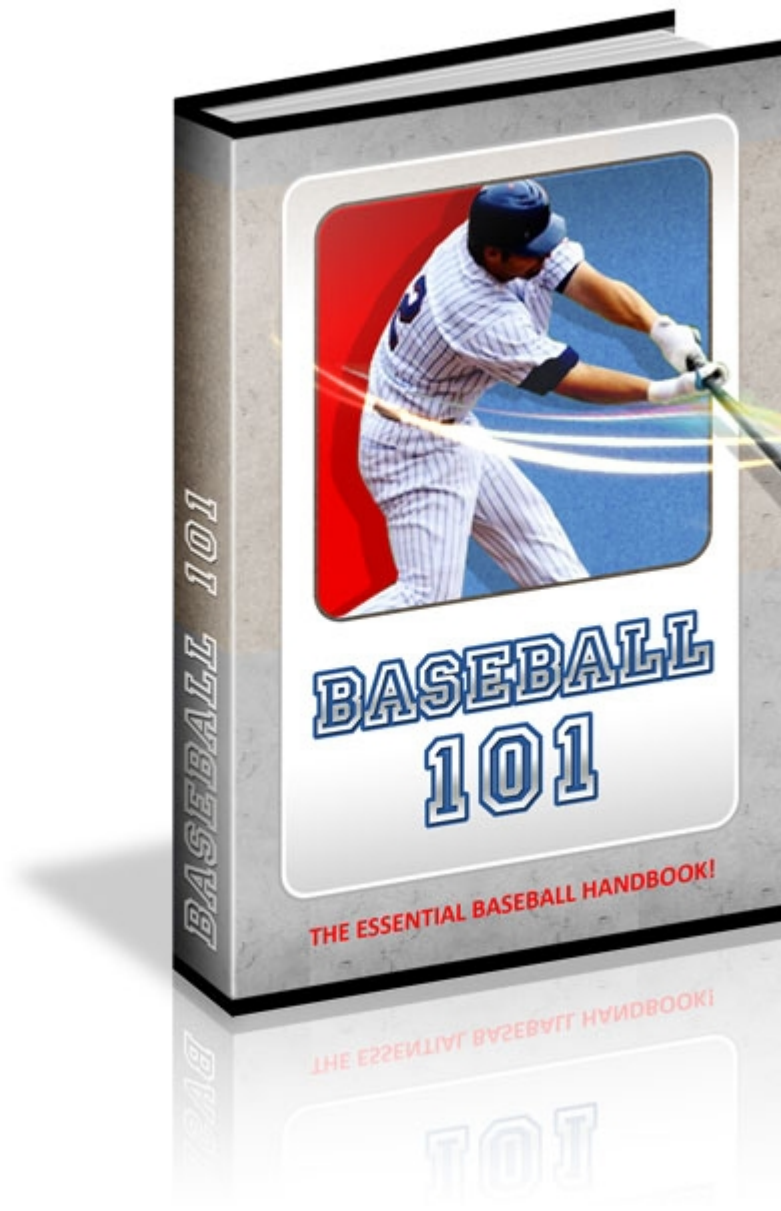


Baseball 101



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Chapter 1 - Introduction

We often think of Baseball as an “American sport.” While baseball is considered to be America’s national pastime, it is also played all over the world, including Canada, Japan, the Caribbean islands, and South America, just to name a few places. This slow moving, non-violent game has not only captured the hearts of Americans, but has also spread to other parts of the world.

In the United States, baseball is still considered to be the “ultimate sport.” While the Superbowl, which is the final contest for American pro-football, gets more television viewers than any other event each year, baseball is still followed and watched. Boys and even girls of all ages join little league by the time they are around 4 or 5 years old and learn to play this game. Most American children understand the rules of baseball and have, at one time or another, played this game.

The rules of baseball are simple. They have changed little throughout the ages, although there are doubts as to the origin of the game. While historians argue over how and when baseball started, one thing is clear, by the end of the 19th century, it was already America’s pastime.

Baseball field sizes have changed. The size of the bat has changed as have the size of the balls. The distance between the pitcher’s mound has been modified throughout the years as has the distance between the bases. But the main gist of the game has remained the same for over 100 years.

This introductory to baseball will help anyone who is trying to understand the game, the rules and even coach little league teams. Keep in mind that rules for little league and for even the high school leagues are a bit different than those for the professional players in that they have shorter innings and shorter field distances. The basic rules, however, are still the same.

Chapter 2 - How It Started

It is unclear how baseball started. Many historians credit baseball as being a derivative of the sport "Cricket" a game that is played in the United Kingdom that involves batting and pitching. However, although the idea of baseball may have been conjured up after watching a cricket match, the two sports are totally different. All sports seem to be derived from some other type of sport, but today's baseball is truly in a league of its own.

By the mid 1800s, Americans were looking for a way to pass the time. This was true in the cities that were swelling with industry as well as the country areas. All work and no play does truly make Johnny a dull boy, and the country needed something. Baseball was introduced as early as 1850, although the exact date and exact baseball game played have not been recorded. By 1880, however, the American Federation of Baseball had been formed and teams were formed to fill the federation. This was an amateur sport at the time and no money was supposed to change hands.

