

1867 NABBP Rules with Interpretation

Sec. 1. The ball must weigh not less than five and one-half, nor more than five and three-fourths ounces, avoirdupois. It must measure not less than nine and one-half, nor more than nine and three-fourths inches in circumference. It must be composed of India rubber and yarn, and covered with leather, and, in all match games, shall be furnished by the challenging club, and become the property of the winning club as a trophy of victory.

The VBBA recommends that clubs use balls constructed in this manner. Balls of the era varied considerably in their degree of hardness and/or liveliness.

The cover would be of a "star" or "lemon peel" pattern. (Both terms are later-day descriptions, and not common to the era.)

Sec. 2. The bat must be round, and must not exceed two and a half inches in diameter in the thickest part. It must be made of wood, and may be of any length to suit the striker.

The intention of the rule is that bats be made entirely of wood (though not necessarily a single piece of wood). The typical bat would be generally conical (straight sided), without a pronounced barrel. A variety of woods were used. If of a lighter wood such as willow or poplar, a bat of 40" to 42" wasn't uncommon. Heavier woods would yield a bat 2 to 3 inches shorter and of smaller diameter. Bats of hickory may have had thinner handles. Bats were occasionally branded with a club name. Bats should lack virtually all other markings such as laser engraving or manufacturer's logo, even if they meet the technical requirements of the rule. Bat handles were occasionally wrapped with string.

Sec. 3. The bases must be four in number, placed at equal distances from each other, and securely fastened upon each corner of a square, whose sides are respectively thirty yards. They must be so constructed as to be distinctly seen by the umpire, and must cover a space equal to one square foot of surface. The first, second and third bases shall be canvas bags, painted white, and filled with some soft material, the home base and pitcher's point to be each marked by a flat, circular iron plate, painted or enameled white.

In 1867, there were two pitcher's points. Very few vintage base ball teams use pitcher's points, though use of them is a practice we would encourage.

Chadwick recommends home base be no less than 9" in diameter. A 13" diameter plate would be just less than 1 square foot in area. The center of the home base is on top of the point where the first and third base foul lines intersect. First and third bases would also have their centers on their respective foul lines. This would make first and third bases half in fair/ and half in foul territory, while home base would be one fourth fair, three fourths foul.

There is clear instruction that the canvas bases should be securely anchored, with further instruction provided in Beadle's. VBBA members may find there are many occasions where anchoring the base is not possible or practical. If the base moves from

its position, the base bag itself, not the “place” or the base anchor, is the safe haven for the base runner. Many 1860s-era field diagrams show the bases rotated 45 degrees from the modern, so that two opposite corners of the bases are aligned on the base lines, with a “triangle” on either side of the base line.

Sec. 4. The base from which the ball is struck shall be designated the Home Base, and must be directly opposite the second base ; the first base must always be that upon the right hand, and the third base that upon the left hand side of the striker, when occupying his position at the Home Base. And in all match games a line connecting the home and first base and the home and third base, shall be marked by the use of chalk, or other suitable material, so as to be distinctly seen by the umpire.

Field markings typically do not yet extend beyond the bases into the outfield, as all that the rule requires is that the lines extend to the bases. Thus, the line typically stops at the bases, though some clubs did choose to extend the line past the bases.

Additionally, although there is not yet a rule requiring the use of a foul flag, Beadle’s suggests the use of foul ball posts at least 100 feet past the bases.

Sec. 5. The pitcher’s position shall be designated by two lines, two yards in length, drawn at right angles to a line from home to second base, having their centres upon that line at two fixed iron plates, placed at points fifteen and sixteen and one-third yards distant from the home base. The pitcher must stand within the lines, and must deliver the ball as near as possible over the centre of the home base, and fairly for the striker.

Measure from the center of home base to the front of the chalked pitcher lines.

“Fairly” means the pitcher must deliver a hittable ball. A pitch that minimally crosses the line of the home base, is not over the batsman’s head, and is within legitimate reach of the bat, is considered to have been pitched “fairly”. After a warning, “unfair” pitches may be called ‘balls.’

Per the Haney’s guide, “for the striker” means in the vicinity the striker prefers; be it shoulder high, chest high, hip high, knee high or lower (i.e., a “low ball”, which could not be requested lower than one foot off the ground). The pitch need not pass completely over the home base to be deemed a good pitch.

Speed of the pitch is not a factor in the determination of a pitch that is “fairly for the striker”. In other words, strikers cannot let good pitches go simply because they think they are too swift.

Sec. 6. Should the pitcher repeatedly fail to deliver to the striker fair balls, for the apparent purpose of delaying the game, or for any cause, the umpire, after warning him, shall call one ball, and if the pitcher persists in such action, two and three balls ; when three balls shall have been called, the striker shall take the first base ; and should any base be occupied at that time, each player occupying it or them shall take one base without being put out. All balls delivered by the pitcher, striking the ground before reaching the line of the home base, or pitched over the head of the batsman, or pitched to the side opposite to that which the batsman strikes from, shall be considered unfair balls.

