

Osterer family shares golden moment, reflects on Israeli softball diamond

For many of the spectators, seeing a cat run onto the diamond as Canada tried to rally from a two-run deficit in extra innings was funny. For four members of the Osterer family on the Canadian team, though, it also carried a significantly different meaning that was heartwarming, motivating and puzzling at the same time.

Martin Cleary
Aug. 28, 2017 • August 28, 2017 • 7 minute read



Osterer family members on Canada's softball team for the Maccabiah Games included, left to right, Stephen, Daniel, Jacob and Robbie. Dr. Harry Prizant/Photo PHOTO BY DR. HARRY PRIZANT

At one of the most dramatic stages of the Maccabiah Games men's softball championship game last month, an unprovoked, light-hearted moment innocently unfolded on the Kibbutz Gezer diamond in Jerusalem.

For many of the spectators, seeing a cat run onto the diamond as Canada tried to rally from a two-run deficit in extra innings was funny. For four members of the Osterer family on the Canadian team, though, it also carried a significantly different meaning that was heartwarming, motivating and puzzling at the same time.



On the final day of the 20th Maccabiah Games, the third largest multi-sport games in the world and considered the Jewish Olympics, Canada and the United States were deadlocked 2-2 after the regulation seven innings. Under international softball rules, each extra inning must start with a runner on second base.

The U.S. took advantage of that running-scoring incentive by counting two runs in the top of the eighth for a 4-2 lead. In the bottom of the eighth, Canada started Paul Foucaul, Jr. on second base.

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

Ottawa's Daniel Osterer then fell behind on the count with no balls and two strikes. Another strike by hard-throwing U.S. pitcher Jason Gluckman would leave Canada two outs from a second consecutive silver medal.

At the most unpredictable moment, however, the game came to sudden halt, almost as if time froze in the 30C-plus heat and humidity of Jerusalem.

As Osterer was awaiting Gluckman's next pitch, the cat ran onto the field. For two to three minutes, the cat did its thing on the softball diamond before leaving.

This was a slice of comedic relief, but also a chance for Canadian team members to catch their collective breath.

The four members of the Osterer family — brothers Daniel and Robbie, cousins Stephen and Jacob — viewed the cat from a different perspective. They deduced that it could have been sent by their uncle. Howie Osterer, who died Nov. 11, 2014, of a heart attack at home plate on that same diamond while umpiring an Israel Association of Baseball junior-level game.

The Osterers figured Howie wanted to have some fun, maybe distract the U.S. players, maybe bring the Canadians good fortune. If that was indeed the case, what happened next certainly supported that theory.

"Howie was a mischievous guy," Daniel said in an interview. "He liked to have fun and keep everyone loose. It was something he'd enjoy."

Whether Howie was behind the cat's unscheduled appearance will never be known, but "whatever it was, it was a welcome break," according to Daniel.

STORY CONTINUES BELOW



Jacob Osterer drills an extra-inning single to score two runs and give Canada a 5-4 victory over the United States in the men's softball final of the 20th Maccabiah Games. Maccabi Softball photo

Back in the batter's box, Daniel came back from down 0-2 to earn a walk, giving Canada runners on first and second with none out. After team captain Rob Bohbot singled sharply up the middle, the bases were loaded.

Les Bernstein's third hit of the game, a single, scored Foucaul to reduce Canada's deficit to 4-3, and the bases remained full. Ottawa's Jacob Osterer, an elite level baseball and hockey player, came to the plate for the opportunity of a lifetime.

"When he pusted his "A" swing on a pitch, good things happen," Daniel said.

Jacob waited no time, drilling Gluckman's next pitch for a two-run single. Daniel scored the tying run and Bohbot slide across home plate to set off a gold-medal celebration.

Somewhere, Howie Osterer, who was an Ontario Football Conference junior all-star defensive lineman for the Ottawa Sooners in 1976, must have been smiling.

As Dan and Bohbot crossed home plate, the celebratory moment for the Osterers and family members in the crowd was also a reminder of the tragic moment on the Gezer Field almost 32 months ago.

While Howie Osterer, then 59, umpired a night baseball game, he suddenly called time before going down to one knee and then collapsing. Two doctors in the stands performed CPR, but he died about an hour later in hospital.

Born and raised in Ottawa, the divorced father of five children moved to Israel in 2008. In Judaism, it's called Aliyah or returning to the Holy Land. He was seeking a fresh start and his connection with and immersion into Israel baseball gave him a new purpose in life.