By 1898, however, it became apparent that there was money to be made in this sport. Players started to get paid a little money to play the game and the federation became very solid. Teams were formed from all different cities and games were played at crudely manufactured stadiums. The stadiums of yesteryear were mostly outside and did not offer much comfort for those sitting in the bleachers. Still, the crowds flocked in to see their favorite baseball players play the game.

One of the problems that the league had was the gambling factor.

We often think that the first baseball gambling scandal to hit the major leagues was the 1919 White Sox scandal (dubbed the "Black Sox"). This was far from the first time gamblers approached players and offered them bribes to throw games. Gambling was big business at the turn of the century and so was baseball. It was pretty well known that some games were "fixed." But the league never did anything about it. Not until 1919.

In 1919, the Chicago White Sox were playing the Boston Red Stockings (now the Boston Red Sox) for the World Series. The World Series of baseball had started 15 years earlier and both teams were pennant winners. Winning the pennant, prior to 1904, was the biggest prize the teams could have. With the introduction of the two leagues, it became apparent that there had to be a series that predicted the true champions of the game. The 1919 World Series was the first big scandal to hit major league baseball.

It was alleged that gamblers approached 8 players of the Chicago White Sox and offered them money to throw the game. One of the players was the heroic Joe Jackson. Joe Jackson, called "Shoeless Joe Jackson" was considered to be the top player of the game. The 8 players were found guilty of the federation of taking bribe money to throw the game and cost the White Sox the pennant. But this was not just something that was swept under the rug. The 8 men were banned from baseball for the rest of their lives. This has been documented on films such as "8 Men Out" and "Field Of Dreams." Although Shoeless Joe Jackson was often thought to have been innocent of the crime of "consorting with gamblers" and throwing the game, historians believe that he was just as guilty as the rest of his teammates.

After the White Sox scandal, the federation took a much harder line on any baseball player that even talked to gamblers. Consorting with gamblers was considered to grounds for someone being "banned for life" from the game of baseball. Two iconic players, Mickey Mantle and Willie Mays, were subsequently "banned for life" after they had retired and began advertising for casinos in Atlantic City. They were since reinstated. Pete Rose, probably one of the greatest baseball players of all times, was not so lucky. Rose admitted to betting on baseball games (not on his own team or against his own team but for his team) and was kicked out of baseball and has been prevented from being in the Hall of Fame.

The toll that the 1919 White Sox scandal took on the game cost the federation money. They knew that people would not want to attend baseball games that were "fixed." After this time, new commissioners were added to the federation and gambling or even consorting with gamblers was not tolerated in the profession.

By the 1920s, baseball was in full swing, so to speak. It was the number one pastime in America and the only professional sport that was being played. While college football was also very popular among campuses, this was an amateur sport. As was basketball, also gaining in popularity. Baseball, however, was a professional sport. Baseball players got paid, got to get their names put on baseball cards and were constantly besieged for autographs from fans. It was the era of stars like Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig and other Yankee players who made the game what it is today.

Baseball players were revered by youngsters and often thought to be "role models." Thus , the womanizing and drinking that the

legendary Babe Ruth was known for, was often kept out of the papers so that youngsters everywhere didn't follow exactly in his footsteps. It is important to realize that although the baseball players were played for their participation in the sport, they were not paid anywhere near what players today are played, inflation aside. A professional baseball player of yesterday would be able to afford to take care of his family and live in a modest home, but they were not considered to be the wealthy icons of today. Even as far back as the 1970s, baseball players were not making the money that today's big players are making.

Baseball is one of the few sports that is not a college sport. It has pretty much always been a professional sport, since leagues were formally formed and teams started in the late 19th century.

Baseball players are normally scouted and recruited from high school baseball teams. Baseball players, unlike other athletes, have a long career in the game. The average baseball player will start playing in the minors when he is about 18 years old and may end up retiring from the major leagues in his mid 40s. Baseball players do not have to be in perfect physical shape - in fact, one of the greats of the game was a bit paunchy. Babe Ruth is still regarded to be one of the greatest players the game has seen, despite the fact that his record of home runs and hits have been surpassed by other players.

Although it is normally played on a baseball field, called a baseball diamond, the game of baseball has been improvised to be played in streets. Even the bats were replaced by sticks by kids who would play stickball in the city streets, improvising different objects for “bases.” It is an easy game to learn and play and something that although is professionally played by men, a game that both sexes can enjoy.

Chapter 3 - Basic Rules Of The Game

The basic rules of the game of baseball require 9 players on each team, at least. Only 9 will be put on the roster. In the professional leagues, players are often removed from the roster and replaced during the course of the game. In little league, up to 15 kids can be on the roster at one time, although there can only be 9 in the field at one time.

Baseball is a game of offense and defense, like American football. Unlike American football, players will play offense and defense. In most cases. The exception is in the American league and has to do with the Designated Hitter rule. But this will be discussed later.

Offense and Batting

Each baseball player will be required to bat. The batting order is created by the coach. The first player to bat is called the "lead off man." This is the player who is considered to be one of the best hitters on the team. He is followed by two other players. The fourth player to bat is usually the best hitter. The concept behind this is that the first three players will get on base and the fourth batter, or sweep batter, will hit a home run and get everyone home. The first four batters are usually considered to be the best hitters on the team.

