

Full circle

Former softball coach, players reunite for World Masters Games in New Zealand

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- BY CHARLES REID With files from TC Media's Eric McCarthy.



The Cheers ladies masters softball team is heading south of the equator to compete at the World Masters Games from April 21-30 in Auckland, New Zealand. Members of Cheers are, front row, from left, Carol White, Tracy Arsenault, Janet Cameron, Jill Dunnett, France Bourque, Tammy Gallant, Rosemary Crane and Joy Hanson. Second row, equipment manager Paul LeBlanc, Dawn Moase, Bernice MacLeod, Sue Kelly, Karen MacLeod, Ernestine Arnold, Carolyn MacPhee, Ginette Sears and Sue Keen. Missing from photo is Lisa Hetherington.

Janet Cameron knows what full circle means now.

She coached Karen MacLeod and Tracy Arsenault on P.E.I.'s softball team at the 1985 Canada Games and now the three are teammates.

This time the trio and the rest of the MacDougall Steel Cheers team are heading to the World Masters Games, April 21-30 in Auckland, New Zealand. The squad, along with the Subway Sluggers, are playing in the 45-plus women's recreation division and Cameron is ready.

"I'm pumped at this point in my softball career I'm still able to play. I'm excited about travelling and being with 18 dynamic people," said Cameron, who added she doesn't do much coaching with them now.

Cheers is a new team, which includes former Sluggers Carol White, Sue Keen and MacLeod. All three have been to the masters before, most recently in 2013 in Italy.

The rest of the squad hasn't attended so it will be a decent learning curve, said MacLeod, who's playing with her former coach for the first time.

“Things are pretty good actually. It’s a lot of fun to reconnect after (30) years or so. Playing ball is just part of it. Most amazing is the opening ceremonies,” said MacLeod. “I expect the teams will be very competitive, but we should be right there with them. Auckland should be very, very strong. Auckland last time was the strongest team by far.”

Cheers coaches are Dawn Moase (head coach) and Ernestine Arnold (assistant), although they hope to do some hitting at the Games.

For more than three years, players have committed to practices, games and raising nearly \$100,000 in funding. The Cavendish Beach Music Festival helped out by giving major spots for volunteers to work for three years. In return, the festival paid Cheers for volunteer hours worked.

This winter the team practised twice a week at the Stratford indoor complex, including one session each week with the current Canada Games women’s team, coached by Jeff Ellsworth, a longtime Canadian men’s fastpitch team member.

And Cameron, when she puts her coach’s eye to task, thinks it’s paying off.

“We’re trying to prepare for everything. We have an excellent balance of hitting and fielding... and just starting to hit our stride, using our brains much more than bodies. Right now we’re playing very well.”

Cheers is in Pool D with teams from around world, including the Demons, the Papanui Shakers, Rockyora Softball 45, the Vicsens and the Monash Magic Teal.

The Sluggers play in Pool A. Competition there includes the Breakaways Red 45’s, the Monash Magic Blue, the Western Diamonds Sharks, the Shore Things and the SEMSA Masters.

The Auckland Games will bring together about 30,000 athletes in 28 sports.