

# **Baseball Zone**

## **Choosing a Bat & Glove**

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## Purchasing Equipment

One of the best things you can do to help your player be successful in baseball is give him the proper equipment. Equipment that doesn't fit, is too heavy or worn out will negatively effect the players ability to perform in a game.

## Choosing a Bat

Lots of different factors can go into choosing the right size bat for your player. The most obvious ones being height and strength. Bat manufacturers today do a great job of combining both bat length and appropriate weight for each age level.

The best way to determine if a bat is right for your player is to watch him swing it. Can he handle the weight and length? If you are going to err on the weight side, I would recommend going a little bit lighter rather than a little bit heavier. A heavier bat can cause poor mechanics and rob your player of much needed bat speed. Also, check with your league rules governing bat composition and barrel size. The rules are changing and not every bat may be acceptable in your league play.

If you are not sure what bat to buy, I would let your player swing several bats to see which one he can handle best. This might mean having your player show up at his first practice without a bat, so he can swing some of the other players' bats. Pick some teammates similar in size/strength and see what they are swinging. This might help the aggravation of returning a bat that may be inappropriate.

### Common Bat Lengths By Age and Player Size

AGES	SMALLER	AVERAGE	BIGGER
5 to 7	24"	25"	26"
8 to 9	27"	28"	29"
10 to 11	28"	29"	30"
12 to 13	29"	30"	31"
14	30"	31"	32"



## Choosing a Glove

Choosing a glove may be the most critical decision you make as a player. You can always use someone else's bat if need be, only one person can hit at a time. But, you can't use someone else's glove, they're using it. Also, by using someone else's glove, your hand/finger size may alter the inside finger holes, making the glove feel uncomfortable or not fit right for the other person.

The older a player gets, the more persnickety he gets about his glove. That glove is now an extension of him as a fielder. There is not a better feeling than putting on a glove that fits your hand perfectly.

A couple things to consider when purchasing a glove, especially at the youth level. First, make sure the glove is the right size. An 11 inch glove is probably plenty big enough to play any position. There are major leaguers who will use an even smaller glove than that. With that in mind, make sure the glove is not too small either. The smaller the glove, the harder to catch. Second, make sure the players' fingers fit. Most, if not all manufacturers, will make youth models. They do this to adjust for the smaller hand/finger sizes of the younger players. Buying an adult glove for your 10 year old may not be a good idea. Lastly, if you have found the model you like, try on a few of the same model gloves in the store. They all may have a little different feel to them. One may be softer, one may bend the way you like, one may be more broken in, etc.

Depending on your budget, composition of the glove is last consideration. Obviously an all leather, top end glove will hold up best. It will also cost the most and be the hardest to break in. Youth players do not have a lot of time to break in a new glove. Manufacturers have come out with a few new variations in their compositions recently. They will vary in price and weight of the glove, which means they will also vary in break-in time. Again, find the glove that fits your player best. Try on several different models and several of the same model once you've made your choice.

Then go play catch!

## Breaking in a Glove

If you find a glove that is not broken in, there are several remedies. Glove manufacturers make a variety of oils to soften the leather, shaving cream with lanolin, vaseline, etc. There are even wooden mallets specifically made to pound the pocket. A rubber mallet will also work.

The bottom line is there are two parts of the glove that are hardest to flex initially: Down on the bottom where the fingers meet the palm (hinge) and up on top of the pocket (web). If you can get those areas soft and pliable, it will make catching a baseball a more fun experience for your child. It may be as simple as working the glove open and closed with your hands (a lot).



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When using oils and such, stay away from over-oiling the fingers and the thumb portion of the glove. These are two areas that you want to remain stiff so the glove won't bend back on contact. Instead, focus on applying to hinge, pocket and web. Over-applying oils may also add weight to the glove.

Of course nothing breaks in a glove faster than using it. Play catch!

Strange ways to break in a glove that may not be beneficial:

1. Running over the glove with your car.
2. Microwaving it.
3. Dunking it in water.
4. Keeping it under your mattress
5. Heating it in the oven.

Gloves need to remain firm yet flexed at the right spots.

#### Glove Care

Once you get your glove broken in how you like it, some tips to keep it in good shape and extend its use:

1. Keep a ball in it when in your bag. Being crushed by your baseball gear is the quickest way to flatten the usefulness out of your mitt.
2. Bring it in the house when it gets damp
3. Lightly clean the mitt to get dirt and mud off of it.
4. I have some players who swear by storing their mitt inside out inside the house during the offseason. Keeps the pocket open and the leather won't be put through changing temperatures.



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