



*We prepare this newsletter because we enjoy talking softball and seeing pitchers and players improve. Please send it to friends who also enjoy the sport.*

WOW.....A BIG *THANK YOU*  
to all our contributors who have made  
this another  
SUPER ISSUE !

## **Don't Just Look At The Number Behind The D**

By Brandon Elliott  
Head Softball Coach  
Virginia Wesleyan College

There aren't many top tier Division I baseball programs looking for five-foot-nothing, one hundred and forty pound (soaking wet) outfielders. In my mind, however, the "D I" aspirations I had as a high school baseball player weren't aspirations, they were a given. Besides, I wasn't a "D III guy", that was for bums. D III was for the guys who watched me play from the dugout in high school, it was for the goofy kid in my science class who couldn't throw and catch, but it wasn't for real ball players.

I guess the 17 year old me wouldn't say I was a real ball player, and if I could get my hands on the 17 year old me there are a lot of things I'd tell him he was wrong about outside of the perception he had of D III athletics.

Looking back, I never would have guessed the irony behind my ignorance. Now I spend a majority of my time trying to assure 16-18 year old softball players (and their parents) that such perceptions are off base (no pun intended) and unfair to the body of D III softball.

Often times the benefits that Division III offers its student-athletes is overlooked in the recruiting process. Three primary benefits to D III athletics are: Division III is the purest example of being a true college student-athlete, D III athletes have more time and opportunities in their social lives to become involved in the college community and Division III student-athletes still have an opportunity to be competitive and compete for national championships.

### **True College Student-Athlete...**

Because the emphasis is on the *student*, athletics gets to complement a student-athlete rather than define them. D III softball players have great opportunities in the classroom, which are typically smaller in size, providing an intimate academic atmosphere where students have no other choice but to succeed. At Division III institutions student-athletes are privy to incredible student to teacher ratios which in essence make them a name instead of just a face. Virginia Wesleyan, for example, flaunts a 13:1 student to teacher ratio which provides students with incredible academic opportunities.

### **Being A Kid...**

Quite often our go to line in the recruiting process is that at our players are going to have the opportunity to compete at a high level on the field, but still have the opportunity to be "kids" off the field. A student's social life in college is one of the most memorable and meaningful times of their lives. Many of our first year players, at Virginia Wesleyan, are surprised to find that they have the same time and opportunities to be directly involved in campus activities as an average college student. Our team and players become well rounded citizens of the college community that they live in. Not only have we produced All-Region softball players during my first three years as the Head Softball Coach, but we have produced sorority sisters, club officers, resident assistants, building supervisors, and even flag football and Powder Puff champions!!! Although athletics is a vital part of their lives, each of our players has opportunities to be just a kid.

### **Winning Is Still The Same...**

One of the greatest myths about DIII Softball is that the competition is just an extension of club ball or high school. This myth couldn't be further from the truth as many of your top tier Division III programs can compete with member institutions from other divisions. DIII isn't an NCAA term for non-competitive, but is a place where student-athletes can play softball because they want to, not because they are bound by the terms of their scholarship. A coaching friend of mine from Methodist University, Ron Simpson, put it best when speaking to a group of campers a few years back when he said, "I challenge you in the recruiting process to not look at the number behind the D, look at the program behind the D." That statement rings true in our program at Virginia Wesleyan as we focus on being the best program that our recruits are being courted by, not just the best Division III softball team. Besides, when you are winning, "The Game" doesn't know what division you are in because winning is still the same.

Let's face it, playing Division III softball isn't for everyone. However, I challenge every recruited high school softball player to take a closer look at what Division III softball has to offer before ruling it out. I have been very blessed to coach alongside and against some great coaches across the country and many of them happen to be running programs stamped with a three behind their "D". As players narrow down their choices they need to apply what Coach Simpson said before making their final choice by not looking at the number behind the D, but at the program instead.

