



Softball Magazine's

Spring Training 2009

Greetings from Softball Magazine's Spring Training! If a picture is worth a thousand words, here is a photo album to help you "get the picture" of what about 130 adult slowpitch players from 21 mostly snow-bound states did in March to prepare for the coming season!

An eager group of ballplayers had a Wednesday night reception and a Thursday morning orientation breakfast at the host hotel, the Holiday Inn Cocoa Beach Oceanfront Resort. They are now spending three full days on four manicured fields at beautiful Stradley Park, just minutes away from the "Space Coast" beaches.

This Spring Training photo album actually starts in the fall. That's when players make their reservations to be in Florida the following spring. For many, that's when the picture starts to come into focus.

Now flip the pages ahead to a Thursday, Friday and Saturday in March.

The opportunity includes a balance of organization and flexibility. Each player chooses his own daily itinerary. Different fields are designated at varying times for games, live pitching practice, Jugs machine batting practice (four machines on two fields), daily contests, defensive drills, and comprehensive instruction from major-level stars in small groups and one-on-one.

"In three days I'm a month ahead of everyone else up north," said 47-year-old Victor Quinton of Washingtonville, New York. "I'll be in game-shape right away."

Lunch is catered to the fields each day, and several huge coolers are stocked with a free and seemingly endless supply of water, Gatorade, and soft drinks. Eastbay has filled several tables with all the basic gear, much of it at special prices. If a player needs a batting glove or finds a pair of shoes at a "can't resist" price, it's all there. Once a player arrives at Stradley Park, he (or she) can stay all day.

Snapshot: On Field Three, one of the three daily games is in progress. The teams are signed up on a first-come, first-served basis, with players choosing the defensive position and time of day they want to play. An umpire is calling balls and strikes thrown by a pitcher behind a protective screen. A "bat-around limit" brings some equity to the friendly competition. Players might be playing alongside new friends, old friends, or teammates who



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have made the trip together, such as one group from Illinois. "Seven players from my team are here," said Kevin Miller of Arthur, Illinois. "That's the core of our team. We'll have the advantage of shooting out of the gate in midseason form."

Miller, 35, is one of the few players who have attended Spring Training five straight years. A game might develop into a regional challenge, such as Miller and the "Illinois boys" against Quinton and a team from northeastern states. Maybe a "pro" or two is added to each lineup to encourage his temporary teammates and to create a baseball fantasy camp-like experience.

"To be out there and have a pro playing right next to me was unbelievable," said a returning player, 29-year-old Steve Bauman of Columbus, Ohio. "I never expected that."

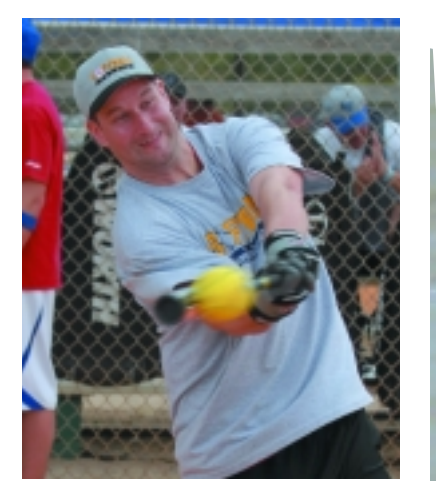
When the players are shaking hands after the last out, there is often another group of players ready to fill the dugouts.

Snapshot: double-barreled action from two parallel pitching machines on the same diamond. Batters are using throw-down home plates about 12 feet apart, with a safety screen between them. They are hitting full-field, like at a golf driving range. Fellow Spring

Trainers are sitting in protective cages, feeding some of the 1,500 Dudley softballs into the Jugs machines. The batters on this field and two others have the choice of about ninety bats from Spring Training's equipment sponsors: Combat, DeMarini, Easton, Louisville Slugger, Miken, Mizuno, Reebok, and Worth. Players are "test driving" these bats, in several models and weights, all day. Four large rubber trash cans are spread across each outfield so shagging balls is a breeze. Batters are taking about 20-25 balls per turn so there is never a long wait and the hits just keep on coming.

Jump back to the Game Field. It is just after 10 a.m. Some players are starting their day by taking some infield work. Other players join in and the guys take turns hitting to each other. Some players are doing this to warm up for the 11 o'clock game, while others are re-acclimating themselves with the familiar rhythm of ground balls.

Occasionally a full-blown defensive clinic will take place, with the pros offering small group discussions, instruction, and drills at their various positions, including pitcher



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and outfield. Many players appreciate the chance to improve that part of their games.

