

# Italian club engineers 120-hour record-setting fastpitch feat



Left: Argenis Blanco (Venezuela) shortstop and Gergana Handjiyska (Bulgaria) second base for the Tortellini Team. Below: Tom Hanswillemenke (Germany) outfielder for the Fettuccine Team.



Giorgio Turconi pitches for the Tortellini Team.



Left: Tom Hanswillemenke is safe at third for the Fettuccine Team as Italy's Nicoletta Giappino waits for the throw. Above: Miss Lara Comi, a member of European Parliament, throws out the first pitch.



Fifty-four players from nine countries, combined with 22 umpires and 14 scorekeepers converged in Italy to play the longest softball game.

# The longest softball game ever played

Story by Don Cameron

Photos by Franco Bagattini

Ironmans, midnight marathons, 44-hour festivals. Some of the endurance softball marathons in the heat of the American Southwest are remarkable events. But they are a piece of cake compared to what an Italian softball club pulled off in June.

Not satisfied with whipping up a record-setting cake, an Italian service group — a local Gruppo Alpini — inspired the AB Caronno Softball Rheavendors club to tackle the arduous task of organizing the longest softball game ever played. From June 1 through 6 in Caronno Pertusella,

a small town near Milan, Italy, two coed teams played fastpitch softball for 120 hours — the equivalent of five full days.

The participants were men and women ranging from ages 21 to 64. Fifty-four players from nine countries — Italy, Bulgaria, Cuba, France, Germany, Great Britain, Slovenia, Spain and Venezuela — hit the diamond, playing in four-hour shifts. The final score: Team Tortellini 762, Team Fettuccine 749.

“It was an incredible experience,” said Giorgio Turconi, head of the organizing committee and an avid ballplayer

and coach. “Playing together for so long a time created the ideal conditions for establishing great relationships among the participants that will last forever.”

The previous softball game record of 115 hours, 3 minutes was set in 2009 in Wasketeau, Alberta, Canada.

Gergana Handjiyska of Bulgaria, an athlete ambassador for the International Softball Federation's BackSoftball Olympic reinstatement campaign, said, “It was just great, people from different countries playing in shifts for six days, united by the love of softball. This is exactly

what we were lobbying for the past few years, and to be part of [the longest game] was just amazing.”

It was amazing, too, that AB Caronno Softball Rheavendors could mobilize Europe's softball forces to carve out a piece of world record legend. In May 2009, as they prepared their record-setting mille feuille cake, Turconi and the head of Gruppo Alpini, Stefano Fiscato, targeted a more impressive record. In October 2009, they met to nail down details of the softball marathon. Turconi sent invitations across Europe. A notice was published in the

newsletter of the European Softball Federation. The response, and the passion, was tremendous.

The Italian Baseball and Softball Federation provided the 22 umpires and 14 scorekeepers needed for the event, held at the Francesco Nespoli field, which also hosted the 2003 European Women's Fastpitch Softball Championship and 2006 European Cup ballgames. Local doctors were on standby to provide medical attention. Rock and roll musicians served up entertainment. To help the event qualify for the world record, players were not allowed

to leave the complex, so tents, restaurant and shower facilities were set up. Rheavendors, a vending machine firm that sponsors the Caronno club, chipped in with carbohydrate-electrolyte beverages.

“I remember two emotional moments,” Turconi said. “At 3:03 p.m. on June 6, when the existing record was broken, on the standings and on the side hill there were hundreds of spectators. We were surprised by an unexpected marching band formed by the staff of Alpini Group, that used as instruments pots, spoons and forks from the kitchen where

meals were prepared for the 54 players. Another unbelievable moment was the end, when each player was called by name, and many of us couldn't hide tears.”

The final score, of course, was a side note in this venture that helped promote the sport and a sense of teamwork. Tournament organizers handed out fun awards to some of the ballplayers. The “Most Beautiful Player Award,” a tradition for international competitions played in Caronno Pertusella, went to Aleksandrina Bogdanova. The “Entertainer Award” was presented to

Leonardo Cruz Alzuru and Wilmer Colina. The Tortellini Panna e Prosciutto group that played the longest time overnight earned the “Players in the Dark Award.” And Riccardo Farisi, injured the first day yet always on the field, nabbed the “Enrico Toti Award,” honoring an Italian hero of the first World War who refused to let the loss of a leg keep him from the fighting lines.

“This sport is contagious,” Turconi said. “This sport requires great respect, to allow players of so different levels and skills to play together. We learned a great lesson from this event.”