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# National Horseshoe Pitchers Association

## OFFICIAL RULES OF HORSESHOE PITCHING

Published By The National Horseshoe Pitchers Association of America (NHPA)

### Rule 1 - Equipment

#### Section A – Legal Shoes

Any official (legal) horseshoe must be sanctioned and approved by the NHPA, and must pass the following maximum weight and measurement standards (there is no minimum weight). The horseshoe weight shall not be more than two (2) pounds, ten (10) ounces. It shall not exceed 7-1/4 inches in width or 7-5/8 inches in length. The opening of the shoe must not exceed 3-1/2 inches, measured from a parallel line  $\frac{3}{4}$  of an inch inward from a straightedge touching the points of the shoe. (A 1/8-inch tolerance to 3-5/8 inches is allowed on used shoes) No part of the original manufactured shoe may exceed one (1) inch in height. Shoes not meeting these requirements shall not be used in any NHPA sanctioned competition and all games pitched with illegal shoes shall be forfeited. All horseshoes used by a pitcher may be checked at any time to verify that they are legal shoes. A judge or other tournament officials will do this checking.

#### Section B – Altered Shoes

Any shoe that has been changed from its original design (calk, notch, welding, etc.) shall be considered an “altered” shoe. An “altered” shoe is illegal and cannot be used in any (tournaments or leagues) sanctioned play. **Note:** The NHPA Executive Council has the right to waive the “altered” shoe provision for a physically impaired contestant.

#### Section C – Shoes Sanctioned by Other Countries

Any shoes sanctioned by another country are permissible in NHPA sanctioned play, but only for contestants from that country, and then only if they meet NHPA specifications. They are not allowable (for U.S. citizens) in NHPA sanctioned events unless they are also sanctioned by the NHPA.

## RULE 2 – PITCHING DISTANCES

#### Section A – Juniors (any pitcher eighteen years old or younger for the entire calendar year)

Junior contestants may pitch from any place on either the full-distance or extended platforms. They must observe the 27-foot foul lines. Juniors age nine or under, for the entire calendar year, may observe a 20-foot foul line. **Note:** \* Juniors may choose to move into the Open Men or Open Women Divisions prior to the age guidelines, but cannot return to the Junior Division, once this declaration has been made.

#### Section B – Open Men (beginning age 18 or 19\*) and Senior Men (beginning age 60)

All Open Men and Senior Men contestants shall pitch from on or behind the full-distance platforms adjacent to the pits and observe the 37-foot foul line. Physically impaired males may be given permission by their governing Charter or NHPA officials to move onto the extended platforms and

observe the 27-foot foul lines. The prior completion and approval of a Medical Exemption Form is required.

### **Section C – Elders (beginning age 70)**

Elders are classified as short-distance pitchers, shall pitch less than the full distance, and observe the 27-foot foul line.

### **Section D – Open Women (beginning age 18 or 19\*) and Senior Women (beginning age 60)**

Female contestants may pitch from any place on the full-distance or extended platforms and shall observe the 27-foot foul lines, except that any woman pitching in the Elders class must pitch from less than 40 feet.

### **Section E – Male Pitchers with an Approved Medical Exemption Form**

Male pitchers less than 70 years old and with an approved Medical Exemption Form (available from State Secretaries) are classified as short-distance pitchers. They shall pitch from less than 40 feet and will observe the 27-foot foul line. At the World Tournament and at State Championship Tournaments, they shall compete in the Elders Division.

## **RULE 3 – GAME PREPARATION**

### **Section A – Court Assignment**

Each contestant shall find his or her court assignment and warm up on that court for their first game. The court shall be prepared for play in a timely manner so that all games can begin at about the same time.

### **Section B – Start of Game**

Each game will begin with the flip of a shoe or coin. The winner of the flip will have choice of first or second pitch.

### **Section C – Court Rotation**

After each game, contestants shall go promptly to their next assigned court and each shall prepare one pit for play, **but only after all games of that round are completed.** If, during the time it takes to complete a round, a contestant wants to practice, he/she shall practice on the court where they just finished their game so as not to cause a distraction by preparing a court near a game still in progress. After both pits have been prepared, the contestants have the option of pitching no more than four warm-up shoes, and then the next game must begin immediately.

## **RULE 4 – PLAY OF THE GAME AND VALUE OF THE SHOE**

### **Section A – Innings**

The game is broken down into innings. Each inning consists of four pitched shoes; two by each contestant.

