



By Jim Flanagan, www.fastpitchwest.com and www.ballparkradio.com with photos by Maddy Flanagan of www.maddysphotos.com

Australia came into the ISF Junior Men's World Championships at Whitehorse, Yukon, Canada in 2008 as the team to beat, having won the last three International Softball Federation (ISF) World Championships (19 and under) in 1997, 2001, and 2005. In view of the wholesale personnel changes that occur every four years, this run of championships by Australia is both remarkable and daunting – in that every other country is gunning to break the string.

The 2008 ISF Junior Worlds would be no different, with plenty of obstacles to gold, including the 2005 silver medalist, Japan, 2005 bronze medalist, Canada, as well as regional rival New Zealand. Gone were pitcher Adam Folkard, and the memory of Andrew Kirkpatrick more distant. In 2008, the pitching duties were spread out among a five man pitching staff of Matt Stafford, Shane Norman, Brad Riley, Tyson Duncan, and Drew Faulkner, with Stafford and Norman getting the ball most often.

During pool play, it was New Zealand that put a dent in their armor, delivering a 9-0 shellacking behind the one-hit pitching of New Zealand's Nick Hayes. But Australia finished regulation play with a 9-1 record, including wins over the other 2005 Medalists, Japan and Canada and the top seed in the medal round. Australia made easy work of

Japan in the first medal round game, leaving only Canada standing between them and gold.

Canada's 2008 roster looked even more formidable than the bronze medal winning team of 2005. It was anchored by power-pitching right hander, Dustin Keshane, who dominated hitters with perhaps the best rise ball in the tournament, and change-up specialist Devon McCullough. Australia squeaked by in their pool play match-up, 3-1, in front of a raucous, partisan packed house of Whitehorse Canada fans.

Canada had a good deal of momentum going into the gold medal game, with three dramatic walk-off wins in a row, including an 8 inning 1-0 win over the United States in the final pool play game, a 4-3 win over New Zealand, and a 5-3 win over Japan, on a Dylan Cunningham home run. They also had a huge crowd of thousands of home, Canadian fans cheering them on.

Through seven scoreless innings both pitchers showcased a golden performance, only surrendering two hits apiece up to that point.

In the top of the eighth, Canada started with Jessin Potskin on second base under the international tiebreaker rule. Unable to successfully get a bunt down, Cory Jones came back with an RBI single off Australian pitcher Matt Stafford, giving Canada a 1-0 advantage heading into the bottom of the inning.

With two outs and runners on second and third, Canadian pitcher Devon McCullough just needed the next batter to hit a soft groundball as the previous batter had done. Instead, pinch hitter Drew Faulkner approached the plate and nailed a single down the middle to drive in the tying and winning runs to give Australia that elusive gold yet again.

McCullough finished the game with five hits allowed and struck out three. Matt Stafford gave up just three hits and recorded five strikeouts.

Canada received a top performance out of Cory Jones, going 2-for-3 at





Opposite page: Australian team celebrates its fourth consecutive ISF World Championship

This page: Australia's Drew Faulkner drives in the gold medal winning runs in the bottom of the 8th inning of the title game.

the plate. Heath Wells of Australia also went 2-for-3, but it was Faulkner, going 1-for-1 with two RBI, who brought the Aussie Colts from down under to defend their title.

Australia had won yet another gold in the ISF Junior World Championships, their fourth consecutive title, with Faulkner's name destined for a spot on the still growing list of Australia's Junior World gold medal heroes. Australia's John Neilsen steered his team to victory in his inaugural Championships as Head Coach of the Team. Team members for the Gold Medalists were:

Players: Steven Albee, Craig Bingley, Cameron Bint, Aaron Boccardo, Shaun Bostock, Tyson Duncan, Thomas Edwards, Drew Faulkner, Beau Harich, Ryan Lavers, Shane Norman, Ty Priest, Brad Riley, Rahim Rohizat, Matt Stafford, Jason Tutt, Heath Wells; Staff: John Nielsen - Head Coach; Gary Butler - Assistant Coach; Laing Harrow - Specialist Coach; Jodie Sheehan - Team Manager; Sandra Evans - IT Specialist; Coach Christine Denkel - Statistician; Chris Neal - Physiotherapist; Phil Matthewson - Head of Delegation.

"Softball Australia is thrilled with this fantastic result, which is a just reward for the entire squad who have worked extremely hard in the

lead up to this event, competently led by Head Coach, John Neilsen," said Mark McAllion, CEO of Softball Australia.

