

Aloha Vintage Base Ball Association

LEAGUE HANDBOOK

ALOHA VINTAGE BASE BALL ASSOCIATION
2025



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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Aloha Vintage Base Ball Association (AVBBA). This league is dedicated to faithfully reviving the game of baseball, or “base ball” as convention dictated at the time, as it was played in the year 1886, during the final years of Hawai‘i’s sovereign kingdom. Our aim is to celebrate the roots of the game while honoring Hawai‘i’s place in its early history.

We play by the 1886 Spalding Rules, which were the first published rules that most closely resemble today’s game, while preserving the unique quirks of the era — including the ability for the batter (striker) to choose their strike zone, and fielders wearing minimal gloves. Each club is outfitted in historically accurate uniforms, and we use reproduction equipment crafted to match the look, feel, and weight of the gear used in the 19th century. Imagine swinging a 40-ounce ash bat under the Hawaiian sun!

AVBBA is as much a living museum as it is a competitive league. Our matches are spirited but respectful, and we encourage gentlemanly conduct on and off the field. We welcome players (ballists), umpires (Haku), and fans (hui) of all backgrounds who share a love for history, sport, and the spirit of aloha.

This handbook provides an overview of how we play, what we wear, and the spirit in which we carry ourselves — with reverence

for tradition, pride in our presentation, and a commitment to joyful competition.

Let us return together to the diamond of 1886 and play the grand game as it once was.

Mahalo.

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RULES OF PLAY

The following is a summarized guide to how base ball is played in the Aloha Vintage Base Ball Association, adapted from the 1886 Spalding's Official Base Ball Guide. These rules aim to preserve the character and customs of the game during that era.

For a full copy of the original 1886 rules, we encourage players and enthusiasts to consult reprint editions or explore the AVBBA resource library.

HITTING

COUNT: A striker (batter) is allowed 7 balls and 3 strikes. A base on balls is awarded after 7 pitches deemed outside the strike zone, and a striker is out after 3 strikes.

FOUL HIT: A foul hit (what we now call a foul ball) does not count as a strike unless bunted. Foul hits not legally caught render the ball dead until it is returned to the hurler in his position.

HIGH OR LOW BALLS: When called to the line, the striker must declare whether they prefer a "high" strike zone (belt to shoulders) or "low" (belt to knees). The umpire will then call only strikes within that range. If no preference is declared, all pitches within the standard zone will be eligible to be called strikes.

FOUL STRIKE: If a striker makes contact with the ball while outside the bounds of the batter's box, he shall be called out.

NO TIMEOUTS: Only a Club Captain may request a timeout. A striker who steps out of the box may be quick-pitched, and base runners may be picked off unless time has been officially called. In the case of injury, a player may complete the inning on the bench but must be removed for the remainder of the match.

HIT BATSMAN: A striker hit by a pitch is awarded a ball, not a base. If the umpire judges that the striker leaned into the pitch, a strike may be called instead. Hurlers (pitchers) who are deemed to have thrown at a striker intentionally may be fined or ejected.

BASE RUNNING

BASE COACHES: A mandatory third base coach must be assigned to their position at the beginning of each inning, with the club having her option of placing a coach at first base as well. These coaches may alternate by inning if desired.

HUSTLE: In the event of a foul hit not legally caught, a base runner may return safely to their bag, provided they do so at once and without delay.

BLOCK RULE: If a live ball is interfered with by a person not involved in the match (such as a spectator), runners may advance without risk of being put out until the ball is returned to the hurler standing within the pitcher's box. If a spectator or outside person kicks or throws the ball further out of play, this rule remains in effect. If the ball merely glances off an outside individual without materially affecting its direction, normal play resumes.

PITCHING

PITCHER'S BOX: There is no raised mound or rubber slab in 1886 play. The hurler must deliver the ball from within a rectangular pitcher's box measuring 4 feet wide by 7 feet deep. The front edge of the box is 50 feet from home base. The hurler must start and finish their motion within this box.

