

My freshman year started in Miami, Florida. Our first game was against Temple University and my coach had told me the week before that I would start in the circle. If you know me, you know that from the moment she told me I would be the starting pitcher of our first game I was both excited to show off my stuff and out of my mind nervous. When the morning finally arrived for our game, the excitement and nerves had blended into a big bash of adrenaline and impatience. I started to warm up my pitches, but I could not calm myself down. Suria, our junior captain and catcher, saw how nervous I was and walked over to me. She said something very simple, "Remember you are never going to get this moment back. You will never be able to play in your first collegiate game again so enjoy it. Don't be nervous, just enjoy it." With that piece of advice I nodded my head and knew what I needed to do. I tell you this story because I will never forget what Suria said to me before that game. I don't claim to be the wisest or most prepared person but I have survived my freshman year, which to me was a great achievement. I could talk for days about what I have learned in college, but I am going to narrow it down to my top ten things (both goofy and serious) learned from my freshman year.

**#10 Learn to love coffee.** Coffee was my savior during finals so if you do not already love it, learn to. While I don't recommend getting addicted to caffeine like me, there are nights where you have to write a twenty-page paper that is due the next day and caffeine is definitely necessary. Another good thing about coffee is that the coffee shop can be a prime studying location. Don't get me wrong, I know that people have different places they like to study, but coffee shops are definitely my choice. Just remember when you are reading at 2:00 a.m. and can barely keep your eyes open, grab for caffeine, but don't forget to hydrate too! Okay so this is kind of a joke (I don't actually recommend drinking tons of coffee), but I did learn to drink way too much coffee in college so learn from my mistake!

**#9 Get connected.** On a more serious note, I learned that it is very important to get connected and involved in your school. The great thing about being a student athlete is that you enter college with an automatic friend circle, your team. Your team will be your family at school and very important to your college experience, but it is also important to have friends who are "normal" students. Yes, while you might resent them for having so much time on their hands, they can bring a new perspective to your college life. In my freshman year, I had as many friends who were not athletes as I had who were athletes and trust me

it is good to be around people who don't wear sweats every day of the week. My advice would be to get involved in something you are passionate about, outside of softball, like church, clubs, or volunteer organizations so that you can meet all different kinds of people. Take advantage of the fact that there are students from all over the United States and maybe even the world.

**#8 Manage your time.** I am pretty sure this is the phrase that is most over-used when talking about life as a college athlete, but no matter how over-used, it is extremely important. I never thought time management would be as hard as it was because I never realized how much time I would have. While this did not always apply during season when I was traveling every weekend, I had much more time to waste in college than I did in high school. I learned the hard way that the hour or two I had between my classes was essential for reading or finishing any work I had to do that day. After getting back from practice, which ended at 10:00 p.m., I never wanted to finish any work. During season, traveling is a great time to get reading done, but it is not necessary to be as crazy as my team and not allow any noise on the bus. While time management is important, so is balance. (Don't worry some of us still forced the team to watch a movie every once in a while.) Use your time wisely and don't procrastinate, it catches up to you!

**#7 Get off campus.** College is great because usually you are living somewhere you have never lived before. A new place brings exciting adventures, but I learned that the most memorable adventures come when you get off campus. I am lucky enough to go to school in Washington, DC, which is one of the greatest cities I have ever experienced. At Georgetown, most people rarely get off campus and explore the amazing city that is only a Metro ride away. The times that I remember the most from freshman year are the times that I got off campus and into the city. Just walking near the capital and the monuments always makes me think "Wow I live here!" My freshman year I was even able to attend Barack Obama's inauguration and I will never forget that history-making experience. Once you get settled your first year, get your friends to come with you and go into the surrounding town or city where you live. Even if you go down the street to a local restaurant, it is good to get out in the real world.

**#6 Talk to professors.** In high school I hated talking to my teachers about a grade or about something I didn't understand in the lecture so I never did. I tried to continue that

in college and I got through a week before I found myself in my professor's office asking for help. I was so lost in one of my classes that I had no choice but to ask the professor for help and he was more than happy to help me. I was in that professor's office at least once a week and I ended up getting a good grade and learning much more than I would have if I had not asked for help. Not only do professors like having their students visit them in their office, you are more likely to get a better grade if you ask for help with test material or an essay. Being an athlete it makes the communication between you and your professor even more important because of missing classes for traveling. Not all professors are accommodating to athletes but they are more likely to help if you talk to them.

**#5 Be coachable.** College is a different world than high school or travel softball so do not get set in your ways. Your college coach is always right with how they teach you to play the game, even if it is not how you have played before. Allow yourself to be coached easily and accept the fact that your coach might want to make some changes. Always remember, though, your coach recruited you because he or she liked how you played so if he or she changes a few things do not lose confidence in your abilities.

**#4 Be comfortable being uncomfortable.** I was uncomfortable for the first whole month of college. While I loved my school and I felt at home there, everything was a new experience. I did not know anyone very well and I had no idea what to expect. Looking back, though, I am glad I went through that experience because it taught me to be comfortable being uncomfortable. Situations might be awkward at first but the awkwardness will fade and later you will laugh at how uncomfortable you were. Embrace the awkwardness because it is part of the experience.

**#3 Actions are more important than words.** I learned quickly that upperclassmen respect you much more for the way you play and act and not what you say. Do not be the freshman that thinks she knows it all, because you will not have a good year. It is much more fun to surprise them with how hard you work or how well you know the game in practice. Do not give excuses. Just remember you only have to be a freshman for one year!

**#2 Be consistent.** Before my first year, I was so worried that I would be terrible in college. I knew I could play decently in travel ball and high school, but college was unknown. Granted, I am a slight pessimist by nature so I guess I am prone to the negative side of circumstances, but I had images in my head that I would be a disaster in college

softball. Luckily I held my head above water, but I learned that it is not about how perfect your stats are it is how consistent you play and practice. Coach Pat, my coach at Georgetown, told me in a meeting once, "I want to know what kind of performance and work I am going to get out of you every time you step on the field." Achieving that type of consistency does not come by worrying about stats and wins, but by being consistent in the way you practice everyday. I would always get frustrated constantly hearing the phrase "you will practice how you play," but that concept is right. If I consistently give 100% effort in practice, I am going to be more consistent in the game. Consistency builds trust with teammates, because if I am consistent my teammates can count on me to show up every game with "my" game. I have to bring "my" game whether I have a 20-page paper due the next day, I just got in a fight with my roommate, or I had the best day of my life.

**#1 Let yourself be a freshman.** My finally advice and the most important lesson I had to learn my first year was that I needed to let myself be a freshman. No matter how well you play, you will always have bad days. Do not let your freshman status be an excuse to fail, but know that failing is a normal experience. You will not know all the answers your first year so do not be afraid to ask. The upperclassmen are a great resource because they have been through the same things you are going through. I asked my upperclassmen everything from what to do on game day to which classes to take or avoid. Remember this is your first year so you have time to grow and get better. While you always want to push yourself and be your best, there will be a transition period. Work hard and enjoy being a freshman because you will be a senior before you know it and then you will wish you didn't have to graduate and end your amazing college experience.