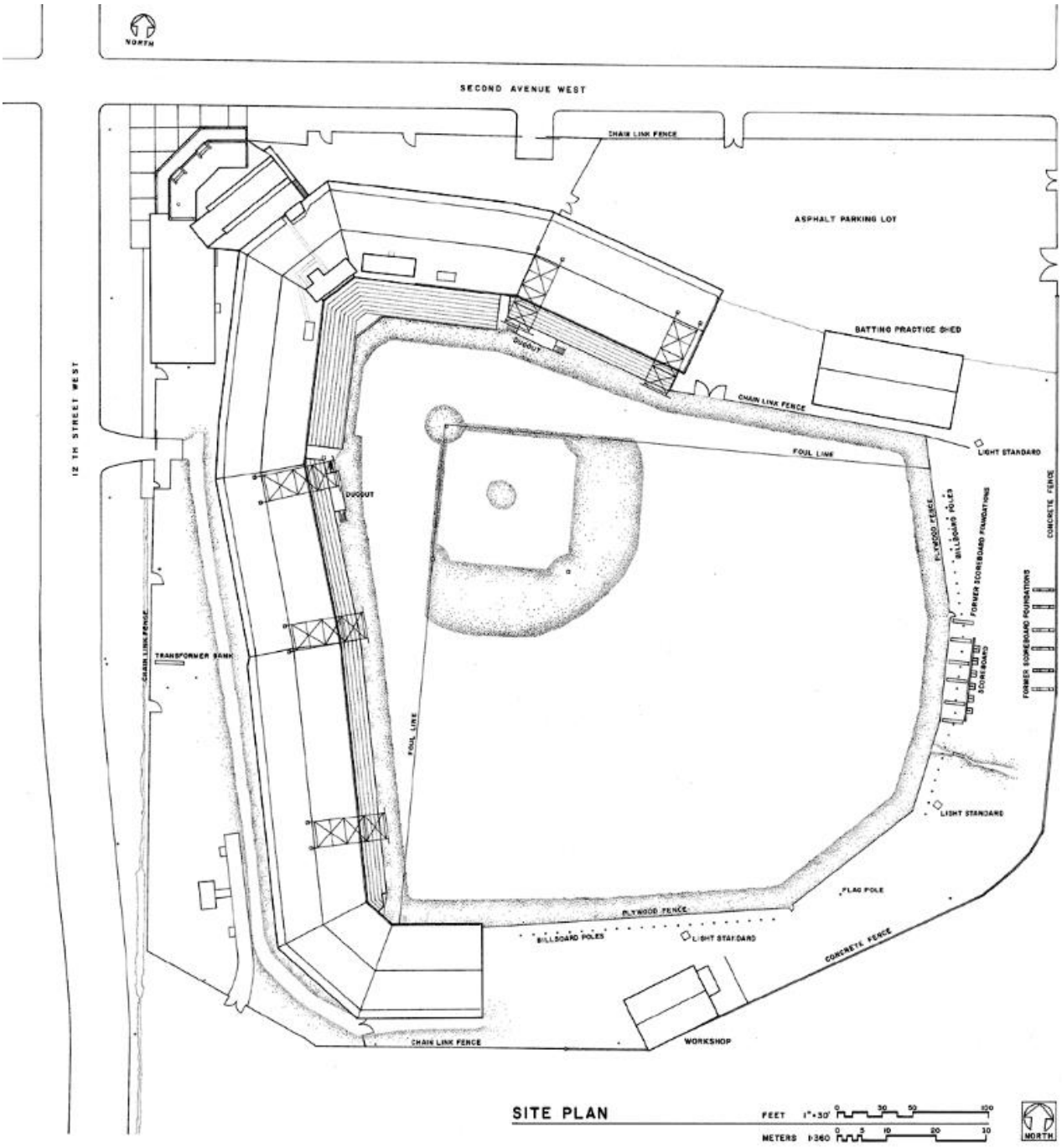
Alabama Public Television Education

Rickwood Field: Designing A Baseball Field

Postcard of "Opening Day at Rickwood Base Ball Park, Birmingham, Ala." Published by S. H. Kress & Co. (A-11953) between 1910 and 1912.

