

Navy SEAL Training

How USA Gold Medal Softball Team

Utilized Rugged Mental Conditioning

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CORONADO, Calif. — Possibly the most unique strategy ever used in sports was implemented last January when the U.S. Olympic women's softball team performed Navy SEAL training.

Navy SEAL training is universally regarded by military experts as the toughest in the world.

The first phase covers eight weeks, and 80 percent of candidates drop out because of the grueling nature of the training.

Physical conditioning with running, swimming, and calisthenics grow harder and harder as the weeks progress.

Candidates participate in weekly four mile timed runs in boots, timed obstacle courses, and swim distances up to two miles wearing fins in the ocean.

The pinnacle of this training is known as "Hell Week." Candidates participate in 5 ½ days of continuous training with a maximum of four hours sleep total.

This week is designed as the ultimate test of one's physical and mental motivation. Hell Week proves to those who make it that the human body can do 10 times the amount of work the average man thinks possible.

Why did U.S. Olympic softball head Coach Mike Candrea utilize such training for his athletes?

Believe it or not, it was all set up to mold the minds of these remarkable athletes to compete at a mental level never achieved before, according to Jim Bauman, sports psychologist with the U.S. Olympic Committee who worked extensively with these ladies.

Such training has never been done with softball or baseball players before, and *Collegiate Baseball* felt this story was important for coaches to know about to broaden their horizons so that their athletes can achieve more peak performances by becoming mental razors.

Keep in mind that the U.S. softball team didn't merely win the gold medal at the Athens Olympics. They dominated opponents, 51-1 in nine Olympic softball games with four being stopped because of the mercy rule.

"Mike felt he had the talent to win the gold medal," said Bauman.

"But winning the gold wasn't good enough to him. He wanted to send another message by dominating the competition, and that's what they did. Mike had them incredibly prepared prior to the Olympics by having their vision sharpened by utilizing a tennis ball machine that could throw 150 mph and worked them extremely hard physically. Prior to every game, pitchers went over scouting reports on opponents. The team was prepared for anything other teams would throw at them.

"This mental development was another important aspect of their training."

Genesis of Idea

Bauman said he came up with the genesis of the idea for navy SEAL training two years ago during a special summit in San Diego of elite athletes. It dawned on him that the Navy Special Warfare Center in Coronado, Calif., where Navy SEAL training takes place, was only a short drive away from the U.S. Olympic Training Center in Chula Vista, Calif.

"Navy SEALs are the world's best training athletes, physically and mentally," said Bauman.

"I contacted Captain Richard Smethers, who was the commander with the Navy Special Forces, and floated the idea of bringing elite athletes in from time to time to train with Navy SEAL instructors. Then they would gain an understanding of the mental characteristics that are necessary to be the best in the world.

"You must understand 80 percent of Navy SEAL candidates wash out. Those 20 percent who survive have special mental characteristics. The cloth they are cut out of is unique.

"When you really look at those Navy SEALs who make it, many have not played college sports. They are good athletes. But they are the toughest people mentally you will ever find who overcome incredible physical pain during their training. They have the ability to go well beyond what the body normally allows.

"In sports, we have always had great athletes. But many athletes simply don't have a good mental package and can get much more than they have. I honestly feel Navy SEAL training sets the tone for that advancement."

Bauman said he has taken six or seven other U.S. Olympic teams for Navy SEAL training to expose them to intense mental pressure such as the U.S. bobsled team, skiers and rowing groups. But he has never taken a U.S. baseball or softball team until last January.

"When your warning light is flashing in your body, what do you do then? You must go further. That is what happens with the Navy SEAL training these teams receive."

It should be stated Bauman refuses to allow just athletic club or teams to receive Navy SEAL training.

"I simply won't bring in anybody for a 'field trip.' It would almost be like hiring a motivational speaker for the day with a Navy SEAL instructor. Society today wastes too much money on motivational speakers. With Olympic teams I bring in, they must build on the training mentally after that point all the way through the Olympics."

Off to Navy SEAL Training

Bauman said the girls were taken to the training facility at about 7-8 a.m. one morning on a bus.

"As we drove over, all I did was give them enough information to conjure up ideas in their minds about what it would be like. I did not go into detail. I told them they would run, swim, crawl in the sand, crawl over obstacles and get a little tired.

"As we came to the facility, it was very secure with high fences, razor wire, and people running around and screaming.

"You could see the intense nature of the training. Now inside the military compound, the girls were ready for some serious work. They would become Navy SEALs for one day, and you could tell each one of them were a little anxious and fearful because they had never done anything like this in their lives.

"The first thing they did was negotiate an ominous looking obstacle course. There were a number of times they had to get through such as the 65-foot high cargo net when they had to go up over and back down. Some were afraid of heights and had a tough time with this. There was barb wire they had to crawl under and swing ropes.

"Almost every girl completed all the obstacles in the course. The Navy SEAL instructors love it when we bring our world class athletes out to their facility because there is an immediate connection. Our athletes have a mission they are on to be the best in the world.

"After a little over an hour on the obstacle course, they were all pretty tired. But it wasn't over yet.

"Girls were split up into six person groups. Each group was told to get 300 pounds boats off the racks and carry them over their heads to the beach. The six girls are equally spread apart under each boat so they were each responsible for about 50 pounds of the load. But if someone slacks off, the weight increases for others. So it is critically important for each athlete to share the load and synchronize their efforts. This is a great lesson in teamwork which is essential in sports as well.

