) When more than one relief pitcher qualifies for a save under the provisions of this rule, credit the save to the relief pitcher judged by the scorer to have been the most effective. It is not mandatory to credit a save. Only one save can be credited in any game.

1975 – Rule 10.20 amended

Credit a save to a relief pitcher when he meets all three of the following conditions:

- (1) He is the finishing pitcher in a game won by his club; and
- (2) He is not the winning pitcher; and
- (3) He qualifies under one of the following conditions:
 - (a) He enters the game with a lead of no more than three runs and pitches for at least one inning; or
 - (b) He enters the game with the potential tying [*sic*] run either on base, or at bat, or on deck (that is, the potential tying [*sic*] run is wither already on base or is one of the first two batsman he faces); or
 - (c) He pitches effectively for at least three innings.

No more than one save may be credited in each game.

1985 – Rule 10.20(3)(b) amended to include “regardless of the count,” to wit: He enters the game, regardless of the count, with the potential tying [*sic*] run either on base, or at bat, or on deck (that is, the potential tying [*sic*] run is wither already on base or is one of the first two batsman he faces).

(On June 10, 1982 Ron Davis of Minnesota was initially awarded a save, which was removed the next day by the American League because Davis inherited a 3-0 count and walked the batter (walk charged to previous pitcher), which put the potential tying run on deck.

2007 – “Effectively” removed as a requirement for being awarded a save by pitching at least three innings. Also in 2007, it was added that a pitcher must credited with at least 1/3 of an inning pitched to be eligible.

A save is a statistic credited to a relief pitcher, as set forth in this Rule 10.19.

- (a) He is the finishing pitcher in a game won by his team;
- (b) He is not the winning pitcher;
- (c) He is credited with at least 1/3 of an inning pitched; and
- (d) He satisfies one of the following conditions:
 - (1) He enters the game with a lead of no more than three runs and pitches for at least one inning.
 - (2) He enters the game, regardless of the count, with the potential tying run either on base, or at bat or on deck (that is, the potential tying run is either already on base or is one of the first two batters he faces); or
 - (3) He pitches for at least three innings.

Shift Violation

With the addition of a penalty for a shift violation in 5.02(c) – an award of first base to the batter and an award of the next base to any or all runners if an infielder in violation of the shift restriction was the first to touch the ball after the pitch – “shift restriction violation” was added to the section regarding interference and obstruction in the scoring rules in 9.12(c) regarding errors.

Shutouts

Shutouts were first noted in the 1953 rule book [10.16(h)] in the section on winning and losing pitchers. The rule noted that a pitcher had to pitch a complete game to be credited with a shutout. It wasn't until 1957 in 10.19(f) that an exception was made for a pitcher entering a game before a batter was out, getting out of the inning without allowing a run, and pitching the rest of the game without giving up a run.

The 2007 rules separated Shutouts into a separate section (10.18, later 9.18) with this description: “No pitcher shall be credited with pitching a shutout unless he pitches the complete game, or unless he enters the game with none out before the opposing team has scored in the first inning, puts out the side without a run scoring and pitches the rest of the game without allowing a run.” Nothing was added for complete games, including a provision that a pitcher could get a complete game by relieving with no out in the first and then going the distance. Even before shutouts were added to the rule with the provision for a reliever to get a

shutout, there is at least one example of a pitcher getting a shutout but not a complete game. This happened in a May 31, 1988 New York at Oakland game. Carney Lansford led off the last of the first with a line drive off the arm of New York's Al Leiter and reached base. Neil Allen relieved, retired the side without a run, and went the rest of the way with no runs allowed. He was credited with a shutout but not a complete game.

Stolen Bases/Caught Stealing

From Peter Morris, *A Game of Inches*, Vol. 2, p. 167: "Stolen bases were a big part of nineteenth-century baseball but were not tracked at all until 1886. Even then official scorers had such different ideas of what constituted a stolen base that the *Providence Journal* concluded that the new rule was "not observed with sufficient uniformity to be of any benefit (*Providence Journal*, quoted in *Cleveland Leader and Herald*, May 16, 1886). Reaching a consensus on the matter proved very difficult, with the unfortunate result that the statistic was not valid for comparison purposes until 1898. Even more regrettable is that many have used this dispute as an excuse to disregard all nineteenth-century statistics."

