

# Washington University in St. Louis



*Editorial by Chris Mitchell - Washington University in St. Louis Sports Information Director;  
Photos by Mary Butkus, WUSTL Photo Services*

Leticia Pineda-Boutté is in her sixth season as head softball coach at Washington University in St. Louis and has endured instant success at the Division III level.

In five seasons on the Danforth Campus, Pineda-Boutté has posted a 161-53 overall mark (.752) with five-straight seasons of at least 25 wins. The Bears have won four University Athletic Association (UAA) conference titles and made five NCAA Division III Tournament appearances.

In her second season on the Danforth Campus, Pineda-Boutté made her mark on the Washington University softball program, guiding the Bears to an NCAA runner-up finish. Pineda-Boutté, the 2007 National Fastpitch Coaches Association (NFCA) Midwest Region Coach of the Year, led the Bears to a 35-7 overall record and their first-ever trip to the College World Series.

Pineda-Boutté comes from a Division I background – spending four years as a student-athlete at the University of Arizona and two seasons as assistant coach at Creighton University and one season at Purdue University.

A three-time softball All-American at Arizona, Pineda-Boutté stands as one of the most prolific players in the history of Arizona softball. She is the only Division I athlete to be named first-team All-America at three different positions – catcher (1996), third base (1997) and first base (1998).

Pineda-Boutté helped guide her teams to the College World Series in each of her four years at Arizona, bringing home the NCAA national championship in 1996 and 1997, while winning Pac-10 Conference titles in 1995, 1996 and

1997.

A 2004 Arizona Sports Hall of Fame inductee, she graduated from Arizona with a bachelor of arts degree in humanities in 1998, and earned a masters of art in management and leadership from Webster University in 2009.

I had the chance to sit down with Pineda-Boutté to discuss her coaching and recruiting philosophy, parenthood, the Bears' hard work in the classroom and the upcoming 2011 season.

## **COACHING PHILOSOPHY**

Coaching and recruiting philosophies are always evolving, according to Pineda-Boutté. The main factors remain the same, but you have to constantly change with the times and the student-athletes that you are recruiting.

Pineda-Boutté considers herself a coach that recruits versatile student-athletes with a high work ethic. "I believe they all bring a certain natural ability to the table, and I just try to enhance that ability," she said.

Pineda-Boutté likes to bring in student-athletes that catch her eye – on and off the field. Besides being

strong in the classroom, she likes a player that is versatile, that can play many different positions.

For example, senior All-American pitcher Claire Voris and junior pitcher Olivia Cook split time on the mound, as each starter gets the ball in a doubleheader. When Voris or Cook are not on the mound, they are typically playing third base.

Pineda-Boutté wants the Washington University softball program to be known as an aggressive team – at the plate, on the base paths and in the field. Her former coach Mike Candrea at Arizona once told Pineda-Boutté, “Speed does not go into a slump.” And she has adopted that policy within her program.

“I try to recruit speed, so we can be aggressive on the bases, and have good athletes at the plate and in the field,” Pineda-Boutté added.

## RECRUITING PHILOSOPHY

Washington University is a world-renowned institution that attracts students from all 50 states and over 110 countries. With almost 7,000 full-time undergraduate students, Washington University has the academic resources and extracurricular opportunities of a larger university with the friendliness and personal attention of a small college community.

And Pineda-Boutté has taken advantage of this in her recruiting, as she feels a student-athlete can get the best of both aspects at Washington University.

“You can get the best of both worlds here at Washington University – quality education and an overall great experience at the Division III level,” Pineda-Boutté said.

Pineda-Boutté encourages her student-athletes to stay active in the off-season, including completing a strength and conditioning program. But she also realizes that the off-season is a time for student-athletes to balance out their high academic workload and complete internships.

“Student-athletes at Washington University are encouraged to get involved during the off-season, whether it’s doing community service, joining a sorority, or competing in intramurals,” Pineda-Boutté added.

Recruiting was a challenge at first for Pineda-Boutté, who is just the second coach in Washington University program history. Coming from a Division I background where athletic scholarships were offered, Pineda-Boutté had to quickly adjust to not having that option.

“It was definitely an adjustment my first year,” Pineda-Boutté said. “But what makes my job easier is that our academics here at Washington University are arguably the best in the country. That makes my job of selling the school much easier, even though we do not have athletic scholarships.”

Pineda-Boutté leaned on a softball few coaches within the Division III community – Central’s George Wares and Emory’s Penny Siqueiros – and Washington University men’s basketball coach Mark Edwards, women’s basketball coach Nancy Fahey and volleyball coach Rich Luenemann for guidance early in her career and making the adjustment to Division III.

Below is an excerpt from a piece that Pineda-Boutté wrote on her recruiting philosophy for the NFCA Newspaper.

Recruiting at the Division III level has its pros and cons just like any other collegiate level. Many would consider not being able to offer athletic scholarships a challenge when recruiting potential student-athletes, but at the Division III level there are numerous advantages for recruits to consider.

