Have a child starting baseball?

Congratulations! Your kid is thinking about playing baseball. While trying a new sport can be a bit scary for all involved, we know once you get started, you and your child are going to love it.

Known as “America’s Pastime,” baseball can be traced back to the 19th century when amateurs played the game using homemade equipment. Since then, it’s grown into a worldwide sport with over 100 countries participating in the game. While Major League Baseball (MLB), is the most popular professional league in the United States, the game is also played at the travel, recreational, high-school, and college-levels.

Baseball is a different experience for many - new gear, new rules, new teammates - so it’s helpful to understand some of the fundamentals before fully investing in all-new equipment. This guide has all the information you and your child need to start playing this classic, all-American sport.
Understand pitching rules.
USA Baseball provides guidelines surrounding how often players can pitch within certain periods of time to avoid overuse injuries. It’s important to understand these regulations to maintain the health of your player.

Buy the right bat.
When it comes to regulations, it’s important to understand bat rules. Some leagues maintain strict restrictions for the weight and diameter of bats, which can affect the equipment-purchasing process.

Don’t buy the first equipment you find.
Sometimes it takes practicing with a few different brands of bats, gloves, or helmets to find the right fit. Don’t commit to expensive equipment right away without testing it out first.

It takes more practice than you might expect.
Baseball is a complex sport that takes kids a while to learn – remind your child not to get upset when they aren’t the best player on the field right off the bat. Learning and developing skills takes time, and no fundamental is trivial.

Transitioning to bigger fields has an impact.
When your child moves up through the age groups, the fields get bigger – the base paths and pitching distances both increase. It can take some time to get used to these changes, but that doesn’t mean your child’s skills are lacking.

Be a fan, not a coach.
As a parent, it’s important to cheer on and support your child without coaching them – this can lead to confusion if your suggestions and opinions are different than those of their coach.

It’s all about the experience.
The only things that matter are building kids’ confidence and teaching them to enjoy the game. It’s not about winning or losing, but about how much fun your child has along the way, the friends they make, and the memories they gain from being a part of a team.

For more information, visit:
sportsengine.com/article/baseball/words-advice-baseball-parents

While baseball initially started in the U.S., it has spread worldwide. Today more than 100 countries are part of the International Baseball Federation. Japan has the largest pro baseball league outside the United States.
FUNDAMENTALS OF THE GAME

Before your child steps onto the diamond, it’s helpful to understand the basics of the game and what to expect.

**Age Group**
The size of the field, length of the game, and sometimes even the number of players on the field are all determined by age group. Age groups are written as the age followed by the letter “u” to indicate that all players in that group are that age or younger. Most leagues will provide materials like charts to help determine which age group a player falls into based on their birth date.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Bases</th>
<th>Pitching</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7U – 8U</td>
<td>60 FEET</td>
<td>40 FEET or coaches will pitch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9U</td>
<td>60 FEET</td>
<td>46 FEET</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10U</td>
<td>70 FEET</td>
<td>46 FEET</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11U – 12U</td>
<td>70 FEET</td>
<td>50 FEET</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13U – 14U+</td>
<td>90 FEET</td>
<td>60 FEET 6 INCHES</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Team**
Most teams consist of between 12-15 players, and the age groups can range from 7u to 18u depending on the league.

**Field Size**
The two factors that determine the field size are the distance between the bases and the distance from the pitching mound to home plate. Younger teams play on smaller fields, and those field sizes increase as players become older and more skilled.

**Time**
The number of innings played and the length of time it takes to complete them is also based on the age of the players. Sometimes time limits are placed on the games, depending on the league.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Innings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7U – 8U</td>
<td>1.5 HOURS</td>
<td>5-6 INNINGS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9U – 10U</td>
<td>2 HOURS</td>
<td>6 INNINGS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11U – 14U+</td>
<td>2 HOURS</td>
<td>7 INNINGS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Score**
If a player touches 1st base, 2nd base, 3rd base, and home plate in that order, without being caught or tagged by the ball by the other team, it’s called a run. The team with the most runs at the end of the game wins.