A reference to steals was in the original 1877 scoring rules at the end of Rule VIII, Section 4 with, "A base or bases shall be given to the runner for a successful steal, whether made on an error of his opponents, or without error." Section 4 was greatly shortened in 1878 with one of the deletions being the reference to a successful steal.

In 1886, Class VII, Rule 70(7) [National League] added, "Bases stolen by players shall appear to their credit in the summary of the game."

In 1886, Rule 53(4) [American Association] added, "In the fourth column [of the tabulated score] shall be scored bases stolen, and shall include every base made after first base has been reached by a base runner, except those made by reason of, or with the aid of a 'battery' error, or by batting, 'balks' or by being forced off. In short, shall include all bases made by a 'clean steal,' or through a wild throw of muff of the ball by a fielder who is directly trying to put the base runner out while attempting to steal a base."

1886 AA 53(4)

In 1887 Rule 65(4) [first time the American Association and National League used a common rule book] adopted the same language regarding stolen bases that the American Association had in 1886.

Stolen Bases for Additional Advancement on Hits or Outs

From 1892 to 1896 runners could receive credit for a stolen base for such things as advancing on an out or taking an extra base on a hit.

In 1892 Rule 68, Section 8 added, "If a Base Runner advances a base on a fly out, or gains two bases on a single base hit, or an infield out, or attempted out, he shall be credited with a stolen base, provided there is a possible chance and a palpable attempt made to retire him." This sentence was removed in 1897.

In 1909, Rule 85, Section 9, *Stolen Bases*, added, "In event of a double steal being attempted from based one and two to two and three, where either is thrown out, the other shall not be credited with a stolen base. [In 1910 a triple steal was added to a double steal regarding runners not being credited with a stolen base if another runner is thrown out.] Also new in 1909:

"In event of a base runner being touched out after sliding over a base, he shall not be regarded as having stolen the base in question.

"In event of a base runner making his start to steal a base prior to a battery error, he shall be credited with a stolen base.

"In event of a palpable muff of a ball thrown by the catcher, when the base runner is clearly blocked, the infielder making the muff shall be charged with an error and the base runner shall not be credited with a stolen base."

1949 Rule 70, Section 10 notes situations in which a runner is not credited with a stolen base (oversliding and being touched out muff of a throw by the catcher in addition to defensive indifference), but it does not mention a runner being charged with a caught stealing. Rule 71, Section 2, has stolen bases, but not caught stealing, as part of statistics the official scorer summarizes. The same (no mention of caught stealing in 1950 10.11) is the case; the summary in 10.03(h) lists stolen bases but not caught stealing.

In 1931 Rule 70, Section 10(a) added, “Do not give a stolen base to a runner who has started to steal and the pitcher balks.”

1950 10.11(g): If a runner, attempting to steal, is well advanced toward the base he is attempting to steal and a balk is called on the pitcher, credit the runner with a stolen base and do not score the balk unless another runner who is not attempting to steal is advanced by a balk. 10.11(g) was dropped from the 1951 rule book.

Caught Stealing

Historian/statistician Ernie Lanigan, in his 1922 *The Baseball Cyclopedia*, regarding players thrown out stealing, wrote, “First work of this character done at request of Charles Schmidt, catcher of Detroit team, in 1912. Done in desultory and scientific fashion since. Data on this vague, but all of it may be assembled within the next few years.”

Caught stealing was referenced in 1951 with the addition of 10.08(d): When records are kept of players caught stealing by catchers, credit the catcher with preventing a stolen base each time he traps a runner off any base with a thrown ball and, as a result of such throw, the runner is retired or would have been except for a subsequent error by any fielder, including the catcher. Runners who are retired in run-down plays started by the catcher trapping a runner off any base, or whose base running life is prolonged by an error after they have been trapped off base by the catcher, are to be included among those prevented from stealing by the catcher. In 1955 an exception was added to the rule (now 10.10) to not credit the catcher with a caught stealing when he traps a runner off base after fielding a batted ball or any play started by another fielder.

10.08(h) in 1963: A runner shall be charged as “Caught Stealing” if he is put out, or would have been put out by errorless play when he 1. tries to steal 2. is picked off a base and tries to advance 2. overslides while stealing. NOTE: Do not charge “Caught Stealing” unless the runner has an opportunity to be credited with a stolen base when the play starts.

