

An Unconventional Road to Gold

Ashley Bratcher '05



The first-ever Women's Baseball team to win gold at the Pan Am Games in 2015

Ashley Bratcher '05 never imagined she'd be back on Ravenscroft's campus, years after graduating, managing the USA Baseball Women's National Team Trials.

LAST SPRING, with the USA Baseball National Training Complex booked for the Division II Baseball World Series, Bratcher, Senior Director of Baseball Operations at USA Baseball, reached out to Ned Gonet asking to use the Ravenscroft field for the inter-squad game, which would bring the 36 women trying-out to represent the USA at the summer Pan Am games down to the 18 selected players. Playing in the first multi-sport international event to ever include women's baseball, the 2015 U.S. Pan American Women's

Baseball Team made history claiming gold by beating host country Canada before a crowd of 5,224.

Bratcher attributes her experience in athletics, particularly at Ravenscroft, to helping her develop skills essential to her success. At Ravenscroft, Bratcher was an exceptional basketball and softball player, playing Varsity all four years and helping to win the softball state championship her junior year. Bratcher also played JV volleyball and field hockey but quickly realized they weren't for her. Learning

about athletic training while recovering from injuries, Bratcher was encouraged by "Coach P" (Coach Michelle Piette) to join the student athletic training program, allowing her to stay actively involved with athletics during the fall. Among other new experiences, this involved working on the sidelines of football games with Coach P who along with Coach Gonet she describes as "her biggest mentors."

When not playing a sport, Bratcher looked for opportunities to allow her to stay involved with athletics and continue to learn and

grow. Throughout high school and college, Bratcher viewed setbacks with a positive attitude, seeking out new opportunities rather than dwelling in what-could-have-been. Her energetic and optimistic outlook led her on a career path she didn't expect but one in which she couldn't be happier in — a career that allows her to pursue her passions, develop new skills and provides her with constant learning experiences.

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games and coming back late at night and having an assignment to do. It prepared me for college and a career and is a skill I use every day.”

Her experience in athletic training at Ravenscroft inspired her to enroll in the athletic training program her sophomore year at UNC-Chapel Hill, which she attended to play softball. After tearing her ACL during a club rugby game her first semester, Bratcher was sidelined from playing softball in the spring. Additionally, faced with having to enroll in a cadaver lab as a program requisite during her junior year, Bratcher realized the athletic training program wasn't for her and transferred into sports administration.

When circumstances altered her original plan of playing softball at UNC and becoming an athletic trainer, Bratcher energetically adapted to a new path. She sought out oppor-

tunities which allowed her hands-on, practical experience such as working as a student manager with the UNC Women's Soccer team and interning with the girls summer soccer camps at UNC.

“Looking back on it, in the long run, playing a club sport in college is a lesser commitment so it allowed me to do athletic training and manage the soccer team. It all lined up better — to continue being an athlete at some level while pursuing things which would set me up for a career after college.”

After graduation, Bratcher interned with USA Baseball managing and coordinating USA Baseball's summer camp program. She excelled in her internship position leading to an offer to manage all operations at the Cary facility. From hiring hourly staff to overseeing scheduling, she made sure everything ran smoothly. Bratcher was tasked, as well, with building and managing the Women's National Team, which is still a large component of her job today.

As Bratcher's role evolved, in 2012, she took over the planning and execution of the annual National Team Championships in Arizona, USA Baseball's largest event in size and revenue, attracting over 5,000 participants in 2015. Bratcher also develops the curriculum for the annual National Team Development Program for selected young men, teaching both on and off the field lessons. From the big picture down to the details, she puts her finely honed operations skills to use through the managing of all logistics from travel to communication with parents and players to lodging and food.

Recently promoted to Senior Director, Bratcher now oversees all programs for 12U through 17U. Her main focus this year is building the 12U Na-

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tional Team. The Team will travel, along with Bratcher, to Mexico for the Pan Am games later this year which Bratcher will coordinate and manage all the details for.

“I get to work with people from all walks of life — 12-year-olds and their parents, former big leaguers and major college coaches, the Japanese women's team... many people from very varied backgrounds. It helps keep things interesting and fresh. I'm always learning.”

Staying true to her interests and maintaining a positive, can-do attitude enabled Bratcher to adapt and grow when her plans and goals — athletic, educational or career — changed. Bratcher is putting the skills she learned both on and off the field into use every day, as she found a career that aligns with her passions and talents. *R*



Bratcher with the USA Women's Baseball team after they won gold at the Pan Am Games