Bats and balls are heavily regulated in baseball. Baseball players have been known to be tossed out of a game or fined for "corking" a bat, making it heavier so that it can hit the ball further. Aluminum and wooden bats are both approved today for play in

baseball. Baseball bats have to be a certain size, but may vary in length. A taller batter may prefer a longer bat.

When batting a baseball player has to wear a batting helmet that fits over his baseball cap. He also wears gloves to get a better grip on the bat. He wears cleats that enable him to run faster on the field. He stands over home plate in front of the catcher and the umpire, who stands behind the catcher. The catcher is crouched down to catch the ball and the pitcher stands on the mound and pitches a ball to the batter. The batter has to then swing to hit the ball.

If the ball is pitched over the plate in the swing zone, the player can either swing at it, hitting it, or he can let it go by. It is then up to the umpire to say whether the ball is a strike, which means it could have been hit by the player, or a "ball." A "ball" is a bad pitch.

If the player does hit the ball, he drops the bat and begins running to first base. If the ball pops up, chances are that the other team members will catch it, but he runs anyway. Ideally, the player wants to hit a ball close to the ground so that it cannot be caught. If the ball pops up and is caught by the other team before it hits the ground, the player is called out.

A player heads for first base as fast as possible. He does not slide into first as this base and home plate are the only spots that can be overrun. The objective is for the player to run as fast as he can to first base and surpass it before the players on the field get the ball and toss it to the defensive player who is manning first base.

If the player is just getting to first base and the other team members manage to get the ball to the first baseman, he has to either tag first base with his foot or the player. Most of the time, he is standing with his foot on first base so that when he catches the ball, the player who is running is automatically out. The first base umpire will be on hand to see who got to the base first - the player who hit the ball or the ball in the glove of the first baseman. If the player got there first, he is considered safe. He must then stand on first base and get ready to run to second base when his team mate gets a hit. If the player is called out, the umpire will use the thumbs up signal to signify to the crowd that the player is out and he returns to the dug out, which is where the players stay when they are playing offense.

Not all players get hits. In fact, it can be hard to get a hit in professional baseball. Pitchers are trained to try to strike out players so that they cannot hit the ball. If too many players start getting hits, the manager or coach will often take the pitcher out of the game and replace him with another pitcher.

Other things can happen when a player is batting. If the player hits the ball and it flies off in a direction that is not considered in play, such as outside of the baseball diamond, then the ball is considered a "foul ball." This counts as a strike against the player. If the player hit's the ball straight on into the end stands that align center field, this is considered to be a "home run" and the player then runs around the bases. Even when the ball is a home run, the player has to make the round of all the bases, although he cannot be called out. Any player who is on base at the time also gets to run home. This is how the team scores. The objective of the defense

is to not allow this to happen.

Another thing that can happen when a player is batting is that the pitcher will pitch too many bad pitches. The pitcher can only pitch four "balls" that are no good and the player automatically gets to walk to first base. This is considered a walk.

If the player swings at a ball and misses, it is considered a "strike." A player can get a strike called by the umpire (such as when he does not swing on a good pitch) or can get a strike when he swings and misses. Foul balls are also considered strikes, but cannot cause a player to strike out. A player gets three strikes before they are called out, but the last strike cannot be a foul ball.

A typical player striking out would be as follows:

First pitch, the player swings and the ball flies into the left field stand, out of play. It is called a foul ball and is considered a strike.

Second pitch, the player does the same thing, but the ball flies to the back of the diamond, it is out of play and is a foul ball, it is the second strike.

Third pitch, the player swings and misses. His third strike and he is out.

Another scenario can be:

First pitch, the player swings and misses. It is his first strike.

Second pitch, the player does not swing and the umpire calls it a strike. He has two strikes against him.

Third pitch, he hits a foul ball. He is still in play. He can have as many fouls as he wants, they do not put him out of the game.

Fourth pitch may be a ball. The count is then 2 to 1.

Fifth pitch is another foul ball. Again, the player remains batting.

Sixth pitch the player hits the ball and makes it to first base.

In order to understand batting, you have to understand the terminology. It is not difficult. Once you understand this, then you can understand how to bat in baseball.

Foul balls - those that are out of play and usually wind up in the stands. They are not in the baseball diamond lines. In some cases, an umpire will have to determine whether the ball is in play. The batter will always take off running if he hits the ball, even if it is foul.

Balls - bad pitches by the pitcher. Four of them entitles the batter to walk to first base.

Strikes - a batter needs three strikes before going out. Fouls count as strikes but not towards the third strike. A strike can be either called by the umpire or is a swing and a miss by the player.

Whenever the batter makes contact with the ball, he starts running. There have been times when it is a close call between foul and fair. It is up to the umpire to judge. The defensive team will play the ball unless directed that it is foul by the umpires.

Another thing that can happen is when a foul ball pops up. This often happens right around home plate or close to first base. In such a case, the first baseman or the catcher will often try to catch the ball. If a foul ball is caught before it hits the ground, the player is out. Many foul balls, however, find their way to the stands. If you have ever gone to a baseball game, you will notice that many balls wind up in the stands. Fans consider this to be the ultimate souvenir of the game and often scramble to get the ball.