Addition to 10.08 in 1967: “after being picked off a base” was added the sentence regarding a runner being credited with a stolen base if he was trapped off base and reached the next base without an error.

Addition to 10.08 in the 1985 rule book: “No caught stealing should be charged when a runner is awarded a base due to obstruction.”

In 2007, a Comment was added to 10.07(h): “The official scorer shall not charge a runner with a caught stealing if such runner would not have been credited with a stolen base had such runner been safe.” In a New York at Minnesota game May 29, 1982, New York’s Graig Nettles and Bobby Murcer were both charged with caught stealing after Roy Smalley struck out into a triple play. Since neither could have been credited with a stolen base (since the other was caught stealing on the play), both could not be charged with caught stealing starting with the 2007 addition.

Strikeout Charged to Outgoing or Substitute Batter?

In 1950 10.14(b) covered a situation when two batters combine for a strikeout: When a batter goes out of the game with two strikes against him and the substitute batter completes a strikeout, score it as a strikeout for the first batter. If the substitute batter completes the turn at bat in any other manner, score the action as having been that of the substitute batter.

Total Bases Run

A one-year statistic, Total Bases Run were the number of bases each player touched safely (with an exception for a player reaching base on what became known as a fielder’s choice). Rule 60(4) in 1880 only called for the scorer to credit “each player the total bases run during the game. In scoring ‘bases run’ where a player has reached first base as the result of putting out of another player, such first base shall not be credited to the striker as one of the bases run by him.” George Gore of Chicago led the National League with 6.0 bases run per game (450 bases run in 75 games), narrowly edging teammate Abner Dalrymple, who had 5.96 bases run per game (501 bases run in 84 games).

Tripleheaders Outlawed

In 1940 Rule 23, Section 7 added a sentence to prohibit a team from playing more than two championship games in one day.

Team Error: Early Attempt at the Concept with Unaccepted Chances

The concept of a team error – a way of protecting the pitcher against unearned runs on plays when no one fielder is responsible for a misplay – has been discussed for decades but not adopted. In 1888, however, this was added to Rule 65(3): A base hit should be scored in the following cases . . . That when a player reaches first base through an error of judgment such as two fielders allowing the ball to drop between them, the batter shall not be credited with a base hit, nor the fielder charged with an error, but it shall be scored as an unaccepted chance, and the batter charged with a time at the bat.

The rule was in the book only in 1888 and also did not address how this would affect an earned run, which was introduced in the 1888 rule book.

Value of Game-Ending Hit

In 2007, in 10.06(f), another paragraph was added to the Comment:

The Official Scorer shall credit the batter with a base touched in the natural course of play, even if the winning run has scored moments before on the same play. For example, the score is tied in the bottom of the ninth inning with a runner on second base and the batter hits a ball to the outfield that falls for a base hit. The runner scores after the batter has touched first base and continued on to second base but shortly before the batter-runner reaches second base. If the batter-runner reaches second base, the Official Scorer shall credit the batter with a two-base hit.

Walk Charged to Outgoing or to Substitute Pitcher?

In 1940 Rule 70, Section 12 added, “The preceding pitcher, and not a relieving pitcher, shall be charged with runs scored by any runners on base when such relief pitcher entered the game. The relieving pitcher shall not be charged with his first batsman reaching first base if such batsman had any advantage because of poor pitching by the preceding pitcher. With the count two or three balls and one or no strikes, or three balls and two strikes, charge preceding pitcher if batsman reaches first base, but credit relieving pitcher if batsman retired. With count one or two balls and two strikes, charge relieving pitcher if batsman reaches first base and credit him if batsman is retired.” The rule dictated a preceding pitcher, if he left a reliever in a disadvantageous situation, to be charged with a batter reaching first base without specifying it would apply only if the plate appearance ended in a walk.

In 1952 10.15(g) specified a base on balls only for charging an outgoing pitcher (based on the count at the time of substitution) for the completion of a plate appearance. It also added the sentence, “Any other action by such a batter, including a safe hit, being hit by a pitched ball, hitting into a forceout or a fielder’s choice or being safe because of a fielding error shall cause that batter to be charged to the relieving pitcher.”

