

# UI professor's talk on baseball

## ■ Honors group lecture focuses on science of game

By PETER ROONEY  
News-Gazette Staff Writer

URBANA — Watching a sliding fastball get the stuffing knocked out of it can be one of life's simple pleasures, especially if you're rooting for the hitting team.

The physics behind such a crowd-pleaser, or crowd silencer as the case may be, is anything but simple.

Even Alan Nathan can't explain exactly what happens when a pitcher scuffs his ball and throws his heater, and he's a professor of nuclear physics, with a specialty in the collision of subatomic particles.

Still, Nathan knows more about the physics of baseball than the average fan, and he was imparting that knowledge Saturday to about 200 high school students with an interest in science.

Among those spending their Saturday at the University of Illinois' Loomis Lab was University High School junior Joseph Smarr, whose father, Larry Smarr, heads the National Center for Supercomputing Applications.

Smarr said the talks featured at the Saturday physics honors program are "really fun."

"I've really been into computers lately, but I find the science stuff to be real interesting," he said.

Nathan's lecture, "When Ash Meets Cowhide: The Physics of



J. SMARR

Baseball," covered pitching and hitting the ball, and explained a bit about flight and trajectory in the bargain.

Knowing all this stuff may not help your Little League's game much, but it won't hurt it either.

"That's not the purpose of this, anyway," Nathan said. "It's more about the physicist's natural curiosity about the world around him."

Besides, the great ones seem to have an instinctive knowledge about those little tricks — scuffs, spit or cork, for example — that alter the physics of the game, and can mean the difference between a strikeout or a home run.

"They don't usually know from a point of physics, but they certainly know what works," Nathan said.

Nathan, a "longtime enthusiast of playing, watching and enjoying baseball," also considers himself to be a statistics freak and baseball trivia expert.

Although his lecture notes incorporate everything from the sweet spot of the bat to the number of rotations a typical knuckleball makes on its way to the plate, Nathan deferred to another expert when asked how best to hit the ball.

"My suggestion? Just read Ted Williams' book, 'The Sweet Science of Hitting.' "



News-Gazette photo by Robert K. O'Daniell  
UI professor Alan Nathan talks about the physics of baseball before his lecture to members of a high school physics honors program. He was at Loomis Lab on-the-UI campus Saturday afternoon.



## Ex-kids home worker gets 15 years

GENEVA (AP) — A former houseparent from the Mooseheart home in Kane County screamed, sobbed and tried to run as a judge sentenced him to 15 years in prison for child pornography.

"Ask me if I care!" Joseph Dinges yelled as Kane County Judge James Doyle pronounced the sentence Friday. "Give me more. I'm going to be dead when I get there."

Doyle then had Dinges bound and gagged so he could continue the hearing.

After Dinges was brought back to the courtroom with his wrists shackled to a belt and his mouth taped shut, he kicked things off a table and continued to curse through his gag.