Canada had moved up from bronze in 2005 to silver in 2008, but will have to wait for 2012 for another shot at gold. Japan traded places with Canada from 2005, settling for bronze, while New Zealand, the only team to beat Australia in 2008 finished just out of the medal mix.

12 Nations Compete in 2008

Whitehorse, Yukon, Canada proved to be an outstanding host for the 2008 ISF Junior World Championships, with George Arcand heading up the tournament.

"It's all about these guys (the players)," said George Arcand, Chair of the 2008 World Junior Fast Pitch Championship during the closing ceremonies. "We're so grateful the ISF gave us the chance to host this great tournament."

Softball Canada President Kevin Quinn was complimentary of all 12 competing nations during his closing ceremony address. "Each team from first to twelfth should be so proud of the entertaining brand of softball they played over the last 10



days. All the medal winners are very deserving."

The tournament drew 12 teams, with three from North America (Mexico, the United States and host Canada), two from South America (Venezuela and Argentina), two from Europe (Denmark and Czech Republic), one from the Far East (Japan), and two from Africa (South Africa and Botswana), and two from Down Under (New Zealand and gold medal winning Australia).

The tournament spanned ten days, during which the teams competed in seventy games, shared cultures, sportsmanship and kindled new friendships with players a world away. The Whitehorse, Yukon fans provided the energy and spirit that drove the games, and talked of their enjoyment not only of the games, but also of the players who hailed from so many lands.

Looking to the future, all three medal winners, Australia, Canada and Japan figure to be back in 2012 and vying for the top spot on the medal stand. New Zealand will be vying to earn a medal after coming so close in 2008, bolstered by the confidence of knowing they beat the best team from the 2008 tournament.

Argentina, Mexico and Venezuela moved up on the ladder, finishing with winning 6 and 5 records, ahead of the 2006 fifth place team, the United States, and playing some close games against the medal winners, with Argentina notching a historic win, their first ever over New Zealand behind the pitching of Guido Silbert, a game that ended on a triple play by Argentina.

The United States finished in eighth place in 2008, and will have to go to work to compete with the current top teams. They saved their best performance for last, though, a 1-0 loss to silver medalist Canada, a game that took extra innings to decide. So they left Whitehorse with the consolation of knowing they can play with the best when they bring their "A" game. The game continues to grow in Europe and Africa, with four teams in 2008 and perhaps more in 2012, returning with the experience of competing with the world's best.

It is not known yet where the ISF Junior World Championships will be held in 2012, but certainly, they will be built on a solid foundation of the 2008 tournament held in Whitehorse, Yukon, Canada, a tournament that provided more drama than one could have asked for.

Thousands of listeners tuned in for the 8th ISF World Jr. Men's Championships at Whitehorse, Yukon, Canada on Ballparkradio.com, with broadcasters Jim Flanagan and Kyle Smith on hand to call the action. Many families and neighbors gathered around one computer for the big event, as reflected in the hundreds of emails received by the broadcast crew at Ballparkradio. Flanagan noted the listener totals for the final two games might have approached the several thousand fans in attendance at Whitehorse, with nearly seven thousand for the four days of broadcasts. Ballparkradio broadcaster Kyle Smith added,





"This is absolutely tremendous for the game of fastpitch that was said to be in decline some years ago. This just goes to show that the game is alive and well."

Contributions to this story by the International Softball Federation (ISF), including Laurie Gouthro and her staff, Whitehorse tournament director, George Arcand, and his staff and Softball Australia are gratefully acknowledged. A special thanks to George Arcand for making it possible for Ballparkradio to broadcast the final four days of the 2008 ISF Junior World Championship.

Final Standings for 2008 ISF Junior Men's World Championships at Whitehorse, Yukon, Canada: 1. Australia 10-1; 2. Japan 9-2; 3. Canada 9-2; 4. New Zealand 8-3; 5. Venezuela 6-5; 6. Mexico 6-5; 7. Argentina 6-5; 8. United States 5-6; 9. South Africa 4-7; 10. Denmark 2-9; 11. Czech Republic 1-10; 12. Botswana 0-11.

Opposite page: Canada's Dustin Keshane of Norqyy, SK carried Canada to the finals

This page top: Japan's determined pitcher, Tomonori Tanigawa

Bottom right: BJ Hunhoff pitching for Team USA;

Bottom left: Botswana infielder covering second in Botswana's first trip to ISF