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

He became the regional director for the Israel Association of Baseball, developed and promoted the sport at all youth levels, proud of seeing the players' enthusiasm. He brought a new energy to baseball in Israel, and it energized him.

The Osterer name certainly was well recognized during the 20th Maccabiah Games. Daniel was warmly greeted by Howie's umpiring partner and an official of the Israel Association of Baseball.

"They said how much the kids loved him (Howie)," Daniel said.

And Israel baseball certainly loved Howie, retiring his umpire number (55), creating a scholarship in his name to assist young players and naming a batting cage after the former Maccabiah Games ump

Before the start of Team Canada's round-robin game against Cuba, a short remembrance service was held to honour Howie. Both teams lined up along the base paths. Kind and solemn words were spoken.

Then there was a moment of silence.

CAPITAL SPORTS HUB

• Ottawa's **Michael Woods** has been designated "the" rider for the youthful Cannondale/Drapac Pro Cycling Team during the La Vuelta Ciclista a Espana, the third and final Grand Tour stage race for 2017. "He's the key rider of our Vuelta team. I don't want to put pressure on him, but I think he's going to be our man this month," Cannondale/Drapac said in its race preview. Woods, who challenged for his first stage win in May during the Giro d'Italia, is good with that. From the Giro, he learned he was "capable of going deeper and taking greater risks tactically than I had previously thought." And Woods is showing his form, recording his best-ever Grand Tour result with a third in Stage 9 on Sunday, and he sits eighth overall only one minute 52 seconds behind four-time Tour de France winner Chris Froome.

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

• **Josh King** lived up to his surname and was the King of the 135th annual Royal Canadian Henley rowing regatta in St. Catharines. The Ottawa Rowing Club athlete won a personal-best four gold medals in senior men's single, senior men's lightweight single, men's championship single, and senior men's lightweight pair with Jason Sukstrof. Ottawa Rowing Club's other gold medal came from Lilliane Page in women's lightweight single dash.

• Check the junk mail on your e-mail account. You may get a surprise. **Doug Corkery**, president of the Ottawa River Runners Whitewater Club, certainly got one. He had sent Ottawa Tourism a request for assistance as the club was preparing to stage the recent Canadian canoe slalom championships. When he didn't hear back, he thought his idea was rejected. Instead, Ottawa Tourism's response to the busy Corkery ended up in his spam filer and he didn't think to look there until he was tying up a few loose ends after the national championships. That was when he discovered the e-mail from Ottawa Tourism, which was providing a \$10,000 grant. The money will help offset the cost of the week-long championships.

• **Jenny Trew** is on the move, shifting the track from the road. The director sportiff of the Ottawa-based The Cyclery-4iiii domestic and UCI women's racing team has been named Cycling Canada's new women's NextGen track endurance coach. Canada has a strong history of consistently winning medals in the women's track endurance program at the international level.

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

• Ontario silver medalist **Bytown Belles** finished fourth at the Canadian women's fast pitch championship in Brampton, Ont. The Belles were fourth in the seven-team round-robin at 3-3 and fourth in the playoffs at 1-2. Outfielders Allyse Volpe and Hayley Bennett were selected to the all-star team. The Belles ranked first in team fielding in the round-robin, second in pitching, but fourth in batting. Volpe tied for third in batting average at .526, while Bennett hit .385.

• The **Ottawa Sooners**, 0-3, reach the mid-point of their Ontario Football Conference junior season Saturday at Carleton University at 7 p.m. against Windsor, having lost to Winnipeg 51-0, Hamilton 53-31 and Saskatoon, 49-15 ... **Rideau Canoe Club** placed second to defending champion Maskwa Aquatic Club of Halifax in team points during the Canadian sprint canoe/kayak championships, but won the senior and junior women's and U17 men's class titles. Madeleine Schmidt won five gold and two silver senior women's medals ... League MVP/quarterback **Ryan Licandro** tossed the winning touchdown pass to Xavier Gervais with 4.6 seconds left in the game to give Cumberland Panthers a 28-24 win over Essex Raiders for the premier junior varsity title in the new Ontario Provincial Football League ... **Samantha Cornett** of Dunrobin and Nikki Todd of Regina reached the women's quarter-finals of the world doubles squash championships in Manchester, England ... **Haley Miller** of the Kanata Rhythmic Sportive Gymnastics Club has been named the Canadian rhythmic gymnastics team in the junior individual class.

If you know an athlete, coach, team or builder you consider a high achiever, contact Martin Cleary at martincleary51@gmail.com