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A Numerical Model for Risk of Ball-Impact Injury to Baseball Pitchers

ROCHELLE L. NICHOLLS[1,2], KAROL MILLER[1], and BRUCE C. ELLIOTT[2]

[1]*School of Mechanical Engineering and* [2]*School of Human Movement and Exercise Science, The University of Western Australia, Crawley, Perth, Western Australia, AUSTRALIA*

ABSTRACT

NICHOLLS, R. L., K. MILLER, and B. C. ELLIOTT. A Numerical Model for Risk of Ball-Impact Injury to Baseball Pitchers. *Med. Sci. Sports Exerc.*, Vol. 37, No. 1, pp. 30–38, 2005. **Introduction:** Metal baseball bats produce higher ball exit velocity (BEV) than wood bats, increasing the risk of impact injuries to infield players. In this paper, maximum BEV from a wood and a metal bat were determined using the finite element method. **Methods:** Three-dimensional (3-D) bat kinematics at the instant of impact were determined from high-speed videography ($N = 17$ high-performance batters). A linear viscoelastic constitutive model was developed for stiffer and softer types of baseballs. The risk of impact injury was determined using available movement time data for adult pitchers; the data indicate that 0.400 s is required to evade a batted ball. **Results:** The highest BEV (61.5 $m \cdot s^{-1}$) was obtained from the metal bat and the stiffer ball model, equating to 0.282 s of available movement time. For five impacts along the long axis of each bat, the "best case scenario" resulted from the wood bat and the softer ball (46.0 $m \cdot s^{-1}$, 0.377 s). **Conclusions:** The performance difference between the bats was attributed to the preimpact linear velocity of the bat impact point and to differences in orientation on the horizontal plane. Reducing the swing moment of the baseball bat, and the shear and relaxation moduli of the baseball, increased the available movement time. Key Words: BASEBALL EQUIPMENT, DESIGN MODIFICATION, FINITE ELEMENT METHOD, IMPACT HAZARD ANALYSIS

The financial cost and morbidity from sports injuries are major public health concerns. Baseball, one of the most popular team sports in the world, is generally considered to entail low risk of injury due to the noncontact nature of the game. However, baseball (and softball) has recently been shown to cause more injuries requiring medical attention than any other sport in the United States (5,32), with more than 2.6 million incidents reported in 1983–1989 (28). Of the 88 fatalities recorded between 1973 and 1995, 76% resulted from impact by the batted, pitched, or thrown ball (5). The pitcher is the closest infielder to the hitter and is therefore at greatest risk of being struck by the batted ball, with 23 deaths recorded between 1973 and 1983 (28).

Reduction in the incidence and severity of such impact injuries not only requires understanding of the biomechanical mechanisms underlying trauma but also rigorous quantification of equipment performance to establish the risk of such an injury occurring. Marshall et al. (16) showed, in a review of 6,744,240 junior player seasons, that modification to the material properties of baseballs can result in reduced incidence and severity of impact injuries. However, the contribution of bat type and bat design to the incidence of players being struck by the ball was not discussed. Wooden bats have been used in baseball since the game originated in the early 19th century. Professional players still exclusively use these bats. More durable metal bats were introduced into baseball in 1972 and are now in worldwide use in most amateur, college, and youth baseball leagues. Metal bats outperform wood bats when performance is measured by ball exit velocity (BEV) (12), which has provoked further scrutiny of metal bat performance (e.g., (1,9)). However, ball-impact injuries are also reported in professional baseball (7,32), indicating the problem is not confined to leagues using metal bats.

During a high-speed impact, the baseball is in contact with the bat for as little as 1 ms (4), a period less than the typical vibrational response time of a wood or metal bat (21). Factors beside bat material properties therefore affect BEV from each bat type. Experimental studies by Fleisig et al. (10) and Greenwald et al. (12) have shown bat mass distribution, which differs considerably in metal and wood bats of equal mass and length affects the preimpact linear velocity of the bat and, by inference, the momentum that can be imparted to the baseball. Bat orientation at impact, which also affects the exchange of energy between bat and ball, has never been quantified but could reasonably be expected to differ in bats of different mass distribution.

