

GOLD MEDALLISTS JOINED IN BLACK SOX BY YOUNGER TALENT

New Zealand Golden Homes Black Sox coach Mark Sorenson has kept faith with his world champion team and has also called up 11 uncapped newcomers in naming a 32-man training squad to prepare for a series with the Czech Republic.

Veteran infielder Brad Rona and pitcher-utility Karl Gollan have retired, but the remaining 15 gold medallists involved in the Black Sox's record seventh world championship victory at Whitehorse, Canada in July will take part in the Czech series on February 10-11 at Albany.

"All the guys available from the Whitehorse squad are back," Sorenson said. "It's recognition of their achievement. This is their free pass – from here, moving forward, we'll be back to selecting entirely on performance."

Sorenson and his selection panel have also added a clutch of promising younger players, including Canterbury utility Reilly Makea and Auckland catcher Harrison Valk, who are still eligible for the 2018 Junior Black Sox under-19 world championship team.

"We are quite excited by the young talent coming through," said Sorenson, who added the Black Sox were building depth in most positions.

Former Junior Black Sox standout Daniel Chapman (Auckland) and left-hander Eru Drage (North Harbour) join 2017 world championships pitchers Nik Hayes (Hutt Valley), Josh Pettett (Wellington) and Campbell Gibson (Auckland).

The other uncapped players include Valk, Makea and his Papanui and Canterbury teammates Jackson Watt (outfield) and Callum Bishop (infield), infielders Dante Matakatea (Wellington), Zac Boyd (Wellington) and Rhys Evans (Auckland) and outfielders Bradley Bennett (Auckland) and Vinnie Harris (North Harbour).

Most have already had international experience with the Junior Black and the New Zealand Major Sox under-23 team.

Wellington infielder Jerome Raemaki, who missed the 2017 world championships after knee surgery, returns for the trial series.

Sorenson said Raemaki and Auckland outfielder Ben Enoke, who was side-lined for most of the tournament in Canada with a leg problem, were "not quite 100 per cent" fit, but would be by the time the trial rolled around.

The players will assemble in Auckland on Thursday February 8 for a training camp on Friday February 9.

Sorenson said they would be split into two "evenly-matched" 16-man squads for the tri-series with the Czechs.

Each side would play doubleheaders on Saturday and Sunday.

Meanwhile, the Black Sox have re-appointed Hutt Valley's Daryl Marino as assistant-coach with former Black Sox catcher Casey Eden as manager.

GOLDEN HOMES BLACK SOX TOP WORLD RANKINGS

The Black Sox remain top of the latest World Baseball Softball Council men's softball rankings issued on December 19, 2017.

The 10 top rankings are: 1-New Zealand, 2-Japan, 3-Argentina, 4-Canada, 5-Australia, 6-USA, 7-Venezuela, 8-Czech Republic, 9-Mexico, 10-Great Britain.

The 2017-18 New Zealand Black Sox training squad

Pitchers: Nik Hayes (Hutt Valley), Josh Pettett (Wellington), Campbell Gibson (Auckland), Daniel Chapman (Auckland), Eru Drage (North Harbour).

Catchers: Kallan Compain (Auckland), Zane van Lieshout (Auckland), Cory Timu (Hutt Valley), Harrison Valk (Auckland).

Infielders: Nathan Nukunuku (Auckland), Joel Evans (Hutt Valley), Tyron Bartorillo (Canterbury), Cole Evans (Auckland), Josh Harbrow (Canterbury), Zac Boyd (Wellington), Dante Matakatea (Wellington), Callum Bishop (Canterbury), Pita Rona (North Harbour), Rhys Evans (Auckland), Isaac Fletcher (Auckland), Jerome Raemaki (Wellington).

Outfielders: Ben Enoka (Auckland), Campbell Enoka (Auckland), Thomas Enoka (Auckland), Wayne Laulu (Wellington), Reilly Makea (Canterbury), Jackson Watt (Canterbury), Bradley Bennett (Auckland), Vinnie Harris (North Harbour), Connor Peden (Auckland), Alfons Oveinokovas (Auckland), Hohepa Monk (North Harbour).

BLACK SOX 2018 SCHEDULE

February 9-11: Training camp and trial series with the Czech Republic at Rosedale Park, Albany.

August 28-September 2: Intercontinental Cup tournament in Prague, Czech Republic.