

## **New Zealand White Sox Softball Experience**

Being selected to play for the New Zealand Junior White Sox team in 2011 was a dream come true and one of my proudest sporting moments.

I never thought that in March 2012 I would be named to play in the New Zealand Women's White Sox team.

I was at school when the team was announced. I think Miss Sullivan found out earlier as she had this cheeky grin when I spoke to her.

I must admit I was so nervous as I scrolled down the page to find out if I had been selected to represent New Zealand at the Women's World Championships in July 2012. Seeing my name on the team list was pretty special. I knew this was the start of hard training and commitment.

The trainings were intense but I was learning heaps from Head Coach Naomi Shaw & our captain Kiri Shaw who both had experienced playing on the international stage. Naomi was part of the 1984 winning world championship team and I value the lessons she continues to teach me.

After three months of training we were finally ready to leave New Zealand and head to Vancouver, British Columbia where we would start our build-up for our final destination the World Championships in Whitehorse, Canada.

I am quite a home girl so leaving family and friends behind was especially hard.

The first night I was presented with my playing uniform, which had FERRISO and number 12 on the back, the same number I wore with pride at the Junior World Championships in South Africa. Although number twelve was not a number I had worn on my back before I could guarantee that it was now a number that meant so much to me.

On our first morning we headed down to the ballpark for our first training with the full team. I was very nervous and felt a bit dodgy behind the ball at first but after a few ground balls everything felt normal again. Being around so many experienced players I learnt what was going to be required to be competitive with the rest of the world. The first few days it was really about settling in and getting rid of any jet lag that we might have from the long travel and time change. For many of us it was our first time meeting one another. Even though this was the case we gelled as a team very quickly. Obviously softball was our main priority but we still found time in Vancouver to shop and go site seeing. The city was very pretty and the people reminded me a lot of the kiwis back home. Dinnertime, as always, was a favorite time for me, as I love my food. Although delicious I still missed my mums home cooked meals.

Our first warm up game was against Japan in the Canada Cup. I was very nervous warming up, as this game was the time to impress the coaches and show them why I was selected in the first place. The team was then announced and I was at second base. Even though I've played that position for as long as I can remember I still get butterflies before every game. In the warmup everything was done with pace and precision.

We were called onto the field over the loud speaker. I ran out and linked arms with my teammates. What an honor it was standing with New Zealand's best ready to play my first game as a White Sox against Japan, the best in the world.

I stepped up to the plate for my first at bat. With a runner on first I was given the 'bunt signal'. I laid down my first bunt of the tournament and reached first base. This was definitely a highlight as any hit against Japanese pitching is difficult. We sadly lost this game but we were able to learn a lot from the number one team. We also played Canada, Australia, USA, Puerto Rico and Venezuela in the tournament. All the teams played with different styles and game sense. Although we only won one game at the tournament we came away with a better understanding with what we had to improve on and look forward to.



We then travelled to Whitehorse, Canada in the Yukon where the World Championships would be played. Our first game was against Mexico, we came out firing as a team and managed to secure our first win. What an awesome feeling that was, my first win as a White Sox player.

That night we had the opening ceremony where the teams were called onto the diamond. There was lots of cheering but for New Zealand the biggest cheer came from my dad.

The first few days in Yukon it was hard to adjust to the all day sunlight. Sleeping for some was difficult but at the end of the day we all knew how important it was to rest.

Game 2 came against Japan, we played well but could not beat worlds number one team. Next up was Great Britain and we were able to secure a 3-1 victory.

Unfortunately we lost to arch rivals Australia, which meant we had to beat Canada or Italy over the next 2 days to make top eight. Playing against Canada was awesome.

The crowds were massive as the locals came out in full force to support their team. My first at bat against the Canadians went to a full count and I was fortunate enough to get a pitch around the zone, which I hit for a single.

Although we lost against Canada we still had one more chance against Italy. We went into a tiebreaker but couldn't hold on and the Italians won by a run. Unfortunately that was the end of our top 8 finish. Although we didn't reach our goal the way we played as a team and the experience was incredible.

We ended up coming 11<sup>th</sup> losing to Chinese Taipei, 3-2 in our final game.

I came away from the World Championships a better player both on and off the diamond. The friendships that I made with people from all over the world will last a lifetime. I loved every moment of it and the memories I took from these 26 days will remain with me forever.