## **Vitamin D - The Sunshine Vitamin**

By Don Mankie, RD

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### ***Chances are some athletes do not get enough vitamin D to support optimal health and performance.***

Vitamin D has gotten recent attention as it has been estimated that up to 75% of Americans are vitamin D deficient. At this time there is little concrete data on the deficiency rate among athletes, however it is safe to say that not many athletes are that different from the general population. The risks of a chronic vitamin D shortage include: weakened bones leading to increased stress fractures, muscle weakness and pain, weight gain, depression, decreased immune function, certain types of cancer, heart disease and hypertension. All of these conditions are concerns for those who play sports, yet vitamin D remains largely ignored in sports nutrition assessments.

Vitamin D, best known for building strong bones in combination with adequate calcium, may have additional benefits for promoting longevity and improved muscular performance.

Vitamin D regulates calcium and phosphate concentration in the blood, promoting proper bone mineralization, growth and bone formation. Inadequate amounts of vitamin D can lead to diseases such as rickets, osteomalacia and osteoporosis. Beyond its proven bone benefits, vitamin D is critical for immunity, prompting production of antimicrobial substances that seem to act like natural antibiotics and antiviral agents.

For athletes, additional concerns are chronic musculoskeletal pain, stress fractures and increased risk for trauma related fractures. Vitamin D has the potential to impact the health, training and performance of athletes.

Workout recovery is another potential area where athletes often see improvements after ensuring that their vitamin D supply is adequate. Intense exercise creates elevated levels of inflammatory substances (cytokines) in our bodies. Vitamin D has been shown to reduce the inflammatory process by promoting anti-inflammatory cytokines. Therefore, an adequate supply of vitamin D may speed recovery from intense training. Recent, yet limited research has suggested that with a vitamin D deficiency there may be an increased fat infiltration into muscle tissue, but further research is needed in this area. There appears to be strong evidence suggesting that athletes' muscles may function better with a sufficient vitamin D supply in the body.

There are two forms of vitamin D that our body uses: vitamin D2 (ergocalciferol) and vitamin D3 (cholecalciferol). Current research indicates that D3 is better than D2 at remaining in the blood stream in adequate levels, allowing the body the greatest benefit.

Vitamin D is a unique nutrient and the human body can obtain adequate amounts entirely from exposure to sunlight. Ultraviolet –B radiation (UVB) contact with the skin surface converts cholesterol containing components in our blood to vitamin D3. Vitamin D is also available in the diet from limited sources, listed below.

Sufficient blood levels should be greater than 32 nanograms per milliliter and optimal levels between 40 and 70 ng/ml. Current adequate intake stands at 200 IU from birth to 50 years old and 400 IU for ages 51-71 and 600 IU for 71 years and older. However, many researchers and scientists believe that 400 IU is too low and are suggesting 800 IU or greater per day of vitamin D in order to achieve optimal vitamin D status.

Before running out and downing large doses of Vitamin D there are two areas that should be assessed. First, a basic nutrient analysis completed by a Registered Dietitian (RD) will determine Vitamin D adequate intake, along with all other dietary nutrients. Second, an assessment of serum concentration is the best indicator of current vitamin D status.

Along with an evaluation of blood levels (serum 25hydroxyvitamin D (OH)D concentration) of vitamin D, anthropometric measurements (height/weight and body composition), dietary intake, and environment/ lifestyle factors are all additional aspects that also impact health and performance status.



### ***Here's how you can make sure you get enough vitamin D:***

Eat salmon or mackerel. Wild salmon contains about 1,000 IU per 3.5 oz serving versus farm raised salmon which contains 250 IU/3.5 oz serving. Other foods naturally rich in vitamin D include sardines, tuna, eggs and liver. Foods fortified with vitamin D include milk, margarine and some breakfast cereals.

Grab a few rays. Emphasis here is on "few," since prolonged sun exposure significantly increases the risk of skin cancer. Twenty (20) minutes of sun exposure without sunscreen enables the skin to produce about 20,000 IU of vitamin D. The National Institutes of Health reports that as little as 5 to 30 minutes of direct sun exposure twice a week may be enough sunlight to produce an adequate amount of endogenous vitamin D. You would need to drink about 400 glasses of milk to get an equivalent amount of vitamin D. Contrary to taking mega doses of dietary supplements, it appears that sun exposure does not cause toxic levels of vitamin D.

