

# THE TIME WAS RIGHT FOR GO TIME IN 2012

By Bill Ballew

**T**ime has a way of taking a toll on softball teams. Regardless of whether the obstacles involve aches and pains or full-blown injuries, family obligations or responsibilities at work, the older a player gets, the more difficult it is to take the field once he reaches his thirties and forties.

That was the case with a group of players in Virginia prior to the 2012 softball season. For years many had played with and against one another while doing what they love. But as many players decided to depart the diamond for other endeavors, several others in and around the Winchester area wanted to keep getting dirty by competing most weekends. As a result, those left standing decided to form a team known as Go Time to see what could be accomplished if everyone pulled in the same direction.

"We're kind of old, which is a little bit impressive in the overall scheme of things," said Go Time coach and first baseman/designated hitter Mike Ashby. "We have four guys who are over 40 and another couple of guys who are 37 and 38. We were butting heads together, which was really fun when we were in our 20s because things got a little bit spirited. But over the past few years, when teams had decided to disband due to various reasons, the rest of us decided to give it a try and see what we could accomplish."

At the very beginning of 2012, Ashby says there were some challenges to overcome. Some of those were eased thanks to Go Time's sponsor, Jack LaForce. "Jack really treated us well and made everything possible," Ashby said. Other hurdles involved the meshing of personalities, especially with everyone trying to get to know one another on a friendly basis instead of a competitive one. Yet by the time the team reached the parking lot of its first tournament, an outsider would have thought the players had been together for the previous decade. "The personalities really worked together well," Ashby said. "It became apparent early on that we could be onto something."

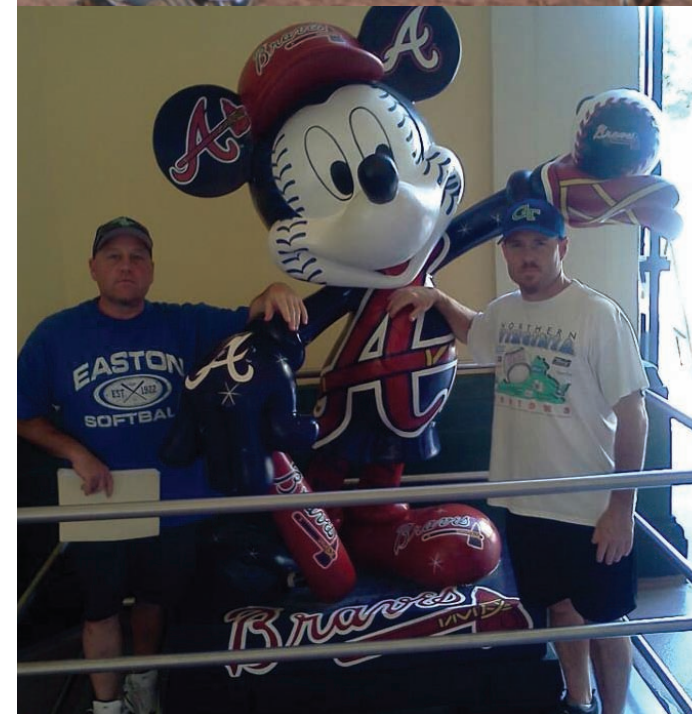
There were other complications to clear along the way, particularly early in the slate. Several players coached their kids in various youth leagues, which caused them to be unavailable on occasion during the spring. Others had work responsibilities crop up on weekends, and three were involved with weddings, including one during an NIT on Memorial Day weekend.

"I will give credit to one of the wives, Ashley, who



is also our scorekeeper," Ashby said. "She and her husband, Kevin, who plays on the team, took a look at our tournament schedule and worked their wedding around that. We knew they were getting married at some point during the summer, and one day he texted me wondering about our schedule in June. I sent him the weekends we weren't playing and they got married then. What's really cool about it is, Ashley is a school teacher and wound up getting married in the school auditorium with her students in attendance."

Ashby, however, knew the team had the desire to compete right from the start. Go Time was slated to open its season in late March in a local tournament that did not make quota. Instead of delaying the start of the schedule by at least a week, they wound up traveling to an event in Lynchburg, Virginia, that required some of the players to drive as much as four hours.



**Above: All World selection Mike Ashby and All World Offensive MVP Tim Sifford hang with Mickey before the tournament; Left: Go Time has arrived.**

"That told me we had a bunch of guys who were ready to get after it," Ashby said. "We wound up winning that tournament and had a great time in the process."

Those obstacles wound up creating a closer-knit team by the end of the season. While some players missed time during the first part of the year, such players as Jeremy Almarode and Justin Hardy stepped up and contributed beyond pre-season expectations.

"Jeremy and Justin were our so-called 'role players,'" Ashby said. "They played a lot at the beginning of the season when guys were missing but they didn't get a lot of playing time down the stretch. Justin was our pinch-runner and Jeremy was our utility guy. They never complained and were always the first guys out to coach the bases and high-five everybody. They are high-character guys and we couldn't have won without them."

Go Time played the conventional old-school lineup with four outfielders and four infielders along with the pitcher and catcher. Unlike many teams that try to beat opponents into submission, Go Time had success by executing the fundamentals to near-perfection.

