

Mayor throws C's first pitch

Sullivan's not about to give up day job

Terry Bell, The Province

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Vancouver Mayor Sam Sullivan cranked it up and hit the mitt Tuesday night.

Aided by a special device -- described as modern version of a medieval catapult -- Sullivan threw the first pitch as the Vancouver Canadians opened their Single A Northwest League season at Nat Bailey Stadium.

"This is a first for me," said Sullivan, a quadriplegic. "I never thought I would be throwing a baseball again. I pitched a few times before my injury in Little League games. I was quite nervous tonight and concerned about how I would do. I think I did a good job but I'm not going to give up my day job."

The crowd counted in unison to nine as Sullivan cranked up the device. The crafty right-hander then hit a switch and the spring-loaded contraption hurled the ball right into catcher Dusty Napoleon's mitt.

"I think he's still stinging from that," joked Sullivan.

The machine was designed by volunteers at the Tetra Society, an organization dedicated to assisting people with disabilities. It was originally designed so a quadriplegic could launch tennis balls to exercise a dog. It was adjusted so it could launch a baseball.

"I feel very honoured to be the first to do this," the mayor said. "I like to think that I can show other people with disabilities and anyone in general, that people can do things when they really want to."

It's believed that this is the first time a quadriplegic has ever thrown out a first pitch. And the feat helped introduce a spiffy Nat Bailey Stadium that received about \$1 million in upgrades during the offseason. The money was provided by the team's new owners and the city.

"The owners have done a tremendous job of providing a legacy for the city," said Sullivan, who said he used to come to the stadium as a boy with his father when it was called Capilano Stadium and was home to the Pacific Coast League's Mounties.

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