### **Section B – Value of the Shoe**

1. **Ringer** – A ringer is a shoe that comes to rest while encircling the stake. A straightedge touching either the points or any part of the heel calks of the shoe must clear (not touch) the stake in order to be declared a ringer. A ringer has a value of three points.
2. **Shoe in Count** – A shoe that is not a ringer but comes to rest with any portion of it within six (6) inches of any part of the stake is a shoe “in count”. A shoe in count has a value of one point. A “leaner”, or any other shoe which is touching the stake (but not a ringer), is considered a shoe in count and has a value of one point.
3. **Shoe out of Count** – A shoe that comes to rest further than six (6) inches from the stake is a shoe out of count and has no scoring value. A foul shoe is also considered to be a shoe that is out of count, no matter where it comes to rest.

### Section C – Delivery of Shoes

1. The contestant pitching first shall deliver both shoes (one at a time) and then the other contestant shall deliver both shoes (one at a time). A contestant may deliver the shoes from either the left or right platform, but in any one inning, both shoes must be delivered from the same platform. A contestant shall pitch the entire tournament with the same hand or arm, except in the case of a medical emergency.
2. A contestant shall deliver both shoes within thirty (30) seconds. This time limitation shall be measured by a judge and will start when the contestant steps onto the platform with the intention of pitching.

#### Exceptions:

- Extra time will be allowed to repair a damaged shoe (filing a burr for example).
- If a player becomes distracted due to unusual playing conditions or by another contestant or spectator, they will not be penalized.

### Section D – Position of Contestants During Delivery

1. **The Pitcher** – During the entire address and release of a shoe, the pitcher must not start or step completely outside the platform with either foot.

#### Exceptions:

- A contestant observing the 37-foot foul line may start directly behind the platform provided they step within it when they release the shoe.
  - A physically-challenged contestant must have at least some contact with the platform and be completely behind the 27-foot foul line when the shoe is released.
2. **The Opponent** – An opponent’s position, when not pitching, shall be standing quietly and stationary on or behind the same court’s opposite platform and at least two (2) feet behind a contestant who is pitching from the same or adjacent court. In mixed-distance pitching, a short-distance pitcher who pitches first must return to this position, on or behind the 40-foot platform.

### Rule 5 – FLOW OF THE GAME

1. Once the four shoes in an inning have been pitched, the contestants shall walk to the opposite pit to determine the score for the inning and retrieve their shoes. No shoe shall be moved before its’ scoring value is determined. If the decision is in doubt, a judge shall be called. The judge shall make the necessary measurements and determine the scoring for the shoes in question. To help speed up play,

contestants are encouraged to carry measuring tools and to make their own decisions on scoring whenever possible. Play shall continue in a similar fashion for each inning until the game is completed.

2. No contestant shall walk to the opposite stake (except to remove a foul shoe) or be informed of the position of any pitched shoes prior to completion of an inning.
3. At any one time, a contestant shall carry and use only two sanctioned horseshoes during the course of a game. A spare shoe or shoes should be taken along to the courts in case of a broken shoe or if the contestant chooses to switch shoes. Shoes may be switched between innings, but not during an inning, unless a shoe breaks.
4. If it is discovered during an inning that a contestant has pitched the shoe of an opponent (and if the opponents agree), the remaining shoes may be pitched and the score will be based on the shoes they pitched. If the contestants do not agree on pitching the remaining shoes, then the shoes pitched shall be picked up and the entire inning shall be re-pitched, using the correct shoes.
5. When a contestant is measuring a shoe and the shoe (or the stake) is accidentally moved, the inning shall be scored only if the contestants can come to an agreement. If no agreement can be reached, a judge shall be called. The judge shall either determine the scoring or void the inning and order it to be re-pitched. When a judge is measuring a shoe and the shoe (or the stake) is accidentally moved, the judge shall either determine the scoring for the inning or void it and order it to be re-pitched.

**Exceptions:** Any shoes for which point values have been agreed upon by the contestants, such as ringers which may have been removed to measure other shoes, should not be re-pitched or have their value changed due to a re-pitch of other shoes. Only the shoe(s) in question when the shoe or stake was moved should be ordered re-pitched by the judge. If one or more shoes are below the shoe(s) in question, they shall remain in place for the re-pitch.

6. It is legal for a contestant to carry and use a blunt-ended hook or shoe pick-up device not exceeding thirty-six (36) inches in total length. Any hook cannot protrude more than two (2) inches from the main shaft. Care should be taken in using the hook so as not to endanger the opponent or other contestants. Contestants are also encouraged to carry a file and towel to keep their shoes burr-free and shoes and hands clean and dry.

