

COP CORNER

by Jeff Blair • Sponsored by Mizuno



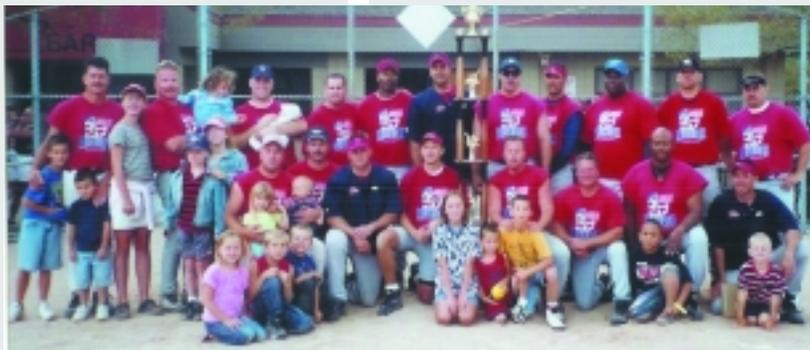
"**B**aseball to me is still the national pastime because it is a summer game. I feel that almost all Americans are summer people, that summer is what they think of when they think of their childhood. I think it stirs up an incredible emotion within people." - Steve Busby, former Kansas City Royals pitcher.

Summer is officially here and we are in the heart of the 2005 softball season. All over the country, softball diamonds are being dragged, chalked and watered. The smell of fresh cut grass and pine tar is wafting through the air. If you play in the law enforcement softball circuit, the smell of analgesic balm emitting from sore hamstrings and tired elbows usually overpowers the smell of the fresh cut

grass, but that's a story for a different day. What I like most about softball is best captured in the quote above from Steve Busby. When I think back to my childhood I remember baseball. For me, the dream of playing in "The Show" ended in high school but for one weekend a month I get to lace up the cleats, pull down the brim of my hat and be a kid again.

The odds are now more slanted in my favor because instead of trying to hit a nasty curve ball I get to hack at 12" softballs being gently lofted underhanded to me. Even though it sounds easy, at times I still find myself struggling to stay above the softball Mendoza-line. These are the memories, sounds, smells and sights of our game. Speaking of sights, a common sight currently on the ball field is the new Mizuno Envy softball bat in the hands of many batters. The popularity of this product has spread like wildfire on a dry California hillside as players at all levels have discovered what a gem Mizuno has unleashed. This bat competes with all of the other manufacturers' top end \$300 bats, but you can find it for less than \$250. You could use that extra \$50 to get that new bat bag or turf shoes you have been eyeing and not sacrifice one smidgen of performance or durability. Perhaps the biggest plus is how well the bat handles lower compression 44cor/375 comp. balls. All that AND it is legal in all major softball associations.

While we are on the topic of Mizuno, let me share some facts with you. The Michigan Lawmen/Belle Tire/Zada Enterprises/Mizuno police softball team has been blistering the Mid-West and East Coast cop softball circuit for many years and they are at it again this year. I chatted with team manager Steve Perkola who makes his living as a Springport-Jackson (Michigan) Police Officer. Perkola traced the roots of the team back 30-plus years as they have evolved from the Eastside Detroit Lawmen



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to the Suburban Metro squad to the powerhouse they are now. Perkola said 1998 was the turning point in team history when the top players from the Wayne-Oakland, Troy Police and Southeast Michigan squads banded together under the name Michigan Lawmen and set a path for cop softball domination across the nation. Their list of accomplishments is impressive as they have won the Detroit World Classic on three separate occasions. That feat is not too shabby considering they had to battle 100-plus teams each time to win it. Other notches on their gun belts include tourney championships in Houston, Jacksonville, and Las Vegas. They have won the U.S.S.S.A. Law Enforcement Championship in Sterling Heights, Michigan, and they were also the L.E.S.A. National Points Champion before the outfit folded a short while ago. They kicked off 2005 with a bang by winning the annual

Virginia Beach tourney. One championship that has eluded their grasp has been the annual Dayton, Ohio, classic but Perkola swears this is their year. Another goal for the team is to win the first ever Softball Magazine/Police Softball.Com World Series in Cathedral City, California, this October. They already have their spot reserved and rumor has it, the Caesar's Palace Sports Book in Las Vegas has posted them at 2:1 favorites to capture the World Title!

Perkola cites power hitting, great defense and mastery of the 5-man infield as team strengths. He boasts with confidence that his team has the best defensive outfield in cop softball and that enables them to hem up the infield with the 5th man. If you were to look for a chink in their ballistic body armor, it might be their inability to play small ball. These are big power hitters and they can bang with the best, even in civilian tourneys they have competed at the A & B level. If you saddle them down with a low HR limit, other teams might be able to peck away but even so it is a rare occasion to drop an L on their resume.

When you are as good as this Michigan crew, you tend to stockpile enemies...since we are just talking about cop softball here, we will call them "competitive rivals." The

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team on top of their Must-Defeat list is the TPS Lawmen from Kentucky. Another team on the list is the New York Metro squad, but Perkola admits that even though things get heated on the field with the Metro, the teams usually end up tipping back cold libations after the game. There is no love lost between the current Wayne-Oakland team and the Lawmen because Perkola has been accused of sucking up the best talent from Michigan area feeder teams and leaving them to flounder. In the "arms race" of cop softball, Perkola controls a super-power.

Key pieces to the Lawmen puzzle include senior team member and first-baseman Scott Affholter from Wyandott P.D.; Catcher Randy Thivierge from Westland P.D. is a power hitter who also runs like a deer; Middle-Infielder Mike McDowell from Macomb County is a steady .900 hitter who was inducted into the Michigan Softball Hall of Fame; Detroit P.D.'s Johnny Anderson mans shortstop and he was recently named All-Tourney in the civilian Class-A Black Worlds for Team Pace; Scott Czmpek from Southgate P.D. is the Pete Rose of the team. He fills the role of the hard nose lead-off hitter.

Perkola cites his sponsors as being the true key to their success. The Belle Tire Company and Zada Enterprises provide enough financial support for the team to travel the nation and represent Michigan Law Enforcement. The players get quality equipment from Mizuno, travel expenses and tournament fees are covered and the total package creates a winning environment. Most importantly, Perkola said the team has become a fraternity and the players really do care about each other. Perkola summed it up by saying, "We are more than a softball team, we have become a family." With the overall atmosphere Perkola has created, it's no wonder players from Michigan are lining up to be adopted into the Lawmen family. The future is definitely bright for the Michigan Lawmen!