"I'm kind of a statistics-oriented guy, particularly when it comes to looking at the overall team," Ashby said. "I'm interested to see how we won a tournament. We stood up for defense. One good thing about having guys as old as we are is the fact that we were a little more fundamentally sound. We also seemed to settle into playing in the big stadiums a little easier. If we have a guy on third with less than two outs, we're going to get him in. We played all of the

# GO TIME



**Above: Official team championship video; Left: Jack Schnezel, All World selection gives an interview; Below: World champions pose in the stadium with the hardware.**

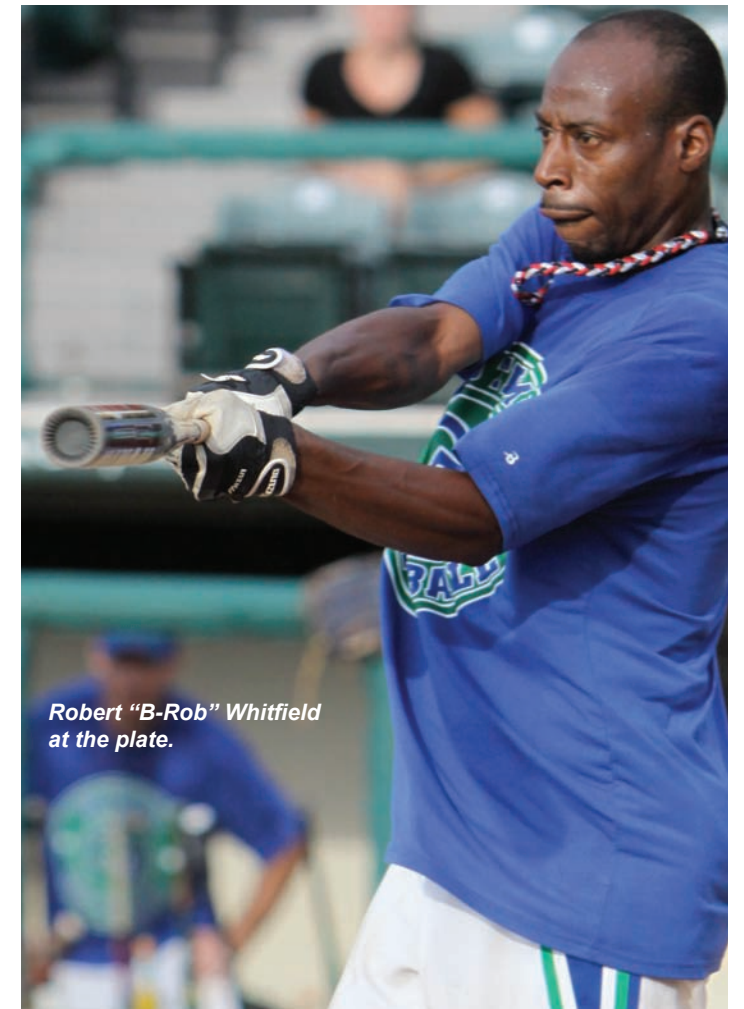
associations so that we could play in a tournament when we wanted to. The only thing we really set ourselves up for was the USSSA Worlds."

Go Time lost the Virginia Men's E State championship by one run in extra innings to In Memory. Two weeks later at the nationals, despite missing a starting outfielder as well as its top reserve in the garden, Go Time decided to play with three men in the outfield and five on the infield for the first time all season. The team wound up going undefeated in five contests to win the event in Salem, Virginia.

With the national trophy nestled in the team's case of accomplishments, Go Time headed to Orlando for the USSSA Men's E East Worlds with nearly everyone available for one of the few times all season. As a result, the team went 8-0, including five victories against opponents that finished the 176-team event in the top five. Go Time beat both of the teams that finished tied for fifth as well as the third-place



*"Week in, week out, Jeff (Swidrak - pictured) was either the first or second best player on the roster. The tough games at Worlds on Friday were won due to Jeff being Jeff."*  
- Coach Mike Ashby



Robert "B-Rob" Whitfield at the plate.

squad. They then upended the second-place team in the undefeated game before beating them again to claim the championship. "We were real proud of the fact that there wasn't a fluke to our winning the tournament," said Ashby, who added that Go Time averaged 10 runs a game and allowed only three per outing in the Worlds. "Winning five games against teams that finished in the top five is not too shabby. And of our other three wins, two of those teams ended up tying for 25th. So we felt pretty good about it." At the team's organizational meeting in January, the players established their goal of winning the USSSA Worlds by relying on defense and the fundamentals, which they felt would help them win close games. That plan fell into place exactly as it was drawn, especially when they reached Orlando. Go Time won two games on Thursday and then posted some impressive victories on Friday and Saturday. On that final evening, the players were sitting around the hotel, realizing they needed to win the undefeated game on Sunday morning to advance to the championship game later that day. "We were joking around, wondering what we would do if we achieved the ultimate prize," Ashby said. "We said we might all jump on the pitcher's mound in a big pile like they do in soccer if you score a goal. We didn't want to jinx it by talking too much about it, but we knew we were at the 'what-if' stage. As it turned out, we were the home team and run-ruled our opponent, 16-1. The umpire called the game and we weren't ready for it!"

After some initial apprehension on the part of a few players feeling the effects of getting older, Go Time decided over the winter to keep at it and see what the team can accomplish during an encore campaign in 2013. While the expectations remain high, Ashby says the team was having too much fun to call it quits just yet. "We all love to play ball so we decided to keep playing," Ashby said. "If we were going to keep playing, we might as well keep playing together. It will be hard to top what happened last year, which



The championship toast - Golden Ale, Golden Cup.

was really a storybook kind of year for us. But I have no doubt that we will continue to play hard and have a great time." **Go Time (listed alphabetically):** Jeremy Almarode, Mike Ashby, Jonathan Cribbs, Brandon Gue, Kevin Hall, Justin Hardy, Rob Riggleman, Mike Raines, Demarcus Robinson, Weasel Roach, Jack Schenzel, Tim Sifford, Jeff Swidrak, Robert Whitfield.