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## Amber Wright oral history interview by Andrew Huse, April 29, 2004

Amber Wright (Interviewee)

Andrew T. Huse (Interviewer)

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USF Florida Studies Center  
Oral History Project  
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Narrator: Amber Wright  
Current Position: USF Graduate; Assistant  
Softball Coach  
Date of Interview: April 29, 2004  
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**SUMMARY:** Amber Wright discusses her experiences as the University of South Florida's assistant softball coach and as a former player for the Bulls.

### TOPICS OF DISCUSSION

Ms. Wright came to USF in 1993 as a student athlete. She is currently an assistant coach for the USF softball team.

#### *Involvement in sports*

She grew up in Brandon, Florida, where she played baseball in the Bloomingdale Little League. Ms. Wright first became involved in sports at the age of eight, when she began playing baseball. She made the transition to softball at the age of twelve, in hopes of one day getting an athletic scholarship to college. "I'll never forget the day that my coach saw me ... she asked me if I wanted to play, and I came on a visit [to USF] and decided that USF was the place for me."

#### *Academics*

Originally, she wanted to study psychology in order to understand "the way the mind works, and the way that people interact ... [it] was very interesting to me." Because her father was concerned that an undergraduate degree in psychology would limit her career options, she transferred to the discipline of biology. "It was a little bit of a process ... I just knew my passion wasn't with biology and switched back ... but [psychology] was a great degree – it's something I carry with me every day."

#### *USF Softball*

During her sophomore year of high school, she recalls being particularly intrigued when he father took her to see a softball tournament at USF. "I was just in awe ... all these players ... were so incredible." As a result, she began thinking more seriously about participating in collegiate athletics. "I think my dad kind of wanted me to go here [to USF], but allowed me the flexibility to explore other options." Her decision came down to a school in Iowa, where her parents were from, and the University of South Florida. Iowa had certain appeal because not only would she be closer to her extended family, but they would also allow her to play both basketball and softball for the university. Partly

because her family was here in Tampa, Ms. Wright decided to attend school at South Florida. She was also very impressed with the coaching staff at USF in addition to the campus atmosphere. “I thought the campus was enormous ... it didn’t fit like the college campus to me ... I always pictured the red brick everywhere, but it was neat – I liked how every building didn’t look the same.” She also had a couple of friends already on the team at USF. “I thought that I could definitely have a good future here ... at that time I wasn’t very geared academically - didn’t know much about what I wanted to do – so it wasn’t that big of a factor as much as the program was.”

Before being formally admitted onto the team at USF, she recalls, “I knew they were kind of looking at me, but I didn’t really know what that meant ... but it just kind of fell into place for me.” She received a call from the head coach, who offered her a significant scholarship to play softball at USF. She remembers feeling “so excited ... I marked it down on the calendar as one of the best days of my life ... I was elated ... that someone thought I was good too.”

#### *USF athletic scholarship*

Ms. Wright and her father made the decision that she would sign on with USF even before the papers had arrived in the mail. She went to the university to formally accept the position along with two of her friends from high school who were also chosen to play for the team. “They had a press conference at the school ... the press was there taking our pictures as we signed this little piece of paper ... [I] felt like a superstar ... and then you think, well that’s my fifteen seconds of fame that everyone talks about ... it was a big honor, a big deal.”

#### *Living arrangements*

Rather than living on campus, she chose instead to stay at home her first year to ensure that she was able to focus on her academics. “I was kind of a borderline student ... and [my father] wanted to make sure I stayed on a good track.” Her second year she moved into an apartment near campus, where she lived her remaining years as a student at USF.

#### *Psychology*

“I really had no idea what I wanted to do [academically] ... I just took a basic core of classes ... the third class I took was Intro to Psychology ... I really enjoyed it ... I really felt like I didn’t have to work so hard to learn it ... something about psychology was really interesting to me.”

#### *Early experiences with the team*

She recalls being somewhat intimidated when she first began practicing with the team at USF. “I thought ... I’m never going to start here, I’m never going to play ... it’s almost like you don’t know how good you are, it’s hard to weigh yourself against somebody else when you’re an athlete ... so I had a lot of questioning myself and my abilities ... I remember being nervous every day at practice for at least two weeks ... I felt like I had to prove something every day.” Forming friendships with her teammates helped to effectively ease her transition onto the team. “I felt like part of the family.”

### *First season*

Although she got a lot of recognition as a high school player, she remembers that her heart “just fell” when she was not on the line-up for the opening game of her first season. “I was so upset ... it felt like, well, you’re not the best anymore ... It was hard.” As the season progressed, however, she played more and more, starting more than most of the other freshmen. “It made me realize I was at the bottom of the ladder and had to work my way back up.” Though she doesn’t remember her performance, Her first at bat, she recalls, was “horrible ... my legs were shaking ... I was so nervous ... but, you get past it.”

