

Softball Magazine's Senior Softball Camp



There is a new “holiday” in the holiday season. Well, for some softball players, there is. Softball Magazine’s Senior Softball Camp takes place in the first week after Thanksgiving in Cocoa Beach, Brevard County, Florida. It is a “Softball Holiday,” a sporting feast with plenty of gifts! Approximately 100 players from 22 states participated in December. More than one quarter of those attending hailed from Florida, while the next most-represented states were Virginia and Pennsylvania. Players flew in from as far away as New Hampshire, Arizona, and California. The players ranged in age from 50 to 77. The median age was 64, and nearly one quarter of the players was 70 or older.

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The weekly overview for the second annual Senior Camp was the same successful format used for 12 years during Softball Magazine's Adult Spring Training. It opened with a Wednesday evening poolside meet-and-greet and a Thursday morning orientation breakfast (including a giveaway of 3n2 apparel). Three full days on the fields on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday followed. Saturday night featured a concluding happy hour and banquet at the Cocoa Beach Country Club, where every player received a new senior bat and bat bag. The base hitting and home run contest winners received prizes, and there were random drawings for other giveaways, including a free pass to the 2017 event. Sunday was a travel day so people could be back to work (or retirement activities) on Monday.

The Cocoa Beach Sports Complex is a four-field park just a few miles from the host hotel, the Comfort Inn & Suites. A full-sized baseball field was set up with three paths of live batting practice, with screens to protect the pitchers, and three instructional batting tee stations. Another field had three inflatable backstops with Jugs pitching machines. A deep supply of Dudley softballs kept all the batting practice moving efficiently. Two more fields next to the Banana River were used for daily defensive practice and instruction, scrimmages, contests, and special events with the pros.

Dozens of new senior bats from the primary sponsors -- Adidas, DeMarini, Dudley, Louisville Slugger, and Miken -- were available so players could compare and contrast various makes and models. Lunch was catered to the fields daily, and players had unlimited access to coolers filled with water, Gatorade, and other beverages. In addition, several vendors offered special deals on all sorts of gear and equipment.

Senior Softball Camp featured an organized, yet flexible, format with a minimum of overlap between conflicting events. Batting practice, featuring both live and Jugs pitching machines, ran all day. Scrimmages were held on a sign-up basis, but the other clinics and contests were open to all comers.

The emphasis of instruction was at the core of Senior Softball Camp. Our featured instructor, Ken Van Bogaert, is the founder of sportstechnique.com. He has several softball instructional videos on the market, and his "Swing Makeover" series on YouTube has millions of views. "Bogie" is a multi-time All-World Senior Player and home run derby champion in addition to being a terrific teacher. He led daily sessions, teaching the primary points of his hitting system. He used live pitching, batting tees from thegtee.com, and other training devices to illustrate his points.

Working with Ken was Steve Imlay. This Arizona resident is a member of the ASA Softball Hall of Fame, Florida Senior Softball Hall of Fame, and the SSUSA Softball Hall of Fame. He has played on teams that won 33 National or World Championship Tournament titles. As impressive as Steve's resume is, it was matched by his desire to share his knowledge of the game, working with small groups of players or one-on-one.

Another teacher was Ken's son Bret, a 33-year-old who not only teaches the sportstechnique swing, but he also uses it to win home run derbies and participate on championship teams.

"I really enjoyed Bogie's clinics, the live hitting stations and the opportunity to try different bats," said Garry Wheeler, who lives in the The Villages in Florida. "I also enjoyed being able to stay busy the whole time with choices on multiple fields. Most importantly, I enjoyed getting on-the-spot feedback from experienced and talented players"

Two of Adidas's top senior softball representatives, Davey Reed and Bobby Davis, were onsite once again. Both men are multi-Hall of Famers and have played on dozens of World and National championship teams. They worked one-on-one with batters to fine-tune their swings against live pitching and off batting tees. Davis enthralled listeners with stories of playing softball in more than a dozen countries, and Reed, also a certified personal trainer, helped the players with ways to overcome physical limitations, such as diminished flexibility.

