

Bombers tour big league ballparks

Story by Lisa Knight, photos by Tom Smedes

The Long Haul Bombers just completed their last two tours of the season at the AT&T Pack Bell Giants Stadium and at Rogers Centre in Toronto.

On August 21, team Miken competed against team Easton for the most power (home-run) hits at the Giants Ball Park where Brett Helmer from Easton won with 10 out-of-the-park blasts, including four he sent sailing to the bay. And only behind by one, Jeff Wallace from Easton came in second place with nine homers and Bob Woldyk and

Kenny Briggs from the Miken team tied for third with eight out of 15 "long ones."

In Toronto, Helmer won again with 12 out of 15 over-the-fence shots and Team Worth, with Jeff Hall and BJ Fulk, won the Manufacturers cup. "Winning the championship again this year was very rewarding. It is great to represent Easton at the highest level," Helmer said.

Helmer's "stellar performance" could be attributed to his participation with the Long Haul Bombers since 2003. Helmer practices three to four times a week for the events

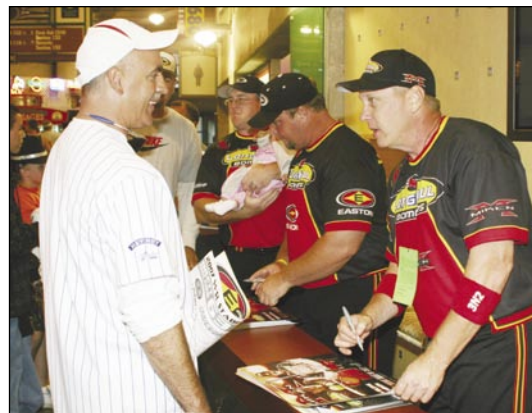
and spends a lot of his time with his major team, Bell Corp as well. Bell Corp performed well this year winning several NIT's and the Smoky Mountain Classic.

Helmer's favorite stadium to hit in this year was Shea Stadium in New York because his family was able to support him during his performance (since he lives only about two hours away from the stadium). Helmer said he also enjoyed hitting at Seattle, San Diego and San Francisco, and is looking forward to participating in the tour again next year.

Jeff Hall from Worth tied with Easton's Brett Helmer for the top home run frequency during the 13 tour stop with 1.66. Worth's BJ Fulk finished third with 1.74 and Jeff Wallace from Easton was fourth at 1.875.



Far Left: Brett Helmer launches a home run into the San Francisco Bay during the Long Haul Bomber Tour at AT&T Park. Helmer won the competition and went on to win the series championship in Toronto. Left inset: L-R) Kenny Briggs, Brett Helmer, Jeff Wallace and Bob Woldyk. Briggs and Woldyk represented Miken while Helmer and Wallace represented Easton at the San Francisco event. Left: Howard interviews Briggs for the Softball 360 show.



Above: Woldyk and the Bombers sign autographs for hours after they hit. Left: Wallace and Helmer talk with Giants owner Peter Magowan and his wife. Below: Sacramento's Kenny Briggs watches one fly into the Bay.



Overall though, in the Manufacturer's Cup Standings, team Worth led the tour in home run frequency with an average of 1.70. Easton came in second with 1.77, Miken was in third with 2.2 and DeMarini had an average of 2.37.

The Long Haul Bombers is comprised of four, two-man, teams (DeMarini, Miken, Worth and Easton) that compete for the most power-shots. The Long Haul Bombers are sponsored by the World Softball League.

The television and radio station, Softball 360, follow the Long Haul Bombers in all of their Power Stadium Tours throughout the season.



Above: Woldyk lines one out to left. Right: Greer Howard interviews Helmer for the Softball 360 show.



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Surprise Happy birthday

One lucky softballer hits with his hero Brett Helmer

By Lisa Knight

SAN FRANCISCO, CA—It was a very special birthday for SF Giants fan, Eddie Gonzales on August 21 when he was able to attend the Giants batting practice.

Gonzales, from Merced, CA, has been playing softball for approximately 16 years. Currently he is playing for a local team in Merced, the Greenscapes/Mr. Beverage. Gonzales has been a Giants fan his

entire life, and has been following the World Softball League's Long Haul Bombers tour since they began a few years ago.

Eddie Gonzales and his wife, Amber Gonzales attend Giants games quite often, and because of Eddie Gonzales' busy work schedule, he records the WSL's Softball 360 television show to watch later. Amber Gonzales said her husband always, "talks about how nice it would be to hit with the guys and get some pointers. So I made it possible."

To make this big event possible, was quite a task. One would assume not just any-old person can go to batting practice with the Bombers; and at first, that's what Amber Gonzales thought. After finding out when the Long Haul Bombers were coming to San Francisco, Amber Gonzales talked her husband into taking vacation from work at the same time. Then she tried to e-mail Softball 360, but received no response. Finally Amber Gonzales found a 1-800 number which got her in touch with Andy Groebner, the marketing director for Softball 360 – that's when it all came together.

Amber Gonzales said her husband was in absolute shock when he found out his birthday surprise was actually getting to meet and practice with the Bombers. "He did not believe me until we pulled up and he actually saw the guys. The guys came up and talked to him and everyone was so nice and easy going," said Amber Gonzales.

Amber Gonzales said she got really nervous at first for her husband when it was time for him to hit. "(Eddie) is a really good hitter, but when you are hitting with the best guys around, it's got to be tough." It turns out Eddie Gonzales did well, hitting four home-runs.

The birthday surprise didn't end there though. After the morning batting practice, Brett Helmer invited the Gonzales family for lunch. "We all sat around talking about softball and family. It was amazing," Amber Gonzales said.

Amber Gonzales said her husband had a "permanent smile," that day and Eddie Gonzales said, "I have the best wife ever."



Eddie Gonzales, wife Amber and baby Lauren with the Bombers.



Eddie Gonzales gets some pointers from Brett Helmer.

