

Out of Bounds

SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT

wiffle ball

There was the slightest pause after my brother's well-batted and gliding ball tapped against a window of an apartment

building that served as a two-story outfield wall. Two seconds later (perhaps three), the ball began to float back to the earth. The shards of glass, however, fell much quicker.

The group of us scattered, as most kids will, and hid behind trees and Dumpsters as the shattering echoed through the neighborhood.

Wiffle balls aren't supposed to break windows, my brother and I later explained to our dad. We said the same thing to the lady whose window we (well, he) broke, right after we told her we were sorry and would pay for it.

We weren't sorry at all, of course, for my younger brother had brandished that red over-sized bat like Hammerin' Hank and busted a window with a wiffle ball. That's serious second-grade power.

While we grew up on a summer diet of diamonds, dirt and leather, you can't play real baseball in the nooks and crannies of oddly shaped backyards dotted with trees and chain-link fences. With a skinny yellow bat and a wiffle ball, though, you can play anywhere.

Perhaps you've forgotten the joys

HERE'S A SUMMERTIME REFRESHER ON AMERICA'S TRUE BACKYARD PASTIME

BY MARK LUCE

of caved-in balls, cracked plastic sticks and ghost runners on first and third, so here's a summertime refresher on America's true backyard pastime.

The Bat — Kids may love the big-barreled berthas because it's so hard to swing and miss. However, the thin, yellow bat is the preferred weapon for wiffle ball devotees because it requires deft hands and immaculate timing.

The Pitching — If you are willing to contort your fingers into far-out forms, you too can throw freaky forkballs, exploding sliders, knee-breaking benders and a knuckler that would make Charlie Hough proud. The best ball for wicked pitches is the official Wiffle ball (the one with the ovals cut from the top and a solid bottom). Wiffle balls covered with circular holes will dance plenty, while solid plastic balls will tend to undulate in accordance with how beat up the ball is.

The Field — Use your imagination and even the lamest lot can be your Wrigley Field. Smashed pop cans make good bases, but rocks don't. Make sure to establish rules before-

hand to avoid arguments (over the fence is an out, under the bushes a ground-rule double, etc).

Ghost Runners — "Ghosts," for short, remain the most complex aspect of a good wiffle ball game when there are only two or three players. Normally, ghost runners advance as many bases as the batter does — a double would score a ghost on second.

More advanced players may experiment with allowing ghost runners to tag up, although this takes strenuous negotiation to get all the rules clear. If there are more than three players, ghost runners should be strictly forbidden.

The Last Word — Contrary to purist squawking, it's permissible to throw the ball at a runner for an out.

Those who say otherwise should go back inside and read George Will columns.

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