In 1955 10.15(a) specified the “decided advantage” in the count when pitchers are changed. If the count is 2-0, 2-1, 3-0, 3-1, 3-2 and the plate appearance ended in a base on balls, the preceding pitcher is charged with the walk. If the count is 2-2, 1-2, 1-1, 1-0, 0-2, 0-1, the outgoing pitcher is off the hook and a walk, or any other action by the batter, is applied to the incoming pitcher.

Walks

Walks Charged as At Bats

In 1876 at bats were charged for walks. Scoring rules appeared in the 1877 National League rule book. Rule VIII, Section 1, regarding the number of times a player has been at bat during the game, included, “Any time or times where the player has been sent to base on called balls shall not be included in this column.”

Walks Counting as Hits

In 1887 Rule 65(3) added to the list of when a base hit should be scored, “When the batsman is awarded a base on balls.” 1887 was the only year in which bases on balls were counted as hits. The sentence was no longer in the 1888 rules.

Note: Respected sources of statistical information differ on how to treat statistics that were compiled with scoring rules that were different than they are now. The 1876 and 1887 seasons stand out for batting average. The former charged a time at bat for a walk; the latter granted a hit for a walk. The statistics printed in the National League guide for 1876 show Ross Barnes with 138 hits in 342 times at bat for a .403 batting average. The American Association statistics for 1887 show James “Tip” O’Neill with a .492 batting average. The statistics used in 1876 and 1887 continued in record books until the issuance of the first edition of the *Macmillan Baseball Encyclopedia*. A special records committee, formed as part of the development of the encyclopedia, decided that walks should be treated by modern means, not with at-bats charged as they were in 1876 nor with hits credited as they were in 1887. The batting average for Barnes (deducting 20 at-bats, the number of times he had walked) was changed to .429 for 1876. O’Neill’s batting average for 1887 was reduced to .435 with the deduction of 50 hits, the number of times he had walked. The first edition of *Total Baseball*, in 1989, followed this practice. Eventually, Jerome Holtzman, the official historian of baseball, announced a policy of keeping records by what the rules of the time were. Sean Forman, founder of baseball-reference.com, grappled with the question and in 2001, with “[A note about statistics from 1887 and 1876](#)” announced he would use “the standard method of computing batting averages and other stats” (meaning statistics would be computed with walks receiving neither an official at-bat nor a hit).

Wild Pitches/Passed Balls

In 1909 Rule 85, Section 10 added a definition of a wild pitch and passed ball: A wild pitch is a legally delivered ball, so high, low, or wide of the plate that the catcher cannot or does not stop and control it with ordinary effort, and as a result the batsman, who becomes a base runner on such a pitched ball, reaches first base or a base runner advances. A passed ball is a legally delivered ball that the catcher should hold or control with ordinary effort, but his failure to do so enables the batsman, who becomes a base runner on such pitched ball, to reach first base or a base runner to advance.”

In 1931 Rule 70, Section 11 mandated a wild pitch rather than passed ball if a pitched ball touches the ground before reaching the plate by adding, “Any pitched ball that strikes the ground before reaching the home plate and passes the catcher, allowing runners to advance, shall be scored as a wild pitch.”

In 2007 10.13(a): The official scorer shall charge a pitcher with a wild pitch when a legally delivered ball touches the ground or home plate before reaching the catcher and is not handled by the catcher, thereby permitting a runner or runners to advance.

[A difference between the 1931 and 2007 rule is the 2007 rule mandates a wild pitch if it touches the ground or home plate before reaching the catcher; the mid-20th century rules specify touching the ground before reaching home plate.]

Wild Pitches/Passed Balls Instead of Errors When Batter Reaches Base after a Strikeout

Rules since 1957 call for a wild pitch or passed ball, but not an error, when a batter reaches first base after a third strike that was not cleanly caught by the catcher. In the past, the rules varied on whether an error and/or wild pitch/passed ball was charged to the culpable party.

From 1926 to 1930, the pitcher was not even credited with a strike out if the batter reached base on a wild pitch/error by the pitcher.

In 1909 Rule 85, Section 8, *Errors*, noted that an error was not to be charged for a wild pitch or passed ball, “unless such wild pitch or passed ball be on the third strike and allow the batter to reach first base . . . In case of a wild pitch or a passed ball allowing the batter to reach first base, the pitcher or the catcher, as the case may be, shall be charged with an error.” The addition of Rule 85, Section 10 in 1909 mandated that, in addition to an error being charged to the pitcher or catcher for such an event, a wild pitch or passed ball, respectively, is also charged. In 1910, the rule no longer included the provision that a pitcher or catcher be charged with an error for allowing a batter to reach first base on a wild pitch or passed ball.

