Untititled Softball Story

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It's not fair. It's just not fair. How could it be? First you're standing at the plate. Elbows cocked. Menacing scowl. Primed to knock the life out the big yellow softball about to be thrown in your direction. And then, zip, zip, zip. Back to the dugout to cheer on a teammate that's about to have the same thing happen to her. That three minutes you just stood at the plate could've been better put to use doing, let's see, almost anything else. What just happened? Chances are, you just got a rise ball, an exploding curve and a sea-sick inducing change-up hurled at you by either MT left hander Jen Martinez or her right handed counter part Stayc Preator, perhaps one of the best one-two combinations to ever don the blue and white. "I guess I'm pretty comfortable with the change-up," says Martinez, who last season was named OVC Pitcher of the Year and is the only player in the history of the OVC to be named Pitcher of the Year for two straight seasons. "But then on good days, my curve works really well too." For Martinez there have been a lot of those good days this season. Earlier in the year there was a stretch of 30 innings in which she didn't allow a run. And, oh yeah, Preator has done that as well not mention hurling the first perfect game in school history in the same game in which Martinez hit her first career homerun. Both players also have 19 shutouts between them and both could quite conceivably break the record of 11 shutouts, set by Jacklyn Story in 1997. Of course, when either pitcher needs a break, senior Amanda Kendall keeps the fires stoked, recording a 5-1 record this season with 36 K's over 40 and two-thirds innings of work. And then there are the strikeouts and ERA numbers. Martinez and Preator have combined to fan an astonishing 287 batters this season and keep their ERA at 1.30 or below. "But," say the two almost simultaneously, "Neither one of us really look at the numbers like that. It's important for the game and it keeps the runs down. But we're just proud of the way everyone is doing right now." The Lady Raiders currently stand at 33-18 on the season and have tallied a home record of 15-4. But make no mistake. It's not just pitching that has led to the success of this year's Lady Raider squad. Offense has had quite the impact as well. And so, not missing a beat, Martinez has also taken over the role as the team's offensive weapon of choice. She currently leads her squad in batting average at .359 and is second in RBI production with 29. "That's probably been one of the most exciting things for me this year," Martinez says, "is

that I've gotten to hit." Although not necessarily known for her power, Martinez recorded her first round tripper on that career day for both players in the win over Austin Peay. "We were just out warming up before the game," explained Preator. "And we were talking about home runs. And Jen says 'I just don't have a home run swing'. Then she stepped up to the plate right after that and knocked one out." As for the memories the pair of aces has about the season, the home run stands out for both. "That was probably my most memorable moment of this season," says Martinez. "And it was probably the most memorable moment for me too," says Preator, "because it was so great for her." There must've been something to the Beech Boys tune, "California Girls." Martinez and Preator, hailing from Fairfield and San Diego respectively, lead a contingent of Lady Raider California natives that include Steffi Silva, Ashlie Way, Lindsay Azevedo, Kristina Hieb and Lisa Sherman. "We're both really comfortable here," explain the two pitchers. "When you smile at somebody here, they don't think you're odd. The people are really nice." Of course the niceties take a back seat when the pair hit the softball diamond. With two weeks remaining in the regular season, both pitchers are hoping to put their squad in position for a post-season berth. "We just want to come out and show the rest of the Sunbelt what we can do," says Preator. "We want people to remember what they thought of us, the first time they heard of us and we want them to think they were wrong. We can do anything any other team in the conference can do. Even better." As far as the pitching strategy is concerned, Martinez has a simple explanation: "We both just go out and find the hitter's weakness and make it weaker." Ranked 18th in the nation in pitching, the Lady Raider hurlers will face FIU this weekend in a four-game conference series at Lady Raider Field.

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