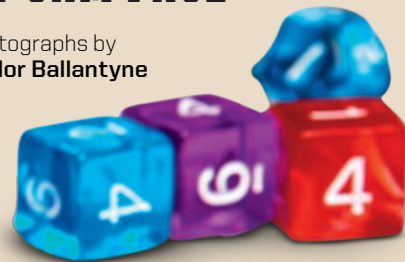




With the game Deadball you can simulate America's Pastime during any season, no matter where you are.

BY SAM PAGE

Photographs by
Taylor Ballantyne



Shake, Roll, and Play Ball!



t's the bottom of the ninth, and the bases are loaded. The home team is down by two, and there are two outs. The count is full. The pitcher throws. A die is rolled. It's a six.

If you want to know what happened in the above scenario, you're going to need to check out Deadball, a baseball game played entirely with dice and a pencil. Designed in January 2017 by W.M. Akers, Deadball is a low-tech, single-player experience that features real or fictional players. Akers conceived of the game after the birth of his son Dash. He wanted something to help pass the time during the dead of baseball's offseason.

"I started thinking, There's got to be a way for me to design a baseball game that I can play while I'm hanging out with my kid that's basically simple enough that I can do an at bat while he's taking a bite of food," Akers says.

In the original version of the game, he used a pair of 10-sided dice to generate a number between 0 and 99. He would compare that number to the first two digits of a player's batting average. If the rolled number was equal to or lower than the rounded-up batting average, the batter got a hit. If the rolled number was higher than his average, the batter was out. The result was then marked on a scorecard.

Akers then added a way to factor in the skill of the pitcher using ERA. As he continued to test the game, he realized it had potential when he found himself getting so invested that he would become mad at the results. The Mets fan got particularly upset when the mighty 1927 New York Yankees kept beating a team of Negro leagues All-Stars.

"I figured if this silly little game I made up with just a handful of dice and a piece of paper could make me angry—and make me angry in the same way baseball makes me angry—that I was probably on to something," Akers says.

Pretty soon, Deadball moved from the baby's high chair to Dad's desk, where Akers began to develop more advanced rules. When his wife discovered him rolling dice one day in his home office, she said it was time to try to make money off his work.

So that March, Akers—who is a writer when he's not working on Deadball—put the game on Kickstarter, a website on which people pledge money to support a project in return for early access. Akers set a goal of \$500 in 25 days. He ended up raising \$7,748.

"The thing about baseball people is that they are addicted to baseball," Akers says, explaining the game's popularity. "They love it so much that even something as simple as rolling dice and scratching out lines on a piece of paper, it triggers the thing inside your brain that feels like you're at the ballpark."

The finished product was a 61-page book, part rules reference and part fictional encyclopedia. Gamers are invited to play with made-up athletes like second baseman Ian White, who is described in the book as "perhaps the best power infielder in the league and a passable ballroom dancer." Or they can take over

one of the teams in the Southern Circuit, such as the defending-champion Charlottesville Flycatchers. People who pledged enough money on Kickstarter had players named after them (or their children, since a baby was the game's inspiration).

Advanced Deadball players can take advantage of in-game tactics like shifting the infield and pickoff attempts. There are also off-the-field effects, such as injuries and generating prospects. And they are all controlled by a roll of the dice. On the next page, you can play a simplified version of the game to get a feel for how it works.

Then, if you're ready, you can graduate to the full version of the game. Akers recently came out with an expansion, Deadball: Year II. He even has plans for a Deadball Hall of Fame. No word yet on what prospective inductees will have to roll to be enshrined.

YOUR TURN

We've picked our team. Choose your players and turn the page to challenge us.



CATCHER
JOHNNY
BENCH
.267 BA

1ST BASE
LOU
GEHRIG
.340 BA

2ND BASE
JOSÉ
ALTUVE
.316 BA

SHORTSTOP
MANNY
MACHADO
.282 BA

THE RULES

First, you'll need a way to generate random numbers. The easiest way is to use a standard set of seven role-playing dice (they're usually sold together). Or you can use one of many dice-rolling websites or apps.

