

Bat Selection for Young Players

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Proper bat selection is crucial to helping a player become a successful hitter. For younger players the focus should be on bat control and speed. The ability to bring the head of the bat around quickly once the eyes have given the brain the green light to swing, requires a bat that is easy to control both horizontally and vertically, as the player manipulates their stroke to come in contact with the ball. This needs to be stressed not only to the player, but also to the well-intentioned parent who unknowingly buys their son or daughter a lead pipe to swing because their up and coming ball player liked the color of it. For ball players who are new to the game, decision-making at the plate takes the longest time to develop. Once a batter has made-up their mind to swing at the pitch, no matter how high it is over their head, the lighter the bat, the better chance they have of coming around on the ball and swatting that fly back toward the pitcher. Since the decision to swing comes later in the pitch delivery for younger players, a lighter bat is easier to bring to the front on a late swing than a heavier one. Sixteen to eighteen ounce bats are a good choice for players in the seven to ten year old age bracket.

Baseball bats are measured by length and weight, where the largest number on the bat is the length in inches, and the smaller number is the weight in ounces. It is common to find baseball bats listed with a minus number, such as -12. This tells the proportion of length to weight. A 30 inch bat with a -12 would weigh 18 ounces. For smaller players, a larger minus number means a lighter bat with extra length. This provides the best potential for bat head speed. As players get older and stronger, a reduced minus number on their bat is desired. This provides more momentum and impact on the ball without sacrificing bat speed. Another thing to consider is bat head configuration. The longer the barrel before it starts to taper toward the handle, the more potential contact area there is with the ball. While this can be helpful to building confidence in a new hitter, bats with longer barrels tend to be top heavy and harder to control. For players with stronger arms and wrist, this should not be an issue. However, for smaller players, instead of them swinging the bat, the bat could be swinging them. The last thing to consider is the grip. Make sure the player's hand fits comfortably around the grip of the bat handle. A grip that is too wide for someone with smaller hands will make the bat hard to control. Properly matching a baseball bat to the skill level and size of a player will help to get the most out of each plate appearance. For the player, this means more fun!