Although much attention has been devoted to bat performance, the contribution of the material characteristics of the baseball to BEV remains unknown. Baseball stiffness (14,16,28) and mass (9,15) have been identified as impor-

Address for correspondence: Rochelle L. Nicholls, Mail: University of Western Australia, Orthopaedic Unit, Fremantle Hospital, Level 6, B-Block, Alma Street, Fremantle (Western Australia) Australia 6160; E-mail: rochelle@cyllene.uwa.edu.au.
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tant to the magnitude and severity of impact injury, but the behavior of the ball during interaction with the bat is yet to be quantified.

Despite the concerns expressed over the potential for balls hit at high velocity to cause injury to infield players, restrictions on bat performance are not evident at most levels of the game. Metal bats used in collegiate (National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA)) baseball in the United States are currently subject to a maximal BEV restriction of 43.1 $m \cdot s^{-1}$ when tested using robotic hitting machines which swing the bat in a horizontal plane at 29.3 $m \cdot s^{-1}$ against a ball projected at the same velocity (2). Such devices, designed for simplicity and repeatability, may not truly reflect the performance capabilities of a bat when swung by a hitter. In this paper, finite element analysis (FEA) was used to approximate the maximum BEV generated from wood and metal baseball bats when swung by high-performance players. FEA has previously been used to quantify baseball bat performance (17,25,26). However, these models did not account for important factors in the dynamics of impact such as the moment of inertia of the bat, preimpact linear velocity of the bat impact point, and three-dimensional (3-D) orientation of the implement. The purpose of this study was to use a model of bat–ball impact based on experimental data for bat kinematics and ball time-dependent behavior to quantify the maximum risk of a pitcher being struck by a baseball from each bat type.

METHODS

Baseball bat models. The 3-D models of a wood and a metal baseball bat were developed using ANSYS/LS-DYNA 6.1 FEA software (LSTC, Livermore CA.). Bat geometry was obtained using calipers at 168 intervals along the bat length from one aluminum alloy bat (Easton BE-811) and one white ash wood bat (Easton Redline Pro Stix 271) of identical length and mass (Table 1). The wood bat was modeled as a homogeneous rigid solid meshed with 9800 eight-node SOLID-164 hexahedral elements (Fig. 1). The metal bat was represented by a rigid hollow tube meshed with 12974 SOLID-164 elements to accommodate changes in wall thickness along its length (3.3–6.1 mm). The assumption of rigidity was appropriate as bat deformation is negligible compared with its overall motion, the collision duration was much shorter than the time taken for an impulse to be reflected from the hitter's hands, and using rigid bodies also reduced the computation time for an explicit analysis (6). Bat moment of inertia values were obtained using the pendulum technique and the parallel axis theorem

TABLE 1. Physical characteristics of baseball bats used to develop 3-D models in this study.