Multivitamins provide vitamin D, but the amount varies widely, so read the labels carefully: Men's One-A-Day contains 400 IU; Centrum Silver has 500 IU; Women's One-A-Day contains 800 IU; and Nature Made Multivitamins provides 1,000 IU.

Many calcium supplements also contain vitamin D, providing between 200 and 400 IU. Single vitamin D supplements are another option. Take care to ensure that the combination of dietary supplements and food sources of vitamin D do not exceed the upper limit recommended by the National Institutes of Health. Signs of toxicity, which include bone loss and kidney problems, begin at about 10,000 IU daily.

***Banana Berry Smoothie*** – Try this smoothie for a quick breakfast, a snack, for an energy boost pre-game or as a great recovery beverage. It is a great source of calcium, vitamin D, protein, potassium and fiber.

1 cup vanilla yogurt                      ¼ fruit juice                      1 ½ cup frozen berries

1 ripe banana (try frozen)              ½ cup milk powder              1 Tbs. sugar (optional)

Combine all ingredients in a blender. Blend until smooth and creamy.

Makes 2 – 16oz servings.              Calories: 270      Fiber: 2 grams                      Protein: 10 grams

Vitamin D: 200 IU                      Potassium: 500 mg                      Calcium: 350 mg

## **A Kid Needs You**

By Denny Tincher

A few years ago my young travel team prepared for a game and I looked across the diamond as three old-timers helped their team settle into the dugout. I was a bit shocked. Those men were long retired, their daughters had finished their softball careers many years ago, and these men were helping a new group of kids get a good start in softball.

I thought of the wealth of experience those men brought to the dugout and hoped the parents appreciated them. Many years ago, as a young coach, I had frequently gone to one of these men and found him to be quite patient and helpful in answering my questions, even stopping by my practices occasionally to help me put things into action on the field. His example made me promise to find ways to help other kids after my own daughters had left the game

So often we are thrown into coaching because our daughters want to play. We want to do a good job, but make a lot of mistakes along the way. When our daughters are finished, we turn the reins over to someone in the same situation and the cycle continues.

There are exceptions around the country. I could mention several names you would recognize, many of them having a lasting impact on the game as well as the kids they coached. In fact, most of them did their best work long after their own kids had finished their careers. When you mention those names, you rarely hear people talk about a brilliant game they once coached, but you always learn about the wonderful effect they had on the lives of kids.

Your own daughter may no longer need you in the dugout, but it would be a shame to let all of that knowledge and experience you've gained go to waste. I am willing to bet, there is at least one kid out there that you can impact in a way that nobody else can.

## **Where are we?**

### **JANUARY**

Weekly in Roanoke,  
Monday & Thursday evenings

Jan 7-9, Concord, NC  
Individual Lessons

Jan 15-16, University of Maryland-clinic/lessons

Jan 21-23, Chester, VA –  
Individual lessons

Jan 28-30, Bristol, VA-  
Individual lessons

### **February**

Feb 4-6, Woodbridge, VA –clinic/lessons

Feb 18-20, Chester, VA - Individual lessons

Feb 25-27, Concord, NC – Individual lessons

### **March**

March 18-20, Woodbridge, VA-clinic/lessons

What separates those who achieve,  
from those who do not  
is in direct proportion to one's ability to ask  
for help.

## **Practical Tips for Pitchers**

(and the mechanical issues related to them)

By Denny Tincher

### **PAIN**

If the elbow or shoulder hurts during pitching practice, or even during a game, stop immediately. If the pain continues as an ache, and especially if it bothers you during sleep, think about seeing your doctor. Another injury that seems minor is a muscle pull at the top of the hip on the front side. Stop immediately. It can end your career if pushed. This list is not meant to be all-inclusive, but a basic rule is this: Never pitch through pain unless your doctor has examined the affected area and assures you it is okay.