## **RULE 6 – BROKEN OR CRACKED SHOES**

### **Section A. Broken Shoes**

1. If a shoe breaks into two or more parts as a result of striking the stake, striking another shoe in the pit, or from landing into the pitching substance, the parts shall be removed and another shoe shall be pitched in its place. If the shoe breaks when striking the backboard or other "foul" ground, it shall be considered a foul shoe and may not be re-pitched.
2. If a shoe has landed in the pit and becomes broken by having another shoe land on it, it shall be scored as it appears to lie. If there is any disagreement, a judge shall be called. The judge shall either determine the scoring for the inning or order the shoe to be re-pitched.

### **Section B. Cracked Shoes**

1. If a shoe is discovered to be cracked (but not completely broken into two or more parts), it shall be scored as it lies. Once the scoring is determined, the shoe shall be replaced.

## **RULE 7 – BROKEN STAKES**

A broken stake is defined as any stake not in the same position as when the game started, and when both contestants agree that it is broken. When the stake breaks during an inning, the game shall be discontinued at the end of the previous inning and the stake shall be replaced. If a stake breaks as the result of being struck by the fourth shoe of the inning, then the inning may be counted. If the contestants cannot agree on this, then a judge shall be called to determine the scoring for the inning or void it and order the inning to be re-pitched once the game resumes. Once the scoring for the inning is determined, the tournament officials may decide to complete the game on another court, resume play after the stake is replaced, or to complete the game at a later time. A judge or tournament official will notify the contestants about resumption of play.

## **RULE 8 – FOUL SHOE**

A foul shoe is a shoe that was delivered in non-compliance with one of the rules of the game. It scores as a shoe out of count and is to be removed from the pit (if it is in the scoring radius of the stake) before any more shoes are pitched. Shoes already in the pit that have been disturbed by a foul shoe are not to be removed, unless they were knocked into foul territory and are returned to the scoring area.

1. The following are rules violations that must be spotted and called by an assigned judge. The penalty is to declare the shoe a foul shoe.
  - a. Any shoe pitched when the contestant has stepped on or over the foul line before the shoe is released.
  - b. Any shoe pitched when the contestant has started or stepped completely outside the pitching platform with either foot before releasing the shoe.
  - c. Any shoe not delivered within the thirty-second time limit.
  - d. Any shoe pitched with the opposite hand/arm, unless there is an approved medical emergency.
  - e. The second shoe, if it is pitched from a different platform than the first shoe.
2. **The following occurrences are also considered foul shoes** and the shoes must be removed from the pit (if they are in the scoring radius of the stake) before any more shoes are delivered unless all competitors in that game agree to leave the shoe where it is.
  - a. Any shoe that contacts the backboard, platform, court frame, or any ground outside the pit area before it comes to rest.
  - b. Any shoe that strikes a previously-defined object such as a tree limb, wire, indoor court ceiling, etc.

**NOTE:** A shoe that strikes a foreign, moving object is not foul and may be re-pitched.

- c. The second shoe if the contestant changes shoes after the first shoe has been pitched. The only exception is if the first shoe has broken and qualifies for a re-pitch.
- d. Any shoe that leaves a contestant's hand once the final, forward swing of the delivery process has started shall count as a pitched shoe. A shoe that is accidentally dropped by a contestant before the final forward swing has started shall not be considered a foul shoe and may be picked up and pitched.
- e. A contestant's shoe(s), if the contestant removes any shoe before the scoring of that shoe has been agreed upon. If the contestants cannot agree, a judge shall be called to determine the scoring or may order the inning re-pitched.

**Note:** Shoes already in the pit area that may be disturbed by other live shoes or by a foul shoe are not to be removed, unless they were knocked into foul territory and then came to rest in the scoring area. They shall be scored “as they lie” after all shoes for the inning have been pitched.

## **RULE 9 - PROTESTS**

If a contestant desires to make a protest, the protest shall be made to the judge or tournament official(s) at the time the problem occurs. If the problem cannot be resolved on the courts, the tournament director or committee shall make the final ruling on all protests. This ruling may occur after the game has been completed.