		Wood Bat		Metal Bat	
		Experimental	LSDYNA	Experimental	LSDYNA
Mass	kg (oz)	0.840 (29.6)	0.872	0.805 (28.4)	
Length	m (inches)	0.835 (32.8)	0.835	0.834 (32.9)	
Density	$kg \cdot m^{-3}$	600	600	2400	2400
Young's modulus	Pa	1.22E+10	1.22E+10	7.00E+10	7.00E+10
Poisson's ratio		0.371	0.371	0.300	0.300
	m (%)				
Center of mass (CM)	Length	0.529 (63)	0.526	0.479 (57)	0.479
Diameter at widest point (barrel)	m	0.064	0.064	0.070	0.070
Wall thickness	mm				
Handle		n/a		34	
Throat		n/a		22	
Barrel		n/a		33	
Moments of inertia about bat knob					
Ixx	$kg \cdot m^{-2}$		0.356		0.336
Iyy (swing moment)	$kg \cdot m^{-2}$	0.329	0.309	0.269	0.254
Izz (polar moment)	$kg \cdot m^{-2}$	0.032	0.114	0.057	3.83E−02
Ixy	$kg \cdot m^{-2}$		−5.05E−02		1.35E+00
Iyz	$kg \cdot m^{-2}$		0.145		1.128
Izx	$kg \cdot m^{-2}$		9.32E−02		2.32E−02
Moments of inertia about CM					
Ixx	$kg \cdot m^{-2}$		4.33E−02		3.83E−02
Iyy	$kg \cdot m^{-2}$		3.76E−02		5.18E−02
Izz	$kg \cdot m^{-2}$		1.40E−02		1.82E−02
Ixy	$kg \cdot m^{-2}$		−4.89E−03		−1.21E−03
Iyz	$kg \cdot m^{-2}$		1.42E−02		1.14E−02
Izx	$kg \cdot m^{-2}$		9.05E−03		2.02E+03
Principal moments of inertia					
Ixx	$kg \cdot m^{-2}$		4.62E−02		3.84E−02
Iyy	$kg \cdot m^{-2}$		4.41E−02		5.53E−02
Izz	$kg \cdot m^{-2}$		4.59E−03		1.46E+02

Included are LSDYNA's estimates of bat mass and inertial properties from the 3-D models. Also given are experimental values for 3-D bat orientation angles, where horizontal orientation is the relative alignment of the bat to the global z-axis, and vertical orientation is expressed relative to the global y-axis. The LSDYNA working plane was rotated from its default x-y alignment to reflect the position of each bat, prior to entry of bat x, y, z coordinates in the modelling process. Linear and angular velocity loads applied to each bat were obtained using high-speed videography from seventeen elite baseball batters. Linear velocity loads were entered as time-varying array parameters applied to nodal components for each end of the bat. Angular velocities were applied about an axis 10 cm distal to the bat knob.

nique, and the size and strength of players all contributing factors. This section outlines the likelihood and severity of impact injury in baseball as related to the properties of bats and balls used by the players. The speed with which a ball can be hit toward a defensive player is a product of the material behaviour of both bat and ball,[12,13] and likewise, the extent of injury caused to a player hit by the ball is a function of the ball mass, stiffness and viscoelastic properties.[14-19]

2.1 Baseball Bats

The rate of deaths from chest impact in baseball increased from 2.1 per year in 1973–80 to 3.3 in 1986–90.[20] While this may reflect increased participation, higher BEV from increasingly lightweight and high-performance metal bats may also be a contributing factor. Wooden bats have been used in baseball since the nineteenth century and are still exclusively used by professional players. More durable aluminium alloy bats were introduced into baseball in 1972, and are now in world-wide use in most college and youth baseball leagues.

Seventy-five percent of ball-related injuries (49% of all injuries) to Little League baseball pitchers[2] are due to impact from the batted ball. The prevalence of such injuries in high-school and collegiate play is not known, although in 1998, 375 National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I collegiate pitchers were struck by the batted ball, with 11% requiring medical treatment.[9] The risk of impact injury to pitchers may be greater when hitters use metal bats. BEV for balls hit with metal bats has been demonstrated as higher than that from wooden bats.[11-13] Bryant et al.,[11] quantified mean BEV from wooden bats at 39.4 m/sec, and 41.1 m/sec from metal bats (n = 6 collegiate hitters). No details were given as to bat length, mass or moment of inertia. Substantially higher mean values were obtained by Greenwald et al.[12] (n = 19 high-school, collegiate and minor league players). Five metal and two wooden bats of varying length and mass were employed, and mean BEV from the top 10% of hits from wooden bats was measured at 43.8 m/sec, while that from metal bats was 45.8 m/sec, with a range of 44.8–47.3 m/sec across the five models. Mean BEV for 17 high-school, collegiate and professional Australian hitters using metal bats was quantified by Nicholls et al.[13] at 44.0 m/sec, with a mean for wooden bats of 40.8 m/sec. This study was the only one that restricted wooden and metal bats to those of identical length and mass, enabling direct comparisons in bat performance.

