

Name _____

Date _____

Baseball's Beginnings



When spring rolls around, so does baseball season. Most people think that baseball was invented by a man named Abner Doubleday. But the truth is that baseball has borrowed ideas from many other earlier games. Long before Christopher Columbus came to America, Native Americans of the Navajo people were playing a game similar to baseball. They called it *aquaejolyedi* (a-kway-jol-yedee), which meant “running around.” In this game, the player used a stick to hit a ball. Then he would try to run around four bases without being caught. The runner could go far out into the desert to keep from being tagged. There was certainly a lot of running around in aquaejolyedi!

Another ancestor of modern baseball is a game called rounders. Boys in England played this game many years ago. They used a straight stick for a bat. They used rags or whatever they could find to make a ball. Three bases were used. If more than eight people played, another base was added. One person batted, one pitched, and the rest played in the field. If the batter made a home run, he could bat again. But if he was tagged out, he gave his bat to a baseman and went out into the field.

When English settlers came to America, they played rounders. But in America, the rules and name of the game were changed. Some called it baseball, while in other places it was called “movin’ up” or “old cat.” A kind of baseball was played at Valley Forge by General Washington’s troops. We know this from the diaries that soldiers kept as they fought the War of Independence. Later, baseball was played as a town sport, with the men of the town divided into two teams. It was called “town ball” and was played with four bases. In this game, throwing the ball at a runner was a fair way to get him out. Ouch!

It is interesting to see how the modern game of baseball has borrowed from many earlier games. What do you suppose our baseball will be in the year 2050?

Answer the questions. Use the back of this page if you need more space.

1 What games are probably baseball’s ancestors? _____

2 How do we know that soldiers played ball games at Valley Forge? _____

3 Which of the games mentioned in the passage is probably the oldest? _____

How do you know? _____

4 List a way the modern game of baseball is different from these older games. _____

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Answer Key

1. aquaejolyedi , rounders, movin’ up or old cat, town ball
2. We know this from the diaries that soldiers kept as they fought the War of Independence.
3. aquaejolyedi; Reasons will vary.
4. Answers will vary. Possible answers include the following: A stick was used instead of a baseball bat. Runners ran around bases in aquaejolyedi until they were caught and could run far out into the desert. In rounders, they used rags or whatever they could find for a ball and only three bases were used unless eight or more people played. One person batted, one pitched, and the rest played in the field. If the batter made a home run, he could bat again. But if he was tagged out, he gave his bat to a baseman and went out into the field. In town ball, throwing the ball at a runner was a fair way to get him out.