

Red Sox come away empty in Belle bat inspection

By CHUCK MELVIN
AP Sports Writer

CLEVELAND — The American League put Albert Belle's sawed-off bat on display Wednesday at Jacobs Field, showing it was indeed made of wood all the way through.

The top of the bat was cut off early Wednesday morning so AL officials could inspect it after Belle homered in the 11th inning of Cleveland's 5-4 playoff victory over Boston on Tuesday night.

The Red Sox, saying they

suspected Belle used a doctored bat, asked for the inspection; under league rules a team may request one examination per game.

Former AL president Bobby Brown, representing the league, oversaw the inspection and declared the bat legal soon after the game ended. Last year, Brown suspended Belle for seven games after he was caught using a corked bat in Chicago.

Cleveland manager Mike Hargrove was disappointed Brown chose to have the bat cut

in half, instead of X-raying it so Belle could continue using it. Belle hit nine home runs in the last 11 games of the season with that bat.

"I think it's a shame, because that was a bat Albert obviously liked, and there were other means to check that bat other than sawing it in half," Hargrove said.

Brown, however, said it wouldn't have been practical to take the bat to a hospital for X-raying in the middle of the night, and he wanted to resolve the

matter quickly. Bob DiBiase, Indians vice president of public relations, said there was no X-ray equipment available at Jacobs Field.

"I could see where there might be a delay that wasn't anybody's fault, and I just didn't want to get involved in that," Brown said. "That's precisely why I had it sawed last night."

"Players have favorite bats, but in this day and time, the bats have handles that are very thin. The bats break easily. I wouldn't

anticipate Albert Belle's hitting prowess would deteriorate because of that bat being out of his hands."

Hargrove said he doubted the matter would distract Belle.

"I don't know that I've ever seen anything get under Albert's skin other than that fan that called him a drunk," Hargrove said, referring to a heckler Belle hit in the chest with a baseball in 1991.

Hargrove said he disagreed with the Red Sox' use of

"gamesmanship" in the playoffs but added that the Indians probably would not retaliate in any way. He said he did not suspect any Red Sox players of using an illegal bat.

"It's over," he said. "We're not going to sit here and bomb their clubhouse. Given the same circumstances, I do not honestly say I wouldn't do the same thing."

Boston manager Kevin Kennedy, who requested the inspection, said he was glad Belle's bat was found to be legal.

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