### **Related Mechanics**

Many injuries are the result of poor form, over-use, or fatigue. Most of the problems we see are the result of bad form. Pitchers try to make the body do things it was not designed to do, or they rely too much on the upper body. We see that a lot with new pitchers. Those problems are usually easy to fix, but we always worry that the damage has already been done. Pain is an indicator that something is wrong. Listen carefully to your body and take action before it becomes a serious problem.

## **The Dreaded “ACL” tear – What you need to know to prevent it**

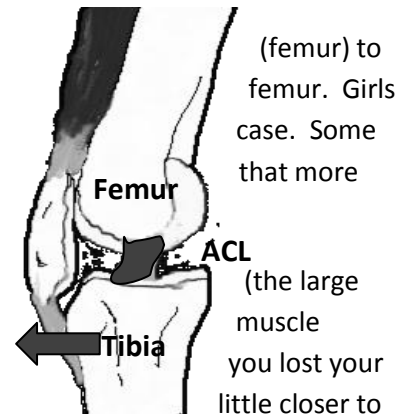
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It is usually a very sad tale. The story unfolds that an athlete was running up to the ball, stopped suddenly to pivot and immediately felt her knee give way. She may have heard a “pop”. The pain was immediate. The knee felt “loose” and she really couldn’t walk well on it. The swelling started almost immediately and in an hour the knee was as big as a softball. This is the story of an “ACL tear”.

The ACL, aka Anterior Cruciate Ligament, is the band that connects the thigh bone (femur) to the lower leg bone (tibia) and functions to keep the tibia from slipping forward on the femur. Girls are more likely than boys to tear the ACL, although it really isn’t clear why that is the case. Some feel that it is due to differences in the shape of a girl’s femur bone; others have found that more tears happen during a specific part of the menstrual cycle.

Tearing seems to occur when there is a disconnect between when the quad muscles (front thigh muscles) contract and when your foot is on the ground. Usually the quad contracts just as or just after your foot hits the ground. If it contracts early, because of a loss of balance or stepping on another player’s foot or just because you thought you were a little closer to the ground than you were, the leg is pulled forward on the thigh and the ACL can get “sheared off” when you land on the ground. Unfortunately, once the tear occurs, you almost always end up having surgery and a lengthy rehab process – usually up to a year, even if your surgery is done by the best knee surgeon.



Is there a way to prevent the dreaded ACL tear? Maybe. Although many theories have been advanced, several recent studies examined game film after female athletes injured their ACL. Although there were many variables, one common thread was weakness of the trunk muscles during landing or pivoting. The weakness resulted in the body swaying to one side, placing a twisting force on the knee. This twist was often the force that “sheared” the ACL. The training programs that have the potential to prevent ACL injuries must address the weakness that leads to “body wobble” during critical athletic moves, such as landing from a jump or pivoting to change direction.

The areas to focus on are the “core” – that is the abdominal muscles, hip muscles, knee position as well as balanced quadriceps and hamstring strength. As in all areas of training, technique and proper form are critical to success. Rather than a series of exercises from a book, it is probably best to see a physical therapist or a personal trainer to make certain that you are using the right form and strengthening the correct muscles. In addition to muscle strength and stability, you may need to work on “position sense”. For example, jumping down from a height of 18 inches and landing on one leg, while catching a medicine ball. These are combination exercises that force you to concentrate on one set of skills (catching a heavy ball) while also concentrating on core strength required for safe landing. This is but one example of a more advanced exercise – your trainer or therapist can teach you the proper progression. Once you have learned good technique, you’ll need to keep practicing on your own. Like all skills in sports, it may be that preventing ACL injuries may be an exercise (literally) in learning how to control your body position in awkward positions; the stronger you are and the more agile, the more likely you are to escape injury – especially the dreaded ACL tear.

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**The will to win is important, but the will to prepare is vital. ~ Joe Paterno**

## Improving Hip Mobility for Faster Cuts

**By Robbie Hebert, CSCS**

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We all heard the old the old saying, “you’re only as strong as your weakest link.” When it comes to speed, you’re only as fast as your slowest component.

