

Bat Makers Strike Out in Japan

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It's the bottom of the ninth.

The U.S. team hasn't scored against the Japan Inc. team, but it has men in scoring position.

Here's the pitch. The batter swings. It's a base hit.

The U.S. team negotiating to open the Japanese market to U.S.-made aluminum baseball bats finally scores.

Wait. The play doesn't count. The Japanese had called "time out."

Then the batter strikes out.

It was the U.S. team's last hope of finishing the game in regulation time.

Of course, they'll go into extra innings. It would be un-American to quit.

But the first nine innings took 10 years to play. Now the U.S. team, which says the Japanese didn't play fair, might play a little dirty.

When the Japanese come to bat, some of the U.S. players might kick

some dirt in their faces. And the fans might be encouraged to throw some debris on the field that could trip up some of the Japanese players.

All this means there is little chance that U.S. aluminum baseball bats, which the U.S. industry claims are better and cheaper than those made in Japan, can be sold there in time for the 1984 selling season, let alone for 1983, according to key players on the U.S. negotiating team.

Furious, President Howard J. Bruns of the Sporting Goods Manufacturers Association said it will continue to negotiate through the U.S. government. But it will begin a "massive education campaign" among U.S. sporting goods retailers, youth leagues, schools and colleges, he told the press in New York.

A sporting goods retailer from New England who attended the press conference, organized by the association, said he and other retailers awaited "some direction" from the association.

Mr. Bruns replied that the association won't come right out and urge these groups not to buy Japanese sporting goods or other Japanese products. That would constitute conspiracy to boycott, he said.

Instead, it will describe the latest U.S. effort to break through Japan's barriers against U.S. aluminum bats and let the groups act as they see fit, he indicated.

"We're meeting with the athletic directors of the high school federation this month," Mr. Bruns added.

"Fortunately, we're in a business based on the concept of fair play," said Chairman Frederic H. Brooks of MacGregor Athletic Products of East Rutherford, N.J.

"We believe we don't have to ask colleges and youth leagues not to buy Japanese products. They can see that the Japanese barriers are costing U.S. jobs," he said at the press conference.

Mr. Bruns said this was the third
SEE BAT, PAGE 5A

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WORLD TRADE

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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1A

time the Japanese had "gone back on their word" during the negotiations on bats.

With the "tremendous" U.S. unemployment, "the Japanese could not have reneged at a worse time. It will be easier to drive out the Japanese now than it would have been if everyone were working," chimed in President John Magadini of Ten Pro Corp. of King of Prussia, Pa.

The industry group had expected to announce Wednesday that it was close to "scoring" an agreement with the Japanese on aluminum bats. Therefore, it would suggest, the U.S. government could suspend the case it had brought against Japan before the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade in Geneva under Standards Code Article 14.4.

If all went well, similar agreements on inflated balls, gymnastic equipment and other sporting equipment could then be negotiated.

However, it didn't work out that way.

In the late innings, the U.S. team had used some of its top hitters and pitchers, including Secretary of State George P. Shultz and U.S. Trade Representative William E. Brock.

The batter whose "hit" everyone

thought had finally led to the U.S. team's first score was utility man, Deputy U.S. Trade Representative David Macdonald.

When Mr. Macdonald came to "bat" in Tokyo last weekend, the Japanese "called time." They unexpectedly said they weren't ready to exchange letters with the U.S. team.

The U.S. letter would state that the Reagan administration would suspend its request for an investigation of the aluminum bat issue by the GATT.

Japan's letter would spell out how the Japanese would implement their latest, 26-page solution of the requirement that each bat be certified with "S" and "SG" marks. The U.S. producers claim this procedure costs more than it costs to make the bats.

"The Japanese would not even agree to the contents of the letters," according to the association's Washington representative, Maria Dennison.

Only after Mr. Macdonald had angrily left for home did the Japanese discuss some of the contents of the letter, she said.

Fred Juer, president of Worth Bat Co., and Jack Hillerich, chairman of Hillerich & Bradsby of Louisville, Ky., said the Japanese want the U.S.

companies to license the manufacture of aluminum bats in Japan under their name.

"This creates only a royalty, a quick dollar but no manufacturing in the United States," Mr. Juer said.

"It would make us some money, but it wouldn't solve the problem," said Mr. Hillerich whose company has licensed the manufacture of its aluminum bats in Japan. It's the only way to sell them there now, he said.

"It's more profitable to sell product," Mr. Magadini said.

U.S. companies introduced the aluminum bat, an American invention, to Japan where the people love "beisboru." Hillerich & Bradsby, which had adapted its product especially for the Japanese market, once sold 30 percent of its bat output to Japan, Mr. Hillerich said. But now all aluminum bats are made in Japan.

The U.S. companies can sell only wooden bat blanks to Japan. These are regarded as "raw material" because Japan lacks the wood.

It's time for the Japanese to take "affirmative action," that is, reserve a certain share of their market for aluminum bats and other sporting goods for imports from the United States and elsewhere abroad, Mr. Brooks of MacGregor said.

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