

Canterbury Softball is celebrating former New Zealand pitcher and coach Cheryl Kemp's induction into the Canterbury Sports Hall of Fame.



Cheryl, Canterbury Softball's CEO for more than 20 years, is the first softball player to be honoured.

She was admitted at the Canterbury Sportsperson of the Year function at Christchurch's Wigram Air Base last Friday night, inducted alongside 1974 Commonwealth Games 10,000m champion Dick Tayler.

Interviewed on stage by Sport Canterbury's George Berry, Cheryl quipped that it was "only the second time in my life that I've been lost for words".

She was asked about how it felt to be first named in the New Zealand team in 1973, as a 16-year-old.

Playing for Auckland then, she was selected for the NZ trial after a national tournament in the deep south.

The team was announced while Cheryl and her Auckland team-mates were flying home. She didn't know she had made the squad till her parents, who had heard the announcement on radio, broke the news at Auckland Airport.

Cheryl went on to represent NZ until 1986, attending three world championships.

She recalled her finest moment on the diamond - winning the 1982 world championships title in Taiwan in front of 40,000 partisan Taiwanese fans. "We weren't their favourite people that day," Cheryl said.

She told more than 500 people at the dinner that she was pleased the 1982 New Zealand team's manager Lyndsey Leask was "at our table" on the night of the award.

Cheryl also paid tribute to Ed Dolejs, the 1982 team's coach in her interview. Dolejs has consistently said Debbie Mygind and Cheryl were the two top pitchers in the world in 1982.

Sport Canterbury said Cheryl had made a superb contribution to Canterbury sport on three levels - as a player, coach and as an innovative administrator, noted for pioneering new programmes - including make Canterbury Softball's HQ a Smokefree ball park.

Cheryl moved to Christchurch from Auckland in 1979 and became the leading light in the Albion club side and the Canterbury representative team.

She had a golden season in 1982 - pitching Canterbury to its first national title for 18 years, then hurling Albion (as player-coach) to their maiden Dustin Cup inter-club crown and capping the year with her world championship gold medal.

After pitching at the 1986 world championships in Auckland - where her career began - Cheryl retired from international softball.

But she remained committed to coaching and was a New Zealand-level coach from 1989 to 1998, taking the Junior White Sox to the 1991 under-19 world championships in Adelaide.

Cheryl became the White Sox's first female head coach in 1994 and led the team till after the 1998 world championships.

She told The Press when she stepped down that it had been difficult to juggle the White Sox coaching job with her day role as Canterbury Softball's executive officer. She said she had missed only one national tournament since 1973.

Cheryl has presided over several landmarks in Canterbury softball - most notably the hosting of the men's world championships - won by the Black Sox - in 2004 and the development of the Cuthberts Green ballpark into one of New Zealand's best softball venues.

Under her watch, Canterbury has become one of the leading softball provinces, on the diamond .

Hall of Fame honours are nothing new for Cheryl. She was elected to Softball New Zealand's Hall of Fame in 2000 and was inducted into the International Softball Federation equivalent in 2001 when she became the first person to be honoured as a player and a coach.

Cheryl spoke at the awards function about her pride that softball was one of the few Canterbury sports to maintain its playing numbers after the catastrophic Canterbury earthquakes in 2010 and 2011.

She said each summer Saturday morning there were "31 junior diamonds in action at Hagley Park", meaning softball's grassroots were in good heart.

Jayden Moore, Canterbury Softball's chairman, said: "Cheryl's induction into the Sporting Legends Hall of Fame is firstly testament to her outstanding ability and achievements as a pitcher both nationally and internationally".

"I strongly believe that her determination, desire and commitment to be the very best she could be at her craft is also the same attributes that have ensured her longevity as one of the best sports administrators in our region."

For Canterbury Softball it is great to have one of our own recognised, and I along with the rest of the CSA Executive Board are very thankful to be working alongside someone like Cheryl whose business acumen and vision keeps our sport at the forefront with our funding

partners and sponsors, which ultimately allows us to provide opportunities for our stakeholders at both a social and elite level."

Tony Smith
Sports Editor