Transferring power to change direction relies on strength, flexibility, and range of motion of the joints and muscles in your lower body starting with the ground up. An athlete’s hips are their powerhouse, and the weakest link usually starts there when it comes to speed. If you lack stability in the hips, you’re not going to be able to transfer enough force to change direction.

This starts before you even spring into motion. You must be able to get into an athletic position- weight on balls of feet, knees bent, hamstrings and quads activated, glutes loaded and butt sitting back.

The inability to assume the proper athletic position can be caused from a few different factors. The main factors include: limited range of motion in the ankles, knees and hips- they all are major contributors to quick cuts and change of directions. Having limited range of motion prevents the athlete from being able to drop his or her hips to plant and change direction quickly and efficiently. This limited range of motion can also affect the hips in the way they rotate open when both throwing and hitting a softball. Worse of all it may lead to knee and back injuries. Hip mobility is the key to unlocking speed and power on the field.

If you have any questions please feel free to contact me at [Robbie@theedgesp.com](mailto:Robbie@theedgesp.com).

## Utilizing Your Greatest Asset

By Denny Tincher

Bringing out the best in a pitcher usually begins by building on a particular strength. If pitching instruction were as simple as following a simple step-by-step plan, everyone would reach her peak quite easily. We may all be going to the same place, but we often use different trails to get there.

Recently a young pitcher wanted to increase her speed. I discovered that she is an extremely fast sprinter. Elite sprinters utilize certain biomechanical advantages, so our first priority was to channel those sources of speed into the pitch. We had to help her understand how her muscles worked to create blazing speed on the base-path, and re-create that feeling off the mound.

Another student admitted she wasn’t the fastest on the team, but certainly has the most quickness, indicating that she was excellent at using contact with the ground to generate energy, efficiently transferring that energy through the body for explosiveness, and then utilizing resistance to release the energy. We took a different track with her, helping her understand how she used her body effectively in defensive maneuvers so she could channel that thinking into the pitch.

One of my pitchers has extremely long arms, in relation to her torso, and a study of female biomechanics in throwing shows that the elite performers have the longest sweep with the arm, yet do it in the shortest amount of time. Obviously with this player we emphasized keeping the arm extremely long and loose, we dramatically decreased the time from beginning of motion to release, and kept the stride long while forcing the legs to keep up with the arm speed. The latter was the challenge that took longest.

One of my pitchers has an uncanny ability to turn my thoughts into specific actions. In her case, we delve more deeply into biomechanics so she understands exactly which parts of the body should fire in which sequence and specifically how that feels. She is so adept at translating words into action that I spend a great deal of time asking her to explain to me how certain parts of the body feel during the actions so I can use it to better teach others.

Each pitcher is basically learning the same form, but each comes at it from her own position of strength. Obviously each of these is fairly mature, so don’t get excited if your 11-year-old is still working on basic mechanics. This sort of approach is still down the road a ways.

Put simply, each kid has advantages and disadvantages. You want to discover ways she can take advantage of her unique features to perform better. Just a few examples of such features are long fingers, powerful legs, quick reaction time, body awareness, intelligence, work ethic, strength, ability to mimic, flexibility, or balance.

The plan for the development of each pitcher should challenge her in the areas where she has the greatest advantage, while helping to find ways to compensate for, or overcome, weaknesses. New pitching students are often surprised that I spend a lot of time analyzing them and discovering any weakness in form. They believe that grabbing a ball and pitching a lot will make them better, but often it just serves to more deeply ingrain problems in form that inhibit them from ever reaching their potential.

What is your greatest asset and how can it best work for you? As was once said in Alice in Wonderland, “If you don’t know where you are going, any road will get you there”. If you have a specific destination in mind, obviously it would be best to chart the shortest course with the least hills to climb. If you have questions, feel free to contact us at [TincherPitching@aol.com](mailto:TincherPitching@aol.com)

## “CHALKTALK”

### WORK WITH DENNY VIA VIDEO...

If you are having trouble with a specific pitch, dealing with a problem with mechanics, or simply looking to improve a specific part of your pitching, we may be able to help through video analysis. This program is designed to work on very specific areas within the pitch, identify problems, help you maintain and improve your form between lessons, or allow new students to get feedback to see how we could help if we get together for instruction.

