

## Al Doran, Richmond Hill, ON



Al Doran's name is synonymous with fastball the world over but he lives in Ontario.

Al has been involved in softball for most of his life, but prefers to be called a "fan" rather than a former player or coach. His first exposure to softball was in his hometown of Windsor, Nova Scotia, which hosted the Senior Men's Canadian Championships in 1998. Al played recreational ball as a teenager and intersection softball during his days in the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF). He picked up the glove again

later in life when he lived in Aylmer Quebec in the early 80's, playing mixed modified in a 36-team community league. Al also did some coaching of both boys and girl's softball in Toronto in the 70's and 80's.

Over the years Al has followed top quality men's ball, getting really interested in the late 80's when he lived in Nepean Ontario near Ottawa's Carlington Park, visiting the park for all the major tournaments to hit the area.

On his return to Toronto in 1988, he quickly found out where the major tournaments where and became a regular in the park, especially in places like Waterloo, St. Thomas and Napanee. But according to Al, his passion for the game peaked in 1994 when his beloved Toronto Blue Jays, and all of major league baseball went on strike. Looking for something to do to fill the void, he heard, from Mark Smith, about the ISC World Tournament being held in Summerside in August. Al booked a vacation and flew down to the island, to what Al describes as his best tournament ever.

1994 produced some great games in an environment conducive to enjoying it, thanks to the friendly hard working Islanders who put on a spectacular tournament. Ten days of nothing but fastball, great people, and fantastic weather convinced Al that there was no need to ever go back to being a baseball fan. Al notes that during the ten days in Summerside he got his "BA" in softball when he lucked into reserved seats next to Joanie and Rick Hnakuik, the aunt and uncle of Darren Zack. Al got ten days of intensive instruction on the game from a couple of people who really know the game. And to this day he remains a close friend with the Zack family.

By the spring of 1995 Al was all set for another great year of ball, but one of the things he noticed was that it was extremely difficult to find out what was happening in the men's fastball world. Al had subscribed to the Fastpitch Chronicle while in Summerside the previous summer and it gave him the dates of some of the big tournaments, but getting quick results from those tournaments was frustrating and even more so it was almost impossible to keep tabs on upcoming tournaments in his area. Al took it into his own hands to make use of the Internet technology he had been working with for many years and decided to share what he knew with others. He did not have his own web page yet but he received co-operation from Ray Wood who had started Slugger's Softball on the web and who posted Al's reports on a regular basis for visitors to see.

Al went to the ISC World Tournament in Sioux City Iowa in 1995 and took his lap top computer with him. Al had a reserved front row seat there, just like in Summerside, and was on top of the action all day every day. He took lots of notes and kept track of all the game results and burnt the midnight oil

typing out his reports which he e-mailed to Ray in Illinois and they were up on the web site the next day. And 1995 was a great year to report on, with Darren Zack setting records that may never be broken, taking the Toronto Gators to their second world title.

In the spring of 1996, Al was invited to attend the kick off meeting of the ISC Travel League of Eastern Canada. Al's work in promoting fastball had been recognized and he was asked to stand for the position of Director of Media and Marketing for the league. This was Al's first exposure to the organizing side of fastball, and he had some good tutors, including Roger May, now a close friend and regular pal in the stands at the tournaments.

In the 1996 season, under Al's guidance, the ISC Travel League saw ten-fold increases in park attendance at league and tournament games through a concentrated marketing program. Working with radio, television, daily and weekly newspapers, and drawing upon the renewed interest in softball in '96 due to success stories such as the ISC World Champion (1993 and 1995) Toronto Gators and the Canadian Women's Olympic team, significant progress was made in promoting softball events before they happened!

In 1996 at the International Softball Federation (ISF) Men's World Championships in Midland Michigan, Al acted as media relations for Team Canada, assisting Tour Director Neil Fennell in delivering game summaries and tournament results to the Canadian Press for distribution around the world. Al also reported all this information each day on the Internet, often reaching media outlets and fans not generally covered by the conventional press. By then Al had his own web site up and as many as a thousand people a day would visit his site from all over the world to get the results of the games. Al received notes of thanks and lots of questions from places like South Africa and Argentina.

Al did not attend the ISC's in Kimberly in 1996 as he was just starting up his own business, having just taken early retirement from York University. But this did not stop Al from reporting almost 24 hours a day on the results. ISC Statistician Gary Baughman faxed the results of each game, as they ended, to Al and he would distribute the results on the Internet, and by fax to all the media outlets in Canada and the USA with a team in the tournament. Most people thought Al was at the tournament.

Al worked with well-known media expert Ray Alviano at the 1996 Canadian Senior Men's Championships in Waterloo Ontario, delivering an unparalleled media presence across the country. Utilizing the community media contacts of each and every one of the senior men's teams in the tournament, the media team broadcast game results and standings, as soon as they happened to almost 100 media outlets in Canada via fax and as many again via the internet.

In the Fall/Winter of 1996/97, Al worked with a committee to expand the ISC Travel League from five teams to eleven. Working with the ISC, the Ontario Amateur Softball Association (OASA) and the North American Fastpitch Association (NAFA), the expanded league emerged as an alliance of premier men's fastball teams in the province of Ontario.

In August of 1997 Al flew to Victoria with his good pal Gord Newman (whom he had met in Summerside in 1994) and they enjoyed 10 days of great ball and simply fantastic weather. By then Al had developed his extensive list of fastball fan contacts on the web and sent out game results and summaries to them and his son in Toronto added them to Al's web site. Al's site had over a thousand hits a day during the tournament.

While in Victoria Al was asked to speak to the full set of ISC commissioners on the opportunities for marketing that an ISC web page would provide to them. Al encouraged them to get a site up and working well in advance of the 1998 tournament. The ISC took that advice and now have web site that is visited on a frequent basis by fans of the game. <http://www.iscfastpitch.com/>

In 1998 Al was chosen as the team leader for Canada's National Men's Softball Team and took them to Valencia Venezuela for the Pan Am Qualifier. Al said this was his most significant and rewarding experience in softball in his life. In 1999 Al attended the Pan Am Games in Winnipeg Manitoba as a fan and watched his beloved team win the Gold.

Al has developed many web sites to promote major tournaments and to report results during those events, including 1998, 1999, and 2003 Canadian Senior Men's tournaments, the ISC World Tournaments in 2000 and each subsequent ones through 2007.

In 1999, Al was formally appointed as the ISC's web site director and as the saying goes, "the rest is history."