

IMPORTANT USSSA BASEBALL AND SOFTBALL ANNOUNCEMENTS:

- **BAT STANDARDS**
- **RESPONSIBILITY FOR ILLEGAL BATS**
- **RISK OF INJURY**
- **PROTECTIVE GEAR**
- **INSURANCE AND DISPUTE RESOLUTION**

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Risk of Injury

The American games of Baseball and Softball have always had the risk of a player (or even a coach or fan) being struck with a ball during a game (or even during the warm up activities prior to a game). Unless the very nature of the game is altered, it is hard to imagine the games of Baseball/Softball without some risk of injury from batted or even thrown balls. Even with the best players in the game and even before the advent of modern balls and modern bats (today's wood bats being much better than the wood bats of yesteryear), injuries have occurred and sometimes they have been serious. It was 1937 and one of the first All-Star games was being played, perhaps the best pitcher of his day—Dizzy Dean-- was on the mound when his career was ended with a batted ball injury. But while there is and always has been some risk inherent in the games of Baseball/Softball from being struck with a batted (or even thrown) ball, the games of Baseball and Softball remain among the very safest sports in America.

Composite Bats

USSSA has been made aware in recent years that composite bats may become softer and therefore perform better when used excessively, abused or damaged. And even more concerning, it became clear that players can accelerate this improvement by altering their bats. To address this issue, USSSA has passed stringent penalties for the use of altered bats and is in the process of making available compression testing machines for under \$500 for use by ball parks and players alike to determine when bats become too soft. In slow pitch Softball, USSSA has reduced the compression of the ball to half of what it once was, has reduced the COR by over 20% and changed the pitching rule to allow the pitcher to release the ball from as much as 6 feet behind the otherwise designated pitching plate which is 50 feet from home plate. No such changes were made to USSSA licensed baseballs as the Bat Performance Factor ("BPF") for Baseball is significantly lower than that of softball: 1.15 BPF for Baseball and 1.20 BPF for Softball. But for certain youth Baseball ages, USSSA has used a 50 foot pitching distance instead of 46 foot and has lengthened the base paths from 60 feet to 70 feet to allow the game to have the room to be played as it was traditionally designed.

The New Mark

In addition, USSSA has now implemented new rules for testing bats before a manufacturer can license its bats for use in USSSA play. Under the new rules, bats will no longer be licensed for USSSA play if they can significantly improve beyond the BPF standard with use, abuse or damage. Beginning in the fall of 2011, such new engineering standard bats will carry a new and very prominent USSSA mark. In addition, the manufacturers will be required to address the issue of making bats that are less susceptible to alteration before the new mark can be used. While other sanctioning bodies have chosen to ban older composite bats, USSSA has determined that it would be grossly unfair to disallow a bat with no notice to the retailers, manufacturers and customers who had previously relied on USSSA rules in the sale or purchase of a bat.

Protective Gear

The current bats first pose a clear competitive imbalance issue and to a much lesser extent a risk of injury issue. The use of too soft bats by some players and not others is an unfair advantage which USSSA believes must be removed from the game. In addition, it has been argued that such bats may increase the risk of injury from a batted ball. Even with the current composite bats in play during recent years, it remains the statistical and insurance experience of USSSA that the games of Softball and Baseball remain among the safest athletic activities in America. However, this does not mean there is no risk of injury from a batted ball. There is, and always has been, risk inherent in the games of Baseball and Softball from being struck with a batted (or even thrown) ball. Even when the new mark bats are the only bats allowed in USSSA play, a risk of injury from a batted (or thrown) ball will still exist. **Anyone who has a concern about an injury occurring from being struck with a ball during USSSA Softball or Baseball sanctioned play should address that concern by the use of protective gear which is available and has always been allowed in USSSA sanctioned play.**

