

THE EVOLUTION OF THE EQUIPMENT | BY STAFF WRITER PETE ALFANO

Better equipped

The modern game means having cork in the baseballs but not, hopefully, in the streamlined bats



Baseballs

Baseballs have changed over the years in color, texture, stitching and with the introduction of a round cork center, or pill, that is wrapped in wool and polyester and cotton yarn, then covered by stitched cowhide. Each baseball has to weigh between 5 and 5 1/4 ounces and measure between 9 and 9 1/4 inches. Cowhide was introduced in the early 1970s to replace horsehide. The cork center replaced rubber strips and the earliest baseballs that reportedly had a lead center and were covered in sheepskin.

Fielder's glove



1880s glove



1940s glove



2006 glove

Fielder's gloves were once not much bigger than what you would wear in cold weather. One of the first models is described as comparable to the glove a train brakeman wore. Nowadays, gloves are much bigger, with webbing, long fingers and deep pockets that make you wonder how anyone ever commits an error.

Catcher's mask



1876 mask



1988 mask



2006 mask

The earliest catcher's masks were cumbersome and restricted the line of vision, but they did help avoid a lot of broken noses and black eyes. Masks are now made of more lightweight material, and the most recent innovation looks a lot like a hockey goalie's mask, combining a helmet and lightweight aluminum cage.

Catcher's mitt



1870s mitt



1970s mitt



2006 mitt

Because of the pounding that a catcher's hand takes handling more than 100 pitches a game — many of them fastballs in excess of 90 mph — the early versions of catcher's mitts were heavily padded to absorb the shock. Over time, however, mitts have become bigger, with more webbing and increased flexibility. This is more forgiving and enables catchers to trap pitches in the dirt.

Bats

The first baseball bat was more like a walking stick. Even Barry bonds would have trouble hitting home runs with it. By the late 1800s, bats were getting longer and heavier. This is when the "Louisville Slugger" was popularized. Bats featured thick handles and maximized hitting surface. In the modern game, however, sleeker, lighter bats are used as players try to maximize bat speed to generate a lot of their power.



1852 bat

1880s bat



1890s bat

2006 bat