



CHANGES TO THE LAW CONCERNING CRICKET BATS A GUIDE FOR PLAYERS

Why does cricket need a new Law for bats?

The Marylebone Cricket Club (M.C.C.), as Guardian of the Laws of Cricket, has a duty to maintain the traditional balance between the bat and the ball. In recent years, it has been evident that the bat is starting to dominate. Furthermore, with the developments in technology and materials, a few cricket bats have appeared on the market with potential performance enhancing properties. M.C.C. believes that, if the cricket bat becomes too powerful, it will be detrimental to the sport.

Consequently, in May 2008, the M.C.C. membership approved the introduction of a new version of Law 6, together with a newly created Appendix E. The Law, which lays down details about the bat, was written following extended discussions with many bat manufacturers, willow growers and the I.C.C.

The new Law comes into effect on 1st October 2008.

What is the new Law?

The new Law is far more prescriptive than the previous version but almost all bats which were legal under the previous Law 6 will remain so. The details of the new Law can be obtained from the Lord's website <http://www.lords.org/laws-and-spirit/> or from the Laws department at M.C.C.. In outline, salient features are:

- The handle itself is defined, consisting of an upper and lower portion. The junction of these two portions is under twine binding and the grip and so is not visible.
- The handle's constituent materials are specified and the proportions of each controlled. The predominant material in the handle must be cane and/or wood.
- Stricter limits are set on both the nature and thickness of protective coverings.
- Limits have been set for the thickness of manufacturers' logos and the area of a bat these may occupy.
- An important new aspect of the Law is that bats have to be graded as either A, B or C.

No limits have been set on:

- The weight of a bat.
- The maximum depth from the face to the back of the blade.
- The width of the side edges.

Any bat that was illegal under the previous version of the Law 6 (2000 Code, 2nd Edition – 2003) remains illegal under the new version and must not be used in any cricket played under the Laws.

The table below shows the characteristics of Grade A, B and C bats.

Bat Characteristic	Grade A	Grade B	Grade C
10% or less materials other than cane, wood and twine in the handle	✓	✓	✓
More than 10% but not more than 20% materials other than cane, wood and twine in the handle	✗	✗	✓
More than 20% materials other than cane, wood and twine in the handle	✗	✗	✗
Anti-Scuff fitted (must not cause unacceptable ball damage)	✓	✓	✓
Blade covered with cloth	✗	✗	✓
Use of non-solid material (e.g. varnish) to improve resistance to moisture and mask natural blemishes.	✓	✓	✓
Toe insert	✗	✓	✓
External toe guard	✓	✓	✓
Side inserts	✗	✓	✓

The grading is based upon the constituent materials and not necessarily on the quality of the willow or the bat. Indeed, the only difference between a Grade A bat and one of Grade B is that the latter may have toe or side inserts to give added protection to these vulnerable areas.

How do these changes affect me as a player?

The onus has been placed on manufacturers to ensure that their bats conform to the new Law and are correctly graded. From 1st October 2008, bats in shops should be graded either A, B, or C although there may be a brief window when some bats are not so marked. Manufacturers and retailers have been asked to address this urgently.

Professional cricket - In professional cricket, only Grade A bats may be used from 1st October 2008. Bats must be marked as such, even if they pre-date the introduction of the new Law. Manufacturers have been told to ensure that their contracted players use appropriately marked bats. If a professional player tries to use an ungraded bat or a bat of Grade B or C, he will be told that he is not allowed to use it and a report will be sent to the appropriate Governing Body for the game.

If a bat breaks during a game, the umpires or match referees are likely to inspect it to check for illegal materials such as carbon fibre handles or any non-wooden objects inside the blade.

Amateur cricket - In amateur cricket there needs to be much more flexibility. Any bat purchased by an amateur player may be used until the end of its natural life, providing it was legal under the previous version of Law 6. This applies to ungraded bats and to bats, such as those with carbon fibre handles, which were legal but have become illegal under the new Law. It does not apply to bats which were already illegal under the previous version of the Law.

