

Pack Wars Baseball Card Game

by Brad Utterstrom

Introduction:

What is Pack Wars Baseball? The concept is simple. Get enough baseball cards to make 2 lineups, play a quick and simplified fantasy dice/board game using only the stats on the card. The game is a box score simulator, generating results of at-bats and plays until all the details of a full baseball game are resolved.

Background:

As a kid in the late 80's, I had a method to my baseball card collecting. I would buy a couple packs of cards, and then make the best lineup I could: positions, batting order, and pitchers. If I bought a handful of packs, I might even figure out how many teams I could make and then randomly distribute the cards into teams, or even run a draft. Then I would do my best to make up some sort of game using dice to play games with my newly created teams. So that's what spawned this idea...Now as an adult, I have a much better understanding of how to make the game more realistic and accurate, but I still love to make a lineup when I buy a few packs. And as a father of two young boys, it won't be long before I've got a couple kids who will be collecting, too, so I wanted to bring my own childhood game to life, and be able to open a few packs with my boys and play a baseball game with them! But it doesn't stop there, you can use any baseball cards as long as they include a standard stat line on the back, or you can even play this game with no cards at all, by using the stats of any player from any season! Create dream teams, pit world series winners from different eras against each other...the sky is the limit!

What you need to play:

*baseball cards: at the bare minimum, you need 8 position players and a pitcher. Ideally, you have enough cards for 2 full teams: a player at each position, a few subs, a pitching rotation, and a bullpen. The game as I envision it is best played with a couple packs of sealed junk era baseball cards per team.

*dice: 2d10, 1d20 per player. (That's 2 10 sided dice, and a 20 sided dice in non-nerdspeak). A dice rolling app or random number generator would work fine as well.

*Pack Wars Baseball rules and charts

*pen and paper, scoresheet and game board are optional. (Download a scoresheet from the internet, I prefer something with both teams on one page.) For a gameboard, all you really need it for is to track the runners on base, runs and outs if you're not using a scoresheet.

Setting up:

*First decide what method you will use to determine your teams. There will be a section on that later.

*Make your lineups: You need the 8 positional players, a designated hitter (optional...pitcher can hit if you choose), and at least one pitcher. Ideally, you use players only at positions that are listed on the card (any position can be the DH), but realistically, you may need to play someone out of position. If this is the case, any infield position can play another infield position (that's 1B, 2B, 3B, SS). For any other player who needs to play out of position, try to use a 'utility' player. That is, a player with more than one position listed on their card.

*choose a starting pitcher/make a pitching rotation. For a single game using the beginner rules, you

only need one pitcher and he can pitch the entire game. For multiple games, advanced rules, or any game mode other than the beginner mode, you'll need a pitching rotation of 4-5 starting pitchers, plus a bullpen of at least a couple relief pitchers.

Now head to the Beginner Rules section and step up to the plate for your first game!

Beginner Rules:

In its simplest form, the game is designed to teach kids and new players a bit about baseball, math, and strategy while still remaining relatively accurate statistically. It's also a good idea to play a beginner game or two just to get the hang of the rules. Even in the beginner mode, the core of Pack Wars Baseball still comes down to a single roll of 3 dice determining the outcome of each at bat. For each at bat, you're going to roll 3 dice; 2d10 and 1d20. The 2 10 sided dice will generate a number from 1-100, and this number is compared to the batter's batting average. This is called the "hit roll". Take a look at his average, we're only going to use the first 2 numbers. So if his batting average is .284, the important number we will look at is 28. Choose one of your 10 sided dice to be the tens place and one to represent the ones place (ideally you have one die that has the numbers 00,10,20 etc, and one that has 0,1,2 etc.) So if you roll a 20 a 6, then your hit roll is 26, and the result is a hit! If you roll a 60 and a 2, the hit roll is 62, and it is not a hit. You then compare your roll on the 20 sided die to the corresponding chart. 00 0 is read as 00 and always a hit. (I realize that 00 on a % die actually represents 100 and thus should NOT be a hit...but for the purposes of this game, it's much easier to read as a hit since any other roll starting with a 0 in the 10's place is a hit. If it results in 1 extra hit per 100 AB's on average, I'm ok with it.)

Hit Chart (Beginner)

1-14	single (runners advance 1 base)
15-17	double (runners advance 2 bases)
18	triple
19-20	home run

Not a Hit Chart (Beginner)

1-4	walk
5-10	strikeout
11-15	flyout (batter is out, runners don't advance)
16-20	groundout (batter is out, runners advance 1 base)

That's it! For the standard and advanced game, we will compare the batter's stats to the pitcher's and modify the roll accordingly, but for the beginner game, we just assume the pitcher has average stats and use the hit roll exactly as it is rolled, unmodified. Simply complete this process of determining the outcome of each at bat based on the rolling of 3 dice for a 9 inning game. The team with the most runs at the end wins!

