

Saskatoon Takes Home Fastpitch Gold in 2013

It was a proud moment for softball in Saskatoon when the little team from Saskatoon did something that was never done before. Coach Brent Ball's Selects were huge underdogs coming into the 2013 U18 Nationals in Charlottetown. After all, they were playing against the likes of defending champion and three time National champions, White Rock Renegades featuring Sr. Women's National Team pitcher Sara Groenewegen. In complete contrast, the upstart Selects had a roster that included 9 first year players and no pitchers who had proven themselves at nationals. It was an exciting day for the team and the association they played for, Saskatoon Minor Softball League, as the "little old team from Saskatoon" became the first team from Saskatoon to win the Midget Girls National Championship.

Scotiabank Selects edge defending champion White Rock in A Division final

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Scotiabank Selects gutted out a 2-1 win over the White Rock Renegades in a hot, dusty Cup (A) Division final at the Canadian Under-18 Women's Fastpitch Championship Sunday in Charlottetown. For the Renegades – three-time national champions at various age divisions, they ended a string of consecutive championships that began in 2011 with a U16 title.

"It was a real close game – it could have went either way," said Renegades coach Chuck Westgard. "We've been doing this a long time. This team has won three national championships and we were going for our fourth... I told our girls that we battled hard but today it wasn't meant to be.

"Someone has to lose, and today it was us."

With the tying Renegades runner at third base and two out, Selects pitcher Haley Volk struck out White Rock catcher Kira Quinnell to end the game and end the B.C. team's chance at a second straight national title.

"I'm just so excited. I didn't even see that last pitch go in the glove," said Volk, named the Selects player of the game for her complete-game victory. "Our coaches have been saying all week we have nothing to lose, and so much to win, we're just a little old team from Saskatchewan."

And the Selects did just that, on a windy Central Field in front over 400 boisterous spectators. But it wasn't easy. They refused to let anything stop them as they got better and better throughout the event. They played consistently well in the preliminary round earning a 4-2 record and turned it up a notch in the playoff round winning 3 times and losing just once. Including two huge wins on Sunday against a pair of national powerhouses.

As a result of their only playoff round loss on Saturday, the Selects had to beat a very tough Rebelles team from Quebec 3-0 early Sunday to reach the final. In the final game, the Selects opened the scoring in the first inning, loading the bases after two walks and a single, and a third walk from Groenewegen cashed in Saskatoon leadoff hitter Brielle McCullough. White Rock had ample opportunity to tie the game in the ensuing innings – twice getting runners on second and third – but Volk pitched her way out of the jam each time. White Rock finally tied the game in the bottom of the fifth when Groenewegen singled and scored three batters later when Cheyanne Head singled.

But in the top of the sixth, McCullough whacked a triple into the left-centre field gap and drove home Ally Gallant from first base. It proved the winning run against the Renegades, who stranded 12 runners on the base paths, including the tying run in the bottom of the seventh.

"Yeah, I think (that hurt us). Things just didn't go our way today. There were a couple of plays that could have gone either way," said Head, still in tears from the loss. "I'm really proud of the way we played, the way the girls came together. We had a really good run."

The game was a pitcher's duel, as each team had their top pitcher in the circle – Canadian Senior National Team member Sara Groenewegen, pitched

for White Rock, while Saskatoon countered with its ace, Haley Volk. Volk allowed just five hits and one run in seven innings, while striking out 11. Groenewegen scattered five hits and struck out five. Both walked seven batters. Although Groenewegen was named White Rock player of the game, after coming off a 14-strikeout performance in a 5-0 win over Saskatoon the previous day she was not quite as sharp as usual in Sunday's final; Westgard was not laying any blame at his star pitcher's feet.

"She didn't have her best game today, but she battled, kept the score close," said the longtime coach, who told organizers after the game that he was retiring from coaching.

"We scored one run. You're not going to win 1-0 every night.

"Today, they were better than us."

Selects pitcher, Haley Volk won the last two games for the Selects and for her effort was named Top Player of the championship round. The other Selects award winner, Samantha Ridgewell, was named the

preliminary round's top utility player. Quebec earned the Cup Division bronze medal.

Selects Looking Good Again For 2014

This year's squad is under the tutelage of last year's Assistant Coach, Dave McCullough. They will again come to the event as provincial champions after going undefeated in Saskatchewan's Provincials. They recently returned from a very successful Canada Cup, where they finished fourth. Unlike last year, they are a veteran crew with only four first year players. The nine players that played in last year's Canadian championship include Haley Volk, Brielle McCullough and Samantha Ridgewell. They will count on that experience to make them stronger. It is always tough to repeat, especially with the added pressure of being at home. They are no longer, just "a little old team from Saskatchewan", they will come into this year's championship with the expectations of the defending champions.



2013 Saskatoon Scotia Bank Selects

- U18 Girls Canadian Softball Champions. First gold medal for Saskatchewan in 22 years.
- Samantha Ridgewell was selected as an All-Star Utility Player and Haley Volk was selected the Top Player in the Championship Round.
- U18 Provincial A Champions, total win loss record 34 wins 15 losses
- Haley Volk and Cassidy Ball selected and participated in the under 21 Canada Games in Sherbrooke
- Finalist for Saskatchewan Sport Awards 2013 Athletes of the Year Team Category
- Winner of the Saskatoon Kinsmen Club Award for 2013 Team of the Year