

ALL NO NEED
THE NEW FUNBALL
SAFE INDOORS OUTDOORS
WHILE BALL REGUL
IT CURVES!
EASY TO THROW CURVES WITH
SIZE BALL
SAFE ANYWHERE
WIFFLE BALL
GLOVE
ED BASE

KING

Regulate



Pop Culture





It is perhaps the ultimate compliment America's collective pop consciousness can bestow: a brand becoming intermingled with the product it names.

In other words, a company makes a product so good, so memorable, that its own brand name becomes as recognizable as the product it produces.

Think of some of the great consumer brands of our time where the product and brand name became synonymous; you know 'em, you use 'em, you love 'em—adhesive bandages: Band-Aid; photography: Xerox; tissue: Kleenex; soda: Coke. The list doesn't stop there. There's Vaseline, Polaroid, Velcro, and Dixie Cups, to name a few.

And *everybody* knows baseball played with that yellow plastic bat and ball is called Wiffle ball. It is a testament to this enduring brand that Wiffle's name itself has become analogous with the game for which it was created—"Wiffle ball."

But make no mistake: Though Wiffle seems to be everywhere, it's a hallowed brand nearly 60 years standing. In other words, Wiffle = Wiffle™.

This American phenomenon continues to grow and reach new generations of fans. We've all played the game and chances are our kids and grandkids will play the game, too. How many things can you say that about?

Wiffle, with no moving parts, and featuring principles in physics that were new in 1738, is more popular than ever.

Wiffle has made an indelible mark on American culture since its inception nearly 60 years ago. From the early department stores where Wiffle was first sold, it has jumped off the shelves and into the hearts and minds (and yards, car trunks, gutters, and garages) of people

across the country and around the world. You will find Wiffle ball played in parks, backyards, at charity events, on college campuses, and even in professional Wiffle leagues and tournaments.

More impressive, all this has happened without a single penny spent on marketing since 1975. Wiffle's marketing budget is zero, nada, zip. Mattel, Coca-Cola, Hasbro, Disney, and other American megabrands have worked their way into our collective memories—but via multibillion-dollar marketing budgets. Wiffle is the rare brand these days that is truly organic, with people coming back year after year not because they saw a commercial or print ad, but because they love it. Because their dad played it when he was little. Because it gets people outside and interacting. Because nothing is more fun.

Wiffle has curved and swerved its way into books, paintings, and comic strips, not to mention television shows, movies, music, and video games. As a beloved piece of Americana, it has been enthusiastically referenced and increasingly revered.

It has become one of the most enduring toys in American history, one whose followers have a “devotion bordering on obsession,” according to *The New York Times*.

VH1's special *I Love Toys* ranks the Wiffle ball and bat set as the 10th best toy of all time, between the Slinky (9) and Play Doh (11), leaving the Frisbee (45), Nerf (23), and even the bicycle (14) in the rearview mirror. The Hula Hoop, Barbie, and LEGO filled the top three



**VH1's *I Love Toys*
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Julius Erving/Dr. J

NBA Legend



... On beating the stuffing out of a rival basketball team as a 10-year-old member of his Long Island Salvation Army team and then getting his comuppance on the Wiffle ball field.

This had to be circa 1960, and I'm playing basketball for the Hempstead Salvation Army. We go to play a group of kids who belong to the Glenville Baker Boys Club in Locust Valley.

We're the kids from Hempstead, and that year our squad probably played 50 basketball games. And we play this game and these kids cannot score. I think the final score was 47–0. It's 47–0, and we were even trying to let them score.

Suddenly it's over. And their coach [said to] our coach, "Well, let's play a game of Wiffle ball since we've got all the kids here."

And we felt bad about beating them in basketball, so we set up a game of Wiffle ball. And they [have] this kid who knows all the pitches. So, like with a Wiffle ball, if you hold the ball a certain way, it rises, it drops, it comes at you, it curves. Man, we couldn't hit this kid.

Next thing we turn around and the score is like 12–0. So they got vindicated the same day we beat them 47–0 in basketball. They now shut us out in Wiffle ball—nobody could hit the pitcher. The great equalizer was the Wiffle ball.

... On his day at the plate.

I didn't get any hits. I couldn't hit him. I just remember that ball coming, and it was like, *whoosh, whoosh, whoosh*. It was wobbling. It was like a flying saucer coming at you. And he would throw it right at you, and it would come across the plate. They were much better Wiffle ball players than they were basketball players, that's for sure.

slots; not bad company. The *New York Times* seconds that, proclaiming, “Wiffle ranks with Hula Hoop and Barbie as quintessentially American toys.”

