

Devon McCullough - There Is No Place Like Home

Bob Van Impe Stadium is like a second home for Devon McCullough. Growing up in Montgomery Place, McCullough was little more than a long throw from the outfield to the complex. "Ever since I was a kid I've been coming down here watching the older guys, or hopping the fence and hitting balls out here," says McCullough.



After a very successful home coming as part of Team Canada at the 2015 WBSC Men's World Softball Championship. Devon hopes to see the same type of home field magic happen in 2017 at the Men's national championship. McCullough will have a definite home field advantage for the tournament. "I've been playing here since I was little," he said. "And I play league here every night so it will be nothing new. I'm comfortable pitching on the mound and that is a big thing."

He showed his comfort level in the Worlds in one of the most clutch performances ever by a Canadian pitcher on Canadian soil. Local softball fans will be talking about the situation and eh pitch for a long time. It one of, "the local boy" Devon McCullough's best, change up. The same pitch that Brad Enoka hit out for a three-run shot the last time Devon faced the Kiwis. But with approximately 7000 fans chanting Devo, Devo, he had the courage to throw it again and this change up worked, as he struck out Stephen Ratu to win the gold medal game. The strikeout helped Canada claim it's first ever Men's World Softball Championship on home soil. It was a huge accomplishment for Canada, after years of disappointment in the Men's World championship they were finally the best and Saskatoon fans let them know it.

It was truly special for Devon as well. Not just because he was in the circle at the end of the gold medal game in spite of being Canada's youngest player, but he was

in the circle, just blocks from where he grew up and on a diamond that he burst through onto the national stage. "Just being at home with friends and family being able to all be there to share it," McCullough said prior to the championship. "I was here in 2009 when I was watching the worlds here, just seeing the crowds here how big, how many people were here. I can't imagine being from your hometown and getting your name announced in front of that crowd. It's going to be pretty hectic," he chuckled.



McCullough grew up in a softball family. His father Dave began coaching with his oldest son Devon, when Devon was 5 years old. He still coaches Devon as he will be coaching this week with the Saskatoon Angels. His wife Barb has been team manager and house organizer for as long as Dave has been coaching and Devon playing. They are joined by their daughter Brielle, who like Devon, was a member of Canada's Jr National Team and won a Midget National Championship with the Saskatoon Selects. The middle child is Darren who has played in numerous Western and Canadian championships and was part of Saskatchewan's team at U21 International in Saskatoon in 2013. He will also be third member of the Angels at this championship.

Pitching was in Devon's blood at an early age. "Back when he was 4 or 5 he loved sports" Dave said. When he picked up a ball and threw it, we all went whoa. He's spend hours at it pretending. It goes back a while that he has been working on it".

Like with Team Canada in 2015 where he was the youngest player on the team, he always seemed to be playing with the older kids. Still eligible to play in the Rookies leagues in Saskatoon's Montgomery community, he moved up to play for the Zone 4

Phantoms. He always seemed to pitch well in his first year but dominated in his second. After his two years in the Squirt class and one Provincial championship, he moved on the Pee Wee category winning a Western Canadian Championship in 2004 and being named Top Pitcher. Two years later he repeated the feat in the Bantam category. His three years of Midgets saw even more success. He won a bronze medal in 2007 (the last time Midget Nationals were in Saskatoon) and was named Top Pitcher and MVP of the preliminary round. He followed that up with a pair of gold medals of Top Pitcher Awards at the next two Midget Canadian championships.

It was after his first year in Midget, that he caught the eye of the National Team program as he was one of three Saskatoon Selects (along with Travis Dauvin and Derek Arsenie) chosen to represent Canada in 2008 at the ISF Junior Men's World Championship in Whitehorse. He was a key player in the pitcher's circle (2.45 ERA with 36 strikeouts in 25.2 innings) and at the plate (.474) as Canada won the Silver medal. It was certainly a bittersweet event for McCullough as he was the losing pitcher in the gold medal game giving up a single in the bottom of the 8th inning. "It was a tough way to lose, but two inches to the left and Terrell Walker gets that ball and throws the runner out at first" commented Canadian Jr. Team Head Coach Tom Doucette. He pitched a heck of a game for us and came one pitch away from a World Championship." (courtesy Softball Canada)

Following that performance, he was added to the Senior Men's National Team Athlete Pool in 2010 and competed in the 2014 Pan American championship. Throughout most of his time on the Athletes Pool he was looked at as a long shot to make a World Championship roster. He was: too young, too small and was not mature enough to play with the big boys some critics claimed. Undaunted by his critics he just got better. So much so that after his performance at the Pan Am championship he could no longer be overlooked and was named to the 2015 team for Saskatoon

This summer McCullough had his second chance to compete at the Sr. Men's World championship. He returned to White Horse in much the same role he played there as a junior. he was to be Canada's number 2 pitcher behind Sean Cleary, but always ready for the

spotlight. The spotlight is what he found, when he got the ball to start in the semi final game against the winningest team in world championship history, the Kiwis from New Zealand. It was a game for the ages, a true classic that unfortunately did not end up like the game in Saskatoon. Devon's pitching helped Canada to a 9-2 lead after 3 innings, just before the rain started to come down. Coach John Stuart decided to replace Devon after the 20-minute rain delay. However, the momentum had swung hard on the side of the Kiwis as replacement Justin Schofield was not able to hold off the powerful Kiwis as they ended their bat with a 10-9 lead. McCullough came back in and gave Canada a chance to win but the bats did not respond like they had earlier and New Zealand won 12-11. Devon returned to the circle the next day in the what turned out to be the bronze medal game. He did well, pitching three innings of one-hit ball in relief, sitting down seven batters on strikes, but his team had to settle for the bronze medal, bowing out the Australians 7-3.



Devon must be looking forward to playing at this championship in his home town with his club team the Saskatoon Angels. He has shared much of his route to the national teams with many of his Angels teammates. A few have been with him in his Phantoms days and some others joined him in Midget, as they are a crew of local boys who like Devon grew up playing ball in an around Bob Van Impe Stadium. Devon has never won a Canadian Men's championship gold medal and knows there would be no better place to do it, than at home. The last time Saskatoon hosted this championship Saskatoon Aspen Interiors won gold and Devon had just returned from Whitehorse as a junior. Now he is poised to help his team become the next local team to win at home. He has pitched in countless places, all over the world at the highest level for his country and his ISC club team. This week he gets to stay at his home and play with his friends. If they manage to win the gold, it will be all that much sweeter, not just playing in front of family and friend but with them.