Called balls and “bases on balls” were introduced into the rules for the 1864 season. Although not yet called a “walk”, balls must be called by the umpire, unasked, after an initial warning, if the pitcher did not deliver “fair balls” (hittable pitches). The umpire shall warn the pitcher after repeated unfair pitches with language such as “ball to the bat,” although no specific wording is required. Some pitches were not called at all. A pitch could be “fair” (hittable) and thus not merit being considered a “ball,” yet not be deemed “for the striker” and therefore not considered a “strike,” either. After the warning and three called balls, the batsman is awarded first base and all runners advance, even if not “forced”.

Any pitch that bounced before reaching home, was over the batsman’s head or out of his reach was required to be called by rule. Given the importance placed on this rule, vintage programs and umpires should be in the habit of calling balls and strikes (strikes are covered in Sec. 42 of these rules) after the requisite warning to prevent delay of game, and as a point that enhances the presentation. However, it is important to remember that umpires varied in their ability and enthusiasm in performing the requirements of their position regarding calling balls and strikes. Those that erred by not calling balls and strikes when appropriate were not infrequently recognized and criticized in the press. Whether they are being called or not, it would be important to interpret this point for the game’s spectators.

The phrase “or for any other cause” was intended to refer to pitchers who were unable to deliver the ball fairly, usually because of their efforts to deliver the ball swiftly. Thus, a pitcher who pitched unfairly because he lacked the ability to pitch fairly was still subject to the penalty of called balls. (Compare this with the restrictions in Sec. 42 on when strikes can be called.)

Sec. 7. The ball must be pitched, not jerked or thrown, to the bat ; and whenever the pitcher moves with the apparent purpose or pretension to deliver the ball, he shall so deliver it, and must have neither foot in advance of the front line or off the ground at the time of delivering the ball ; and if he fails in either of these particulars, then it shall be declared a balk. The ball shall be considered as jerked, in the meaning of the rule, if the pitcher’s arm touches his person when the arm is swung forward to deliver the ball ; and it shall be regarded as a throw if the arm be bent at the elbow, at an angle from the body, or horizontally from the shoulder, when it is swung forward to deliver the ball. A pitched ball is one delivered with the arm straight, and swinging perpendicularly, and free from the body.

Pitching is underhand, with the arm perpendicular (at a right angle) to the ground. (Some compared the pitching motion to that of a clock pendulum.) Bias or spin may be applied to the pitched ball, as long as it is done without violating the restrictions of the rule. Jerking is touching the body during the forward motion of the arm. Failing to deliver the ball after the pitcher begins his regular motion(s) is a balk. Once the arm begins the final motion to deliver the ball, the pitcher may not lift a foot off the ground until the ball has left his hand. Both feet must be inside the two pitcher’s lines before he begins his motion and once the ball leaves his hand – stepping over the line before the ball is delivered is a balk. The pitcher may not run through the lines.

The pitcher needn't pause between pitches or fakes to a base – the striker, once arriving at the striker's line, is expected to be ready to hit. There is nothing in the rules or period citations requiring a pitcher to cross his legs, stand in any particular manner, or present the ball to the striker. The ball may be pitched at any speed. The purpose of this rule is to be fair to base runners who may be attempting to steal a base.

Sec. 8. When a balk is made by the pitcher, every player running the bases is entitled to one base without being put out.

“Balk” is one of four calls the umpire MUST make, immediately and unasked. All runners get the next base, though the striker does not get a base, as he is not yet a player running the bases (See Sec. 9).

Sec. 9. The striker shall be considered a player running the bases as soon as he has struck a fair ball.

Previously the striker was not considered “a player running the bases” until he had reached the first base. The change was made to be consistent with other rule changes, though the correction was not properly carried through all of the rules

Sec. 10: If a batsman strikes a ball on which the ball has been called, no player can make a base on such a strike, nor can any player make a base if the batsman strikes a ball on which two balls have been called, nor if he strikes a ball on which three balls have been called can more than one base can be made by each player occupying bases ; in the latter event the batsman shall also be entitled to one base. If he strikes a ball on which a balk has been called, sections eight and nine of the rules shall apply. In either case the ball shall be considered dead and not in play until settled in the hands of the pitcher ; in neither case shall it be considered a strike ; and if a batsman wilfully [sic] strikes at a ball out of the fair reach of the bat, for the purpose of striking out, it shall not be considered a strike.

The NABBP acknowledged in June 1867 that the incorrect version of Section 10 was printed in newspapers and in the rule books (Beadle's and Haney's). The corrected version appears above and should be used instead of the incorrect version (shown at bottom, below) of the rule as found in Beadle's or Haney's for 1867.

First, it is important to understand that in the modern day the call of “Dead Ball” also means that play is suspended, aka “time” is called. In 1867, however, a call of “Dead Ball” and a call of “Time” are different. In this era, “Dead Ball” means that the ball is unable to be used to make an out until it is made live again (by the pitcher holding the ball). ‘Time’ is not ‘out’, and play continues. The ball is dead in a number of circumstances, including when the ball is foul.