Pitchers are limited to a one-step delivery. Leg kicks must not rise above the knee, and the rear foot may not pass behind the plant leg. If this rule is violated twice in the same at-bat, the striker shall be awarded first base.

PITCHING MOTION: The hurler may not wind up or use modern overhand mechanics. The delivery must be deliberate and gentlemanly. Violations may be called as no-pitches at the discretion of the umpire.

NO INTENTIONAL WALKS: All strikers must be pitched to in earnest. Intentional walks are not permitted.

QUICK PITCHING: A hurler may deliver the ball to the striker at any moment unless time has been called by the umpire. This is a legal and strategic tactic under 1886 rules.

BALK: A balk shall be called only if the hurler initiates a pitch but fails to complete it. Deceptive throws to bases are allowed. If a balk is called, all runners advance one base.

HIDDEN BALL TRICK: There is no rule requiring the hurler to hold the ball while in the box. However, if a pitch is made without the ball in hand, a balk is awarded and all runners shall advance.

Any violation of the above mechanics may be called at the umpire's discretion to preserve the spirit and fairness of the game.

NOTE ON BALL TAMPERING:

In the era of 1886, the use of spitballs, greaseballs, and other foreign substances was not only permitted but considered a legitimate part of the hurler's craft. Pitchers were known to apply saliva, dirt, tobacco juice, or soap to alter the ball's flight. Additionally, scuffing the ball on one's belt buckle, pinching the seams to raise edges, and otherwise manipulating the ball's texture were all within the rules.

While such practices are allowed in the AVBBA to preserve historical accuracy, hurlers are expected to act with decorum and sportsmanship. Any attempt to damage league property without purpose, or create undue hazard to the striker, will be subject to review.

FIELDING

NO INFIELDFLY RULE: The infield fly rule was not yet in existence in 1886. Fielders may choose to allow a pop-up to drop untouched in an attempt to turn a double play. It is the responsibility of the striker and base runners to remain alert to such strategy.

GLOVES: Players in 1886 typically wore minimal hand protection, if any. Gloves may be worn, but only if they resemble 19th-century styles — fingerless or rudimentary leather gloves with no webbing are permitted. Overly padded, modern gloves are prohibited.

Outfielders and infielders may wear the reproduction gloves supplied or approved by the league, but should strive to use only what is necessary for comfort and historical fidelity.

NOTE ON CATCHER'S GEAR:

For safety and practicality, AVBBA allows players in the position of "behind" (catcher) to wear reproduction gloves modeled after early 20th-century styles, specifically those of the 1910s–1920s. While not authentic to the 1886 ruleset, this adjustment ensures the safety of the player receiving high-velocity pitches without compromising the spirit of the game.

These gloves may include full-finger protection, modest padding, and sewn seams, but shall not contain webbing or modern materials. Catchers may also wear vintage-style masks and chest

protectors, provided they align with the visual aesthetic and historical spirit of the league.

BALL CONDITION: The same ball is used for the entire match unless it is deemed unfit for continued play by the umpire. Players are expected to adjust to the wear and character of the ball throughout the game, contributing to the unique challenge of vintage base ball.

FIELDING STRATEGY: All fielders are expected to play their positions with integrity and sportsmanship. Taunting, baiting, or deliberately causing confusion on the basepaths is discouraged unless part of a gentlemanly and clever play. Fair play, wit, and hustle are encouraged.

THE FIELD

BASES: Bases shall be 15-inch square canvas bags filled with loose material such as sawdust or kapok. They should be securely fastened to the ground where possible to prevent movement during play.

For safety and convenience, bases may be staked or left free if the field conditions require.

HOME BASE: Home base shall be a white, 12-inch square of rubber or flat stone, flush with the playing surface. One corner should point directly toward the pitcher's box, forming the foul lines with first and third base.

A modern pentagonal home plate may be used where appropriate, provided it does not significantly alter gameplay or presentation.

