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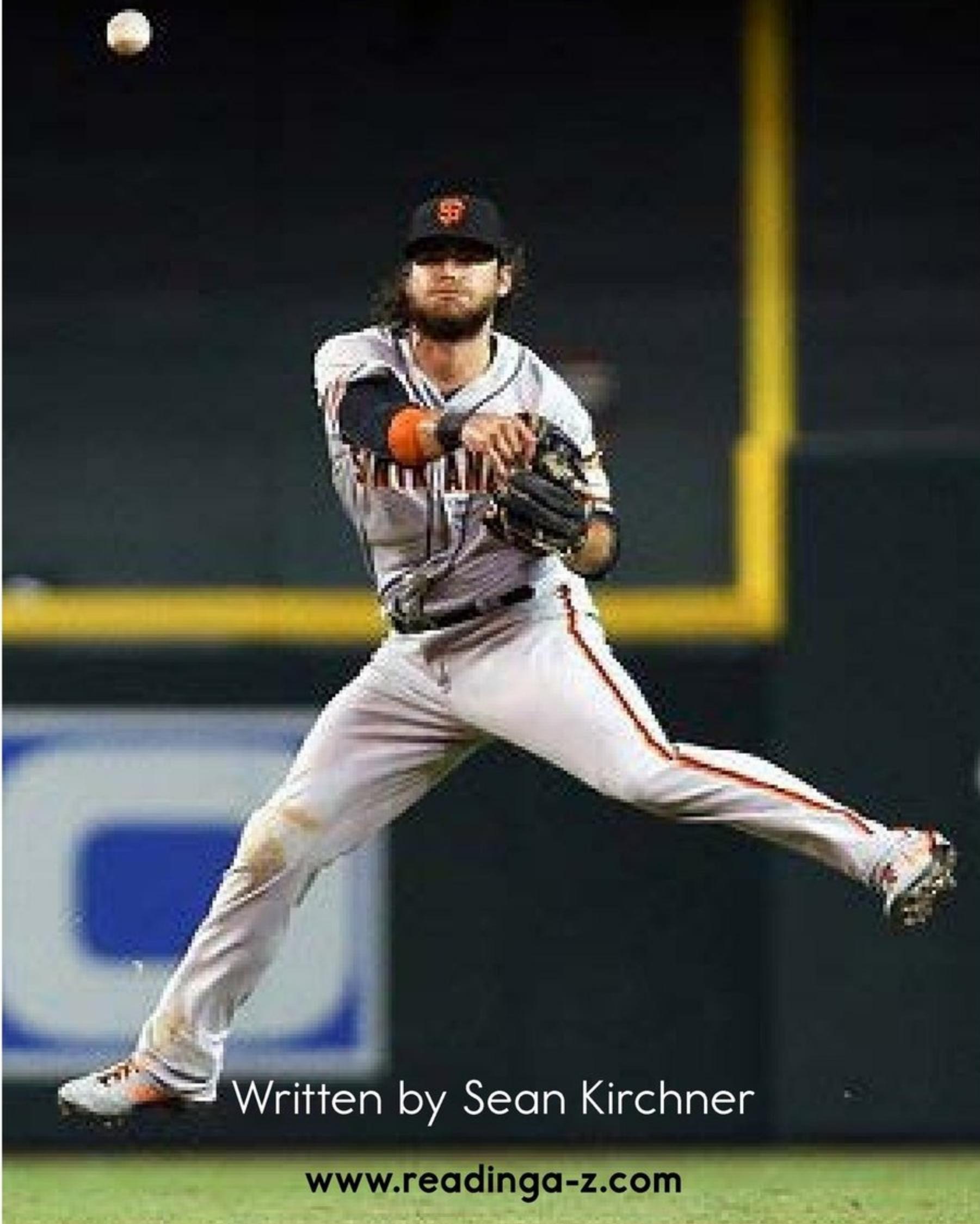
Baseball



Written by Sean Kirchner

www.readinga-z.com

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Focus Question

How has the history of baseball shaped the sport we know today?

