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British and Finnish Baseball: International Variations on an American Pastime

By Emyr W. Williams, Jan-Erik Romar, and Michael Hartman

Increase students' activity levels and introduce an international element to your softball or baseball unit by including British and/or Finnish baseball in your curriculum. Both British and Finnish baseball are easy to introduce, as the specific skills involved in both sports are identical to those used in traditional baseball. If students have the skills to play traditional baseball, they have the

skills to play British and Finnish baseball as well. After a brief overview of the unique rules and strategies of these international sports, students can quickly participate in these high activity versions of traditional baseball.

British baseball is a high scoring game that is a cross between cricket and baseball/softball. In British baseball, runs are



Figure 1. Cricket bat, “crazy” cricket bat, British baseball bat, and softball bat.

scored based on the number of bases a batter reaches after hitting the ball, resulting in a high scoring game similar to cricket. Running the bases for both British and traditional baseball are more or less the same. Finnish baseball is a direct descendent of the American version of the game, however it evolved into its own unique sport (Pullinen, 1993) which emphasizes the running aspect of the game more than hitting. The major benefit of including both British and Finnish baseball into your softball/baseball unit is the increase in student activity levels that are inherent in these international variations. Additionally the novelty of both British and Finnish baseball can motivate students who are indifferent to traditional softball/baseball to actively participate in these fun sports. Finally, the inclusion of these sports into the curriculum can enhance students' appreciation of the international diversity of sport and also provide the opportunity for interdisciplinary connections across the curriculum.

This article outlines the rules (with some American adaptations) for introducing both British and Finnish baseball. The rules outlined have been minimally modified for practical and safety reasons from the original sports for inclusion into American physical education classes.

British Baseball

Basic Rules

The first aspect of British baseball that's different from traditional softball/baseball is the bat. The British baseball bat is essentially a cut down version of a cricket bat (Welsh Baseball Union, 1992), which has a flat surface (See Figure 1). Consequently, any flat bat is appropriate to use for this game. A flat bat with a larger surface area generally results in enhanced opportunities for the batter to successfully hit the ball, which in turn promotes the requirement for running the bases – an integral factor in increasing the active participation of students.

Table 1 outlines the main rules of British baseball. These rules relate to the number of players on each team, game duration, type of ball used, pitching and pitcher rules, strikes and balls, playing area, how runs are scored, and how outs are achieved. Some of these rules are completely different (Foul Territory, Number of Players etc.), whereas some rules (Strike Zone and Outs) are similar to traditional baseball and softball.

