

## “Pesis” i.e. Pesäpallo

### Introduction to the game

Pesäpallo is the national game of Finland. It is a combination of traditional ball-batting team games and American baseball. The game was first developed by Lauri "Tahko" Pihkala in the 1920's, and in the summer of 2002 pesäpallo celebrated its 80th anniversary. The game is nowadays also known by the name of *pesis*. The game of pesis is played and enjoyed equally by men and women. Both men and women are unionized under same organisation, Pesäpalloliitto (PPL).

The rules of pesis are quite complicated, but the idea of the game is simple. One team tries to score by hitting the ball and running through the bases (offensive half, batting team), the other team tries to defend by catching the ball and putting the runners out (defensive half, fielding team). The key to the game and the most important difference between pesis and baseball is the vertical pitching. Hitting the ball, as well as controlling the power and direction of the hit, is much easier. This gives the offensive game much more variety, speed and tactical dimensions than in baseball. The fielding team is forced to counter the batter's choices with defensive schemes and anticipation, and the game becomes a mental challenge.

In competitive pesis the manager has an important role. The offensive and defensive strategies include several prepared plays for every situation. The manager leads his team's offense by giving signals to the players with a multicolored fan (photo 3).



Photo 1: A run or not a run? Runner (in front) and pitcher are sliding simultaneously to the home base. If touching the base at same time or if runner is first, he scores a run. (Photo: PPL)

### Equipment and Field

Basic equipment<sup>1</sup> needed in pesis are:

- **The ball:** normal circumference 216-222 mm, weight ca. 135-165 g. The ball is harder and heavier than a tennis ball, for not to bounce too much and for to be more suitable to throw.
- **The bat:** The bat is made of wood or synthetic fiber. It may be covered with reinforcing material, such as plastic or textile tape. Length of the bat is 90-100 cm.
- **The glove:** May be used by the fielding players (defensive team) to help catching and controlling the ball. Made of leather.
- **The helmet:** A protective helmet must be used in official games by active offensive players (batter and runners), and by front-field defensive players.

The format and dimensions of the playing field are shown in the end. The immediate field consists of the home base and the area bounded by and including the sidelines and the backline. Every field base has its own safe zone, where offensive player has safety. The immediate field shall be surrounded on all sides with an open area of at least 10 meters width.

The boundary lines shall be drawn with slaked lime, chalk or other clearly visible (white) material. The width of the boundary line is 10 cm.



Photo 2: Basic equipment of pesis: The bat, the ball, the glove, and the plate (which belongs to the field equipment). (Photo: Keski-Suomen Opisto)

## A summary of the rules

A modern competition game is played in two periods of four innings each. A period is won by the team which scores more runs in its offensive half-innings. If each of the teams wins one period, the game will be decided by an extra period, which consists of one inning and, if necessary to break the tie, of a special scoring contest. During an inning both teams take turns playing offense (batting) and defense (fielding).

The defensive team has nine players on the field, one of them being a pitcher in home base. The offensive team has nine players in advised batting order. The offensive team can continue batting until three players have been put out or one round of the batting order has been completed without at least two runs scored<sup>2</sup>.

The batter and the pitcher face each other in the home base, on opposite sides of the circular plate (photo 3). The pitch is delivered by throwing the ball directly upwards above the plate (above, not from the side!), to a height of at least one meter over the head of the pitcher.

The batter has three strikes available on his turn at bat. A fair hit does not force him to advance; he can use all three strikes at bat before he becomes a runner. A pitch counts as a strike, if the batter takes a swing at the ball or if the umpire rules the pitch legal. If the pitcher delivers a bad pitch (ball), the batter is granted a walk (free) to the first base only if the field is empty. If there are runners on the field, the point runner is granted a walk to the next base for the second bad pitch, and during same batter the runner gets a walk after each bad pitch. A pitch is ruled bad, if the ball does not fall on the plate, if the pitch is too low or if the pitcher commits a violation.

A hit is foul, if the ball first touches the field outside of the boundaries. The batter or the runners cannot advance on a foul hit. If the fielders get control of the ball before it touches the field, the hit is a catch, and all runners who tried to advance on that play are caught when being simultaneously out of the base. Caught players are removed from the field, but they do not count as outs.