In 1867 citations the umpire would call “Dead Ball” to alert the field on such an occurrence. (See Section 26 for a description of an exception to the standard rules on dead balls.)

The intent of 1867 Sec. 10 is simply that if a balk is called on a pitch and that pitch is struck by the batsman, the ball is dead, and play stops, allowing runners to return to their bases. Period press indicates that the expectation among most was to call "No Strike" if the striker struck such a pitch. ("No strike" is essentially a 'do-over' – the ball is dead, but runners are not able to be put out as they return to their bases.)

The problems they were apparently trying to remedy were (1) some umpires called balls before the pitch had reached the striker, and (2) there were occasions on which a balk or ball was called on a pitch, yet the batsman struck the pitch putting it in play, perhaps making outs.

In summary; We encourage umpires to avoid calling a ball while the pitch is in flight, to give the striker an opportunity to swing. However, calling a ball in flight did occur during this period, and so would not be period inappropriate, though it was routinely discouraged. If the umpire does call a ball in flight and it is subsequently struck, a call of "No strike" should follow. If it is 'ball three' all runners and the batsman advance a base. If it is not ball three all runners and the batsman remain where they were. It is important to emphasize that runners cannot be put out in returning to their bases, as they could on a foul ball, which is also considered a dead ball.

Balks should be called as they occur, which may mean that the balk is called while the pitch is in flight. If a pitch on which a balk has been called is struck and put into play the umpire should call "dead ball" and place runners accordingly.

Incorrect version of the rule printed in Beadle's and Haney's, included for information's sake only: Sec. 10. Any ball, delivered by the pitcher, on which a balk or a ball has been called, shall be concerned dead and not in play until it have been settled in the hands of the pitcher, while he stands within the lines of his position; and no such ball, if hit, shall put the striker out.

Sec. 11. If the ball, from a stroke of the bat, first touches the ground, the person of a player or any other object, behind the range of home and the first base, or home and the third base, it shall be termed foul, and must be so declared by the umpire, unasked. If the ball first touches the ground, the person of a player or any other object either upon, or in front of the range of those bases, it shall be considered fair.

Defines fair and foul. One of the most important duties the umpire has is to call foul balls, immediately and loudly. The original commentary following this rule in the Haney's guide is well written and clear.

The Haney's commentary for Sec. 11 reads:

"[Special rules are requisite in all cases where there are peculiarities of a ground to interfere with fielding operations, such as a tree, a house or a fence in the way. In such cases if a foul ball is caught on the fly from a tree, it counts only as a bound catch, and if a fair ball is held on the fly on a re-bounce, from a fence or a house, it is no catch unless mutually agreed to be so considered before the game is commenced. If a ball strikes the hand or person of a fielder, fairly, and re-bounds outside the lines of the bases it is nevertheless a fair ball. And if it strikes the fielder's person outside the range of the bases and rebounds to the ground inside, it is still a foul ball. A fielder, however, may be

standing within the line and yet reach out to catch the ball in such a manner as to have his hand make the ball foul by touching it outside the range of the base lines.]

If the pitch is inside and accidentally hits the striker's bat without the striker swinging at it, the ball is neither fair nor foul, because the ball is not moving "from a stroke of the bat." In such a case, the ball is in play and runners could take bases while the catcher fields the ball. The ball is not dead, and thus the catcher could throw directly to the base without having to go through the pitcher to make the ball live. This is the same as if the ball were to hit the striker while he stood on the line of his position, provided that he did not intentionally lean into the pitch to have it hit him, which would be interference. (See Sec. 24)

Sec. 12. A player making the home base shall be entitled to score one run.

There is neither requirement in the rules, nor primary source evidence, of any custom that a runner should "check in" with a scorer or ring a bell of any kind when scoring a run.

Sec. 13. If three balls are struck at, and missed, and the last one is not caught, either flying or upon the first bound, it shall be considered fair, and the striker must attempt to make his run.

On a third strike swung at and missed, the striker **MUST** attempt to make his base if the catcher does not hold the ball on the fly or a single bound. Unlike the modern rule, this applies regardless of the number of outs or runners on base.

Though the rule is not explicit here, contemporary documentation suggests that this rule applies if the third strike called, as well as if it is a swinging strike.

Sec. 14. The striker is out if a foul ball is caught, either before touching the ground, or upon the first bound.

Chadwick recommends always trying for the fly catch: "besides a fielder has two chances in attempting a catch on the fly, for should he fail in the first instance, he has the resource of the catch on the bound afterward." Note that the ball must be "caught"; period commentary does not support the notion that a ball, having come to rest on any object, could be merely picked up or retrieved for an out. Period commentary specifies that a foul ball may be caught after contacting a fielder as well as the ground, but not off a party not engaged in the game as a fielder.

Sec. 15. Or, if three balls are struck at and missed, and the last is caught, either before touching the ground, or upon the first bound, provided the balls struck at are not those on which balls or balks have been called, or not those struck at for the purpose of willfully striking out.

Note that to get three strikes, you have to have three swings and misses, three called strikes, or a combination of swing and misses and called strikes. Foul balls are not strikes.

