

# Nelson Legends of Sport

Edward (Ed) Dolejs is  
one of the big names in  
New Zealand Softball.



He coached the New Zealand Women's Team in four World Championships, winning one gold, one silver and two bronze medals. Ed never lost a final in a World Series or World Class tournament.

Born on 30 June 1929, in Cleveland, Ohio, USA, Ed grew up in a small town called Northfield. He was a starting player in his high school baseball, football and basketball teams. His baseball team were county champions for four straight years and Ed trialled with the Cleveland Indians.

Ed joined the US Army and served some of his time at 'Checkpoint Charlie' on the Berlin wall. He continued to play baseball in the Berlin Military League and had the highest batting average (.386), no mean feat in a competition that included Chicago Cubs 'Hall of Famer' Ernie Banks.

**1960s** After marrying Ruth and emigrating to New Zealand in 1965, softball became Edward's focus. His first coaching role was with the Nelson Men's team at the Ed Barr Cup in 1968-69 - he coached Nelson to the C Grade national title.

**1970s** His skills were noticed by the New Zealand Softball Association (NZSA) and in 1973 when they decided to appoint their first full time coach Ed was the obvious choice.

Ed's first international experience came as trainer/hitting coach of the New Zealand Men's team in 1976 at the World Series in Lower Hutt. This was his first gold medal as New Zealand, Canada and the United States were jointly awarded first place when the series was washed out.

In 1977 Ed was appointed New Zealand Women's team coach. After the national tournament he started preparing the team for the 1978 World Series in El Salvador. His team won bronze, finishing third behind the United States and Canada.

In 1979 the New Zealand Women's team were invited to play at the Friendship Games in Japan. With three pitchers down due to pregnancy Ed found emerging talent in an Auckland teenager, Debbie Mygind, who pitched in every game at the tournament. New Zealand won the tournament beating Japan in the final 2-0.

**1980s** In 1982 at the World Championships New Zealand beat Taiwan 2-0 in the final to win their first ever gold medal at a World Championship event.

In 1986 with the World Series at home in Auckland, and New Zealand defending champions, there was an air of expectation. New Zealand went on to finish third behind the extremely strong United States and China teams.

In 1987 New Zealand won gold at an international invitational tournament in Taiwan, but in 1988 came home disappointed from Australia. In 1989 Ed rallied his troops to win the South Pacific Classic in Christchurch in preparation for the 1990 world series.

**1990s** In 1990, Ed's final World Series as coach, the team made the final against the USA. The game was 0-0 in the fourth innings when relentless rain forced the tournament to be abandoned. Contrary to the International Softball Federation's decision in 1976, gold was awarded to the United States on a countback of previous results. Ed remains convinced that New Zealand would have gone on to win the gold medal.

Ed Dolejs retired a happy coach with two gold, one silver and two bronze medals from five World Championships.

## Ed's Achievements

- Born 30 June 1929
- World Championships
  - 1976 Gold medal NZ Mens Softball Team - New Zealand
  - 1978 Bronze medal NZ Womens Softball Team - El Salvador
  - 1982 Gold medal NZ Womens Softball Team - Taiwan
  - 1986 Bronze medal NZ Womens Softball Team - New Zealand
  - 1990 Silver medal NZ Womens Softball Team - USA
- International Invitation Tournaments
  - 1979 Gold medal NZ Womens Softball Team - Japan
  - 1982 Gold medal NZ Womens Softball Team - Australia
  - 1983 Gold medal NZ Womens Softball Team - Hong Kong
  - 1987 Gold medal NZ Womens Softball Team - Taiwan
  - 1989 Gold medal NZ Womens Softball Team - New Zealand
- 1993 Inducted into International Softball Federation Hall of Fame
- 1993 Life Member of Softball New Zealand
- 1995 Inducted into Softball New Zealand Hall of Fame

