**Prepare to fail and get better in long run**

*By JOSEPH MANISCALCO  NY BlueFire Fastpitch*

The focus of this article is high school seniors who are off to play collegiate softball. After the accolades of high school, graduation parties, celebration and moments of trophy idealization, you must start your preparation.

**COLLEGIATE** athletics is by far one of the most rewarding sports experiences you will ever have. While high school championships are wonderful, they are localized, sometimes motivated by external forces and guided by popularity. Unfortunately, one of the pitfalls of high school sports is that one does not learn how to lose. If you play in a consistently-dominant high school program, the team usually wins year after year or is at the top of the leaderboard often.

From what I have seen and experienced, the same top four teams are battling at the end of the season for a high school championship. Players are successful based on popularity of reputation and are rarely challenged with failure.

College softball, on the other hand, will provide you with true excitement, camaraderie that is unparalleled and an experience you will cherish for the rest of your life. You will learn how to lose first, and then how to succeed.

You will learn how to manage and juggle your academics and social life while being away from home, and not having parents remind you to work hard and do your studying or drag you to your trainer or practice. Instead, this will be on you.

**PROFESSORS WILL NOT** be guided by the popularity of the high school season when grading. Instead, they will care about their academic subject just as much as your coach cares about winning a championship. That means you will have to be responsible, engage in time management and be prepared. Your maturity will abound in an instant or you will falter like the ones who were unable to be student-athletes.

So, as you embark on your collegiate softball career, look at failure as an act of progression and growth. You will experience failure. You will probably cry your first semester, call home and say “I can’t do this.” But you can.

You will feel the pressure of the schoolwork and meeting different personalities of students cannot help you overcome the homesick nature of the environment you are in at the moment. You will strike out and you will give up home runs. You will make errors and you will make mental mistakes on the bases.

You will fail and you will feel like you cannot compete at that level. However, the coach who recruited you believes that you can compete at the collegiate level, and that coach has faith in you and the process of your development.

**DO NOT BE** frustrated. Learn, grow and develop. Look for failure and make sure that it is something you recognize. For many of you who came from powerhouse high school programs, you will not understand what failure is, so be careful not to allow this unknown concept to become your finishing piece.

In anticipation of your collegiate experience, look to challenge yourself in the summer.

Perhaps play at a much more competitive level than high school. Complete the program’s summer workout with zeal, passion and determination. And look to read a book of interest to expand your mind. Practice time management during the summer. Become employed, have chores, do your summer training regime, play softball and read several great books. This will prepare you for the collegiate experience you are about to encounter.

**WINNING A HIGH SCHOOL** championship is achievement, but this is not success. Success is about learning. It’s about growing and being better today than you were yesterday. There is a fine line between the two.

Embrace the opportunity you have been given to play collegiate sports and become a student-athlete. The experience will be rewarding. Use it as a canvas to create your desired masterpiece.

Remember, every failure brings with it the seed of an equivalent success. The key is to recognize this and not allow the temporary failure to be the picture on the canvas you created.