And so says Tim Walsh, author of *The Playmakers*, a glossy history of the most influential toys of our time. “The Mullany family is so uncelebrated. If you create a piece of music that sells a million copies, they give you a gold record and put you on the cover of *Rolling Stone*.” Walsh believes the Mullanys need their due. “They’re still relatively unknown. [If] an album that sold as many copies as Wiffle has sold, well, [the Mullanys would] be as big as the Beatles or Michael Jackson.”

Paradoxically, in the Age of the iPod and the video game, Wiffle, with no moving parts and featuring principles in physics that were new in 1738, is more popular than ever. It’s everywhere. Wiffle balls and bats are sold in all 50 states and in dozens of countries. In the warm summer months, you can’t walk into a store without seeing that familiar 24-count Wiffle display. It’s in drugstores, it’s in sporting goods stores, and it’s in department stores.

To give you some idea of the iconic American-ness of this thing, here’s a story from Hank Paine, owner of The Connecticut Store, which sells Connecticut products to customers worldwide. “We have a customer that orders [Wiffle products] in quantity and the only way to get them there is by Express Mail, so I end up standing in line at the post office. The guys are used to seeing me come over there.



After 1953, a suburban kid and a couple of friends could play a baseball game in his own backyard, with a ball that curved as if thrown by Dizzy Dean himself.

They'll say, 'Hey Hank, where are we going today?' And one day I answered, 'Well, we're going to send some made-in-Connecticut Wiffle balls to China.' There was a pause and the clerk looked at me and said, 'What'd you say?' I said, 'We're sending Wiffle balls to China.' He said, 'Holy crap, Hank, that's great,' and the people in back of me just started to applaud."

The appeal of this simple kids' toy cuts across ages and generations. They're playing Wiffle ball in backyards, they're playing it in schoolyards, they're playing at the South Pole, and they're playing it in Afghanistan. What's the deal? It's just an odd little ball and a yellow plastic bat. How did this unlikely duo get to be so popular? To answer that question, we need to go back to a different era, to 1953.

Pop culture exploded in the years following World War II. The 1950s were a relief from the Depression, the war that followed, and all of the rationing and stress that came along with both. The national mood had changed. It was the era of Marilyn

Monroe, of fins on Cadillacs, and of Tupperware. Popular culture was evolving as the country healed from the war. *I Love Lucy*, *From Here to Eternity*, and Tony Bennett all topped their respective charts. It was a prosperous new era of mass production and mass consumption. The watchword was *buy, buy, buy* as standardized, branded consumables went mass-market, becoming more affordable than ever. 1953 saw the first color TVs, the first *TV Guides* to go with them, and the first Corvette automobiles.

It was a juncture of technological change that shifted the way people lived their daily lives. Injection molding, the process by which



plastics are heated and shaped, was coming into its own. It allowed for products from milk cartons and combs to toothbrushes and garbage cans—anything plastic—to be produced more easily than ever before. It's no accident that the '50s was the age of simple injection-molded toys like the Hula Hoop and the Frisbee.

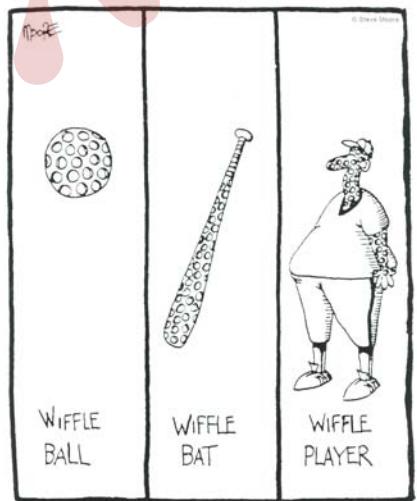
Perhaps most important, all these developments were being fueled by the postwar baby boom. People were getting hitched and making babies in record numbers. They were moving out of cities. In response to this exodus, mass production hit the housing market too—with the advent of the G.I. Bill and with it the invention of the suburbs. As Levittowns sprouted, so did Wiffle balls and bats in those Levittowns' garages.

There is one last piece of our puzzle: The early '50s were also a golden age of baseball, with Yogi and The Mick taking the Yankees to their fifth consecutive world championship in 1953. That was also the year that the curveballing legend Dizzy Dean was inducted into the Hall of Fame. In 1953, America was baseball-crazy, the national pastime was at its postwar zenith, and here's the connection: baseball, the suburbs, *backyards*.

Before 1953, a kid could play baseball or stickball or stoopball. There was no plastic bat-and-ball set. It simply didn't exist. So getting a baseball game together was no easy feat.

