

FASTPITCH

ISSUE 19

Softball

MAGAZINE



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MARCH 2014



SOFTBALL ACADEMY

with Mitch Alexander

An Interview With Professional Softball Player - Olivia Galati



This month I had the rare pleasure of interviewing Olivia Galati, the highest achieving softball player from Long Island, NY. She was a two-time All-American pitcher at Hofstra University and professional softball player in the National Pro Fastpitch league for the NY/NJ Comets, where she was the number two overall draft pick out of college. Some of her remarkable achievements include: being named to the 2013 All-National Pro Fastpitch team in her rookie year; National Premier Player of the Year; She led NCAA

Division 1 softball in ERA (.95) her junior year and currently holds the records at Hofstra University with strikeouts (1415), wins (129), single season wins (40) and single season strikeouts (395); She was named Colonial Athletic Association Pitcher of the Year four years in a row; She is the NCAA leader with career perfect games (5), single-Season Shutouts (22), and NCAA Second All-Time Consecutive Wins Leader (31); In her Senior year Olivia led the NCAA in wins (40), fewest walks aloud per seven innings (.64) and shutouts (22); She was honored as a Capital One Academic All-American and NFCA Academic All-American.

MA: When you were in high school, how did you decide on Hofstra University?

OG: I decided to go to Hofstra because I wanted to help bring a team out of the Northeast to the Women's College World Series. I fell in love with the coaching staff and I really liked the work ethic of the Hofstra Softball team.

MA: Many of our readers are student athletes and their parents. The recruiting process can seem very complex and to some scary. How did the recruiting process work for you? Did you verbal early?

OG: Today, many athletes verbal quite early to the school they choose to commit to. I got involved in the recruiting process and verbally committed to Hofstra my junior year in HS, which is considered late now. Most student athletes verbal their sophomore year. The recruiting process may seem scary for many people because they don't know that much about it. It is important to remember that not only is the athlete being recruited, but they also have to decide if the school and the softball program are right for the athlete. There is a school for everyone. Whether it is a D1, D2, D3 program, the athlete has to compete in college showcases to be seen by coaches. The more showcases you play in, the more of an opportunity you have to be seen by coaches.

MA: What recruiting methods did you use and which do you think were

effective?

OG: Personally, I attended clinics, went on unofficial visits and I competed in showcase tournaments. The tournaments really helped me get seen by coaches across the country. Every tournament I played in was a showcase tournament.

MA: Does jersey number 2 have a special meaning to you?

OG: When I was younger, my older sister used to play softball and I wanted to copy her like little sisters do. I have tried out wearing other numbers before I stayed with #2, but that number fit for me. I love being #2. I wore it from 8th grade until my professional career.

MA: What were you thinking when the 2013 NPF draft was performed and you were drafted by the NY/NJ Comets as second overall in a very deep pool of talent, ahead of NCAA superstars Keilani Ricketts, Ivy Renfroe, Chelsea Thomas, and Michelle Gascoigne?

OG: I was in shock. I couldn't believe my name was called second. It took a little while for it to sink in, and I still think it is sinking in to this day. It is an honor and a privilege to play with and against the all time greats in this game.

MA: Which was more difficult of a change: going from high school softball to NCAA Division 1, or going from college softball to NPF professional softball?

OG: They are both similar in the fact that you have to make adjustments to the way you play your game. Going from high school to college, you learn how to really develop your skills and play the game at a higher level. From college to Pro, you perfect your skills and it's more mentally challenging because every single batter you face 1-9 can hit the ball out of the park. You have to make adjustments as a pitcher and be creative with the way you try to get batters out. Throwing a rise ball to strike batters out may have worked in college, but if you throw two rise balls in a row in the pro league, and the second rise is not better than your first, you will be watching the other team celebrate as the batter trots around the bases.

MA: Were there any batters at the college level that you didn't want to go up against? How about at the professional level?

OG: I never fear any batter. Yes, some are tougher than others to face, but that doesn't mean you give up and throw to the batter and hope she doesn't hit it. Embrace every challenge. At the college and pro level, every pitch is a new challenge because the entire game can change with only one swing. That is why it is so important for teams and players to fight until the end of the game because the game can be turned around so quickly.

MA: Your stamina in the pitching circle is legendary. What's your longest stretch of pitching?

OG: I think the most was around 28 innings in three days. The fact is, yes I trained hard to be able to keep pitching a number of innings, but I never give up. For me, no matter how tired you are, you don't give up. You will always remember the result of a game and if you give up or make the excuse that you were tired and that's why you lost, you are not a true competitor. Find a way to win. You will not always have your best stuff every game you play, but find a way to beat your opponent. Again, it's another challenge. Win it.

MA: Some pitchers throw outside the strike zone for their first pitch and try to get the batter to chase the ball, others always go for that first strike. What's your pitching strategy with regards to first pitch selection?

