

Marty Kernaghan was shortstop of Canadian Champs

Following is a reprint of an interview conducted by Ohio sports reporter Jeff Murphey that features Grafton native Marty Kernaghan of the Alberta Brake and Clutch men's fastball team operating out of Calgary. The interview was republished in the Cobourg Daily Star April 21, 1986.

“.386” Anyone familiar with professional baseball knows that this batting average is a plateau very few hitters have ever reached. But when one realizes that this batting average was achieved in a sport where pitchers throw rise-, drop-, and fastballs at speeds approaching 100 mph from a distance of 46 feet, then the statistic becomes even more amazing. Combine the .386 batting average with 26 home runs and 87 RBI's and one can readily understand why 27-year-old Marty Kernaghan is considered as one of the elite hitters in the world of fast-pitch softball.

Fastpitch softball, as Kernaghan describes it, is a contact sport. But he is not referring to physical contact as in hockey or football. Instead, he is alluding to “getting the bat on the ball,” an assignment that is difficult when pitchers like Peter Meredith are throwing at speeds upwards of 100 mph from only 46 feet away. Forget that the 12-inch ball is three inches bigger than a baseball; the pitcher is 14 feet closer and the pitch is traveling faster than a major league pitch when it crosses the plate. Add to this the confusion of not knowing whether the ball will drop a foot or rise two just as the pitch reaches the plate, and one has a good understanding of what Marty Kernaghan means when he says the game is a contact sport.

“Contact is the thing in fast-pitch softball. Just getting a bat on the ball will give a batter a better chance of getting a hit,” claims Kernaghan.

Contact. Something a hitter rarely makes against the great pitchers. But Kernaghan believes that the pitchers' domination of the sport no longer exists.

“Pitchers used to dominate in

this sport, but not any more. The hitters have finally caught up to the pitchers.” And Kernaghan feels the change is good for the sport, especially for the fans.

“The crowds really like the offense. They deserve to see the other side of the game. True, it can be very exciting watching a pitchers' duel, but this really doesn't bring out the athletes these hitters are. The best hitters are great athletes and the fans should see this side of the game, too.”

For this reason, Kernaghan is upset with the new step-back rule, which he believes will only give pitchers a greater advantage over hitters.

Despite the rule change, Marty Kernaghan remains one of the sport's top hitters. Playing for Alberta Brake and Clutch, he won Most Valuable Player honours at the 1985 ISC World Tournament, an award he is most proud of.

“The ISC World Tournament assembles the best group of fast-pitch ball players in the entire world. To be recognized as MVP for such a great tournament was quite an honour.”

It was an honour he richly deserved. In just seven games, Kernaghan led his Calgary team to a third place finish by hitting three home runs and driving in 10 runs, while batting .321 (8 for 21). In fact, with one game remaining he was one HR and one RBI from tying the record in each category.

Only a wildly thrown pitch and his team's poor performance kept him from tying the records.

In the first inning Marty was struck in the mid-section by Decatur pitcher Brent Stevenson. His second trip to the plate resulted in a ground out and his third at bat never came as the game was called after 4 1/2 innings with Decatur leading 8-0.

Kernaghan recalls, “At the time I wasn't even looking at breaking the records. Our team was getting beaten very badly and all that my teammates and I were concerned about was getting off the diamond. It wasn't until later when I felt disappointed about not getting a better chance to break the records.”

Nevertheless, Kernaghan had



THE INTENSITY OF A WINNER - Marty Kernaghan was a highly-talented infielder with the will to win.

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an outstanding tournament both individually and as part of Alberta Brake and Clutch's third place finish. According to Kernaghan, his team's finish ranks among the top three thrills in his career.

“It rates right up there with winning the gold medal at the Pan American Games in 1983 and winning the Canadian Nationals last year.”

Marty Kernaghan got his start in fastpitch softball at age nine, playing three years in “Squirt” a youth division in Canada. For the next seven years he played baseball, until the opportunities to continue playing in that sport dwindled. Then he made the jump back to fastpitch softball, thereafter becoming heav-

ily involved at the national level. Kernaghan has played for a number of teams - the Camrose Alberta Merchants, Dome Petroleum of Calgary (with whom he does exploration work for a living), the Oshawa Tonys, and now for Alberta Brake and Clutch. Although he plays shortstop with his current team, Kernaghan began playing fastpitch as a pitcher.

“I got started playing pitcher, as a backup to Peter Brown while I was playing with Camrose. I also played centre-field that year, but then played shortstop the next year,” he recalls. Having also played shortstop in baseball, shortstop appears to

be his most comfortable position.

“I really don't have a ‘natural’ position, but I feel most comfortable playing shortstop,” Kernaghan remarks.

Marty Kernaghan is also comfortable at the plate. He combines excellent contact with good power, and is at his best with runners in scoring position during a tight, pressure-packed game.

Witness his performance at the finals of the Canadian Nationals last year against Dorchester. With both pitchers in command of a scoreless game, and a couple of men on base, Kernaghan hit a sixth inning Bill Lunney inside corner dropball over 350 feet to enable Alberta Brake and Clutch

to win the championships.

What accounts for his success as a hitter? “I really cannot single out one thing that makes me a successful hitter, Kernaghan says. “But I do play in a great league with great pitching, which has made me a better hitter. I would love to talk with Brian Rothrock about hitting to get some idea on how he approaches the game.”

In fact, Rothrock, who plays for Decatur ADM, is Kernaghan's personal choice for best hitter in the game. “I am a personal fan of his. He has all the tools and nobody else in the sport can dominate a game as he does.”

Kernaghan considers himself to be strictly a pull hitter, but says that Rothrock's biggest assets are his ability to hit the opposite field and his low strikeout-to-at-bat ratio. Although hitting over .380 last year, Kernaghan believes that cutting down on his strikeouts (he had 23 in over 85 games last year) is his biggest goal in the upcoming year.

With the attitudes “contact is everything” and “why should someone strike out?” it stands to



Marty Kernaghan

reason why Kernaghan rarely goes through a batting slump and is considered a “tough out” by opposing pitchers. Nevertheless, there are still some pitchers and pitches which give him trouble. While leaving the troublesome pitches nameless, Kernaghan has great

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