When Rickwood Field opened on August 18, 1910, the people of Birmingham were so excited that the businesses closed all over town so that fans could fill the park. The Birmingham News front page described the crowd as "…the greatest crowd in all the history of Southern baseballdom-the largest assemblage of fan-folk that ever held forth under one roof…" The park was described in the Birmingham New as "…the newest and best baseball park in all the Southland." Its dimensions were spectacular at the time with 405 feet to the left field fence, 470 feet to center field, and 334 feet to right field.

This is the original blueprint of Rickwood Field:



Site Plan. portion of Drawing Sheet 2 of 22. "Rickwood Field, 1137 2nd Avenue West, Birmingham, Jefferson County, Alabama" Historic American Buildings Survey. National Park Service. John P. White, delineator. Birmingham District Recording Project 1993. AL 897.

How Does the Original Rickwood Field Compare to Today's Major League and Little League Baseball Fields?

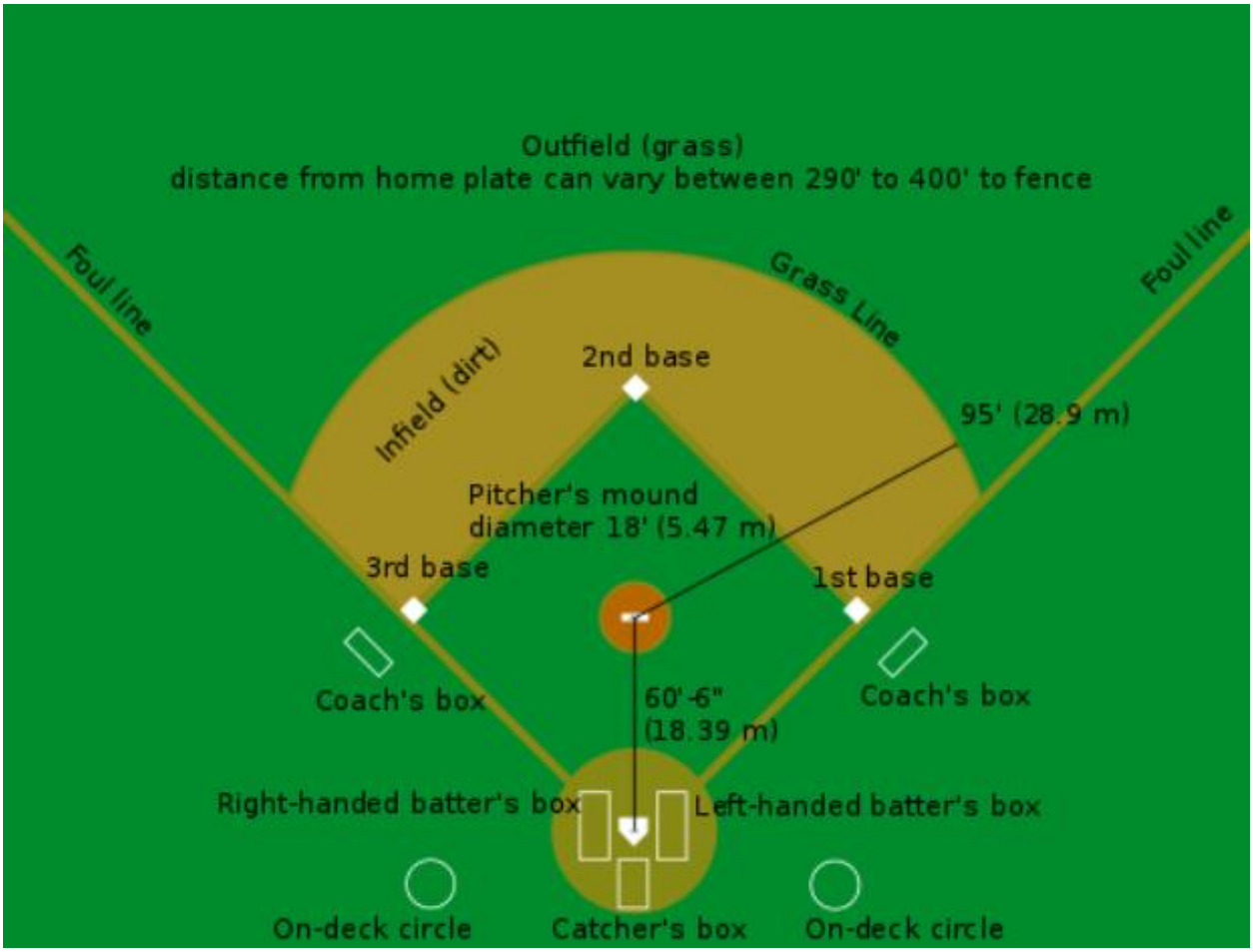
Today's major league baseball fields are required to follow certain specifications so that the games are equally challenging on every field. According to the Major League Baseball organization, ballparks, while not alike, must have certain regulated parts:

