

Yukon Softball Guru Gets His Dues



Play
MAKERS
with George Maratos

George Arcand sips a cold beer, sits back on the wooden bleachers and chats with some local ball players.

He is content. It is a late August night in Whitehorse and the outfield grass at the Pepsi Softball Centre in Takhini is perfectly trimmed, the sun is shining and another successful slo-pitch season is coming to a close.

Normally that would be enough to make Arcand smile, but he has even more reason to be grinning on this night.

In November, he will become the first Yukoner to be inducted into the Softball Canada Hall of Fame.

"Surprised, very surprised," says Arcand, when asked how he reacted to the news of his upcoming induction. "Unbeknownst to me, some folks from around here put the nomination papers in.

"I think mostly what comes from it is just the recognition, which

everybody loves. We all love to be recognized for what we've done and that's the biggest thing."

Since 1969, softball in the Yukon has been Arcand's passion.

First as a player, then coach and now as the "do-everything" guy, executive director of Softball Yukon, Arcand is as prominent a fixture at the complex in Whitehorse as the hot dogs, pitcher's mound or home plate.

Whether it is serving the beer, trimming the outfield grass or solving a rule dispute between players, he is the man when it comes to softball in the Yukon capital city.

Only fitting then, that last month Softball Canada would announce that the long-time Yukoner was being inducted into the "Hall" as a Builder.

Another feather in Arcand's ball-cap is the fact Whitehorse will be hosting the 2008 International Softball Federation Junior Men's World Championships next June.

Arcand is modest in accepting credit for bringing the Championships North, the largest softball event to come North of 60, however, he was one of the main cogs in the successful bid.

Of all the accomplishments, Arcand says it is the Pepsi Softball

Centre in Takhini that he is most proud of.

"When I first moved here it was a gravel pit," grins Arcand. "The ballpark is huge obviously and, that's not just me, it's a lot of others as well, but that is one of the biggest things I've done because it has allowed us to do everything else."

On top of the usual park maintenance over winter, he will be

preparing for next year's Junior World Championships.

He also plans to suit up for the Yukon slo-pitch team at the Canada Senior Games in New Brunswick next August.

Plus, the regular planning that is necessary to ensure the slo-pitch season is another success in 2008.

"It a 24-7 job," says Arcand, while taking another well-deserved

sip of beer. "It's a non-stop thing. Sometimes it can be discouraging but overall it's very rewarding. To pull off an event like Dustball and make everyone happy and then bring a "Worlds" North ... that is what makes it all worthwhile."

The induction ceremony for Arcand will take place Friday, Nov. 9, during the Softball Canada annual general meeting, which will be held in Whitehorse this year.

Not Pleasant Being a Chicken Plucker's Son



Life on
THE FARM
with Graham Rudge

Yup, it's that time of the year again: time to butcher the chickens.

This year, we got special funding for a group purchase of chicken processing equipment. The most important piece of equipment that we got was an electric knife. This is the tool that is used to kill the bird. Out of all the methods that we've tried over the years, this one is the best.

When you touch them with the electric knife while it's turned on, it knocks them insensate. This is

a term that my Dad used, meaning that they are still alive but they are not conscious of anything around them. After they have been stunned, you cut the artery in the neck and they just bleed out.

This is a good method, there is no flapping and because of the electrified blade it takes a very short time for them to bleed out.

Despite these facts, I still can't stomach being the one that does the actual killing. Once the head, feet and feathers are gone, I can deal with the rest.

After they're dead they go into the scalding. The scalding is essentially a big container full of hot water, which loosens the feathers so that once the chicken is put into the plucker, the feathers almost fall out.

We got a scalding with an automatic dunker attached as well as a propane heater that is regulated, so all you do is press a button and it dunks the birds however many times you want. This helps keep things consistent, so when you

find the right temperature as well as the right amount of dunks, the feathers fall out really nicely.

If the temperature is too hot, the skin tears too easily when they go through the plucker, whereas if it's too cold the plucker won't be able to get the feathers out and you'll have to do them by hand. Could you imagine pulling every single feather from 300 birds by hand?

After the dunker, the chickens get transferred to the plucker. The plucker is basically a washing machine with rubber fingers on the inside.

And finally the chickens get submerged in a trough full of ice water to get their core temperature down as soon as possible.

After that the last bit of cool new equipment is the eviscerating table. This stainless steel table has four hoses attached to it which helps a lot with the cleaning process.

This is all the equipment for this sometimes unpleasant task, now all that's left is to actually do it.

Until the next time...

Graham Rudge can be contacted at graham_on_fire@yahoo.ca.

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