

Bob McCullough

July 16, 1960 -

When it comes to baseball, Cambridge has produced a number of talented players and even a few Major Leaguers – take Rob Ducey and Scott Thorman, for example – and several national team members, but as of 2009, there has only been one city native who played for Canada’s national baseball team at the Olympic Games.

That player was Bob McCullough. The Galt Collegiate graduate and standout short stop with the Cambridge Terriers of the Major Inter County Baseball league played for Canada’s national squad in 1983 and 1984, and competed at the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics.

McCullough, even as a young boy, was into sports. Baseball and hockey were his two favourites, and of those, baseball was his real passion. His mother, Claire, recalled how, as a youngster, he accidentally sent a baseball through his neighbour’s window, but such things just seemed to go with the territory for the upstart athlete. He was learning, after all.

If his mother was sympathetic it might have been because her grandfather had been a notable ball player for Nanticoke in the 1890s.

After graduating from Grade 12 at GCI in 1978, he went to play baseball and continue his education at Seminole Community College in Florida for two years.

From Seminole he went on to Stetson University – a school named after John B. Stetson of hat fame – and graduated in 1984 with a degree in physical education. It was an idyllic time for the young man from Cambridge. He didn’t miss the snow back home in Canada.

“I had thoughts of becoming a teacher,” he said, but truth be told, he still had designs on making it to the majors. “In high school I really had no direction,” he said. “I wanted to play ball and the only way I could do that was to head south.”

There were many who believed he had the talent. One of them, Cam Allan, the coach of the Terriers in the late 1970s and early 1980s, had the utmost confidence in McCullough. “He was a great defensive ball player,” said Allan. “And a pretty good hitter, especially in the clutch. I always thought he had pretty close to major league potential in the field.”

When McCullough was in the infield, he knew no balls would get by him. “He was one of my favourite ballplayers,” said Allan. “You didn’t have to motivate Bobby to play ball.”

Ed Heather, a former major league scout who was director of player personnel for the Terriers during Allan’s reign, agreed. “He probably had as much ability as players who made it to the majors,” he said.

As a member of the Seminole College squad, McCullough made an impression on coach Jack Pantelias. He said the Canadian had the talent to make the pros, and even though he



was a great defensive player when he arrived in Florida, after working with a coach on a fielding adjustment, “he never made an error fielding a ball after that.”

McCullough had many highlights while playing baseball, including being a member of the 1979 Inter County champion Terriers managed by Randy Collins, but the pinnacle came in 1984 when he played in the Olympics.

After graduating from Seminole he was asked to try out for the Canadian national team. It was a good move. By 1984, baseball was a demonstration sport at the Olympics.

“It was an unbelievable experience,” said McCullough about being an Olympian. “It was nothing I had expected. It was just a dream come true.”

Playing at Dodger Stadium before a full house was almost otherworldly for the former Cambridge Terrier. “We were treated like royalty down there.”

