

Hillerich & Bradsby
Louisville Slugger / Louisville, KY



Meritorious Category
Inducted November 1992

Hillerich & Bradsby's Louisville Slugger took shape from the splinters of Pete "The Old Gladiator" Browning's bat. Over a century ago, Browning was a star player with Louisville's Eclipse team of the old American Association (the forerunner of what is now the National League). During his career, he achieved a .341 batting average, the 12th highest average in Major League history. But in 1884, Browning was fighting a slump, one that appeared to deepen when he broke his favorite bat. John Andrew "Bud" Hillerich happened to be watching the game that day. After the game, Bud Hillerich invited the despondent Browning to the shop where he said he'd create a new bat. The two worked through the night, Hillerich periodically letting Browning take practice swings. Finally, Browning pronounced the bat just right. The next day, Browning used the Hillerich bat to go three-for-three. The bat pulled Browning out of his slump and put the Hillerichs in the bat business. Today, it is the oldest and largest such business in the world.

In 1978, the company bought an aluminum bat plant in California. Today, the company is one of the major producers of aluminum bats in the world, serving baseball, softball and youth teams. The company makes more than 100 different aluminum bat models at its Ontario, California manufacturing facility. Over 1 million Louisville Slugger aluminum bats are sold annually. H&B has been an industry leader in producing light, yet durable aluminum bats for both baseball and softball.

On September 1, 1905, "The Flying Dutchman" Honus Wagner signed a contract giving J.F. Hillerich and Son permission to use his autograph on Louisville Slugger bats. Many baseball legends have signed with H&B and used Louisville Slugger bats. These greats include Ty Cobb, Babe Ruth, Ted Williams, Mickey Mantle, Roger Maris, Hank Aaron, Johnny Bench, and George Brett to name a few. Softball legends have had their autographs on Louisville Slugger bats as well. Bill Gatti, Rick Wheeler, Rick Scheer, Dough Brown, Rich Plante, Rusty Bumgardner, and Hank Garris to name a few. Legendary Softball teams have had their own line of Louisville Slugger bats as well. Teams like Howard's Western Steer, Elite Coatings, Starpath Systems, Rich's Superior, Superior Appolo, Marlton Trucking and Team TPS.

In 1983, the fledgling softball organization called The National Softball Association went to Louisville Slugger asking for monetary and equipment support for various tournaments and publications. Louisville Slugger jumped on board with the NSA and has been a partner in softball ever since, becoming the first and oldest major Sponsor that the NSA has ever had. Louisville Slugger annually supports as title sponsor of the Youth Fast Pitch World Series Tournaments for the NSA. Annually Louisville Slugger works hand in hand with the NSA in providing equipment for testing in order to make the game safe and enjoyable to all.

In November 1992, Louisville Slugger became the first sponsor to be inducted in the Meritorious Category into the NSA Hall of Fame.