

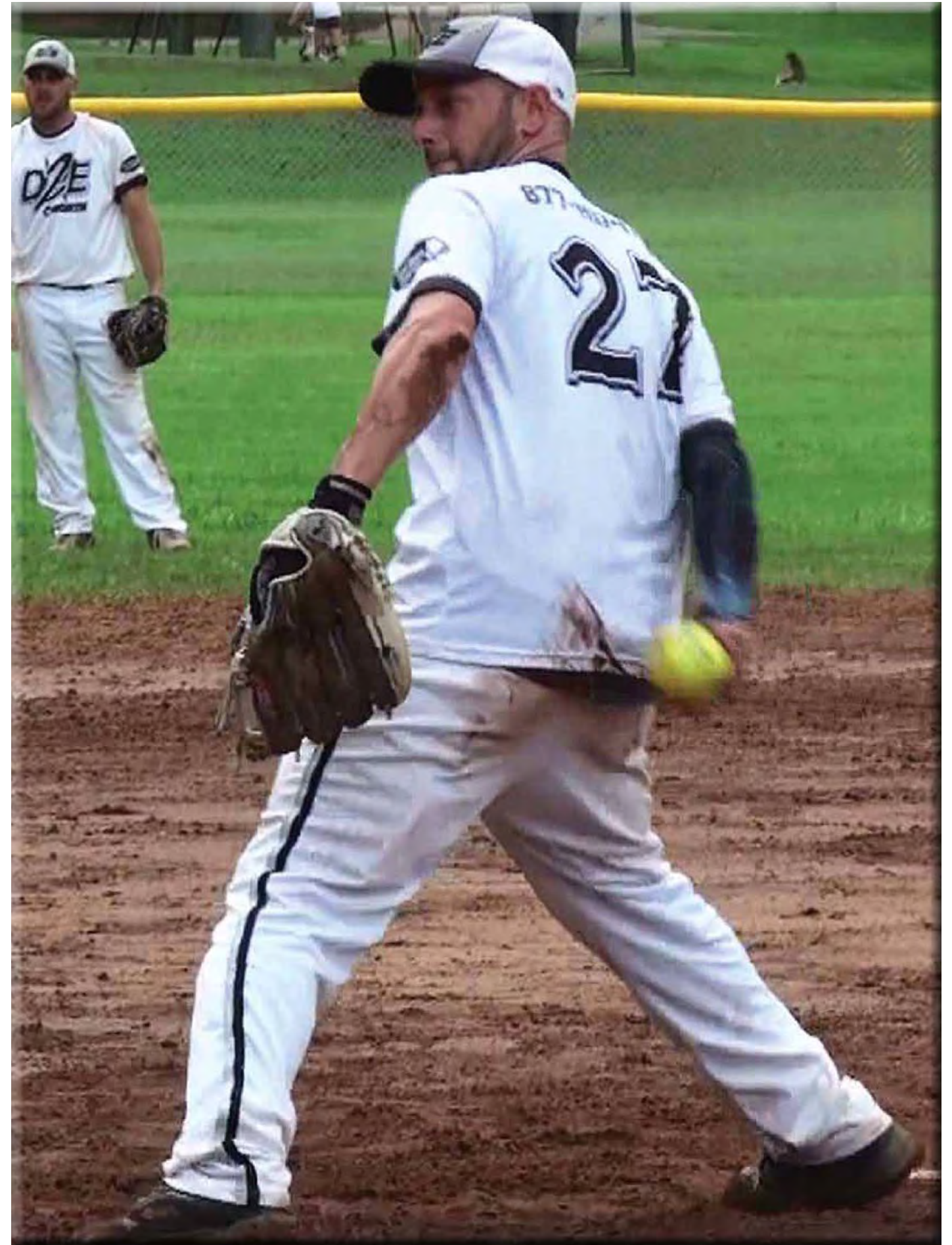
He does it

His Way

Justin Mucciarelli

It is the top of the seventh inning in the Men's USSSA 'B' World Tournament championship slowpitch softball game on a beautiful Sunday afternoon in Kissimmee, Florida, outside of Orlando. The pitcher for the home team, Down2EarthSports/SBC/Worth based out of Baxley, Georgia, is none other than eight-time national champion Justin "Mooch" Mucciarelli. Justin is trying to change that moniker to "nine-time national champion" but he needs to find a way to hold down the visiting team, Buzini/BWW/Worth based out of Mississippi, in the top half of the inning in order to give his team a chance to win the game in the bottom of the frame and avoid having to play the "if necessary game" of the double-elimination tournament.