Division III athletics offers the “best of both worlds.” It offers student athletes an opportunity to play softball at a competitive level while excelling academically. Many Division III athletes are recruited by Division I or II institutions but choose the Division III route because they would like to focus on academics, have a well rounded college experience, and prepare themselves for their professional careers upon graduation.

The Division III well-rounded experience mainly occurs during the non-traditional softball season (fall). During the non-traditional season, per NCAA rules, Division III athletes are limited to no more

than five weeks of practice with a total of 16 practice opportunities, one of them being a play date. Upon completion of the non-traditional season, Division III coaches are not allowed to have any softball related practices or activities.

This allows student athletes to get involved in various other activities on campus such as participating in sororities, intramural sports, getting involved in academic clubs, playing another varsity sport, or even studying abroad. Division I and II coaches are able to have more softball contact during the non-traditional season, leaving little time for extracurricular activities for the student athlete.

I have been afforded the opportunity to play and coach at Division I, II, and III levels and from my experiences, Division III athletes are as competitive, driven, and dedicated as Division I and II athletes. Since there are no athletic scholarships at the Division III level, athletes are not obligated by athletic scholarships to compete; they are competing because they truly love the game of softball!

## PARENTHOOD

Pineda-Boutté learned early on in her coaching career that it was going to be difficult to raise a family while working at a Division I school. That is what led her to Division III.

“Being at Division III has allowed me to have a work-life balance, and to be a mom,” said Pineda-Boutté, who is married to Shawn Boutté. The couple has one daughter, Lorin, who just turned five years old.

“I was a first-time mom and did not know what to expect, from the challenges parenthood would bring. It’s definitely a challenge at any level – Division I, II or III – but the tools are all there to make it work, especially at Division III.”

The Division I recruiting calendar is from August 1-November 24, and from January 2-July 31. Each institution is limited to 50 evaluation days. At Division III, schools do not have the supported budget that is sustained by a Division I program for recruiting.

Division I and Division III also have a different rule for individual sessions. Division I softball programs are also allowed individual sessions throughout the year, while that is not the case at Division III.

“It would be nice to have contact past September with our student-athletes, but it allows me to get ahead on my recruiting and still be home for dinner each night,” said Pineda-Boutté.

## BEARS HONORED FOR WORK IN THE CLASSROOM

Washington University was recognized by the NFCA for having the highest grade-point average among all NCAA Division III teams for the 2009-10 academic year. The Bears posted a cumulative GPA of 3.549 last year, to take the top spot among all Division III programs.

“Those young ladies demonstrated the uncanny ability to achieve academic excellence while navigating the rigorous academic demands placed on students here at Washington University,” said Pineda-Boutté. “Whether they are in the classroom or on the softball diamond, their work ethic is tremendous.

I am very proud of all the young ladies that have been a part of this softball program and their commitment to academic excellence while here at Washington University. The award is a true testament to the level of excellence these young women have set for themselves.”

In addition to the team award, student-athletes who achieved a 3.50 GPA during the last academic year were named Girls Got Game/NFCA Scholar-Athletes.

Eight student-athletes from Washington University earned the Girls Got Game/NFCA Scholar-Athlete Award: Ashley Janssen, Caitlyn Hoffman, Carter Malouf, Claire Voris, Kathy Peter, Megan Fieser, Rebecca Salisbury and Sondra Polonsky.

## 2011 SEASON PREVIEW

Washington University returns five starters and 12 letterwinners from a year ago, when the Bears posted a 37-11 overall record

## Washington University in St. Louis

and a third-place finish at the NCAA Division III Central Regional. The 37 wins tied for the second most in school history, and the Bears also placed second in the University Athletic Association (UAA) with a 5-3 mark.

"Last season was one of the most enjoyable seasons I have had as a coach. Our senior leadership was strong, and our team had great chemistry," Pineda-Boutté said.

Pineda-Boutté will lean on three seniors who will lead the Bears into the 2011 season – Voris, Ally Berenter and Antonia Ferguson.

"It's nice to see the journey they have taken and hard to imagine they are already seniors," said Pineda-Boutté.

Voris returns for her final year on the Danforth Campus. Playing third base when not in the circle, she led a group of five Bears last season on the NFCA All-Midwest Region Team.

Voris, the 2009 and 2010 UAA Most Valuable Player, posted a 21-7 overall record and a 1.97 earned run average in 26 starts for the Bears. She struck out a conference-best 222 batters in 181 1/3 innings pitched, while holding opponents to a .218 batting average. Voris also had a career season at the plate, batting .388 with five home runs and 27 RBI.

"Having a dominant pitcher like Claire on your staff puts you at an advantage," Pineda-Boutté said. "As a senior on this team, I expect her to not only lead from the circle but lead in the dugout."

Pineda-Boutté will also look to junior Olivia Cook to split time on the mound and at third base. She posted a 12-4 record in 19 starts on the mound last season with a team-best 1.76 earned run average. Sophomore pitcher Kathy Peter saw limited time in the circle as a rookie, recording a 4-0 record with a 2.19 ERA in 38 1/3 innings pitched.