## **RULE 10 – LENGTH OF THE GAME**

The length of a game and method for breaking ties shall be determined and announced by the tournament officials before play begins. There are three options:

1. **Point Limit** – The game shall be played to a pre-determined number of points. Forty (40) points is the suggested amount. The first contestant to reach (or exceed) that amount is the winner.
2. **Shoe Limit** – The game shall be played to a pre-determined number of shoes. Forty (40) or fifty (50) shoes is the suggested amount. It shall be an even number. When that number is reached, the contestant with the highest score is the winner. If the score is tied, there are three options:
  - a. Each contestant may receive  $\frac{1}{2}$  win and  $\frac{1}{2}$  loss. (This option should be used if a handicap system is in effect).
  - b. A one-inning tiebreaker may be played, using the same method of play that was used in the game. In the event of another tie, this same procedure shall be continued until the tie is broken. This is recommended for cancellation play.
  - c. A two-inning tiebreaker may be played, using the same method of play that was used to begin the game. In the event of another tie, this same procedure shall be continued until the tie is broken. This is recommended for count-all play.
3. **Point Limit or Shoe Limit** - For example, thirty-five (35) points or fifty (50) shoes, whichever comes first. In the event of a tie when the shoe limit is reached, each contestant may receive  $\frac{1}{2}$  win and  $\frac{1}{2}$  loss (this option should be used if a handicap system is in effect), **or** additional single innings may be played until the tie is broken.

## **RULE 11 – SCORING THE GAME**

There are two methods of scoring in horseshoes – cancellation and count-all.

1. **Cancellation Scoring** - In cancellation scoring, only one contestant can score in each inning.
  - a. **Ringers** – Ringers cancel each other. A ringer of one contestant shall cancel a ringer of the other contestant and those shoes shall not score any points. Any uncanceled (live) ringer scores three points.

- b. **Shoes in count** – A shoe “in count” must be within six inches of the stake and shall score one point under the following conditions:
1. If there are cancelled ringers and no live ringer, the closest shoe to the stake that is in count shall score one point.
  2. If there are no ringers, the closest shoe in count shall score one point. If the other shoe of that same contestant is the second closest shoe in count, it shall also score one point.
  3. If there is one uncanceled ringer and if the other shoe of the scoring contestant is the closest in-count shoe to the stake, it shall score one point (four points total).
  4. Opposing contestant’s shoes that are touching the stake, or that are in count and determined to be an equal distance from the stake, shall cancel each other and (like cancelled ringers) shall score no points. In this situation, the next closest shoe in count (if there is one) shall score one point.

## 2. Calling the Score

Points shall be awarded in the following situations. The contestant scoring the points shall call the score.

1. No ringers with the closest shoe in count – call “one point”.
2. No ringers with the two closest shoes in count – call “two points”.
3. One ringer with either no shoe in count or the other contestant having the closest shoe in count – call “one ringer, three points”.
4. One ringer with the closest shoe in count – call “one ringer, four points”.
5. Two cancelled ringers with the closest shoe in count – call “one ringer each, one point”.
6. Two cancelled ringers with one uncanceled ringer – call “three ringers, three points”.
7. Two uncanceled ringers – call “two ringers, six points”.

**Note:** No points shall be awarded in the following situations. The score shall be called by the contestant who pitched second in the previous inning. This contestant shall also pitch first in the next inning.

8. All four shoes out of count – call “no score”.
9. Two cancelled ringers with no shoes in count – call “one ringer each, no score”.
10. Two cancelled ringers with two shoes an equal distance from the stake or out of count – call “one ringer each, no score”.
11. Four cancelled ringers – call “four dead”.

## 3. Count-All Scoring

- a. Count-all scoring is where each contestant receives credit for each of his or her shoes that have scored, for all innings of the game. Each contestant may score zero, one, two, three, four or six points per inning.

- b. Count-all scoring can also be used where the contestants only receive credit for the *ringers* they pitch, for all innings of the game. This format may be called a “Ringers Only” game. Each contestant may score zero, one, or two points per inning. This type of scoring should generally be limited to higher-percentage classes.

#### **4. Recording the Score**

Care should be taken in reporting the scores to the scorekeeper so that the proper score is recorded for each contestant. In tournament play, the score sheet (not the scoring device) shall be the official record of the game. Contestants are encouraged to pay close attention to the score at all times. If a question or discrepancy occurs regarding the correct score, the contestants may approach the scorer between innings or during their half inning to clarify the situation. If the discrepancy cannot be corrected to the satisfaction of both contestants, a tournament judge shall be called to make the final decision.

### **RULE 12 – PITCHING ROTATION DURING THE GAME**

#### **Section A. - Cancellation Rotation**

If the game is to be played under cancellation scoring, there are two ways to determine who shall pitch first in the next inning, (insert comma) once the game has started. The method to be used shall be determined before play begins.