Willfully striking out was an occasional tactic to get on base if a third strike pitch were wild, or to get an inning finished before rain or darkness, so the score doesn't revert to the last completed inning.

Sec. 16. Or, if a fair ball is struck, and the ball is caught without having touched the ground.

As noted in the commentary on Sec. 14, Chadwick recommends always trying for the fly catch: Note that the ball must be caught; Other documentation makes it clear that a ball, having come to rest on any object, could not be merely picked up or retrieved for an out. Note that a fair ball may be caught for an out even after rebounding from another fielder, as long as it has not touched the ground.

Sec. 17. Or, if a fair ball is struck, and the ball is held by an adversary on first base, before the striker touches that base.

There are conflicting citations as to whether an out should be recorded if the baseman only touches the ball to the base or whether some part of the baseman must be touching the base. We leave this to the discretion of the umpire. We suggest that this be discussed with captains prior to the game, while discussing ground rules, as the situation emerges on occasion, and 1867 players are often familiar with the recommendation in Haney's stating that such a situation should not be an out; this is often believed to be a rule, rather than commentary, and it is best to address it in advance.

Sec. 18. Any player running the bases is out if at any time he is touched by the ball while in play in the hands of an adversary, without some part of his person being on the base.

If the fielder has the ball in his hand, and is in control of the ball, once he touches the runner with the hand holding the ball the out is recorded, and anything that happens after that does not affect the call. Citations from the mid-1860's and early 1870's indicate that control of the ball after a tag is not required. Control of the ball following a tag will not be required by rule until 1877.

As noted in the commentary on Sec. 3, period commentary makes it clear that a loose base must be followed out of position, and that the base bag is the safe haven even if it is out of place.

Sec. 19. No run or base can be made upon a foul ball; such a ball shall be considered dead, and not in play until it shall first have been settled in the hands of the pitcher. In such cases players running bases shall return to them, and maybe put out in so returning in the same manner as when running to the first base.

On a foul ball, the base runners must return to their bases. They may be put out in returning after the pitcher has possession of the ball. The pitcher may be anywhere on

the field. Runners may advance once they have returned to their base, AND the pitcher has held the ball. They may not advance at any time prior to the pitcher holding the ball” New for 1867 are further rules that apply if the ball is stopped by non-players. (See Sec. 26.) There is no “tagging up” on caught foul flies. (See Sec. 20)

Sec. 20. No run or base can be made when a fair ball has been caught without having touched the ground, such a ball shall be considered alive and in play. In such cases players running bases shall return to them, and may be put out in so returning, in the same manner as the striker when running to first base ; but players, when balls are so caught, may run their bases immediately after the ball has been settled in the hands of the player catching it.

On a caught fair fly, the base runner may immediately advance after successfully returning to retouch his base (“tagging up”). Runners must wait to see that the ball is "caught" before tagging up and advancing. If a fly is bobbled yet subsequently caught, the runner must remain on his base until the ball is secured. He may not advance on first contact – if he does so, the defense may simply send the ball to the base from which he left and appeal to the umpire for judgment.

Sec. 21. The striker, when in the act of striking, shall not step forward or backward, but must stand on a line drawn through the centre of the home base, not exceeding in length three feet from either side thereof, and parallel with the line occupied by the pitcher. He shall be considered the striker until he has struck a fair ball. Players must strike in regular rotation, and, after the first innings is played, the turn commences with the player who stands on the list next to the one who lost the third hand.

The striker’s line may or may not be marked with chalk, but it should be marked in some way (e.g., as a line marked in the dirt with the head of the bat). The rule requires the striker to place and keep his foot on that line, and not stand behind the line to effectively increase the pitching distance; however, this is a requirement without a penalty. There is substantial documentation that umpires had been lax in enforcing this rule. In 1867, language was added to emphasize that batsmen may not step away from the line in the course of batting. It appears the intent of this rule was not to restrict the normal striding, shifting or replanting of the feet as most batsmen do, as long as he stayed on the line, although some umpires were more strict. The NABBP edited this rule to emphasize this requirement to not step away from the line in 1867, but still neglected to add a penalty to the rule itself. As with the events described in Sec. 10, period press indicates that the expectation among most was to call “No Strike” if the striker fully backed up behind the line or charged ahead of it. “No strike” is essentially a ‘do-over’ – the ball is dead, but runners are not able to be put out as they return to their bases.

The “striker” now becomes a “player running the bases” when he hits a fair ball, (see Sec. 9) instead of when he reaches first. This change of language appears to have been necessary to jibe with other rules that allow him to be tagged out in his run to first. The rule spells out the batting succession.

Sec. 22. Players must make their bases in the order of striking ; and when a fair ball is struck, and not caught flying, the first base must be vacated, as also the second and third bases, if they are occupied at the same time. Players may be put out on any base, under these circumstances, in the same manner as when running to the first base.

Describes the force out. Game accounts from the late 1850's and early 1860's indicate that a force would stay in effect even if a runner preceding the forced runner was put out. By 1863, accounts are promoting a force in the modern manner wherein if a trailing runner is put out, the force is removed. Therefore, by 1867 the sequence of applying the force play is the same as in the modern day.