A
**The fast food giant
 McDonald's, which
 opened its first
 franchise.**

IN THE BLEACHERS



It took a whole bunch of guys, for starters. You needed baseballs, gloves, and a backstop. And you needed a lot of room. So if you played it in, say, a suburban backyard, you were going to break every window on the block.

And forget throwing a major-league curveball.

After 1953, a suburban kid and a couple of friends could play a baseball game in his own backyard, with a ball that curved as if thrown by Dizzy Dean himself. Just as important, it wouldn't break a window even if the batter was lucky enough to get a piece of it. That simple invention—a lightweight, injection-molded plastic ball with funny holes (the bat came a little later)—made all the difference.

It caught on like gangbusters.

In 1953, the first Wiffle balls went on sale. By the early 1960s, Wiffle was a staple up and down the Eastern seaboard as *the* game to play at picnics, charity events, and school competitions, among others. “Wiffle” quickly became a part of the American vernacular. And not just as a toy that protects windows but as a pastime unto itself.

Why has it been such a success? Part of its charm has to be the simplicity of the idea. Chris Byrne, a.k.a. “The Toy Guy,” is one of the toy industry’s top consultants. “What makes the toy different, or what makes the toy sustain is that each subsequent generation brings to it their own sense of fun and play,” he says. “Things like an Etch-a-Sketch, or a Slinky, or a Wiffle ball, or any of these classic toys, they really are nothing until they are brought to life by the child.”

Also—and this is no small consideration—it works. Exactly as advertised, a Wiffle ball curves like crazy, won't break windows, and delivers a satisfying baseball experience. “And, the game, as we know, happens in the imagination, so that the child is imagining that

Wiffle balls and bats are sold in all 50 states and in dozens of countries.

he or she is a big-league baseball player. And the closer it replicates the ability to throw a slider or throw a curveball, or something... that replicates a real baseball experience, you know that's a good toy," says Byrne.

And don't forget that the whole family can play across age and gender lines. Your dad can pitch a no-hitter and so can your sister.

There's the iconic, unmistakable, you'd-know-it-in-the-dark ball. It's old school and new school, unique and ubiquitous. The Wiffle ball remains the great equalizer, as they call it, befuddling batters of all ages. With its humble holes, it curves, zips, and zooms, turning everyone into a major league pitcher. It's a fad-proof fan favorite. Tim Kennedy, president of Kennedy Design, a NYC-based industrial design firm, says there's mom, apple pie, and the Wiffle ball. "I think Wiffle is an American design classic. I would put it in a category with things like the Frisbee, the Airstream trailer, and the Fender Stratocaster, American design products that have just endured as great designs through generations."

Another key to Wiffle's timeless appeal has to be its born-in-the-USA, still-made-in-the-USA pedigree. The same family, the Mullanys, has been making the Wiffle balls for almost 60 years—and still use some of the original machinery.



DID YOU KNOW

The Wiffle ball was originally created from discarded perfume packaging.



Nick Jonas

Actor; Musician, the Jonas Brothers and Nick Jonas and the Administration

... On playing Wiffle ball in his backyard in Jersey.

Growing up in Jersey, the backyards are big but not big enough to play full-out baseball. So finding something to play in the backyard is always a nice thing. Mine was just big enough, so it was the perfect Wiffle ball field. All the kids in the area would come over and play.

... On what his field looked like.

We had a patio that looked exactly like what an infield would look like. So we had the patio, and beyond that was a grassy area and these two large trees that were kind of set up like foul poles. We would basically play like it was a baseball field, just smaller. And it worked out perfectly.

We would set up the bases and run the bases just like a real baseball game. It usually was about four or five on each team, but it always depended on how many people would show up. It was a lot of fun.

... On his Wiffle skills.

My curveball would have to be my best pitch. Obviously, my fastball has worked a couple of times. It's kind of fast, I can get it up to 65 or 70 miles per hour on a good day. When we were shooting the TV show for Disney Channel, we set up a bullpen and would just go out there every day and throw new pitches. And the pitches were new and we'd just try to get better.

... On his favorite all-time Wiffle ball field.

We've played in parking lots, backyards, and concert venues. Anywhere we can go to get out there in the venues and play is always a lot of fun. And the arenas especially. They're built like a bowl, so it works out perfectly for hitting the ball—it's good.

The Forum in L.A. [is awesome]. One day, me and a couple friends set up what we called a "Jonas Olympiad." Basically, it was four teams and it consisted of Wiffle ball, dodgeball, and then kind of a thinking game. So, a few different things. But the