In 1920 Rule 85, Section 8, *Errors*, added, “An error shall be charged to the catcher if he drop [*sic*] a third strike, allowing the runner to reach first base; except this rule is not to apply in case of a wild pitch.”

In 1926 Rule 85, Section 8 added and/or changed these two paragraphs:

“The catcher shall be charged with a passed ball when a base-runner is enabled to advance by the catcher’s failure to hold or control a legally delivered ball that should have been held or controlled with ordinary effort.” [The previous rule had included that the catcher be charged with a passed ball for a batter reaching base on a third strike (when it was judged to be the fault of the catcher rather than the pitcher) as well as an error. The change removed a passed ball charged to the catcher for such a misplay.]

“An error shall be charged to the pitcher if he make [*sic*] a wild pitch for the third strike and the batsman reach first base and in such case the pitcher shall not have credit for a strike-out.” [A pitcher continued to be charged with a wild pitch and an error if such a wild pitch resulted in a batter reaching first after a strike out; however, previously the pitcher was still credited with a strike out.]

In 1931 Rule 70, Section 9 Rule 70, Section 9 no longer included an error to a pitcher for a wild pitch that allowed a batter to reach base after a third strike. In addition, the pitcher would be credited with a strike out on such a play.

An error returned to being charged to the pitcher for a wild pitch on such plays in 1950 in 10.10(b): Errors are not charged when a batter is awarded first base because of a base on balls . . . or if a runner, or runners, advance because of a passed ball or a wild pitch except: If a batter swings at a wild pitch for his third strike and thereby is enable to reach first base, it shall be scored as a strikeout and also an error for the pitcher and not a wild pitch; when a catcher muffs a third strike, thereby permitting a batter to reach first base, it shall be scored as an error for the catcher, not a passed ball, and as a strikeout.

In 1950, under earned runs, 10.15(b) added “Since a wild pitch on which a batter reaches first base is the pitcher’s fault, solely, even though it is scored as a fielding error, it shall be disregarded as an error and considered as wild pitch in computing earned runs and is the only instance in which an error is so disregarded.” The consideration of wild pitch was for reconstruction purposes only. A wild pitch was not charged to the pitcher in such situations; it was merely to be considered by the official scorer as tantamount to a wild pitch rather than an error so that it would not absolve the pitcher of an error.

In 1955 10.11(g)(1) also called for an error on the pitcher if a fourth ball was wild, which resulted in additional advancement of the batter-runner and/or runners beyond the base they would have been entitled to. The pitcher was not charged with a wild pitch on such plays.

In 1957, part (g) of Rule 10.11 was deleted in tandem with the addition of 10.13(f) to call for a wild pitch or passed ball rather than an error on the pitcher or catcher, respectively, for a batter reaching first after a strikeout. [Note: an error could still be charged if there is a subsequent misplay that allows the batter to reach first after a strikeout. For example, if the catcher does not cleanly catch the third strike but recovers the ball with time to put out the batter at first with ordinary effort but makes a bad throw, allowing the runner to reach first, the catcher may be charged with an error for the bad throw rather than being charged with a passed ball or the pitcher being charged with a wild pitch.]

Fielder’s Choice Rather than Wild Pitch/Passed Ball on a Strikeout When Batter Still Needs to be Put Out

In 1957 the addition of the rule to charge a passed ball or wild pitch rather than an error to the catcher or pitcher when a batter reaches base after a strikeout came a rule regarding advancement by other runners when a catcher had to complete a putout on a batter because the pitch was not cleanly caught after a strikeout.

Rule 10.13(f)(2)(ii): When the catcher recovers the ball after a wild pitch or passed ball on the third strike, and throws out the batter-runner at first base, or tags out the batter-runner, but another runner or runners advance, score the strikeout, the putout and assists, if any, and credit the advance of the other runner or runners as having been made on the play.

Winning and Losing Pitchers

With the overhaul of the rules in 1950, 10.16 was added to, for the first time, define winning and losing pitchers. The rule reflected the general usage going back to 1920.

A provision for an exception to a relief pitcher who was the pitcher of record but who was “ineffective and brief” was added in 1951 in 10.16(c)(5).

