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SOFTBALL GOLD AT MACCABIAH AN EMOTIONAL MOMENT FOR OSTERER CLAN

By Paul Lungen, Staff Reporter - August 8, 2017 > 11000 > 0

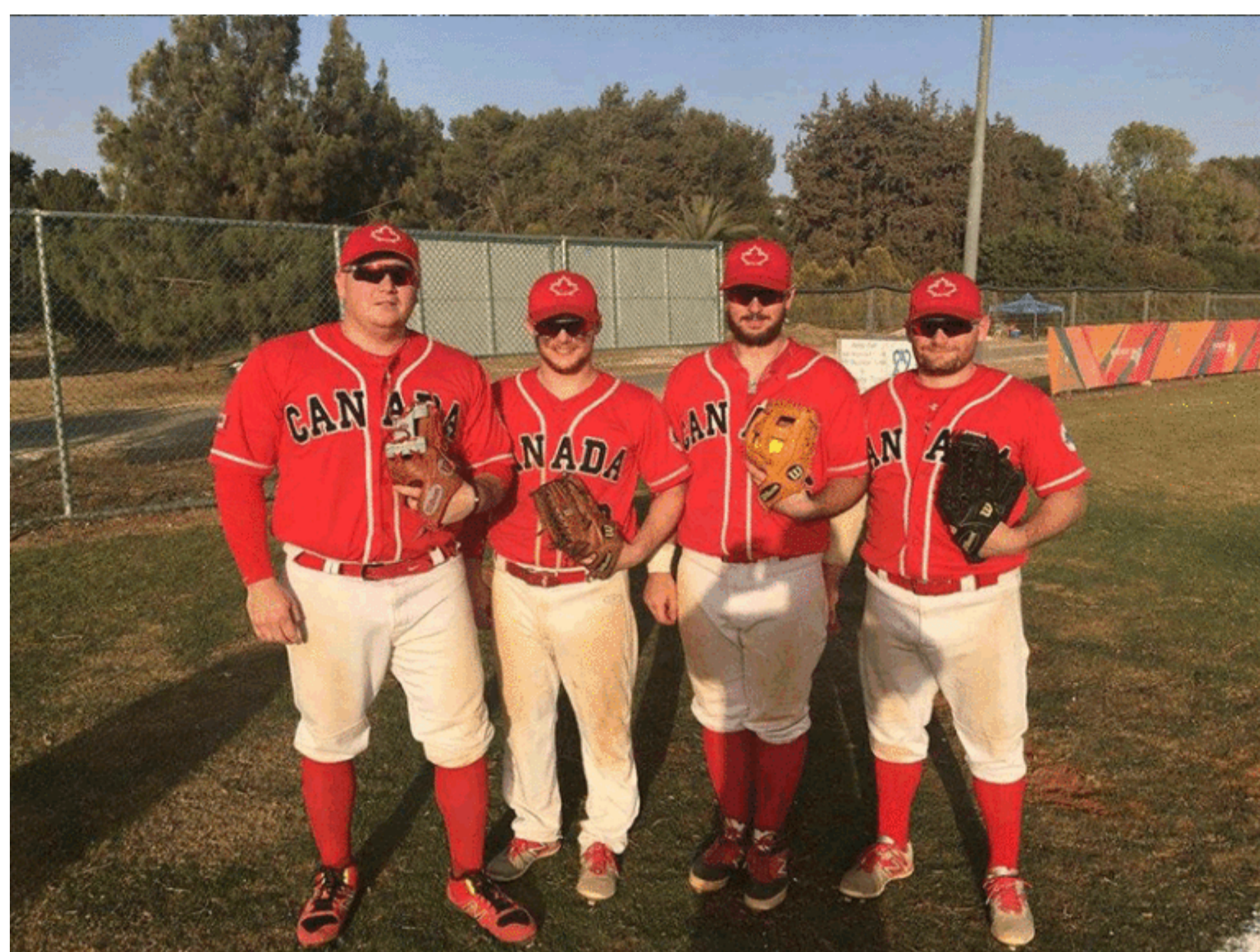
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VIEW



From left, Daniel, Jacob, Robbie and Stephen Osterer. All played key roles in Canada's gold medal win at the Maccabiah Games

Kibbutz Gezer has a special place in the hearts of the extended Osterer family, for both good and bad reasons.

A few weeks ago, four members of the family, brothers Stephen and Jacob, and their cousins, Robbie and Daniel, played pivotal roles in Team Canada's gold medal win over Team U.S.A. in the Maccabiah Games softball tournament. Jacob Osterer, the youngest of the crew at age 22, hit a walk-off single in extra innings to power the Canadians to a 5-4 win.

But on Nov. 11, 2014, Kibbutz Gezer was the scene of an Osterer family tragedy. That was where Howie Osterer – the boys' uncle who had made aliyah to Israel from his home in Ottawa, and who brought his passion for the game with him – suffered a fatal heart attack at home plate while umpiring a youth game.

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For Murray Osterer – Howie's brother and Stephen and Jacob's father – the tournament and the win were especially significant. Team Canada's coaches, Dan Berlin and Paul Rosen, arranged for a moment of silence to be observed during one of the round-robin games and the boys played knowing that was where their uncle died.

"All four of the kids were really close to Howie, so it was very emotional," Murray Osterer said.

The experience was all the more significant when Jacob Osterer batted in the winning runs, giving Canada the gold medal victory.

"It was really unbelievable. My wife came with me. I can't explain how emotional it was," Murray Osterer said.

For Berlin, who coached the Open softball team in 2013 when they lost to the United States in the gold medal game, the theme of the 2017 competition was completing unfinished business.

Canada was buoyed by a veteran lineup of players who know how to win, Berlin said. There were four holdovers from that 2013 team and five from the 2009 gold medal team. And many of the players were familiar with each other, having played together in a Toronto league.

That team's cohesion and the experience brought by the 2009 gold medallists would prove to be instrumental in the Canadian victory.

But against Jason Gluckman, the pitcher on the U.S. team, it's never easy, Berlin said.

"He throws hard. He has a great drop and a great rise ball and he's a great competitor who doesn't tire easily. To beat a guy like that, you have to scratch and claw for every run you get."

Canada was no slouch in the pitching department, either. Berlin ranked Jason Dinetz and Josh McKinlay as the best pitchers of the tournament, next to Gluckman.

McKinley started the gold medal game for Canada, while Dinetz came in as a reliever in the extra inning.

Pitching his second game of the day under the lights at Kibbutz Gezer, Gluckman and the U.S. fell behind 2-0, before tying it up in the fifth. The score was still tied 2-2 after the regulation seven innings, forcing extra innings. Under international rules, each team starts the inning with a runner on second base to facilitate scoring.

The United States scored two runs in the eighth to take a 4-2 lead, before the boys in red and white came to the plate in their half of the inning. By that time, Gluckman was tiring. He had pitched all seven innings against Israel earlier in the day and was in his eighth against Canada. Canada scored one and then loaded the bases, setting the stage for Jacob Osterer's heroics. His first swing of the bat was good for a single, driving in the tying and winning runs.

Berlin, who was also serving as third base coach at the time, recalls waving the winning runs in. "It was pure elation and joy. I don't think I've experienced anything like that before," he said.

Canada finished the tournament with an 11-1 record. Daniel Osterer hit .514 through the tournament and McKinlay finished with the best earned run average and walks plus hits per innings pitched of any pitcher. Following the tournament, Les Bernstein, who had three hits in the gold medal game, was inducted into the Maccabi Softball Hall of Fame for his career accomplishments of four gold and two silver medals since 2005.

It was a performance that would have made Howie Osterer proud.

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