

DIAMOND SHARP: STEADY BATS PROGRAM BRINGS OFFSEASON TRAINING TO BALL PLAYERS

By **Jim McCarthy** - June 29, 2023



Coach Doug Mientkiewicz talks to Steady Bats participants about base running. KEYS WEEKLY FILE PHOTO

High school baseball and Little League concluded another season on the Upper Keys diamonds. While it may be the offseason for players young and old, there's always an opportunity to sharpen fielding skills, master base running and improve bat swings.

Enter Steady Bats — a program that's helped some 70 players improve their skills since its inception in 2020. The Steady Bats program kicked off after the 2020 high school baseball season. Coral Shores High School baseball coaches Joe Molinaro, Doug Mientkiewicz and Paul Varga realized that players needed more than regular-season games if they wanted to compete with the best teams in the division.

For younger baseball players, it brought an opportunity to work alongside high school players and receive a high level of instruction by the 'Canes baseball coaches.





"It is clear that the talent level in the Upper Keys is far less superior than the competition," Molinaro said. "In our first season of Steady Bats, we had significant involvement in the program from the varsity level players, which translated into an improved competitive season.

"For younger players, they were able to get comfortable on the bigger field and get to see what it takes. It gives them that experience they wouldn't get anywhere else," Molinaro continued.

Steady Bats provides a consistent training program over the course of five months, from July 6 to mid-December. Players are provided with training that they can take away on their own for improvement.



"Steady Bats is a great way to learn fundamentals and keep sharp in the offseason. It's also a great way for the younger players to get to meet the high school players and coaches," said coach Andy Putetti.

Doug Mientkiewicz said he's interested in seeing more growth both physically and mentally from players in Steady Bats.

“It’s about learning more about the game of baseball and challenging the player to push themselves to become better every session,” he said.

The age range of players in the program had coaches realizing that it could be a challenge to keep everyone engaged. That’s when Pam Molinaro, Joe’s wife, offered to help and suggested her experience as a mental health therapist as an added tool. While coaches concentrate on teaching and reinforcing baseball fundamentals, Pam concentrates on the mental aspect. Coaches and Coral Shores athletic director Rich Russell saw the benefit, so much that she joined the high school baseball team as assistant coach in 2021.

Steady Bats was implemented to provide baseball skill development, but really offers much more, Pam said.

“We tailor sessions to be age appropriate. We utilize older players to encourage and positively lead the younger players. We strive to balance fun, discipline and learning in each session,” she said.

With high-level instruction from coaches also comes new training and field equipment for quality baseball training. Coaches expect players to consistently work on their strength, mental toughness and on-field baseball skills.

“If players are not training at Steady Bats or elsewhere, players need to realize that impacts their ability to achieve the results they desire and could very easily cost them playing time in their respective seasons wherever they may play,” Joe Molinaro said. “We can’t harp enough for players to get stronger and better every day on their own and to supplement their growth with Steady Bats.”

The Steady Bat program is free to players this year due to the generosity of the Ocean Reef Community Foundation. Sessions will be held Tuesdays and Thursdays from 5:30 to 7 p.m. Days and times are subject to change, so visit www.steadybats.org.

Steady Bats is a baseball development program through the nonprofit Upper Keys Baseball Development Foundation. Donations and sponsorships are available by visiting the Steady Bats’ website.





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Jim McCarthy is one of the many Western New Yorkers who escaped the snow and frigid temperatures for warm living by the water. A former crime & court reporter and city editor for two Western New York newspapers, Jim has been honing his craft since he graduated from St. Bonaventure University in 2014. In his 4-plus years in the Keys, Jim has enjoyed connecting with the community. "One of my college professors would always preach to be curious," he said. "Behind every person is a story that's unique to them, and one worth telling. As writers, we are the ones who paint the pictures in the readers minds of the emotions, the struggles and the triumphs." Jim is past president of the Key Largo Sunset Rotary Club, which is composed of energetic members who serve the community's youth and older populations. Jim is a sports fanatic who loves to watch football, hockey, mixed martial arts and golf. He also enjoys time with family and his new baby boy, Lucas, who arrived Oct. 4, 2022.