The 2007 rule book added comments to 10.17(b) and 10.17(c) to provide guidance on choosing the most effective relief pitcher and judging an ineffective and brief appearance by a relief pitcher in determining the winning pitcher.

Regarding pre-1920 customs and standards for 1901-1919, Frank J. Williams (“All the Record Books are Wrong,” *The National Pastime* 1982, Society for American Baseball Research, pp. 50-62) wrote that the lists in the annual baseball guides “were based on what the official scorer recommended to the league secretary or president. (He could never do more than recommend: it was the secretary or president who officially compiled the pitchers’ won-lost records during the season.) Often, when two or more pitchers were involved in a game, the official scorer’s recommendation was overruled by the league president. It was widely known that Ban Johnson, after reviewing the situation, often disagreed with his official scores. Sometimes the dispute was made public; usually it was not. This compelled statisticians like George Moreland, who compiled many of the weekly lists that appeared in newspapers, to rely on the scorers’ unofficial recommendations rather than the final, official decision rendered by Johnson. *Of course, the Reach and Spalding Guides were also forced to use their unofficial lists at the end of the season because Johnson did not release the official won-lost decisions. . . .*”

Winning and Losing Pitchers in a Forfeit

In 1940 Rule 24, Section 11 added a clause that, although all individual and team records are incorporated into a regulation game that has been forfeited, no pitcher will be credited with a win or charged with the loss in the game.

The 1963 rules [10.03(e)(2)] allowed a winning and losing pitcher in a forfeited game. If the team winning by forfeit was behind, there would be no decisions, but if the winning team was ahead (in a regulation game), the pitchers of record would be credited with a win and charged with a loss. Prior to this, the rules said no pitcher could be credited with a victory or charged with a loss in a forfeit.

Statistics

Minimum Standards

Batters

1950 10.18: To be eligible for the individual batting championship of any minor league, a player must have appeared in at least two-thirds of the games played by his team (not scheduled games). In the major leagues, a player must be credited with at least 400 official “times at bat.”

The minimum was changed in 1952 to 2.6 at bats per the number of games scheduled for one club in his league during the season.

The standard for qualifying for a percentage championship in batting was changed in 1957 to 3.1 plate appearances times the scheduled number of games, making it 477 plate appearances when the season was 154 games and 502 plate appearances when the season was 162 games.

In 1974 lesser minimums were set for the minor leagues.

In the strike-shortened 1981 season, the minimum used was 3.1 plate appearances times the number of games played (not scheduled) by a player's team.

Fielders

Minimum standards for fielding average were added in 1955 with 10.19(c). A catcher must have participated as a catcher in at least 90 games (80 games in leagues playing schedules of 140 games or less). An infielder or outfielder must have participated at his position in at least 100 games (90 games in leagues playing schedules of 140 games or less). A pitcher must have pitched in at least as many innings as the number of games scheduled for each club in his league that season.

In 1958 10.22(c) changed the minimums for fielding championships to at least one-half the number of games scheduled for catchers (had been 90 games, or 80 in leagues playing schedules of 140 games or less) and for other non-pitchers, at least two-thirds of the games scheduled (had been 100 games or 90 in leagues playing schedules of 140 games or less).

In 1965 10.22(c)(3) added an exception that if another pitcher, who has not qualified, has a fielding average as high or higher and has handled more total chances in a lesser number of innings, that pitcher will be the fielding champion.

Pitchers

The 1951 rule book added 10.18(b) for pitchers, who must have at least as many innings as the number of games scheduled for each team in the league to be eligible for league leadership for earned-run average.

In the strike-shortened 1981 season, the minimum used was one inning times the number of games played (not scheduled) by a player's team.

Exceptions/Addition of Hitless At-Bats

In 1952, 1953, and 1954 and then starting again in 1967, an exception was added to 10.18(a) and then 10.22(a) regarding the minimum plate appearances to qualify for a batting championship. The exception was that, if a batter would still hold the lead in batting average even with the addition of enough hitless at-bats to reach the minimum, the batter would still be considered to be the leader.

Other

1973 – Addition of 10.24 for guidelines for cumulative performance streaks. 10.24(c) covered a consecutive playing streak and said, "If a player is ejected from a game by an umpire before he can comply with the requirement of the rule, his streak shall continue."

