



Chicago Metro

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One of my favorite teams in the police softball circuit is Chicago Metro and there are many reasons for this. For example, Chicago Metro travels extensively and supports many tournaments throughout the nation. Chicago Metro tends to seek out tournaments that draw high-caliber teams, and even if they are outgunned, they never shy away from a challenge. You won't hear a Chicago Metro player complaining about having to play one of the monster teams in the circuit; instead, you will see them lace up the cleats and go to work. Lastly, they have what could be described as the strongest fan base in the nation. They travel deep and their fans are proud, vocal but also respectful. When Chicago Metro is playing, there is an electricity in the air that starts with their loyal fans (wives, girlfriends, family members). When Softball Magazine asked me to write a team profile, Chicago Metro was the first team that came to mind. I contacted Coach Anthony Buonadonna and asked him to tell me about the history of the team, their accomplishments and goals. Here is what I learned about "America's Team."

During the summer of 1974, a young South Holland, Illinois, police department patrolman by the name of Stu Hoskins was only two years removed from being a Kansas City Royals pitching prospect and was playing in an all-police softball league called Gunsmoke in the south suburbs of Chicago. One year later, in the summer of 1975, the Chicago Metro Police Softball team was formed by Hoskins, who is now 60 years old, remains on the team's active roster, and is a member of the policessoftball.com Hall of Fame.

Hoskins enjoyed the camaraderie that playing softball with other police officers brought and decided to share that with other cops from around the Chicago area. In the 1970s, one of the only police softball tournaments in the country was the National Police Softball Championship in Dayton,



Anthony Buonadonna



Keith Jarosz



Shawn White

Ohio, and Chicago Metro quickly became a staple. Chicago Metro enjoyed success in the mid-1980s, finishing third in both 1984 and 1987, and were National Champion runners-up in 1985. Unfortunately, Hoskins did not keep track of stats and not a lot of pictures were taken in those days, but he estimates there are more than 50 Chicago Metro alums in the area and there were more than a dozen all-tournament players from that era.

Fast forward to the late 1990s-early 2000s when Chicago Metro was getting older. Many guys had established families and were retiring from police work, causing them to lose interest. The team was still playing primarily in Dayton and going by the name of FOP 6. Enter Anthony Buonadonna, a young police officer who was asked if he wanted to play softball in Ohio for the weekend. After playing, Buonadonna could not believe there was a whole world out there of just cops playing softball against each other. During the winter between the 2001 and 2002 seasons, Buonadonna realized the team was about to fold and decided to introduce a new generation of police officers to police softball. Knowing he needed to build a team from the pitcher out, Hoskins was one of the first players he contacted and he signed on.

Seeing a need for a fresh start, Buonadonna changed the team's name to Region Law and started contacting police officers from all over the Chicago area. In 2002 and 2003, Region Law played in Dayton. Tired of not having an identity name-wise, he decided to change the name back to Chicago Metro and adopt the colors of the Chicago Bears. In 2004, Buonadonna wanted to start branching out of the Midwest, and Chicago Metro began to travel to more tournaments, starting with Jacksonville in 2005. By 2007 Chicago Metro had a new look on the field by going with much younger players. In 2008 they finally won their first tournament in team history, the 'B' Division in Virginia Beach.

"Once tournament directors realized a need for two divisions, it gave teams like us a chance to have something to look forward to at big tournaments," Buonadonna said. "By 2008 we realized that if we played civilian ball we would be a 'D' or 'E' team, so we were just unable to keep up with the big boys like Jacksonville and NYPD."

Chicago Metro made their first Polic-

esoftball.com World Series appearance in 2007 and the team sprouted from there, recruiting and taking on the personality of its coach. "If you're going to represent yourself as a police officer on the field, then you need to act like one," said Buonadonna, noting that the team has had to get rid of a "few bad apples" over the years. Chicago Metro players have shown that helping others is important to the team, picking up police officers from around the country at the airport when they come in to Chicago, making sure guys have places to stay, getting sports tickets, whatever it takes to help a brother officer out while in the area. The helping hand of Chicago Metro's players has paid off. Pitcher Dan Pleckham and infielder Mike O'Neill were named Policesoftball.com's Co-Sportsman of the Year in 2010 and Buonadonna was awarded the Sterling Heights, Michigan, USSSA Law Enforcement Championship's Sportsman of the Year in 2012.

