



Anže Tanc

PLAYER PROFILE

Anže Tanc of Slovenia's Dream Team is the type of softball player that will have an impact on the game and will leave the IOC no choice but to reinstate the bat and ball sports back into the Olympics. The fact that his passion is slowpitch softball makes no difference whatsoever, as in Europe, the entire sport, and baseball, has a one-for-all, all-for-one attitude.

The 21-year-old shortstop who lives in Ljubljana, Slovenia, is currently a student, moonlights as a taxi cab driver to make a living, and is a non-stop supporter of the bat and ball sports. When he's not playing at stops across the continent, working or going to school, he's a coach of both a 12u and 16u baseball team.

"I do my best to try and expand both sports wherever I can," says Anže. "In Slovenia, as well as in most European countries, softball is not very well recognized. Therefore, we try our best to popularize it in as many ways as possible. With the ESSL, which is the top level of slowpitch in Europe, we expect that the sport is becoming more recognized."

How did a 21-year-old become so passionately involved in the sport of slowpitch softball? First off, Anže is a life-long athlete who competed in gymnastics for 12 years and was a multiple-time national champion of Slovenia. Taking a two-year break from that sport, when he was 15, he found the new love of his life, slowpitch softball. Because of softball, he discovered the sport of baseball and played that for three years, but Anže says it did not give him the satisfaction that the sport of slowpitch softball does.



"I live close to a baseball field and with a few friends decided to form our own slowpitch team," says Anže. "We started playing tournaments and practiced with the Dream Team from Ljubljana (Slovenia). Ten years ago, an organized league for slowpitch began here. I like the competitiveness of the sport; that is the main reason why I began to play slowpitch more seriously. Playing with and against the Dream Team, and the person who had the biggest impact on me was coach Darja Grimšič. Because of her, I have learned what type of sport softball really is. Darja is the biggest promoter of this sport I have ever met. Along with all of the work she does with slowpitch, she is also a baseball coach and promotes it in Europe as well. But for me, I still prefer softball!"

And that is obvious in his accolades in the sport already at 21, playing at a high level in several national championships since 2005, as well in the European Championship and European Cup in 2010. He was part of teams that garnered back-to-back championship wins in the Open German Nationals, a third place in the amateur Italian League, second place in an International tournament in Croatia, first place in an International tournament in Slovakia and many firsts in different national championships. He was also invited to play at a high level of baseball in the Italian league after a local coach saw him play just two games.

"I declined the offer even after playing baseball for three years in the national championships," he says. "I prefer slowpitch because it is a more attractive game to me."

Like any softball player, he has his favorite moments in the sport.

"I was impressed when I went to our first international tournaments, in Croatia and Slovakia," Anže says. "That is where I first saw the international scene, or competition you might say. Hitting a home run in Prague against one of the best pitchers in the European circuit, Drew Chesser, was good, too. My first season playing in the ESSL gave me the chance to play against the best slowpitch teams in Europe, and that is where I met more great friends through the sport. Playing my first European championships ranks high in my memorable moments as well, along with winning the Open German Championship the first time in 2013."

Anže is no different than any other softball junkie across the globe, with the sport becoming the center of his life, saying that softball gives him everything in return he expects for what he puts into it. He also loves to travel and to meet new people, something most all softball players love secondary to the game.

"Slowpitch became the biggest part of my life, which is why I adjust my work schedule to incorporate the travels," he says. And their concerns and roadblocks are no different than grassroots players anywhere. "We all are amateurs in Europe, and this can be a problem because this is a big financial load. We have long hours of travel right after work and we return just before work on Monday starts. I don't have a wife so I travel with my friends and we combine sport and other things as much as possible. For me, I love this kind of life."

Does he plan on playing softball through his senior years, which are still very far away?



"Of course!" he says. "I am certain that this is a sport that you can play for a very long time. My biggest role models are Reggie from Die Hards, Switzerland, and Aleksander Alpina in Italy. Both are well over 70 years old and are still actively playing softball at a very high level."

Anže also sees the future for the bat and ball sports in Europe and sows the seeds to help them flourish by being involved in each sector of the diamond games.

"I play for Dream Team, which is the most active slowpitch team in our country," he explains. "We play slowpitch as well as fastpitch. Last year we started a baseball 12u Risi (Lynx) and 16u Ljubljana Bombers team. A lot of kids are interested in baseball and we know it is important to foster their interest. And, we do all this without our own field. We pay a very high rent for the field that we play on and that is why our biggest wish is that one day we will have our own field."

Fifty years from now, an up-and-coming young ballplayer in Europe - baseball, fastpitch or slowpitch - will no doubt name Anže Tanc as their role model.