Figure 2. Dimensions of British baseball field

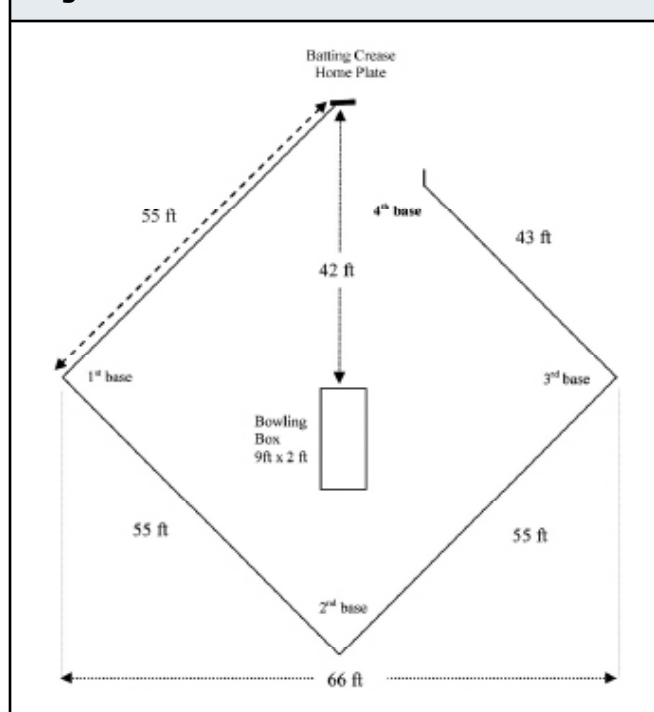
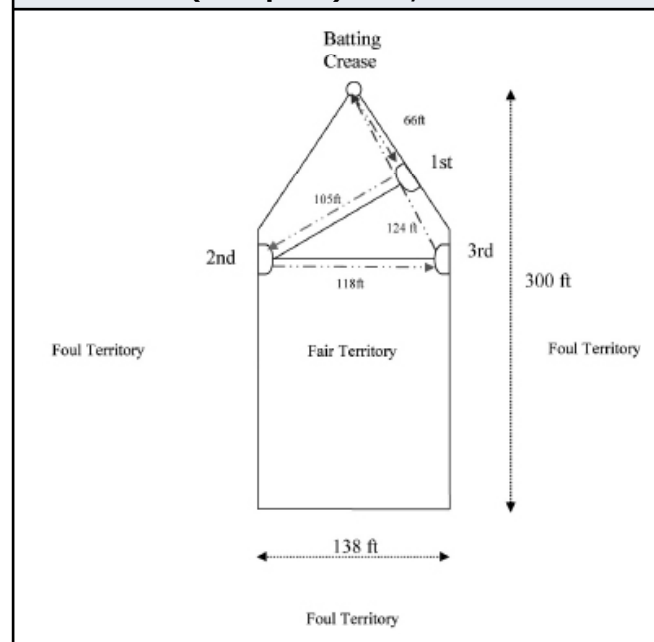


Figure 3: Dimensions of Finnish baseball (Pesapallo) field, men.



Layout of the Field

The bases are located in the same general area as baseball (see Figure 2). The suggested distance between the bases for the middle school aged students is 55 feet from home to first, first to second, and second to third, respectively (International Baseball Board, 2001). The distance from third to fourth base is 43 feet. Players do not run to the home plate; they are safe once they reach 4th base (12 feet from home plate), (International Baseball Board, 2001).

Table 1. British Baseball Rules

Rule	Description
Number of players	Up to 11 players per side – minimum of 8. (International Baseball Board, 2001).
Game duration	The game consists of two innings (similar to cricket), where everyone on the team bats.
Good and Bad Balls/ Strikes and Balls	- A ball bowled over the batting crease/home plate and between the shoulders and the knees is considered a “good” or strike. A ball bowled outside these limits is a “bad” or ball. - Two strikes and the batter is out. Two balls and the batting team earns a run. * Two additional balls (four balls in total) the batting team earns another run and the batter advances to 1st base.
Foul Territory	There is no foul territory.
Bunting	“Bunting” is not allowed. The batter must swing at the ball.
Scoring	A batter, after hitting the ball, scores one run for each base that he reaches without stopping on that hit.
Who wins?	The team that scores the most number of runs wins. In British baseball, teams typically score 10 or more runs per inning. Scoring multiple runs is easy in British baseball, so expect high scoring games which makes it more exciting and fun for the students.

Source: (International Baseball Board, 2001)

Finnish Baseball

Basic Rules

As Finnish baseball is a direct descendant of American baseball, the same bats, balls, bases etc., are used for this sport. The major difference, however, is where the bases are located, and consequently the direction that batters run the bases, how runs are scored, and how outs are determined. Although Pulitzer Prize winning sports journalist Red Smith (Smith, 1952) wasn't thrilled with Finnish baseball or as he called it a “Monstrous Infant,” one of his major criticisms of the game in 1952 was that the ball was continually in play. More than fifty years later, this continuous activity aspect may be part of why this sport is appropriate for physical education curriculum. If Finnish baseball was derived from traditional baseball, what then makes it different?

