

COP CORNER

by Jeff Blair • Sponsored by Mizuno



I don't want to keep beating a dead horse here but as I have said many times in the past, the best aspect of playing in the cop softball circuit is meeting players and building relationships with fellow law enforcement officers from all over the nation. Over the last year or so, I have become friends with one of the biggest characters in the circuit. His name is Dennis Leonard and he is from Orange County, Florida. I am a police officer in Orange County, California, but Softball Magazine and the police-softball.com website have really opened the doors of communication for cop softball players from coast to coast. Dennis plays for the 2005 National Champion Jacksonville Police Softball Club and his team is currently ranked #1 in the Central/Eastern States Top 25. After securing the title in Dayton, I decided that a team profile would be appropriate so I gave my buddy Dennis a call. Let me first warn you that Dennis is the circuit's equivalent to Howard Stern. He has a tendency to tell it how he sees it and he does not pull any punches. He is such an entertaining writer he was given his own sub-topic on the policesoftball.com message board titled, "Dear Dennis." Essentially, players from all over the nation ask Dennis for advice on a variety of topics ranging from marital counseling to hitting tips. Dennis provides some EXTREMELY tongue in cheek responses that will either totally offend you or have you rolling on the ground with tears of laughter. Nobody ever accused Dennis of being politically correct and nobody escapes his crosshairs. Here are some examples... Dennis explaining his belief that corrections officers should not be allowed to play in police tournaments: "Dealing with criminals in a 6' X 6' cell doesn't impress me. We chase, fight and disarm them so they can baby sit them and make sure they get their food delivered in a timely manner. The reason we get squad cars is because we can pass a literacy test." Dennis on the women from Maryland: "The gals from Maryland aren't exactly the pick of the litter." Dennis giving advice to a player who has a schedule conflict between his wedding anniversary and a tournament: "Since the anniversary date is important (to her only) how did you even remember it?" Dennis helping a rookie cop decide if he should pop the question to his girlfriend: "Have her pitch you some BP. If she can throw strikes consistently she is a keeper. If she can field your middle shots you need to work on your game." I don't have enough space in this article to get into his view on "hose draggers" (firefighters) playing cop softball. Dennis clearly has enough venom to spew at everyone but it is ALL done in good fun...all except for those he deems to be Jellyfish. Jellyfish are those who come to his site and post negative comments but refuse to sign their names. Dennis respects everyone's opinion provided they don't hide behind the cloak of anonymity. When they do, they are quickly identified as being spineless (aka: a jellyfish) and that is when the Backbone Doctor opens up business. Backbone insertion is his specialty but it does get messy. Fortunately, I caught Dennis on a good day and it helped that we were talking about something he truly has a pas-

Team Profile: Jacksonville Police Softball Club



sion for, his Jacksonville team. Dennis was quick to cite team manager and left fielder Robbie Freitas from the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office as being the heart and soul of the team. Robbie has ordained Dennis as Assistant General Manager, but Robbie makes the machine run. The team formed in 1980 under the leadership of Rick Hall, but he passed away. Robbie has been involved with the team for the past 17 years and he now organizes the Rick Hall Memorial Tournament. The team began exclusively with Jacksonville Sheriff's Office players but it started to branch out in 1989 to include players from surrounding counties. They did this

for the same reason all teams combo up and that is to field a more competitive team to go against the large agencies from Los Angeles, Detroit and Houston. One team in particular that they wanted to take down and that was everyone's nemesis, New York Metro. The decision to bring in players from outside agencies was immediately successful as the Jacksonville squad won the Dayton National Police Tournament in 1989 and continued with victories in 1992, 1993 and 1997. They hit a dry spell from 1998 until 2004 but this year things were different. A supercharged Jacksonville group rolled in to Dayton and secured the national championship in a convincing way.



Jacksonville Police Softball Club

Tournament MVP Vince Miniet and All-Tournament Players Doug Cullen and Dennis led the charge. Defensive MVP Brett Parnell was dealing nasty stuff on the hill and he shut the middle down. Other key players on the squad include Brad Gidcomb and Doug Cullen's brother, Paul. It truly was a great day in history for the boys from Jacksonville.

The team has had a great year so far and they intend to bring their best efforts to their two remaining tournaments. They will be playing in Sterling Heights Michigan and then in October they will go against the nation's best in the Police Softball World Series in Cathedral City, CA. These guys are so dedicated they even bring along a team trainer who keeps the players hydrated, taped up and healthy for the games. These guys are very focused on winning every tourney they play in but they do have an Achilles heel. It seems many of the players are DIE-HARD Florida Gators football fans and it can be a chore to pry them away from the television in football season. In the World Series there is a chance my team might have to face this Jacksonville squad but I have a plan. Since I am the tourney director, I set the game times. I think there will be a good chance that Jacksonville might be facing the SoCal Alliance at exactly kickoff time for the Florida Gator game that weekend. Whatever the case there will be 31 other teams gunning ESPECIALLY for Jacksonville because nobody wants them to sweep the Dayton Nationals and the Police Softball World Series in the same year. For now, Dennis and the Jax boys...enjoy the glory, but remember come October, you will be the team to beat! Heavy is the head that wears the crown, but I am sure you guys have the backbone to support it.

The Cop Corner's Mizuno Product Spotlight •
This month: Mizuno Pro GMP Fielding Glove



I was reading a recent article in Sports Illustrated about how professional baseball players value their fielding gloves. One player in particular caught my attention and that was Mizuno Ambassador Ichiro Suzuki of the Seattle Mariners. I learned that Ichiro places extreme importance on the

construction and care of his fielding glove. How much importance you ask? So much so that he has it hand sewn by a legendary Japanese Mizuno glove technician and then keeps it safely locked away so only he has access to it. Ichiro does not even like his teammates to put their hands inside his glove. If a perennial gold glove winner treats his leather so well, why do you throw yours in the corner and let it bake in the hot sun between innings? If defense is half the game, why not give your glove some love? Go take a look at your glove right now. I bet it is dry, torn and broken down...like the old Ford Pinto on blocks in your driveway.

I suspect you could use a new glove and I have a suggestion for you. Mizuno is once again at the forefront of high performance equipment research and they are now offering fielding gloves with 4D Technology. I won't get into the minutia of how it works but in laymen terms, Mizuno has created a glove based on pressure points consistent with the dynamics involved at specific fielding positions. You read it right; they have created position specific fielding gloves! For additional details, you can check out www.mizunousa.com and query the Mizuno Pro GMP Fielding Glove line. There is even a dummy-proof step by step menu to assist in picking the right glove for you. If you are serious about your game, and I mean your total game, the Mizuno Pro GMP is a worthwhile investment. Remember, take care of your glove and your glove will take care of you...just ask Ichiro.