> "The infield must be a square that is 90 feet on each side, and the outfield is the area between the two foul lines formed by extending two sides of said square (though the dirt portion of the field that runs well past the 90-foot basepaths in all Major League parks is also commonly referred to as the infield). The field must be constructed so that the bases are the same level as home plate.
>
> The rulebook states that parks constructed by professional teams after June 1, 1958, must have a minimum distance of 325 feet between home plate and the nearest fence, stand or other obstruction on the right- and left-field foul lines, and 400 feet between home plate and the nearest fence, stand or other obstruction in center field."

The average major league baseball field today measured from home plate is 331.5 feet to the left field, 405 feet to the center field, and right field distance is 327 feet.

The best and strongest baseball players can hit a ball between 550-575 feet. But things such as wind, sea level, air density and humidity can all affect the distance that a baseball can travel. Babe Ruth of the New York Yankees, hit a ball 575 feet in 1921! (This was before camera and radar systems were used, so even though he holds the number one position for the longest home run, the measurement is often questioned.) More recently, Jesu´s Sa´nchez of the Miami Marlins hit a homerun that traveled 496 feet.

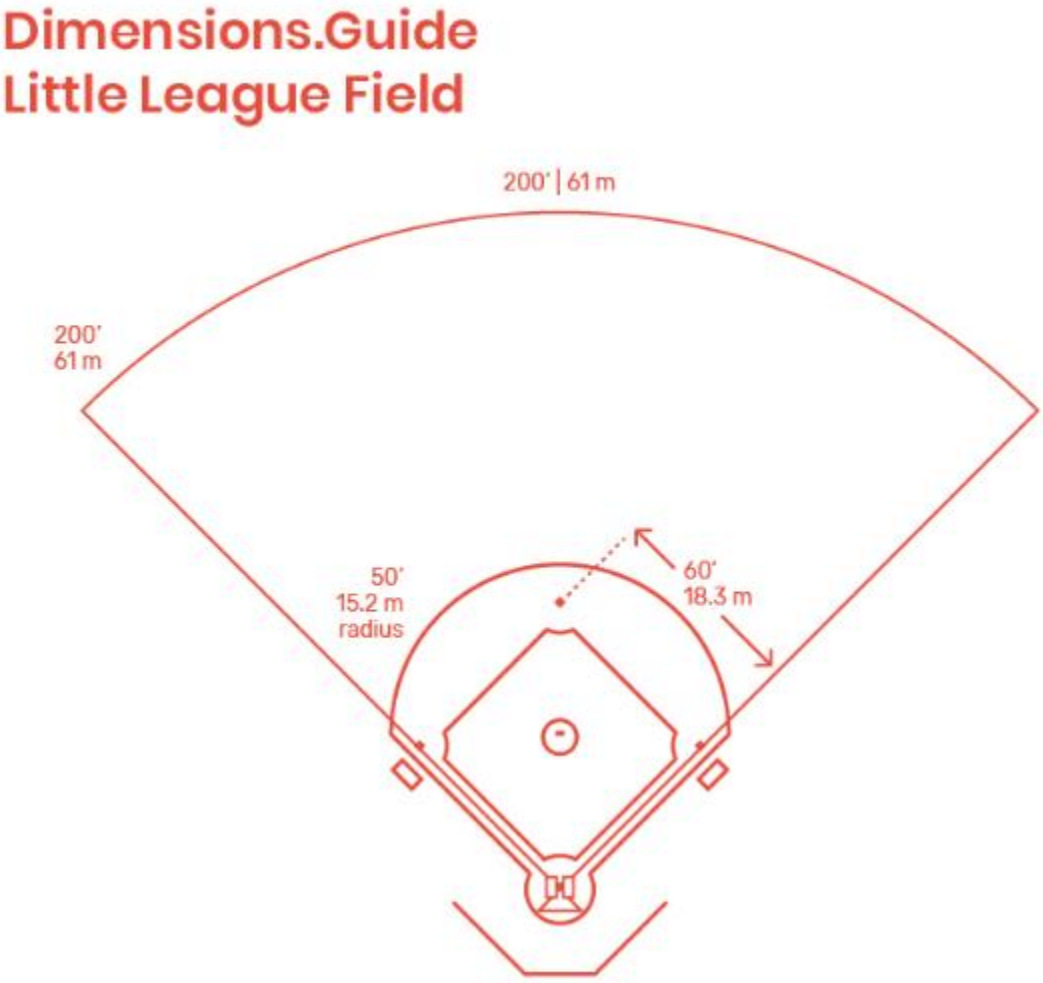
Here are the measurements for a Major League Baseball field today:



