The proposed new version of Law 6 (The Bat)

The General Introduction explains the reasons why the changes are proposed and contains a breakdown of each section of the proposed Law and the Appendix E.

The second section provides the proposed new version of Law 6 (The Bat) which will result from the approval of the Resolution.

The third and final section provides the proposed new Appendix E which will result from the approval of the Resolution.

General Introduction

M.C.C. has decided to re-write Law 6 (The Bat) with a view to maintaining the essential balance between the bat and the ball, upon which the very nature of the game depends. New materials and technologies have allowed cricket bat manufacturers to produce bats that are increasingly powerful. If this development is left unchecked, the Club feels that the balance of the game could be tipped too far towards the batsman.

Cricket is not the only sport to face such issues. Golf, tennis, hockey and baseball have all had their own problems in dealing with the advancement of materials. Golf courses have had to be lengthened to counteract the longer distances that new golf clubs can hit the ball. In tennis, the pressure of the ball has been altered to cater for more powerful rackets, while in baseball, titanium and aluminium bats have been banned in the professional game, where only wooden bats may be used. The changes seen in other sports as a result of newer materials have not necessarily been to the detriment of these games. However, most cricket grounds, including Lord's, cannot easily be made any bigger. Cricket is now at the stage where changes must be made to safeguard the game's traditions.

M.C.C. has undertaken much consultation in drafting the new version of Law 6, including discussions with the International Cricket Council and its Full Member Countries, as per the provisions of Club Rule 27. There have been two rounds of meetings with nine different bat manufacturers, ranging from major brands to smaller, independent bat-makers. This included manufacturers from as far afield as India and Australia, as well as British-based companies. This enabled the Club not only to garner the opinions of the manufacturers, but also to learn about materials and technologies that may become available in the future. The Club also met willow growers to establish the situation with regard to future supplies of willow. Crucially for the new Law, the future availability and price of cane was also investigated.

M.C.C. recognises that it is not just bats that are becoming more powerful. Many of the best players are fitter and stronger than in the past and this enables them to hit the ball harder. The Club wishes to stress that it is not seeking to legislate against such players; it is the influence of new materials which could make a major difference. Traditional bat-making techniques will not be affected by the new Law.

The reasoning behind each section of the proposed law is outlined below.

Section 1 mentions the handle for the first time in the Laws of the game. This is important for subsequent sections of Law 6.

Section 2 makes reference to a newly created Appendix E. All measurements relating to the new Law are contained in this Appendix. Further information on Appendix E is below.

Section 3 defines the handle. It has been necessary to define an upper portion of the handle and also a lower portion. Sub-section (b) provides that the handle must be made principally of cane and/or wood – this is further defined in Appendix E. The Club was initially reluctant to be prescriptive on the materials used in the handle but developments in handle technology were such that it was decided that traditional bat-making methods needed to be maintained. Carbon-fibre and graphite handles are becoming more prevalent and are leading to more powerful bats. Section 3 also provides for twine and a grip to be applied to the handle.

Section 4 defines the blade, which must consist solely of wood. This section prohibits any other insertions into the blade but allows for adhesive to join the blade to the handle.

Section 5 introduces different categories for bats – Grades A, B and C. The main reason for different grades is the need for cheaper and junior bats to be able to be covered with materials which help to hide blemished or poor quality willow. This type of covering, often done with a kind of thin cloth, is essential and is used in many bats of poorer quality. If poor quality willow was not able to be used and masked in this way, the cost of bats would rise significantly, particularly at junior level. M.C.C. feels strongly that the price of junior bats should be kept as low as possible to encourage participation. However, the Club did not want the ability to cover a bat to be used by some bat manufacturers as a "loophole" to cover the blade with a material which may be performance enhancing. Consequently, bats used at the top level cannot be covered except for protection and repair as allowed under Section 6. There is further explanation of Grades A, B and C in the new Appendix E.

Section 6 allows for materials to be placed on the bat for protection and repair. This will allow materials such as "anti-scuff" or fibreglass tape to be used on the face, sides and shoulders of the blade, for all grades of bat. Sub-section (b) permits the use of wood to repair damaged blades in all grades of bat. Furthermore, Grade B and C bats may have wood inserted in the toe or edge at the point of manufacture as a means of offering additional protection from damage. This is aimed at prolonging the lives of cricket bats. Toe inserts, usually made of harder wood than willow, are already used in some bats. They will not be allowed in Grade A bats, again as a means of ensuring that there are no loopholes that can be exploited for enhanced performance. Toe guards, stuck onto the bottom of the toe, will be allowed in all bats under sub-section (c). Sub-section (d) allows the use of substances such as linseed oil or types of varnish.

Section 7 ensures that materials used in or on the bat are not likely to cause unacceptable damage to the ball. This is a more descriptive version of what already exists in the current Law 6.

Section 8 is very similar to Section 3 of the current Law 6, which outlines what will constitute contact with the bat. This is essential for various reasons, not least defining catches and whether runs should be credited to the batsman.