Words to Know

competitor
fielding
infield
league
minor

outfield
pastime
professional
titles

Front cover: Derek Jeter of the New York Yankees bats against the Tampa Bay Rays in Yankee Stadium.

Title page: A San Francisco shortstop during a game between the Arizona Diamondbacks and the San Francisco Giants at Chase Field in Phoenix, Arizona

Page 3: A New York Mets player crosses home plate to score a run.

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Spectacular Sports
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Table of Contents

Everybody's Game	4
The World Loves Baseball	5
Baseball Rules	7
A Look Back	9
<i>Major League Stadiums</i>	11
Famous Players	13
A Sport for All Time	15
Glossary	16



Artist George H. Hastings's work shows spectators watching the Boston baseball club, also called the "Boston Beaneaters," at play in the 1880s.

Everybody's Game

Do you have a bat, a ball, a glove, four bases, and an open field? Then you can play baseball!

People have been playing different versions of baseball for hundreds of years. In early America, the colonists played games that were similar to the sport we know as baseball today. Some of these games were called *stool ball*, *town ball*, and *rounders*. Although many of the rules for these games were alike, some were different.

In 1845, a New York group called the Knickerbockers decided to write down new guidelines for baseball. They wanted to change some of the rules and establish a formal code for others. Many of these rules became the basis for the game that we play today.

The World Loves Baseball

Today in North America, baseball remains a favorite sport. **Professional** players compete on thirty Major League Baseball (MLB) teams. They play in hopes of winning their championship each year—the World Series.

Just under the MLB teams are 240 professional **minor** league teams. These leagues give players a chance to develop their athletic skills in hopes of making it to the major leagues.

Baseball is also popular in the rest of the world. The sport is played in over one hundred countries, and millions of fans enjoy watching it worldwide.

