Shaped by her own experiences as an elite player at the University of Massachusetts under late NFCA Hall of Fame coach Elaine Sortino, Whitney Goldstein has quickly engineered a spot for her Worcester Polytechnic Institute squad among the top Division III teams in the New England Region.

In three seasons as head coach, Goldstein has won 75 percent of her games, including leading Worcester Polytechnic Institute to its first NCAA Regional and Super Regional in program history in 2015.

“A LOT OF IT I credit to listening to Elaine (Sortino),” Goldstein said. “She was one of the best mentors I could have had.”

Before joining the Engineers, Goldstein spent three seasons at Amherst College, serving as interim head coach in 2013 when the Lord Jeffs were 24-12, their highest win total in 15 years.

As a player, Goldstein said she often asked herself watching Sortino, “Why is she pushing this player so hard this day?”

She said Sortino was the best at taking the temperature of the team each day. “Everyone wanted to play for each other,” she said. “Obviously, we want to win, but there’s a bigger goal,” which is to shape young women who go off and be successful in life after softball.

“Elaine was just special. I would call her every day and ask ‘How do I deal with this?’”

Sortino would tell her, “You can’t close the door to learning” which Goldstein has taken to heart. “I always try to learn from others — whether we’re playing against them or it’s at convention,” Goldstein said. “Can we do something better?”

There are a few concepts she thinks are keys to the success her team has had.

“IF YOU WANT to win, you have to hold yourselves accountable,” she said. “It’s all about accountability. (My players) aren’t afraid to call each other out in a respectful way.”

“When I was younger, I was afraid to hurt their feelings (as a coach). Now, I’m about making sure I’m just doing the right thing.”

Playing as a unit is important, too. “It’s about chemistry. You have to work at it every day. Williams, Tufts, all the successful teams, their kids have the same goals, I think.”

And having a coach who was a great player doesn’t hurt. In 2006, Goldstein was the first Ex-UMass star has brought elite expectations to Division III Worcester Polytechnic Institute

By DAVE HINES

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1) How has the game changed in the time you’ve been coaching?

“T’ll ever do the armbands … I get it (though). People are trying to pick signs. I’ve had to change my signs. Hopefully, I can do a good enough job with my signs. There’s nothing wrong with that (armbands). I just haven’t adjusted to it.”

2) What are some problems coaches now face that are different from when you started coaching?

“When I was recruited, my parents didn’t say anything. I went in and looked my coach in the face and asked questions. People hide behind their phones (now). I’m not in favor of everyone getting a trophy. Things aren’t handed to you (in life). You have to work for things.”

3) If you knew then what you know now, how would your coaching have been different?

“If I had known if I was honest all the time (not worrying about offending players), it would have been helpful for me.”

4) Is there a secret to success in coaching?

“Be in the moment. I have the 24-hour rule. If I take you out, take 24 hours before you talk to me — you may realize why I did what I did. They need to know I believe in all of them.”

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In 2006, Goldstein was the first...
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player in Atlantic 10 Conference history to win both the Player of the Year and Rookie of the Year awards in the same season. She was a three-time Atlantic 10 Conference and NFCA All-Region third baseman, a 2006 Easton All-American and a 2009 Atlantic 10 All-Academic team selection.

UMass compiled a 163-53 record over her four seasons, with four Atlantic 10 titles, four trips to the NCAA Regionals and one berth in the NCAA Super Regionals.

SHE STILL ranks in numerous career offensive categories at UMass, including first in total bases (363) and runs batted in (156), fourth in hits (222), seventh in batting average (.363) and runs batted in (156), fourth in hits (222), seventh in batting average (.363) and runs batted in (156), and ninth in slugging percentage (.558). This all following her selections as a 2006 Easton All-American and NFCA All-Region third baseman, a 2009 Atlantic 10 All-Academic team selection.

So it’s understandable that Goldstein might occasionally be frustrated when her players don’t immediately grasp the things she and her coaching staff are trying to convey.

“Why can’t they get this as fast as me and my teammates did?” she admits thinking sometimes, “but there’s probably times that (Elaine) wanted to chop my head off.”

“I’m hard on them,” she continued, seeking to unlock their full potential. “I coach with a D1 mentality at the D3 level. But I’ve learned to be more patient.”

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Others simply say they trust their gut. When you sit down with a recruit and her parents, what does your gut say?

IN MY OPINION, a balance of due diligence and “blinking” is the formula for good recruiting. You should do your homework about prospective players — not just their stats, but who they are and what they are like. I also believe that if your instinct is sending up red flags, you should listen and not try to rationalize that the talent you see is worth the headache you don’t feel yet.

AND REMEMBER that each spot is gold. I have heard more stories about coaches thinking in the exception of some sort, even doing a good deed, picking up a player for that last spot, thinking that that spot has less of an effect on the team that the top few.

Not true. That last spot can make or break you.

It took one wolf to eat three pigs. Every spot, every jersey, every person involved in your program can make a powerful impact, for better or for worse.

If you are a high school, travel ball or junior college coach reading this article, your role in the recruiting process is critically important. You are the purveyor of information. Your personal and professional reputation is on the line with each recommendation you make.

WHILE THIS DOES not give you license to sink a kid or a college coach, you need to be honest with all parties in the recruiting process. This is not an easy job. You need to help frame reasonable expectations for the prospective player and her family. You also need to provide truthful assessments when talking with college coaches.

AT THE CORE of this process, you are probably in the best position to give your opinion of whether this is a “good fit.” Your opinion is not the final decision, but it is a piece of the calculus.

Recruiting is more than a summer tour of softball fields. Recruiting is the key to the future of your program and your job security. It is about building both championships and culture. You need talent to win, or perhaps talent to coach to win.

I encourage you to look beyond the talent, to the person in the uniform and her parents in the stands, who are either cheering or bleacher-seat coaching. Do you want to open the door to your house to these multi-year guests?