



## **Metal bats pose unnecessary risk to pitchers**

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My last few summers have been pretty standard for a college student: jobs, internships, a couple trips to the beach, and an occasional concert or two. It doesn't really sound too exciting, I know. But I bet your curiosity would be piqued if I informed you that every fifth day, I risked severe injury and even death.

If you pictured something bold and daring such as a sky-diving or fire-fighting, however, I'm afraid I'm going to let you down. I'm just an amateur baseball pitcher.

The truth is, in this day and age with an increased emphasis on weight-training, the rampant use of steroids in baseball, and most importantly, the use of metal bats, the threat of being hit by a batted ball has made pitching extremely dangerous. After all, we pitchers are just 60 feet-six inches away from the plate.

What disturbs me the most, though, is that pitching doesn't have to be as dangerous as it is. Simply switching from metal bats to wooden ones would save lives and prevent countless injuries.

Fortunately, this issue is beginning to receive attention from lawmakers throughout the country. Last March, the New York City Council passed a city-wide ban on the use of metal bats in high school baseball games. New York City Councilman James Oddo, who sponsored the bill, said he hopes that other cities will now adopt a similar law.

"We always envisioned that New York City would be the first domino," Oddo said in a recent telephone interview. "Hopefully, others will take notice that a public school system of this size has gone to wood and they will follow suit."

Currently, in Harrisburg, the Pennsylvania General Assembly is taking a look at the issue. There are also two bills being considered in Albany, N.Y., that would ban metal bats in all leagues for players under the age of 16. In 2005, the entire state of North Dakota banned metal bats for players in grades seven to 12. Youth leagues in Miles City, Mont., and Montvale, N.J., have also implemented a metal bat ban.

So what is preventing every college, high school, and youth league throughout the country from switching to wood? Oddo simply said: "Follow the money."

In strong opposition to these bans is a coalition of sporting goods companies that manufacture metal baseball bats, most notably Easton and Louisville Slugger. Obviously, these

companies lose out on a great deal of profit if their \$200 and \$300 bats are no longer in demand. To combat the anti-metal movement, they have put together what Oddo referred to as “a very smart group of people” who spent almost a quarter of a million dollars lobbying the New York City Council in 2006 and 2007, according to filings with the city clerk’s office.

Their main defense was and is the fact that there is no empirical data to prove that metal bats are more dangerous than wooden ones.

Try telling that to Debbie Patch of Miles City, Mont., who had to bury her 18 year-old son Brandon after he was struck in the head by a ball hit by a metal bat in 2003. Twelve year-old Steven Domalewski from Wayne, N.J., lost his ability to walk and talk after a metal bat sent a baseball off his chest last June.

Do you think he needs empirical data to tell him that pitchers have less time to react to a ball off a metal bat than a wooden one?

The same goes for Bill Kalant, a 16-year-old pitcher in suburban Chicago who took a comebacker off his temple and needed brain surgery after waking up from a two-week coma. Perhaps, after he learns how to read again, Kalant will conduct the research necessary to convince any doubters of the dangers of metal bats.

Oddo believes that there has been no comprehensive study on the safety of metal bats because no organization, government, or university is willing to put forth the time, money and effort to conduct it. He said an exhaustive data analysis is not really necessary to prove that metal bats are more dangerous than wooden ones.

And he’s right.

As a pitcher, I have faced metal as well as wooden bats, and I can tell you without a doubt that a ball comes off a metal bat much faster than it does off of wood.

Former New York Mets pitcher John Franco testified before the New York City Council, promoting the ban on metal bats. According to Oddo, Franco’s testimony said it was “laughable” to think that metal and wooden bats yield the same results.

Not only are metal bats dangerous, but they have also taken away from the game itself. Ever since the introduction of metal bats in 1974, the game has been steering more toward offense and away from defense. For example, in 1972, Santa Clara led all NCAA Division I teams with a total of 51 home runs hit in 55 games. In 2006, Delaware more than doubled this total with a league-leading 111 home runs in 54 games. In addition, runs scored, batting averages and earned run averages have all increased considerably during the metal bat era.

If I told you that the University of Southern California defeated Arizona State 21-14 on June 6, 1998, you would probably wonder why these two schools were playing football in the spring. Shockingly, that was the final score of the championship game of the 1998 College Baseball World Series. I believe this score speaks for itself in showing how far out of hand this problem has gotten.

While the additional “pop” provided by metal bats may please the hitters, it makes the pitchers’ lives miserable. Penn State starting pitcher Seth Whitehill said metal bats allow hitters to get away with many cheap hits.

“I think metal bats give the batter more room for error,” Whitehill said. “A pitcher can

throw a good pitch and jam a hitter and he will still get a single over the shortstop's head. But with wood, the ball would be fielded."

Because of this, Whitehill said he believes that college pitchers nowadays are more hesitant to throw inside.

Wooden bats give the game a more natural feel, and they will bring the game back to the way it was intended to be played. Five-hundred-foot home runs and double-digit run totals would be replaced with stolen bases, hit-and-runs, bunts, and defense.

To me, that's what baseball really is. If that's not exciting enough for you, maybe you should find a different sport. I hear sky-diving is a blast.