uesday • March 10, 1998

THE BAT DISEASE

SPORTS

nroughout the last 20 years, aluminum bats have slowly taken control of college seball, transforming it into a distant descendant of its professional counterpart



Ma

ago, the sound of wood bats cracked the silence of mid-afternoons in March on just about every college campus in America. Along with the smells of freshly cut grass, hot dogs and popcorn and the sight of the American flag flying over the ballpark, the

wenty-four years

FURTICK ports editor

Louisville Slugs signaled the winter awakening our National Pastime to base-

g &l-hungry fans. But if you happened to inture within earshot of ur campus field over the git two decades, an alla familiar "ping" has relot aced one of baseball's st sacred sounds. as Aluminum bats were roduced to collegiate

seball in 1974 in orto solve some probis facing the Great me. Wood bats were be-

ning insanely expensive for collegiate proa,6-ms, while their use had been putting a large at into the supply of bat-suitable wood. The AA needed an alternative, and the alu-

num bat seemed to be the answer. Sure, this alteration to America's most uninged sport didn't sit well its traditionalists,

t when the argument was completely examd, it was obviously something that had to done. So college baseball became an alu-

num-bat game, but I doubt if anyone ever bected a rule change to alter the face of the rt like it has.

The situation is relatively simple according Texas A&M Coach Mark Johnson. He said he lieves the use of aluminum bats in college is

essary because of the phenomenal costs of atinuously replacing wood bats. He said the blem is in the technology and development the aluminum bats currently in use — they Lewve had a negative impact on the game itself. Inson said college baseball is suffering from standpoints of safety and integrity by using current arsenal of bats available to it. fety is an obvious issue concerning the

minum bat. It doesn't take a seasoned colle-

giate baseball coach to realize the continued improvement in ball reaction off these bats will lead to more injuries to defensive players.

'It's almost impossible for the pitcher, the third baseman playing in or the first baseman holding a runner on to protect themselves if a batter hits the ball just right," Johnson said. "I'm standing down at third base, and I know I'm getting a year older every season, but I move further and further away.

"With a runner on second I'm probably 75 feet away from home plate, and if a guy turns on one, I could get hurt." According to the NCAA Injury Surveillance System, baseball has remained the safest sport in terms of fre-

of injuries, but Bill Thurston, baseball coach at Amherst College in Massa-chusetts, says the issue should not be whether or not baseball is as safe as other sports, but if the traditional game was safer than today's

Thurston, the NCAA Baseball Rules editor, said he has noticed a trend in the injuries over the past few years.

"With the high performance aluminum bats used in the past three years, I have heard of more injuries via the batted ball than in my previous nine years as the NCAA Baseball Rules editor," Thurston said.

In regards to another issue clouding the current aluminum bats in use, Thurston completed a study last fall comparing players' statistics from their NCAA seasons to those from their competition in the Cape Cod Summer League, which requires the use of wooden bats.

Ninety Division I hitters with at least 70 at bats in the Cape and 60 pitchers with at least 25 innings pitched were included in the study.

Thurston's results, although by no means hard scientific evidence, did show an astounding difference in the performances of batters and pitchers from their college seasons to the summer league. Batting averages dropped from .339 in regular NCAA games to .232 in the Cape, while the slugging percentage fell from .551 to .325. During the NCAA season, 35 hitters batted over .350 and 70 hit over .300, but in the Cape only five players managed to hit over 300. Pitchers' ERA fell from 4.89 to 2.79

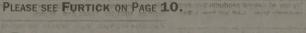
and increased their strikeouts per nine innings by more

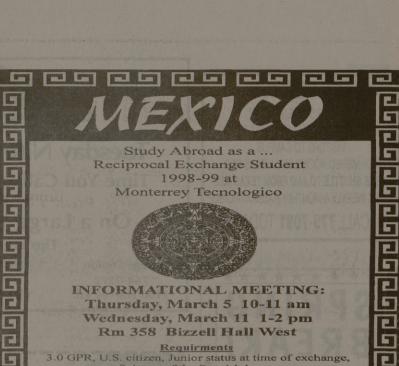
> Johnson said these outon field, I the difference each year when players pick up a new, more powerful bat. There's no question about the difmaking," Johnson said. "Players laugh because the ball comes off so easy and so much further and quicker. We have .250 hitters hitting 310 only because

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they are using an aluminum bat. They wouldn't be able to do that with a wood bat. Another issue aluminum bats have given rise to is college baseball's role as a learning ground for players on their way to the professional level.

College players who spend three or four years honing their skills in preparation for a shot at the majors have to completely relearn to play the wooden-bat version of baseball.





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About Bill Youngkin

- TAMU, Class of '69
 - Head Yell Leader
 - Ross Volunteer/Corp of Cadets
- Vietnam Veteran
- Graduate Baylor Law School *
- Partner in the Law Firm of Youngkin, Catlin, Bryan, Stacy & Dillard
- Past President Brazos County Bar Association 1985-86 *
- Past President of the Association of Former Students 1991 *
- Current Member of the Executive Committee of the * 12th Man Foundation
- Daughter Libby, Class of '00 Chi Omega Sorority *

Next to my relationship with the Good Lord and my family, nothing has had a greater influence in my life than my university. That was what drew me back to this community to begin my family and my legal career. I have tried to serve my university over the years by remaining involved. Now I want to serve my community by being your judge of the 85th District Court. It can only happen with your help, your vote, this Tuesday.