FIELD DIMENSIONS: The pitcher's box is to be placed 50 feet from the center of home base. Foul lines and base paths may be adjusted based on available field space, but efforts should be made to mirror the dimensions of a 19th-century diamond.

GROUND CONDITIONS: Given the nature of parks and fields in the islands, occasional irregularities in the ground are to be expected. Players are encouraged to view this not as a flaw but as part of the authentic vintage experience.

SUBSTITUTION POLICY: AVBBA league matches shall be 7 innings unless otherwise specified. A maximum of 2 non-roster

substitutes may be used per match. Substitutes may not play the hurler or behind positions. A player removed due to injury may not return to the match.

GAME PLAY

LINEUP CARDS: Prior to each match, each manager must complete a league-issued lineup card listing the full order of strikers (batters) and any designated substitutes. This card must be presented to the Umpire before the match begins for record-keeping and official scoring. Any changes to the lineup after the start of the match must be approved by the Umpire and noted on the card.

BATTING ORDER: Each club must declare before the match whether all players present shall bat in a set order throughout the game, or only those who took the field in the prior defensive inning. Once a method is chosen, it must remain consistent for the entirety of the match.

The manager must announce the chosen batting format prior to the first pitch. Lineup changes to favor certain batters are not permitted once the order is set.

OLI (CHANT): To honor the traditions and cultural foundation of Hawai'i, each match of the Aloha Vintage Base Ball Association shall begin with an oli (chant) performed before the first pitch. The oli—specific wording to be determined—serves as a ceremonial opening, grounding the game in a sense of place, purpose, and respect for those who came before us.

All players shall remove their caps, stand in silence, and face the speaker until the oli is complete. This is a required part of each match and a reflection of our commitment to honoring the unique history and cultural context in which we play.

TIEBREAKERS: In the event of a tie in league standings or match outcomes requiring resolution for tournament seeding or seasonal standings, the following order will apply:

1. Head-to-head record between tied clubs
2. Fewest runs allowed during the season
3. League Board decision if necessary

Because weather and field conditions in Hawai‘i can vary, some matches may require early conclusion. In the case of rain or darkness, a match will be considered official after five complete innings (or four and a half if the home club leads).

SUSPENDED MATCHES: Any match suspended before the fifth inning shall be replayed in full unless otherwise agreed upon by both captains and the umpire.

PACE OF PLAY: Gentlemen are expected to take their place in the field and at the line without undue delay. Socializing is encouraged, but idle time should not prevent the timely progress of the match.

POST-MATCH SALUTE (AVBBA CUSTOM): At the conclusion of each official match, clubs will partake in a brief ceremonial salute honoring both the Umpire and the gathered spectators, in keeping with the traditions of vintage base ball and the cultural spirit of Hawai‘i.

Immediately following the final out, both clubs shall line up along the foul lines. Upon a signal from the Captain or Umpire, each team steps onto the field and removes their caps.

THE FIRST SALUTE is directed to the Umpire:

All players turn toward the Umpire, bow, and call aloud:

****“HO‘OMAIKA‘I, HAKU!”****

(Lit. “Well done, Haku!” — a respectful tribute to the authority and fairness of the match arbiter.)

THE SECOND SALUTE is directed to the crowd of supporters:

Players then turn toward the spectators and call:

****“MAHALO I KA HUI!”****

(Lit. “Thanks to the supporters!” — an expression of gratitude for the assembled fans.)

This post-match custom honors the tradition of gentlemanly play, mutual respect, and the shared joy of the game. It is to be observed at all league-sanctioned matches.

THE UMPIRE

AUTHORITY: The Umpire — addressed respectfully as "Haku" — is the final and unquestioned authority on the field. His judgment shall not be challenged or appealed by players, captains, or hui. Respect for his station is a central tenet of vintage base ball.

POSITIONING: The Haku may assume one of two positions, provided he remains consistent within each inning:

- Positioned 15 feet behind and at a 45-degree angle to the striker, adjusting sides for right- or left-handed batters.
- Positioned behind the hurler, offset slightly to view the strike zone.