For more information, visit: 
sportsengine.com/article/baseball/fundamentals-baseball
The Basic Rules

Innings & Outs
An “out” is when an offensive player must leave the field after:
1. Being tagged by a ball in play
2. Not making it to the base or home plate before a member of the opposing team with the ball in their glove does
3. Swinging three times at a pitch and missing all three times

Once the offensive team gets three outs, it’s their turn to play defense. An inning ends after both teams have played both offense and defense, and each team gets three outs.

Strikes
Each batter has three chances to hit a ball that’s pitched to them. If they swing and miss, or they don’t swing on a pitch that’s ruled fair by the umpire, it’s called a strike. After three strikes, the team receives an “out.”

Foul Balls
There are lines drawn on the field that connect the bases. The lines leading from home plate to first base, and from home plate to third base are used to determine whether a ball is in play. If the ball is hit between the base lines, it’s in play. If a ball is hit outside of the base lines, it’s called a foul.
If a batter hits a foul on the first or second pitch, it counts as a strike. If a batter hits a foul on the third pitch, it counts as a foul, and the batter is allowed another pitch.

Balls
If a pitcher throws an unfair pitch, it’s called a ball. If the pitcher throws four balls, then the batter is allowed to walk to first base.

For more information, visit:
sportsengine.com/article/baseball/baseballs-basic-rules

The unofficial anthem of American baseball, “Take Me Out to the Ballgame,” is traditionally sung during the middle of the 7th inning. It was written in 1908 by Jack Norworth and Albert von Tilzer, both of whom had never been to a baseball game.
GETTING INTO POSITION

At any given time, there will be a minimum of ten, and up to thirteen players on the field – eight defensive players, one batter, and up to three baserunners.

OFFENSE

The offensive team is the batting team. Batters take turns receiving pitches from the defensive team and attempting to hit them. Once a ball is hit, the batter then runs as far as they can around the bases without getting caught by the defensive team, with the goal of reaching home plate to score a run.

- **Batter**
  The player who receives the pitch and hits it with the goal of rounding the bases to home plate.

DEFENSE

The defensive team pitches to the batters and has players on the field. Once a batter from the offensive team hits a ball into the field, the defensive team’s goal is to stop the batter from reaching home plate by tagging them with the ball, or reaching the next base with the ball before the batter gets there.

- **Pitcher**
  Throws the ball from the pitcher’s mound toward the catcher to begin each play, with the goal to throw as many strikes as possible.

- **Infielders**
  Field balls and throw them to one another. 1st, 2nd, and 3rd basemen defend the areas surrounding the bases, and must be able to catch both ground and fly balls, and throw accurately. The shortstop is the player between second and third base, and on average, receives the most hit-balls. Infielders typically have quick feet and are able to easily transition from fielding to throwing to get the runner out.

- **Outfielders**
  Left, center, and right outfielders all track fly balls and throw them to the infielders with the goal of tagging the player from the opposing team.

- **Catcher**
  The player who crouches behind home plate in front of the umpire and receives the ball from the pitcher. Depending on their age, the catcher handles the majority of the plays on the field. Once they become older and more skilled, they are able to understand the situation of the game and call games.

For more information, visit: 
sportsengine.com/article/baseball/baseball-positions
BASEBALL TERMS EXPLAINED

Few sports have more lingo being tossed around the field than baseball. Your child will have a tough time getting the hang of it if they don’t understand the game’s jargon. Communication between players, coaches and referees is crucial, so here are a few terms you and your child will come across on the diamond.