Next, fill out the lineup on the scorecard on the opposite page. Next to each name, write the player's position and his Batter Target—the first two digits of his batting average. Find the pitcher's ERA on the Pitch Dice table and write down what it says. That's the Pitch Die. (For instance, if your pitcher's ERA is 2.50, you'll use the number that comes up when you roll the eight-sided die.) We've provided a sample team you can play with or against.

Now we're ready to play ball! The batter rolls a d100 (that's two 10-sided dice, using one die result as the tens place and the other as the ones place). The pitcher rolls his Pitch Die, and adds the result to what the batter rolled. (If there is a minus sign before his Pitch Die number, you subtract the result of the roll.) We call that the Modified Swing Score (MSS).

If the MSS is equal to or less than the Batter Target, it's a hit. If the MSS is one to five points higher, it's a walk. If it's more than five points higher, the batter is out.

If the result is an out, find the final digit of the MSS on the Out Table. That will tell you how the batter was retired. If the result is a hit, roll the 20-sided die and find the result on the Basic Hit Table. If it says "roll for DEF," that means the defense has a chance to take away the hit (or make an error). Roll a d12 and consult the Defense Table to see if the result is adjusted.

Once the final result has been determined, record it on the scorecard. If the batter makes an out, write the notation in parentheses from the Out Table. If he gets on base, draw the first leg of a diamond to show his trip to first base. Draw the second leg when he goes to second, and the third when he goes to third. When he scores, complete the diamond and fill it in.

Here's a sample plate appearance: Mike Trout is batting against Clayton Kershaw. Trout has a .305 batting average, so his Batting Target is 30. Kershaw's ERA is 2.37, which

makes his Pitch Die d8 (the eight-sided die). First, roll a d100. Let's say it comes up 21. Then roll the Pitch Die. Let's say that is 7. Adding the two rolls together gives us 28. Since that's less than the Batter Target, Trout gets a hit.

To find out what kind, we roll the d20. Imagine it comes up 13. That means Trout hits a double—but since the Basic Hit Table tells us to roll for DEF, we have to roll one more die, the d12. Say it comes up 11. So the defense made a nice play and actually held Trout to a single. (But any baserunners would still take an extra base.) We record that result next to Trout's name on the scorecard, and Babe Ruth comes to the plate and we start all over.

Now get out there and play ball!

ERA	PITCH DIE
0- 0.99	d20
1-1.99	d12
2-2.99	d8
3-3.49	d4
3.5-4	-d4
4-4.99	-d8
5-5.99	-d12
6-6.99	-d20
7-7.99	-20

BASIC HIT TABLE (d20)	
1-2	Single
3-7	Single, roll for DEF
8-12	Single, runners advance two bases
13-15	Double, roll for DEF
16-17	Double, runners advance three bases
18	Triple, roll for DEF
19-20	Home Run

OUT TABLE	
0	Strikeout (K)
1	Strikeout (K)
2	Strikeout (K)
3	1st Base (G-3)
4	2nd Base (4-3)
5	3rd Base (5-3)
6	Shortstop (6-3)
7	Leftfield (F-7)
8	Centerfield (F-8)
9	Rightfield (F-9)

DEFENSE (d12)	
1-2	Error. Runners take an extra base.
3-9	No change.
10-11	If it's an extra-base hit, it is reduced by one base. A double becomes a single (runners advance two bases). A triple becomes a double (runners advance three bases). A home run becomes a triple. A single remains a single.
12	The hit becomes an out. Runners hold.



DEADBALL

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	R	H	E
AWAY: BEAMERS															
HOME:															

NAME, POSITION	BT	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	HITS
JOSÉ ALTIVE 2ND BASE	31													
MIKE TROUT CENTERFIELD	30													
BABE RUTH RIGHTFIELD	34													
HANK AARON LEFTFIELD	30													
LOU GEHRIG 1ST BASE	34													
JOHNNY BENCH CATCHER	26													
MANNY MACHADO SHORTSTOP	28													
JOSÉ RAMÍREZ 3RD BASE	29													
BUZZ BEAMER PITCHER PITCH DIE: D8	31													

NAME, POSITION	BT	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	HITS