After the batter becomes a runner, he must try to advance safely to the first base. The runner reaches safety on a base by touching the base area before the ball is thrown to a fielder in the base. If the ball gets to the base first, the runner is put out and removed from the field. The batter is also put out, if his third strike is foul hit. A runner on a base is forced to advance, if the next runner reaches safety on the same base.

The offensive team scores a run (photo 1), when a runner returns safely to the home base after advancing safely through all three field bases. If a batter advances to the third base on his own fair hit, he scores a home run. He can then stay on the third base and try to score again as a regular runner by reaching the home base on a later play.



Photo 3: The batter is ready in the middle, other offensive players are waiting their turn on safety lane. Manager and his multicoloured fan on the left. (Photo: PPL)

## Some details of the rules

### Pitching

- The batter tells from which side he wants to hit, and pitcher takes the opposite side of the plate.
- The pitcher shall hold a short moment the ball on a stable position so that the batter can see it.
- The ball will be delivered upwards with a single continuous movement of the lower hand.
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- After the pitch the pitcher must yield away from the batter for not to disturb batting. If not, the umpire can penalize the pitcher by granting a walk (free advancing to next base) to the batter and all the runners who are in bases.

### **Batting and advancing**

- When one is batting, the other batters are waiting on the safe lane of home base (photo 3).
- The hit is either fair or foul. The hit is foul if
  1. the ball lands out of the bounds or in to the home base, without touching any fielder,
  2. the ball first touches a offensive player after the hit,
  3. the hit is a double hit, e.g. the bat and ball make contact more than once,
  4. the batter throws the bat or the bat is flung off the batters hold, or breaks into pieces,
  5. the batter swings before the ball has reached the highest point of the pitch, or swings at the ball after it has touched the plate or the ground.If the hit is foul, all runners advancing must return to the base they left. When the 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> hit is foul, the batter can't run, but may still hit the pitches which are left, except on the foul number 5 when the batter shall be put out. If the 3<sup>rd</sup> hit is foul, the batter will be put out, too.
- The batter becomes a committed runner when he
  1. has used his three strikes, or accepts a walk (free advancing) to the first base,
  2. reaches safety on the first base,
  3. is off the home base at the moment a fielder makes a catch,
  4. is off the home base at the moment the ball is controlled by a fielder on home base.
- The runner has safety in the base, even when being in air (jump) and in the safety area.
- The runner can leave the base and legally return back to it without losing safety, until
  1. the next runner legally reaches the base in question,
  2. the ball is controlled by a fielder (defender) on the base in question,
  3. a fielder makes a catch of a hit while the runner is off the base.On these cases the runner will be put off if the ball reaches next base before him.
- Interference is forbidden in all situations in the game. A player may not interfere with or obstruct the opposing players to stop them from performing legal play actions. If an offensive player acts so, he shall be returned to the base he left or be put out. If a defending player the path of an advancing runner, the runner shall be granted a walk.

### **A catch**

If a fielder gets control of a hit ball straight off the hit before the ball touches the ground, it is a catch. When an offender is then out of a base, see above "...without losing safety, until", case 3.