Standard Game Rules:

Now, for a little more variety, we have two more gameplay levels, the standard game, and advanced. For the standard game, we're going to introduce a lot more strategy and variety. We'll take the pitcher's stats into consideration, the batter's power hitting, running speed, etc. We are still, however, basing everything off the same hit roll of 3 dice, 2d10 (d100 if you will) and 1d20 for an at-bat.

“Rounded” Batting Average, or “BA”:

In the beginner game, we only use the first 2 numbers on the batting average, dropping the 3rd entirely. But in the standard and advanced games, we will round up or down to the nearest 2-digit number for a bit more accuracy. Thus a .275 average gets rounded up to 28, while a .243 average would be rounded down to 24. In Pack Wars Baseball we will refer to this 2 digit batting average as BA (this helps with the simplicity of applying modifiers. In essence you're changing the 10's place of the batting average, not the one's place. So if the game calls for a -3 to BA because of the pitcher's ERA, you subtract 3 from his 2 digit BA, not the standard 3 digit batting average.)

Pitcher's ERA:

One major difference in the standard game is that we use the pitcher's ERA to modify the chances of a hit. A pitcher with an era from 4.0 - 4.49 is considered average, and the hitter's effective BA is unmodified by the pitcher's ERA. But if the pitcher's ERA is lower or higher than that, the batter's BA for this at-bat will be modified accordingly, refer to the below ERA chart for details. This modifier to the BA is referred to as the “pitcher's modifier” or “pitcher mod” for short.

ERA	Pitcher Mod
0-.49	-8 (ie -8 to hitter's BA)
.5-.99	-7
1.0-1.49	-6
1.5-1.99	-5
2.0-2.49	-4
2.5-2.99	-3
3.0-3.49	-2
3.5-3.99	-1
4.0-4.49	0 (no adjustment)
4.5-4.99	+1
5.0-5.49	+2
5.5-5.99	+3
6.0-6.49	+4
6.5-6.99	+5
7.0-7.49	+6
7.5-7.99	+7
8.0+	+8

WALKS:

The next thing we're going to consider that's new is the chance of a walk, based on the number of walks on the batter's card. If a batter's hit roll is pretty close to a hit, but just a bit too high, it's likely a walk. For every 10 walks the player has (BB on a baseball card), that gives a 1% chance of a walk. So for instance, I'll look at Ozzie Smith's 1987 card. He had a .280 batting average, so on a roll of 28 or less, he's got a hit (28 BA). But he's also got 79 walks, so we'll add a 7% chance of a walk (28+7=35)...if he rolls between 29 and 35, it's a walk and he still gets on base.

A player can declare an intentional walk before a batter's roll.

The charts for "HIT" and "NOT A HIT" are also a little more detailed than in the beginner game. Refer

to these charts for details.

HIT TYPE d20

1-8	1B (runners advance 1 base)
9-15	1B (runners advance 2 bases)
16-17	2B
18-19*	2B/3B
20+	HR

add +1 to roll for every 10HR on hitter's card

* if result is 18-19, roll d10. If this roll is equal to or lower than the number of 3B on hitter's card, it is a triple. Otherwise, it is a 2B.

NOT A HIT d20

1-3	BB
4-8	K
9	error (all runners advance 1 base, everyone is safe)
10-11	lineout (no runners advance)
12-14	flyout (runner on 3rd only advances)
15	popout (no runners advance)
16-18	groundout (runners advance)
19	GIDP (runner from 2nd or 3rd advances)
20	Triple Play if no outs (GIDP if 1 out already)

GIDP=Grounds into double play

Advanced Game Rules:

The Advanced Rules bring a lot of new strategies and options into play.

Handedness:

In baseball, generally speaking a pitcher has the advantage if they are pitching against a hitter from the same side (ie righty vs righty or lefty vs lefty), while the hitter has an advantage hitting from the opposite side of the plate (righty vs lefty or lefty vs righty.) As such, in Pack Wars Baseball if it's righty vs righty, a -1 modifier is applied to the batter's BA (ie advantage to the pitcher, it's slightly harder to get a hit), whereas if it's righty vs lefty the hitter gets the advantage and there's a +1 applied to the BA (slightly easier to get a hit). If a switch hitter is at bat, there is no bonus or penalty either way.