Each team gets three outs before they have to stop batting and then go play defense. This is called "retiring the side" in baseball terminology. Baseball is played in innings. There are 9 innings to a professional baseball game. Each team gets to bat once during each inning. The home team (the team that hosts the game) bats last and the visitors usually lead off. The innings are often called as the "top" or the "bottom" of the inning. The top of the inning is when the first team is batting. The bottom is when the other team (usually the home team) is batting. Announcers will call the game as being in the "top of the 8th inning." This would mean that the visiting team is at bat and the home team has yet to bat.

There is no time limit to a baseball game and there are no ties allowed. Baseball games can go on for hours. The team gets to complete their batting until they get three outs. An average professional baseball game lasts for about 3 hours.

In Little League, there are only 5 innings played, although this varies with leagues. High school baseball will play 7 innings instead of a full 9.

You may think that each player who gets up to bat wants to hit a home run. While this is ideally true, there are often strategies that managers and coaches will instruct the players on to advance the game. Some players will intentionally try to get tagged out so that another player can advance to second or third base. This is called a "sacrifice."

Bunting is another way that players often sacrifice so that the team advances on the bases. To bunt, the player will hold the bat in both hands, at the top and the end, and try to just tap the ball so that it goes right to the pitcher. He will be called out because he will be tagged. But the player on first will most likely advance to second base. It is up to the coach to instruct the players on how to make a play.

The types of hits that a player can get in baseball include the following:

A Single - This means that the player made it to first base

A Double - This means the player made it to second base. It usually involves some sort of line drive to the left or right field.

A Triple - Often a fly ball that falls behind the center, left or right fielder and looks like a home run. The player made it to third base.

A home run - The player hit the ball to either left, center or right field, still in the diamond but out of play. It usually winds up in the stands. In some cases, it has been known to go out of the park altogether. It is an automatic home run. A home run can also be a hit in which the player manages to round all the bases and make it to home plate, although this is not normally done unless there have been a series of errors on the defensive side.

A grand slam - this is a home run that is hit when there are three men on base. Having a man on first, second and third base is known as the bases being "loaded." This is the ultimate hit for any baseball player. All of the players get to round the bases and come home.

The team scores one run for each player who manages to make it around the bases and to home. Baseball scores are not like basketball scores. The average score is very low in a baseball game. It is not unusual for neither team to score for several innings and they hold each other at bay.

The Bases, Plates And Mounds

You need to have three "bases" for baseball - first base, second base and third base. They are all spread evenly in the diamond. Third base is directly across from first base and second base is directly across from the home plate. The home plate is where the batters stand to hit the ball and where they hope to reach so that they can score.

The mound, or the pitcher's mound, is an area where the pitcher stands to pitch the ball to the player. The distance from the home plate depends on whether it is a little league, high school or professional game. It is important that players realize what bases can be overrun and what bases must be stepped on when playing the game of baseball.

First Base

The bases are considered the players "safe" zones. As long as they are standing on the base, with at least one toe, they are considered to be safe. A player must reach second and third base without getting tagged out by the ball. We have already discussed how a player can overrun first base. This is the only base on which he can do this. You have most likely seen films of players "sliding" into base. They do this either by sliding head first or feet first to get to the base before the ball. Not so with first base. With first base, the player can overrun the base and still be considered safe. As long as he touched the base with his feet when he ran over the base.

Second and Third Base

Second and third base are a bit trickier to get to. You have to go directly to the base and stay there. Your foot has to be on the base at the time the ball is thrown to the baseman. If you are running to second base, the second baseman can tag you out if you take your foot off of the base. This is why you will see people sliding into second and third base.

Third base is the same thing. Only there is a difference. In some cases, the runner does not have to go to third base, but thinks that he can make it. As long as there is not a man on second base, he can retreat to second base. The third baseman cannot get the ball and declare the player out by standing on the third base bag. He would have to tag the player with the ball or toss the ball to the second base player and hope that he can tag the player. If there is no "force out," which means that the player can either be at second or third base, the player must be tagged with the ball to be declared out. If there is a man at second, the second baseman needs only to tag the base and the runner is declared out. This is often called a forced out. In such cases when a player is trapped between two bases, he is nearly always declared out as it is unlikely the basemen will drop the ball and the player can only run in the baseline to get away.

Home Plate

This is where the game starts off and where it ends. You can overrun home plate, just like you can first base, but you will often see players sliding into home plate. This happens during a play that is very close and where the catcher is crowding the plate so that the player cannot make it home. He is trying to catch the ball and tag the player before the player tags home plate. Whoever tags first wins, so this is why you will see players sliding into home plate. In the case of a solid home run, the player will not slide. A slide into home plate is one of the most exciting aspects of watching a baseball game.

Defense Positions

There are nine men on the field playing defense for each side. These same players (with on exception) will be those who are batting. Although baseball teams are comprised of many players, only 9 are on the rooster at one time. The defense positions are:

- ÿ Pitcher
- ÿ Catcher
- ÿ First Baseman
- ÿ Second Baseman
- ÿ Third Baseman
- ÿ Short Stop
- ÿ Left Field
- ÿ Center Field
- ÿ Right Field

Pitcher

This is the guy who pitches the ball to the batters. He is often considered to be the “star” of the game, although big hitters are often also remembered as stars. In the National League, the pitcher also has to hit. He has to be adept at pitching as he is at hitting the ball. In the American League, there is the “designated hitter” rule. This means the pitcher can opt for another player to hit for him. During the World Series, when the American League pennant winner plays the National League pennant winner, this rule is no longer in play.

