

Brännboll: The rules for the casual viewer

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Raymond Chen

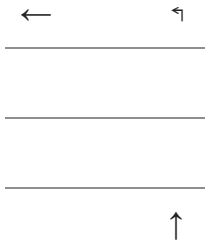
Brännboll is a Swedish bat-and-ball game. The name is pronounced “brennboll” and literally means “burn-ball” because the term for being “out” in Nordic countries literally translates as “burnt”.

Brännboll is a casual game, so house rules are common. Petri Oksanen notes that it is common in Swedish schools, and at “poorly planned social outings at workplaces.” It was that last description that convinced me to cover the game of brännboll.¹

There is an annual world championship in Umeå, and the rules here are taken primarily from the rules for the 2016 tournament, supplemented by the game description in the English and Swedish Wikipedia entries for brännboll. I also watched YouTube videos of brännboll games to get a sense for the flow of the game and to clarify things that were still unclear after reading the rules.

- One team bats (**innelaget**: the “in” team) and the other is in the field (**utelaget**: the “out” team). Gloves are not worn.
- The batting plate is the vertex of a wedge-shaped playing area. The central angle is approximately 50 degrees, but in informal games it can exceed 90 degrees. There is no rear boundary in theory, but 90 meters is typically sufficient.
- The bases are cones arranged counter-clockwise to form the corners of a rectangle. First and fourth bases are outside the playing area, and the second and third bases inside.
- From the fielding team, the catcher (**brännare**: the “burner”) stands at the burning plate (**brännplatta**) a few meters from the batting plate; the others arrange themselves anywhere beyond the short-hit line (**kortslagslinjen**).

- A runner is at a base if they are within the opposite angle of the basepath's interior. In other words, the green area in the diagram below:



- Multiple runners may occupy one base.
- At the start of each period, the batting team may place up to two runners at first base. (Some rules do not grant free runners.) The remaining members of the batting team form a batting queue.
- The ball is similar to a tennis ball. The bat has a fabric loop which must be wrapped around the batter's wrist.
- The batter (**slagmannen**) stands on the batting plate and tosses or bounces the ball into the air, and then hits it. One-handed and two-handed batting are both common.
- The batter has two chances to make a valid hit. (The number of chances varies from one to three, depending on rules.) If unable, the batter is burnt and goes to first base, and the fielding team scores a point.
- For a hit to be valid, it must be struck below shoulder height² and hit the ground inside the playing area beyond the short-hit line (**kortslagslinjen**).
- When the ball is hit, the batter drops the bat and runs to first base. Other runners may at their option attempt to advance one or more bases.
- When the ball is retrieved and thrown to the catcher, the catcher steps on the burning base and shouts "bränd" (burned). Any runner not at a base has been burnt, and the fielding team scores a point for each burnt runner.
- A runner who is burnt returns to first base. (Some rules send the runner to the last safely-reached base.)
- A runner who reaches the fourth base scores a lap (**varv**), worth one point. The runner then rejoins the batting queue.
- A batter who hits the ball and runs all the bases scores six points. (Unclear if this includes or is in addition to the one point for reaching fourth base.)
- If a catch (**lyra**) is made before the ball hits the ground, the fielding team scores a point. (Some rules award a bonus point for a one-handed catch.)
- A ball hit outside the playing area may be caught, in which case the batter is burnt.
- Runners may leave their bases as soon as the ball is validly hit, even if it is caught.
- If the batting queue is empty, a burn-out (**utebränning**) is declared. The fielding team scores 5 points, plus one for each runner. (Some rules omit the runner bonus.) Play resumes as if the period had just started.

- Penalties for infractions take the form of point penalties or awards, or (for runners) being returned to first base.
- The teams switch roles after a twelve-minute period. The game ends after each team has had one turn at bat and one turn in the field. (Some rules give each team two turns at bat and two turns in the field.) In the case of a tie, the winner is the team who was last in the field.

The 2017 finals ended with a close play at fourth base. That final play also clarified whether runners are obligated to run: They are not. Two of the runners at third base chose not to run on that final hit.

I may very well have misinterpreted some of the rules. Corrections are welcome.

¹ There is a German variant named *brennball* (pronounced the same, with the same literal meaning). There was no corresponding funny German description of the game to convince me to include it. However, the rules are pretty much identical to the Swedish game. If you are invited to a brennball game, just play according to the brännboll rules. If you accidentally break a rule that is different, pretend you're Swedish.

² I originally mistranslated the rule “Om bollen träffas över axelhöjd” as “If the ball is *hit* above shoulder height,” thinking that this meant that the ball could not be hit high in the air. After watching some videos where balls were clearly hit high into the air, I came back to this rule and realized that even though *träffas* does mean “hit”, it means specifically “to make contact”, rather than “the path of the ball after being struck.”

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