

Pan Am gold medalist joins Diggers coaching squad



By Jake Courtepatte

Aurora's Todd Martin has a good feeling about Canada's chances at softball gold in next month's Pan Am Games.

He's already got his tickets and his predictions ? including a bold prediction of Canada's women's team taking home their first Pan Am gold medal.

?It's a tough task, but they've been getting closer and closer to the U.S. for years,? Martin tells The Auroran. ?They've got the pitching now?I think it's finally their year.?

For what it's worth, Martin has also chosen the men to win gold over Argentina in the return of men's softball for the first time since 2003. Canada is 7 ? 0 in the tournament's medal history, defeating the United States all seven times in the final.

The ex-pro is certainly entitled to his opinions, having won gold with the men's squad in the 1999 Games, in front of a national home crowd in Winnipeg. He's also got a number of other accolades to his career, including six ISC World Championships, a nine-time ISC World All-Star, and named the ISC World's Most Valuable Pitcher three times.

Following his playing career, he made a move to coaching, working with pitchers at levels both collegiate and professional. His proudest pupil happens to be Jenna Cairra, co-captain of the Canadian National Softball team, who joined the Aurora Diggers for a clinic last month.

?She's probably the most talented that I've worked with, and I'm pretty excited to see what she can do on the mound in a couple weeks when the Games start.?

He's also worked with a handful of other players on the women's team, and played with a few guys still on the men's roster. But recently, he's taken up a position with the Diggers that brings him back to the very basics.

Martin's daughter followed in his footsteps three years ago, the youngest squad he's ever coached in pitching. He is now a director on the board of the Diggers, as well as the proud head coach of the 10-and-under Mite team.

?It's neat to be coaching a squad that's just getting their feet wet,? said Martin, who calls it a ?privilege? to be given the chance to get kids started into the game. ?Hopefully someday these kids can experience what I experienced at an international level at the Pan Am Games.?

He remembers his 1999 gold medal win vividly ? a packed house at John Blumberg Softball Complex, cheering on Martin and his team en-route to a victory over the United States.

?Canada really got behind us,? recalls Martin. ?We had wall-to-wall coverage, all the playoff games were on live?standing on the podium afterwards singing ?O Canada' in front of 4,500 people was pretty awesome. I'll never forget it.?

The 2015 Games will host softball at the President's Choice Pan Am Ballpark in Ajax. Tickets are still available at www.toronto2015.org/tickets.