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The Crack of the Bat is Changing

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May 2012

One of the first things people notice when they walk into my office are my 3 wooden baseball bats. I joke that I use them to get witnesses to tell the truth in depositions. One of the bats was used by my brother, Bryan, when he played in the Los Angeles Dodgers system. Another one is a maple bat, like the ones that have become popular in Major League Baseball. I fondly remember hitting with a black and yellow Easton baseball bat back in the day. Now that I coach Little League baseball for my son, Bryce, I've noticed how much metal bats have changed.

Metal bats were introduced as a cost-saving alternative to wooden bats, which are prone to break if you don't hit the ball in the right spot. Since the 1970s, metal bats have come to dominate youth baseball. As technology improved, and the science behind metal bats improved, metal bats clearly outperformed their wooden counterparts. Scientific research performed in 2002 by a group of engineers at Brown University found that, on average, baseballs hit off a metal bat traveled over 7 mph faster than baseballs hit off a wooden bat.

Critics of metal bats pointed to a growing body of evidence showing that metal bats are unsafe because pitchers have less than half a second to react to line drives. The most common fear articulated by metal bat critics is a situation involving a small 12-year-old pitcher on the mound facing a large 12-year-old batter at the plate. This fear became a sad reality at many age levels. In fact, several high school players were severely injured and at least two were killed by scorching line drives.

As injuries mounted, lawsuits were filed against baseball bat manufacturers. In 2008, the NCAA and Little League Baseball announced more stringent tests aimed at making metal bats perform more like wooden bats by 2011.

As a result, effective in 2012, nearly all metal bats in use in most amateur baseball leagues became illegal. Now, all metal baseball bats must meet the Batted Baseball Coefficient of Restitution (BBCOR) standard and all metal baseball bats that are used in amateur sports must have the BBCOR label on them in order to be "legal" in most leagues.

So, if you're wondering why the baseball sounds a little different off the bat this spring, it is because of the new rules designed to increase the safety level for our youngest baseball players.