### *Starting position*

When the starting third baseman was moved to catcher during Ms. Wright’s sophomore year, she was moved into the starting position at third base. “Thank goodness for me ... because of her unselfishness, it allowed me ... to be a constant starter.”

### *Memorable moments on the field*

Ms. Wright remembers one play in particular where the team defeated the University of Florida. “It was a squeeze bunt play ... there was somebody on third base that was going to steal right on the pitch ... I knew we were going to win the game ... I got the bunt down ... it was just a really neat feeling, to feel like [I] had a part in winning a really big game ... The part that was so neat was the way that everybody else reacted ... everyone just went crazy. Personally that was probably one of [the] biggest plays of my career.”

### *Teamwork*

None of her own accomplishments, she modestly admits, would have been possible without the skilled team with whom she shared the field. “We had days ... as a team ... that I’ll remember forever.”

### *Tough moments on the field*

One of her toughest moments came in a tie-game during the “Speedline Tournament” in which she errantly threw a ball that cost the team the game.

### *Traveling with the team*

She remembers that traveling with her teammates was a particularly enjoyable and memorable experience. “There wasn’t a down second ... there [were] a lot of different personalities on our team ... there [were] constant pranks, mostly a lot of teasing.”

### *Graduation*

Uncertain about what exactly she wanted to do, Ms. Wright felt some apprehension as her graduation approached. Because she secured a job playing professional softball the very summer following her graduation, she was better able to enjoy the moment. “I was really proud of myself ... I was the first person in my immediate family to get a four-year degree ... I definitely knew that I owed a lot to [my parents].” “I was walking across the stage for a lot of people – my family especially – and all the ... people that helped me along the way.” She feels that softball provided a means for her to obtain her academic degree, the value of which she began to realize over the course of her years at USF.

### *Balancing academics and athletics*

Asked how she was able to balance academics with athletics, she responded, “They didn’t give me a choice.” Because her grades were admittedly “shaky” from the start, she was assigned ten hours of mandatory study time as a freshman. “There wasn’t a lot of room for me to mess up ... I had a very structured environment.”

### *After graduation*

Because professional softball was only a seasonal job, Ms. Wright was forced to find other work during the down time. She worked for some time at the USF Golf Course doing groundwork while also volunteer coaching for the softball team at USF. “No matter what you do, you have to take pride ... and do the best you can.”

### *Coaching USF softball*

She recalls an occasion when one of the softball coaches asked her if she was interested in coaching at the college level, to which she enthusiastically replied, “Yeah, I think it is – this is what I want to do.” Towards the end of that season, one of the coaches announced that she would not be returning the following year, and Ms. Wright was asked to fill her position. She remembers, “I thought I was going to jump up and start cheering ... I was like, ‘I would love to take it,’ and that was it ... I was excited the whole day.”

Her experience as a salaried coach for the softball team was much different than those positions she had held previously. “I felt ... a lot more responsibility, especially in the office ... It was a lot more work than I thought it was ... it was a nice transition for me.”

### *Rewards*

When asked about the most rewarding part of coaching, Ms. Wright replies without hesitation, “the girls.” She explains, “I look forward to them everyday ... to having a part in their [lives] ... I realize that it’s a hard time [for them] and I really feel like that is a main role of mine – to reassure them and to push them in a positive direction ... It’s neat to see them grow up ... that’s the best part.”

### *Challenges*

“I think there [are] a lot of challenges ... a lot of hard situations arise ... you have to do some soul searching ... they’re young people and they make mistakes ... that’s really hard to balance the punishment with the growth ... because the growth is the more important aspect.” Difficulties arise when, for instance, student athletes are not attending classes regularly, thereby compromising their eligibility to play on the team. Punishment for skipping class is a one-game suspension. “We let them know that they are letting a lot of people down ... they know that there [are] no exceptions.”

“I think psychology has [had] a big impact on my coaching ... it’s helped me step back and think about ... different ways that I could handle the situation ... and help them grow and learn. All my life experiences have taught me to be more patient and to help me see that ... in the end they’re going to be better.”

### *Future plans*

Ms. Wright is currently studying counseling at USF, though it is not something she is looking to get into right away. “When I have a family, I don’t want to be traveling ... college coaching isn’t going to be my career forever ... As soon as I have a family I want to devote my time to them.”

### *Advice*

“I really advise people to pick the college for the degree and for the learning experience ... Student athletes: come to work hard. [They’re] going to be under different demands than the rest of the student body ... really enjoy the people around them, and realize how lucky they are to be surrounded by this mini-family.”

Following the interview, Ms. Wright enthusiastically exclaims to our own Andrew Huse: “You are great! Do you know that? You are absolutely amazing. You did spectacular[ly] ... you did great.” Modest of his ineffable charm, Mr. Huse, the consummate professional, defers all adulation to Ms. Wright and concludes a magical interview.

### *End of Interview*