In an unpublished thesis, Cassidy and Burton estimated 400ms is required for a pitcher to complete a protective movement such as lifting the hand to the face. This corresponds to a 'safe' velocity of about 42 m/sec. Although individual variation in a pitcher's follow-through technique was not accounted for in this study, BEV values reported in the literature suggest a high potential for impact injuries from balls hit by metal bats. Skull fracture has been shown to occur at impact speeds of 26 m/sec in cadaver heads,[16] highlighting the potentially catastrophic nature of injuries faced by pitchers.

The source of difference in BEV between wooden and metal bats has been previously proposed to depend on bat material and vibrational properties.[21,22] However, during a high-speed impact at the bat centre of percussion or at a vibrational node, where no vibrational response is generated in the bat and maximum energy is retained by the ball,[1,22] the baseball is in contact with the bat surface for just 1–2ms[1,12,22] and the flexure and vibrational properties of the bat materials exert little effect on the energy returned to it. Therefore, the linear velocity of the bat at impact is of major importance to the momentum transferred to the ball.[12,13] The velocity with which a bat can be swung is dependent on the bat design, particularly the distribution of mass along the long axis of the implement (moment of inertia [I]). For hitting implements, I is most commonly reported about an axis perpendicular to the proximal (grip) end of the bat.[13] As aluminium is four times as dense as wood, metal bats are fashioned as hollow shells to remain comparable in mass. Wooden bats are solid and the bat weight is distributed through the implement, with a narrower but relatively heavier barrel. Mass distribution has a quadratic effect on resistance to angular acceleration-

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tion: the relative extra weight in the barrel of a wooden bat increases the torque required to accelerate the bat, and the corresponding reduction in linear bat velocity results in lower BEV.[12,13]

2.2 Baseballs

The material properties of the baseball are important in two instances with respect to injury. First, ball response to high-speed loading affects the dynamics of the bat-ball interaction, and thereby both BEV and time available for evasive action. Secondly, in the event of the player being hit, the material properties of the ball also determine the severity of the injury.

Baseballs are made from a cork or rubber core wound in grey and white wools, covered in two hourglass-shaped pieces of cowhide. Regulation baseballs have a circumference of 22.8–23.5cm and a mass of 155–163g. The sole performance indicator used to establish regulations on baseballs is the coefficient of restitution (COR), which is determined by firing the baseballs at 26.8 m/sec (60 miles/hour) against a flat wall, and is reported as the ratio of outbound to inbound velocity. Baseballs are required to have a COR of 0.543–0.555 (NCAA, 2000 regulations).

2.2.1 Baseball Properties and Ball Exit Velocity

Reduction in the velocity of balls hit into the infield is required to reduce both the incidence and severity of impact injuries to defensive players. During impact with the bat, the baseball is compressed to 22% of its original diameter in less than 1ms,[23] using finite element analysis (figure 1). Most previous investigations of ball material behaviour during compression have been limited to mechanical compression tests to 10% of original ball diameter,[14-17,24] in which range ball behaviour is presumed linear elastic. Nicholls et al.[23] showed baseball behaviour is non-linear (hyperelastic) during unconfined compression to up to 25% of ball diameter (figure 2). Similarly, the data of Hendee et al.[17] show the dynamic behaviour (COR) of the baseball is strongly velocity-dependent, or viscoelastic, with COR decreasing with increasing impact velocity. This may explain why COR has previously

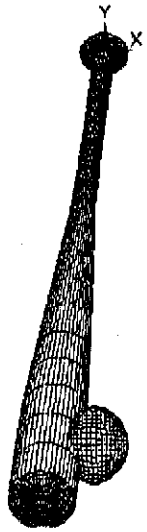

Fig. 1. Finite element analysis enables detailed investigation of transient high-speed events such as the impact of a baseball with a bat, which occurs over a period often less than 1ms. Nicholls et al.[23] used this method to investigate the deformation and recovery patterns of different types of baseballs with wood and metal bats. X denotes the horizontal axis (directed into the infield), Y is vertical and Z is the cross-product of the two (directed out of the page).

shown no relationship to ball stiffness or mass,[14,17] but is, as shown by Nicholls et al.,[23] a function of the time-dependent properties of the soft polymers used in ball construction.