MLB Field Dimensions

How Does the Original Rickwood Field Compare to a Little League Field?

Little League field measurements are also standardized to ensure that players practice and play on fields that are like each other. However, there are adaptations made to fit the ages of the players. Little League is played by children between the ages of 9 and 12 years old. Here are the measurements for a Little League Baseball Field: 60 feet between the bases and 46 feet from the pitcher's mound to home plate. According the to the Little League World Series directors, some of the best 12-year-olds in the Little League World Series can hit a ball 250-265 feet.



Little League Baseball Field Dimensions

Activity: Are There Differences?

Directions: With a partner, compare the measurements of the original Rickwood Field to Major League Baseball field requirements and to Little League Baseball field requirements today. Answer the following questions:

1. Are there measurement differences between these fields?
2. Describe the measurement differences between the fields. (For example: How much longer is Rickwood Field and a Major League Baseball field compared to a Little League Baseball field?)
3. Research the base distances for both a Major League Baseball field and a Little League Baseball field. What are the differences?
4. If you were building a baseball park, what kinds of structures, outside of the field, would you need to construct? List these structures. (Would you include enclosed dugouts? Batting cages? Bleachers (covered or uncovered)? Public bathrooms? Concession stands? Parking?)
5. How much land would you need to build your proposed baseball field? (Important information: The length and width of an acre is 66 feet X 660 feet.)

In the next activity, you will create your own baseball park!

Activity: Design Your Own Baseball Park

With a partner, you will design your own baseball field. You can choose to design a Major League Baseball field or a Little League Baseball field.

Materials needed:

- Ruler
- Paper (Chart paper may be used.)
- Pencil

Directions:

- Measure one acre on your paper. (You will use a specific scale: 1 inch will equal 10 feet on the field.)
- Using the internet, conduct some research on one Major League Baseball field or the Howard J. Lamade Stadium located in South Williamsport, Pennsylvania where the Little League World Series is played.
- Draw your baseball field with the measurements for a Major League Baseball field or a Little League Baseball field. Be sure to measure and label the bases, the pitcher's mound, the infield, the outfield, the coaches' boxes, the on-deck site for right and left-handed batters, the warmup area for pitchers, the grass line, the fence, and the foul lines.
- Create a name for your field and write it across the top of your paper.
- Create a logo for your field and include it with the name of your paper.
- Think about the things that you listed above that you would like to include in your baseball park. With your partner choose two or more items and draw them in your baseball park. Do you need more than one acre to create your ballpark?

Things to Think About

1. How might a baseball park improve a community?
2. What kind of support might a community offer to assist you in the building of your ballpark?
3. If you were asked to vote for a special tax for a ballpark, would you vote for it or against it? Explain your answer.