

FASTPITCH

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Softball

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THE OFF SEASON

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SOFTBALL ACADEMY

with Mitch Alexander

Collegiate View: Playing in the Ivy League

This month I am starting a multi-part series of interviews with current NCAA softball players to help our readers get a better understanding of the differences and similarities between the various divisions in NCAA softball and what their recruiting process was like. This month, we start the series with a look at playing in the Ivy League.



I interviewed Alexandra (Alex) Yule from Columbia University. Alex graduated in 2015 from Archbishop Molloy high school in Queens, NY. She is a member of the National Honor Society and an AP scholar. She earned athletic awards as a first team all-Queens pitcher, a first team Brooklyn/Queens Diocese short-stop, and a second team All-City Madison Square Garden (MSG) Varsity selection. Alex is entering into

her sophomore year at Columbia. In her freshman year, she started in every game, posted a .242 batting average with 2 home runs and a team leading 23 walks.

Q: While in high school, what specific recruiting activities did you perform and when? Which ones do you think were most helpful?

A: I would email colleges during the week for tournaments I would be playing on the weekend. I let them know my schedule and my



interest in their school. I also did many camps at schools I was very interested in. This allowed me to get to meet the coach and play for more than just seven innings in front of them.

Q: Did you find that showcase tournaments were an important part of your recruiting efforts? Did your future college coach discover you or come to see you play at a showcase?

A: I think showcase tournaments were a major part of my recruiting efforts. It helped build confidence when I was younger to play in front of college coaches and ultimately gave me the best exposure. My college coach saw me at a regular tournament.

Q: Please describe the timeline of how your recruiting took place.

A: My coach saw me play the first weekend of September in my senior year of high school. I had to be academically approved because it is an Ivy League school. Once I was approved I went on my official visit a month later in October.

Q: What made you decide to go Ivy?

A: I felt that I would be playing quality softball while getting the best education I could get. To me I wanted to continue playing at the highest level I could after high school, but I also realized softball wasn't always going to be there. Being able to get this education is unmatched and is setting me up for a future after softball.

Q: What made you choose your current school?

A: I wanted to go to Columbia since I was a freshman in high school, so when the opportunity presented itself I was ecstatic. For me it's perfect. It's 20 minutes from my home, it's in the city, and its academics are unmatched.



Q: Were you interested in other schools?

A: I was looking at a couple of other schools at the time. They found me at showcases and some camps that I had done. I found that recruiting was pretty equal amongst all divisions.

Q: We all know that neither Ivy League nor Division III schools offer athletic scholarships. Was anything else offered?

A: I didn't receive any type of scholarship from the school. Ivy doesn't provide athletic or academic scholarships.

Q: What differences are you aware of between your Ivy softball program and a D1 program?

A: The major difference is the time commitment. We don't only follow NCAA rules but also Ivy League rules, which are in place to make sure we have adequate time to go to class and get our studies done.

Q: How do you feel that your college and softball experience is different from some of your friends who are playing in different divisions?

A: I don't feel like there really is a difference. We are all playing and representing our schools on and off the field.

Q: Did you find the recruiting process stressful?

A: I feel like it is a very stressful process to try and get recruited. Unless you're a superstar going to a top D1 program I don't think it's a smooth experience for anyone.

Q: What advice do you have to our readers about selecting a school and the recruiting process?

A: The recruiting process isn't easy but stick it through because it will all be worth it in the end. When it's time to pick a school, go with



your gut. When you know, you know.

Q: Do you wish that you did anything differently when it comes to the recruiting process or school selection?

A: I wish I started the recruiting process earlier because it might have been less stressful in the long run. But I have absolutely no regrets with where I ended up or the school I chose.

Q: What positions did you play in high school softball? Travel softball? College?

A: In high school and travel ball I was a pitcher and played short stop. But my freshman year of college I caught the entire season.

Q: What was the transition like between travel ball and college ball?

A: Everything was just a little faster. The pitchers threw a little harder, the girls ran a little faster, and the plays were made a little quicker.

Q: How did your Freshman softball experience start and when?

A: For me it started the first week of school. Our coach asked us to go to the locker room to pick out our uniforms. Getting our numbers and our jerseys was the first time I was like, wow I'm really here!

Q: Do athletes at your school get any perqs? For example, we've heard that at most schools, athletes get scheduling priority.

A: At Columbia the only perq we get is scheduling priority.

Q: Do you have time during the school year to enjoy college life or are you basically focused on your studies and softball?

A: We have time to be able to get dinner with our friends or go out



and sightsee in New York. But it's all about time management; we're only able to enjoy having a social life if we take care of school and softball first.

Q: What did you find the most difficult to adapt to?

A: I think the hardest thing to adapt to was juggling school and softball. But once I developed a routine and stuck to time management everything became a lot easier.

Q: How many players are on your team? Do you feel that the roster size is too small or too large?

A: Last year we had 14 people on our team, which is generally smaller than most D1 schools. On our team I feel like players are expected to fill many roles on and off the field.

Q: Now that you've been through almost a full year of college softball, please describe what your Fall season was like in your first year.

A: In the fall we play four games, two doubleheaders. Last year we traveled for one of the double headers and had the other at our home field. In the fall, softball is much lighter than in the spring but the course load is much heavier in the fall. Most players do this so during the spring they can have a lighter course load while traveling and being in full season.

Q: What about your winter schedule? How were the holiday breaks handled?

A: Our strength and conditioning coach gives us a packet for workouts that we are expected to do. It mirrors what we do in the weight room when we are in school. I had plenty of time for family and free time but it is expected that you are still working hard to get ready for



the season ahead.

Q: What was your Spring/Summer schedule like for both classes and softball-related activities?

A: A typical day would be waking up at around 8 am to go to class until about 12. Then jump on the bus to head up to our athletic facility where we would do an hour of lifting and then have about a two-hour practice. Depending on if you had night classes, which some days I did, I would jump back on the bus to go to campus where I would generally have class from 6-8pm. Then shower, eat, study, and then try to get as much rest as possible.

Q: How many games did you play? How disruptive was this to your studies?

A: Last year we played 48 games. We traveled about every weekend leading up to in conference play. We took a trip down to Florida, Virginia, and the Carolinas for spring break. Most of our traveling occurs when school isn't in session like spring break or four day weekends. We don't really miss that many classes during season because of that. While on the road we use most of our free time, if not all of our free time, studying and getting ready for classes or exams that we have once we get back.

Q: After your Freshman year was over, were you dismissed for summer vacation with any kind of required schedule, training, etc.?

A: Much like winter break, we were given a packet by our strength and conditioning coach that is expected to be done.

Thank you for sharing this information with our readers, Alex! Playing in the Ivy League is different than other divisions even though Ivy League teams compete in Division I. Typical Division I teams require a lot of dedication to softball with lots of practices. In these schools,



a contract is essentially in place between the school and the student athlete, where the school provides a scholarship (money) for a playing/practicing commitment. Since the Ivy League does not provide scholarships to its student athletes, there is more of an emphasis on academics. Student athletes thinking about applying to Ivy League schools must have excellent grades. While these schools do not provide athletic or academic scholarships, they do provide need based money to help offset tuition costs.

Mitch Alexander is the creator of www.varsityfastpitch.com, a new web site to help students play softball in college. His area of focus is on youth sports and college recruiting. 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 World Series. Over the years, both have managed and coached Little League and select/travel teams at all levels and helped spark a love for softball in their student athletes. Mitch can be reached at Fastpitch2001@varsityfastpitch.com.

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