Although Buonadonna has had to change his methods on and off the field for the team to become successful, there is no doubting Chicago Metro's success in recent years, including winning three USSSA Law Enforcement 'B' Championships (2008, 2010-2011), one Battle of the Badges 'B' championship in Cincinnati (2009) and second-place finishes in Sterling Heights (2009), as well as in Montgomery County, Maryland (2012). The team also has several third-place trophies on its shelves and has had six Policesoftball.com East Conference All-Stars/Team MVPs in Mike O'Neill, Keith Jarosz, Shawn White (three times) and Brian Beauchamp. In addition, White, who is recognized as one of the best power hitters in the circuit, won back-to-back home run derby championships in Sterling Heights (2010-2011) and was named the tournament MVP both years. In addition to the players above, several Chicago Metro players have also been named to all-tournament teams at various tournaments, includ-

ing Nate Bruni, Jon Hand, Jeff Myszak, Jim Knapp, and Dave Levy.

They boast a hefty 29-player roster from 19 police departments in northeast Illinois and northwest Indiana. "The number of players on our roster jumped after we started playing in leagues and needed players to fill in for starters that were working," Buonadonna said. It has been a blessing and a curse for the team, and Buonadonna has had to have a lot of "heart to heart" talks with players about their individual playing time. Overall, the team feels that it isn't the best position ever to win the World Series as they boast one of the fastest outfields in police softball after the addition of Jacob Daubenmier out of Indiana last year. They also have a focused and committed outfielder/third baseman Anthony Valera, who is a former White Sox prospect. Chicago Metro recently moved in a new direction on the mound by signing Hector Mendez, also from Schererville PD, and moving White from shortstop primarily to pitcher. White has two formidable replacements in the infield in Travis Morgan and JD Sickles. "We still need our old guys, though," said Buonadonna. "Guys like Stu, Roger Cardwell, and Darren Lindsey are just as important to the team so we keep that



Stu Hoskins





Jon Hand



balance of new school and old school.”

Although the main goal of Chicago Metro is to win tournaments, especially the World Series, the team consists of players that have bought in to the idea of “family.” Chicago Metro players are friends on and off the field, as are their wives and girlfriends while attending funerals, birthday parties and weddings together. “Facebook has really kept us together all year round,” Buonadonna said. The team travels well with some of the best fans in police softball bringing wives, girlfriends, friends, parents, aunts, uncles and work partners to tournaments. Kids are usually part of the scene as well by becoming bat boys/girls and even giving their two cents on coaching decisions. Chicago Metro usually takes off November and December before getting back to the grind again in January while starting off the season with a team Christmas Party. After that, it’s on to an indoor league in northwest Indiana and their annual St. Patrick’s Day party, the team’s only fundraiser of the year. The rest of their money is raised through sponsorships by individual businesses, such as bars, doctor offices and restaurants.

Chicago Metro also starts hitting in January, now made easier by first baseman Myszak, who has opened a baseball/softball hitting academy. Players pay a small fee and can hit any day of the week as long as there are cages open. In the past couple of years, the team has also started individual awards where players get to vote for each other for team MVP, Defensive Player of the Year, and 12th Man of the Year. The team home run and batting average leaders also receive awards. This is meant to be a morale boost and something for players to work towards during the year. MVPs have included White and Valera. Defensive Player of the Year has gone to Myszak and second baseman Jim Strayer. Knapp has won 12th Man of the Year twice. “Teams can win titles, but not many can build a family,” Knapp recently said in a Facebook post. That said, I certainly look forward to seeing the Chicago Metro family in Las Vegas once again this October for the World Series.