

Little League® Statement on Non-Wood Bats

Recently, Little League International has received a number of inquiries regarding non-wood bats, particularly in relation to a March 14 vote by the New York City Council to ban the use of non-wood bats in high school baseball games.

It is important to note that the New York City Council's vote applies only to high school baseball games played in the city, and does not apply in any way to Little League games at any level in the city or anywhere else.

Little League International has and will continue to provide as much factual information as possible on the subject to the media, to volunteers, and to legislators considering laws that would dictate the use of certain types of equipment in Little League Baseball and Softball. It is Little League International's belief that the same governmental imposition may soon be directed at Little League Baseball and other youth baseball programs.

Little League Baseball has always advocated that local leagues and individuals may choose wood or non-wood bats for use in our program.

Little League supports the right of a local Little League to implement a wood-only rule, and we support any league's right to make that choice for its local community. Some prefer the game played with wood bats, and that's fine as well. But Little League International does not accept the premise that the game will be safer if played exclusively with wood, simply because there are no facts – none at all – to support that premise.

As a result, any individual or league choosing a wood-only option must understand that the choice is not being made because of any factual data or scientific information.

Little League volunteers already know that participation in Little League is made safer by Little League rules, regulations and policies. Little League's safety record is second to none, as less than 1 percent of all participants annually in Little League require medical treatment of any kind as the result of an injury in a practice or game.

As Steve Keener, Little League Baseball and softball president and chief executive officer, said: "If there was a safety concern, based on Little League's proven history of attention to safety with matters such as mandating background checks and pitch counts, we'd be the first in line to address it."

Safety continues to be Little League's No. 1 concern, and the non-wood bat issue is no exception. For that reason, we are providing these facts:

- More than 10 years ago, the major manufacturers of non-wood bats reached an agreement with Little League to limit their bats to a "Bat Performance Factor" (BPF) of 1.15. ... The BPF is essentially a measure of a non-wood bat's performance (how fast the ball exits the bat when hit) in relation to a standard wood bat's rating of 1.00. A very good wood bat's BPF is 1.15.
- That means today's best non-wood bats (usually made of aluminum) used in Little League perform statistically the same, in terms of how fast the ball exits the bat, as the best wood bats.
- For the last 10 years, bat manufacturers have only been producing non-wood bats for play in Little League Baseball that do not exceed the 1.15 BPF. Most of these bats are already printed with the BPF of 1.15, but beginning in 2009, all bats used in Little League Baseball must be imprinted with the BPF.
- A common misconception is that lighter bats always translate into a baseball being hit harder. This is not the case, because there is a point at which a lighter bat (even though it is swung at a higher speed) does not exert the same force on the pitched ball as a heavier bat does. A simpler way to understand this is to consider a small hammer used to pound a nail: Although the small hammer may be swung with much greater speed, a heavier hammer (swung at a lower speed) will drive the nail with fewer blows because it has more inertia at the point of impact. This is why the non-wood bat manufacturers have agreed to the current standard – so that the non-wood bats perform at a level close to wooden bats, even though a Little Leaguer may be able to swing them faster. ... Imposing a wood bat mandate could result in fewer players in the game. A more forgiving bat means more players have a chance for some success and therefore will want to play and enjoy the game.
- Little League reached this agreement in the early 1990s with the manufacturers of non-wood bats because it noticed the number of reported injuries to pitchers who were hit by batted balls had increased to about 145 in a year.
- Since that agreement, these types of reported injuries have decreased to their current level of 20-30 per year. Considering there are more than a million Little League games played each year, with hundreds of millions of pitches, this safety record is nothing less than outstanding.
- Little League also has addressed the baseballs used in games. Requirements for baseballs to have standardized hardness and liveliness have been in place for several years as well.
- In 2002, the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission reviewed this issue thoroughly and resolved that there was inconclusive data to support such a ban of non-wood bats from use in high school and youth baseball.
- Since records were kept beginning in the 1960s, tragically there have been eight fatalities in Little League Baseball from batted balls. Six of those resulted from balls hit by wood bats and two from balls hit by non-wood bats. Those two fatalities occurred in 1971 and 1973, prior to the 1993 implementation of today's youth bat standards.
- This is not a business interest for Little League Baseball. While Little League does receive royalties from the Sporting Goods Manufacturers Association Youth Bat Licensing Program, these royalties amount to only about 2 percent of Little League's annual operating budget of \$18 million. ... If a wood-bat mandate were imposed, Little League estimates that its royalties from this program would either equal or exceed current levels.