

Jenna Cairn thrilled with return of softball to Olympics in 2020

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When Jenna Cairn got wind of the news that softball would be returning as a medal sport at the 2020 Summer Olympics in Tokyo, it brought an immediate smile to her face.

And for good reason.

As a pitcher for Canada's women's softball team since 2009 and a member of their gold-medal winning team at the 2015 Pan American Games, she was glad to see the sport make a return to the Summer Olympic menu upon being dropped after the 2008 Games.

At the same time though, with the sport making a return along with baseball, it could open the door for the 27-year-old Gormley resident to possibly fulfill a dream to compete on the international stage.

In fact, when the word got out of softball's return, Cairn was deluged with messages to see what her status might be.

"Teammates from my travel ball years, college and even Team Canada asked what I was going to do," she said.

While Cairn has yet to make a decision on her future plans on the ball diamond, she will remain firmly attached to the sport.

Whether it be as a player or a goodwill ambassador to the game she's been involved with while growing up in Gormley and continued through her teen years and collegiate days when she played at Syracuse University from 2009 to 2012 and with Canada's national junior program.

"All I know is the the passion I carry for this sport will be a part of me forever," she said. "Whether it is on or off the field, I started playing when I was four years old and I will always be an ambassador for softball."

While it might be assumed that once softball returns to the 2020 Olympics, the game's popularity might see a spike, Cairn insists that's not the case.

Currently working on a campaign initiative for the Olympics, she is quick to point out the sport has never waned and continues to grow in popularity.

And not just at the more competitive levels where players might have their sights set on

trying to earn a collegiate scholarship south of the border or are on the cusp of playing for Canada.

At the grassroots level, Cairn recalled meeting players as young as six years of age who were passionate about possibly one day playing with the Maple Leaf on their jersey, regardless if the sport was in the Olympics or not.

But to have softball back in the Olympics certainly does not hurt that cause.

"It has actually grown immensely around the world since 2008 thanks to the many advocates who fought hard to get this sport the attention it deserves," she said.

"In fact there were 30 teams at our most recent World's tournament this past July in British Columbia.

"The competition has become stronger and I think it is exciting for young girls to have something to look forward to. At the Pan Am Games in 2015, both men's fast pitch and women's Canadian softball programs won gold, including men's baseball, while the women took silver.

"Let's not forget that the senior women's national softball team won bronze at the World's this year in B.C. The hype for softball and baseball in Canada is at an all-time high."

Citing one of her objectives is to inspire female softball players to learn more about the Canadian national team program, Cairn is extolling the virtues of it through social media and instructional camps and clinics she conducts.

So far, she said it's been a success.

"I ran my first ever softball camp last January and the turnout was unbelievable," she recalled. "I invited Team Canada players to teach all aspects of the game, while also allowing the younger generation to learn about how each of us were successful in our careers.

"I hope to make this an annual camp because more kids are now able to put a face to a name for our athletes, including wearing jersey numbers for a reason other than their birth date."

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