

# Winona State University

## *Reaching New Heights in Minnesota*

Courtesy of Winona State University Sports Information Office;

Photo credit: Winona State University Athletic Department Staff

**W**INONA, MN: Although it is not a varsity athletic program at most colleges and universities, mountain climbing is something similar to what a lot of collegiate athletes and coaches are active in. Each year players and coaches try to reach heights they have never reached before. Some reach those heights, while others fail to reach their objectives. This holds true for the head softball coach at Winona State University, Greg Jones and his players, although they have been more successful than not.

Jones is now in his tenth season of trying to take the WSU softball program to heights it has never reached before. Jones and the Warriors have set their sites to heights they wanted to reach and have continued to climb higher and higher. In the 2008-2009 season the Warriors nearly reached the peak of collegiate softball on a NCAA Division II level, a national championship. But as most coaches, and probably most mountain climbers will tell you, you will need to take many small steps before reaching the top of the peak you are after.

The Warriors have taken many of those small steps and in '08-'09' took the step into the NCAA Division II Softball World Series (a round of eight regional champions in a final double-elimination tournament) and in their first World Series appearance the Warriors were very successful, winning one of three games and only a matter of inches prevented them from taking that one final step to a national championship.

Although the last game the Warriors played in the World Series was disappointing, Jones would be the first to say that you should never look back. That you need to keep looking forward. That what is in the past is in the past and the next step is to keep moving on.

To keep moving forward is something Jones has been doing during his coaching career at Winona State. Coming into the 2009-10 season Jones compiles a record most can only hope to reach, as the Warriors have played 512 games under Jones' tutelage and totaled a 365-143-4 record with an impressive .717 winning percentage.

The success of the Warriors under Jones has covered the entire map of play. Jones is 125-28 (.817) in Northern Sun Intercollegiate Conference play. His teams have won outright or shared three regular-season conference championships and have come away with three conference tournament championships, including the two past seasons. And in his quest to keep moving forward, Jones has led his charges to five NCAA regional tournaments including the past three consecutive seasons and five times out the past seven seasons.

No Winona State softball teams have had more success in the postseason than the teams guided by Jones. Before Jones the Winona State softball program had little prominence on the national postseason level. Although Winona State played in the inaugural AIAW (Association of Intercollegiate Athletics for Women) tournament in the 1973-74 season, the only other time Winona State reached the national tournament was in the 1982-83 season and the NAIA (National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics) tournament.

With successful programs there is always the eternal question - What makes a successful program? The coach or the players? The answer is probably a combination of both. A coach who can create a mixture that allows players to have a chemistry that makes the program bloom and prosper with consistency.

Over the years Jones has been able to brew a very consistent program not just in winning, but in individual performances. In the ten year's Jones has been the WSU head coach, his teams have averaged .295 hitting, come up with 5.2 runs per game, fielded at a rate of .956, allowed only 2.5 runs per game and totaled an 1.85 earned run average.



Winona State University head coach Greg Jones holds up the Super Region 3 championships trophy after the Warriors earned the right to play in the NCAA Division II World Series.



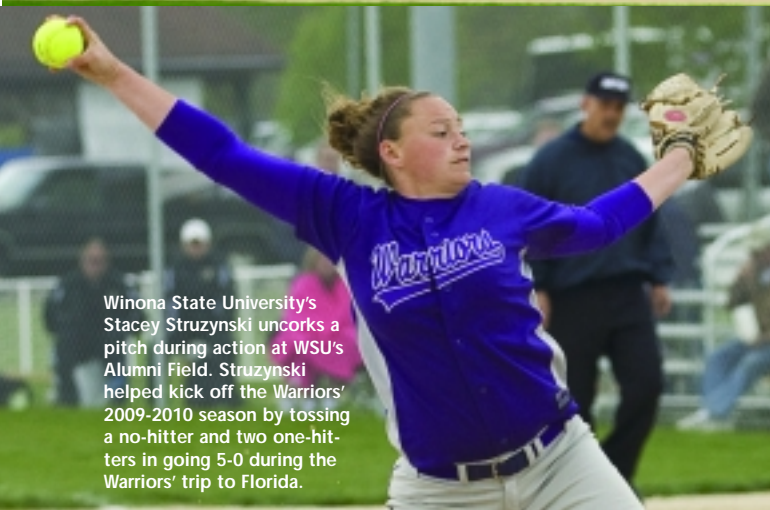
Winona State University head coach Greg Jones waves around Callie Givens in the Warriors Super Region 3 game with Mesa State College, CO.

All that has led to an average of 40.6 wins per year.

