

**BARGER:** We all run. We all work out about three times a week. There is nothing too strenuous. Some guys will run every day and others only twice a week. It's not mandatory. But all of us have found that it helps our overall physical capabilities. As far as the G tolerance goes, that is an acquired capability. The more you fly, the better our tolerance is. The more we go out at full Gs, the better our body adjusts to what it needs to keep the blood in our brains. The guys on the staff can now pull 9 Gs easy. But if you don't fly for a month, you will have a 5-6 G body. You have to work your way back up.

**CB:** Is there any requirement that aviators use sunglasses during the day? NASA did a study some years ago which showed a key chemical in the eye is retained after the use of sunglasses during the day which makes night vision sharper.

**BARGER:** We don't do much night flying out here. We only do one mission. All the rest are during the day. Now our guys are flying with the night vision goggles. If your eyes are already 20/20, and you don't need correctable sunglasses, any piece of glass you put in front of your eyes will degrade your vision a little bit. For the guys who don't need glasses, we generally recommend that they don't wear sunglasses. They only use the helmet with the visor over it.

**CB:** What sort of training does a Naval aviator go through before he has an opportunity to be invited to Top Gun? In baseball you have certain players freeze during games but perform extremely well during practice. Do you have pilots who freeze during combat situations?

**BARGER:** There is a 3-year training period guys go through. It begins at Officers' Candidate School in Pensacola, Fla. They put you under pressure—from the very first minute you are in the military. They want to see you perform under pressure all the way until the day you could possibly go into combat. You have already faced pressure for X many years. So your chances of folding under combat pressure are very minimal.

What I would say as far as baseball is that you must put all of your players under pressure as much as possible in practices and scrimmages and play them seriously and force them to play under pressure so when they do it for real, they perform better. Once again, it goes back to the mental preparation. Knowing exactly what you are going to do will allow you to perform better. As a general rule, guys who freeze under pressure do so because they are not sure of the outcome or circumstances surrounding their mission. They may feel they don't have control over what is happening.

**CB:** You mentioned earlier that what you teach at the Top Gun School is vanilla and not complex at all. Do you feel baseball is becoming too complicated, and coaches should hone in on the basics just as Top Gun has done for the past 25 years with tremendous success?

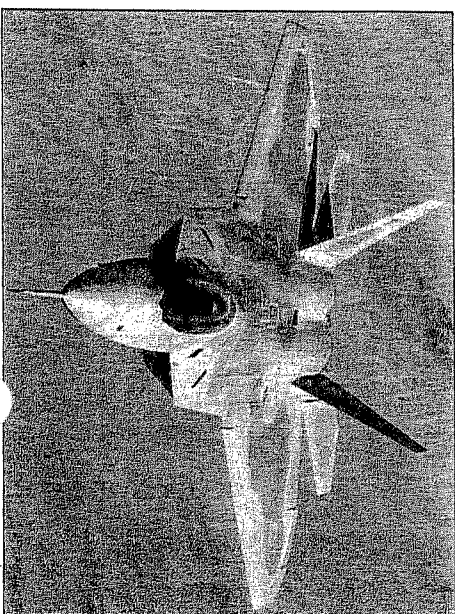
**BARGER:** Without question. I think the teams that do very well are the teams that do the basics very well. I don't think anyone would ever argue with that. That's not to lead you to believe that we don't teach advance tactics, because we do. But the building blocks of the advance tactics are the basics. If they can do the basics, they will be able to do the bigger stuff.

**CB:** Has your background in baseball helped you be a better pilot and instructor?

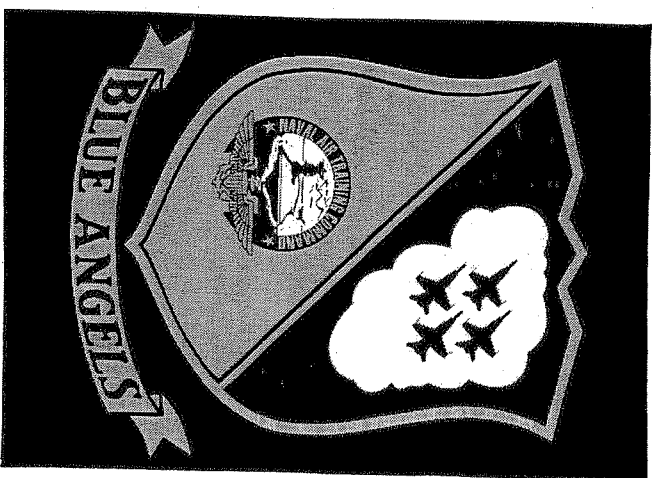
**BARGER:** Unquestionably. I was a catcher. Catchers are busy folks. There is a lot going on and everything is in front of you. I think what that allowed me to do was learn how to think basically. It put the pressure on me early to make decisions quickly. That is the best capability a young man can have coming up playing baseball. That's where we see the good and not so good pilots.

When I played for Coach (Bud) Middaugh at Michigan, I hated him calling pitches from the dugout that I relayed to our pitchers. I went with it, but I didn't like that at all. As a general rule coaches are probably smarter than the catcher on the field.

But I don't think they have the feel of exactly what the pitcher is throwing you. You, as the catcher, know how much his curve is breaking. You know how much his cut fastball is moving. You know what the hitter is looking like because you are squatting down right next to him.



F-22 Raptor



MIRAMAR, Calif. — The teaching concepts of the Navy Fighter Weapons School, better known as "Top Gun," is a fascinating study. Many of their basic principles can be integrated into baseball instruction. The Top Gun School was started 37 years ago because of a dramatic decline in the kill ratio of U.S. Naval jets over enemy aircraft. During the Korean War, that ratio slipped to 2-1. The Top Gun School was started so Navy and Marine combat pilots could master the fundamentals of dog fighting with training also in advanced aerial tactics. Thanks to the remarkable teaching staff at Top Gun, the kill ratio is now back up to 12-1. *Collegiate Baseball* was allowed to interview a Top Gun instructor to delve more deeply into some of their teaching techniques which would cross over into baseball. We were fortunate to interview Lt. Mike Barger, an instructor at Top Gun and former catcher with the Michigan Wolverines under former Coach Bud Middaugh. This article originally appeared in the Jan. 6, 1995 edition of *Collegiate Baseball*.