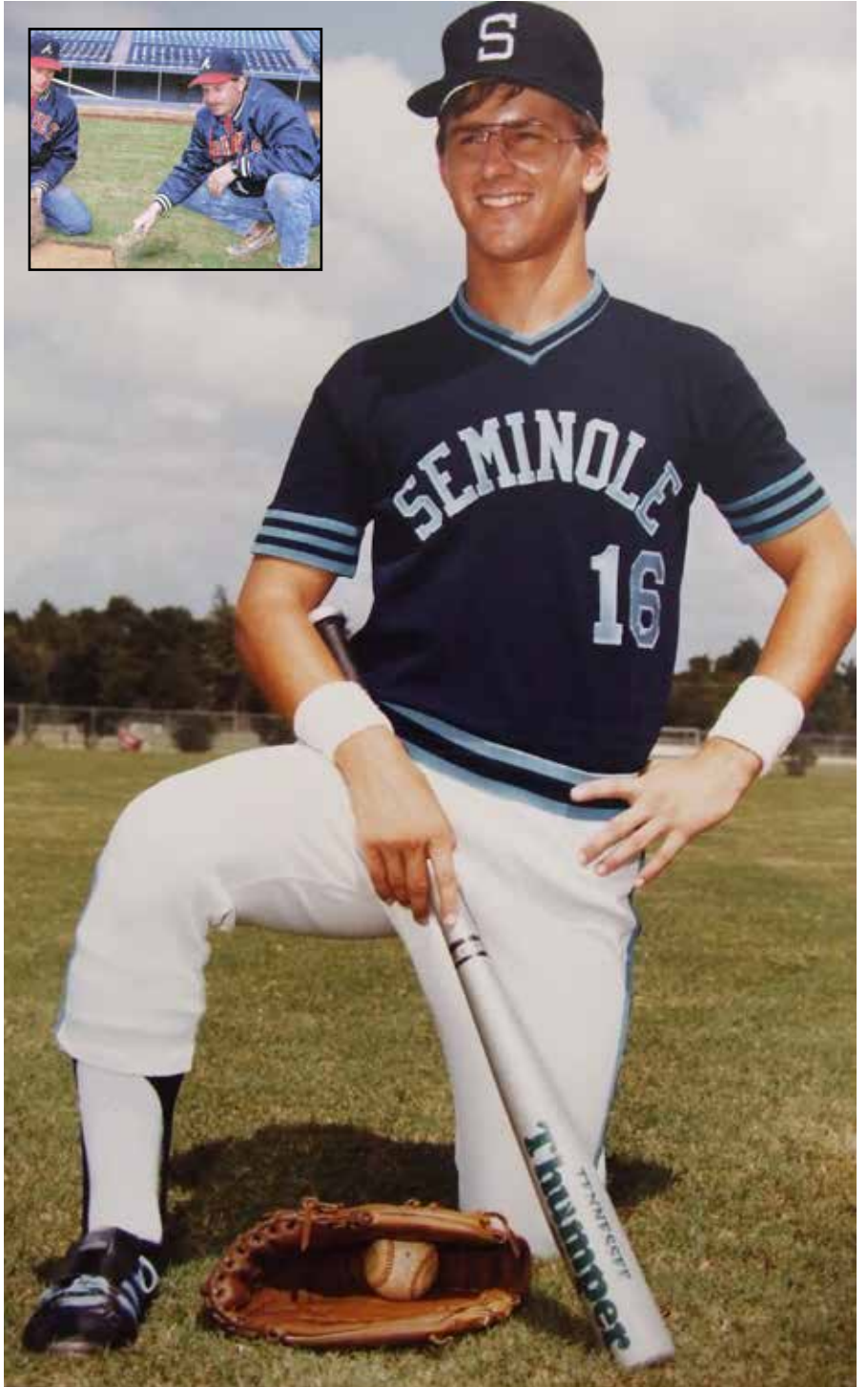
During the tournament he played with and against many future major leaguers like Mark McGuire, and teammates Mark Gardner and Steve Wilson. Gardner, a Sarnia native, went on to pitch with the Boston Red Sox, while Wilson became a pitcher for the Los Angeles Dodgers.

Although Canada lost its first two games, they came back to beat the eventual gold-medal winning team from Japan. “I got a lot out of that national team experience,” he said. “We played all over the world.”

McCullough returned to Cambridge following the Games, his dream of making it to the majors all but dead. He played for the Terriers in the summers, but yearned to return to the southern U.S., and in 1987, when he got his Green Card, that desire finally became a reality.

Using his baseball connections, he played semi-pro at a baseball and amusement park called Boardwalk and Baseball, but when the park folded, it became a spring training facility for the Kansas City Royals and McCullough had to follow other pursuits.

He didn’t know it immediately, but his baseball-playing days were over, though his association with the game was still very much alive. And while he never got a chance to play in the majors, he did the next best thing, eventually being offered a job on the grounds crew for the Atlanta Braves at Fulton County Stadium.



Bob McCullough, above in his Seminole State College (Florida) uniform, played short stop for the Cambridge Terriers of the Senior Intercounty for several years prior to being selected to the 1984 Canadian Olympic baseball team. McCullough helped Team Canada

“I enjoy working outside and working with my hands,” he said in the early 1990s, “and I’m still around baseball.”

In 1991, when the Braves won the NLCS and went on to play the Minnesota Twins for the World Series, Braves owner Ted Turner flew McCullough to Minnesota to see a couple of the away games. He also got a championship ring and a share of the playoff money.

Being the assistant field director for a major league team – the NHL’s Atlanta Falcons also played at the stadium before moving to the Georgia Dome – was demanding. “During the baseball year we’re here every day,” he said. “But most of the time I enjoy going to work.”

That, despite the pressure of having to make the grounds perfect. “We’re on TV every night,” he said at the time, “and the grounds have to be perfect. Big games depend on it.”

When the Olympic Stadium was constructed for the 1996 Olympics, the Braves moved into their new home across the street from the old Fulton County Stadium.

McCullough and his boss, the field director, who had hired him, left the Braves in eventually left the Braves and today, McCullough is married and a father, and lives in Buford, Georgia.

Inducted 2008