A pair of all-Region selections also return in Berenter and junior infielder Corissa Santos. Berenter started 47 games a year ago – 23 games at third base and 27 games as the designated player – and was selected as the first-team utility player. She hit .356 with nine doubles, nine home runs and 37 RBI in 2010.

Santos will anchor the Bears' infield at shortstop in 2011 after starting 45 games - 33 at second base, 10 in right field and one each at shortstop and third base - a year ago. She hit .407 with three home runs and 33 RBI, and was second on the team in on-base percentage (.469). A first-team all-UAA selection, she also was tied for the lead in Division III with 20 doubles.

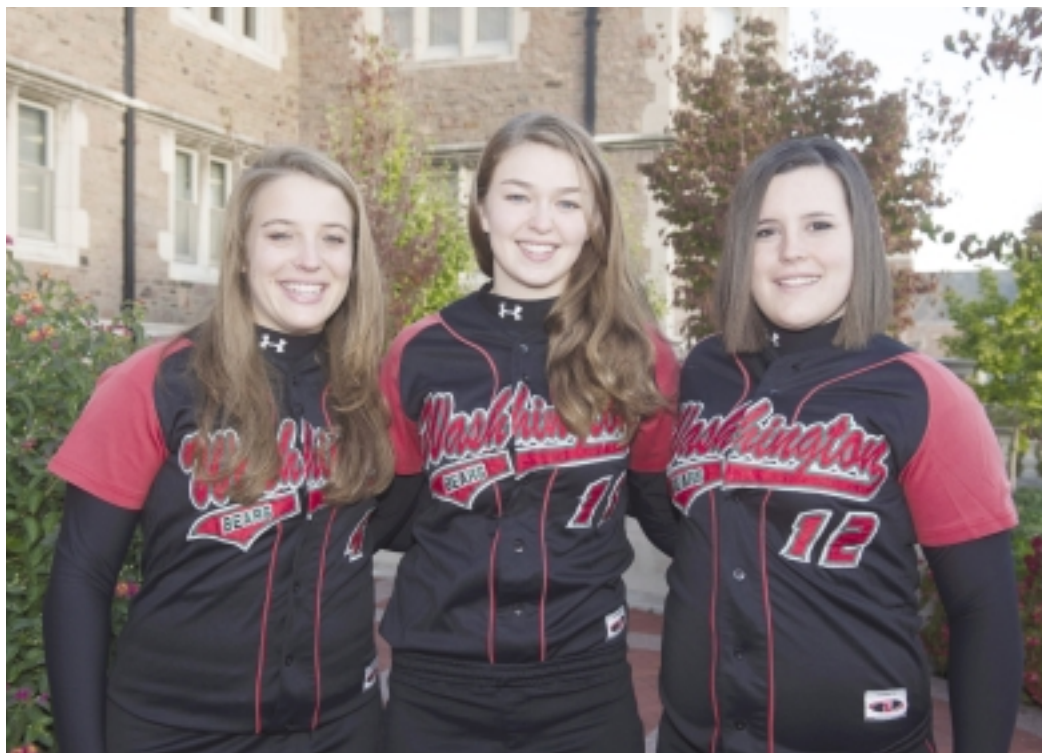
"There is no substitute for game experience," Pineda-Boutté said. "When they are comfortable playing in a game situation, and dealing with a season of ups and downs, that's only beneficial to the team dynamics."

Sophomore outfielder Ashley Janssen came on late in the

season and earned NCAA Division III Central Region all-Tournament team honors after hitting .364 with one home run and four RBI in five postseason games. Janssen started 27 games for the Bears in her rookie season batting .304 in just 69 plate appearances.

Junior outfielder Alyssa Abramowski started 44 games in the outfield for the Bears a season ago and hit .244 with one home run and 11 RBI. Abramowski has started 84 career games, and will be the most experienced outfielder for the Bears in 2011.

The Bears must replace four starters from a year ago, and Pineda-Boutté will look to sophomore catcher/outfielder Sondra Polonsky (.218, five RBI, 22 starts), junior infielder Rebecca Salisbury (.143,



five RBI, 16 starts) and sophomore infielder/catcher Alex Fjeldheim (.143) to help fill the void.

In addition, Pineda-Boutté has two other returnees and four newcomers who will also challenge for playing time: Ferguson, sophomore infielder Claire Downs, sophomore catcher/infielder Hilary Stepansky, freshman catcher Claire Henkel, freshman outfielder Maggie Mullen and freshman pitcher/infielder Kelsey Neal.

"We have our work cut out for us, replacing those four starters," said Pineda-Boutté. "But this does present an opportunity, though, for our younger players."

The Bears open the season with two games at Rhodes College on Feb. 27, followed by three games at Hendrix College on March 5-6. This will serve as a good pre-season test for Pineda-Boutté and the Bears, as they prepare for the UAA Championship, held March 10-14 in Altamonte Springs, Fla.

Washington University was denied its seventh-straight UAA Championship a year ago, and Pineda-Boutté knows this year will be a challenge again.

"It's a challenge to be at the top of our game for our conference tournament so early in the season," Pineda-Boutté said. "The competition at the UAA Championship has improved each year, and we always go down there with the same goal in mind, to win a conference championship."