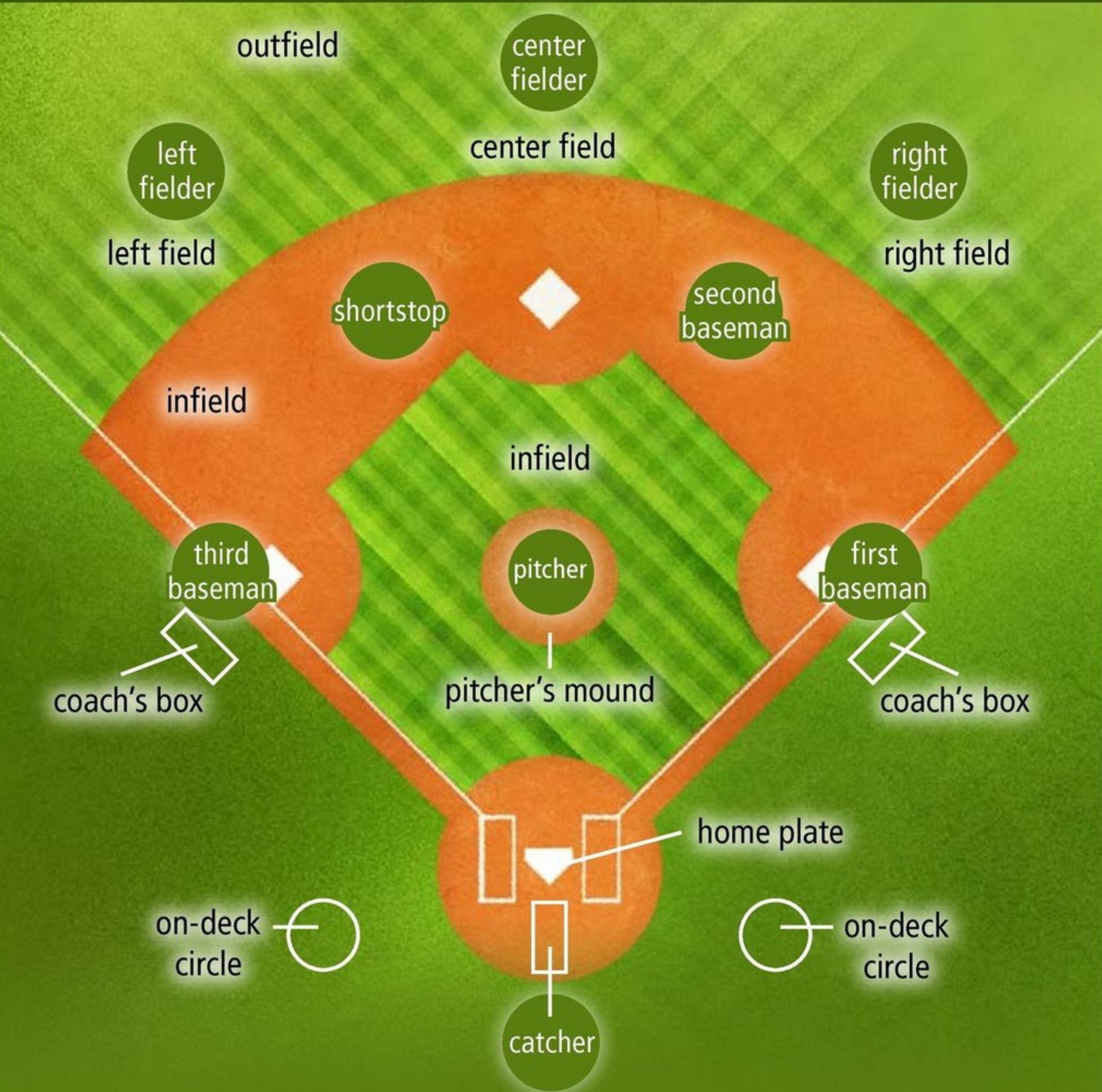
Baseball Around the World



Baseball is a major sport in many countries, including Canada, the United States, Argentina, South Korea, Taiwan, and Japan.

 Countries that play baseball

Baseball's Playing Field



- The distance between bases is 90 feet (27 m).
- The distance between the pitcher's mound and home plate is 60.5 feet (18 m).
- Nine players are on the field. The infield has four bases that form a diamond.
- The right, center, and left field players are called the *outfielders*. They must be quick runners in order to catch fly balls. They also must be accurate when they throw balls to an infielder—or baseman—to get an opposing player out.

Baseball Rules

The baseball playing field is sometimes called a *diamond* because of its shape. It has a pitcher's mound, four bases, an **infield**, and an **outfield**.

Baseball games are divided into nine innings. An inning is a basic unit of play that is divided into two halves. The first half is called the *top* of the inning, and the second half is called the *bottom*.

A baseball game has two teams. Each team has nine players. While one team plays in the field, members of the other team take turns hitting the ball with the bat. The batting team stays up to bat until the **fielding** team gets three batters out.



Fielding a ball, whether it's in the air or zooming along the ground, requires great speed and concentration.

If a runner feels like taking a risk, he or she can "steal" a base, or run while the pitcher is busy pitching to a batter. In this youth game, a player steals second.



The visiting team bats first at the top of an inning, and the home team bats at the bottom. When a batter hits the ball, he or she runs to first base. If the ball reaches the outfield, the runner may try to run to second base, third base, and finally to home plate. The fielding team tries to get the ball and tag the runner or the base for an out before he or she reaches the base. If the runner makes it to home plate, the team scores a run.

If a ball is hit over the outfield fence or wall and is in fair territory, it is a home run. The batter then runs around all of the bases until he or she crosses home plate and scores. The team that scores the most runs is the winner.

A Look Back

Long ago, African Americans were not allowed to play in the major baseball leagues with white players. African Americans didn't have a league, but they played on small black teams. Rube Foster wanted to change things. A former pitcher on a black team, Foster started the Negro National League. In the years that followed, more Negro Leagues were established.

The Negro Leagues included many talented athletes. Over time, white major league teams began to ask Negro League players to join their teams. As a result, fans lost interest in the Negro Leagues and they began to fade out.



Estimates indicate that from the 1880s to the 1950s, hundreds of teams participated in the Negro Leagues.

In 1943 in the United States, millions of men went to fight in World War II. This included men who were baseball players. There would be very little professional baseball played during the war.