3. Head and Chest Injuries

The biomechanical response during ball-player impact is affected by the ball velocity, mass and material properties, and the properties of the target. Both baseball stiffness[3,9,14,16,25] and mass[1,14] have been identified as important to the magnitude and severity of head and chest injury.

3.1 Head, Ocular and Dental Injuries

Head injuries are commonly classified as either damage to the soft tissues or scalp, bony fracture or brain contusion.[18] 170 000 head injuries occur in baseball each year,[26] constituting 86% of impact injuries in Little League baseball.[2] Eighty percent of head and facial injuries are experienced by fielding players,[7] probably due to the use of helmets by

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batters. The US Consumer Protection and Safety Commission proposed softer baseballs could prevent or reduce the severity of 47 900 head, neck and facial injuries per year.[27] Softer balls have cores that compress over a larger area and for a longer time, thereby increasing ball deformation and impact time, and reducing peak impact force. Increased peak force, highly localised impact, and shorter dwell time have been linked to higher stress transmitted to bone and increased severity of head injury.[13,14,15,17,18]

The biomechanics of head injury are complex and involve a combination of translational and rotational motion, structural vibration and inertial response transmitted through the cervical spine. A pressure gradient (compressive pressure near the impact site and tensile pressure at the opposite location), and shear strain maxima occur in the vicinity of the impact load, indicating additional potential for tearing or cavitation to the soft tissues within the skull.[18] Head injury risk is often quantified using the Head Injury Criterion (HIC), derived from measures of head acceleration. Decreasing the ball modulus has been shown to reduce impact force and peak head acceleration up to 72%,[13,14] and decrease the risk of head injury from 52% to 14%.[3] Heald and Pass[16] indicated injury risk (HIC) balls for lateral head impacts at 28.6 m/sec, was only 1% for 'soft' baseballs – those with a compression strength of 175 N/cm or less, compared with a professional standard baseball (700 N/cm or more).