MANNER: All calls shall be made in a clear and elevated voice, audible to both clubs. The Umpire shall wear period-appropriate attire and may, if he chooses, carry a cigar or cane as was fashionable in the 1880s. Clergy and undertakers were often chosen for their moral clarity and steady judgment.

FINAL SAY: The Haku shall maintain the pace and decorum of the match from start to finish. Play shall be stopped only for rain, injury, or another matter of genuine concern. No decision may be overturned at the request of any player or spectator.

GENTLEMAN'S RULING: If the Umpire declares that his view of a play was obstructed, a Club Captain may request a Gentleman's Ruling. The Umpire will then call for those directly involved to truthfully recount the events. If a consensus is reached

or the evidence favors one result, the Haku may amend his ruling accordingly.

The Gentleman's Ruling is a rare privilege and should not be requested lightly. Repeated abuse of this courtesy may result in a warning or fine.

UMPIRE PAYMENT: Each ballist (player) is expected to contribute \$5 in cash or via Venmo after the match, to be collected by the Club Captain or team manager. This contribution goes directly toward compensating the Umpire for his time and dedication. If a player forgets to bring payment, they are expected to settle up at the next match or coordinate repayment with their Captain.

OFFICIAL SCORING

To ensure the faithful documentation of each match, one designated scorekeeper shall be assigned per contest. This duty may be fulfilled by a bench player, Club Captain, or willing member of the hui (fans), and must be agreed upon by both clubs prior to the start of play.

The scorekeeper shall record tallies (runs), outs (hands), innings, and relevant remarks in the official AVBBA scorebook, using the league-approved scorekeeping method based on 19th-century scoring conventions. This record shall serve as the official account of the match.

While the task may appear humble, it is essential to the integrity and memory of our gentlemanly sport. The scorekeeper is considered an honorary official for the duration of the match and shall be treated with due respect.

At match conclusion, the Captain or team representative shall verify the score and submit the results to league officers within 24 hours.

PLAYER CONDUCT

Sportsmanship and gentlemanly behavior are the cornerstones of the AVBBA. All participants are expected to uphold the honor of the game, respect their fellow ballists, and carry themselves with dignity both on and off the field.

DISCOURTESY: Arguing with the Umpire, taunting opponents, cursing, fighting, or any behavior deemed unsportsmanlike will result in a warning, fine, or removal from the match. Repeat offenders may face suspension or removal from the league.

GENTLEMANLY PLAY: Players should address each other, the Haku (umpire), and hui (spectators) with respect. There shall be no shouting to distract fielders, no excessive celebrations, and no modern theatrics. A well-timed handshake or tip of the cap is always encouraged.

ALCOHOL, TOBACCO & CONDUCT: Tobacco, if used, must be in a historically appropriate manner (e.g., cigars, pipes) and only with respect to field conditions and courtesy to others. Players may not partake in play while intoxicated.

INTERACTION WITH SPECTATORS: Players may not sit among the crowd during active play unless removed for injury. Any inappropriate behavior will be met with immediate disciplinary action.

We encourage spirited fun and camaraderie but always within the bounds of 19th-century decorum.

PERIOD AUTHENTICITY

The Aloha Vintage Base Ball Association strives to present the game as it would have been seen and played in the year 1886. All players are expected to uphold the visual and cultural standards of the era both in attire and conduct.

PROHIBITED ITEMS:

Modern baseball gear is not permitted on the field. This includes but is not limited to:

- Batting gloves
- Helmets
- Wrist bands, arm sleeves, or shin guards
- Modern-style sunglasses or hats
- Uniform numbers or names
- Logos, advertisements, or brand labels
- Jewelry, smartwatches, or fitness trackers

If a player must wear medical or protective gear, it should be concealed under clothing and approved by the league beforehand.

UNIFORM STANDARDS:

Uniforms must follow league-approved 1880s specifications, including natural fibers, high socks, and collarless or band-collar shirts. Caps should be reproduction pillbox or soft-top styles. Uniform upkeep is each player's responsibility.