You can take a look at the **Chalk Talk** videos by Denny on this **PowerChalk** website:  
<http://www.powerchalk.com/?affcode=tincherpitching>

Fill in the free registration, then do a keyword search for TincherPitching.

**ChalkTalk** video services are **not intended to replace one-on-one lessons**, but certainly can enhance your practice time between visits, keeping you more focused on areas you need to work, eliminate problems when you know they are happening, but don't know what to do, and certainly to save on trips when you live across the country!

## 100 DAYS TO GREATNESS

How do you help your daughter, your players, or your coaches develop individual plans? Most of us just don't know where to start.

Our program, **100-Days to Greatness**, is a very simple concept that allows parents, coaches, and players to chart a course for each individual based on her specific needs. It requires some research, working closely with the player to identify her specific needs, and a good bit of energy and creativity from everyone. However, it allows you to become a partner in her goals, helping you work together in a more fun way, and giving you a method to judge when a change in course is needed.

**Learn more about bringing this new training concept to your organization, contact us at [TincherPitching@aol.com](mailto:TincherPitching@aol.com)**



## I had a Dream...or was it Destiny?

By Natalie Titcume

Co-Founder of TLC Mentoring, Australia

Olympic Medalist, 2000, 2004, 2008

Let's all imagine for a moment that all dreams come true. What would your looks like? How would it feel? And who would be around to celebrate with you?

I often wondered what would have happened? As a 9-year-old girl sitting down and watching the 1984 Olympic Games believing and dreaming that one day that would be me. I pretended to stand on the dais, I pretended to win every race I ran in, and I even imagined what I would say to the interviewer and whom I would thank when asked. I even thought that I looked like Glynis Nunn who was the inspirational athlete I was watching.

What if the Olympic Games had not inspired me? Where would I be? I believe that at that time, something in me clicked, was I destined to be an Olympian, even if my sport was not part of the games til 1996? And if I didn't become an Olympian, would that change who I am today?

I believe that there are moments in all our lives that can drive and inspire you, but you have to be ready, wondering what lies around the next corner, what is the next challenge I set for myself.

Why is it that as adults we lose the skill to pretend or is it that it's something that is not allowed anymore? How good would it be if we kept pretending and dreaming big exciting things, reaching new heights or just pretending to be more active and positive? As with anything the more you do it the better you become. Words and thoughts become actions no matter what your age.

With my dream I let it be known; I shared it with my friends and family that I wanted to succeed in sport. In them knowing I knew that I would have to step up to ensure support could be utilised to my best advantage. But I told myself why stop there. What if I was to be injured? Or just not selected I wanted to ensure that I always had another dream, something else to be proud of. I needed something else to keep me in check, something that would take me out of my comfort zone.

I was the first person in my family to get a tertiary education, to complete a degree. This became my plan B dream.

Plan B, I know does not sound as special or even as inspiring I know, but this has to be the most realistic choice when you are thinking ahead. Being a teacher was something that I was drawn to, even though I was not a particular good student, study wasn't always the first thing on my mind after school. It was what route will I take home today from school and what time will I do it in. Who was playing back yard cricket or footy that afternoon or did I have training tonight....

Plan B is one of the most important choices you should make. Being a teacher has given me some of the most special moments in my life. The chance to make a difference in someone else's life, to actually help and support somebody else every day. To see the good and bad in all people, but take the time to understand and inspire them to achieve.

When taking on my first teaching job in western Sydney, I knew what lied ahead, I grew up there. I knew it would be tough because I was a student there only 4 years earlier. But what was it I wanted to give back. I wanted to help inspire, that you can be anything you want to be. I wanted to be a role model.

My dreams and goals in retirement as an athlete are regularly changing. But if I didn't have plan B, if I didn't take every opportunity that was there, if I didn't have high expectations I would never have the opportunity to support others. I love where I've been don't get me wrong, but I can't wait to see where I end up from here.

(photos at left of Natalie living her dreams !)

**Some dream of success, while others wake up and work hard at it !**