

Knattleikr – the Trelleborg Rules with Vlachernai Variations.

Transcribed by [Stephen Wyley](#)

After reading the article by Kaare Johannessen (curator at the Trelleborg Museum, Denmark) in the third edition of the [Viking Heritage Magazine](#) for 2002, we attempted to try the game ourselves in early November at our Siege and Skirmish Event.

Over the event, we played two games with a great time had by all. We had men, women and teenagers participating which engendered less vigorous displays of male testosterone. The games took on the feel of an Australian Rules foot ball match with players forming forward and back lines and the teams who won had a good passing game. The injury rate was very low; a hit hand from someone with an overzealous bat and a strained arm from being bent the wrong way in a tackle. The use of the ball-up at the start, and subsequent re-starts made it a bit safer. Below I have transcribed the rules first set out by Johannessen and add the variations we used are italicised.

Following mention of our games on the [Living History email list](#) it came to light that some New Zealanders had also tried the game with enjoyable results. I have also put it to the organising committee of the 2003 Australian Medieval Conference that we play a display game during the event. This suggestion has been taken on board by the committee and all we now need some volunteers to take on the might (and bulk) of the [New Varangian Guard Inc.](#)

Note: The Vlachernai variations are bracketed.

1) Field details.

The field is rectangular in shape, measuring 40 by 15 paces, with rugby style goals at either end, with the cross bar set at six feet/1.8m above the ground.

2) The Ball.

The ball is made from leather or cloth, about the size of a tennis ball.

During the game the ball may be kicked, thrown, or hit with the bat.

The ball may be carried in the hand for up to five paces.

3) The Bats.

All players are issued with wooden bats.

(The bats are similar to 'rounders' bat in shape and size -- approximately 40cm long, 10 cm wide and 1cm thick.)

4) Out of bounds.

Players may freely cross the boundary lines but if the ball crosses the boundary lines the ball is thrown in by a member of the opposing team to the last player to touch the ball.

5) Player identification.

The teams will wear identifying head bands of different colours.

6) Player deployment.

At the start of the game, each team member is assigned an opposing team member to play against.

The exchange of players from the reserves can take place at any time during the game. The player on the field leaves the field and hits the bat against that of his replacement.

7) Teams.

The game is played by two teams of five members on the field.

Reserve players may consist of any number agreed on at the start of play by both teams.

Each team appoints a captain and the captainship can switch to another player at any time during the game.

8) The Umpire.

The Umpire is chosen with the agreement of the two teams.

The Umpire may call a halt to play if it becomes too fierce (or boring) and restart the game, *(or if any of the rules is infringed upon.)*

9) Starting the Game.

At the start of the game, the ball is placed on the ground in the centre of the field.

(To start the game the ball is thrown up into the air between the two captains by the umpire.)

The captains stand five paces from the ball on the opposing teams half of the field.

All other players remain in their own half until the start of the game.

When the Umpire blows the horn, the captains battle for control of the ball.

10) Scoring and Winning the Game.

The ball must be hit with the bat over the goals horizontal bar and between the two uprights.

The first team to score three goals wins.

11) Player Contact.

Players may tackle opponents but only with the upper body.

(A tackle on an opponent must only be made between the hips and the shoulders.)

Players are not allowed to hit or kick an opponent.

The bats may not be used to hit an opponent.

Reference;

Johannessen, K., *Blood, Sweat and Laughs – A Bonebreaking Ballgame Re-invented*, Viking Heritage Magazine, 3/02. <http://viking.hgo.se>

Links;

[Bandy - http://www.geocities.com/Colosseum/Track/2049/English/Bandyhistory.html](http://www.geocities.com/Colosseum/Track/2049/English/Bandyhistory.html)

[Rounders - http://www.hickoksports.com/history/rounders.shtml](http://www.hickoksports.com/history/rounders.shtml)

[Rounders / Townball - http://www.chaosmedia.com/Rounders/RoundersDocs.html](http://www.chaosmedia.com/Rounders/RoundersDocs.html)

[Viking America: The Norse Crossings and Their Legacy by, James Robert Enterline
http://www.vnlnd.net/author/EJ02A972.htm](http://www.vnlnd.net/author/EJ02A972.htm)



Spanish Baseball(?) from an un-named 13th century Spanish manuscript.

This page was last updated 24th December 2002

Copyright © 2003
[Kaare Johannessen](#) & [Stephen Wyley](#)