Pitchers tend to have the longest career spans in baseball. Many pitchers play until their mid to late 40s at this game. Some of the

most popular pitchers in baseball history have been Cy Young who won 511 games. He played for the Boston Red Sox in the early part of the 20th century. He was elected to the Hall of Fame in 1937.

Catcher

The catcher stands behind the batter and wears protective gear over his face and head to prevent him from getting hit with a bat or a ball. He signals to the pitcher on the type of pitch to throw.

Hand signals between the coaches, managers and catcher often are the way the team communicates with one another.

The catcher will signal the type of ball that the pitcher will throw based upon experience and his observation of the batter.

Some of the most famous baseball catchers include Roy Campanella, Yogi Berra and Johnny Bench. They have been elected into the Hall of Fame.

First Baseman

The First baseman mans the first base and has to be able to react quickly to catching the ball. It will be up to him to tag out the runner who tries to make it to base. A first basemen is an infielder position. In baseball, there are outfielder and infielder positions. One of the most famous first basemen to play the game was the legendary Lou Gehrig.

Second Baseman

The second baseman has to be able to catch line drives as well as tag a man out on second base. He should also be able to be quick with reflexes in case a player tries to "steal" a base. There are plenty of famous second basemen in the Hall of Fame including Ryne Sandberg and Rod Carew. One of the most famous was Jackie Robinson, who broke the color barrier in professional baseball and was the first African American to be allowed to play professional baseball.

Third Baseman

The Third baseman is another infielder who has to have good reflexes. He also has to be able to have a long throw as is the case of a double play. Some of the most famous third basemen have been Mike Schmidt, Wade Boggs and George Brett.

Shortstop

The shortstop stands between second and third base and is considered to be an infield player. His job is to get to the ball before it gets to the outfield. He is usually someone who has a good throwing arm and fast reflexes. Ernie Banks, Ozzie Smith and Bobby Wallace were all shortstops. The shortstop position is generally one that is the most integral when it comes to the defense in baseball.

Left Field

Outfielders are either left, center or right field. Historically, the outfielders see less action and are good at picking up fly balls, have

a strong throwing arm and are generally the best hitters. The left fielders see a bit more action than right fielders as most baseball players are right handed and more action tends to go to the left field. Some of the most famous left fielders who have been inducted to the Hall of Fame include Willie Stargell, Stan Musial and Ted Williams.

Center Field

Center field is the player who will catch the most fly balls. He plays back and will pick up what is not able to be caught by the short stop or the second baseman. Ty Cobb, Mickey Mantle and Joe DiMaggio were all Center fielders. Like most outfielders, they were substantial offensive opponents.

Right Field

Your biggest hitters are usually put in right field as it sees a lot less action than any other position. Babe Ruth was a right fielder as was Reggie Jackson and Hank Aaron. Most of the biggest hit makers in the game played in the outfield, usually in right field. Right fielders have to be on the lookout for left handed batters who are more likely to hit the ball in their direction.

Chapter 4 - Sneaky Moves & Strange Happenings

Baseball is a game of skill, but there is also some strategy involved in the game. Earlier, we mentioned "stealing bases." You may wonder how this is accomplished.

When a player is on first base, he can move forward to second base if he is fast enough to move when the pitcher has the ball. This means that before the pitcher pitches the ball to the batter, if the man on first thinks that he can make it to second without being tagged out, he can make a run for it. This is known as stealing bases. You can steal any base when you are playing baseball, although it is rarely done except in the case of stealing third. Very often, the coach or manager will signal a player on second base to steal third base if there are no outs in the game. This gives the player the advantage if the batter gets a hit and enables him to come home and score.

Stealing bases is part of baseball and, although it may seem like a sneaky move, it is part of the game and totally ethical. It is similar to bunting, which was talked about earlier, where a player fakes batting so that the player on first can move to second.

Another sneaky move is picking a man off base. The pitcher knows that the player on first or second is trying to steal a base. He will often try to pick the man off by pretending to pitch and then tossing the ball to the baseman to tag the man. This sometimes works. This can go on several times before a pitcher actually pitches the ball to the batter.

Deliberate walking is another one of the sneaky moves that pitchers will make, although it often draws boos from the crowd. This is not done in the Little League level because it is seen as “unsportsmanlike” but it is totally ethical in major league baseball. This is where the pitcher wants to walk the batter rather than risk him getting a hit that will bring men home. This is often done for the big name hitters, although it would be considered to be in very bad form if the player was actually trying to break a record.

In Little League, players are often requested to “chat it up.” This entails making a lot of noise on the field. Go to a little league game and you will hear cries of “hey, batter, batter,” from the kids on the field. This is not so much a sneaky move but a way for kids to get used to the idea of being able to concentrate on batting when there is a lot of noise - there is no need to do this when playing in the big leagues as there is plenty of noise emitting from the stands, including taunts at the batters.

While players in little league are encouraged to chat it up, they are not encouraged to taunt the batter - this is considered to be poor sportsmanship.