Pitcher fatigue/confidence:

In the standard game, the pitcher simply has a strict limit of how many innings he can pitch. In the advanced game, it's a little more complicated. The later he goes into the game or the more runs he gives up, the more likely he is to see his usefulness decline.

*The pitcher's average number of innings pitched gives a base number of innings he can pitch to his full capacity if he is doing well. For every inning they pitch beyond this number, their effective ERA is raised by .5. (IE their bonus or penalty is decreased by 1.)

*For every 3 runs the pitcher gives up, his effective ERA is also raised by .5

*if he strikes out the side (3 strikeouts with no runners reaching base), he sees a boost in confidence/momentum, and his effective ERA is LOWERED by .5

*a pitcher who makes a start cannot pitch the next 3 games.

*a pitcher who pitches 2+ innings in relief cannot pitch in the next game.

Player Limitations and Pro-rating Stats To a Full Season:

*if a player has between 100 and 300 AB, he may not play in more than 2 consecutive games

*if a player has under 100 AB, he may ONLY be used to pinch hit or pinch run 1 single time in a game.

*if a player has up to 100 AB, you may multiply his stats by x6 for the various checks based on stats...HR, BB, 2B, 3B etc

*if a player has 101-200 AB you may multiply his stats by x3

*if a player has 201-300 AB you may multiply his stats by x2

*if a player has 301-400 AB you may multiply his stats by 1.5

(The above can be simplified based on personal preference. You may just decide it's easier to double the effective stats of anyone who had fewer than 300AB and disregard the above)

*exception: Stolen Bases. For stolen bases, you don't refer to AB when pro-rating, you refer to GP.

Since regular season is appx 160gp, we'll use that number to simplify. So if a player has 41-80 GP, you can double their SB total when making a check involving SB. For someone up to 40GP, you may multiply his SB by 4. The reasoning for this is that there are players who are used a lot as a pinch runner if they're fast. So a player may have a high number of SB and a high number of GP, but relatively low number of AB.

*use only MLB Stats on the card. If the player has no MLB stats and you want to use minor league stats from the card, subtract .050 from the batting average (ie .325 becomes .275.) Also for specific hit types, divide them by 2. A guy who hits 36 hr in the minors counts as 18 hr in Pack Wars Baseball. For pitchers, I think adding 1 full point to their ERA is reasonable here. I am just giving suggested guidelines here, I only use a player if he has MLB stats.

Trying for an extra base:

There are situations where a runner has a chance to try for an extra base, perhaps stretching a single into a double, tagging up when there's a close play, etc. In these instances, unless otherwise noted, do an SB check on a d20, max 18. (IE if you roll the player's SB or fewer they are successful...however 19-20 always results in them being thrown out.)

Playing out of position:

If you have no eligible player at a position, then use a utility player if possible. In Pack Wars Baseball, a utility player will simply be defined as any player with multiple positions listed on their card.

Examples: 1B/OF, SS/3B, C/OF, INF, etc. DH does NOT count as a position for a utility player, so

OF/DH would not be a utility player. If no utility is available either, then use one of the following:

For an infielder: any infielder

for an outfielder: a 1b, 3b, or C

for a C: a 1b, 3b, or former catcher (this requires baseball knowledge for a judgment call! Biggio, Surhoff, Schwarber are examples of players who played catcher earlier in their career and might be a good choice behind the dish in a pinch, even if C isn't listed on their card. I also use judgment calls for other positions, and occasionally I'll see if I can find any more info on the back of the card. For

instance a player may have only 3B listed on the card, but when you read the bio on the back it might say “so and so filled in at third, second, and short during the season”, that gives me a pretty good idea where he can play.)

Trading:

Instead of playing players out of position, trading is encouraged! This is true especially for sealed pack scenarios, where you're more likely to end up missing a position

Triples:

On the advanced hit chart, there is no spot designated for triples. This is because your average player gets a triple less often than 1 in 20 hits. Instead, there are 2 spots for double OR triple. If a roll results in 2b/3b, you make a d10 check for a triple...if the result is equal to or lower than that player's number of triples, then it's a triple. Otherwise, a double. A roll of 10(0) is always a 2b. So in the case of a player with 10 or more triples, they would get a triple on a roll of 1-9, a double on a roll of 0 (which represents 10 on a 10-sided die).

Passed balls and wild pitches:

On your roll for each at bat, any time you roll a 00 (0's on both 10 sided dice), the result is a passed ball. Any time you roll a 99, the result is a wild pitch. For all intents and purposes, the way these affect gameplay is the same. If you see a wild pitch or passed ball, before resolving the at bat, any runners on base advance one base (a run will score if there is a runner on 3rd.) Once the WP/PB is resolved, then look at the numbers on the dice to resolve the rest of the at-bat as normal.