Sec. 23. Players running bases must touch them ; and, so far as possible, keep upon the direct line between them ; and must touch them in the following order ; first, second, third and home ; and if returning must reverse this order ; and should any player run three feet out of this line, for the purpose of avoiding the ball in the hands of an adversary, he shall be declared out.

The runner can be more than 3 feet out of the line between the bases if his speed around the bases compels it; the rule only penalizes the runner intentionally leaving the direct line between the bases to avoid a tag. A period explanation states: "Unless he LEAVES (emphasis ours) the line of the bases to avoid the ball, he does not infringe the rule." If a runner is out of the base line when a fielder approaches him with the ball, the runner can run directly to the next base.

As of 1865, a runner that misses a base must be touched with the ball before returning. The umpire must then be appealed to. The defense touching the missed base only is insufficient. Runners attempting to return must touch all bases passed.

Sec. 24. Any player, who shall intentionally prevent an adversary from catching or fielding the ball, shall be declared out.

A player who intends to interfere is declared out. A player who is accidentally hit by a batted ball is not out. It is up to the umpire to determine intent.

The Haney's guide offers this commentary: "The word "intentional" in this rule, refers to actions which could have been avoided."

There is no indication that actual contact with the ball or the fielder is required for interference to occur. Intentionally interfering with the fielder's vision could be deemed interference.

A batsman that intentionally interferes with a pitch to give a base runner an unfair advantage may be ruled out for interference.

There is no provision in Section 24 itself for the act of offensive interference to suspend play or place runners. Even so, the umpire – being the sole judge of fair and unfair play – has the authority to do so.

Sec. 25. If the player is prevented from making a base, by the intentional obstruction of an adversary, he shall be entitled to that base, and not be put out.

Blocking a runner off the base, (including setting up to take a throw in front of the base) is obstruction, and the runner is given the base even if tagged off the base. It is obstruction to move into a runner's path to take a throw at any base, when the throw could have been caught without being in the runner's path. Note that this is a distinct difference from modern understandings of "obstruction."

As with the previous rule, determining intent is the key to making the call, but the fielder has the responsibility to avoid obstruction if at all possible. Unlike the modern day, if the defender initiates a collision, even with the ball in hand, it may be deemed obstruction.

The 1867 Haney's guide offers this commentary: "In regard to a base-player taking a ball from a fielder, the former has no right to stand between the player and the base he is running to, when the ball could be equally well be taken by standing out of the way of his adversary. In such instances as these the obstruction should be regarded as intentional, in the spirit of the law, from the fact that it could have been avoided, though perhaps the obstruction was not actually intended." (Pg. 50)

If the umpire sees obstruction, he calls it and the runner is not out. A runner/captain may appeal an out call if he feels he was obstructed.

Sec. 26. If an adversary stops the ball with his hat or cap, or if a ball be stopped by any person not engaged in the game, or if it be taken from the hands of any one not engaged in the game, no player can be put out unless the ball shall first have been settled in the hands of the pitcher while he is standing within the lines of his position.

(See Section 10 for a general description of dead balls.)

This rule is essentially the same as had been in place since the beginning of the NABBP's rules. The differences added in 1867 are that in some specific circumstances (ball stopped/held with the hat/cap, or stopped/held by someone not engaged in the game, i.e., a spectator), the pitcher must hold the ball while in his position between the pitching lines to make this dead ball live again. Before 1867 the pitcher was allowed to be anywhere on the field to make any dead ball live, including those made dead for the above reasons. (The rule was also modified to add that the ball need only be "stopped" by a spectator to render it dead; previously, it had to be "taken from a spectator's hands", so that spectators could stop the ball but not pick it up, and the penalty of being called "dead" did not apply.) .

The commentary in Haney's reads:

"If the ball be stopped by a crowd at the back of either the first or third base, the ball must be returned to the pitcher before it can be used to put a player out, and it must be settled in the hands of the pitcher while he stands within the lines of his position before it is again in play"

Also on page 24 of Haney's (misplaced under the commentary for Sec. 28): "The amendment to this rule prevents the pitcher from leaving his position to take any ball stopped by an outsider in a game. Formerly the rule was nullified by the pitcher running to the base to take a ball stopped by the crowd."

Note that the commentary restricts this rule to balls over foul ground that are stopped by persons other than the nine men on defense, such as spectators and players not in play (players 'on the bench' in modern terms). Balls stopped by the batsman may be considered separately as interference. Balls inadvertently stopped by the umpire are

presumed excluded. (In the rare occasion when a vintage base ball game had spectators seated or standing in the field of play, the same rule would apply, or other ground rules developed for those circumstances.)

Other commentary in the Haney's guide on pg. 128 specifies that this stopping of the ball by a spectator need not be intentional: "In the event that an "adversary stops the ball with his hat or cap, or if a ball be stopped by any person not engaged in the game, or if it be taken from the hands of any one not engaged in the game" a "Dead Ball" is called yet runners may continue to advance."