Hitting the batter with a ball is often done as a very sneaky and unethical move in professional baseball. If the batter gets hit by the ball, he is automatically walked to first base. In some cases, this will start a fight in baseball. If you have never witnessed a baseball fight, it is something that you should behold. While it is not encouraged in professional baseball as fines are issued, it is something that is something to behold. Baseball is considered to be a family game and baseball fights are not supposed to be part of

the sport.

A Baseball Fight

So what happens during a baseball fight? Usually what happens is that the player is hit with the ball and rushes the pitcher. Baseball players are very team oriented so they feel compelled to join in the melee. In a baseball fight, you can expect the benches to be cleared and every single player in the middle of the fracas. In most cases, players from the bull pen, which is where players who are not in the rooster are warming up, will also join in the fun. In some other cases, managers and coaches will also join in. The baseball fight rarely happens, but when it does, it often holds up the game and makes the news. Fines are then levied against players who started or participated in the fight.

Being Tossed Out Of The Game

This is another happening that often happens at a professional baseball game, usually to a manger or a coach who disagrees with the decision of an umpire. The manager will argue with the umpire loudly and the ump will then throw them out of the game. Unfortunately, this is also happening in little league today as irate parents often challenge umpires and their calls and find themselves ejected from the game.

Chapter 5 - Little League

Because baseball is such a beloved sport, many parents dream of glory for their sons when they are born and get them into little league as soon as possible. There are many different levels of little league. When boys are small, they can play with girls in mixed teams. This occurs until the boys and girls get to be about 7 years old and are then separated. Girls normally play softball, a game that is very much like baseball but which will be discussed later.

The first foray into little league is through t-ball. T-ball does not require a pitcher and is for children who are anywhere from four to six years old. In this game, the bases are closer together and the player uses a lighter bat. The ball is placed on a "t" cone and the player must then learn to hit the ball and then run the bases. T-ball is the way that many youngsters learn to play baseball.

Springtime in the United States starts the baseball season, but it is not just the major leagues that have their celebrations and debut. Little league is big business in America. Parents sign their children up who are then put on teams and given uniforms. The typical baseball uniform of a little league player mirrors the uniform of a major leaguer. They will wear hats, jerseys and pants that come just down below the knees. They will then wear socks of a certain color to match the uniform and cleats. Cleats are shoes that are used for running sports like baseball. Children will also have baseball gloves that have to be oiled and broken in. The team will supply the helmets and the bats and balls, as well as the bases. Bases and home plate are usually removed from parks to prevent any theft.

When children are just starting little league, they will be able to play on any team. Their skills will not be judged until they get to be about 7 or 8 years old. At this time, the children start playing with a pitcher. The ball is pitched overhand and the children then have to hit the ball. The baseball diamond is still much smaller than an adult diamond and the children only play five innings.

This is little league. It is also called the junior league. This is where some players are seen to be stars and others are seen to be just average players. It is at this level that you will see All Star teams forming.

In an effort to get their children ready to play baseball, fathers, and often mothers, play catch with their children. Learning how to catch the baseball is one of the key aspects of the game. There are also batting cages at most parks that allow players to practice batting. If a boy seems to have a good arm and good aim, he may practice pitching. There are pitching nets that you can get for your backyard that can teach child how to pitch.

Most children who excel at baseball have parents who have encouraged this skill or have siblings who are also players. You will often see boys who have many older brothers excel at sports like baseball as they have learned to compete at an early age. But no matter how much a parent may want their child to succeed at the sport, or how many siblings that the child has, it is the love of the game that really makes the good baseball player. Most youngsters who excel at baseball seem to have a natural aptitude for the game and generally love the sport.

Unlike other sports, baseball has been marketed at youngsters since its inception. Baseball cards came in packs for kids to collect and date back to the late 19th century, although these were not for children. Early baseball cards came with chewing tobacco. In the early part of the 20th century, baseball cards became a popular collectible for young boys and came with a stick of chewing gum. Today, baseball cards from the early days are worth millions. Baseball card collecting is no longer a pastime for children but a real adult hobby and one that can be very lucrative.

Not all children who excel in baseball start out in little league, although it does give them a good fundamental start in the game. Many children who grow up to be good baseball players start out by playing with their friends in impromptu games. Little league costs money and so do uniforms and gloves. Just because a child is privileged to be able to join little league will not necessarily make him a baseball star. There are plenty of examples of children who grew up without this privilege excelling in the sport.

Baseball can be played wherever there is enough of a field. In the United States, baseball diamonds are part of just about every landscape. Even in the city, where there is less space, you can see some baseball diamonds dotting the areas.

Boys who do well in little league often graduate to what is known as the Pony League. This is a league for older baseball players who are not yet in high school. Pony League players will often be scouted by high school coaches who will offer scholarships for private schools who want the player on their team. Private high

schools often offer free tuition for gifted athletes. Scouts will watch the Pony league players play.

Little league encompasses a boy's life from the time he is about 5 years old until he is about 14. At that time, he starts to play high school baseball. This is where it can get serious because high school players are scouted by professional teams.

Chapter 6 - High School Baseball

High school is where the professional baseball player is born. This is where the scouts will watch to see who is the best of the best. Only they will not be offering college scholarships for gifted athletes. They will be offering a contract for the minor leagues with a chance to play in the major leagues.