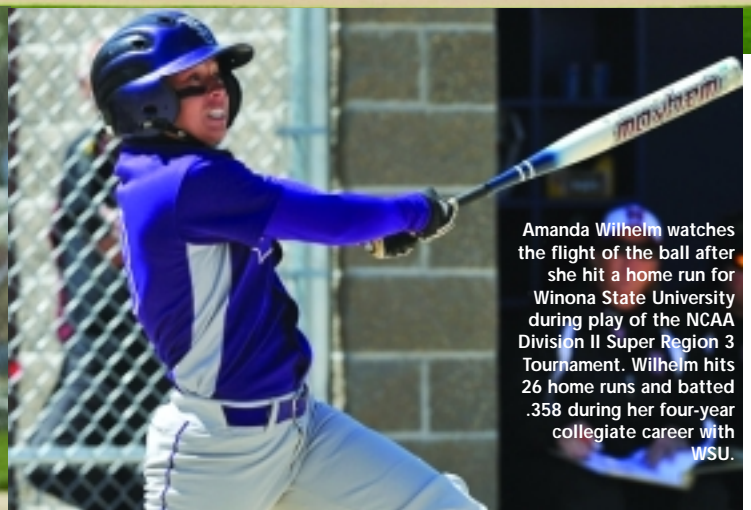
Individually Jones' players have not been a fly-by-night group. WSU records show that Jones alumni are second (Sarah Carlson (03-06), .386), third (Kari Webers (00-03), 3.84), sixth (Amanda Wilhelm (06-09), .358) and seventh (Terra Halron (06-09), .351) on the program's all-time hitting standings (It



A panoramic view of Winona, MN and Alumni Field during the playing of the national anthem of Game Two to the NCAA Division II Super Region 3 Tournament.



Winona State University's Stacey Struzynski uncorks a pitch during action at WSU's Alumni Field. Struzynski helped kick off the Warriors' 2009-2010 season by tossing a no-hitter and two one-hitters in going 5-0 during the Warriors' trip to Florida.



Amanda Wilhelm watches the flight of the ball after she hit a home run for Winona State University during play of the NCAA Division II Super Region 3 Tournament. Wilhelm hits 26 home runs and batted .358 during her four-year collegiate career with WSU.

should come as no surprise that all of those players earned All-America status). And currently there are two Jones players who rank in the top ten -- Kalya Lewis (.381) at No. 4, who earned All-America status in the '08-'09 season, and Kathy Crudo (.337) at No. 10.

Pitching has also been a successful individual point for Jones teams. Mound artists Elissa Wisniewski (03-06), 60-16, .789; Jenny Stannis (04-07), 68-28, .708; Stephanie Fritch (01-04), 50-27, .658 and Kristen Fossell (05-08), 47-21, .701 were all instrumental in the development of the softball program under Jones.

With all that in mind, there is no wonder how this year the Warriors got off to one of its most successful season starts ever. The Warriors began the season with a preseason ranking of No. 5, a spot that matched where they finished in last year's NCAA II World Series, and posted victories in all ten of the games they played in their southern swing to Florida.

Pitching highlighted that impressive start, as the SU three-pitcher staff came up with two no-hitters, three one-hitters, one two-hitter and one three-hitter and allowed only 26 hits and 9 runs in 58 innings of work for the ten games. Junior, right-han-

der, Stacey Struzynski keyed the pitching efforts for the Warriors, tossing a no-hitter against No. 16 Bloomsberg, PA, which came after her one-hitter against No. 9 Kutztown, PA.

Struzynski started the WSU season with a one-hitter against Dominican, NY and finished the Florida trip with a 5-0 record.

Fellow, junior, right-handed, hurler, Courtney Strang went 4-0 to start the season and in the process threw a one-hitter against Grand Valley State, MI, came up with a two-hitter against Assumption, MA and notched her third collegiate no-hit gem in a 9-0 win over Belmont Abbey, NC.

All that pitching was supported by a potent offense that went on to outscore WSU opposition 62-9 and recorded a team batting average of .382 that was boosted by the .591 hitting from, sophomore, Samantha Hildebrandt, who banged out 13 hits in 22 at bats, scored 11 runs and drove in eight runs. In all Hildebrandt finished with a slugging percentage of 1.136 with 25 total bases that included two each doubles, triples and home runs. With that direction eight Warrior batters totaled ten or more hits and six drove in between eight and six runs by the end of the southern trip.

Winona State University teammates get ready to mob Mollie Bjelland after she hit a home run in the Super Region 3 Tournament held in Winona, MN. Bjelland's round tripper led to a WSU win and a berth for the Warriors to the NCAA Division II World Series.

