

**THE OFFICIAL PLAYING RULES, GUIDELINES, AND SPECIFICATIONS  
FOR THE SPORT OF HORSESHOE PITCHING  
(aka The RGS Book)**

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**SPECIFICATIONS** – The Specifications Section includes information about specific measurement requirements for equipment and for court layout (including Covered and Indoor Courts), the sanctioning of horseshoes and courts, and the allowable repairs for horseshoes. Diagrams are included here (see back covers), but for individuals or clubs that are constructing new courts, detailed plans can be found on the NHPA website at [www.horseshoepitching.com](http://www.horseshoepitching.com).

## **I – EQUIPMENT SPECIFICATIONS**

### **SECTION A – Sanctioned Horseshoes** (also see diagram on the inside, back cover)

All horseshoe designs and prototypes must be approved and sanctioned by the NHPA before the shoes they represent can officially be manufactured and used in NHPA sanctioned competition. The maximum weight and measurement standards are as follows: The horseshoe weight shall not be more than two (2) pounds, ten (10) ounces (there is no minimum weight). No horseshoe can exceed seven and one-quarter inches (7-1/4") in width or seven and five-eighths inches (7-5/8") in length. The opening of the shoe must not exceed three and one-half inches (3-1/2"), measured from a parallel line three-fourths of an inch (3/4") inward from a straightedge touching the tips of the shoe points (a one-eighth inch (1/8") tolerance to three and five-eighths inches (3-5/8") is allowed on used shoes). No part of any horseshoe shall exceed one inch (1") in height when placed, with calks down, on a level surface. Shoes not meeting these requirements shall be declared "illegal". Illegal shoes 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, before or during competition, to verify that they are legal shoes. A judge or other Tournament/League Official will do this checking. (see Bylaws, Standing Rules 7 & 8 for additional information)

### **SECTION B – Altered Horseshoes**

Any sanctioned shoe that has been changed from its original design (calk, notch, etc.) shall be considered an "altered" shoe. An "altered" shoe is illegal and cannot be used in any sanctioned event. Contestants using altered shoes in a sanctioned event shall be subject to penalties, which could include a one (1) year suspension from the NHPA (see Bylaws for additional information). **Note:** The NHPA Executive Council has the right to waive the "altered" shoe provision for a physically challenged contestant.

### **SECTION C – Legal Horseshoe Repair**

Through prolonged use, horseshoes may become bent or warped and "mushrooming" or "roll-over" may occur on the inside of the "toe" area, or elsewhere. Horseshoes may also crack or break into two or more parts. When possible, these conditions may be corrected by filing, grinding, heating, pounding, or welding of the shoes, so long as the original design of the shoe is not altered in the process and so long as they still meet all of the measurement requirements for NHPA sanctioned horseshoes. (see Section A above)

### **Section D – Horseshoes Sanctioned in Other Countries**

Any horseshoes sanctioned in other countries may be used during NHPA sanctioned play, but only by contestants from that country, and only if the shoes meet NHPA horseshoe specifications. They are not allowable for use by U.S. citizens in NHPA sanctioned events unless the horseshoes have also been sanctioned by the NHPA. (see Section A above)

### **Section E – Pitching Accessories**

It is legal for a contestant to carry and use a blunt-ended hook or horseshoe pick-up device, but it cannot exceed thirty-six inches (36") in total length. Any hook cannot protrude more than two inches (2") 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.

## **II – SPECIFICATIONS FOR COURT LAYOUT** (also see diagram on back cover)

### **SECTION A - Sanctioning of Courts**

Court conditions inconsistent with the NHPA specifications listed below are discouraged primarily because of the need to standardize the conditions and results of play for everyone.