Baseball is one of the few sports that does not hit the college level. From high school, the baseball player will go to the minors and, if he is lucky, then to the major leagues. It is very rare that a baseball player goes from high school to the majors. The minors is the way for the players to hone their skills and get ready for the big leagues.

High school baseball has seven innings instead of nine. The diamond is larger, though still not the size of a regular baseball diamond. High school players make the team by trying out for a position. They will usually be moved around from various positions so that the coach can see what position they are best suited for.

Scouts will usually inform players that they are being scouted. Just because a player is scouted does not necessarily mean that he will be drafted to the minors, but he has a pretty good chance. Scouting is done throughout the baseball season at high schools all across the United States. Scouting also takes place in other countries. More ball clubs are bringing players from other countries who have become adept at the sport of baseball.

Only about 10 percent of high school baseball players are scouted

and drafted to the minor leagues. Just because a player has a chance to play in the minors does not necessarily mean that he will make the major leagues. For this reason, many high school baseball players opt to go to college instead of taking the chance on the big dream with the majors.

Chapter 7 - Minor League Baseball

All major league baseball teams have minor league teams as well. You can usually see them play and practice if you visit their camps. Most major league teams have camps in Florida, Arizona and other parts of the nation where the weather is warm all year long. They will stay in their on season area during the baseball season, but will then move to their baseball training camp. This is where both the major league players stay in shape during the off season and where the minor league players play.

Many people like to watch minor league games. One of the main reasons for this is that the minor league games are more affordable than the major league games. The price of ball game tickets has gone up considerably in recent years. Minor league games are much more affordable for the family.

Another reason why people like the minor league games is because the players are more accessible. Autograph hounds will want to get autographs of the minor league players who appear to be up and coming. And this is not just for collecting - either. Autographs from the big named players end up being worth a lot of money on places like eBay. Some people who want to speculate on the future worth of a player will enjoy the minor league games. You never know when you are going to meet the next big major league star.

The minor leagues are not only a way up for players, but also a way down. Some of the players who have been signed to a long term contract and who are not able to play any longer, or whose game is not what it once was, are transferred back down to the minor

leagues. In some cases, their careers are revived, and in other cases, they simply play out the rest of their contract in the minor leagues.

The minor leagues have the same rules as the major leagues. Watching a minor league game is very similar to watching a major league game. You will not get the loads of food that is sold at a major league baseball game, but you will see some good playing.

Chapter 8 - Baseball Derivatives

There are many different baseball derivatives that are played in various ways. The concept of hitting the ball and getting around to home plate has spawned many different games that mirror baseball. Here are some of them:

Softball

Softball is very similar to baseball except that the ball is a larger ball, softer and gloves are often not worn. There are two different types of softball played - 10 inch and 16 inch softball. Most people who play softball in public parks and do so in an informal way will play 16 inch softball. Bats are the same, but gloves are not used to play the game.

Girls often play softball instead of baseball. By the time girls get to be about 7 years old, they are often separated from the boys. There have been cases where girls who were good enough to play with the boys in little league games have sued to play with the boys. For the most part, girls traditionally play softball.

Younger girls will play 10 inch softball with gloves. This is the sport that is often played in high school, too. The softball diamond is not as large as a baseball diamond, but the rules are the same. There is no designated hitter rule in softball and there are only 7 innings.

Softball is a good game for both boys and girls to play and is a good way to learn the rules of baseball, how to play the game, sportsmanship and how to play as part of a team.

Stickball

Stickball is a game that has been played for ages in the streets of most cities. Instead of using a bat, a stick is used. A softer ball is used rather than a hard ball. A hard baseball can do some damage on windows and is not a good ball to use in a stickball game as it is too hard to hit.

In stickball, anything can be used for bases and home plates. Again, this is a street game, but it is the way that a lot of inner city youths, ones who became stars in the major league, learned the concept of how to play this game. Stickball can be played with any type of stick and dates back to the late 19th century.

Kickball

Kickball is a game that is played similar to baseball except that you use your feet instead of the bat. The ball is rolled to the “batter” who then kicks it as hard as he or she can and then proceeds to run the bases. The rules are the same as they are for baseball.

Whiffle Ball

Whiffle Ball is a game that is played with a plastic bat and ball. It is played just like baseball but the ball and the bat are much lighter. This is an ideal game for younger children to play as well as a way to play in the back yard, street or where a hard ball may damage windows or cars. Whiffle Ball is also a good way for younger children to learn the rules of baseball.

Chapter 9 - What To Expect At A Baseball Game

What do you expect when you go to your first baseball game? A professional baseball game is something that everyone should get to attend once in a while. There is a lot of excitement at the game. You will hear announcers over the intercom system announcing the play and be able to see much of the game on the big screens overhead.

Bring your appetite - there is plenty to eat and drink at a baseball game. Baseball games are long - generally about 3 hours. And there is about 10 minutes of time when the players warm up between innings.

You can get a program and keep track of the players as well as their statistics when you go to a baseball game. Often, there are special promotions at the games. You may go for ball day or cap day where children and others get free baseballs and caps.

Going to a baseball game can be expensive. You will be tempted to eat again and again as vendors continuously hawk food such as pretzels, peanuts, cotton candy, hot dogs, nachos and beer. But this is all part of the fun. The National Anthem is sung before every game and everyone is expected to rise.