Table 2 outlines the basic rules of Finnish baseball. These rules include a description of players, an inning, an out, strikes, balls, foul territory, bases (location of and the running direction for batters), scoring runs, and winning the match. Since Finnish baseball is directly derived from the American version of the game, many of the rules are similar (number of players, definition of an inning, and generally how runs are scored). However, there are unique rule variations which are completely different to traditional baseball/softball such as the direction in which players run the bases, the distances between bases, and how players are defined as being out.

Layout of the field

The following dimensions are for a full size (men's) field. For a physical education setting, the field dimensions should be reduced by 10% or more to meet the developmental needs of your students. The maximum dimensions of the field are as follows:

- 92 meters or approximately 100 yards long
- 42 meters or approximately 46 yards wide
- HB to 1st base = 20 meters (66 feet)
- 1st base to 2nd base = 32 meters (105 feet)
- 2nd base to 3rd base = 36 meters (118 feet)
- 3rd base to home = 38 meters (124 feet)

The emphasis of the game of Finnish baseball is on running around the bases, not hitting “home runs” out of the park. Therefore, the batter attempts to hit the ball to positions on the field that enables him/her or the other base runners, to advance safely around the bases. Consequently, strategy plays a large part when hitting the ball and running the bases, making this game a highly active and running-intensive version of baseball.

Students' perspectives

Having introduced both of these versions of baseball to middle school physical education classes, what did the students think about these sports? Overwhelmingly, students liked the fact that there were no foul lines in British baseball. Without foul lines, every hit is in play, which results in greater activity opportunities

Table 2. Finnish baseball rules

Rule	Description
Number of players	Nine per side
What's an inning?	An inning equals three outs.
What's an out	The only out that counts as an out is when the batter is run out trying to get to base. If the batter is caught then he/she is "retired" from the inning but is not technically counted as an out against the team.
Strikes	A batter has three strikes per at-bat. If he/she hits the ball on the first or 2nd "good" pitch, they are NOT obligated to run. (Remember the purpose of batting is to advance runners, NOT hit home runs). After three good pitches (strikes), the batter must attempt to run to first. After three balls, the batter gets a walk to first base.
Scoring	Teams score by advancing runners around the bases until they reach home. If a batter reaches 3rd base on the hit, then he gets a run (home run).
When is the inning over?	The inning is over when a team has three outs (run outs) or the team doesn't have any eligible batters left to hit, as the other batters have been "wounded" or "retired" from the inning and therefore cannot participate in that inning as bat.
How is the game won?	Two options/versions: The actual game of Finnish baseball is won by the team that wins the most innings. There are four innings per game and a 5th is played if tied after four innings. Physical Education option: the team that scores the most cumulative runs wins.

for both the batting side to run and for the fielding side to retrieve the ball. Additionally, the flat bat increases the likelihood of a successful hit, and more hits in this game equate to more running as the batter must run on every hit.

For Finnish baseball, many students surprisingly liked the zig-zag direction that players ran the bases. Although at first the zig-zag pattern is a major difference, the distance between the bases in Finnish baseball provides a challenge. Additionally, a player cannot hit a home run, meaning that even on long hits the batters are forced to run the bases. As a result of the distance that the batter has to run (nearly 140 yards), it is virtually impossible to hit the ball to far enough to allow the batter to get around all of the bases. At best, the batter on a good hit may be able to make it to third before being held up by the fielding team. Some students did not like the fact that "the field was too short" and found it difficult to control the force and direction of their swing.

Both British and Finnish baseball are similar, yet different, to traditional baseball. These international versions of the game are easy to introduce as complimentary activities into your softball/baseball curriculum. Both versions are easy to teach, fun to play, and require extensive running. Introducing these international sports into your softball/baseball unit may promote increased activity and develop a greater appreciation of the diversity of world sports, which can enhance the opportunity for interdisciplinary connections across the entire curriculum. Most of all, these sports

will provide a high-activity international variation of baseball that your students will enjoy.

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