1. **Full Court Sanction** – Courts that meet all of the specifications listed below in Section B may receive a Full Court Sanction Certificate from the Regional Director of that Charter, once these specifications are verified. Any sanctioned event may be contested on these fully sanctioned courts.
2. **Conditional Court Sanction**
  - a. **Permanent Ground Level Courts** – The NHPA recognizes that while some older courts may not meet all of the specifications listed below in Section B, they may meet the fundamental requirements of pitching distances, minimum pit dimensions, stake dimensions and placement, and legal pit substances called for in these specifications. Accordingly, such existing courts may receive a Conditional Court Sanction Certificate from the Regional Director of that Charter. At such time that the courts are modified or re-built to meet *all* of the court specifications (see Section B), the courts may then qualify for Full Court Sanction Certification. Any sanctioned event may be contested on conditionally sanctioned, permanent courts *except* State, Regional, or World Championship events, which must be contested on fully sanctioned courts (see Section D for exceptions).
  - b. **Portable Raised Pits** – Any sanctioned event may be contested on approved Portable Raised Pits. (see Section C, below).
3. **Court Complexes** – Since only one court sanction certificate will be issued in locations where there are multiple courts, *all* courts within the complex must meet the minimum specification requirements of pitching distances, pit dimensions, stake dimensions and placement, and legal pit substances, for the issuance of a Conditional Court Sanction Certificate. Likewise, *all* courts within a court complex must meet *all* of the specifications listed below, in Section B, to qualify for the issuance of a Full Court Sanction Certificate by the Charter/Regional Director. **Note:** All sanctioned events must be contested on fully or conditionally sanctioned courts.

## SECTION B – Court Specifications

1. **Court Dimensions** – The rectangular playing area of a horseshoe court shall be six feet (6') wide and forty-six feet (46') long. An additional two feet (2') of buffer zone, along each side and behind each pitching box, is recommended for safety reasons. This combination of measurements results in an overall court area that is ten feet (10') wide and fifty feet (50') long. All surfaces within this area shall be level. A north-south orientation for outdoor courts is recommended, to minimize the effects of sunlight.
2. **Court Surfaces** – There are no specific court surface material requirements other than the use of suitable pit substances (see #9, below). The same surface material should be used for all pitching platforms and crossover areas surrounding the pit. For outdoor courts, recommended materials for all walkways, platforms, and crossover areas include concrete or paved asphalt. For indoor courts, concrete, wood, or suitable carpeting is recommended for all platforms and crossover areas. Other court surfaces may consist of any natural or man-made material, so long as it provides a safe, non-skid surface. Suitable drainage of surface water away from pits and platforms is recommended for outdoor courts. Shrubs, signs or other objects must not block the view of pitchers or interfere with their necessary movements on the court.
3. **Multiple Courts** – In facilities with multiple courts, the following layout guidelines shall be observed:
  - a. **Side-by-side Courts** – For safety reasons and to minimize distractions, the stakes of adjacent courts must be no closer than ten feet (10') apart. A distance of twelve feet (12') is recommended.
  - b. **Back-to-back Courts** – The stakes of back-to-back courts must be a minimum of sixteen feet (16') apart and a visual and protective barrier (a minimum of six feet (6') high is recommended) must separate the courts.
4. **Pitcher's Box** - The pitcher's box is a six-foot (6') by six-foot (6') area at each end of the court. It is composed of two main parts: The Pit, and the Pitching Platforms. The back of each box should be forty-six feet (46') from the back of the opposite box.
  - a. **The Pit** - The pit is a rectangular area filled with the "pit substance" into which the shoes are pitched. The *maximum inside length* of the pit (in the direction in which the shoes are pitched) is seventy-two inches (72") and the *minimum inside length* is forty-three inches. (43") The *maximum inside width* is thirty-six inches (36") and the *minimum inside width* is thirty-one inches (31"). The pits shall be centered on the courts' lengthwise centerline, which is also midway between the full-distance pitching platforms. For safety reasons, the use of sideboards to contain pit material is not recommended. If used, they shall not exceed a height of seven inches (7"). **Note:** The areas behind and in front of the pit are referred to as "crossover" areas (also see RULE 3, Section D.3).
  - b. **Pitching Platforms**
    1. **Full-Distance Pitching Platforms** These pitching platforms flank each side of both pits and are parallel to each other. They shall be eighteen inches (18") to twenty and one-half inches (20-1/2") wide (depending upon the width of the pit) and shall be a minimum of six feet (6') long.
    2. **Short-Distance Pitching Platforms and Walkways** – The pitching platforms, on each side of both pits, shall be extended forward for the full length of the court to provide a continuous walkway and to

accommodate short-distance pitchers. These platforms shall be level with and be of the same width as the full-distance platforms. The surface material should be the same as the full-distance pitching platforms.