On a Foul Ball, the ball is also "dead" in that it cannot be used to put a runner out until it is held by the pitcher, but on a "foul ball" runners may not attempt to advance until the pitcher has held the ball and they have returned to their base. (See Section 19.)

We thus need to combine these two rules (Sec. 19 on foul balls Sec. 26 on balls stopped by spectators):

As it is a "foul ball," the runners may not attempt to advance until the ball is held by the pitcher anywhere on the field

But as it is also a "blocked ball" (using modern terminology – no term for this type of ball is given in the rules), the defense cannot use the ball to put a runner out until the pitcher has held the ball at his pitching position.

If a foul ball is stopped by a spectator and the pitcher then holds the ball while away from his position (for example, he goes to the third base line to receive the ball back from a spectator), any runners are free to advance as soon as the pitcher holds the ball (assuming that they have retouched their base), and the runners cannot be put out until the ball is taken by the pitcher to his position. Therefore, it is best for the pitcher to remain at his position on a foul ball and have the ball sent to him there when runners are on base.

Umpires are encouraged to be alert to balls being stopped by spectators when runners are on base.

Sec. 27. If a ball, from the stroke of a bat, is held under any other circumstances than as enumerated in Section 26, and without having touched the ground, the striker is out.

Haney's (pg. 24) notes that "If a ball be held in the lap of a fielder, or between his knees, or on his feet before it touches the ground it is a fair catch".

This rule is a clarification of Sec. 26 that disallows a 'catch' in a hat or cap. There is substantial documentation that further describes the word "caught," clarifying that a ball did not have to be caught in the hands - that it could be trapped between the arm and the body, for instance.

"To be "settled" the ball must be plainly held, if only for two or three seconds". (Ball Player's Chronicle, Sept 19, 1867)

"If a fly ball is held if but for a second or two, unless it plainly rebounds from the hand, it should be considered a catch". (Ball Player's Chronicle, July 25, 1867)

As covered under Sec. 11, a ball rebounding from a fence or house would not be a catch unless a ground rule had been established and understood allowing such a catch. Therefore, a ball that rebounds from a table or spectator could not be held for an out, even if caught before touching the ground. Likewise, a ball that comes to rest on an object or person cannot be retrieved for an out.

Sec. 28. If two hands are already out, no player running home at the time the ball is struck can make a run to count in the score of the game if the striker is put out by a fair catch, by being touched between home and the first base, or by the ball being held by an adversary at the first base before the striker reaches it.

This rule addresses the question of a run scoring on a play on which the 3rd out of an inning was recorded. The rule clarifies that this is an issue of timing. The umpire must determine if the run scored before the 3rd out was made. The exception was the striker; if he is the third out, before reaching first (by being touched with the ball or the ball held at first base before he gets there), no run can score, without regard to the timing. As soon as the striker of the ball has made his first, it becomes a matter of timing. This differs from the modern rule, in that here a force play at a base other than first does not automatically negate a run, if the runner touches home base before the out was made.

Sec. 29. An inning must be concluded at the time the third hand is put out.

Further clarifies when a runner can score. No runs can be counted after the 3rd out is made.

Sec. 30. The game shall consist of nine innings to each side, when should the number of runs be equal, the play shall be continued until a majority of runs, upon an equal number of innings, shall be declared, which shall conclude the game.

In 1867, there were technically 18 innings, 9 for each side. An inning was one club's turn at bat.

There were not yet any provisions in the rules to end a game when the club batting last was ahead and the losing club had completed their nine innings and was still behind in the score. By rule, a club choosing not to complete a game was considered a forfeit. According to Sec. 39 (see below), the score of a forfeit was 9-0.

It is important to note that it was not uncommon for teams batting in the bottom of the ninth inning who had already won the game would still play their best, and would often add additional runs to their total.

We can document that 8 1/2 inning games did occur in 1867, although rarely, in a multiple game tournament when other games were ready to be played. Friendly games of fewer than nine innings occurred when due to a late start they knew darkness would fall before completion.

In that we are demonstrating base ball as it was actually played, and further that we are primarily playing for exercise and entertainment, we encourage clubs to play out their full nine innings.

Should clubs choose to call a game short of a full nine innings each, we would then encourage them to explain to their spectators the actual rule, and that they are departing from it.

Sec. 31. In playing all matches, nine players from each club shall constitute a full field, and they must have been regular members of the club which they represent, and of no other club, either in or out of the National Association, for thirty days immediately prior to the match. Position of players and choice of innings shall be determined by captains, previously appointed for that purpose by the respective clubs.

This is the “no ringers” rule.

The NABBP had expectations of exclusive club membership as a requirement for match play. It is often not practical for modern vintage clubs that may be struggling for players to forbid bringing in players from other clubs to fill their nine. Clubs are encouraged that when they bring in outside players, to dress them in their club uniform and perhaps first ask their opponents’ permission, particularly in tournaments.

Any additional men beyond nine likely would not be in uniform, nor would more than nine be in the batting order. A club may play with fewer than nine.