Appendix E - notes

Grading of bats – Grades A, B and C were explained in the notes for Section 5 of the proposed new Law 6. Grade A bats, which will be the highest quality bats, may be used at any level of cricket. This part of Appendix E then places the onus on the Governing Body for Cricket in the country concerned to decide at what levels of cricket Grade B and Grade C bats may be used. It is expected that Grade B or Grade C bats will not be allowed to be used in any professional cricket, while only Grade C bats will be excluded from the top level of amateur cricket, such as Minor County or Premier League cricket. All manufacturers will be asked to submit their designs to M.C.C. for approval and Grade classification. There will be a moratorium period, which will be defined by the Governing Body in each country. M.C.C. has reached agreements with manufacturers whose bats will not comply with the new Law 6, including a deadline by which such bats will no longer be available for purchase in the shops. In amateur cricket, players who have purchased bats which will become illegal under the new Law will be able to use them for the rest of the bat's natural life.

The blade – defines the different parts of the blade, namely the face, the shoulders, the edges, the toe and the back.

Adhesives – the type of adhesive to be used in the bat is not specified but must be kept to a minimum.

Materials in handle – for Grade A and Grade B bats, 90% of the total volume of the handle must consist of cane and/or wood and/or twine. The remaining 10% is designed for other unspecified materials for the purpose of reducing vibration, such as rubber or cork springs. For Grade C bats, these figures alter slightly to a ratio of 80% and 20%. The other materials may extend into the lower portion of the handle to assist in the reduction of vibrations, but only to a specified depth.

Binding and covering of handle – specifies how far the binding and the grip can extend down the handle from the junction of the blade and the handle.

Length and width – maintains the same measurements as the current Law 6.

Length of handle – introduces a maximum length of the handle in proportion to the total length of the bat. This is aimed at ensuring that the lower portion of the handle, often known as the splice, does not extend too far into the blade.

Covering of blade – only applicable to Grade C bats and within the defined limits.

Protection and repair of blade – places restrictions on the thickness of materials used for protection and repair. There is also a restriction on the application of non-solid materials which, when dry, form a layer thicker than a specified amount.

Toe and side inserts – only applicable to Grade B and Grade C bats.

Toe protection – applicable to all Grades of bat.

Commercial identifications – places restrictions on how much of the bat may be covered with stickers. The limits are in line with International Cricket Council regulations.

The new Law is more prescriptive than M.C.C. would ideally like. However, it is felt that this is a necessary step to preserve the fundamental nature of the game. In terms of enforcement of the proposed new Law by umpires, the bats will be pre-approved by M.C.C. and will be given the appropriate grading. In addition, random tests will be carried out by M.C.C. on bats on sale throughout the world to ensure that they conform to the new Law. In most levels of recreational cricket, all Grades of bat will be able to be used and so most umpires should not have to concern themselves with the grading system. Furthermore, as is the case at present, umpires will not be expected to check anything but the visible features of the bat.

The Committee is fully supportive of the proposed new Law, which is the culmination of a great deal of work by the Club. It urges Members to support the proposal.

The proposed new version of Law 6 (The Bat)

1. The bat
The bat consists of two parts, a handle and a blade.

2. Measurements
All provisions in sections 3 to 6 below are subject to the measurements and restrictions stated in Appendix E.

3. The handle

(a) One end of the handle is inserted into a recess in the blade as a means of joining the handle and the blade. The part of the handle that is then wholly outside the blade is defined to be the upper portion of the handle. It is a straight shaft for holding the bat. The remainder of the handle is its lower portion used purely for joining the blade and the handle together. It is not part of the blade but, solely in interpreting 5 and 6 below, references to the blade shall be considered to extend also to the lower portion of the handle where relevant.

(b) The handle is to be made principally of cane and/or wood, glued where necessary and bound with twine along the upper portion.

(c) Providing 7 below is not contravened, the upper portion may be covered with materials solely to provide a surface suitable for gripping. Such covering is an addition and is not part of the bat. Note, however, 8 below.

(d) Notwithstanding 4(c) and 5 below, both the twine binding and the covering grip may extend beyond the junction of the upper and lower portions, to cover part of the shoulders as defined in Appendix E.

4. The blade

(a) The blade comprises the whole of the bat apart from the handle as defined above. The blade has a face, a back, a toe, sides and shoulders. See Appendix E.

(b) The blade shall consist solely of wood.

(c) No material may be placed on or inserted into either the blade or the lower portion of the handle other than as permitted in 3(d) above and 5 and 6 below, together with the minimal adhesives or adhesive tape used solely for fixing these items, or for fixing the handle to the blade.

5. Covering the blade

All bats may have commercial identifications on the blade.

Grade A and Grade B bats may have no other covering on the blade except as permitted in 6 below. Grade C bats may have a cloth covering on the blade. This may be treated as specified in 6(d) below. Such covering is additional to the blade and is not part of the bat. Note, however, 8 below.

6. Protection and repair

Providing neither 4 above nor 7 below is contravened,

(a) solely for the purposes of

either (i) protection from surface damage to the face, sides and shoulders of the blade

or (ii) repair to the blade after damage

material that is not rigid, either at the time of its application to the blade or subsequently, may be placed on these surfaces.

