



CHANGES TO THE LAW CONCERNING CRICKET BATS A GUIDE FOR UMPIRES

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. The details 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.
- 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.

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.

How do these changes affect umpires?

The umpires' duty under Law 3 to ensure that the implements of the game conform to the requirements of, among other Laws, Law 6 cannot extend beyond visible features of the bat. Moreover umpires could not reasonably make the measurements and/or calculations required for checking even some visible items. Consequently, the onus has been placed on manufacturers to ensure that their bats conform to the new Law and are correctly graded. There will be random sampling of bats to check on these aspects of manufacture.

Umpires will not be expected to check the following items although they are prescribed in the new Law:

- The composition of the handle.
- Whether the penetration of the lower portion of the handle into the blade conforms to the limits set.
- How far either the twine binding or the grip on the handle extends beyond the junction of the upper and lower portions of the handle.
- The thickness of stickers.
- The percentage of the blade area that stickers cover on the back.
- The length that stickers on the front extend beyond the bottom of the grip.
- The thickness of any toe or side inserts.
- The penetration into the blade of any toe or side inserts.
- The thickness of any external toe protector.
- The thickness of protective or repair materials on the blade.

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.

Umpires 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.

How do umpires distinguish between the different grades?

Umpires should accept that a bat is of the grade marked on it, unless it is clear from a visual inspection that it does not conform to that grade. It is likely, however, that in the immediate future many bats will not show a grade.

The table below shows the characteristics of the three grades. The last column indicates whether this is something that the umpires would be able to check if required.

Table to show the various characteristics of Grade A, B and C bats.

Bat Characteristic	Grade A	Grade B	Grade C	Umpires can check
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	✗	✓	✓	✓

How do umpires know what grades of bat are permitted?

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. The rules of Competitions should specify which grades can be used.

From 1st October 2008, every new bat sent to the retailers by manufacturers should be marked with its grade. Only bats already in use or currently in shops may not show the grade. In due course all bats must have the grade marked on them. It may take several years before only these bats are in use.

What should umpires do if they think a bat is incorrectly graded?

If there is an obvious feature showing that a bat is incorrectly graded, umpires should not take issue with the player unless there are restrictions on the grades to be used in that game. For example, a bat with a cloth covering may be marked as Grade A. The player should be forbidden to use the bat only if Grade C bats are not permitted at that level of cricket.

However, M.C.C. needs to know of such mis-graded bats. Umpires are requested to note the make and model of the bat and send all details to Laws@mcc.org.uk. M.C.C. will then investigate further with the manufacturer.

What should umpires do if a player is using an illegal bat or an ungraded bat?

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 player tries to use an ungraded bat or a bat of Grade B or C, he should be told that he is not allowed to use it. A report should be sent to the appropriate Governing Body for the game.

If a bat breaks during a game, the umpires or match referees are asked to try to inspect it to check for illegal materials. Items particularly to look for are carbon fibre handles or any non-wooden objects inside the blade. If the presence of such materials is suspected, M.C.C. requests that the bat is sent to them for further testing.

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. 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 using 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. Umpires will then have to act accordingly.

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 8751.