

# Rules of Horseshoes

The two metal posts in horseshoes are situated forty feet apart. Ideally the ground between the two stakes should be level. Classically the ground around the stakes may be sandy, but is nearly always loose dirt. If this area is not dug up, a few games with horseshoes flying into the pit, will likely convert the ground. The area around the stake is called a pit and may be surrounded by heavy wooden frame built level to the ground, and may even have a sturdy wooden backstop.



Two persons, or two teams of two persons each may play the game.

The players begin by choosing a set of two horseshoes based on color, traditionally green or red. Horseshoes will also be marked with an "A" or "B" in anticipation of the inevitable time when the paint is worn from the sets. The player to throw or pitch first is determined. This can be done by chance, or a pitch of one horseshoe from each player with the player getting closest to the stake determining the beginning order of play. (There is no scoring advantage to pitching first or last.)

The pitching line is within three feet of the player's own stake, or approximately 37 feet from the stake towards which he is throwing. Players should at all times be aware when horseshoes are being pitched. Even the best horseshoe pitcher may sometimes throw a wild horseshoe. The large, heavy, metal object can cause serious injury even when flipped sideways and rolling along the ground. The

best position for other players and spectators is behind the pitcher or out of range of wild pitches. Other adjustments can be made to move the foul line for other players. Children nine or under can pitch from the half-way point (20 feet). Juniors and women may pitch from anywhere behind the 27 foot line.

The first pitcher throws two consecutive horseshoes at the opposite stake. All other players and spectators should remain silent to avoid distracting the pitcher. The object of the pitcher is to get the horseshoe as close as possible to the stake, or better yet, to score a ringer by situating the horseshoe so that the stake is between the two arms of the shoe. If a straight line is drawn from tip to tip of the arms of the horseshoe, the line should not touch the stake. The term "ringer" has two meanings. One, the horseshoe seems to wrap around or ring the stake. Also a ringer will often hit the stake and cause a ringing or clanking noise.

Once the first player has pitched. The second player throws his two horseshoes. (When both players have tossed, this is called an inning.) Again, getting as close to the stake as possible. When all four shoes have been tossed, the shoes are examined to determine any points to be awarded. There are two methods of scoring in horseshoes. Some tournaments and individual players insist that all points are counted. This means all ringers count for three, and all shoes within six inches of the stake (including those touching or leaning on the stake) count as one point. More commonly cancellation scoring is used.

## Cancellation Scoring Method

When cancellation scoring is used, only one player may score during any particular inning. This means when both players have a ringer that the ringers cancel each other and no points are awarded for the ringers. If one player throws two ringers and the other throws one, the result is only three points for the player who pitched the two ringers.

Next, any shoes pitched within six inches of the stake are examined (viable pitched shoes most often are determined by using the width of the front arms of another horseshoe placed between the stake and the pitched shoe). If there are no ringers the closest horseshoe within six inches of the stake counts one point. If the same player has another viable shoe closer than any of the opponent's other shoes he gets an additional point. However, if the opponent has another shoe between two of the player's viable shoes only one point is scored for the player. It might be convenient to think of the ringer as the closest shoe (but counting three points). In the case of a player having a ringer, the opponent having the next closest viable shoe and the player having another viable shoe, only the three points for the ringer are scored. But if the next viable shoe is closer than the opponent's a total of 4 points would be scored. Ties simply do not count for any scoring.

## **Foul or Dead Shoes**

In official tournaments there are many reasons to call a shoe dead:

- Any shoe that hits the backstop or rolls outside of the pit.
- A second shoe tossed with a different hand than the first shoe.
- A shoe striking any permanent object (like a phone wire).
- A shoe striking an incidental moving object (like an invading soccer ball) is not foul, and may be pitched again.
- If the second shoe is pitched from another platform than the first shoe.

Dead shoes should be removed immediately. However, if they should hit another shoe in their ramblings, that affected shoe will be scored as it lies, whether or not it was moved by the dead shoe before or after it became dead.

## **How Winner Is Determined**

Typically, the player or team scoring last will pitch first in the next inning. This is not a hard and fast rule, as tossing first or second has no scoring advantage, though pitching second may have a psychological edge. Before the game begins the players should have agreed on the length of the game. Most often a goal is selected, usually, 21 to 40 points. But a number of innings may also be played to determine the winner. In cancellation scoring a tie at the goal is impossible. However, a tie when the game is based on number of innings may occur. In which case the players may accept the tie as a result or play "sudden death" with the player first scoring more than his opponent being declared the winner.