

Congress is No Playground

By Reg P. Wydeven
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When I was in grade school, my favorite part of the day was recess. Pearl, Timmy, Daffy, Scott and I would play catch, kickball, red rover, and my least favorite playground game - tag.

As my high school coaches would later attest, I was never "conventionally fast". Thankfully I had quick hands, so if I was ever tagged, I usually would re-tag the person who was "it" before they could flee. This strategy served me well, until the dreaded "no tag-backs" rule was implemented, meaning you had to tag someone different than the person who tagged you.

Because of my 'molasses in January' speed, I would have liked to attend Willett Elementary School in Attleboro, Mass., just South of Boston. Officials at Willett have banned kids from playing tag, touch football and any other unsupervised chase game during recess. The officials fear the kids will get injured while playing these games and sue the school.

The ban is only at Willett, not the entire Attleboro district. A few years ago, the district also looked at outlawing dodge ball, another of our playground staples, because it is exclusionary and dangerous.

Tag was also banned at elementary schools in Cheyenne, Wyoming, and Spokane, Washington, while all unsupervised contact sports have been banned in a district outside of Charleston, South Carolina.

Much to my delight, when we got a little older we stopped playing tag at recess and picked up baseball. Again, because of my lack of blazing speed, I needed to hit the ball as far as humanly possible if I was going to beat out the throw to first base. That's why I was so excited when I got a shiny aluminum bat for my 10th birthday.

Velocity-challenged youth in New Jersey, however, are going to have to get the lead out if they want to get base hits. Lawmakers in the Garden State are attempting to make New Jersey the first state to completely ban aluminum bats from youth sports.

New Jersey lawmakers are considering the ban because balls hit off aluminum bats are so fast, young fielders have no time to react, resulting in severe injuries. In 2002, Brown University conducted a study that discovered balls hit off aluminum bats averaged 93.3 mph, while balls hit off wooden bats averaged 86.1 mph. Further, only 2 percent of balls hit off wooden bats exceeded 100 mph, while 37 percent of balls hit off metal bats exceeded 100 mph.

The new law would require wooden bats for all leagues with players under 18 in the state, however, visiting teams from outside New Jersey would be granted an exemption. But New Jersey is not alone - Illinois high schools have started a pilot program to test wooden bats. Next year, high school teams in North Dakota plan to switch to wooden bats. Finally, since 2003, Massachusetts Catholic high school baseball teams have used only wooden bats.

While it doesn't seem possible, now that I'm over 30, I'm even slower than I was before. If I lose a step, I will actually be moving in slow motion. Plus, Kimberly's rec league softball banned our high-end, gel-centered, double-barreled aluminum bat. So the moral is, even if you're slow and can't hit the ball far, it's hard to get kicked off the softball team when you're the sponsor. Go Legal Eagles!