



Training for Softball

by **JEFF BLAIR,**
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As a kid growing up, I was undersized and not exactly the most fleet of foot. I learned early on if I wanted to be successful in sports, I had to work harder than the next guy. When I started playing tournament softball that is exactly the mindset I carried both on and off the field. I became a zealot for preparation and it was specific to becoming a better softball player. My conditioning recipe was strength training in the gym and countless hours of batting practice. When I trained with weights, I had only one goal, and that was to become as strong and explosive as possible. I did not care about

developing beach muscles as I felt that muscle size should only be a byproduct of strength (not vice versa). I do not play much any more and my training methods have changed, but I wanted the focus of this article to be about training and preparation for softball. Since there are so many different approaches and methods to accomplishing peak preparation, I decided to showcase the training tactics from a few of police softball's most talented and accomplished players.

Henry "Butch" Castor

Age: 37
Occupation: Police Officer, Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department/Operations

Police Softball Team: Ohio Lawmen
Police Softball Accomplishments: Two-time Police National Championships winner, several All-Tournament and MVP selections at various tournaments throughout the years.

Civilian Softball Team: Pure Romance/Fouls/Easton/Headlines

Pedigree: Collegiate and professional baseball player

How do you prepare in the off-season?

"First thing I do is REST! I will not pick up a bat or throw a ball until February. As a Crossfitter my pinnacle is being the best softball player



Note: Butch recently front squatted 365 lbs. at his Crossfit gym.

I can be. I up the training days to five days a week with multiple workouts a few of those days in the off-season. Once February rolls around, I will be spending a couple hours in the cage one day a week. Being from the Midwest we pray to get outside as much as possible early on, but it normally doesn't work out that way."

How about during the season?

"I continue with Crossfit four to five days a week and take out the extra workouts. I also play league ball during the week and if possible, try and get a good batting practice session in before the weekend."

Raymond Steiber III

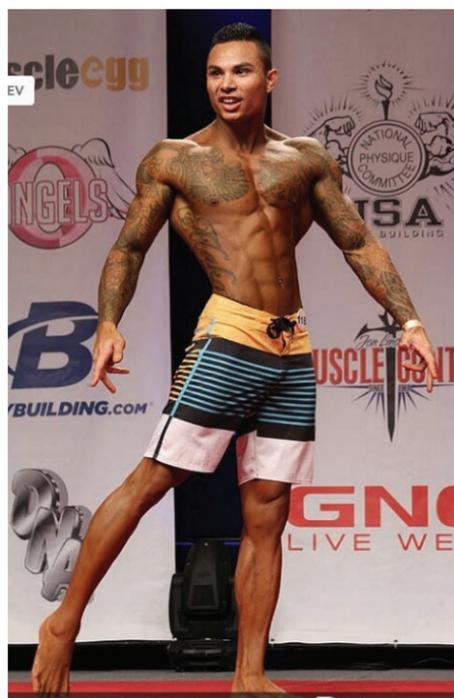
Age: 28
Occupation: Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Dept. Patrol Division - Downtown Area Command

Police Softball Team: Battleborn (5-man)
Police Softball Accomplishments: Policesoftball.com 2014 MVP and West Conference Player of the Year

Civilian Softball Teams: Shortstop for Custom Truck B and C division from 2007-2009; Haole-fied Softball Club 2009-2012, (MVP 2010 and 2012).

Pedigree: Club baseball from age 10; High School - three-year letterman Varsity Baseball; Gold Glove recipient in 2003, Foothill High School as sophomore. All-state second baseman 2004 and 2005; started high school all-star game 2005; Greenville Astros travel club 2005-2006 (Astros Organization) as center fielder and shortstop.

What is your off-season training philosophy? "I like to train smarter, faster, stronger. I use the mistakes and weak points from the season before in order to train at a mental level. This may take 50,000 ground balls and



memorizing strong points of hitters I know I will face in the following season. Countless swings to the opposite field. Not that I can't hit right side; I just feel I can get better. I use calisthenics to train for speed - jump rope, box jumps, sprints, and many variations of jump lunges.

I concentrate on my strength building while in the weight room. I vary my training with heavy lifting and focus lifting. Heavy to use compound movements for a complete lift, and focus to use only the muscle I am training to get the maximum stretch and contraction."

How about during the season? "I never attempt to fix a skill. I focus on perfecting the skills I am best at and utilize the off-season to work on weak points of my game. Although I have many tools on my belt, there are only a few that I will ALWAYS turn to. I train this way so that I can be dependable. I want my team to have confidence in my performance when the time comes."

Note: Ray is also an accomplished men's physique competitor.

Keith "Benji" Benjamin

Age: 50
Occupation: Retired Chandler, Arizona, Police Officer (29 years)
Police Softball Team: Fill in player for DEA Combo and SoCal Lockdown

Police Softball Accomplishments: "I've been fortunate to play on some great teams, such as the Arizona Whores in the early 1990s. We were the best team in Arizona and one of the top five teams in the country. I played for the DEA Combo where we won every tournament for two straight years. I also played for Cal Quake and HardCor, which were always top five law enforcement teams on the West Coast. I was elected into the Police Softball Hall of Fame in 2009."