Ace
Best starting pitcher

Around the Horn
After an out is recorded, teams throw the ball around the infield

Balk
When the pitcher tries to trick the base runners with illegal motions

Bunt
When a batter holds the baseball bat out and tries to barely tap the ball in order to advance another base runner

Can of Corn
Easy fly ball

Change Up
A pitch that is meant to appear fast, but is actually much slower than it looks

Cleanup
A player that hits the ball exceptionally well and is the fourth batter in the batting order

Count
The number of balls and strikes on a batter. A 3-2 count means the batter has three balls and two strikes

Diamond
The four bases of the infield

Dinger
Home run

Double Play
A defensive play that results in two players being tagged out

Error
A defensive mistake that allows a batter to reach base or a base runner to advance

Fly Ball
A ball that is hit high into the air

Full Count
When the pitch count has 3 balls and 2 strikes. The next strike or ball will end the at bat. If the batter hits the baseball foul, then the count remains 3 and 2 and are allowed another attempt to hit the ball

Ground ball, or “Grounder”
A baseball that is hit on the ground

Hit and Run
A play where the base runner starts running when the pitch is released in order to get a head start. The batter must hit the ball into play so the runner doesn’t get out

For more information, visit: sportsengine.com/article/baseball/baseball-terms-explained
BASEBALL TERMS EXPLAINED (CONT.)

Hit for the Cycle
When a player hits a single, a double, a triple, and a home run in one game

Hot Corner
Third base position

Lead Runner
The first base runner when more than one runner is on base

Bases Loaded
When a base runner is at all three bases

On-Deck
The next batter up to bat

Pickle
When a base runner is in a rundown

Pinch Hitter/Runner
Substitute hitters/runners

Pitch Out
A pitch that cannot be hit by the batter

Position Player
Any player on the field except the pitcher

Power Hitter
A skilled batter that hits the baseball far, usually for home runs or extra bases

Relay
When the ball travels from one fielder to another, then another

Reliever/Relief Pitcher
A replacement pitcher for when the starting pitcher reaches the pitch limit or their shoulder becomes too worn-out to continue pitching for that game

Rundown
When a baserunner is stranded between two bases and in jeopardy of being tagged out

Runners at the Corners
Base runners on 1st and 3rd

Scoring Position
A base runner on 2nd or 3rd base is in the position to make it to home plate and score a run

Strike Zone
The area over home plate, above the batter’s knees, and below the batter’s chest where pitches are called. If a pitch does not enter this zone, it’s not a fair pitch

Walk
When the pitcher throws four balls to a batter, the batter gets to walk to first base

6-4-3
A double play referring to positions by their numerical designation; the ball is fielded by the shortstop (6), thrown to 2nd base (4), and then thrown to 1st base (3)

For more information, visit:
sportsengine.com/article/baseball/baseball-terms-explained

Cal Ripken, Jr. holds the record for playing in the most consecutive baseball games. He played in 2,632 games and was twice named the American League’s Most Valuable Player, in 1983 and 1991. He didn’t miss a game in 16 years.
DRESS TO PLAY

Baseball has some specialized equipment unique to the sport. Before you fully commit to buying new equipment, try borrowing a friend’s gear or seeing if your club has equipment you can borrow or rent.

Here’s what is required for your child to get started.

- **Batting Helmet**
  A helmet that’s worn by the batter to protect their head and ear facing the pitcher from the ball.

- **Baseball Cap**
  A hat designed to shade sunlight from players’ eyes.

- **Spikes**
  Specific shoes made for baseball players that are worn for better traction on the field.

- **Glove**
  A leather glove with a webbed pocket between the thumb and forefinger that helps players catch the ball easily.

- **Sunglasses** (optional)
  Most players wear sunglasses in addition to their caps to keep the sun out of their eyes.

- **Catcher’s Helmet**
  A helmet with a face mask designed to protect the player’s face from the ball.

- **Bat**
  A round, solid wooden or hollow aluminum bat.

- **Ball**
  Layers of yarn or string rolled on a cork sphere with a leather coat stitched on top.

For more information, visit:
sportsengine.com/article/baseball/dressed-play-baseball-gear

Currently, the baseball team with the most World Series wins is the New York Yankees with 27 titles.
WAYS TO PLAY
With a little research you should be able to find a baseball program that fits your child’s interest level. There several types of programs, each with varying structures and commitment levels.