A major league team owner, Philip Wrigley, decided to organize the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League (AAGPBL). Thousands of people came out to watch these women play.

When the war was over, the major league players began to return home. The appeal of women baseball players started to die out. The AAGPBL played their last season in 1954.

Today, young women play in Little League programs. They also play on high school and college teams. Some people think it's only a matter of time before they are in the major leagues.



Over six hundred women competed in fifteen women's teams in the 1940s and 1950s.

Major League Stadiums

For many years in North America, baseball was centered on the East Coast. From 1913 to 1957, Ebbets Field was the home of the Brooklyn Dodgers. As the Dodgers became more popular, Ebbets Field could no longer hold all of the fans who wanted to see them play.

In 1957, the Dodgers decided to move to a bigger stadium in Los Angeles. That same year, the New York Giants also left New York for San Francisco. Baseball was expanding across the country, and larger stadiums were being built for the growing numbers of fans.

Fenway Park in Boston is the oldest major league baseball stadium in the United States. Fenway opened in 1912. It continues to be the home of the Boston Red Sox to this day.



Fans fill 37,673 seats at Fenway Park.

Wrigley Field seats 41,072 devoted fans.



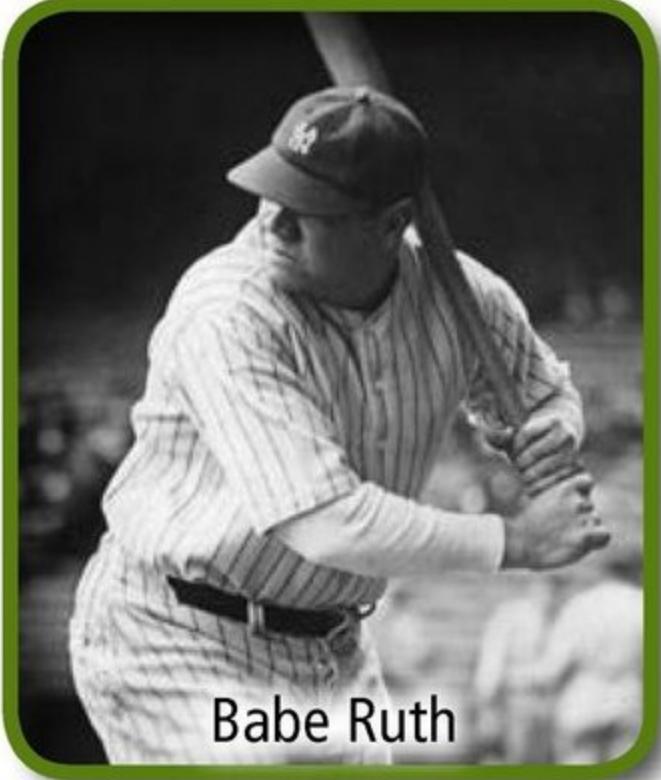
Wrigley Field in Chicago is the second-oldest stadium in America. Wrigley Field was built in 1914 and is home to the Chicago Cubs. Many fans believe Wrigley is a baseball treasure with its nine decades of rich history.

Wrigley is famous for its ivy-covered walls that gobble up balls hit into the outfield.

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Retractable roof stadiums help in areas where weather might cause game delays or cancellations. The first stadium of this kind was the SkyDome in Toronto, Canada, built to keep the game going in cold or snowy weather. Phoenix, Arizona, has air-conditioned Chase Field to help combat desert heat.