Any such material shall not extend over any part of the back of the blade except in the case of (ii) above and then only when it is applied as a continuous wrapping covering the damaged area.

(b) solid material may be inserted into the blade for repair after damage other than surface damage. Additionally, for protection from damage for Grades B and C, material may be inserted at the toe and/or along the sides, parallel to the face of the blade.

The only material permitted for any insertion is wood with minimal essential adhesives.

(c) to prevent damage to the toe, material may be placed on that part of the blade but shall not extend over any part of the face, back or sides of the blade.

(d) the surface of the blade may be treated with non-solid materials to improve resistance to moisture penetration and/or mask natural blemishes in the appearance of the wood. Save for the purpose of giving a homogenous appearance by masking natural blemishes, such treatment must not materially alter the colour of the blade.

Any materials referred to in (a), (b), (c) or (d) are additional to the blade and not part of the bat. Note, however, 8 below.

7. Damage to the ball

(a) For any part of the bat, covered or uncovered, the hardness of the constituent materials and the surface texture thereof shall not be such that either or both could cause unacceptable damage to the ball.

(b) Any material placed on any part of the bat, for whatever purpose, shall similarly not be such that it could cause unacceptable damage to the ball.

(c) For the purposes of this Law, unacceptable damage is deterioration greater than normal wear and tear caused by the ball striking the uncovered wooden surface of the blade.

8. Contact with the ball

In these Laws,

(a) reference to the bat shall imply that the bat is held in the batsman's hand or a glove worn on his hand, unless stated otherwise.

(b) contact between the ball and

either (i) the bat itself

or (ii) the batsman's hand holding the bat

or (iii) any part of a glove worn on the batsman's hand holding the bat

or (iv) any additional materials permitted under 3, 5 or 6 shall be regarded as the ball striking or touching the bat, or being struck by the bat.

The proposed new Appendix E

APPENDIX E – The bat

Grading of bats: Grades A, B and C are bats conforming to Law 6 sections 1 to 8 inclusive. Any other bats are graded below C are not recognised in the Laws. Grade A bats, the top grade, may be used at any level. Grades B, C and lower grades may be used only at or below levels determined by the Governing Body for cricket in the country concerned.

The blade: The face of the blade is its main striking surface. The back is the opposite surface. The shoulders, sides and toe are the remaining surfaces, separating the face and the back.
The shoulders, one on each side of the handle, are along that portion of the blade between the first entry point of the handle and the point at which the blade first reaches its full width.
The toe is the surface opposite to the shoulders taken as a pair.
The sides, one on each side of the blade, are along the rest of the blade, between the toe and the shoulders.

Adhesives: Throughout, adhesives are permitted only where essential and only minimal in quantity.

Materials in handle: As a proportion of the total volume of the handle, materials other than cane, wood or twine are restricted to one-tenth for Grades A and B and one-fifth for Grade C. Such materials must not project more than 3.25 in/8.26 cm into the lower portion of the handle.

Binding and covering of handle: The permitted continuation beyond the junction of the upper and lower portions of the handle is restricted to a maximum, measured along the length of the handle, of
2.5 in/6.35 cm for the twine binding
2.75 in/6.99 cm for the covering grip.

Length and width:
(a) The overall length of the bat, when the lower portion of the handle is inserted, shall not be more than 38 in/96.5 cm.
(b) The width of the bat shall not exceed 4.25 in/10.8 cm at its widest part.
(c) Permitted coverings, repair material and toe guards, not exceeding their specified thicknesses, may be additional to the dimensions above.

Length of handle: Except for bats of size 6 and less, the handle shall not exceed 52% of the overall length of the bat.

Covering of blade: The cloth covering permitted for Grade C bats shall be of thickness not exceeding 0.012 in/0.3 mm before treatment as in 6.6(d).

Protection and repair of blade: The material permitted in 6.6(a) shall not exceed 0.04 in/1 mm in thickness. In 6.6(a)(ii), the repair material shall not extend along the length of the blade more than 0.79 in/2 cm in each direction beyond the limits of the damaged area. Where used as a continuous binding, any overlapping shall not breach the maximum of 0.04 in/1 mm in total thickness.

In 6.6(d), the use of non-solid material which when dry forms a hard layer more than 0.004 in/0.1 mm in thickness is not permitted.

Toe and side inserts: The wood used must not be more than 0.3 in/0.89 cm in thickness.
The toe insert shall not extend from the toe more than 2.5 in/6.35 cm up the blade at any point.
Neither side insert may extend from the edge more than 1 in/2.54 cm across the blade at any point.

Toe protection: The maximum permitted thickness of protective material placed on the toe of the blade is 0.12 in/3mm.

Commercial identifications: These identifications must not exceed 0.08 in/0.2 mm in thickness. On the back of the blade they must cover no more than 50% of the surface. On the face of the blade, they must be confined within the top 9 in/22.86 cm, measured from the bottom of the grip.