

Going Batty Over Bats?

With baseball bats costing as much as \$400 or more, you want to make certain that you choose not only the bat with the proper characteristics for your player but also one which is and will remain 'legal' or "Approved for Little League" well into the future. Here are a few current requirements as defined in the 2008 Official Regulations and Playing Rules for All Divisions of Little League Baseball:

	Division			
	Little League	Junior League	Senior League	Big League
Age	Up to 12 yrs old	12 yrs old ¹ 13 - 14 yrs old	14 yrs old ¹ 15 - 16 yrs old	16 yrs old ¹ 17 - 18 yrs old
Bat Length	33 inches max	34 inches max	36 inches max	36 inches max
Bat Diameter	2 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches	2 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches	2 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches for wood bats; 2 $\frac{5}{8}$ inches for non-wood bats	2 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches for wood bats; 2 $\frac{5}{8}$ inches for non-wood bats
Bat weight ²	N/a	N/a	-3 max	-3 max
BPF (non wood) ³	1.15	N/a	N/a	N/a
BESR (non wood) ⁴	N/a	N/a	Required	Required
White bats	Illegal	Illegal	Illegal	Illegal
Bat 'donuts'	Illegal	Illegal	Illegal	Illegal
Dented Bats	(See Note 5)	(See Note 5)	(See Note 5)	(See Note 5)

Notes:

1 - These ages may or may not be included in the respective divisions during the regular season at the discretion of the local Board of Directors. However, they are included in typical post-season tournament play.

2 - Bat weights are typically displayed in ounces and a 'minus factor'. The 'minus factor' is a numerical relationship between the length in inches and the weight in ounces. For example, common 'minus factors' in Little League are -10, -11, and -12 (although others are permissible). What this means is that if the bat is 30 inches in length, then the weight is 18 oz (ie '-12'), 19 oz (ie '-11'), or 20 oz (ie '-10'). Currently, there is no regulation concerning the 'minus factor' for Little League, as long as the bat is 33 inches long or less. **HOWEVER**, for 2008 and beyond, Senior and Big League bats are limited to a numerical difference of -3 max. For example, if a 15 yr old Senior League player has a 34-inch bat, it cannot weigh less than 31 OZ (ie '-3').

3 - The Bat Performance Factor (BPF) becomes a regulation in 2009. The BPF measures the 'liveliness' of a ball bouncing off a bat compared to a ball bouncing off a wall. For example, a BPF of 1.20 would indicate there is 20% more bounce off a bat than the wall. In order to limit a bat manufacturer's ability to introduce excessive 'bounce' with exotic materials, the overall BPF is limited to 1.15, and the bat must display the BPF rating.

Check a bat before you buy it to ensure it meets this requirement, especially if your player will continue into the 2009 season and beyond. Also, look for the rating to be either permanently etched or otherwise non-removable because an adhesive sticker with the BPF rating is likely to be disqualified since the sticker could be moved from bat to bat.

4 - The Ball Exit Speed Ratio (BESR) is similar to the BPF but is only applicable to Senior/ Big League (and consistent with the standards set for High School and NCAA baseball). A very simple way to imagine this ratio is that if a pitch is thrown at 50 mph and the bat is swung at 50 mph and the ball exits contact with the bat at 50 mph, then the BESR = 1.00. For whatever reason, the maximum allowable BESR is 0.728. (In the example, the ball would exit the bat at approximately 36 mph.) Any non-wood bat used by Senior or Big League players must have a BESR less than 0.728, and the BESR rating must be imprinted on the bat. Again, a sticker is not allowed (because it can be moved from bat to bat) and will render the bat illegal. For an interesting discussion on the history and measurement of the BESR, follow this link to a white paper on the subject: <http://webusers.npl.uiuc.edu/~a-nathan/pob/BESRWhitePaper.pdf>

5 - The Official Regulations allow for the fact that non-wood bats develop dents over time. The guiding rule for whether or not the bat can be used or must be discarded is whether or not it will pass through an official Little League bat ring. This ring is 2 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches (for all Little League divisions) and as long as the bat can pass through this ring then it can still be considered useable. Final determination is still up to the umpire, based on overall condition of the bat, as long as the dent has not created an unsafe condition. But merely a dent is not grounds for disqualification. It behooves each umpire, coach, and manager to carry a Little League approved bat ring to help determine the usability of any bat.

The foregoing clarification of Little League rules concerning selecting bats is current as of the 2008 season. Any reference to future requirements such as the BPF requirement for 2009 have been included if available. Selecting the correct bat depends on many other factors such as age, size, strength, etc, and should be done after consulting with a manager or coach, or general considerations can be found at: <http://shop.mlb.com/sm-baseball-bat-buyers-guide--bg-222833.html#F>