1. **Cancellation Play** – The contestant who scored in the preceding inning shall pitch first in the next inning. If neither pitcher scores, the contestant who pitched last in the preceding inning shall pitch first in the next inning.
2. **Alternate Pitch** – Alternate first pitch is used to guarantee each contestant an equal number of first and second pitches during a game. It can be done in three ways. If the game is to be played to a shoe limit, it is recommended that the limit be a number divisible by four.
  - a. One contestant shall pitch first in innings 1,4,5,8,9,12,13,16,17, etc. while the other contestant shall pitch first in innings 2,3,6,7,10,11,14,15, etc. until the game is completed. This is the fairest way and is recommended.
  - b. One contestant shall pitch first in innings 1,2,5,6,9,10,13,14, etc. while the other contestant shall pitch first in innings (insert “s”) 3,4,7,8,11,12,15,16, etc. until the game is completed.
  - c. One opponent shall pitch first from one end of the court and the opponent shall pitch first from the opposite end.

#### **Section B. – Count-All Rotation**

Any game played using count-all scoring shall be played under an alternate-pitch format, described above in Section A, 2.

#### **Section C – Handicap Rotation**

Any game played under any kind of handicap system shall use an alternate pitch format.

## **Section D – Out of Turn Rotation**

If it is discovered during an inning (before all four shoes are pitched) that the wrong contestant has pitched first, the shoes pitched so far in that inning shall be re-pitched. If the error is not discovered until after all four shoes have been delivered, they shall be scored as they lie and the correct rotation shall be re-established for the rest of the game.

## **RULE 13 – APPROPRIATE NHPA MEMBER CONDUCT**

### **Section A. On the courts:**

An NHPA member, while in competition, shall make no disturbing noises or movements that would distract the opponent or competitors on adjacent courts. Other inappropriate behavior would include profanity, abusive language, obscene gestures, etc. The first offense shall call for a warning from the judge or a tournament official. A second offense shall call for a forfeiture of the game being played. Any further offenses shall call for a forfeiture of all games. This member shall also be subject to a one-year suspension from the NHPA.

### **Section B. Sportsmanship:**

Any NHPA member who indulges in heckling, unfair rooting, or any other form of un-sportsmanlike conduct toward any NHPA member or tournament official, shall be subject to expulsion from the tournament and from the tournament site. This covers any inappropriate behavior in the area of the courts, such as profanity, abusive language, obscene gestures, etc. This member shall also be subject to a one-year suspension from the NHPA.

### **Section C. Dress Code:**

All pitchers competing in a World Tournament shall have, as a minimum, their last name and State or Country abbreviation professionally lettered on the back of their shirts. Said shirts cannot be sleeveless. No cut-offs are permitted and closed-toe shoes must be worn. Further dress code restrictions can be imposed by the Executive Council if all entrants are notified no later than the mailing date of their pitching schedules. This dress code may also be enforced at any State or Regional Tournament or at any local sanctioned event, but must be announced in advance by the Tournament Director or Tournament Committee.

### **Section D. Alcohol, Tobacco Products, and Illegal Controlled Substances:**

The use of Alcohol, any form of Tobacco, or Illegal Controlled Substances while in the confines of courts shall be prohibited for all contestants, officials, and scorekeepers.

### **Section E. Cell Phones:**

As a courtesy to other pitchers, the use of cell phones shall not be allowed on the courts.

## **RULE 14 – TOURNAMENT PLAY**

### **Section A. Standard Method of Sanction Tournament Play:**

The standard method of NHPA sanctioned tournament play is round-robin play with contestants being seeded into classes. Each contestant will play all other contestants in the class. Court assignments and the order of play will follow a printed schedule, given to each contestant at the beginning of the contest.

### **Section B. Determining Class Winners**

At the end of round-robin play, win-loss records or ringer percentage shall determine class winners. In addition, total points may be used if the scoring was done using the count-all method. If ties occur, they shall be settled by playoff, who-beat-whom or one of the other methods that was not used to determine the winner. The tournament committee shall decide how winners are to be determined and how ties are to be broken and announce these procedures before tournament play begins. If playoff games take place, the method of play and the length of the games shall be decided by the tournament director or tournament committee.

### **Section C. Ringer Percentage**

A contestant's ringer percentage shall be determined by dividing the total number of ringers by the total number of shoes pitched. Shoes pitched in playoff games and in extra innings pitched because of tie games shall be included in these totals.

### **Section D. Seeding Contestants**

The rules used to seed contestants in all NHPA sanctioned tournaments are found in Articles X-XII of the NHPA Bylaws. In addition, rules regarding game length and format and tie-breaking situations in State, Regional, National, and World Championship play are found in the same Articles.

### **Section E. Handicapping**

Handicapping may be used in open tournaments and in league play. The tournament director or tournament committee shall determine the amount of the handicap. Class winners will be determined by win-loss record or by total points. An alternate pitch format shall be used. Game handicapping shall not be used in any World, National, or Regional Tournament or in the championship class of a designated division of any State Championship Tournament.