



The official rules governing the game of Horseshoes

by Dudek

It's that time again. The snow is gone, the frost is out of the ground, and the pits are dry enough to prepare for play. It's horseshoe pitching season in Moab.

The game is one of the oldest of them all, dating back to Roman Army camps around 100 AD, according to the Encyclopedia Britannica. It wasn't until 1914, however, that the rules were standardized, and the National Horseshoe Pitchers Association, the NHPA, was formed. The NHPA is headquartered at Route 5, Lucasville, OH 45648.

Itinerant shoe tossers in this area have noticed certain rule differences at different courts around the county. In an effort to clear up the discrepancies, and hopefully arrive at a set of rules we can all toss by, here are the official rules according to the NHPA.

COURT: The stakes are 1" steel posts set 40 feet apart. (30 feet for women.) The stakes stand 14" high, and are canted 3 inches off vertical in the direction of the opposite stake. The stakes are located in the center of a 6' by 6' pitchers box. The front edge of the box is bordered with a 2" high wooden rail. The toss must be made from within the confines of the pitcher's box. The landing area around the stake, composed of clay, soil or sand, must be at least 3 feet wide (18" on each side of the stake), and the length of the box in the other direction (6 feet).

SHOES: The horseshoe may be no more than 7 $\frac{1}{4}$ " wide and 7 $\frac{5}{8}$ " tall, and the throat may be no wider than 3 $\frac{1}{2}$ ". The shoe may weigh no more than 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ pounds. Each pair of shoes are marked for identification. Toe and heel calks may extend no more than 3/4" above the face of the shoe.

PLAY: Two players (singles) or four (doubles) compete, each pitching two shoes in succession which completes an inning. In singles, both contestants pitch from the same end and change ends after each inning. In doubles, partners play at opposite ends throughout the contest. Only one player scores in an inning, and that winner throws first in the next inning. The pitcher stands anywhere he chooses within the pitcher's box, but he may not step on or over the foul line during his delivery. A glove or finger tape is permitted. Immediately upon pitching his second shoe, the player must exit the pitcher's box, and he must take up a position off to the side behind an imaginary line that is even with the stake. The second player may not walk over to the opposite stake and examine the lie of the horseshoes before pitching his half of the inning.

SCORING: The shoe must land within the borders of the opposite pitcher's box; otherwise they do not score.

After all four shoes are pitched, any shoe which rings the stake, or lies the closest to it, scores. A shoe is judged to be a "ringer" if a straight-edge laid across the tips of the shoe encircles the stake without touching it. A

non-ringer shoe must lie within 6" of the stake to score. A measuring device determines whether this criteria is met.

A shoe closest to the stake scores 1 point. Both shoes closest to the stake score two points. A ringer is worth three points. A double ringer is worth 6 points. All equals count as ties and no points are awarded.

If each player has a ringer on the stake, they cancel each other out and no points are awarded. In such a case, the next closest shoe is eligible to score. In a case where a player has one ringer and his other shoe is closest to the stake, he scores 4 points. If both players score two ringers, no points are awarded. If one player scores two ringers to his opponent's one ringer, he scores 3 points. If both shoes lie closer to the stake than the opponent's, two points are scored. If a shoe leans against the stake (one point), and an opponent's shoe on the ground also touches the stake, they tie and no points are awarded. If no score is posted in an inning, the last player (or team) has the next pitch. The first player reaching 50 points is declared the winner. If the game total is reached by the first player in an inning, the second player is not allowed his turn to "catch up" or surpass the first player, and the game is over.

MOVED SHOES: A shoe moved by an opponents shoe is counted in its new position. A shoe which becomes a ringer as a result of having been moved by an opponent's shoe counts as a ringer. A ringer knocked off the stake by an opponent's shoe loses its ringer score.

INFORMAL PLAY: In informal play, and to allow more matches per outing, a game may be declared at a lower score, usually 21 points. Sometimes a "shoe width" is declared the close measure for shoes in the one point range. In the event that pitchers are using two different brands of shoes with varying widths, a standard distance (say, the width of the smallest shoe) must be decided upon beforehand. And finally, "leaners" are sometimes scored as two points, although a very low leaner is subject to great dispute and this rule variation is not recommended.

RECORDS: The record for consecutive ringers is 72, by Ted Allen of Boulder, Colorado. The record for percentage of ringers is 88.5%, by Elmer Hohl of Wellesey, Ontario, Canada. The women's record for consecutive ringers is 30, set by Sue Gillespie of Portland, Indiana. Allen also holds the record for world titles, 10, over a span dating from 1933 through 1959. The women's record is 8, by Vicki Chapelle, of Winston, Lamonte, Missouri.

Well, here's hoping that this clears up some of the major rule discrepancies that have cropped up in this area. Obviously, there's a lot more to the game, and information on the finer points may be obtained by writing to the NHPA in Ohio.

Happy hooking, campers. I'll be seeing you out there in the pits this summer, for sure.