

Metal bats, ball speed subjects of NCAA standards

INDIANAPOLIS (AP) — The NCAA has adopted new standards to limit the speed of a baseball hit with a metal bat.

The association's executive committee Tuesday affirmed a recommendation made last month by a research panel to limit the exit speed of balls hit by metal bats to 97 mph in NCAA games for at least three years, starting in January.

"The moratorium will give the baseball community time to adjust to the new standards and for the panel to do further research," said Charles Wethington, University of Kentucky president and NCAA executive committee chairman.

"Of course, we reserve the right to make adjustments in the standards for

bats and balls at any time, if necessary."

The panel recommended a batted-ball exit speed be adopted for non-wood bats equivalent to the highest average speed using major league-quality wood bats, which is less than 97 mph. The committee received the report in August but delayed implementing the panel's recommendations pending further tests.

Many college teams last season went to smaller aluminum bats, one of the recommendations by the panel, to increase safety and to reverse a trend of higher scoring than with wood bats, which broke easily.

Early metal bats were heavy, and only the strongest players could generate much speed in their swing. But in recent years, manufacturers have refined their products to make them

lighter and capable of producing power from a larger area of the bat. A well-hit ball off an aluminum bat can reach speeds of more than 100 mph.

A record 62 home runs were hit in last year's College World Series in Omaha, which ended with Southern Cal's 21-14 victory over Arizona State. In this year's 14-game College World Series, with the smaller bats in use, there were only 35 homers, and the 164 total runs were the fewest since 1994. In the title game, Miami beat Florida State 6-5, with each team hitting one home run.

In a related matter, Easton Sports Inc., announced it has settled its lawsuit against the NCAA connected to the organization's August 1998 ruling restricting the use of aluminum bats.

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"The fact that a number of our bats have already been tested and meet the new standard confirms that aluminum bats can be very safely used in NCAA and all other levels of play."

JIM EASTON
chairman of Easton Sports

have already been tested and meet the new standard confirms that aluminum bats can be very safely used in NCAA and all other levels of play," Jim Easton,

chairman of Easton Sports, said in a statement.

As part of the settlement agreement, no financial figures were released.

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