Consequently, there will be a phasing out period during which players will be allowed to use bats that are ungraded or possibly illegal under the new version of the Law. M.C.C. decided that setting a time limit to this phasing out period would be unfair to players who had bought bats in good faith. A time limit has been set, however, beyond which they cannot be sold. Moreover, it is likely that eventually Leagues and Competitions will themselves set a time limit on the use of such bats.

What grades of bats may be used in my level of cricket?

National Governing Bodies decide what grades of bat are permitted at each level.

Requirements are laid down for Grades A, B and C. Bats which do not conform to any of these three grades are regarded as below Grade C. They may be used only by special regulation or in special forms of cricket played outside the Laws.

In **professional cricket**, only Grade A bats may be used from 1st October 2008. In most **amateur cricket** all three grades may be used, although it is possible that Grade C bats may not be allowed at the highest levels of the amateur game. The rules of Competitions should specify which grades can be used.

If a bat pre-dates the new Law and is ungraded (but still conforms to the previous Law), it may be used in any amateur cricket even if, were the bat to be graded, it would not be allowed in that particular League or Competition. For example, a cloth covered bat purchased in 2007 could still be used in a game where Grade C bats were not permitted. The same leeway is not given to a bat which is mis-graded – see below.

How will the Grade be marked on the bat?

The Grade will be marked with a sticker or brand on the back or shoulders of the blade, or on the top of the handle. It may be marked as, for example, "Grade A" or just simply "A".

If my current bat is ungraded, can I grade it myself?

No, the grade must be applied by the manufacturer only. There is no need to grade the bat yourself, as your bat may be used in any amateur cricket until the end of the bat's natural life, providing it was legal under the previous version of Law 6.

If you think that your bat has been incorrectly graded by the manufacturer, please contact M.C.C. who will happily investigate this with the manufacturer.

Players must not change the grade of a bat once the grade has been defined and marked by the manufacturer. If there is an obvious feature showing that your bat is incorrectly graded, umpires should not take issue with you unless there are restrictions on the grades to be used in that game. For example, your bat with a cloth covering may be marked as Grade A. You would be forbidden to use the bat only if Grade C bats are not permitted at that level of cricket.

If my bat has a carbon fibre handle and the handle breaks, can a new carbon fibre handle be inserted?

No. M.C.C. has reached agreements with the manufacturers of bats with carbon fibre (or similar) handles that they should not insert replacement handles made from such materials. If the handle breaks but you wish to keep the blade, the new handle must conform to the new version of the Law.

Are coloured bats allowed under the new Law?

No. They have not been allowed previously. The new Law now states this specifically saying that any treatments to the bat must not materially alter the colour of the blade. Coloured bats may be used only by special regulation or in special forms of cricket played outside the Laws.

How will the law be enforced?

M.C.C. will be carrying out random testing of bats from all over the world to ensure that illegal bats do not get onto the market. M.C.C. will work closely with the I.C.C. and National Governing Bodies to take action against manufacturers who produce illegal bats.

Additionally **the umpires** will check visible features. They will be responsible for seeing that:

- The overall length and width of the bat are within the specified limits.
- Any covering on the blade does not have a surface likely to cause unacceptable damage to the ball.
- Nothing other than wood is visible in the blade itself.
- The grade of bat is allowed at the level of the game being played.
- There are no side inserts or toe inserts in Grade A bats. A toe insert is a strip of wood inserted up into the blade at the bottom to give added strength in that area. It should not be confused with a toe guard, an external strip of protective material fastened onto the underside of the toe, as protection against damage if the toe strikes the ground and to prevent moisture ingress. These added strips are allowed in all grades of bat.
- Only Grade C bats have cloth coverings.

Umpires will not be expected to check invisible items such as the composition of the handle or how far a side insert penetrates the blade. However, if your bat breaks in the course of a game, it may be inspected to check that internal features revealed by the break conform to the Law.

Junior Bats

The new Law applies to bats of all sizes. An exception for bats of size 6 or less refers only to the length of the handle. Junior bats will be graded but it is envisaged that there will be no restriction on grades allowed in Junior cricket.

What if I have other questions?

All questions can be directed to the Laws department at M.C.C. Please e-mail laws@mcc.org.uk or telephone +44 20 7616 8753.