by Dale Weiser



Justin "Mooch" Mucciarelli

Justin played competitive soccer most of his adult life and didn't get his start in softball until the age of 27 when some friends asked him to play on a local league team. He was the shortstop on the team until he tore an MCL in his knee, and soon after with less mobility moved to the pitcher's mound where the art of pitching was a natural fit for him. Soon his renegade team was beating the top team in the league on a regular basis and that team, Booker's, asked him to play 'B' tournaments with them and eventually league ball. From there Justin was noticed by major player Jimmy Devine and was picked up to play for a team out of New York called Hit n Run. Together they won the 2004 NSA 'B' and NSA Super slowpitch national championships.

He became a hot commodity as a pitcher on the upper-level circuit as his next opportunity was provided by softball veteran Lou Mongelli and the Barardis team based out of Kentucky. Mooch helped pitch Barardis to the 2005 ASA 'A' national championship and then got the call to play for the top 'A' team in the country, Jean Shoppe, from Tennessee. Justin won the 2006 WSL and NSA 'A' national championships with Jean Shoppe as well as his most coveted title to date, the 2007 USSSA 'A' World Championship.

Justin was self-taught as a pitcher and spent two years early in his pitching career learning to throw the knuckle ball. Pitchers that do not throw the knuckle ball in the upper levels of slowpitch softball often don't last very long at that level. Mooch holds the knuckle ball like he would hold an egg with a single grip using three finger tips to guide the ball. He claims he watches a lot of pitchers and what grip they use in order to see if their way of throwing the knuckle is better than his. Mooch says the best pitcher in the game is Andy Purcell from the top team Resmondo/Worth whose knuckle ball often drops at the last second before the bat hits it. Justin says he often would stay at the park to watch Purcell and Scott Nastally, who used to pitch for another top team called Dan Smith, in order to pick up any tips he could.

Justin is most known for his trick pitches. In USSSA-sanctioned slowpitch softball the pitcher has five full seconds to deliver each pitch. As long as he is touching the pitching rubber when he releases it, he can do whatever "tricks" or "antics" he can to throw off the batter's timing. Mooch is known for his "cartwheel" pitch, which he throws just a few times a year, where he does a full cartwheel spring flip and lands on the pitching rubber and releases the pitch. He is also known for his between-the-legs pitch, the face-in-the-glove "no look" pitch, the around-the-back pitch, the jump pitch, and for his variety of fakes. Those offerings have led to his being known as one of the most entertaining pitchers in softball. He says the key to a trick pitch is "to be able to throw a strike with it and to be able to throw it with two strikes or a full count." His best piece of advice is to "remember in slowpitch you are never trying to strike out the batter, you are just trying to get him to hit your pitch into the strength of your defense."

Unlike most Major level softball players, Mooch's off-season conditioning program does not include lifting a lot of



1991 ALL AREA BASEBALL			
Player	Team	Position	Year
Andy Purcell	Resmondo/Worth	Pitcher	1991
Scott Nastally	Dan Smith	Pitcher	1991
Justin Mucciarelli	Down2EarthSports	Pitcher	2013



heavy weights. He usually sticks to running, light weights, pushups and sit-ups. He often starts pre-season pitching practice in March with a bag of 100 softballs that he drags to the local diamond to practice his knuckle ball. He says he will play softball until his body or failing eyesight tells him he should quit.

Justin's game-time pitching strategy includes balancing his pride of "never wanting to walk a batter" with never giving in to the batter and throwing too good a pitch, which in slowpitch softball is called a "cookie." When asked to give some tips to up-and-coming pitchers, Mooch responded by half-joking, "Don't pitch, learn a new position. Pitching isn't for everyone."

"Seriously, though, pitch to your defense, trust your defense, and never show frustration at your defense for making an error," Justin said. "Also, you want to learn your opponent's tendencies about what they like and where they hit, and always trust in your teammate's opinions. Teammates may have played with some of your opponents in past years."

When asked about tips for young pitchers learning the knuckle ball, Mooch said, "There is no one correct way. It is different for everyone. Go out there with 100 balls, try hard, soft, and medium grips, and try throwing it with your finger tips, knuckles, and even your finger nails on the ball. Try all of these different combinations and see what works best and what you can throw strikes with."

