

# Military standouts

# Excel

## Nations top military athletes meet at ASA Women's Open Nationals

Story and Photos by Mayble Watson



**T**he men and women of the armed forces are more than just dedicated soldiers, fighter pilots, naval officers and Marines. They can handle a softball bat in their hands as well as a weapon. They take pride in defending our country, and they take pride in their competitive spirit on the diamond.

That spirit shines through at the annual women's slow-pitch Armed Forces All-Star Game, and often at an even higher level — the ASA Women's Open National Championship.

As a wrapup to the 2008 slate, the Armed Forces squad turned in a terrific effort at the ASA nationals, eventually falling in the championship game to the Hawks/Miss Kitty club from Des Moines, Iowa.

Every branch of the service is active with softball programs. They not only play league games but also travel to tournaments around the world. During the middle of August, a Best of the Best tournament is held, with each branch sending its champion to the tournament. The winning team's coach is given the opportunity to coach the all-star team in a final tournament in the fall. After the selection of the all-star team, the players not selected return to their bases. All-stars practice about two weeks before the squad competes in the Open division of the national tournament in Oklahoma City, Okla.

This year's team featured players stationed overseas and stateside, all brought together by the love of the game. All of the players have a hometown in the United States, and at least half of them are from the West. The head coach, Cheryl Trapnell, represented Air Force, and the assistant coach and manager — Ron Bible and Kirk Myers, respectively — represented Navy.

The Armed Forces women competed with two other teams at nationals — Fraley's/Low Bob, out of Frankfort, Kentucky, and Hawks/Miss Kitty.

Following a three-game exhibition slate, the tourney got under way on a Saturday, with the Hawks overwhelming Fraley's 14-4. Next, Armed Forces moved into the winner's bracket with a 12-4 pounding of the Hawks, keyed by an eight-run fourth inning. In a rematch, Hawks eliminated Fraley's 7-4, then

faced the challenge of having to beat Armed Forces twice. The Hawks scored consistently in a 10-0 whitewashing, setting up the "If" game.

In a tense championship nightcap, the Hawks pushed home two runs in the bottom of the seventh for a 6-5 win and the Open title. Catcher Sirene Johnson went 2-for-4 in the final game to earn MVP honors for the Hawks.

Although they didn't win the national championship, the Armed Forces players had a lot to be proud of by the way they represented their respective branches and bases. The All-American team was a nice combination of both teams, with nine players from the Hawks and six from the Armed Forces. The Armed Forces All-Americans were Pfc Leticia Pacheco (Marines, MCS Parris Island, S.C.); A1C Brandi Jackson (Air Force, Elmendorf AFB, Alaska); SPC Brittany Shannon (Army, Kaiserslautern, Germany); MSgt Karrie Warren (Air Force,

Tyndall AFB, Fla.); Sgt. Laurie Doughty (Air Force, Osan AB, South Korea); and PO2 Rena Engelhardt (Navy, Whidbey Island, Wash.)

After the games were over, players exchanged addresses and other items as keepsakes. Most of the Armed Forces players jetted out of Oklahoma City at 6 the next morning. Another stellar softball season was over, and duty was calling at their bases. It was time to move on with the rest of life in the service.



Friendly competition stands out at Women's Open Nationals.