



Basic Base Ball Rules
Adopted by the Vintage Base Ball Club of
Old Cowtown Museum, Wichita Kansas



This is a summary of the basic rules governing the play and conduct of the Wichita Red Stockings and Wichita Bull Dozers. The majority of the rules are taken from “Spalding’s Official Base Ball Guide” of 1876 and The Rules of 1873, as adopted by the National Association of Professional Base-Ball Players. In a few cases, rules from an earlier time period are used and are so noted. This interpretation enhances the flow of the game and allows the spectators to experience and enjoy some of the differences between our modern game and base ball as it was originally played.

THE FIELD: The field is laid out as in modern baseball – four bases in a diamond, the sides of which are respectively thirty yards. The first, second, and third bases shall be canvas bags filled with soft material and equal to one square foot. The home base shall be flat stone or metal plate painted white. It shall be place directly opposite second base. [1876]

The pitcher’s position shall be within a six by six foot square. The front line of which shall be forty five feet from the center of home base. [1876]

In all match games, lines connecting the home and first bases, and the home and third bases, and also the lines of the striker’s and pitcher’s positions shall be marked by the use of chalk or other suitable material. The line of the home base shall extend four feet on each side of the base and shall be drawn through its center and parallel with a line extending from the first to third base. [1876]

PITCHING: The pitcher, while delivering the ball to the bat, must remain within the lines until the ball has left his hand. The ball must be delivered with the arm swinging nearly perpendicular at the side of the body and must pass below the hip. [1876]

A “**foul balk**” is called if the pitcher throws overhand. The umpire shall issue a warning. A “**balk**” is called if the pitcher makes a motion the deliver the ball but fails to do so, or if any part of his body is outside of his position when the ball is released. When a “balk” is called, all runners shall advance one base. [1876]

A **good ball** is one delivered over the home base and at the height called for by the striker. [1876]

An **unfair ball** is any ball that is not over the home base or at the height called for by the batsman. Every *third* ball so delivered shall be called a “ball”. When three balls have been called (nine **unfair balls**), the striker shall take first base and all players “forced” shall take one base. [1876]

If the batsman strikes at a called ball, the ball shall be considered a “good ball”. [1876]

BATTING: The striker shall stand within the space of ground on either side of home base, six feet long by three feet wide, extending two feet in front of and four feet behind the line of home base. The nearest edge of the box shall be one foot from the base. [1876]

The striker shall call for either a “high ball”, a “low ball”, or a “fair ball” and the umpire shall notify the pitcher. The call may not be changed after the first ball is delivered. [1876]

A “high ball” is above the waist but not higher than the shoulders. A “low ball” is from within one foot of the ground and the waist. A “fair ball” shall be between the shoulder and one foot from the ground. All balls shall be delivered over the home base to be considered **good balls**. [1876]

Should the striker fail to strike at a **good ball**, or strike and miss the ball, the umpire shall call “one strike”. “Two strikes” are called for the second occurrence. Three strikes, either called or swung at and missed, are an out. [1873]

If the third strike is not caught on the fly or after one bounce, the batsman must attempt to make his run. [1867] See **SPECIAL GROUND RULE # 8**

The striker shall stand within the lines of his position. Stepping outside of the lines while striking, shall be called a “foul strike and out”. [1876]

The batsman may take only a small step while striking at the ball. The 1867 rule forbidding the striker to step forward or backward while swinging was removed in 1868.

If the ball is struck and first touches the ground, a player, or object in front of or on the foul line, it is considered a **fair ball**. Conversely, if the ball first touches the ground, etc. behind the foul line, it is considered a **foul ball**. **Foul balls** do not count as strikes. [1876]

The batsman shall be declared **out** if:

A fair or foul ball is caught before touching the ground. [1876]

A fair or foul ball is caught after touching the ground only once. [1863] See **SPECIAL GROUND RULE #7**

A fair ball be securely held by a fielder while touching first base with any part of his person before the runner touches the base. [1876]

Three strikes have been called and the ball is caught before touching the ground or after touching the ground only once. [1876]

Making a “foul strike” by stepping outside the position. [1876]

RUNNING THE BASES: The batsman may overrun first base provided he does not turn toward the second base and he must return directly to first base. [1876]

Any player running the bases on fair or foul balls caught before touching the ground must return to the base he occupied when the ball was struck and re-touch the base before attempting to advance. [1876]

If a **fair ball** is caught after one bounce, the striker is dead and the force play is off. Therefore, a base runner normally forced to run may hold his base or attempt to advance at his risk. [1863]

No runner may advance on a **foul ball** that touches the ground before being caught. [1876]

Any player running the bases shall be declared **out** if:

While the ball is in play, he is touched by a fielder with the ball in hand without touching the base he is entitled to. [1876]

A fielder with the ball touches the base before a runner who is forced to advance. [1876]

THE UMPIRE: No decision rendered by the umpire on any point of play in base-running shall be reversed upon the testimony of any of the players. If the captains of the contesting clubs can show that the umpire has misinterpreted the rules or given an erroneous decision, he shall reverse the decision. [1876]

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 given. [1876]

SPECIAL GROUND RULES: The following rules are adapted especially for play at the Old Cowtown Field.

- 1) Any batted ball that goes over the white fence, without striking the ground first, and lands before the chain link will be considered a home run.
- 2) Any batted ball that goes over the chain link fence, without striking the ground first, will be considered an out charged against the striker.
- 3) It will be left to the umpire's discretion if any batted ball striking the tree in left field will be called fair or fail.
- 4) Any ball striking livestock in the field of play will be considered a live ball unless the umpire rules otherwise.
- 5) Any ball striking the shed and remaining in play shall be a live ball. If the ball exits the playing field, the umpire may rule the ball a ground-rule double or other appropriate call at his discretion.
- 6) No firearms are allowed on the field during a game.
- 7) One bound rule applies to any batted ball in both fair and fail territory.
- 8) The striker may run to first base on a third strike only if first base is unoccupied.
- 9) Any ball that rolls under or bounces over the white fence will be considered out of play and the runners may advance one base.
- 10) Base runners may lead off one stride but are not allowed to steal.
- 11) Modern baseball shoes are allowed during the game, we request that they be **black** out and any **logos** covered up.
- 12) **Period shoes or boots are required for public appearances, while in town and during skits with other museum volunteer groups.** Check with BaseBall Club staff for approval of footwear.
- 13) Only period correct gloves may be used.
- 14) Finally, in order to preserve the uniforms and the structural integrity of the older players, sliding is not allowed.

As an additional reminder, **cell phones, plastic water bottles, wrist watches, modern jewelry, and any other 20th century artifacts** shall be hidden out of sight while on museum grounds.