

Don Bates A Long Way From Retirement



Plans change, and sometime people have to go back to work to get a rest. When Don Bates Senior Men's National Team coach decided to retire from working with the Saskatoon Public School Division as a Principal, he

was probably hoping to slow things down a bit, make life a little less complicated. But that was not going to happen. Although he probably could not have pictured what his life after superannuating would have been like, he knew it was going to involve softball. Softball participants in this country are thankful for that.

Don's involvement in the sport began long before he left his office for the last time four years ago. Bates has been coaching softball for about 20 years and doing clinics for even longer. He played 18 seasons of Senior A, winning a national championship with Saskatoon Rempel Brothers and represented Canada at a number of international competitions. One of his most respected qualities is his ability to communicate, whether that be to a young player just trying pitching for the first time or a national team ace. That comes from his love of the sport and the people he works with. Prior to one the many coaching clinics which he has been putting on for almost 30 years, he stated, "I love the kids," "They're awesome. They're kids that want to be there. They work hard, they're enthusiastic, they're pumped up about what they're doing and it's always fun to be around people that are doing something that they love to do." This is also seen in his coaching resumes which was extensive even before

his national team involvement. "I've coached all ages. I've coached my own kids through minor ball. I've coached men's ball. My coaching experience is pretty extensive, along with just about every other sport. As a Phys Ed Teacher, I logged a lot of coaching hours."

Don's decision to stay involved in coaching the sport he loved after leaving his full time job was an easy one. He had been acting as an assistant to the men's national team since early 2006 and in 2008 was tasked with preparing Canada's best female pitchers for the 2008 Olympics. At the time he knew that the new role with the women's program would more than keep him busy when he finally left teaching, but would also be a tremendous challenge. Immediately after being named the pitching coach for the Canadian women's softball squad, he admitted to feeling some heat. "It's really exciting -- to be honest, it's a little scary," says Bates, 51. "You have the honour of representing Canada, but also the pressure of wanting to do well for your country. We represent all Canadians. We're certainly taking that seriously." Canada's women went to record a fourth place finish at the Olympics. Although it was one spot short of medal it was evidence that the program was moving in the right direction

When the Saskatoon Public School division was looking for someone to spearhead it's first ever Softball Academy in 2009, Don was the logical choice. His experience in Physical Education, softball and coaching was unmatched. When combined with his love of kids, the program which was designed give students the opportunity to earn high school credits, develop softball skills, provide volunteer service to their community and create lasting friendships, was sure to be a success. After three years at its helm and with the program getting bigger each year he turned it over to former national team pitcher Trevor Ethier, so he could focus on another post retirement challenge.



Don's next challenge began in 2009 when Softball Canada named him Head Coach of the Men's National Team program. He was the man in charge of the highest level of softball played in our country. "It will be a real pleasure to have Don Bates on board as the Head Coach of our Senior Men's National Team program" said Softball Canada President Kevin Quinn. "Don is highly respected in the softball community for both his softball expertise and his ability to work cooperatively. Don has great technical knowledge, especially in the pitching area, and will be a real asset in developing young athletes as we start our rebuilding process. I am extremely pleased that Don has accepted the challenge and look forward to working with him in the future."

The Senior Men's National Team had recently won a Bronze medal at the 2009 ISF Men's World Championship held in Saskatoon, and is always considered a Gold medal threat. However, one year later, Don was not inheriting the same type of team that won that medal. Don knew full well this challenge would make him forget about issues he used to deal with in his life as school administrator. "With a number of our National Team players retiring from competitive play, one priority over the next two years will be to identify our top young players who appear ready to make the transition to International competition" assessed Bates. "These players will need to be exposed to top International competition to gain the experience required for success at the ISF World Championship. I look forward to working closely with the Provincial/Territorial associations as we begin the process of identifying and developing our National Team roster players." Don put in an incredible amount of time with the men's' program in the hopes of developing the young talent through to the next world championship. It appeared it had paid off after they won a huge extra innings round robin game against defending silver medalist New

Zealand at the 2013 ISF world championship in Auckland. However, they could not continue the momentum they had developed by winning their pool, and lost two straight in the playoffs and had to settle for a 5th place finish. In spite of the lower than expected finish, the men's program remains one of the strongest in the world and local fans look forward to seeing Bates in charge of the squad when it returns to Saskatoon for the 2015 ISF World Championship.

Another "little pass time" that kept Don active during his retirement has been his involvement in coaching development. While working towards obtaining his Level IV certification, Don has also helped Softball Canada on the administrative side of the game. He has been a member of the Long Term Athlete Development Steering Committee, and accepted to chair the committee at the 2009 Annual General Meeting held in Ottawa. As part of his passion for player development his tenure on the LTADS Committee has produced many steps forward in setting up a clear plan for athlete development in softball. This April, he handed over the chair of committee to another highly respected Saskatoon softball coach Noreen Murphy.

There has been no time for putting his feet up and lounging around for Don Bates, during his "retirement" He has put the skills and passions he developed during a successful 30 year career in education, to very good use. He continues to help develop all level of athletes and coaches from the world's best to mere beginner. Not bad for someone in his retirement years. Don has been chosen to throw out the opening pitch of the U21 Men's International Softball Championship opening ceremonies. With event being so important to the development of men's softball in this country, the committee could not have selected a more appropriate person for the job.

-With assistance from Matt Gardiner – Prince Albert Daily Herald and Saskatoon Star Phoenix August 2008

