





February 2019 Person of the Month

Becoming a Hall of Fame sports player requires tremendous sacrifice. Professional and personal moments pass by as a player trains and plays the game. But they press on in hopes of achieving the goal of every player – the championship title.

Joey Barreras, 49, admitted to missing some family time while training and playing softball and called it “lost time.” But he also said the hard work paid off when he was nominated, unanimously voted for, and inducted into the United States Speciality Sports Association Hall of Fame for men’s competitive softball Feb. 9.

Barreras spoke with the *Sun* Feb. 12 about his accomplishment, and what it meant to him, and to the rest of Gallup.

“Everyone in town knows me, so it’s a big deal to me,” he said. “This is a Gallup award. This is for everyone I know.”

BACKGROUND

Barreras hails from Albuquerque, and his softball career began when he was 15. He said that he started playing the sport with his father when they moved to Gallup.

“My dad was one of the most well-known players in the area,” Barreras said. “One of the best power hitters.”

His father, George Barreras, made a name for himself in softball despite having, according to Joey Barreras, only two and a half fingers on one hand.

In all, Barreras said he spent eight years training and playing with his father. Five years ago, he introduced his son to the sport.

Despite never playing baseball before moving to Gallup, Barreras said his interest in the sport peaked when he attended Gallup High School. He picked the sport for one of his classes

because it was the only option available to him.

This led to Barreras joining the Captain Ds Outlaws in 1985, staying onboard until 1998. In that timespan, the Outlaws were Class D State Champions, placed in state six times; two-time Triple Crown State Champions; and were an All World Team in 1992.

Overall, Barreras's accomplishments in high school included pulling in the most wins in one year as a pitcher. He was also the varsity starter all four years of high school, named 1st Team All State at two positions, and was a New Mexico State Champ in both home runs and RBIs.

After graduating from Gallup High School, Barreras enrolled in New Mexico Junior College in Hobbs. His softball career continued in Hobbs, where he was made the full-time pitcher.

However, attending New Mexico Junior College may not have been his original plan. Barreras was offered a scholarship to Mississippi State in 1991, which he turned down in order to stay close to home and his family.

Despite the successful career he has had, Barreras admits that this decision is one he still thinks about.

"That turned out to be one of my biggest regrets because that year Mississippi State went to the College World Series," Barreras said.

REFLECTING AND LOOKING AHEAD

Barreras has been teaching across the state for 21 years now, and has been an English teacher in Gallup for the past 14.

“I’m a Bengal, and this is where I wanted to be,” Barreras said of his decision to return to Gallup.

In addition, he has coached his children on his own time, including his daughter. To build on this, Barreras said he will be coaching an age 11 and under league this summer.

Becoming a coach in softball feels like a good way to build on 34 years of playing the sport, Barreras said. He added that coaching his daughter is the natural next step after he retires from playing.

“My daughter has said she wants to play softball at UCLA,” he said.

When asked where decades of playing the sport has taken him, Barreras said that he has traveled from coast to coast and border to border across the United States. Standouts for him include California, Texas, and Arizona.

Overall, Barreras’s achievements from those decades of playing include being a 14-time state champion, four national titles, being named an All-American seven times, two national championships in men’s fastpitch, and five state titles in men’s fastpitch with the Gallup Storm and Las Cruces Wolfpack teams.

“We’re still very close,” he said when asked about the teammates he has played with.

HALL OF FAME INDUCTION

The USSSA Hall of Fame was established in 1995, and two people are inducted each year. Players must be nominated by members of the Hall of Fame, and then they are voted on by 12 state directors.

Seven of the 12 directors have to vote yes for a player to be inducted. When he was nominated the first time, Barreras said he received only six of the 12 votes, so he was passed over.

But this year, Barreras made history by being the first player to be voted into the Hall of Fame with a unanimous 12 votes.

Barreras spoke about how other players who are inducted into the Hall of Fame pepper their speeches with jokes to loosen themselves up. But when he was given his moment to speak on Feb. 9, the emotion of the moment was overwhelming.

“I’d timed my speech before at seven minutes,” Barreras said. “But when I got up to the podium and started, within about 30 seconds I was bawling.”

As he let the tears flow during his speech, Barreras said he noticed the crowd also seemed emotional, as if he touched their hearts in some way. And when he finished, he said one of the directors gave him a powerful remark.

“He told me, ‘That was the best speech we’ve ever had. You told it like it is,’” Barreras said.

By Cody Begaye
Sun Correspondent