

Beep Baseball in a Nutshell

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Introduction:

Spectators who witness today's style of beep baseball are delighted and amazed. They see athletes who are visually impaired dive on to the ground to stop a beeping ball and run full speed 100 feet toward the sound of a buzzing base to score a run. They see desire, determination, teamwork and in many cases skilled performances of players with visual impairment having fun in the midst of extreme competition. They also witness an occasional injury. Beep baseball is not a game for those who are concerned about a scraped elbow. Safety is a high priority, but due to the nature of the game, some injuries do occur. As with any sport, players know this and fully accept the injury risks for the sake of playing a sport they love.

Beep Baseball Overview:

Understanding the game is relatively easy, but there are differences from baseball. A game lasts six (6) innings unless more are needed to break a tie. Teams can be co-ed. A team has three outs per inning, and umpires have the right to eject unruly players or spectators. There is no second base. First and third bases are four foot high padded cylinders with speakers, which are placed one hundred feet down the respective baselines and ten feet outside the foul lines. This is to prevent a runner from colliding with a defensive fielder. The bases contain sounding units that give off a continuous buzzing sound when activated. The batter does not know which one will be turned on. When the ball is hit, the base operator activates one of the bases. The runner must identify the correct buzzing base and run to it before the ball is fielded by a defensive player. If the runner is safe, a run is scored. In other words, there is no running from one base to another. A player does one of three things when batting: hit the ball and be put out by the defense, hit the ball and score a run, or strike out.

A batter is allowed four (4) strikes and one (1) pass ball. The fourth swing must be a clean miss.

To better understand how the game is played, keep in mind that each team has its own sighted pitcher and catcher. The pitcher attempts to place the ball on his batter's bat. The ball is pitched from a distance of no less than twenty feet from the front of Home Plate. According to the rules, a pitcher is obligated to clearly verbalize two words. He or she says "ready" just before the ball is about to be released. This alerts all players the ball may soon be hit. As the ball is being released, the pitcher says, "pitch" or "ball." The batter allows a split second before starting his/her swing. If contact is made, one of the two bases is activated and it becomes a race between the runner and the defense. Also, a hit ball must travel at a minimum of forty (40) feet on the field to be considered fair. A ball that travels one hundred seventy (170) feet in the air is considered a home run, worth two (2) points as long as the batter makes it to the buzzing base in 30 seconds. A hit ball grazing or rebounding off the pitcher is ruled a "no pitch". It helps for pitchers to be quick and agile.

A pitcher never fields or bats, but the role is critical. Most pitchers are good athletes with competitive spirits. Their success is in direct proportion to the number of runs their team scores. High ERA's are preferable.

Defense:

Playing defense is a challenging aspect of the game. There are six defensive players in beep baseball. Not all teams use the same defensive placement of their players. Most teams use the same numbering system to identify the direction the ball has been hit. One thru five or one thru six in pie shaped wedges emanating from home plate on both sides of the field are the only numbers allowed. Five or six being the common, overlapping numbered zone, up the middle of the field. Some teams reverse this and have the 'one zone' be the up the middle, with a "five" or "six" call being along the base line. The narrower the zones, the more precise the information the fielder has to respond to. There are one or two sighted spotters positioned in the outfield, one on either side of the field. A good spotter should be aware of fielders at all times and stay out of the way of the play, not distracting the fielders, who are intent on the ball.

When a ball is hit, a spotter will quickly call the number indicating the general direction the ball is traveling. The number does not signify a person so much as the zone the ball is heading to. A spotter is allowed to call one number, one time. The only exception is if both spotters call the same number. Each spotter takes half the field to call the one thru five or one thru six numbers. The players coordinate their defensive moves according to the number called. Some spotters use inflection in the number to indicate a 'short' ball, or air/fly ball or pop up. Most teams stagger the depths of player placement for freer lateral movement, usually but not always consisting from base line to center field, side to side and a specific amount forward or backward. Each team decides on various players' areas of fielding responsibility. There are no set ways to arranging how a field is set up. Each team develops its own defensive strategy of fielder placement. Some shift more players to right field if a left handed batter appears, for instance. Some have two players in the 'short' depth area to play dribblers; others elect to only have one player in order to have another player further back. Some teams have two deep fielders, others have only one roving behind.

The players can verbally communicate with each other and frequently do. "By me right" or "By me left" is a helpful statement to fielders further back. Players are free to speak to each other as long as it does not supersede the pitcher's cadence.

A defensive player does not throw the ball to another player to record an out. Outs are earned by fielding the ball before the runner reaches the base. In the umpire's opinion, the fielder must have the ball in hand, away from the body and off the ground to constitute possession. Players do not snatch balls out of the air. Many attempts have been made to catch an air ball, but in the N.B.B.A.'s history, there have been less than half a dozen instances of a hit ball being caught. Should it happen, it does count as three outs, or finishes that part of the inning.

Good defensive players learn to use their bodies and the ground to block hit balls, and then pick up the beeping ball and display it for the umpire's call. Because most fielding is done in this manner, flat grassy areas, free of

protruding sprinkler heads, pot holes, trees and bushes are preferred. Quiet lawns or soccer fields are often best.

Many teams keep individual statistics on their players. Good hitting teams may have several players with batting averages of .500 or above. Players proudly admit they enjoy the thrill of swinging at a pitched ball and making solid contact and charging down the base path full speed to score a run. They like the exhilaration of diving to cleanly field a well hit ball to make an out. Even the most modest players are happy to vividly describe the put-outs they've made.

Beep baseball has evolved into a wide-open, competitive game. Each year new and improved training and coaching methods are introduced. Throughout the country and internationally, there are now many good players and teams. As time goes by, beep baseball continues to expand.

Organizing a team:

Organizing new teams to play competitive beep baseball is not a simple matter. More than one ingredient is necessary in molding a group of individuals into a coordinated unit.

Essentials are: dedicated sighted help, players and reliable equipment and practice fields. Absence of any one of these requirements is guaranteed frustration.

A team of outstanding beep baseball players would flounder without benefit of dedicated sighted help. Successful teams have sighted help who are willing to devote the time it requires to become skilled at pitching, catching, and number calling, (also known as "spotting") and to help out with fund raising, transportation to practices and tournaments. It is a team effort for all.

New teams are generally started in one of two ways. Either a person who is blind learns about beep baseball and recruits other players and sighted help, or a person with sight, usually one with enthusiasm for new and innovative projects, meets a person who is blind and introduces them to the game. Either way, recruiting has to commence. A minimum of six players with visual impairment and three people with sight are required. Finding recruits with a visual impairment is not as hard as some may think because players do not have to be totally blind. Many beep baseball

players are partially sighted. They are all are required to wear blindfolds while batting or fielding. When starting a new team, contact organizations and agencies who provide services for the blind and low vision about seeking players for a team. Reach out to local civic groups for sighted volunteers to assist your team.

Tools for Success:

Review the different equipment needed for playing beep baseball at:

<http://www.nbba.org/equipment>

Identify if a team is located near you:

<http://www.nbba.org/teams>

Attend regional tournaments or practices, if possible, to observe how other organized teams handle various situations, practices and team procedures. Each team adopts its own character and methods. However, there are similarities that have resulted from experience. Next, obtain a copy of the official N.B.B.A. Rules. They can be reviewed or downloaded from this link:

<http://www.nbba.org/rules>

Contacting the NBBA:

You can also contact the NBBA Secretary for help or advice to begin a team:

Stephen Guerra, Secretary
National Beep Baseball Association
Phone: 866.400.4551 Extension 2
Email: secretary@nbba.org

Good luck and play ball!