CATCHER'S EXCEPTIONS:

Catchers may wear slightly more modern protective gear as approved by the league, including reproduction 1910s–20s style mitts, masks, and chest protectors. Shin guards are not permitted unless worn invisibly beneath socks.

NICKNAMES:

Nicknames were a proud tradition of 19th-century base ball. All AVBBA players are encouraged to earn a nickname through play and camaraderie. Ballists may not assign themselves a nickname; it must be bestowed by teammates by their third official match. Nicknames must match the spirit of the era and not include modern references.

MATCH ENVIRONMENT:

Spectators are encouraged to dress in vintage attire and join in the spirit of the game. Music, signs, and cheers should remain in the tone of the 19th century when possible. The match is both sport and living history.

AUTHORIZED EQUIPMENT

To preserve the authenticity of 1886 play, only league-approved equipment is permitted in AVBBA competition. While there are several manufacturers of reproduction gear, not all meet historical or league standards. The following guidelines must be followed:

APPROVED SUPPLIERS:

Players are encouraged to purchase uniforms and equipment from league partners such as:

K&P Weaver: www.baseballamericaspastime.com

- Reproduction uniforms
- 1880s fingerless or full-finger gloves
- Period caps and accessories

Vintage Base Ball Factory: www.vbbf.com

- Reproduction gloves and balls
- "Foxy Irwin" gloves
- 1870s–80s baseballs (the only ball type allowed in AVBBA)

Bulldog Bats: www.bulldogbatsonline.com

- 35” wood bats, 40–43 oz., minimal taper, historically styled handles

HANDMADE BATS:

Handcrafted bats are welcome only if the maker has received prior league approval. Bats must adhere to the AVBBA specifications:

- Length: 35 inches
- Weight: minimum 40 ounces
- Barrel diameter: max 2.5 inches
- Handle diameter: min 1.25 inches
- Minimal taper only; no knobs unless historically appropriate

The Umpire or League Officers may inspect any bat for compliance at any time. Altered or non-conforming bats will not be allowed in match play.

CATCHER’S GEAR:

- Reproduction 1910s–20s mitts are permitted

- Chest protectors and masks must reflect the visual era and be approved by the league
- Shin guards are only allowed if worn underneath socks and not visible

All equipment must be well-kept and reflect the integrity of vintage play. League-issued or team-provided gear may be made available to new players, and used gear may be shared with approval.

VINTAGE BASE BALL TERMS

Part of the joy of playing in the AVBBA is embracing the rich and colorful language of 19th-century base ball. Below are common terms players, haku, and hui should familiarize themselves with:

ACES – *Runs scored*

BALLIST – *A player*

BEHIND – *Catcher*

BLIND / BLINDER – *No score in an inning*

HURLER – *Pitcher*

BOUND – *Bounce*

BOUNDER – *A ground ball that bounces, often weakly*

CAPITAL – *Excellent or first-rate (e.g. "a capital catch")*

CAPTAIN – *Team manager*

HUI – *Enthusiastic fans*

DAISY CUTTER – *A sharply struck grounder that skims just above the grass*

GARDEN – *The outfield*

GINGER – *Spirit, enthusiasm, aggressive play*

HAND – *An out (e.g. “three hands down” ends the inning)*

MATCH / MATCH GAME – *A scheduled game between two clubs*

MUFF – *A misplayed or dropped ball*

MUFFIN – *A less skilled or amateur player (often endearing)*

PICKED NINE – *A club assembled from the best local players for a single contest*

SAFETY – *A clean base hit*

SKY BALL – *A pop-up*

SHORT FIELD – *An early term for shortstop*

STRIKER – *Batter*

“STRIKER TO THE LINE!” – *The umpire’s call for the next batter*

TALLY – *To score a run*

These terms are used throughout the league to enrich the atmosphere and charm of vintage play. Don’t be shy — the more you speak in 1886, the more fun it becomes.