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Fafard overcomes obstacles to excel

BY DEVON SHEWCHUK

When it comes to her skills on the softball diamond, self-doubt isn't something Aimee Fafard has to worry about.

For a second time, the 22-year-old is headed into her senior year with the Mayville State University Comets in Mayville, N.D.

She regained a year of eligibility after COVID-19 put a kibosh on her team's previous season just 15 games into the year.

Fafard is happy to have another go-around on the diamond, while tuning out the naysayers and continuing to prove she can do absolutely anything she puts her mind to.

"From a skill perspective, I've had many doubters for sure. It really comes down to trust and my talents. I've been playing softball since I was about nine or 10 and I played hockey all the way to high school as well, so I've learned how to get by," Fafard said.

"I just let my talents do the talking and educate people on how I need to be accommodated."

In a game that requires consistent communication with teammates, Fafard has had to adapt to her own way of getting the job done.

She's hard of hearing, mean-



Dauphin product Aimee Fafard is a pitcher and second baseman headed into her senior season of softball with Mayville State University. (Submitted)

ing she can't rely on hearing instructions while playing softball.

Instead, the multi-position player relies solely on visuals and lip reading wherever possible.

"Mostly it has to do with how my teammates communicate to me," Fafard said.

"If I'm a cut-off from the outfield, whoever is calling the ball has to have their hands up so that I immediately find them when I turn around."

When Fafard is playing second base or up to bat, coaches use a variety of hand signals to let Fafard know when it's time to do things like run, stop or

tag up.

She has hearing aids, which makes many people assume she should be able to easily hear them. In reality, the aids only bring up her hearing 50 to 60 per cent of what a standard hearing person hears — and that's under ideal circumstances.

While Fafard wasn't born hard of hearing, it developed during her preschool years, so she learned how to read lips from a young age. She doesn't use American Sign Language, but is fluent in French.

The Dauphin product said it's best when people get her attention first so she knows



they're talking to her, then face her while speaking so she can read their lips.

"If people don't know about my hearing loss, they may assume I'm ignoring them. So, it does present challenges of trust if they don't know or realize I don't hear them."

Fafard generally finds that once teammates understand her situation, they're helpful, patient and accommodating.

Her experience at Mayville has been nothing short of amazing.

"My favourite thing has to be all the friends I have made. Some of my best friends are from my time spent in the U.S.

at college, from all over the States and Canada and even the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico. I know I'm going to be friends with them for the rest of my life," she said.

Fafard, who also pitches, previously attended Minnesota's Rainy River Community College, playing two years of softball there. Since it's a junior college — meaning it only offers two-year programs — she transferred to Mayville State in her junior year, to continue her education and softball career.

Now, she's majoring in business administration with a specialization in management. Fafard's goal is to own her own



Aimee Fafard

business one day, though she's taking some time to figure out exactly what type of enterprise she'd be interested in.

Fafard began playing softball to follow in her sister Cateline's footsteps, who's six years her senior.

Their dad first got Cateline involved in the sport so she could represent the Parkland region in the Manitoba Summer Games in 2004.

Growing up, it was a thrill for Aimee to watch spend an evening out at the diamond watching her sister play. The younger Fafard ended up following suit and joined the sport.

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» Extracurriculars fill Fafard's time

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Years later, Aimee got the chance to represent Parkland region as well, when she competed on its softball team for the 2012 Manitoba Summer Games.

Cateline went on to pursue a college softball career at Rainy River during that time, which encouraged Aimee to do the same.

"It looked very exciting ... The head coach had his sights set on me attending when my family went down to visit, and we kept in touch until I was ready to go," Fafard said.

When she's not playing softball or taking classes, Fafard puts a lot of her energy into

community work. She coached an under-nine Mayville community hockey team alongside a Mayville softball teammate from Teulon, and last year served as vice-president for Mayville State University's Intercultural Club. The club is for students of all cultures and ethnic backgrounds, blending international students and American students together. It's a place where international and minority students on campus can have a voice and share their cultures, which Fafard has greatly enjoyed.

Heading into her final year on Mayville's softball team, Fafard said it's hard to look back and choose just one fond memory

of her time on the team.

"I'd have to say the atmosphere at all sport events and games on campus," Fafard said. "The athletes have amazing support from the community and fellow athletes that the atmosphere at the games is so amazing. There's so many fans and we have theme nights and the student section is always cheering and it's just really fun to be there. Then of course any trips and time spent with my team.

"We're always laughing and having fun, it really is a once-in-a-lifetime experience."

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