Also representing Adidas was RayRay Wimbrough and Don Clatterbaugh. Wimbrough is in at least four Halls of Fame and has played on more than 90 National Championship teams. He was excellent at giving tips to the pitchers in camp. Clatterbaugh has a similarly deep resume, with his name in several Halls of Fame and on more than 140 National Championship rosters.



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Players who wanted batting tips flocked to listen to the man who went 101-for-104 during the 2011 season.

"I went to the camp for a very specific reason, to improve my batting skills," said Gilbert Garcia, from Bluffton, South Carolina. "The Adidas guys (Ray and Don) spent three hours with me and were able to dissect my problems. That *alone* was worth the price of the camp."

The instructional roster ran even deeper. Miken's Bobby Nifong, a top-level player and coach, is a familiar face at Softball Magazine's events. DeMarini/Louisville Slugger's Southeast Regional Manager Mike Cornell brought his experience and ebullient personality. Miken's Jason Kendrick, a former Major-level star, also helped with the instruction.

There was plenty of batting instruction, of course, but there were also daily defensive clinics, with pitchers, infielders, and outfielders receiving specialized instruction. Wimbrough from Adidas brought his wealth of championship knowledge to the pitchers' meetings.

At certain times, one could look from field to field and see a full buffet of activity underway simultaneously: live batting practice, Ken Van Bogaert's batting clinic, other one-on-one pro instruction, pitching machine batting practice, a defensive clinic, and a scrimmage. It was a highlight of the most ambitious itinerary ever completed at a Softball Magazine Camp.

"I was very proud of that, but it's a full team effort," said Camp Director Jim Ramsey, "the guy with the clipboard" at all 23 Softball Magazine camps over 12 years. "All this equipment



being set up and broken down by Mike Beasy and his crew, the behind-the-scenes work by some great volunteers and other Softball Magazine staff such as umpiring, catering, and registration, a lot goes into it. The whole group makes it appear seamless."

Most of the players agreed with that assessment. "This camp is excellent," said Terry Cartledge from Canton, Georgia. "It's very instructive on your particular faults to be corrected, especially hitting. The instructors were great. I feel like all of the ones I worked with are my friends now and not just instructors. I left camp feeling like they all wanted me to succeed. My overall rating would be a 9 out 10. I will definitely be back next year."



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The players ranged in age from the minimum requirement of 50 years old to 77. About a quarter of the camp included players in their 70s, and the median age of the players was 64. Many of them, regardless of their age, left Cocoa Beach excited about how they learned techniques to improve their hitting and then had the time and abundant opportunity to implement those changes.

"The entire program was well run, with plenty of group and one-on-one time with the pros," said Bob Mandell from Fort Lauderdale, Florida. "I really learned a lot and have been able to take it to the field."

Other campers had similar praise:

"I was like a kid in a candy store. I had to split my time between some of my wants and needs, but I managed, understanding that in that time frame that is all I could do. I wanted to play at least one game daily to practice all this new crammed in knowledge, knowing full well, I needed this." – Marty Cumba, Venetia, Pennsylvania.

"My greatest impression over two years is that everyone on the staff, the instructors, and the vendors, really care about making the camp experience the best for everyone - and that every attendee counts - not just the guys that can hit over the fence! Keep up the good work! See you next year." – Neil Mitchell, Fairfax Station, Virginia.

"The camp exceeded my expectations. Had a great time meeting others who were passionate about senior softball, learning from Boogie, Bret, and the Adidas guys. I enjoyed all the live hitting you wanted, playing softball games and the fellowship. I spent a few extra days with the wife visiting Orlando, Tampa, and Sarasota so that maybe she will let me come back next year, ha ha!" – Kevin Kyle, Jackson, Tennessee.

Registration for 2017 is coming up this summer. Check with softballmag.com and seniorsoftballcamp.com for your chance to participate in Softball Magazine's Senior Softball Camp!



~~TUESDAY~~
~~HIT SOFTBALLS~~
~~LAUNCH SOFTBALLS~~
~~CRUSH SOFTBALLS~~
~~BOMB SOFTBALLS~~
~~DESTROY SOFTBALLS~~
 BUY MORE SOFTBALLS

ALL DAY
 EVERY
 DAY

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