THE RULES OF THE MASSACHUSETTS GAME

(TOWN BALL)

The Rules & Regulations
Governing The Game Of Base Ball
As Adopted By
The Massachusetts Association
Of Base Ball Players
At Dedham, May 13, 1858.

RULES

OF THE

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ASSOCIATION

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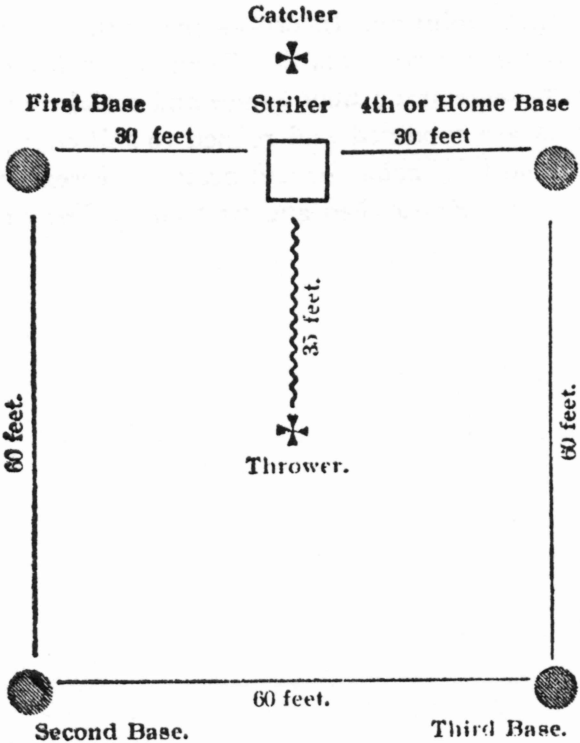
THE STRIKER.

STICK and ball games were played under many different rules in the early 1800's as informal pastimes. Rounders, One-Old-Cat, Stool Ball, Trap Ball and Base Ball were some of the names applied to the more popular variations. Rules were localized and varied significantly according to local customs, ethnic populations, the size and topography of the playing site and the type of home-made balls and bats available. In many communities the rules were not written down but simply passed along orally and by practice from generation to generation. By the 1850's, these older games had begun to lose their appeal in the face of the more popular New York Game, a style of baseball adapted from older forms by the Knickerbocker Base Ball Club of New York City. However, Town Ball, as it came to be known, continued to flourish in and around the Boston area. On May 13, 1858, the Massachusetts Association of Base Ball players met at Dedham and adopted 21 rules and regulations.

govern the games of Base Ball as they then played it. Because of its connections with Massachusetts this form of base ball became known as the Massachusetts Game to distinguish it clearly from the New York version. The first inter-collegiate game of base ball was played under the Massachusetts rules in Pittsfield, Massachusetts on July 3, 1859 between Williams and Amherst colleges. For a brief time the Massachusetts style of base ball held its own in popularity but during the Civil War the New York Game emerged as the preferred form of base ball and rapidly developed into the organized amateur and professional sport we know today as our National Pastime. However, it is important to recognize that these earlier forms of base ball were the true antecedents of the game we know today. Modern base ball is not the product of a single inventive genius or even the outgrowth of a given period of our history. Present-day base ball is instead the culmination of a long social evolution that began in earliest times with primitive childrens'

stick and ball games. In many respects the Massachusetts Game represents the mid-point in this evolution. Incorporating both primitive and modern concepts the Town Ball rules help us to understand how games and social conventions are modified and refined to suit changing standards of behavior and personal recreation.

Researched and written by *Tom Heitz*.


Catcher
First Base
Striker
4th or Home Base
30 feet
30 feet
35 feet.
60 feet.
60 feet.
Thrower.
60 feet.
Second Base.
Third Base.

THE MASSACHUSETTS RULES

1. The Ball must not weigh less than two, nor more than two and three-quarter ounces, avoirdupois. It must measure not less than six and a half, nor more than eight and a half inches in circumference, and must be covered with leather.
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.
3. Four Bases or Bounds shall constitute around; the distance from each base shall be sixty feet.
4. The bases shall be wooden stakes, projecting four feet from the ground.
5. The Striker shall stand inside of a space of four feet in diameter, at equal distance between the first and fourth Bases.

6. The Thrower shall stand thirty-five feet from and on a parallel line with the Striker.
7. The Catcher shall not enter within the space occupied by the Striker, and must remain upon his feet in all cases while catching the Ball.
8. The ball must be thrown - not pitched or tossed - to the Bat, on the side preferred by the Striker, and within reach of his Bat.
9. The ball must be caught flying in all cases.
10. Players must take their knocks in the order in which they are numbered; and after the first inning is played, the turn will commence with player succeeding the one who lost on the previous innings.
11. The Ball being struck at three times and missed, and caught each time by a player on the opposite side, the Striker shall be considered out. Or, if the Ball be ticked or knocked, and

caught on the opposite side, the Striker shall be considered out. But if the Ball is not caught after being struck at three times, it shall be considered a knock, and the Striker obliged to run.

12. Should the Striker stand at the Bat without striking at good balls thrown repeatedly at him, for the apparent purpose of delaying the game, or of giving advantage to players, the referees, 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 struck at three fair balls.

13. A player, having possession of the first Base, when the Ball is struck by the succeeding player, must vacate the Base, even at the risk of being put out; anb when two players get on one Base, either by accident or otherwise, the player who arrived last is entitled to the Base.

14. If a player, while running the Bases, be hit with the Ball thrown by one of the opposite side, before he has touched the home Bound, while off a Base, he shall be considered out.

15. A player, after running the four Bases, on making the home Bound, shall be entitled to one talley.

16. In playing all match games, when one is out, the side shall be considered out.

17. In playing all match games, one hundred tallies shall constitute the game, the making of which by either Club, that Club shall be judged the winner.

18. Not less than ten nor more than fourteen players from each Club, shall constitute a match in all games.

19. A person engaged on either side, shall not withdraw during the progress of the match, unless he be disabled, or by the consent of the opposite party.

20. The Referees shall be chosen as follows: One from each Club, who shall agree upon a third man from some club belonging to this Association, if possible. Their decision shall be final, and binding upon both parties.

21. The Tallymen shall be chosen in the same manner as the Referees.

Note: The above rules for The Massachusetts Game appear as printed in "The Base Ball Player's Pocket Companion," Boston, Mayhew & Baker, 1859 at pages 20-22.

GLOSSARY

Avoirdupois..... A weight, of which a pound weighs sixteen ounces.

Basetender..... An infielder stationed near one of the four stakes marking the bases.

Catcher..... The fielder who plays opposite the Thrower to receive balls missed by the striker.

Knock ..... To hit the ball.

Plugging the Runner. Throwing the ball at the runner to put him out; the ball must be thrown a tag does not suffice; the runner must be off the stake.

Scout..... The outfielder.

Soaking the runner..... Same as plugging.

Staketender..... Same as Basetender.

Striker..... The batter.

Tally..... A run or ace counted after a runner has touched all four stakes in consecutive order.

Thrower ..... The pitcher.