

Peace College Makes Wright Choice

Written by Mike Kelly
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Peace College softball coach Charlie Dobbins has been developing players at the collegiate level for a long time.

During his 13-year stay at the Division III school in Raleigh, Dobbins has done his share of recruiting and finding the right players that will fit into his program. His latest choice is probably one of the best he's ever made. On Thursday afternoon, Dobbins landed Watauga High senior Tori Wright, who made it official by signing her national letter of intent to study veterinary medicine and play softball at Peace College next fall.

"I feel I've landed a very good player," Dobbins said. "I saw her play in a showcase down in Charlotte, and I was very impressed with her bat. She has power, and she has a lot of talent. We're in need of a first baseman, and with our facility (190 feet down the right-and left-field lines), I think Tori brings a lot to us with her power."

Wright played for Team TFS 18 North Carolina last summer out of Raleigh. So, for a small-town girl, Wright has some knowledge about the big city. But she admits, even though she's extremely pleased with her choice, she's also pretty nervous about the move.

"I'm nervous about moving to the big city," she said. "I've never been away from home. I just wanted to make sure that I found a school where I fit in well. And I really like the atmosphere at Peace College. Coach Dobbins is super nice and all the girls seemed to take me in. And being away from home (a three-hour drive), I just want to be comfortable with my situation and the people I was going to be around."

Peace College is a liberal arts women's college and a member of the USA South Athletic Conference. And Dobbins admits, the recruiting trail isn't easy, especially at the Division III level. But every year he's managed to find the right athletes for his program.

"We may be a small school, but I have some great resources around me," he said. "I sell the Triangle, and you have three big schools in the region (North Carolina, North Carolina State and Duke), so you can root for blue, dark blue or red. The choice is there. And it's a beautiful area with a lot of college students living in it. Also, I have an indoor facility that allows our women to work on their game during the winter months.

"And that's been a huge benefit, especially for a school our size (the school has a total undergraduate enrollment of 732 students). When it's 30 degrees outside, some teams are hindered and can't workout. But our women have the advantage of going indoors. The facility has been a big blessing for our program."

And while Wright is excited about the opportunity of playing college softball, her main focus is academics. Her goal is to become a veterinarian, and to start her own business one day here in the High Country.

"I may be going to Raleigh," Wright said. "But I'm coming back to the mountains. This is my home, and I want to start up my own practice here some day. They have a very good biology program at Peace, and they have connections with (North Carolina) State, which has a very good veterinary program. As for playing softball, yes, I'm excited about it. They have a real young team this season. But I just want to get down there and work hard and earn my way into the lineup."

And according to first-year coach Stephanie Long of the Pioneers, Wright shouldn't have any

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problems blending right in at Peace College.

"She always trying to make herself better," Long said. "She'll come to practice and say 'Coach, I took 400 cuts over the weekend. What do you think about that?' She's always asking questions, and she's always willing to put in the extra effort. And Charlie is an excellent coach. He'll do a great job preparing Tori. He'll get her ready to play at that level."

But Wright, who savors the moment, is just ready to enjoy the rest of her senior year at Watauga.

"I'm excited and disappointed at the same time," she said. "But I'm really glad it's over. It was great going to the tournaments and having the coaches watch me play. It was a lot of fun. But I've found a school that fit me, and a coach that fit me, and I'm happy about it."