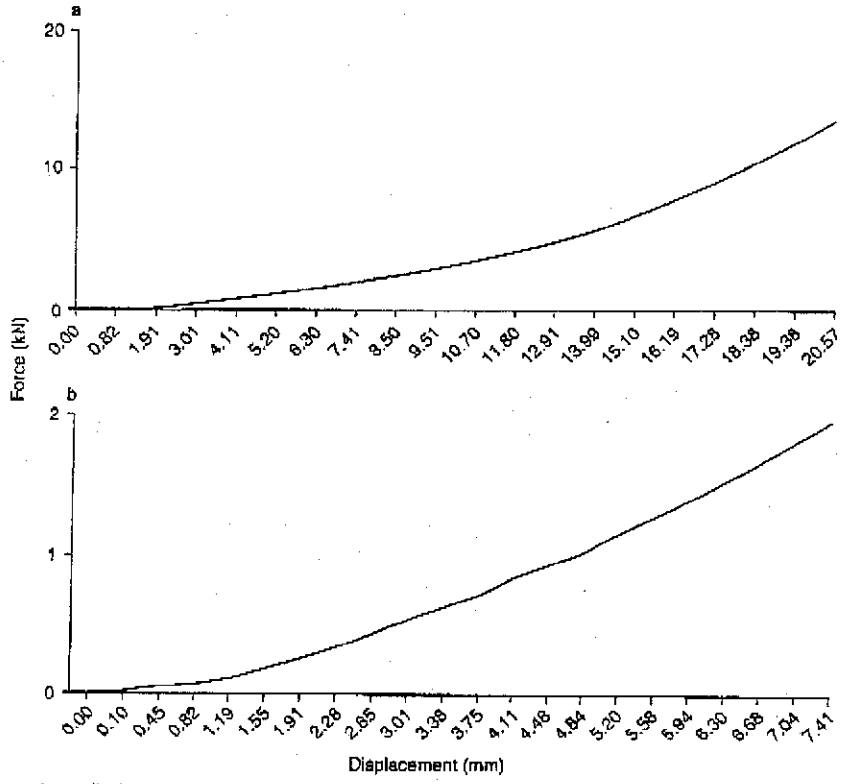

Fig. 2. The nonlinear force-displacement response of a baseball during compression to 25% of its original diameter is evident in (a). This large deformation is typical of compression reached during bat-ball impact. Previous studies of baseball material behaviour have been confined to compression to 10% of original diameter, in which force-displacement response is largely linear (b) [reproduced from Nicholls et al.[23] with permission].

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Crisco et al.[14] demonstrated a theoretical relationship between ball mass and head injury, in which decreased ball mass reduced peak impact force and peak acceleration 41% at velocities to 40.2 m/sec. However, simplifications of material properties of head and baseballs (each of which were assumed linear elastic isotropic) and neglect of neck compliance, which contributes up to 29% of total force for forehead impacts,[3] may explain the large discrepancies between reported absolute values for peak head accelerations and those of experimental studies.[3,16]

Dental injuries constitute 10% of injuries to Little League baseball players, although this may be as high as 18% for outfielders.[2] The effect of ball mass, stiffness and viscoelastic behaviour on dental injury is unknown. Baseball is the leading cause of sports-related eye injuries in 5- to 14-year-old children in the US, accounting for 55% of baseball-related injuries treated in hospital emergency rooms.[27] Zagelbaum et al.[26] documented 24 eye injuries occurring to professional players in the infield or on the sidelines. These injuries included malar fractures, ocular tearing, corneal abrasion and subconjunctival haemorrhage. The eye is a viscoelastic tissue whose response to loading depends on the rate of force application, hence the use of softer baseballs may decrease the severity of both ocular soft tissue and associated bony structures. Impact at 24.6 m/sec with a traditional ball has been shown to cause ocular rupture, with almost total extrusion of the intraocular contents, whereas a modified ball caused only posterior translation of the eye at speeds up to 33.5 m/sec. While an extremely soft baseball (10% of professional stiffness) may actually intrude into the orbit, ocular impact force is reduced for most modified balls.[19]

3.2 Chest Injuries

More deaths in 5- to 14-year-old baseball players result from impact to the chest than to the head. The use of batting helmets has reduced the incidence and severity of head injuries.[2,3,6,27] However, protective devices for the thorax are not used by any players with the exception of the catcher. The US Consumer Protection and Safety Commission attributed 41% of the 51 deaths reported in 1973–85 to chest impact by the ball. Such injuries comprised 35% of 23 deaths among pitchers between 1973–83.[10]

Giacobbe et al.[15] proposed that thoracic injury may result if the internal soft tissues are excited into resonance by the impact. Excitation depends on the dynamic hardness of the ball (a measure of the frequency of the energy transferred to an impacted object).[15] If dynamic hardness is below the natural chest wall frequency, the majority of impact energy will be transferred into vibration of the internal organs. The dynamic hardness of standard baseballs was quantified as 400Hz, and that of modified balls as 78Hz. The natural frequency of the chest wall is 50–100Hz and the heart 20–30Hz, indicating the lower dynamic hardness of the modified ball may be undesirable since most of the impact energy can be passed beyond the chest wall. However, dynamic hardness was measured in that study at 2.2 m/sec and the data may not be representative of a high-speed impact.[15]