**Tee-Ball**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age:</th>
<th>4–6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Good for:</td>
<td>Player development, parent involvement, socialization, and getting acclimated to playing on a team.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment:</td>
<td>1–2 practices per week, 1 game per week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Season Length:</strong></td>
<td>2–3 months over the summer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Travel:</strong></td>
<td>Minimal local travel; practices and games are usually held at the same park.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Financial:</strong></td>
<td>Low-cost registration fees and low-cost equipment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Structure:</strong></td>
<td>Open to beginners learning the basics and enjoying the game. Coaches are usually parents or volunteers. Teams compete against other teams in the area, and usually there’s a league tournament at the end of the season.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Rec/Community**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age:</th>
<th>9+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Good for:</td>
<td>Those seeking a fun, social, team-oriented environment and are also looking to stay physically active throughout the season.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment:</td>
<td>2 practices per week, 2 games per week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Season Length:</strong></td>
<td>2–4 months starting in the spring and ending in late summer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Travel:</strong></td>
<td>Some local travel required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Financial:</strong></td>
<td>Cost is between tee-ball and travel ball – most spending is attributed to purchasing bigger equipment for growing players.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Training:</strong></td>
<td>No off-season training is required, but it can help if players want to transition from rec to travel.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Structure:</strong></td>
<td>Coaches are usually parents or volunteers, and teams compete against other teams in the area. The season typically ends with a league tournament.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Travel

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age:</th>
<th>8-18</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Good for:</strong></td>
<td>Competitive atmosphere, playing against new people and new teams, and exploring and experiencing baseball in new settings.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Commitment:</th>
<th>2 practices per week, 2 games per week</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Season Length:</strong></td>
<td>3–6 months or year-round depending on the team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Travel:</strong></td>
<td>Teams usually travel for weekend tournaments during the school year, and for full weeks during the summer depending on the intensity of the organization. Long drives and air travel can be expected.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Financial:</strong></td>
<td>Costs are associated with registration, tournament entry fees, team uniforms, travel arrangements, accommodations, and more.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Training:</strong></td>
<td>Off-season training is expected. Most travel players attend camps and clinics to improve their skills, making travel baseball a year-round commitment.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Structure: | Coaches are very skilled and sometimes paid. Teams compete with other travel teams both locally and from around the country. |

## School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age:</th>
<th>High Schoolers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Good for:</strong></td>
<td>Preparing for college sports, the social aspect of playing on a team in high school, exercise, extracurricular activity.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Commitment:</th>
<th>Practices and games can be expected throughout the week, depending on the team's schedule.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Season Length:</strong></td>
<td>Winter training usually begins around January or February, and practices and games occur through May or June.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Travel:</strong></td>
<td>Local travel is involved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Financial:</strong></td>
<td>Costs are associated with personal equipment like gloves, shoes, sunglasses, and any other desired items.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Training:</strong></td>
<td>Off-season training is expected, but usually conducted through the school. It also helps to train prior to trying out for the team for the first time.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Structure: | Teams compete against other high schools. Paid coaches and student players are generally skilled, depending on the division and school district. |

The oldest baseball park still in use is Fenway Park, the home field of the Boston Red Sox, which debuted in 1912.
Mo’ne Davis was the first girl to be a winning pitcher in a Little League World Series game. It happened on August 15, 2014, and her team won 4-0.