According to Justin, the biggest change in the game from the time he started playing until now is "the batted ball speeds are much higher, the players are much more athletic and in shape, and the talent level has increased." When it comes to safety equipment he says that he was "stubborn" and did not wear a helmet to protect his head and face until recently. He always felt the mask limited his visibility. Now he wears the GameFace protective mask over top of an old school-style batting helmet as well as shin guards that come up to just below his knee.

Justin is a union laborer and works four 10-hour days during the season in order to be able to travel on Fridays for out-of-state tournaments. Also, two nights a week Justin can be found umpiring the local NSA slowpitch leagues, calling as many as six games per week. On his off weekends he enjoys spending extra time with his daughter, Ava, and they often go to the beach. Once in awhile he will compete in local tournaments and carnival tournaments with the stipulation that he never pitches but plays a different position.



Justin's game-time pitching strategy includes balancing his pride of "never wanting to walk a batter" with never giving in to the batter and throwing too good a pitch, which in slowpitch softball is called a "cookie." When asked to give some tips to up-and-coming pitchers, Mooch responded by half-joking, "Don't pitch, learn a new position. Pitching isn't for everyone."



2012 USSSA 'B' World Champions Down2EarthSports

Justin "Mooch" Mucciarelli

Back on the mound in the top of the seventh inning, Mooch's team, Down2EarthSports.com, trails rival Buzini, 13-11, in the USSSA 'B' World Tournament finals. Mooch sets the defense and the first Buzini hitter hits a long drive to left field. The fields here are deeper than the standard 300-foot fields that slowpitch softball is typically played on and the park holds the drive just enough to where Down2Earth left fielder Brandon Connell (younger brother of the nation's best hitter, Greg Connell) is able to reach back and over his head on the warning track and haul it in for out number one. It is Connell's third great defensive play of the game! The second batter hits a hard shot to the hole between short and third base where shortstop Todd Hilton (also a professional golfer) takes a quick step to his right, goes to one knee, grabs the grounder with a backhand, and fires a perfect throw to first baseman Chivas Clark for the second out. Now one out away from giving his team a decent chance to win in the bottom of the inning, Mooch toes the pitching rubber, gives two hard overhand fakes and comes across with an outside knuckle ball that the Buzini hitter smashes on one hop back towards the Mooch's barehand side. The ball seems to be past Mooch when his "cat like" reflexes snare it with a quick backhand and he makes an easy toss to first base for the third out.

In the bottom of the seventh, Down2EarthSports get a walk from Bruce Nail and a single from Griffis before longtime softball veteran Geno Burdick hits the first pitch deep to left-center field and gets just

enough "backspin" on it to clear the 325-foot fence for a game-winning home run. Down2EarthSports wins the 'B' World Tournament title and the celebration is on!

The championship was a true team win with pitching, defense, power, and timely hitting serving as the key elements. Both teams pose for team photos and then gather as the awards are given out. When it comes to the Most Valuable Player award, tournament director Rick Robertson announces, "Justin Mucciarelli." Justin humbly accepts the award and along with it his ninth national and world title.

Justin and about half of the team actually stay in Florida for a few days after the 'B' World tournament because their next tournament is the USSSA Major World Series, which begins the next Wednesday in Kissimmee. Down2Earth doesn't win a game at the Major and in the offseason Justin learns that D2E will not be putting a team together for the 2013 season. And thus begins the process of talking with prospective new teams and finding the "right fit" so he can pursue his 10th championship!

Justin Mucciarelli's championships: 2004 ASA B - The Scene - NY; 2004 NSA Super - The Scene - NY; 2005 ASA A - Barardis - KY; 2006 WSL A - Jean Shoppe - TN; 2006 NSAA - Jean Shoppe - TN; 2007 USSSA 'A' - Jean Shoppe - TN; 2012 WSL Open - Bubba's - IL; 2012 USSSA 'B' - Down2EarthSports - GA.



2012 USSSA 'B' World Champions Down2EarthSports Coach Drew Dubberly and MVP Justin Mucciarelli



INTRODUCING
RAW POWER

CHECK OUT THE RAW POWER SLOW-PITCH BATS AT EASTON.COM/SLOW-PITCH

EASTON

