

## **Q and A with Michele Smith**

### **Should older girls who have never played softball before still tryout? What challenges will they face?**

Yes. You don't always have to start a sport at a young age to be successful. I started playing softball when I was seven years old but I didn't start to pitch until I was a sophomore in high school. The big thing is that if you are passionate about a sport, don't be afraid to give it a go. One of the challenges that you are going to face is that your skill level will be lagging behind in comparison to other players. Especially if you have friends playing ball, it is a good idea to get involved in the sport. Of course, you are going to be a little bit behind in your skills. But, that can always be made up by working really hard and on your own. Practice isn't just limited to the hour or hour and a half that your coach says it is time for team practice. If you go out and practice improving your skills on your own, typically you can improve really quickly. Don't be intimidated by other players because you can easily catch up with them by working extremely hard.

### **How did you develop your pitching skills so quickly since you started at a later age than most girls?**

I spent a lot of time practicing on my own. In high school I also played field hockey and basketball, but I always set time aside to improve my pitching. It didn't matter what season it was. When field hockey practice was over I would stay behind for an hour to pitch to my father. Same thing during basketball season, after practice my dad would come to the high school and I would pitch to him. I would probably do that 3-4 times a week. That extra work made a big difference. It allowed me to grow my skills and catch up to pitchers that started years before me.

### **Are there any specific drills or skills that girls should be practicing more than others to develop faster?**

A lot of people think that the way to become a great athlete is to learn how to hit home runs, slam dunk the basketball, kick the 50-yard soccer shot from midfield—but that is not the case. The greatest athletes in sports are the ones who are really fundamentally grounded. Some examples of defensive softball fundamentals are learning how to throw accurately, how to catch the ball properly, working on fielding

ground balls, moving to the ball, pop-ups in the outfield, etc. When it comes to offense it's the little things like base running, rounding bags, learning how to pick up your coach's signs, how to put the ball down when bunting. You need to become a student of the game and learn the fundamentals. It's typically the fundamentals of the game that drive your success. Big "wow" standout moments might win you one game in your career, but the fundamentals are what make you win thousands of games in your career.

**What kind of extra help should new players seek out to develop their skills?**

It's important to always hear different perspectives so I think going to clinics as much as possible is very important because learning from others is extremely important. Another great way to learn from others is to watch them. You can gain a lot by just being observational at practice. You can watch your teammates when they are practicing and observe what they are doing right and what they are doing wrong so that you can learn those skills. We learn a lot by watching. By listening, watching, and practicing different skills from different perspectives it is going to really help you learn quicker and open your eyes to different techniques so that you can decipher which one of those might be more successful for you.

**Do you have any last-minute advice for older players that are looking to get into a sport?**

Uncommon results come from uncommon efforts. If you are doing what everybody else is already doing then you aren't going to be any better, you are just going to be keeping pace. Make sure that if you want to get better in any field, any sport or any class, do the uncommon. You must do the stuff that other people aren't willing to do. Doing the uncommon will set you apart and help you become a better athlete, a better student, a better person.