

The Rule Book recognizes three categories of bats that may not be used. They are Illegal Bats, Non-Approved Bats, and Altered Bats. This article describes these bats and the penalties associated with their use.

Illegal Bat – “A bat that does not meet the requirements of an official bat or warm-up bat.”

Non-Approved Bat – “A bat that does not meet USA Softball specification or is on the current USA Softball non-approved bat list [even though it has] USA Softball Certification Marks.”

Altered Bat – When the physical structure of an otherwise legal softball bat has been changed. Legal bats become “altered if they are rolled, shaved, repainted, weighted or modified to change their characteristics from that produced by the manufacturer. Identifying the bat by means of laser marking, engraving, or painting the name or number of the player will not make the bat an altered bat.” Additionally, a bat may not be cooled or heated (which will change its characteristics).

So, what are the differences between the above categories? A non-approved bat is one that USA Softball has not listed as approved or has previously listed but has withdrawn the listing for that model bat. An altered bat is one that is a listed model, but the individual bat has been altered from how the manufacturer created the bat. This would be an intentional change. For example, an approved bat has been rolled so that the bat can hit a ball further than it could when it was manufactured. On the other hand, an illegal bat is a USA Softball approved model but the bat changed its characteristics so that it no longer meets the requirements of USA Softball.

How can a bat become illegal? Through normal use it develops a crack, a rattle, or its compression characteristics change so that it is no longer within specifications.

When umpires inspect bats prior to the game umpires are looking for any bat that is not legal for play. This would include non-approved bats, altered bats, and illegal bats.

The USA Softball rules make no penalty distinction between altered bats and non-approved bats.

In general the penalty for using an illegal bat is an out, whereas the penalty for using an altered or non-approved bat is an out and an ejection:

If a batter merely enters the batter’s box with an altered or non-approved bat and it is discovered prior to the first pitch (legal or illegal) to the next batter, the batter is out and ejected. Any outs as the result of the at bat stand and any advancement(s) as the result of the at bat are nullified. (Advancement(s) not the result of the at bat – steals, certain base awards, etc.- are not nullified.)

The penalty for using an illegal bat is the same except there is no ejection.