

Sir Peter Leitch's **Mad-Butcher Club** at Mt Smart Stadium

News Flash!



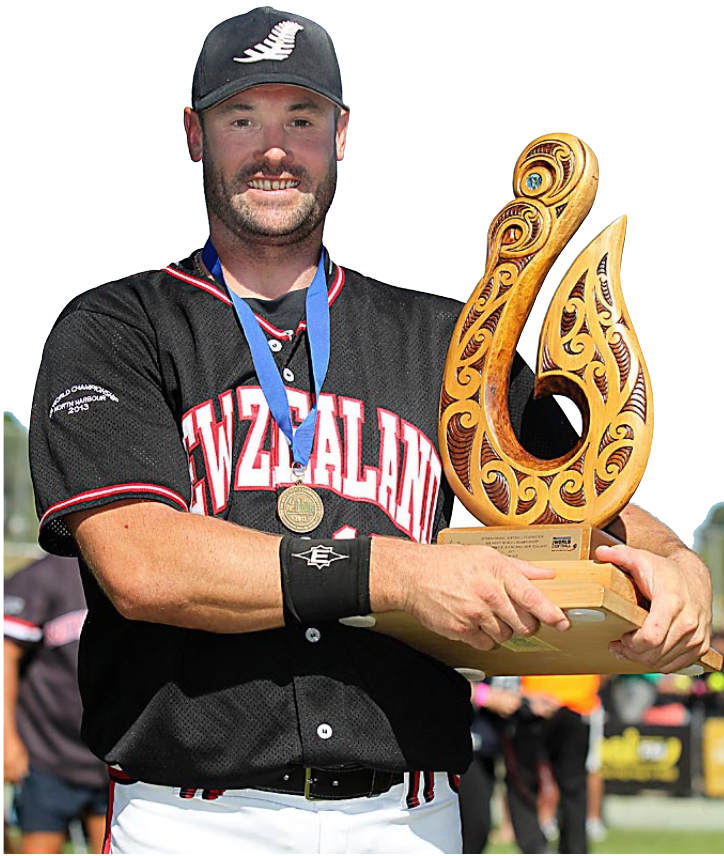
CONGRATULATIONS TO THE BLACK SOX: WORLD CHAMPIONS!



"Captain Courageous" Casley leads Black Sox to sixth world title

Above: Black Sox with world championship trophy. *Photo: Ben Campbell.*

Skipper Rhys Casley completed a miraculous comeback from injury to provide a winning three-run homer and lead his Black Sox to their sixth title at the Tradestaff ISF World Softball Championship in Auckland.



Black Sox captain Rhys Casley with the world championship trophy. *Photo: Ben Campbell.*



Manager Carl Gould, Coach Eddie Kohlase and Batting Coach Chubb Tangaroa

New Zealand defeated Venezuela 4-1 in today's final at Rosedale Park, with Casley driving in Brad Rona and Daniel Milne to break a 1-1 tie in the bottom of the third inning.

The regular second baseman required surgery after badly injuring his throwing shoulder last year and was still doubtful as recently as two weeks ago, when reserve Nathan Nukunuku was called into the squad as infield cover.

But hitting as a designated player, the captain came up with the goods when it counted.

"It's all too surreal at the moment," he admitted afterwards. "It hasn't sunk in - it might take a couple of weeks."

Jeremy Manley, another who battled back from injury and surgery over the past couple of months, pitched the entire game for six strikeouts and just three hits, and was subsequently named Most Valuable Pitcher.

From the start, Venezuela, who had eliminated champions Australia earlier in the morning, wasted no time putting pressure on their rivals.

Lead-off batter Ivan Paez smacked a triple into rightfield off Manley's first pitch and next up, Herwins Querales took a delivery on his hands to reach first base.

When Manley walked Edwin Linares, bases were loaded and Paez came home, tagging up on a fly ball that was caught in foul territory by Donny Hale. But Manley got out of the inning without further damage and the Black Sox were perhaps fortunate to trail by just one run.

"They were on an emotional high and hitting fairly well," said coach Eddie Kohlase. "We thought if we could get that first innings, we'd have enough offensive power to beat them."

The home side had an opportunity to answer immediately, with short stop Tyson Byrne and slugger Rona hitting singles. But when Casley struck out looking, they were left stranded. They had a bigger chance in the second inning - Thomas Makea grounded into a double play and behind him, Patrick Shannon cleared rightfield for a solo homer that could have been much more.

But in the third inning, Casley made up for his earlier lapse with the crucial hit over centrefield. By that stage, Venezuela were already onto their third pitcher - Ramon Jones - who seemed to immediately lose composure when his favourite ball was fouled out of the stadium, never to be seen again.

With two outs, he hit Rona with a pitch and then walked Milne, before presenting Casley with the money ball over the plate. Milne had subbed in for Hale, who broke his little finger sliding into third base. "Daniel's was a big at-bat for us in the context of the game," reflected Casley. "If he doesn't get on base, who knows what happens."

"I never expected to hit the ball out. I was just looking to make solid contact and was happy to get wood on the ball."

Casley's big bomb answered the critics that had questioned Kohlase's decision to keep him on the roster, dropping rookie Jerome Haretuku, when it seemed he might be a passenger through the tournament. The coach had always

insisted his man would play an important part in the outcome and that faith proved well founded.

"He was our Captain Courageous," beamed Kohlase. "He really shouldn't have been here with that injury."

"It was a credit to the physios and medical staff that got him out there. What an outstanding player."

Then it was up to Manley to keep the South Americans at bay. He had also had his critics in the build-up, but thrived on four starts in five nights as his form returned.

"We've worked hard for this since 2009," said Kohlase. "The team has just believed, really."

"We stuck to our processes and systems, and I'm just very proud of them."



NZ Black Sox 4
(Patrick Shannon HR,
Rhys Casley HR,
Brad Rona,
Daniel Milne)

Venezuela 1
(Ivan Paez)

Asics Black Sox:
Jayden Moore,
Daniel Milne,
Coach Eddie
Kohlhase and
Arron Neemia.



For several of the veterans, this will likely be their last appearance in the Black Sox uniform. Utility Jarrad Martin, who recently turned 40, and outfielder Makea have now won four world titles, while Shannon made no secret he would not be back.

"We spoke a little about that this morning," said Casley. "Every time you put on the black shirt, you never know whether it could be your last - you just never know who won't be back."



The Black Sox the day after celebrations