

Baseball Time!

Robbie played baseball. It was his favorite sport. Sure, the other ones were fun, but there was something special about baseball. Baseball was a series of slow, tense moments waiting for something to happen. When something did happen, it was exciting and sudden. You always had to be ready for it!



Baseball isn't too expensive to play. There are cheap, safe versions of the game like wiffle ball, which is all played with a plastic ball and bat. You can use your hands to catch the ball. It's very fun! Softball is pretty similar, too. To play baseball or softball, you need a uniform, which is a jersey, athletic pants, socks, cleats, and a hat. You also need a glove to play in the field or a helmet and a bat to hit the ball. Batting gloves are nice, too, because they minimize the stinging if you hit a fast ball.

Baseball usually has 9 players per team. That's a pitcher, a catcher, four infielders, and three outfielders. Outfielders are named by where they stand: left, right, and center fielders. Infielders are the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd basemen, along with the shortstop, who helps out between 2nd and 3rd base. The pitcher stands at the middle of the infield, throwing the ball toward home plate, where the catcher must catch the ball. He needs special equipment to protect his legs, chest, and face, because he can catch a baseball in the body pretty easily if the ball comes off the ground or off a bat wrong!

Baseball has 9 innings, which seems like a weird number compared to sports with halves, periods, or quarters, right? Each inning has a top and a bottom, where either the home team is trying to hit the ball or the away team is. That means each team has 9 chances to score and 9 chances to defend. A special break is taken after the 7th inning, called the "7th inning stretch."

Robbie played as a pitcher. He was decent when it was his chance to bat, but he loved being out on the pitcher's mound, staring down at the batter. It was a mind game between him and the batter, with some help from the catcher, who gave him hints and signals on where to throw the ball. Each batter could have up to 3 misses when they swung. If they hit the ball, they had to run to 1st base before someone got the ball there. If someone caught the ball in the air before it bounced, the runner was out, too. Each team only got three outs per inning, so striking out by missing the ball too many times, getting the ball you hit caught, or by not running fast enough was a way to let your team down.

As a pitcher, it was Robbie's job to throw the ball in such a way as to make it very difficult to hit. He had to get it over home plate so the batter had a chance to hit it, but he could throw it too close to the batter, too high, too low, or even too fast! The batter had to watch the ball and predict where it would go so they could hit it. Good batters could aim the ball to a place in the field where there were no players, and they could get on the bases and run around to score. Scoring was a team effort

usually, requiring players to advance a base or two at a time until they crossed home plate to score a point for their team.

Umpires watch each pitch to see if it is a good one, a strike, or a bad one, a ball. If a player collects 4 bad pitches (balls) without swinging at them before they get 3 good ones (strikes), they get to get on 1st base for free. This is called a walk. This doesn't happen too often. Usually a player hits the ball to get on base or have the fielders get them out, or they strike out. The fielders are very quick to catch balls and get them to the right base in order to get the runners out. There are umpires watching bases, too, to see if a runner is safe or out. Sometimes it is a very close call!

There are not many penalties in baseball. Most play happens pretty smoothly. You either hit the ball or you don't. You either catch it or you don't. You either run faster than the ball gets caught or you don't. It's a simple set of concepts, but it is very difficult to play! Imagine trying to hit the ball at 90-some miles per hour!

Robbie knew not everyone loved his sport as much as he did. Baseball was pretty big in America. It is nicknamed, 'America's Game.' It's not as popular as it once was, falling behind things like Football and Basketball these days, but the most popular teams are still hugely popular. In Central America and East Asia, baseball is a big deal, too. For Robbie, standing on that red dirt and raked gravel, seeing the perfectly-cut grass and the lights coming on at night during a game was enough. He couldn't beat that feeling.

Are you going to try to watch or play baseball?



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Use the information in the story to answer the questions below.

1. What sport does Robbie play?
 - A. Softball
 - B. Wiffle Ball
 - C. Kickball
 - D. Baseball

2. How many innings are in a baseball game?
 - A. 4
 - B. 6
 - C. 9
 - D. 12

3. What position does Robbie play?
 - A. Catcher
 - B. Pitcher
 - C. 1st Base
 - D. Shortstop

4. TRUE OR FALSE: Baseball is nicknamed 'America's Game.'
 - A. True
 - B. False

5. TRUE OR FALSE: Batters get 5 balls before they get a walk.
 - A. True
 - B. False

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