

BASEBALL

PACKET # 11

INSTRUCTIONS

This Learning Packet has two parts: (1) text to read and (2) questions to answer. The text describes a particular sport or physical activity, and relates its history, rules, playing techniques, scoring, notes and news.

The Response Forms (questions and puzzles) check your understanding and appreciation of the sport or physical activity.

INTRODUCTION

Baseball is probably the one sport which is most clearly identified with “being American.” Former President Herbert Hoover once stated that baseball is the greatest of all team sports. For the past 150 years, baseball has become so intertwined in all aspects of American daily life that the baseball strike of 1994 seemed almost unthinkable. Who could imagine summer without hot dogs and soft drinks at the ball park or a warm summer evening spent cheering a favorite team to victory?

HISTORY OF THE GAME

Baseball, however “American” it may seem to us today, did not originate in America. It probably began in England with a game called “rounders.” The term “baseball” dates from 1744, when a book on sports described and illustrated a batter holding a bat with a catcher in position behind the batter and a pitcher ready to throw a ball. This English book was reprinted in America around 1762.

In 1845, an American amateur baseball player named Alexander Cartwright, along with other early baseball players, wrote the rules of the game. Many of these rules are still in effect today.

Baseball came to be dominated by professional players some time around 1869, when the first professional team, the Cincinnati Red Stockings, was organized.

Later, many regional leagues were started, then dissolved. At this point in history, baseball was not a very lucrative business, and few teams were able to make money. In the late 1880s, the

National League attempted to limit the salary that players could accept to a maximum of \$2,000.

During the early period of league formation, rules for transferring players from one league to another were created. There were also strict rules for recruiting minor league players for the major leagues. At present, all major league teams maintain minor league teams called “farm clubs” where players are trained and eventually transferred to a major league.

In 1903, the first World Series was held. It was held every year since until the baseball strike of 1994. Today, baseball, despite the impact of the strike, continues to be a highly organized and lucrative sport. The salaries of baseball players are the highest of all athletes who play team sports.

HOW THE GAME IS PLAYED

THE RULES OF THE GAME

In baseball, two teams of nine players compete with one another on a baseball “diamond” which in reality is a square field. The teams are comprised of a pitcher, catcher, a first, second and third baseman, a shortstop, and left, center and right fielders.

A catcher stands behind the batter and signals the pitcher as to what type of ball to throw. Each game is made up of nine innings. If the home team is ahead (that is, if it has scored more runs) at the end of the middle of the ninth inning, the home team wins.

The baseball field has four bases which are spaced ninety feet apart from each other. The batter’s box, the area where the batter stands, is located 60 feet and six inches from the pitcher’s mound. The two foul lines run the length of the field and define the playing area.

The batter’s objective is to get a hit. Once the ball is hit, the batter (now called the “runner”) must get to first base before the ball is caught by the first baseman.

Once the ball is caught, the runner is tagged or the first baseman touches first base before the runner touches it. If the batter can get to first base safely, it is called a “single.”

A “double” occurs if the batter can run to second base, and a triple occurs when a batter makes it to third base. A home run means that the batter runs around all the

bases and reaches home plate ahead of the ball. The batter can also hit a home run by hitting the ball over a wall or fence in the outfield.

The defensive team in the field tries to keep the offensive team's batters from scoring.

One way of getting a batter out is to pitch three strikes. A strike occurs when the batter swings and misses or doesn't try to hit a ball that is pitched within the strike zone. If a batter already has two strikes and hits a ball into foul territory, the foul does not count as a strike. A foul ball counts as a strike under all other conditions. If a pitcher throws a ball that does not cross home plate between the batter's armpits and knees (the strike zone), the pitch is "a ball." When a pitcher throws four balls to any one batter, the batter is able to go to first base without having to hit the ball—technically called "a walk."

Once the ball is hit and is in the air, the players in the field attempt to catch the ball before it hits the ground. If a fly or line ball is caught, the batter is automatically out. A ground ball, when caught, is thrown to a base in order to get the runner out. Baseball players can also slide into a base to keep from being tagged out. Sliding is more difficult than it appears to be and requires practice to be done properly. The body falls to the ground in a controlled manner by a fall backward on the outer surface of the knee and lower leg, or just by diving head first.

All games have at least one umpire to call balls and strikes. Major league games have four umpires, one at each base.

THE PITCHER

The pitcher is considered the most important defensive player on a team. This position is the most physically demanding spot on the team as well as the position with the most control over the game. A pitcher needs excellent control over the ball in order to throw the ball where he or she aims it. Pitchers have been known to throw the ball 100 miles per hour.

Various styles of throwing the ball may be used to achieve different results. For example, a curve ball swerves from a straight line to the left or right, depending on which arm the pitcher is using. A fast ball is just that—a ball thrown extremely fast. A "slider" is a cross between a fast ball and a curve ball and seems to "slide" away from the batter.

OUTFIELDERS AND INFELDERS

Long or high balls, or ground balls that go past the infield, are caught by one of the three outfielders. Outfielders must have superior throwing ability. The center fielder is generally the fastest of the three outfielders since he or she has the most area to cover. Center fielders must also have a “strong arm,” as they must throw balls to third base and home plate.

Some of the most famous names in baseball were outfielders—among them Babe Ruth, Ty Cobb, Joe DiMaggio, Ted Williams and Mickey Mantle.

The job of the infielder, the player who is on the bases and the shortstop, is to try to prevent balls from going into the outfield. These players also attempt to throw or tag out the batter once a ball has been hit. In particular, the short stop has the most demanding position and must have a strong throwing arm and quick reactions.