BASEBALL HIERARCHY

Known as America’s pastime, baseball has gained popularity across the world. Learn about how your child fits into the sport’s hierarchy by breaking it down from an international to local level.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{WBSC} & \\
\text{IBAF} & \\
\text{COPABE} & \\
\text{USA Baseball} & \\
\text{National Associations} & \\
\text{Regions} & \\
\text{States Associations} & \\
\text{Youth Teams} & \\
\text{Youth Players} & \\
\end{align*}
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For more information, visit:
sportsengine.com/article/baseball/hierarchy-baseball
**BASEBALL HIERARCHY (CONT.)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>National Associations</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>WBSC</strong></td>
<td>The World Baseball Softball Confederation is the international governing body for baseball and softball, and formed in 2012 when the International Baseball Federation and the International Softball Federation approved to form one international federation. The WBSC has 198 national federations and 13 associate members in 138 countries.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>IBAF</strong></td>
<td>Prior to the formation of the WBSC, the International Baseball Federation was the national governing body of the sport, but now it acts as the head of the baseball division. It has 124 NGBs under it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>COPABE</strong></td>
<td>The Confederación Panamericana de Béisbol, or the Pan American Baseball Confederation, is the NGB within the Americas. There are 29 countries apart of COPABE, which are located throughout North America, South America, and the Caribbean.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>USA Baseball</strong></td>
<td>USA Baseball has been the NGB for the United States since 1978. Today, nearly every major national amateur baseball organization in America is part of USA Baseball, meaning they govern over 15.6 million players.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>National Associations</strong></td>
<td>USA Baseball lists 16 national associations, which range from Tee-Ball to adult amateur leagues. Listed is a brief description of the different youth leagues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Babe Ruth League</strong></td>
<td>Leagues consist of Cal Ripken Baseball (4-12), Babe Ruth Baseball (13-18), Babe Ruth Softball, Bambino Buddy Ball, and Xtreme Fastpitch. Currently has over one million players on 60,000+ teams in over 11,000 leagues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>American Legion Baseball</strong></td>
<td>This league was founded in 1925 by the American Legion. Today, teams can be found in all 50 states, plus Canada, with participants ranging in age from 13-19.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dixie Youth Baseball</strong></td>
<td>Dixie boys baseball is for athletes ages 13-14, but the Dixie Majors Baseball was created for players up to age 19. DIY runs through 11 states in the southeast corner of the country.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For more information, visit: sportsengine.com/article/baseball/hierarchy-baseball

The lifespan of a major league baseball is 5–7 pitches. During a typical game, approximately 70 balls are used.
The last major league stadium to install lights was Wrigley Field, who only played daytime games until 1988.

For more information, visit: sportsengine.com/article/baseball/hierarchy-baseball

**BASEBALL HIERARCHY (CONT.)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>National Associations (cont.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Little League</strong> - Little League Baseball and Softball is the world’s largest organized youth sports program. They have millions of participants in the United States, and more than 80 other countries every year. Ages for participants range from four to 16.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PONY League</strong> - PONY League consists of seven different leagues, which all consist of boys and girls of different ages playing baseball and softball. There is also the Champions League, which is a league that was created for kids with special needs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tee-Ball USA</strong> - Was founded in 1996 to provide a major national organization for the game of tee ball. They support numerous organizations and leagues that run tee ball leagues, and help provide unified rules and standards around the game.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regions are geographical areas where multiple states are grouped together. Check with your league to see which region your team fits into.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>States Associations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Geographic areas within a state that houses different leagues. Usually based on the population of different areas and the size of the state.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Youth Teams</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>There are a wide number of teams throughout the nation that compete at different levels. With a little search you will be able to find the right team for your child.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Youth Players</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A decade ago, baseball seemed to be on a decline. Today, it's become one of the nation's fastest growing sports as 13.6% of kids ages 6-12 played baseball in 2018. Making it the second most popular sport in the nation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ABOUT SPORTSENGINE
SportsEngine is the home of youth sports, enhancing the sports lives of more than 30 million athletes, parents, volunteers, administrators, families, and fans with intuitive software solutions that help build relationships, keep athletes safe, and simplify administrative tasks.

ABOUT RIPKEN BASEBALL
Ripken Baseball brings teammates, coaches, and families together through our Big League Experiences, including Tournaments, Camps, and Spring Training. We teach the values of the game, and how to play it the right way - The Ripken Way. Learn more at www.ripkenbaseball.com.