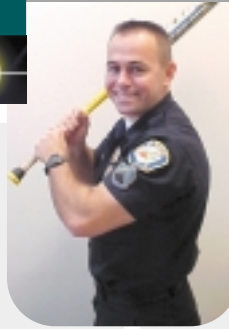


COP CORNER

by Jeff Blair • Sponsored by Mizuno



I have watched the game of cop softball evolve over the past few years. When I started playing in the mid 90's, most teams were more at the recreational level with a handful of legitimate competitive teams that always ended up facing each other come playoff time. About 5-6 years ago, teams started bulking up (pun intended) and it wasn't uncommon to find players on the B, A or even Major lists suiting up for cop teams. Balls started flying out of parks at an alarming rate and single game scores in excess of 80 runs were the norm. Recently, there have been some big changes in the softball world and the cop circuit was



not immune to the consequences. For safety purposes, bats were scaled back to conform to a more stringent testing standard, tourney balls went from 525 lbs. compression to 375 lbs. and directors started imposing stricter home run limits. The stage is set for a new trend. I suspect the next wave of really successful cop teams will be built around a strong defense. I was recently at a prestigious 40-team tourney that featured teams from New York to California and I was fortunate to watch some teams put on very impressive defensive displays. Once again, the normally dormant light bulb in my head flicked on and I thought...what a great idea for a Cop Corner article. I will profile some of the finest double-play combos in the cop circuit. Let me introduce you to the Ozzie Smiths and Roberto Alomars of cop softball.

Name: Nate Baez; **Team:** LAPD Blue/Easton
Position: Shortstop; **Agency:** LAPD; **Assignment:** P-2, Rampart Division Patrol; **Age:** 29; **Athletic Background:** Played baseball at Bishop Amat High School and Glendale JC. Currently coaches the LAPD GameCops traveling baseball team.



Frequently makes the transition from hardball to softball player on a weekly basis; **Notable Fact:** Nate is currently on the Southern California A.S.A. and U.S.S.S.A. "B" player lists and his civilian team Bangtime is well known in the region; **Quote:** "Playing shortstop in softball is much more difficult than in baseball because everything happens faster. The ball gets to you faster, the bases are shorter, you really need to field that ball cleanly and get rid of it in a hurry."

Name: Jerry Miller; **Team:** LAPD Blue/Easton; **Position:** Second Base; **Agency:** Los Angeles County Sheriff Dept.; **Assignment:** Detective (detail classified); **Age:** 34; **Athletic Background:** Played baseball at Hart High School and later played soccer at Northridge College; **Notable Fact:** Jerry played for one of cop softball's most fabled teams, the LASD Red who, during one hot streak, won 127 consecutive games; **Quote:** "Don't try to read a batter's feet. Good hitters will burn you if they catch you cheating. Most importantly, anticipate that every ball will be hit to you regardless of the circumstances."

Tournament Results:
Palm Springs P.O.A. Tourney
May 14, 15
1. NYPD Metro
2. California Quake
3. LAPD Blue/Easton
3t. NYPD Blues

Virginia Beach Tourney
May 21, 22
1. Michigan Lawmen
2. New Jersey G-Boys
3. TPS Lawmen

Name: Dave Feather; **Team:** Houston P.O.A.; **Position:** Shortstop; **Agency:** Federal Bureau of Prisons; **Assignment:** Supervisor, Beaumont Texas Federal Prison; **Age:** 40; **Athletic Background:** High school and minor league baseball. Armed Forces softball for the Air-Force team. Workout fanatic, spends hours in the gym or on the field taking batting practice; **Notable Fact:** Dave has played at the Major and Class A level for civilian teams such as BellCorp and



Name: Joe Saenz; **Team:** Houston P.O.A.; **Position:** Second Base; **Agency:** Harris County (Texas) Sheriff Department; **Assignment:** Deputy assigned to the jail; **Age:** 40; **Athletic Background:** High school and semi-professional baseball pitcher; **Notable Fact:** Joe has played A/B level civilian ball for teams based out of Texas. Most recently he played for Top Dog softball; **Quote:** "You learn the fundamentals of second base early on but you keep your skills sharp through repetition."

Meridian; Scouting Report: "These Houston guys prove that you can be big and strong but still stay agile and quick. They could be the biggest and most powerful offensive 2B/SS combo in the circuit but their defense does not suffer."

Name: Jose Larraga; **Team:** SoCal Alliance/Mizuno; **Position:** Second base; **Agency:** Pomona Police Department; **Assignment:** Motorcycle patrol; **Age:** 36; **Athletic Background:** Jose played competitive baseball and soccer since he was five years old; **Notable Fact:** Jose played for the LAPD Red Dawgs who dominated the cop circuit before they folded five years ago. Turned five double plays in one game for the SoCal Alliance last year; **Scouting Report:** "The only man to ever have hands this quick was Arthur Fonzarelli. If you even get the ball in the neighborhood Joser will make the turn and deliver a strike. What he has cannot be taught."



Name: Scott Spalding; **Team:** SoCal Alliance/Mizuno; **Position:** Shortstop; **Agency:** Orange County (Ca.) Sheriff Department; **Assignment:** Detective, Anti-Terrorism Task Force; **Age:** 42; **Athletic Background:** Starred in both basketball and tennis in high school. Genetics probably have something to do with his success because his father is still playing competitive softball at age 73; **Notable Fact:** Scott is on the Southern California A.S.A. and U.S.S.S.A. "B" player lists and his civilian team PANIC placed 2nd in the A.S.A. Worlds in Midland, Tx. in 2004; **Scouting Report:** "Nobody has a better work ethic than this guy. He is the epitome of the disciplined ball player. Not only that, he is also one of the most heady guys you will ever see. He wins games with both his head and heart."

Mizuno Envy Review:

I received the Mizuno Techfire Envy just in time for the Palm Springs POA Tournament on May 14/15 and I have to admit that I enjoyed the celebrity status it brought me. You see the bat had not been released to the general public yet and I was the only person at the complex that weekend that had one. Players, umpires, and spectators approached me and asked how I got one already and they wanted to know how it performed.

Let me first clear the slate here and remind everyone that the days of super hot, titanium plated, testosterone injected wonder bats are a thing of the past. If you have been around the game for 3-4 years, you know the ones I am talking about. Those bats are now illegal and it is unfair to compare any recently released bats to them. With that in mind, here is my read on the Envy: The Envy is a good looking bat with sharp graphics. It has a heavy end load which should make a lot of people happy because the majority of the new wave of bats has been more toward the balanced side or during the re-certification process, were counter balanced. I am no physics expert, but all things being equal it makes sense that an end loaded bat would transfer more energy into a ball than a balanced bat. The grip is the same one used on the Blur line of bats which many people like. The bat began to make a throaty sound on well hit balls which is unlike the previous Techfire line. I was impressed with the size of the sweet spot because I had figured it would be smaller due to the heavy end load...not the case at all. The way the ball came off the bat and overall distance reminded me of the original Crush. The ball jumped off the bat and had a great deal of carry. The durability has not been a concern because my team was handing the bat off from one guy to the next in a recent tournament and at the end of the day the bat still looked new with the exception of a few ball marks. I did a little research on several softball message boards prior to writing this and I learned that I am not the only one impressed with this bat. Hopefully you will get a chance to hit one so you can make your mind up for yourself. I think you'll agree with my assessment.

-Jeff Blair