1976 – Addition to 10.21: When a player listed in the starting lineup for the visiting club is substituted for before he plays defensively, he shall not receive credit in the defensive statistics (fielding), unless he actually plays that position during a game. All such players, however, shall be credited with one game played (in "batting statistics" as long as they are announced into the game or listed on the official lineup card).

1976 - 10.22(e) regarding computing an earned-run average, added this note: For purposes of earned run average calculations and innings pitched totals, innings pitched shall be rounded off to the nearest whole inning. EXAMPLES: 200-1/3 innings becomes 200; 200-2/3 becomes 201. The rounding remained through 1981 but was changed to no rounding in 1982.

Game-Winning RBI: First in the 1980 rule book as 10.04(e) although it had been adopted by the Playing Rules Committee in December 1978 and used in 1979. The Game-Winning RBI is the RBI that gives a club the lead it never relinquishes. There does not have to be a Game-Winning RBI in every game.

The game-winning RBI was eliminated after the 1988 season and did not appear in the 1989 rule book.

1982 – Addition to 10.24(b) for Consecutive-Game Hitting Streaks: “The player’s individual consecutive-game hitting streak shall be determined by the consecutive games in which the player appears and is not determined by his club’s games.”

10.23 – Slugging percentage and slugging champion added in 1983 to go with the batting champion with the highest batting average for those with enough plate appearances to qualify.

10.22(f) – On-base percentage added in 1984 rule book: On-base percentage, divide the total of hits, all bases on balls and hit by pitch by the total of at bats, all base on balls, hit by pitch, and sacrifice flies. NOTE: For the purpose of computing on-base percentage, ignore being awarded first base on interference or obstruction.

Format Changes

Beginning in 1920 the rules in the *Spalding’s Official Base Ball Guide* contained 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 books back to the 19th century had more than 50 rules with only a few of them devoted to scoring. For example, the 1891 book had 67 playing rules plus Rule 68 on Scoring and Rule 69 for The Summary. The 1914 book had 83 playing rules with rules 84-86 devoted to scoring. The 1949 book had 69 rules with Rule 70 for The Rules of Scoring and 71 for The Summary, which had 17 sections on what the official scorer had to list and then a section on determining percentages.

(Rule books from 1944 to 1947 contained ground rules for each of the parks.)

The 1950 rule book had 10 rules:

- 1.00 Objectives of the Game
- 2.00 Baseball Definitions as Used in This Code
- 3.00 Game Preliminaries
- 4.00 Starting and Ending a Game
- 5.00 Putting the Ball in Play. Live Ball
- 6.00 Rules Governing the Offense, The Batter
- 7.00 Rules Governing the Offense, The Base Runner
- 8.00 Rules Governing the Defense, Pitching
- 9.00 Rules Governing the Umpire
- 10.00 The Scorer

2014:

- 1.00 Objectives of the Game
- 2.00 Definition of Terms
- 3.00 Game Preliminaries
- 4.00 Starting and Ending a Game
- 5.00 Putting the Ball in Play. Live Ball
- 6.00 The Batter
- 7.00 The Runner
- 8.00 The Pitcher
- 9.00 The Umpire
- 10.00 The Official Scorer

2015:

- 1.00 Objectives of the Game
- 2.00 The Playing Field
- 3.00 Equipment and Uniforms
- 4.00 Game Preliminaries

- 5.00 Playing the Game
- 6.00 Improper Play, Illegal Action, and Misconduct
- 7.00 Ending the Game
- 8.00 The Umpire
- 9.00 The Official Scorer

Definition of Terms

Appendices – Diagram and layout of the playing field, gloves, and strike zone

Rule 5.00 became the longest of the rules, encompassing many of the rules that had separate sections until 2014. It covers Starting the Game, Fielding Positions, Base Coaches, Batting (Batting Order, The Batter's Box, Completing Time at Bat), When the Batter Becomes a Runner, Running the Bases (Occupying the Base, Advancing Bases, Dead Balls) , Pitching (Legal Pitching Delivery – The Windup and The Set Position, Warm-Up Pitches, Pitcher Delays, Throwing to the Bases, Effect of Removing Pivot Foot From Plate, Ambidextrous Pitchers), How a Team Scores, Making an Out (Retiring the Batter, Retiring a Runner, Appeal Plays, Effect of Preceding Runner's Failure to Touch a Base, Retiring the Side), Substitutions and Pitching Changes Including Visits to the Mound, Designated Hitter Rule, Calling "Time" and Dead Balls.