### **A full force play**

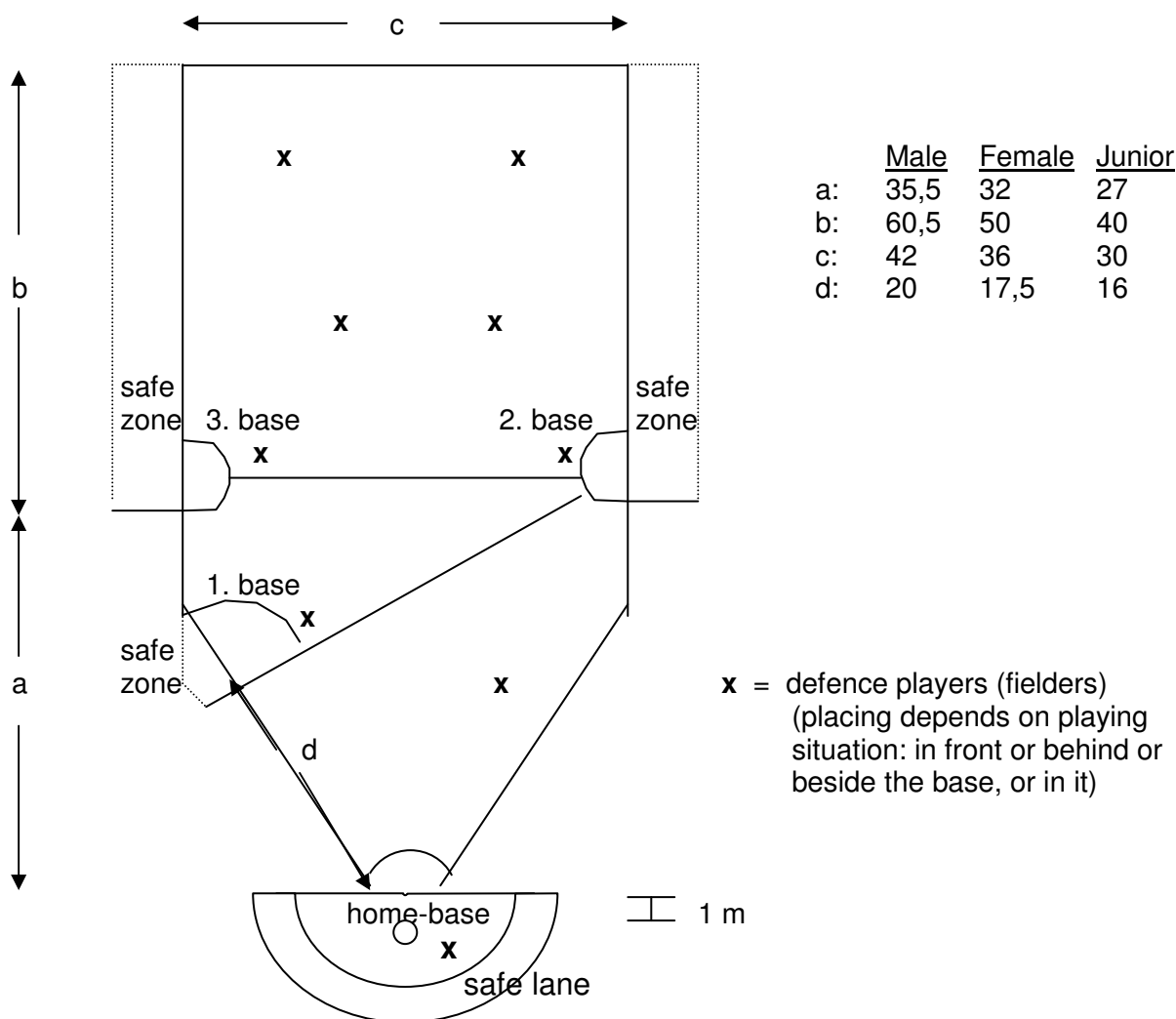
A full force play exists, when there is a runner on every field base. The batter on turn must advance at last after the third hit, and then all others must advance, too. If the hit is a catch, every runner will be taken off the field, but none is put out. If third hit is a foul, the batter is put out, the others remain on those bases and a full force play is continuing with next batter.

### **Scoring a home run**

A player who reaches third base on his own hit and the defensive team has not tried to put him out at previous bases, scores a home run. The player may come home, or stay in third base and try to score a double run by advancing to the home base normal way by an other batters hit.

## The umpire's whistling signals and the official field (diameters in meter)

- Start /End of game: Three long blows    \_\_ \_\_ \_\_
- Stop / continue play: One long blow    \_\_
- Foul hit: Short and long blows    , \_\_ , \_\_ , \_\_
- A catch: Several short blows    , , , , ,
- Player is put out: Two sharp blows    --
- Change of inning: One long and several short blows    \_\_ , , , , ,



Original PPL –text revised by Keski-Suomen Opisto / VV.

For original text and further information see:

[www.pesis.fi/nuorisopesis/international\\_site/in\\_english/](http://www.pesis.fi/nuorisopesis/international_site/in_english/)

[www.pesis.fi/nuorisopesis/international\\_site/in\\_english/official\\_international\\_rules/](http://www.pesis.fi/nuorisopesis/international_site/in_english/official_international_rules/)

Some useable variations for children and students, and when having no suitable equipment:

<sup>1</sup> You can use the following variations as well: A tennis ball is useable. Or hit large, quite light and soft, ball with straightened arm; No gloves are necessary when playing with tennis ball or bigger ball; A plate is not necessary, draw a circle on the ground; Helmets are not needed in unofficial games.

<sup>2</sup> You can use the following variations as well: Counting put outs begins not until one batting round has gone; One scored run during a batting round is enough, or no need to get any at all.