

Saskatoon's Patrick Burns and Devon McCullough Different Paths to Success



Patrick Burns and Devon McCullough, are Saskatoon's Men's softball poster boy's as they helped Canada win a bronze medal at 2018 WBSC Men's World Softball Championship this summer in Prague and Havlíčkův Brod, Czech Republic. They come from the same city, are basically the same age and have been on many of the same teams but in many ways cannot more different. They even came from the Saskatoon Diamondbacks organization, that you will be watching this week.



McCullough was always the little guy. He was the one who always seemed to over perform for his age and size. He would never make it to the next level said everyone. 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 and a pair of Top Pitcher Awards at the next two Midget Nationals.

Growing up, Burns was a not as noticed as McCullough on the diamond. He has a quiet intensity that few seemed to notice. What he did, appeared to be natural almost effortless at times, always low key. He came from the Raiders zone, opposite side of the city from the Phantoms and not well known for it's male softball. His team didn't always go to the big tournaments like the Phantoms and the Hustlers who were led by National Junior Teamer Travis Dauvin. But with the coaching of his dad, he continued to improve into Midgets where he joined McCullough and Dauvin with the Selects winning back-to-back Gold medals with the Saskatoon Selects at the U19 Men's Canadian Championship in 2008 and 2009. It was at Midget where he finally began to get noticed. His athletic ability was obvious and his potential was limitless. But throughout high school and into his university years, basketball was his main focus. His dad was quoted as saying "Don Bates from Team Canada (former national team coach and pitching coach) used to tell me that he was hoping that Patrick would get done with his basketball so he could concentrate on his pitching," Garry Burns says with a laugh. "He had fun with both and they complement each other, keeping him in shape year-round."

Burns, wrapped up his CIS men's basketball career in 2013, averaging 9.4 points and 9.2 rebounds — nearly a double-double — in his final year with the University of Saskatchewan Huskies, totalling 14 blocks and 48 steals. He was never really on the national team radar.

While Burns was helping the Huskies win a national championship in basketball in 2010,

McCullough was pitching his way onto the Junior National team winning a silver medal. 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 the World Championship roster. He was too young; he was not mature enough to play with the big boys some critics claimed. But he just got better. So much so that after his performance at the Pan Am championship he could no longer be overlooked and he was named to the team that eventually won the 2015 Men's World Championship in Saskatoon. Burns and the rest of the city watched as Canada came back from a 4-0 deficit and Devon shut down the powerful Kiwi's earning the victory in relief.

The next summer with collegiate basketball over Burn's softball career started to take off. Away from his Saskatoon club team, Burns began to play for an International Softball Congress squad, J&B Painting, out of Agoura Hills, Calif. That team featured players from all over Canada and the United States. "When I first started with (J&B), they needed an outfielder so that's what I first started out as," says Burns. "Now, after the last three years with them, I've sort of transitioned into one of the pitchers on the team." That summer in the 2016 Boys of Summer tournament in Wisconsin, Burns hit a three-run homer in the seventh inning off his Saskatoon Angels teammate pitcher Devon McCullough, who was playing for the A-1 Bombers. He began flying out almost every other weekend and the result followed and a goal to make Team Canada seemed in sight.

Team Canada head coach John Stuart was quoted as saying at the time, Burns is definitely garnering some attention as a diamond in the rough.

"I'll be honest with you — I never heard anything about him until I watched him in Kelowna this past May and he's definitely on our radar now," admits Stuart. "He's definitely one to keep an eye on. Nothing is 100 per cent, but I could say in the future I could definitely see him being at a national team camp."

He finally was able to bust through when named to the 2018 Men's National Team Athlete Pool in 2017. He kept getting better and better as a pitcher. The extra time and commitment were bringing out his immense talent. It wasn't that he all of sudden threw faster. He was always up there with the best in the world in velocity. But his control and confidence in the circle got better and better. He was eventually named to the pitching staff for the 2019 World Men's Softball Championship. Playing for a medal, Team Canada had to again rely on a pitcher from Saskatoon, this time it was Patrick Burns. In the bronze medal game Patrick threw a 3-hitter limiting New Zealand to 1 run and earning a hard fought 2-1 win.



Devon and Patrick are an interesting contrast in a number of ways, but they share one important similarity. They both came from softball families. Devon's dad Dave began coaching his oldest son Devon, when Devon was 5 years old. 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 went to numerous Western and Canadian championships and was part of Saskatchewan's team at U21 International in Saskatoon in 2013. Patrick has been coached for years by his dad Gary who has been a fixture in Saskatoon softball for years. His mom Susan has volunteered at countless championships hosted around the city. Patrick's older sisters Alison and Erin played competitive softball. Allison is married to Todd McCulloch a former assistant coach with Canada's Junior men's Team.