Insurance and Dispute Resolution

In addition, USSSA makes available at reasonable rates insurance for teams and players who do not otherwise have insurance to cover the risk of accidental injury from playing USSSA sanctioned Baseball or Softball. If a player or coach does not otherwise have such insurance, it would be only prudent to purchase insurance to cover such risks. If you choose not to be prudent, but to attempt to create a legal liability for USSSA or its officials for such accidental injuries arising from the inherent risks of the games of Baseball or Softball, you should be aware of the USSSA Constitutional provision which bans anyone involved in a lawsuit against USSSA or its officials from ever again participating in a USSSA sanctioned event. In addition, by policy USSSA does not allow anyone who is threatening legal action against USSSA to participate in any USSSA sanctioned event until such threatened legal action has been resolved to the satisfaction of the USSSA Board of Directors. To be clear, USSSA simply does not want or need the participation of anyone who thinks that an amateur athletic rule dispute or injury issue should be resolved by threatening or hiring legal counsel. For those who disagree with this approach, there are a large number of other sanctioning bodies under which you can play Softball or Baseball and USSSA would truly prefer that you played elsewhere.

Working with USSSA on Dispute Resolution

Where there is a real allegation that USSSA or its officials have not properly decided the application of a rule, there is a rigorous set of procedures for the protection of teams and players. USSSA encourages you to work through the system to resolve any real concerns that you may have in the application of USSSA rules and will assist you in such efforts. In addition, if you sincerely believe that USSSA or a USSSA official was responsible by negligence or intentional wrongdoing for an injury, USSSA does have insurance for such actions. If the claim is legitimate, please contact USSSA and USSSA can assist you in the filing of such a claim with its insurance carrier.

Altered, Damaged and Too Soft Bats--Player, Parent and Coaches Responsibilities

By allowing for a grandfather period for old bats, USSSA believes that the new bats with the new mark will make for a clean break that will make administration of the new rules feasible for umpires and directors. Any approach that requires umpires or directors to closely inspect bats to see if they are metal or composite or if their model number is on a list, is in USSSA's experience and view unworkable. Indeed, if the administration of a system for eliminating old bats is unworkable, such an approach may increase the competitive imbalance concern rather than reduce it and surely will take away from precious playing time with wasted administrative time at the ballpark. **For now, it remains first the responsibility of the player (and for youth players, their parents) and their coaches to make sure that altered bats, damaged bats or bats that have clearly become too soft are not used in USSSA Baseball or Softball sanctioned play.** In addition, while USSSA is sure that there will always be a way to cheat and alter a bat, USSSA views the manufacturers of bats as the ones who, after the coaches and players, can best stop the altering of bats by anticipating the ways in which their bats may be altered.

USSSA Penalties for Those Who Cheat

USSSA for its part will continue to enforce harsh penalties for those who cheat, but there is simply no way for USSSA umpires and directors to stop the use of altered, damaged or too soft bats without the cooperation and attention of the players, parents, coaches and manufacturers. Once the new mark has been implemented and the manufacturers have improved their bat designs to reduce altering and eliminate the potential for bats getting too soft/good with use or damage, USSSA will continue its vigilance in finding and punishing those who cheat. USSSA will do so with a system designed to make enforcement by umpires and other event officials consistent and easy to implement without excessive disruption of the game itself. In any event, however, there will always be the possibility of cheating and of an injury occurring from a batted ball. **Again, anyone who has a concern that the risk is too high should wear the protective gear that they deem appropriate and should know that USSSA rules will continue to allow such gear.**

Stopping the Use of Illegal Bats—A Shared Responsibility

Where USSSA finds cheaters, it will continue to impose harsh suspension penalties. USSSA, however, has decided not to impose penalties on innocent retailers and customers where such can be avoided with reasonable grandfathering rules for old bats. Again, USSSA has also determined that it does not make sense to pass the complete burden of enforcement on to umpires and event directors who are simply in no position to take on such roles. **It remains the view of USSSA that players, parents, coaches and manufacturers must share in this effort with sanctioning bodies to insure that the games of Baseball and Softball are played with legal and sensible equipment. Indeed, it is the primary responsibility of the players, parents and coaches to make sure that illegal bats are not used in USSSA play.**