Should a club choose to have additional men available in uniform or bat more than nine, we have an opportunity to explain that this would not have been done in the era.

The choice of who bats first in match games (i.e., “choice of innings”) was typically done with the captains tossing a coin, most often a penny, according to period documentation. Unlike the modern NFL, the captains themselves typically tossed the coin without the umpire’s supervision, and not as part of a pre-game ceremony. The modern practice of allowing the coin to hit the ground is unnecessary.

Sec. 32. The umpire shall take care that the regulations respecting the ball, bats, bases, and the pitcher’s and striker’s position are strictly observed. He shall be the judge of fair and unfair play, and shall determine all disputes and differences which may occur during the game. He shall take special care to declare all foul balls, balks, strikes and balls immediately upon their occurrence, and when a player is put out, in what position and manner, unasked, in a distinct and audible manner. He shall, in every instance, before leaving the ground, declare the winning club, and shall record his decision in the book of the scorers.

This rule allows the umpire to decide issues not specifically covered in the rules. Foul balls, baulks, and calling balls and strikes are the calls the umpire is required to make unasked. The umpire did not call most other plays, unless judgment was asked.

Added this year was the requirement for the umpire to announce the manner of all outs for the sake of the scorers recording the game. This is not the same as deciding the outcome of a play, which was still typically done by the players, with calls to the umpire for “judgment” (or “how’s that!”) when the outcome was unclear. The umpire’s announcement in 1867 is simply that – an announcement.

Sec. 33. In all matches the umpire shall be selected by the captains of the respective sides, and shall perform all the duties enumerated in Section 32, except recording the game, which shall be done by two scorers, one of whom shall be appointed by each of the contending clubs.

In 1867 there is not a lone scorer; there are 2 scorers, each club supplying one.

Note that the umpire was not determined by the home club, as is common in VBB today, but was instead selected (often in advance) by the opposing captains.

Sec. 34. No person engaged in a match, either as umpire, scorer or player, shall be either directly or indirectly interested in any bet upon the game. Neither umpire, scorer or player shall be changed during the match, unless with the consent of both parties, except for reason of illness or injury or for a violation of this law, and then the umpire may dismiss any transgressor.

No gambling on the game, gentlemen. As covered in Sec. 31, many modern vintage clubs choose to bat more than nine, as well as rotate players in defensively. Clubs are encouraged, when they allow substitutions, to advise spectators that this would not have been done in the era.

As with the players, there are no substitutions for the umpire or scorers, although this is hardly a critical issue for vintage game play.

One aspect of substitution that is well-documented as being accepted practice dating back to the 1850's was allowing a substitute runner from home for a batsman that was injured. In the modern day this is called a "courtesy runner". In the period he was not called a courtesy runner; he was a "substitute" runner. A player may not have another run for him simply because he is a better runner. The substitute runner need not be the 'last out', but he was a player already in the game. Substitute runners started from a position slightly up the third base line from home base, far enough behind and away from the striker to avoid being struck by a pitch or a swung bat. For 1867 play, choice and position of a substitute runner could be agreed to by the captains.

The language regarding dismissing transgressors is referring to players determined to have played for a different club within thirty days, again per Sec. 31.

Sec. 35. The umpire in any match shall determine when play shall be suspended ; and if the game cannot be concluded, it shall be decided by the last even innings, provided five innings have been played; and the party having the greatest number of runs shall be declared the winner.

5 even innings are the minimum amount necessary for a match (game) to be official. If the match has to end at a time other than the end of an inning, then the score reverts back to what it was at the end of the last completed inning.

Sec. 36. Clubs may adopt such rules respecting balls knocked beyond or outside the bounds of the field, as the circumstances of the ground may demand ; and these rules shall govern all matches played upon the ground, provided that they are distinctly made known to every player and the umpire previous to the commencement of the game.

Special ground rules should be agreed on prior to the match. Ground rules were specific to the peculiarities of the field itself.

There is no documentation of which we are aware of fields where a ball hit a great distance or over a fence was considered to be an automatic home run. Balls hit into accessible fields were often yet live. Balls hit over obstacles hindering recovery on the

bound or fly may be one or two bases. A pitched ball reaching a catcher's fence (backstop) that was closer than 70 feet (distance per the Beadle's guide commentary – other sources recommend 90 feet) behind home may award extra bases based on a ground rule.

There is no historical precedent for the practice of creating "gentleman's agreements" to alter or modernize other rules or customs as is sometimes done in modern vintage base ball. Significant contemporary evidence suggests that even in small towns, base ball clubs were eager to be "up to date" and play by the rules adopted by the National Association.

Sec. 37. No person shall be permitted to approach or to speak with the umpire, scorers, or players, or in any manner to interrupt or interfere during the progress of the game, unless by special request of the umpire.

This section is not intended to mean that players are not allowed to address the umpire as they are required to do in requesting judgment in the normal course of play. Rather, it is designed to prevent spectators or players from interfering with the attention of the umpire, scorers, or other players.

Sec. 38. No person shall be permitted to act as umpire or scorer in any match unless he shall be a member of a Base Ball Club governed by these rules.