Commotio cordis (death from blunt thoracic trauma in the absence of cardiac abnormality) accounts for 2–4 deaths in baseball per annum.[11] Vincent and McPeak[20] documented 76 occurrences of commotio cordis in sport, of which 40 were baseball-related. Death was instantaneous in about half of the cases, while in the others there was a brief period of consciousness before collapse.[20] The rate of successful resuscitation is only 10%.[10] A primary feature of deaths from commotio cordis is the absence of clinically significant cardiac injury at autopsy.[8,10,20] The aetiology of commotio cordis has been proposed as a direct concussive effect from the abrupt deceleration of the heart as it strikes the sternum or spine.[1] The result may be functional disruption of electrical conduction leading to fatal arrhythmias such as atrial or ventricular fibrillation, T-wave depression or inversion, ventricular tachycardia or complete heart block. Link et al.[28] proposed the risk and type of arrhythmia depended upon when the impact occurred during the cardiac electrical cycle (figure 3). Impacts occurring 15–30ms before the T-wave peak (the time of great-

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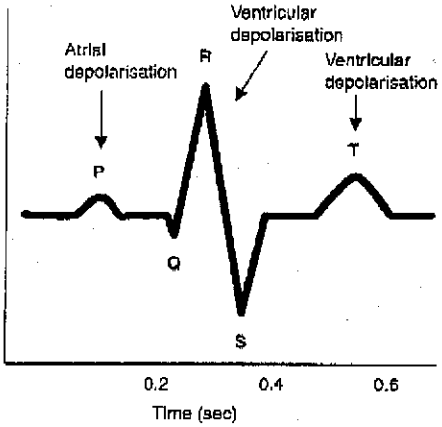

Fig. 3. Schematic of an electrocardiogram tracing showing the distinguishable deflection waves of the cardiac cycle.

est heterogeneity of repolarisation) produced immediate ventricular fibrillation in 90% of impacts in a swine model.

Van Amerongen et al.[8] contended children may be particularly vulnerable to thoracic injury because of the elasticity of their rib cage. In addition, the narrower antero-posterior diameter of the thorax provides less protection to the underlying organs, and slower reflexes and lower awareness of risk may contribute to the higher incidence of commotio cordis among youth players as reported by Van Amerongen et al.[8] and Vincent and McPeak.[20] However, Mueller et al.[2] indicated that only 1.4% of ball-related injuries in Little League baseball occurred to the chest, of which none were fatal.

The likelihood of commotio cordis was initially believed to be proportional to both the speed and force of the impact and the size of the contact area.[11] Link et al.[28] indicated that a relationship exists between baseball hardness and the likelihood of ventricular fibrillation in a swine model. At 13.2 m/sec – a relatively slow velocity in baseball terms, but reflective of the slow speeds at which commotio cordis has been documented to occur[1] – the softest baseballs produced ventricular fibrillation in only two of 26 impacts, compared with eight instances after 23 impacts with regulation baseballs. In a follow-up study, tests at 18 m/sec triggered ventricular fibrillation in less than 22% of instances compared with 69% with standard baseballs.[29] It was concluded that wider use of modified baseballs may reduce (but not eliminate) the risk of commotio cordis.

A theoretical lumped-element viscoelastic model of the chest in which both ball mass and modulus could be varied, showed peak impact force decreased by 80% when both variables were decreased.[14] The results of this analysis were not presented as functions of momentum, an important contributor to chest response.[30] Viano and Lau[31] proposed the viscous criterion as a predictor of commotio cordis. Viscous criterion is an index of the magnitude of chest wall deflection and the velocity of deformation, normalised for chest thickness; the higher the viscous criterion, the greater the energy absorbed by the tissue and the risk of injury.[20,31,32] Reduction in viscous criterion is achieved by reducing the velocity of deformation and/or extent of compression of the chest during impact. In a review of 88 700 impact injuries, Kyle et al.[27] reported that softer balls reduce the frequency and severity of chest injuries in youth baseball. Although softer balls may produce lower viscous criterions than regulation baseballs, results vary widely across ball models.

4. Protective Devices

Batting helmets are now compulsory in baseball. Most batting helmets are open-faced and protect the majority of the supero-lateral skull but not the jaw or facial area. The US Consumer Protection and Safety Commission indicated helmets fitted with face shields may prevent or reduce severity of 3 000 facial injuries to children each year,[27] but there is a lack of rigorous data to support such a claim.

