

Striking Achievement



**PITCHER AGRESTI
IN LINE TO BREAK
NCAA STRIKE-
OUT RATIO
RECORD**

By Erin Sweeney M'07

Laurie Agresti averaged 12.1 strikeouts per game in 2006. PHOTO BY WARREN RUDA

THE UNASSUMING, BESPECTACLED STUDENT WALKS across the greenway to attend class in her senior year, the female Clark Kent of Wilkes University. On the softball mound, however, Laurie Agresti becomes almost superhuman.

Over the past three years, Agresti has been a powerhouse on the mound, fueling the University's softball program. A three-time Freedom Conference Pitcher of the Year, Agresti enters her final season with the Lady Colonels ranked eighth on the NCAA Division III career strikeout list, with 780. Averaging an outstanding 12.4 strikeouts per game during her first three seasons, the hard-throwing right-hander is in line to break the Division III record for career strikeout ratio, which currently stands at 10.8 per game. The Harrisburg, Pa., native also will look to reach the 1,000

strikeout mark this spring, becoming one of only four student-athletes in NCAA Division III history to reach the plateau.

Agresti has garnered a plethora of accolades during her prolific career at Wilkes. After fashioning an overall record of 15-6 on the mound in 2006, including seven wins by shutout, she was named a National Fastpitch Coaches Association East Region All-American. The hurler led the Lady Colonels to a 28-15 record during the campaign and the Freedom Conference championship. She pitched in all four games for Wilkes in the NCAA Division III East Regional Tournament and was named to the All-Tournament team for her efforts. In 139 innings of work last season, Agresti averaged 12.1 strikeouts per game, fanning 241 hitters while walking just 22. She allowed the opposition to hit a mere .135 against her en route to a 0.76 earned run average.

Besides her success on the mound, Agresti is an accomplished student. The accounting major is a four-year member of the dean's list

and a Pennsylvania Institute of Certified Public Accountants scholar. The 2006 season saw Agresti earn a berth on the ESPN The Magazine Academic All-District II College Division Softball first team, after garnering second-team honors as a sophomore.

Coach Frank Matthews is proud of Agresti's achievements but expects a lot more to come, both on and off the field. "Laurie is the best pitcher ever at Wilkes University. She will set the NCAA strikeout ratio record this year, and she will get 1,000 strikeouts – all while maintaining a 3.7 GPA."

DOUBLE PLAY

FRESHMAN LAUNCHES PRO BASEBALL CAREER WHILE EARNING ACCOUNTING DEGREE

By Kim Bower-Spence

AS HIS FELLOW WILKES students took off for spring break, freshman Paul Chmiel headed to Sarasota, Fla., for spring training with the Baltimore Orioles farm system.

The Orioles selected the 6-foot-6-inch 20-year-old in the 22nd round of the 2005 draft – on the same day as his high school graduation. The Orioles deal included a signing bonus and college tuition.

An Outstanding Leaders Scholar in the Sidhu School of Business and Leadership, the accounting major played first base for Baltimore's rookie team, the Bluefield (W.Va.) Orioles, in 2006. Chmiel hopes this spring season finds him moving up to the Aberdeen (Md.) IronBirds, Baltimore's Class A affiliate.

Training starts with a half-hour of stretching and 20 minutes of throwing. Then the team breaks into positions and works on basic defensive drills before finishing up with about an hour of batting. In the afternoon, players move on either to exhibition games or more conditioning, base running or individual training. The day's work may end as early as 12:30 p.m. or as late as 5:30 p.m. "It's the same thing every single day, seven days a week for spring training," Chmiel says. During the extended season, he gets off every fifth day.

Chmiel took a year off academically before beginning studies at Wilkes in fall 2006. Not to sit idle, he took a free tax course while waiting to launch his professional career. "I really liked



Chmiel, shown here on his baseball card, was ranked eighth among "power prospects" for batting in the Orioles' minor league system. PHOTO BY MARK GOLASZEWSKI

working with the numbers and doing the taxes." This year, he taught the tax course and had cranked out 70 returns for Liberty Tax Service before leaving for spring training. "In case baseball doesn't work out, I'm realistic, and I'll have my college education to fall back on."

Chmiel missed the first week of classes as he finished out baseball season in Bluefield but then turned his attention to full-time studies. For spring semester, he lightened his class load to just seven credits. Business Professor Jeff Alves and accounting Professor Nandita Das recorded lectures and PowerPoint presentations so Chmiel could keep up with lessons.

"We do not often have a student with Paul's range of interests and talents," Alves explains. "When we do, I try to make sure that he or she has the opportunity to stretch and learn as much as they can – and this means outside the classroom as well as inside."

Chmiel completed his responsibilities for his team's successful business project. During spring training, he will continue the course with copies of the class presentations and audio clips of classes online. And he will submit homework and take all quizzes – including unannounced – and exams on the same schedule as classmates.

Chmiel misses more than class. One of the bigger challenges is being away from girlfriend Trisha Nawrocki, his co-valedictorian at Pittston Area High School and a finance major at Villanova University.

He got off to a rough start in Bluefield, starting last season 0-21 at bat. "I wound up hitting over .300 the next two months and ended up at .300 for the season." A March article in *Inside the Warehouse* ranked him eighth among "power prospects" in the Orioles' minor league system. Chmiel's goal for this season is to keep building skills and getting the attention of coaches.