

Official Baseball Rules (OBR) 2020 Rule Changes

Below is a rundown of the changes. The three-batter minimum, a rule change that was instituted this past offseason, will remain in place. It requires pitchers to face at least three batters or pitch to the end of a half-inning, with exceptions for injuries and illnesses.

Universal designated hitter

While the American League adopted the DH rule in 1973, pitchers have continued to hit in games played at National League ballparks. That won't be the case in 2020, as both leagues will use the DH to avoid overtaxing pitchers by having them hit.

Runner on second to begin extra innings

During the regular season, every half-inning after the ninth will begin with a runner on second base. If that runner scores, the pitcher won't be charged with an earned run.

The runner placed on second base at the start of each half-inning will be the player in the batting order immediately preceding that half-inning's leadoff hitter, or a pinch-runner. However, if the player in the batting order immediately preceding that half-inning's leadoff hitter is the pitcher, the runner placed on second base may be the player preceding the pitcher in the batting order. This rule will not be in place for the postseason.

Over the past five years, 8.26% of all regular-season games have gone to extra innings. There were 208 extra-innings games in the 2019 regular season, counting for 8.56% of all games.

Position players pitching

There will be no restrictions on position players pitching in 2020.

A rule change installed this past offseason would have required teams to designate every player on the active roster as either a pitcher or a position player, and position players would have been unable to pitch unless it was extra innings, their team was ahead or trailing by more than six runs, or they had qualified for the "two-way" designation. That rule won't be in place during the 2020 season.

Suspended games

If weather forces a game to be cut short before it is official, it will be continued at a later date rather than started from scratch.

Unsportsmanlike conduct

Players and managers will be expected to maintain physical distance from all umpires and opposing players on the playing field whenever possible. Players or managers who leave their position to argue with umpires, come within six feet of an umpire or opposing player or manager for the purpose of argument, or engage in an altercation on the field will be subject to immediate ejection and discipline, including a fine and a suspension. Discipline will be consistent with past precedent, and shall not be reduced or prorated based on the length of the season.

Wet rag

Pitchers will be permitted to carry a small wet rag in their back pocket to be used for moisture in lieu of licking their fingers. Pitchers will not be able to access the rag while on the rubber, and they must clearly wipe the fingers of their pitching hand dry before touching the ball or the rubber. Water is the only substance that will be allowed on the rag.