5. **Imaginary Stakes** - Imaginary stakes are a useful reference, for short-distance pitchers, on where to stand. They shall be marked (often by a spot of paint or other marker of the same diameter as the official stake) midway between the extended platforms, or on the inside edge of the extended platforms, at distances of thirty feet (30') and twenty-three feet (23') from the opposite stake.
6. **Stakes** - The stake is the target at which the shoe is pitched. Stakes shall be positioned in the very center of the pitcher's box, on the court's lengthwise centerline, with a minimum of twenty-one inches (21") from the stake to the front and back of the pit substance. The distance between stakes shall be forty feet (40'). This distance is to be measured from the front of each stake, level with the pitching platform. Stakes shall be one inch (1") in diameter and shall be made of cold-rolled steel, mild iron, soft metal, or NHPA-approved synthetic material. The top of each stake shall be no less than fourteen inches (14") and no greater than fifteen inches (15") above the level of the pitching platforms (see exception for raised pits in Section C, below). Stakes shall be securely mounted (see diagrams on back covers) and have a three inch (3") lean toward the opposite stake.
7. **Foul Lines** – Foul lines shall be defined by straight lines extending across the full-distance and extended platforms and shall be placed perpendicular to an imaginary line between the stakes. The thirty-seven foot (37') and twenty-seven foot (27') foul lines shall be measured from the front of the opposite stakes. A single, twenty-foot (20') foul line shall be marked on each platform at the exact mid-point between the stakes. Foul lines shall be measured at the level of the pitching platforms (see exception for "Raised Pits" in Section C, below). While the width of foul lines may vary (two inches (2") is recommended), their location shall be marked in a way that is clearly visible to the pitchers and judges.
8. **Backstops/Backboards and Protective Barrier**
  - a. **Backstops/Backboards** – For safety reasons, every pit should have a backstop/backboard. It shall be at least three feet (3') behind the stake, be at least one foot (1') high, and extend to the width of the pit. For spectator visibility, a mesh netting or chain-link material is recommended. If made of solid material, it should be a color that will provide a contrasting background so as to make the stake more visible for the contestants. **Note:** The backboards of raised pits are usually attached to the inside of the wooden framework and may therefore be as close as twenty-one inches (21") to the stake.
  - b. **Protective Barrier** – For safety reasons, all court complexes shall be surrounded by a protective barrier. This barrier should be at least eight feet (8') behind the stakes. A chain-link type of fence at least four feet (4') high is recommended.
9. **Pit Substance** - Clay, sand, dirt and NHPA-approved synthetic materials are all legal pit substances. The *minimum* depth of the pit substance shall be four inches (4"). An eight inch (8") depth is recommended for ground-level pits.
10. **Overhead Court Clearances** – The air space above all courts shall be free of all natural or man-made objects such as tree limbs, wires, etc. for a height of at least twelve feet (12') above the playing area.

## SECTION C – Raised Pits

Also known as temporary or portable pits, raised pits are often used for events of a relatively short duration such as the world tournament, a local fair, or an exhibition. Normally constructed of treated plywood and framing lumber (2X4s and/or 2X6s), the height of the pit framework shall not be more than seven inches (7") above the level of the adjacent platforms. For sanctioned events, the minimum inside dimensions shall be the same as stated in Section B, 4.a above. After the proper positioning of the pits (see positioning of stakes in Section B.6, above), foul lines shall be measured from the bottom of the stake, before the approved pit substance is added. The pits should be anchored in such a way that they will not move during their use. The top of each stake shall be no less than eighteen inches (18") and no greater than nineteen inches (19") above the inside, bottom of the pit. The pit substance in the scoring area surrounding the stake shall be maintained at a depth of four inches (4"), between games.

**SECTION D – Court Sanction Waiver** – Some Court Sanction requirements may be waived by the Regional Director and/or the NHPA Council under special circumstances (see GUIDELINES, PART II, #5, Section B, and Regional Director Guidelines).

## SECTION E – Specifications For Covered and Indoor Courts

The regulations for covered and indoor courts are exactly the same as for permanent ground level courts with the additional stipulation that they shall have a minimum twelve-foot (12') vertical clearance to the lowest possible obstruction.