Changes Noted in Rule Books

Beginning in 1893 rule books published in the *Reach Official Base Ball Guide* (1897 in rule books published in the *Spalding's Official Base Ball Guide*) noted if there had been changes or amendments (with an occasional miss, such as in 1904) and indicated they were marked in some manner: italics, bold type, and/or citation of changed rules. The 1940 rule book, which had extensive changes, was prefaced by two pages with details of the alterations.

The 1950 and 1951 rule books contained a legend to refer to the pre-1950 rule book, e.g., 24-1 meant old Rule 24, Section 1. An N means new wording or material and was in black type in the 1950 rule book.

The 1954 rule book noted changes from the previous year with italics but did not list the rules changes.

The 1955 and 1956 rule books did not mark changes.

The 1957 and 1958 rule books began listing the rules that had changes.

The rule books from 1959 through 1962 did not list changes. Few rule changes occurred during these years.

The 1963 rule book resumed with a listing of changes.

The 1967 rule book listed the rules that had changes and also bolded/underlined such changes.

From 1990 to 2005, the only rule change occurred in 1996 with changes (noted by underlining) in the strike zone for the lower level of the strike zone to be a hollow below the kneecap.

The 2006 rule book had a number of changes, and this began the practice of all changes being specifically listed with some explanation of the change. Most of the rule changes contained an asterisk indicating that the approval of the Players Association was needed.

The 2013 rule book listed changes and also went back to underlining the changes. The underlining continued in 2014 but not in subsequent years.

The NOTES – CASE BOOK – COMMENTS section, which followed the main portion of the rules beginning in 1950, was eliminated in 1978 with the approved rulings in this area transferred to Comments to go with each rule in the main section of the rule book. A note in the 1978 rule book said the Official Playing Rules Committee voted, at its December 1977 meeting, to incorporate the Notes-Case Book-Comments section directly into the rules at the appropriate places.

The 2006 rule book listed numerous changes (only one change, to the strike zone in 1996, had been made since 1990), and most of the changes were marked with an asterisk to indicate that the approval of the Major League Players Association was needed for implementation. The approval by the players had been required for many years, although they were not noted. [Note: Apparently many of the rules marked with asterisks were not put into use in 2006; the 2007 rule book lists many of those that had been marked with asterisks in 2006 and, in the listing of changes for 2007 at the beginning of the book, writes, "The Playing Rules

Committee made the following changes before the 2006 season that went into effect in the National Association for the 2006 season and that will be in effect in the Major Leagues for the 2007 season (as amended further, in some Rules)"]

The 2006 rule book, at the end of 2.00 – Definitions, was the first to have a gender-neutral reference: Any reference in these Official Baseball Rules to “he,” “him,” or “his” shall be deemed to be a reference to “she,” “her” or “hers,” as the case may be, when the person is female. Eventually this was moved to the front of the book.

Also, the 2006 definition for LEAGUE PRESIDENT has a comment that includes, “With respect to the Major Leagues, the functions of the League President pursuant to these Rules shall be carried out by the designees of the Commissioner of Baseball.”

The 2006 rule book began labeling casebook comments. In addition to listing the rules that were changed in the front of the book, it added a brief description of the change. Changes within the book were no longer bolded or underlined. In the list of changes, it marked with an asterisk those that required approval of the Major League Players Association for implementation at the major league level in the upcoming season.

Pending Rules

After the development of the players association and the need to have the players approve rule changes adopted by the Playing Rules Committee, some rules could appear in a rule book but not take effect until the following year, such as rules adopted in December 1978 on not reverting to the last full inning if a game was rained out in a partial inning.

The 2006 rule book began marking with an asterisk those that required approval of the Major League Players Association for implementation at the major league level in the upcoming season.

With the 2022 collective bargaining agreement, a Joint Competition Committee replaced the Playing Rules Committee. The new committee – noted for the first time in the 2023 rules – includes players, streamlining the process for rule changes.

Thanks to Philippe Cousineau, Marc Alan Jones, Dan Levitt, Rich Marazzi, Wayne McElreavy, Brian Morrison, Jeff Nelson, Dave Smith, Bob Tholkes, and John Thorn, among others, for their contributions.