

## Mark Sorenson - HoF - 2010

Softball buffs on both sides of the globe rightly rank Mark Sorenson as one of the sport's all-time greats \_ maybe even the best ball player to ever don a pair of cleats.

Sorenson's stats speak for themselves.

- \* Twelve ISC All World team selections in 18 forays to the softball world's most prestigious club tournament.
- \* Four-time ISC championship winner (1988, 1991, 1992, 1994)
- \* ISC Tournament MVP and RBI category leader (1988).
- \* A record five ISF world championship gold medals (one junior, four senior between 1984 and 2004).
- \* Six-time All-American team selection at the ASA nationals and tournament MVP in 1990 and 1992.
- \* New Zealand National Team Captain (1989-2001).
- \* Three-time New Zealand Softballer of the Year.
- \* Three-time Wellington (NZ) Sportsman of the Year.
- \* Member New Zealand Order of Merit (1997) \*(a New Zealand government honour).
- \* Member of the ISF (2009) and ISC (2010) Halls of Fame.

Mark Sorenson regards it as ``the ultimate honour'' to be admitted to the ISC Hall of Fame.

The Lower Hutt native is the fifth New Zealander \_ but the first non-pitcher \_ accorded entry to the hallowed hall, joining golden arms Kevin Herlihy (1993), the late Paul Magan (1995), Peter Meredith (2007) and Michael White (2009).

Sorenson roomed with Herlihy on his first New Zealand tour, caught to Magan at Hutt Valley Cardinals and played on New Zealand ISF world championship teams with White (three times) and Meredith (once) and both with and against them at ISC level.

Mark Sorenson (Brutus to his many softball friends) was born to play ball. His father, Dave Sorenson, represented New Zealand at the first four ISF world championships, captaining the Kiwis to a share of the gold medal at Lower Hutt in 1976. He was later New Zealand assistant-coach and was elected to the ISF Hall of Fame in 1993. Mark joined him there in 2009 as the Hall's first father-and-son duo.

Mother Maureen was a leading scorer and Hutt Valley softball administrator and Mark's most ardent supporter.

As Sorenson has said many times, "It was only natural that I follow in Dad's footsteps". Young Mark joined his first junior team for Hutt Valley Cardinals as a five-year-old in 1972 and began playing premier club ball at 14 years then senior representative softball at 16.

He was just 16 when he attended his first ISF world championship in Midland, Michigan in 1984. Mark was a starting outfielder in the Kiwi side which won their first outright world title. But he soon settled into his natural home at catcher (apart from a mid-career dalliance at first base).

Renowned for his booming bat, plate discipline and strategic smarts behind the dish, Sorenson bestrode the world softball stage for two decades. Many of the fastpitch game's greatest pitchers and hitters had their strengths and weaknesses methodically annotated in Sorenson's famous, thoroughly-thumbed black book \_ intelligence which gave him an instant edge over his rivals.

Mark Sorenson's annual exodus to the ISC tournament began back in 1986 when the-then 18-year-old linked up with The Farm Tavern from Madison, Wisconsin. It was a journey he was to make for 18 long but successful years.

His most profitable period came in the early 1990s with Sioux City clubs Penn Corp and National Health Care Discount.

Sorenson steered Penn Corp to first place in 1988, winning the MVP and RBI crowns and repeated the feat in 1991 after a second place in 1990.

He won back-to-back titles for the first and only time in 1992 \_ this time with National Health Care Discount, who were runners-up in 1993.

Sorenson was back on the winners' podium in 1994 with All-Car Road Runners from Green Bay, Wisconsin.

He had four years on the All-Car squad before a three-season stint with Broken Bow (NE) Travellers with whom he finished second (twice) and third. Then it was back to Wisconsin with County Classics for two tournaments before ending his ISC career with two second place finishes with County Materials in 2003 and 2004.

He signed off with no regrets but plenty of lasting memories from the ISC arena which he revered as "always about the best of the best". "There was nowhere to hide in this tournament."

Sorenson had ended his international innings earlier in 2004 after the best part of 20 years as the highest profile softballer in a country besotted with the English codes rugby and cricket.

The Wellington Branch Manager captained the New Zealand Black Sox at three consecutive world championships and played an instrumental role in guiding Michael White to a perfect game in the 1996 triumph over Darren Zack's Canada (at Midland, Michigan) and Marty Grant to a no-hitter in the 2000 final (at East London, South Africa).

He couldn't have scripted a better finale. Sorenson had surprisingly gone without a home run throughout the 2004 ISF world tournament \_ until the grand final against Canada in Christchurch (NZ).

But he blasted a three-run, out-of-the-park dinger to set up the Kiwis' 9-5 win on their inexorable path to an unprecedented three consecutive ISF men's world championship crowns.

The Sorenson sign-off was viewed on free-to-air TV and he left the ballpark as a national hero.

Today, some six years after his retirement, Mark Sorenson is still hailed at home and abroad as a champion, a gentleman and a born winner.

Written by Tony Smith