Pitchers hitting:

If you're playing National League rules (pitchers hit for themselves, no DH), we'll just use a generic statline for all pitchers, since there are generally no pitcher hitting stats available on a baseball card. I recommend the following: .150 batting average, 2% for walks (so 16/17 would be a walk), and -2 for bunt or sacrifice attempts.

Advanced game sample gameplay:

Let's look at a simple half inning of baseball, using the advanced rules, so I can walk you through it. For this I'll use teams I made up using '87 baseball cards ('86 stats).

The pitcher will be Dwight Gooden, he's a righty with a 2.84 ERA so he'll effectively reduce the opponents' BA by 3. With an average IP of 7.58, (we round up) he can pitch up to 8 innings without penalty. But remember, he'll drop an ERA level for every 3 runs he gives up and gain one any time he strikes out the side, so his effectiveness may change throughout the game. Also, remember Gooden is a righty, so any time he faces a righty batter you'll subtract another point from the BA, any time he faces a lefty you'll add one, any time he faces a switch hitter, we don't add or subtract. For now, we'll note Gooden on the scorecard like this:

Gooden R -3 8st (I like to write st for stamina, just as a reminder so I can quickly reference when a pitcher will lose his effectiveness.)

The first batter for the visiting team is Alan Trammell. He's got a .277 batting average so his base hit number is 28. He has 59 walks, and for every 10 walks he gets a 1% walk chance (we always round down on walks, we can simply reference the number in the 10's spot), so his walk number is $28 + 5 = 33$. His name in the scoresheet looks like this: Trammell-SS 28R

We're also modifying his BA based on Gooden's ERA (-3 to BA), and the fact that Gooden has the righty-righty matchup advantage for an additional -1, so before we roll we'll subtract 4 from 28, Trammell's target to get a hit is 24 for this AB, +5 so 25-29 would be a walk.

Trammell rolls 10 and 1 on the 10-sided dice, that's an 11. He's got a hit! The 20 sided die result is 3, and with Trammell having 21 HR, we'll add 2 to that roll for a grand total of 5. We check this number

on the advanced hit chart, and 5 is a solid single (extra base hits start at 14 and above.) Trammell is on first with a single. Write 1B in the appropriate box on the scoresheet, and place a pawn on 1b on the game board (if you're using one...a simple diamond drawn on a sheet of paper will do) to represent him.

Now I don't know that I'd steal with Trammell right off the bat, but for the purposes of this tutorial, let's go ahead and try it. He's got good speed with 25SB. Stealing 2nd has a base chance of 45%, plus 25 for his SB, so he's got a 70% chance (ie we need a 70 or lower on our d100 roll.) 37, he's successfully swiped a bag and put himself in scoring position! He could try to steal 3rd, but let's not push our luck with no outs here in the top of the 1st.

Next Batter is Ken Griffey Sr. He's a .306 hitting lefty with 21 HR and 35 BB. So on the scoresheet he'll look like this: Griffey Sr-LF 31L

Whereas Gooden had the advantage against the righty hitting Trammell, Griffey as a lefty will have the advantage here so he gets a +1 to his BA. Gooden still gets the -3 for ERA though, for a total of -2 modifier. So Griffey needs a 29 for a hit, +3=32 for a walk. He rolls 23 so he's got a hit, and 14 on d20, so it's a possible double! He's got 22 doubles so he'd need to roll 11 or lower on d20 to stretch it into a double, so let's not risk it. He'll stay safe at 1st, but Trammell will score from 2nd! We've got our first run of the game!

Next up, #3 hitter, George Brett. His stats .290 avg, 16 HR, 80 BB. Brett-3B 29L

For being a lefty his modifier from Gooden is only -2 (-3 for ERA, +1 for lefty vs righty), so he needs a 27 or less for a hit, 28-35 for a walk. His roll is 65 so we'll now refer to the advanced chart for "Not a Hit". His roll on the d20 is 8. K! Doc records his first strikeout of the game, George Brett the victim. That's just a few at-bats, but hopefully it's enough to get you on the right track. It seems long-winded, but once you get the hang of it you'll quickly be able to calculate the number needed for a hit and for a walk, and you'll find the result of the At-Bat on the appropriate chart. In most cases an at bat takes just a few seconds.