OG: The first pitch is the most important pitch of the at bat because it sets the tone for the at bat. It is important for pitchers to get ahead in the count so they can get the batter to chase later on. If pitchers are ahead on batters early on, they have the ability to work the count and throw different pitches to get inside the batter's head and set up the batter for the strike out pitch later on.

MA: Do you use scripted pitching runs (combinations of pitches) or does every pitch stand alone and is based on the batter's reaction to the previous pitch?

OG: The batter reacts to each pitch you throw. With every reaction, there is a pitch to counter their reaction. It is important to open your eyes to the batter and read the batter and situation to make the adjustments you need to make as a pitcher.

MA: What system does your catcher use to call pitches for you?

OG: Each team or pitcher-catcher combo has their own system. Pitchers should always work the four quadrants and use different pitches to throw to each quadrant. Throwing to the four zones makes you more effective as a pitcher because now hitters have to defend a bigger zone if they get behind in the count.

MA: What do you do to prepare for a game? Do you have a routine? Any superstitions?

OG: Honestly, I like to listen to Taylor Swift before I go out to the field. I am oddly obsessed with Taylor and her music. People make fun of me but I don't care. When I go out to the field, I run, stretch, and throw overhand and then start to get loose underhand. One routine that I have is that I always put on my right cleat first. When I am on the mound, I like to have a specific hand shake with my catcher as well. It helps get me in the zone.

MA: What is your postgame routine? Do you ice your shoulder or elbow?

OG: When I was in college, I used to do a full body ice bath after every game. It was freezing, but it helped. If I don't have access to an ice bath, I usually ice my shoulder and forearm.

MA: In addition to being a top rated NCAA Division 1 pitcher, you also excelled in hitting. Do you think being a pitcher provides any advantages in being able to read what type of pitch is being thrown at you or predicting what the next pitch will be?

OG: I think being a pitcher helped me because I hated sitting back and watching my team hit or score. I wanted to help out. I am part of the team

so why shouldn't I hit - because I'm a pitcher? I always enjoyed hitting and wanted to help my team score. I never really thought of pitching while I was hitting because pitchers have different ways of responding to how a hitter reacts to a pitch. It is also hard to know how you react to a pitch when you are the hitter because what goes on in your head might not match up to how everyone else saw you react to a certain pitch.

MA: As a productive hitter, what do you look for in a bat? What's your favorite bat?

OG: I like the feeling of how the ball leaves the bat as well as the weight distribution. If I feel I can swing a bat fluidly and I feel comfortable, I will like the bat. I don't have one particular bat I favor.

MA: We all know you love softball, but what else do you like to do? I heard a rumor you like to sing! Do you have any plans to pursue music?

OG: I do love to sing. I record songs and actually wrote a few songs that are still in the works. I really enjoy music and I love that you can express emotions through music. It is almost like writing in a journal. [MA's note – Olivia honored me by sharing some of her music with me and she is very talented and quite good.]

MA: What one piece of advice to high school varsity pitchers with regards to pitching strategy would you give?

OG: Never give up. Go after every batter and expect to win. Sometimes you will fail, but learn from it. Make the adjustment next time.

MA: In a perfect world, what would you like to see happen with professional softball?

OG: I want to see professional softball grow and be known more across the country. If we can build venues for teams that are in the league and have fields designated for professional softball, I think the league can grow.

MA: You've been awarded so many prestigious high school and college/NCAA awards. You've played pro level softball. What's next for Olivia Galati?

OG: Continue to play the game as long as my skill and body allow and start giving back to the community using the sport as the gateway. Teaching/coaching young players and helping the sport develop.

Olivia was drafted to play professional softball in the inaugural season of the NY/NJ Comets. A new team, the Pennsylvania (Pittsburgh) Rebellion inherited the Comets' roster and draft rights. As of the writing of this article, Olivia signed with the USSSA Pride as a franchise player. She will join an impressive roster including veteran stars Andrea Duran, Kelly Kretschman, Lauren Lappin, Danielle Lawrie, Caitlin Lowe, Cat Osterman, Natasha Watley, and newcomer collegiate stars Keilani Ricketts, Jessica Shults, and Chelsea Thomas. This is sure to be an exciting year for Olivia Galati, the USSSA Pride, and the National Pro Fastpitch league. When I asked Olivia about signing with the Pride, she commented, "I looked up to Cat Osterman and Natasha Watley growing up, and now I am playing on their team. I am humbled by the experience that I am able to have with playing at such a high level." Parties wanting more information about camps and clinics featuring Olivia Galati can contact her at OliviaGalati@icloud.com.

Mitch Alexander is the CIO for a major electronics company and coaches both Little League and Travel softball teams and is currently completing his PhD. He is a certified SUNY, ASA, and Double Goal Coach. His wife, Marie was one of the first female student athletes in the country to play Little League softball after Title IX was passed and played in the first Little League Softball World Series. Over the years, both have managed teams together and helped spark a love for softball in their student athletes. In his spare time, Mitch designs websites for fastpitch teams and businesses and can be reached at fastpitch2001@optonline.net.