Civilian Softball Experience: "I have played civilian ball for the last 12 years, playing on the top C and D teams in Arizona. I currently play 50 major plus with Sommerville softball, which is player/coached by Hall of Famer Ron Parnell. Every player was hand-picked by Parnell to play on that team. Sommerville was 51-3 last year. I play five-man and bat leadoff. I also play 40 major plus for Fatboyz Monsta where I play second base. Both Sommerville and Monsta are considered in the top three of the senior major plus divisions."

Pedigree: College basketball and baseball in junior college. Earned a Division II scholarship offer but chose to start working for OC Sheriff's Department in 1986.

What does your off-season conditioning routine look like? "I really don't have an off-season. Arizona and California weather allows me to begin playing in January and I usually finish the season in Palm Springs at the Toys for Tots in December. I played 407 games between league and tournaments last year! I go to the gym and lift heavy five-to-six days a week and foam roll daily. I have hit two-to-three times a week for the last five years throughout the year. So, my routine is the same, all year, every month."

What are your future goals?

"To continue to play 300-plus games a year and do more stretching to avoid injury."

Do you have any advice for players looking to still compete at a high level into their 40s and beyond?

"I have been on prescription testosterone therapy for the last seven years and truly believe adjusting my levels has allowed me the opportunity to continue to compete at a high level and not be crippled in pain on Monday mornings after weekend tournaments. I believe working shift-work caused my level to drop and I am very thankful for the treatments. I recommend all cops age 40 and older to talk to their doctor, get their hormone levels tested, and do their own research to see if the therapy is an option for them."

Note: Keith was named the 2007 Shevy Wright Sportsman of the Year by Policesoftball.com



John Zintak

Age: 38
Occupation: South suburb of Chicago/Patrol Officer
Police Softball Team: Great Lakes Lawmen
Police Softball Accomplishments: World Series VII Champions and MVP!

Civilian Softball Team: Trailstone Financial
Other athletic experience: NCAA DIII baseball and football.

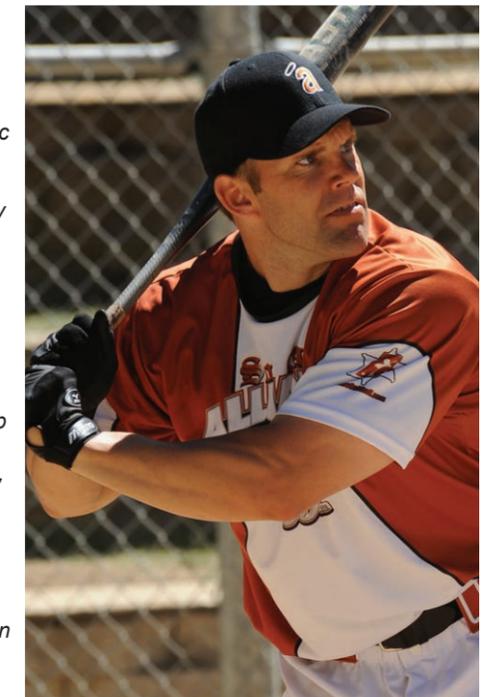
How do you condition yourself and prepare for softball? "Both in-season and off-season, I try to hit and throw as much as possible year-round. The winter weather does make it more difficult in the off-season, whereas my gym workouts are uninterrupted regardless of the season."

What do you do in the gym? "My workouts are centered around power-lifting (deadlift, squat, bench press, and military press) and strongman lifts. I adopted this method because many of the guys I train with are or were high-level, competitive power-lifters and strongmen, and for me it helps to develop overall strength. The power-lifting is using bars and plates - period. Any machine work, dumbbells, or any of the new wave methods to make those lifts easier is not what I'm talking about. Those can also be very effective methods for improvement, but in my mind they are accessory movements. There are a variety of strongman lifts, such as farmers hold/walk, log press, tire flips, stone lifts/carry, axle bars for presses and pulls, etc., but the basic principle is lifting and moving awkward objects. I wouldn't say my training method is any better than others out there (especially when considering functional strength), it just works for me right now. The right combination of training, diet, and sleep can vary greatly from one person to the next, and is dynamic within each individual, which further complicates reaching your ceiling. The only significant change from off-season to in-season training is I won't exhaust myself as much in the gym late

in the week if it's a tournament weekend. It's much more difficult to play a tournament if my body is "beat up" and not recovered from the gym."

What are your goals? "A constant everyday goal is trying to find that individual formula to maximize my potential, both physically and mentally. With the dynamic variables involved, this is an endless goal, so in keeping with the pursuit is the real goal. Within softball, my first goal is the obvious one shared by the majority: try to win every tournament I play in, specifically a world championship in both the police and civilian circuits. The second goal in softball is to improve as a player every year. Contrary to common belief and practice that once a person reaches a certain age, that person declines as a player, there have been exceptions. Only time will tell how this plays out in my case."

Note: John's wife is also a fitness buff as she competes in women's physique competitions.



So there you have it, four different athletes and four different approaches to training and preparing for softball. Perhaps one of these methods might help you on your road to becoming a better player.