"Each group of ladies did pushups with the boats over their head as well as squats. Then the ladies were instructed to have a race in the ocean. The boats were lowered in the water, and each group paddled their boats over the breaking waves and then out to a specified distance past the white water about 200 yards away and back to the beach again.

"Some of the girls were very comfortable in the water while others were not. Part of the Navy SEAL training is helping your buddies in uncomfortable situations, and this is what happened on the boats. The teamwork of everyone pulling together was great to watch. These situations teach you how to help your friend in uncomfortable situations and how you ask for help.

"One of the phrases that the girls took from this situation was, 'It pays to be a winner.'

"The reason this phrase was so important was that the group which finished the race in first place was done with their boat work. But the other groups had to do it all over again and compete in another race. It was ingrained into these ladies that you can't slack off for even one second. If you don't push hard, you must do it again. Winning right away was vitally important. All of these key lessons on working together and winning are what takes place in team sports."

Do NOT Celebrate!

Bauman said something very interesting happened when the winning boat crew arrived on the beach first.

"They started celebrating and cheering. But the instructor was very upset with their conduct. He said Navy SEALs are *expected* to win and no cheering is allowed, so each of those girls were told to do four dozen pushups. Keep in mind all the grueling things they had done prior to this with the obstacle course for over an hour, lifting a 300 pound boat, doing pushups and squats with the 300 pound boats and then racing with boats as they used paddles. There were absolutely exhausted. Even doing five pushups at this time was extremely difficult for them. But they all did them."

Bauman said an incredibly important lesson was learned at that time concerning celebrating after wins.

"Not once did these ladies celebrate in any wild fashion after any of their wins at the Olympics. They would slap hands after wins and then go about their business as usual. It really was all business after those victories. The only time they truly celebrated was after capturing the gold medal. Then they cut loose."

The sports psychologist said the ladies were three hours into their training at this point and were physically tired. They had lunch...but not just any lunch. They ate the same field rations that Navy SEALs must digest during missions.

"After lunch, the girls were so physically exhausted that they couldn't do any more. So they watched navy SEAL candidates do even more training. Six men per group were told to grab logs about 10 feet long and about 10 inches wide that weighted approximately 350 pounds each. Each group did pushups with these logs and sit ups. It was an

amazing display because they were obviously tired from grueling physical work prior to lunch and were still going. Our athletes were reminded that they only had a half day of training with this kind of tough work. The Navy SEALs are not deployed until after a year of training. They thought this was just remarkable.

"One of the purposes of this training was to ingrain into the mind so of these ladies that if you are tired, you can still go on and do more. If things get a little tough, keep going. If the fuel gauge is about to go off, you now know how far you can go. The problem in athletics and the Navy SEALs is that the fuel light is going off all the time. You must know how far you can go once that happens.

'So What' Key Phrase

Bauman said an important phrase that the softball teams utilized in its training and at the Olympics after this important day with the Navy SEALs was, "So what!"

"Instructors would routinely say 'so what' if one of the SEALs was complaining of being in the ocean for 24 straight hours r undergoing intense training that is almost unbearable. The catch phrase they always use is 'so what.' They feel you can be part of the problem or the solution. If you are tired, irritable, cranky or complain about every little thing or don't think you have enough sleep, 'so what.'

"The night before the gold medal game in Athens, we ran a video for the girls which showed them performing Navy SEAL training back in Coronado, Calif. and were reminded that they not only completed all of those obstacles there but others along the way to this gold medal game. They were told that they used those experiences to be solidified about the business at hand, and they have demonstrated over and over again they are winners. They were told that they now much reach down a little further to complete the mission that they had set out to do a long time ago. There is plenty of fuel and don't let anything stand in their way."

Bauman said if the Navy SEAL training was only utilized as one day even and never tapped into again, it would have been a waste of time for the U.S. Olympic softball team. But day after day up to the gold medal game, references were made to this training.

"Looking at people who achieve peak performance consistently is remarkable to study. And I have tried to study people with the Top Gun (fighter pilot) program, NASA and other areas of the military to see what they are doing to be successful mentally.

"In sports, there is a tremendous amount of information on the physical end, including equipment, physical conditioning and diets. But we have not really worked at refining the mental part of the equation. I have been in sports psychology for 16 years now and read almost every sports psychology book.

"It's the same thing over and over again. So I thought it would be helpful to look into different agencies like the Navy, Army and other branches of the military. Why don't we study how people who are injured with brain injuries are rehabilitated to get a better grasp of how to work with the mind?"

"This (training the mind) is in its infancy stage. The future is before us, and it will be special for all athletes when we develop the plan more fully."

Remarkable Experience

Candrea said the Navy SEAL training was a phenomenal experience for his team.

"Jim (Bauman) explained the entire training with me, and I thought it would be very interesting. So he set it all up so the girls could see what elite military soldiers go through mentally as they perform grueling drills day in and day out.

"Se we went out there last January and performed a number of drills.

"What intrigued me is that 75-80 percent of their candidates wash out because the training is so intense. In softball, a hitter may fail that much because the pitching is so dominant.

"There is a high failure rate in hitting. There are incredible parallels with teamwork, work ethic and winning that our team experienced during that day of Navy SEAL training.

"The two phases we kept using during our pre-Olympic tour and the Olympics were, 'So what' and, 'It pays to be a winner.' We learned both of those phrases at Navy SEAL training, and they struck with us.

"It was an experience I will never forget as a coach. It taught me a lot."