Prohibits "ceremonial" umpires such as local politicians or other prominent citizens who may have little knowledge of the game. For our purposes, it is important that umpires be very familiar with the specific year's rules and playing customs.

Sec. 39. Whenever a match shall have been determined upon between two clubs, play shall be called at the exact hour appointed ; and should either party fail to produce their players within thirty minutes thereafter, the party so failing shall admit a defeat, and shall deliver the ball before leaving the ground, which ball must be received by the club who are ready to play, and the game shall be considered as won, and so counted in the list of matches played : and the winning club shall be entitled to a score of nine runs for any game so forfeited, unless the delinquent side fail to play on account of the recent death of one of its members, and sufficient time has not elapsed to enable them to give their opponents due notice before arriving on the ground.

Self-explanatory, but not typically an issue that would be considered in modern vintage match play.

Note that 1867 is the first year in which the rules specified that a forfeit had a score of 9-0.

Sec. 40. Any match game played by any club in contravention of the rules adopted by this Association, shall be considered null and void, and shall not be counted in the list of match games won or lost, except a game be delayed by rain beyond the time appointed

to commence the same. Any match game can be put off by mutual consent of the parties about engaging in the game. No match game shall be commenced in the rain. This rule was added in 1866 primarily to address player eligibility (See Sec. 34). Not typically a concern in vintage base ball.

Sec. 41 No person who shall be in arrears to any other club, or shall at any time receive compensation for his services as a player, shall be competent to play in any match. All players who play base ball for place, emolument, or money, shall be regarded as professional players ; and no professional player shall take part in any match game ; and any club giving any compensation to a player, or having to their knowledge a player in their nine playing in a match for compensation, shall be debarred from membership in the National Association, and they shall not be considered by any club belonging to this Association as a proper club to engage in a match with, and should any club so engage with them they shall forfeit membership.

Prohibits professional players. Also prohibits players from creating financial difficulties for clubs they leave by failing to pay their dues, uniform costs, or other fees owed to the former club.

Sec. 42. Should the striker stand at the bat, without striking at good balls repeatedly pitched to him, for the apparent purpose of delaying the game, or of giving advantage to a player, the umpire, after warning him, shall call one strike, and if he persists in such action, two and three strikes ; when three strikes are called, he shall be subject to the same rules as if he had struck a fair ball.

Called strikes are a remedy for the once common practice of extending a turn at bat while the striker waits for base runners to advance on passed balls, or by stealing their next base. The batsman, on taking his position at the striker's line, could indicate his preference in pitches (i.e., what "for the striker" meant for him; see commentary on Sec. 5). The umpire must warn the batter after two or more such pitches are allowed to pass with language such as "warning to the striker", although no specific wording is required. Speed is not factor in the determination of a hittable pitch.

Unlike modern baseball in which every pitch must be either a ball or a strike, there is a broad area that pitches may be located that are neither a ball or a strike.

Any pitch that was virtually unhittable must be called a ball. Some umpires called balls on hittable pitches. For a pitch to be deemed a strike, it would be "for the striker". Even if the pitch is "for the striker", for it to be deemed a strike, the batsman must also be intentionally allowing it to pass to try to give a runner an opportunity to advance, or to (typically) delay the game into darkness.

Sec. 43. Every match hereafter made shall be decided by the best two games out of three, unless a single game shall be mutually agreed upon by the contesting clubs.

Prior to 1860 and after 1865, a match (what we would consider a "series") was typically a "best of 3" game format. Most clubs today seem to "mutually agree" on a single game.

From the 29 June 1867 Wilkes' Spirit of the Times, page 328, col. 1:

The New Rules

The official organ of the National Association published the rule as ordered to be changed by President Gorman. The following is the copy of the order sent to all clubs:

"National Association Of Base Ball Players, Washington, June 17, 1867,

"Sir: My attention has been called by Dr. J. B. Jones, Chairman of the Committee of Rules of the National Association, to an error in the printed rules for 1867.

"An examination of the original minutes of the Association satisfies me that such is the fact, and I therefore deem it my duty to inform you, and through you your club, that the correct reading of the rule in question is as follows:

"Sec. 10: If a batsman strikes a ball on which the ball has been called, no player can make a base on such a strike, nor can any player make a base if the batsman strikes a ball on which two balls have been called, nor if he strikes a ball on which three balls have been called can more than one base can be made by each player occupying bases ; in the latter event the batsman shall also be entitled to one base. If he strikes a ball on which a baulk has been called, sections eight and nine of the rules shall apply. In either case the ball shall be considered dead and not in play until settled in the hands of the pitcher ; in neither case shall it be considered a strike ; and if a batsman wilfully [sic] strikes at a ball out of the fair reach of the bat, for the purpose of striking out, it shall not be considered a strike.'

"On and after receipt of this communication all play in which your club is concerned will be governed accordingly.

"Very respectfully Arthur P. Gorman, President, N. A. B. B. P.

"To the corresponding secretary of the _____ B. B. Club, _____."

This rule goes into effect from the date of its appearance in the Chronicle, June 20th.