*Tip to speed up the game: you can make most of your rolls without all of the calculations. That is to say, I roll first and usually can find out the result without even referring to the batter's stats. If I roll a 65, I pretty much know that's not a hit for ANY player, and I can skip right to checking the d20 result on the "Not a Hit" chart. And if the 10's die rolls a 0 or 10, well that's a hit for almost everyone. It's pretty much just the 20/30 results that you'll need to refer to the batter's average and # of walks to make sure you get the accurate result.

Ways to Play:

As mentioned, I envisioned this game to be played with sealed baseball card packs, preferably junk era. And even today, those junk era (late 80's-early 90's) packs are very affordable and available, so I recommend that you give it a shot if you can get your hands on some packs! But that's certainly not the only way to play, you can play with any old stack of cards, any year, as long as you can make a lineup and there are stats on the back of the card.

***Sealed:** Each player gets enough sealed packs to field a team of around 25 ballplayers, at least 8 position players. I recommend 2-3 junk era packs per team since they usually have around 15 cards per pack, almost all of them being standard base cards. Set aside any special/insert cards that don't have a basic stat line, we won't be using any of those. The only cards eligible for a game of Pack Wars

Baseball are those with the basic stats shown on the back. Choose your defensive alignment, batting order, and pitching rotation/bullpen. If you're short on a certain position, I encourage trades with the other players! This needs to be agreed upon by all.

***Sealed pack draft:** This is my personal favorite. A variation of sealed play where cards are drafted one at a time. Let's assume each player has 2 junk era packs. All players open their first pack, pick one card, and pass the pack to your right (if there are only 2 of you, you'll be passing back and forth.) Draft your next player from the pack just handed to you, and repeat this process until there are no more cards in the pack. Then everyone opens their next pack, and repeat the whole process with the new pack. This way, you always get first pick from your own pack, and as you draft you can be thinking of positions needed so there's a better chance you can draft a lineup without holes. If you just have to take whatever is in your packs it is more likely that you're missing a position, for instance, whereas in a draft you can strategize your picks from the get go. You've got to use your best judgment in some cases as situations can arise, for instance a duplicate player. I recommend the following. If there's a duplicate player, the first team to draft him gets him. Any duplicates should then be removed. If that's not an option or you don't know who drafted him first, a simple roll off (high roll keeps him), arm wrestle for it, heck, whatever seems fair!

***Sealed full draft:** In this mode, you get enough packs so that there will be enough players to go around (ie if you have 4 players, 8 junk era packs should do.) Open all packs. Remove any duplicate players or specialty cards with no stats. Pool all the eligible cards, and draft one at a time (snake draft recommended...reversing the order of the draft each round so the same guy doesn't get first pick every round.) This will take longer than the other 2 sealed methods, but might make the most sense especially for a tournament or league where you'll be playing more than a couple games.

***Standard full draft:** Grab whatever cards you have/want to use (ie not sealed.) Otherwise this is the same as sealed full draft.

***Use personal collection:** each player can use any cards in their collection. Or agree upon a set criteria. You can do Yankees all-time greats vs Red Sox all-time greats, My favorite championship team vs your favorite championship team, sky is the limit here. Also, be aware, you don't actually have to have baseball cards to play, you can find stats for any baseball player any year...as long as you have the stats, you can use them to play a game.

***American League vs National League:** this can be done in sealed or with a random stack of cards or whatever. One person gets all AL cards, one gets all NL cards.

***Best Season:** This is a fun variant. I've got a handful of 1987 baseball cards in front of me so I'll use them as an example. For each player, rather than using the '86 season, you may choose to use the stat line for any season that appears on the back of the card! So for Tom Seaver, he was getting a bit long in the tooth by the '86 season, I think I'll go with his 1971 season with the Mets where he posted an amazing 1.76 ERA!

Prizes at stake:

***winner take all (sealed):** This would be a game or tournament where everyone agrees beforehand that all cards from the sealed packs go to the winner. Can be a fun way to play, picking up a few packs with a friend, play a game or series, winner gets to keep the cards! If you've got more than 2 players, great, the pot just gets bigger.

***High Stakes Tournament:** Play any kind of games/tournament from above you'd like, sealed or unsealed. Everyone has to agree on it. Then agree on a value for the card that each player will put up as the bet, from their personal collection. For instance maybe we all agree it's got to be at least a \$20 Beckett value card, so everyone would bring a card, throw it in the pot, and then either play winner take all, have a draft of the prizes in the order of finishers, however you'd like to do it as long as it's agreed upon by all players.

Post-Game Recap: Regardless of which version of the game you play, the fast-paced beginner version or the more statistically accurate advanced version, solo or helping your child learn the basics and teaching them to enjoy collecting the same way you did as a Little Leaguer, I'm hoping you can find some joy and nostalgia in Pack Wars Baseball!