

AN INTRODUCTION TO BASEBALL

The playing field:

Fair territory is all of the space within the 90 degree triangle formed by home plate and the two foul poles. **Foul territory** is all the space in the other 270 degrees. A ball hit in fair territory is called a **fair ball** and a ball hit in foul territory is a **foul ball**.

The **infield** is the space in fair territory between home plate and the dirt arc just beyond the bases. The **outfield** is the remaining space in fair territory beyond the infield. A fair ball hit over the fences in the outfield is a **home run**.

The **dugout** is where the players stay when they are on the offense or when they are not playing. The **bull pen** is where the relief pitchers stay until they have been put in the game.

The people:

Each team has 25 players. There are usually 5 **starting pitchers** and 6 **relief pitchers** on a team. The other players have specialized positions when they are on the defense: **catcher, first baseman, second baseman, shortstop, third baseman, left fielder, center fielder, and right fielder**. Players often have the ability to play more than one defensive position and a team will have several players who can play each position. When the game begins, the **manager** (coach) identifies which players will play each position on defense and the order (**batting order**) they will hit on offense. The batting order stays the same throughout the game but a player may be substituted for. Like soccer, once a player has been removed from the game for a substitute he may not go back into the game.

In addition to the manager, each team has a number of coaches who help players with various aspects of the game. During the game, when a team is on offense, one of these coaches stands near first base and another coach stands near third base.

There are four **umpires** (referees) who apply and interpret the rules. There is one umpire at each base and one behind home plate.

There are 30 major league teams: 14 in the **American League** and 16 in the **National League**. Each team plays 162 games (about 6 per week) in the season which runs from early April to late September. Five teams in each league will qualify for the playoffs in October. Eventually the winning team in each league will meet in the **World Series**. The first team to win four games in the World Series is the champion.

The game:

There is no clock baseball. It is an opportunity-based game where each team will have 9 opportunities (**innings**) to score points (**runs**) on a rotation basis. If the score is tied at the end of those 9 innings, another inning will be played. If the score is still tied at the end of the 10th inning, another will be played and this will continue until one team has more runs than the other at the end of an inning.

In each inning, one team will be on the offense and the other team will be on the defense for half the inning. For the second half of the inning the teams will reverse positions. These switches from offense to defense will take place each time the offensive team has had three unsuccessful activities (**outs**.)

The objects of the game are simple: when a team is on the offense it wants to score runs. When it is on the defense it wants to get three outs. The offense needs to put men on base and move them around so they can score. The defense wants to keep men off the bases and remove them when they are on base.

At the heart of the game, and its most important element, is the confrontation between the pitcher on defense and the batter on offense. This confrontation is fought in the **strike zone**. The strike zone on each batter is the width of home plate and runs from the batter's knees to the top of his stomach. Any ball thrown by the pitcher which crosses this zone is called a **strike** and the batter is expected to swing at it. It is also called a strike if the batter swings at the pitch and misses it, regardless of whether it was in the strike zone or not. A foul ball is also called a strike. Conversely, any ball thrown by the pitcher which does not cross the strike zone is called a **ball**. A batter will be out (**strike out**) if he gets to three strikes (a foul ball can not be a third strike). He will get to first base (called a **walk**) if the pitcher throws four balls. The number of balls and strikes on a batter at any time (known as **the count**) influences the respective performance pressures felt by the batter and the pitcher. Pitchers will try to vary the speed of the pitch, its location when it crosses the strike zone, and the movement of the ball to make it harder for the batter to hit the pitch.

Besides strike outs, batters will make outs if they (1) hit a ball that is caught by any fielder before it hits the ground; (2) fail to reach a base they must get to before the ball gets there or (3) are tagged by a fielder with the ball anytime they are not on a base. These are the four ways most outs are made.

Besides the walk, batters may get on base by making a **hit**. Depending on the number of bases a batter gets to when he hits the ball the hit is called a **single, double, triple or home run**. Earlier batters who are on base (once on base batters are then called **runners**) when the current batter hits the ball or walks will move up as much as they can while avoiding making an out.

Since runners may move to the next base at any time, they will sometimes try to do that while the pitcher is in the process of throwing the ball to home plate. If they reach the next base before they are tagged with the ball, they have made a **stolen base**.

When players are in the field on defense, they are expected, within reason, to catch and throw the ball successfully. When they fail to do that, those mistakes are called **errors**.

Other information:

National Anthem – Just before the game starts, the players and fans will stand up, remove their hats and sing the *Star Spangled Banner*, the country's national anthem. This is the custom at most sporting events in this country.

Seventh Inning Stretch – At the middle of the seventh inning, fans will stand up and sing a traditional song *Take Me Out to the Ballgame*. Supposedly, this tradition goes back to the early 1900s when a President of the country was attending a game and he stood up in the middle of the seventh inning. The fans, believing the President was leaving the game, stood up to show their respect. He then just sat down and this became known as the seventh inning stretch.

Cubs games at Wrigley Field

The Scoreboard – Behind center field, there is a large green scoreboard which will show the scores in the other baseball games going on around the country. It will also show the number of outs and the count on the batter. Another smaller electronic scoreboard in right field will show information about the pitcher and the batter.

The Rooftops – A unique feature of Wrigley Field are the stands built on the rooftops of the buildings beyond the outfield seating area. Wrigley field is one of the oldest ball parks in the country and when it was built there were residential buildings surrounding the area. Over the years, the owners of these buildings realized that they could build seating areas on their roofs and charge people admission. Several years ago the owners of the Cubs threatened to build high fences on the stadium wall to block the view but eventually the building owners and the Cubs game to an agreement and now the building owners share some of their revenue with the team.

The Curse – It has been over 104 years since the Cubs last won the World Series and over 62 years since they have even played in the World Series. This is the longest time that any baseball team has gone without winning the World Series. The other team in Chicago, the White Sox, won the World Series in 2005. There are many reasons why people believe the Cubs have not won in such a long time and those reasons are generally referred to as the curse.