A traditional aspect of the baseball game is the 7th Inning Stretch. This occurs just before the 7th inning and everyone is expected to rise to "stretch" their legs. It is at this point when the song "Take Me Out To The Ball Game" is played and everyone is encouraged to join in. The words are as follows:

Take Me Out To The Ball Game

Take me out to the ball game

Take me out with the crowd

Buy me some peanuts and cracker jack

I don't care if I ever get back

Cause it's root, root, root for the home team

If they don't win, it's a shame

Cause it's one...two...three strikes you're out!

At the old ball game

You hardly see Cracker Jack being sold at the baseball games any longer, but there are still plenty of peanuts sold. If you go to your first baseball game, be prepared for the traditional 7th inning stretch.

The "wave" took off in the 1980s and was popular during this era. You do not see the "wave" any longer at most baseball games. Some teams have mascots, such as the Atlanta Braves, who do the tomahawk chopping motion along with a Native American chant during the game. Even in politically correct times, this is still a big part of the Braves' games.

Baseball games are a family event. Profanity is discouraged and can get you tossed out of the stadium. Fights rarely happen during baseball game events and it is generally considered to be a family function.

Throughout the years, baseball has seen many changes. During

WWII, women played in baseball games because the men were all at war. The ladies leagues were featured in the film "A League Of Their Own," a dramatized version of the event, but one that actually did occur. It was first thought that baseball would be finished because of the war, but the women players kept the sport alive.

In 1947, Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier in major league baseball. Robinson was the first African American to play in the major leagues. He played with the club that was then known as the Brooklyn Dodgers. The Dodgers have since moved to Los Angeles, but in this one bold move, the color barrier that separated white from black in baseball was broken. Prior to 1947, there was a "negro" league that housed black players. Robinson paved the way for others of color to also join in the major leagues.

National League - American League

There are two major leagues in American baseball - the National League and the American League. The leagues have always operated separately. The World Series is when the winner of the National League pennant and the American League pennant play for the championship. The World Series consists of 7 games and the winner is the one team that wins the best out of 7. The games are split up between the two teams home stadiums.

The team that has won the most World Series games is the New York Yankees. The Yankees are the team that was home to Babe Ruth, Lou Gehrig, Mickey Mantle and Joe DiMaggio, to name a few. Some of the most beloved figures in baseball were on the New York Yankees, an American League team. The New York Yankees play at

the Yankee's stadium located in the Bronx. They have won the World Series 26 times.

The Chicago Cubs have the longest losing record of any team in major league history. The National League team usually starts out strong, making it to the playoffs and stopping short of winning the pennant. Their last championship season was in 1908.

This year was going to be "the year" for The Cubs, who many felt looked better than ever. They ended up losing in the playoffs, making it 100 years since they won the World Series. The theme for most fans of this Chicago baseball team is "wait until next year."

Most people who follow baseball in the United States have a favorite team that represents their home town. Many cities, such as Chicago, New York and Los Angeles, have more than one ball club. The National and American league teams consist of teams from the United States and one from Canada (The Toronto Blue Jays).

The first modern World Series was played in 1903. Since that time, it has been an annual event that signifies the end of the baseball season.

Throughout the years, there have been significant events that have marred the World Series. The first was the 1919 White Sox scandal, often called the "Black Sox" scandal. This was discussed earlier and meant the end of careers for Shoeless Joe Jackson, Happy Felsch, Fred McMullin, Buck Weaver, Swede Risberg, Eddie Cicotte, Lefty Williams and Chick Gandil. It was said that Gandil, the first

baseman , was the brains behind the scheme to throw the world series in exchange for \$100,000. It took 80 years before something else happened to mar the World Series.

The 1989 World Series was to take place in San Francisco against the Oakland As and the San Francisco Giants. Just as the teams were warming up for the first game of the series, the 1989 San Francisco earthquake hit. It collapsed bridges and killed 62 people. The series was delayed. The horrific part of this tragedy was that many people were watching the game when the earthquake actually hit. Candlestick Park, the San Francisco stadium, remained intact, but actually swayed during the earthquake.

In 1994, the baseball strike threatened to end the game. The players went on strike in August and for the first time in 90 years, the World Series was not played. Many thought that this would be the end of baseball as many fans, disgusted with the rising cost of tickets and the salaries the players were receiving and demanded, threatened to boycott the games. It took a few years after the strike to regain the public's love for the game of baseball, but it did come back in full swing after a few years.

Baseball has been part of American history for over 100 years, heavily ingrained into the heart of every American. Most Americans know the rules, have played the game at least once in their lives and root for a special team. Americans have a reputation throughout the world of being an aggressive group of people. Blamed for wars and other ills of society. We are stereotyped as being loud and demanding. Not having a great deal of patience and wanting to have everything right away. It is ironic that we

choose as our national sport, our beloved pastime, a slow moving, non violent game.

If you have read this book, you understand a bit about the rules of baseball as well as the importance of the sport not only as a money maker, but as part of a culture. Learning how to play baseball is easy enough, and the equipment is relatively inexpensive. If you are playing baseball for the first time, be sure to wear a helmet if you are batting and playing with a hard ball.

Once you are ready to play the game, you need only to get a few people together and then get ready to, as the umpire says at the beginning of each game, "Play Ball!"