Babe Ruth

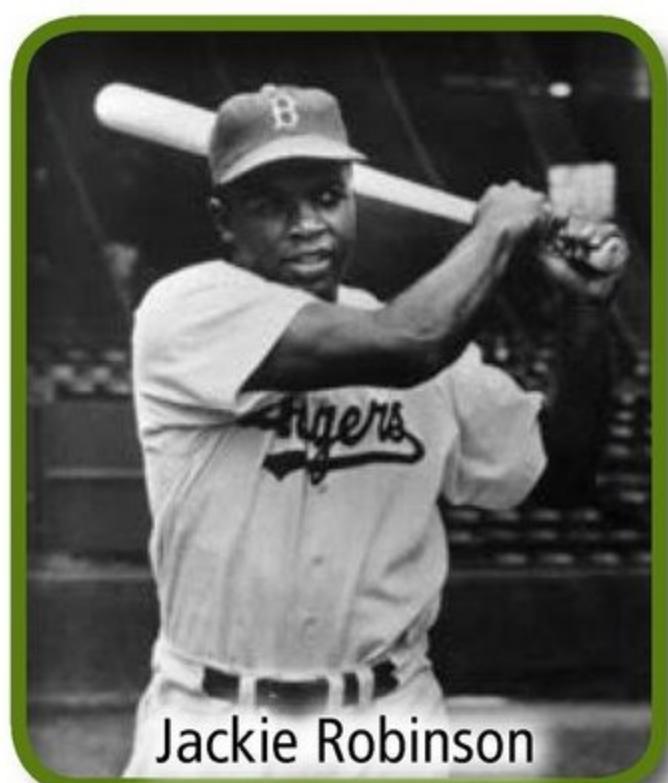
Famous Players

Most people consider Babe Ruth to be the most important baseball player in history. Some people even think he is the best player who ever lived.

With the New York Yankees, Babe helped his team capture four World Series **titles**. In twenty-two seasons, he broke every record for home runs. He also set attendance records never seen before in professional baseball.

Jackie Robinson was a smart and fearless **competitor** with remarkable baseball skills. He was also an African American who played in the Negro Leagues. Branch Rickey, the general manager of the Brooklyn Dodgers, convinced Jackie to be the first player to join an all-white major league baseball team.

On April 15, 1947, Jackie appeared with the Dodgers as the first African American player in the majors. He became a national hero.



Jackie Robinson

Roberto Clemente was another baseball great. Born and raised in Puerto Rico, Roberto played for the Pittsburgh Pirates from 1955 to 1972. His famous home run in Game 7 of the 1971 World Series won the championship for the Pirates.



Roberto Clemente

Sadly, Roberto died in a plane crash on his way to help earthquake victims in Nicaragua.

Derek Jeter, a former Yankee shortstop, is a modern baseball hero. Derek was a leader in scoring hits and runs in the American League and was a five-time World Series champion.



Derek Jeter

When he retired from the game in October 2014, he said, “The thing that means the most to me is being remembered as a Yankee.”



Getting involved in Little League is a great way to practice skills, make friends, and learn about teamwork.

A Sport for All Time

After a long winter, the baseball season begins with the arrival of spring and warm weather. Returning each year to the baseball season can take fans back to memories of their childhoods and of all the players they once rooted for and loved.

Baseball is a wonderful **pastime**. Some people believe that baseball is like life. Everyone has a position to play, and all the players have to work together in order to succeed.

Glossary

competitor (<i>n.</i>)	a person or team that one plays against; a rival (p. 13)
fielding (<i>adj.</i>)	playing in the field of a baseball game (p. 7)
infield (<i>n.</i>)	the area of a baseball field that includes the three bases and home plate (p. 7)
league (<i>n.</i>)	a group of sports teams that play each other (p. 5)
minor (<i>adj.</i>)	less important or not serious; secondary (p. 5)
outfield (<i>n.</i>)	the area of a baseball field beyond the infield and between the foul lines (p. 7)
pastime (<i>n.</i>)	a hobby or activity (p. 15)
professional (<i>adj.</i>)	earning money for taking part in an activity, rather than doing it purely for pleasure (p. 5)
titles (<i>n.</i>)	championships or awards won (p. 13)

Baseball

A Reading A-Z Level S Leveled Book

Word Count: 1,183

Connections

Writing

Choose one baseball legend from the book to research. Create a timeline of his career, including at least five events. Then, write a paragraph outlining his accomplishments in baseball.

Social Studies

Using the diagram on page 6, make up a new game that can be played on the same field. Work with a partner to create a poster for the game, including its name, number of players, equipment used, and how to win. Present your new game to the class.



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