Aside from the catcher, defensive players wear no special gear to protect against impact injury. The use of polycarbonate safety glasses for infielders have been encouraged by organisations including the American Academy of Pediatrics,[33] but not widely adopted due to a lack of supporting research. Most studies have focussed on the efficacy of equipment developed to reduce thoracic injury in fielders.[1,27,30,32] Increasing the effective mass of the

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chest using a padded vest may reduce the velocity of impact, viscous criterion and momentum transferred to the body.[32] Sternal acceleration was reduced by use of closed-cell foam vests for high-speed impacts in swine and dummy models,[30,32] but only minor reductions in the incidence of cardiac arrhythmia and viscous response were noted. In some vests, following impact with both standard and softer baseballs, peak force and momentum transferred to the chest were increased,[32] indicating debatable protective effect, which has forestalled the introduction of such products into the game.

5. Conclusion

The incidence and severity of impact injuries in baseball, particularly those to junior players, can be considered a substantial problem in sports medicine. However, the exact mechanisms of trauma, particularly in commotio cordis and role of stress and acceleration in head injury, remain unclear. The use of simplified models of ball and head[14] and the variety of experimental methods for chest impacts[1,28,30] may have contributed to varying conclusions to a highly complex problem, in which the involved biological tissues are acknowledged as inhomogeneous, anisotropic and nonlinear, and the material behaviour of playing equipment are similarly complex.

While it has been suggested having external automatic defibrillators and medical personnel present at youth games to treat impact injuries,[20] it is only by anticipating these injuries and trying to prevent them that they can be diminished in frequency and severity. Protective and modified equipment have been developed to protect players from the likelihood of, and severity of, impact injuries. Decreasing BEV is necessary to increase reaction time for defensive players and thereby reduce the incidence of batted-ball impact injuries. However, in order to develop effective standards for equipment, the effect of bat and ball design on BEV, and impact dynamics with the tissues of the body, must be further quantified.

There is debate over the performance characteristics of modified balls and the relative contribution of ball mass and stiffness to impact injury.[1,10,14-17,24,27] The reason for variance in impact severity amongst softer balls is unclear, although it has been shown modifying the time-dependent properties of ball material can reduce BEV.[23]

The behaviour of the ball during high-speed impact with the bat must also be quantified in order to regulate BEV to safe levels for infielders. The rebound characteristics of baseballs are currently only quantified at one velocity (60 miles/hour) before commercial sale, which is unrepresentative of bat-ball impact velocities and gives no information about the effect of rate of energy loss. The use of the finite element method has given more detailed information about the impact properties of the baseball (Nicholls et al., unpublished data).

Reduction in bat linear velocity (swing speed) reduces momentum transferred to the ball and thereby BEV, giving fielding players extra time for evasive action. The moment of inertia of metal bats has been identified as a critical factor in BEV.[11-13,24] Introduction of standards for non-wooden bats so the implement becomes "comparable to wood bats in weight variance" was first proposed by the NCAA in 1996[34] and supported by Fleisig et al.[24] However, optimal values will be difficult to identify as the effect of the size and strength of hitters is unknown, and the recommendations are yet to be adopted.

Impact tests using swine models[1,28,30,32] and test-dummies[1,3] indicate closed-cell foam chest protectors may not reduce, and indeed may increase, the peak force and momentum transferred to the chest. Test protocols with standardised boundary conditions, constraints and test velocities, are recommended to match ongoing improvement in the biofidelity of surrogate models, and increase the validity of further independent testing, evaluation and certification programmes. Current injury data are largely collected from emergency rooms[6,27] and insurance claims,[2] with no provision for non-hospitalisation injuries and those occurring in unorganised play. A large database of injury assessment reference values will also assist in continuing improvement in models of impact response.

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Correspondence and offprints: *Rochelle L. Nicholls*, The University of Western Australia, School of Surgery and Pathology (Orthopaedic Unit), Fremantle Hospital, WA 6160, Australia.
E-mail: rochelle@mech.uwa.edu.au

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