On the next field, a group of players is standing near the plate on a field where live-pitching batting practice is underway. The pitcher is behind a protective screen, just like on the Game Field. The pitcher might be getting in his repetitions because he pitches for his team back home, or he might be slinging strikes to his buddies. Either way, there is nothing like working on your hitting against live pitching.

Hey, what's that gale of laughter on Field Four? JC Phelps of Louisville Slugger is holding court. JC's outgoing and friendly demeanor is putting the group at ease. The players at Spring Training range in age from their 20's to their 70's, and abilities cut across a broad spectrum as well.

"I think I picked up a couple useful tips this time," said 71-year-old Ken Heimann of Boca Grande, Florida. "I still play six times a week and I'll go back with more enthusiasm."

Those at Spring Training share a passion for the game, the desire to improve, and the willingness to maximize having some of the 13 major players provide analysis of their swings and other advice. There is plenty to learn when the two-week major-player roster reads like an All-Tournament Team... Dal Beggs and Jason Kendrick from Combat, Willie Brown and Larry Carter from DeMarini, Brett Helmer and Brian

Wegman from Easton, JD Genter and JC Phelps from Louisville Slugger, Geno Buck and Denny Crine from Miken, and BJ Fulk, Jeff Hall, and Dennis Turner from Worth.

"I like working with the pros," Quinton said. "I take what I am seeing and work it into my game."

Some players reported removing flaws, adding consistency, learning to hit to the opposite field, and even hitting a home run for the first time.

"Overall for three days I was very impressed," said Paul Glozer, a Spring Training rookie. "There was plenty to do, plenty of help, and great advice. I will be back unless I am deployed!" The 34-year-old is stationed at Andrews Air Force Base in Maryland.

Bonus photo, and a bonus buzz: During the first week, a film crew from the DeMarini Ultimate Softball Show was on hand. While collecting material for their internet site, they incorporated the sights and sounds of Spring Training. Check it out at www.demariniultimatesoftball.com. It was a rare treat to have them there.

Bonus part II: in the second week, a film crew from www.softball360.com was with us, and for a very good reason. Take another look at the roster of pros. The savvy softball fan might have recognized the names of all eight players on the WSL Long Haul Bombers 2009 Stadium Power Tour. Yes, the

same top hitters who perform in Major League Baseball stadiums across the country converged in Cocoa Beach to fulfill some media obligations, to get in some hitting (and hit they did), and to take part in Softball Magazine's Spring Training as guest instructors. The Bombers, wearing their 2009 uniform shirts, brought a great deal of excitement, enthusiasm, expertise and camaraderie to the event. You can see some video and find out more about their tour at www.softball360.com. Both of those bonuses were not part of the originally-intended offers, but were welcome additions and examples of the reputation Spring Training is achieving in the softball community.

Snapshot: There is a pause in the action on the live pitching batting practice field so one of the daily contests can take place. On Thursday there is a baserunning contest - a timed sprint around the bases. Some young burners might be seeing who really has the jets, or maybe two guys from the "Clydesdale Division" are betting who is "faster," relatively speaking. The Friday contest features the bat-control masters spraying line drives to different parts of the field. Saturday has the home run hitting contest, while dozens of fellow Spring Trainers choose to watch the spectacle from the bleachers. The contests are for fun and bragging rights, but they are also for prizes at the banquet Saturday night.

Next Snapshot: The

Holiday Inn Cocoa Beach Oceanfront Resort is the site of that wrap-up banquet. Sixty to seventy players have cleaned up (nicely!) after leaving Stradley, and many have brought along spouses or other guests. This was the only time some players were seen in collared shirts and without hats! The night includes a slide show of photos from the fields, a cocktail hour, a delicious dinner, and an array of prizes: some for contest winners, and some in random drawings. Every player receives an equipment bag with a bat and assorted gear from one of the eight equipment sponsors. One player in each week is randomly chosen to receive a free entry fee to return the following year.

Sunday is the designated travel day, allowing people plenty of time to be back at work Monday morning. Although we don't have photos to verify it, there's a good chance many of those players stood out like sore (and suntanned) thumbs back in their offices. Nor could we blame them if, during a less-than-captivating staff meeting, they replayed these snapshots in their minds... images from three full days in the Florida sun, images that will not fade no matter what the next wave of technology may be, and images they create and review on their own, highlighting their experience at Softball Magazine's Spring Training.

For more information, go to www.softballspringtraining.com and www.softballmag.com