The history of baseball is full of famous infielders, including Lou Gehrig, Rogers Hornsby, Jackie Robinson and Ernie Banks.

THE CATCHER

The position of catcher is considered to be very important. The catcher is the “brains” or strategy planner for the game. His or her judgment in choosing pitches can determine the best defensive play for the rest of the team.

The catcher is thought by many to be the hardest- working member of a team. He or she has to know all the weaknesses and strengths of the pitchers. He or she covers third or first base when no one else is on base, and wears more equipment than any other player.

DESIGNATED HITTER

A tenth starting player in the American League, minor leagues and many amateur leagues is a player used only to bat. This player has no defensive role and bats instead of the weakest hitter (usually the pitcher).

KEEPING SCORE IN BASEBALL

The box score (records of both individual players and games) is kept by an official scorer. Also, newspapers and baseball clubs keep detailed records of the players’ batting averages, fielding averages and pitching records.

Batting averages are calculated by taking the number of hits and dividing that figure by the number of times a player is at bat. If a batter “walks,” it is not counted as a time at bat. Nor is it counted as a hit. Fielding averages are figured by

taking the total put-outs and assists and dividing them by the total number of put-outs, assists and errors.

An error occurs when a player gets to first base because the defensive player did not catch the ball or, having caught the ball, threw it poorly to another player.

Pitching records indicate the number of games won and lost and earned-run averages (total earned runs allowed, divided by the number of innings pitched, then multiplied by nine).

PLAYING TECHNIQUES

THROWS IN BASEBALL

Developing a good throwing technique is an important skill in baseball. Throwing is the most complicated of all the baseball skills to execute effectively. It calls for speed, accuracy and long hours of practice. Good throwing takes into account the following steps:

The first step in learning a correct throwing technique is a proper grip. The player should grip the ball by placing the index and middle fingers over one of the four long seams on the baseball. The inner side of the thumb is placed on the underside of the ball in line with the middle finger. The ball and the point where the index finger and thumb meet should form a “V” shape. The ball is held loosely, almost in the fingertips.

Learn the proper stance for throwing. As the player prepares to throw the ball, his or her elbow should be up, shoulders level, and wrist cocked with fingers behind and on top of the ball. As the ball is released from a point over and in front of the player’s head, the player’s fingers should be behind the ball.

Remember that a player’s arm does not work alone in throwing the ball. The player’s entire body needs to be propelled forward in order to build arm speed for the throw. The player needs to take an exaggeratedly long step forward toward the target. The length of that step, however, depends on how far the ball has to travel. For example, an outfielder’s step will be long because he has to throw the ball up to 300 feet away.

Follow-through is important! The technique of throwing does not end when the ball is released from the hand. If there is no follow-through, the ball will lose a great deal of speed and accuracy. The throwing arm should continue to move

downward across the front of the body and behind the left hip if the right arm is being used. Both feet should be parallel to the target and pointing toward it. Players need to take special care of their arms because of the intense workout the arm gets in a game of baseball. Warm-up exercises should always be done before practice or a game. Many players ruin their chances at a pro or amateur career in baseball by abusing their arms. Watch that arm—it is your most valuable asset in the years of baseball playing ahead of you!

EQUIPMENT AND CLOTHING

Baseball is played with very simple equipment—a ball, a bat and a glove. Bats are no more than 2-3/4 inches in diameter and 42 inches long. They can be of any weight. The baseball itself weighs about five ounces and is covered with two strips of white horsehide stitched together with a small inner core of cork or rubber.

All players on a team use gloves. A standard baseball glove may not exceed 12 inches in length and 8 inches in width.

The first baseman and catcher usually wear gloves that are thicker than those of the other players.

STUDENT RESPONSE PACKET

BASEBALL

NAME _____

DATE _____

WHAT TO DO

The following questions will help you to have a greater appreciation and understanding of baseball. Write your answers in the spaces below the questions. If there is not enough room, write on the backs of these sheets. **Be neat, spell correctly, and write in complete sentences.**

1. Baseball is often identified as the great American sport, yet it didn't begin in America. How and where did this game originate?

2. What are some of the physical benefits to be gained from playing baseball?

3. What are "farm teams" and how are they used?

4. How many people make up a typical baseball team and what positions do they play?

5. What is a “single”? a “double”?

6. When does a “ball” occur?

7. How is a good slide into a base performed?

8. Why is the pitcher considered the most important defensive player on the team?

9. Name at least four factors involved in performing a good throw:

10. What are some of the effects of the baseball strike in 1994? In your opinion, will baseball ever return to its pre-1994 status as the most popular spectator sport in America?

Word Search

Name: _____ Date: _____

Use the clues below to discover words in the above puzzle. Circle the words.

1. They are the players who try to prevent ball from going into the outfield
2. The distance in feet between the bases
3. The number of bases
4. A hit that gets the batter to first base safely
5. Wrote the rules of baseball in 1845
6. Another word for a minor league team
7. The batter stands in it. It is 60 feet 6 inches from the pitcher
8. When the batter swings at a pitch and misses it
9. Most consider him to be the most important defensive player
10. Nickname for a baseball field
11. This player takes a position in the batter's box
12. A cross between a fast ball and a curve ball
13. They are the players who are responsible for catching long fly balls
14. What baseball used to be called in England
15. The player who gives signals to the pitcher to tell him what type of pitch to throw
16. A method of touching the base without being tagged out
17. Weight in ounces of a baseball
18. If the ball is not pitched in the strike zone and the batter does not swing, it is called this
19. A hit that gets the batter to second base safely
20. The first pro baseball team was the Cincinnati Red _____

S T S R N L L E R C L R R T T A S T O C K I N G S A S O V T
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