

April Alumni Appreciation: Ashlie Way

Former Blue Raider displays unique passion for softball

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*Editor's note: This is the first story of a three-part weekly series on former Blue Raider softball players entitled "April Alumni Appreciation." **Photo***

Gallery Some people love doing something so much that they simply cannot give it up. Whether it is playing a sport, teaching a class or operating a restaurant, their life just does not seem complete without tapping into their particular passion. In the case of former Blue Raider softball player Ashlie Way, the love was for softball. A softball and soccer player while growing up, Way came to Middle Tennessee all the way from San Marcos, Calif. "I originally had many scholarship offers to play either softball or soccer," she said. "But by the end of my senior year of high school, colleges were pulling their offers and I was left with only a

few partial scholarship offers." Still undecided on her college destination after graduating from La Costa Canyon High School, she continued playing in softball tournaments across the country. It was at one of these tournaments that Way finally was presented with an opportunity she could not turn down. "I was playing in a tournament in Colorado over the Fourth of July weekend," she said. "I knew Middle Tennessee pitcher Courtney Wallace, and she convinced Coach Karen Green to come see me play. I ended up having a great day while she was there – going something like 9-for-10 at the plate." The performance was all Green needed to see as she proceeded to offer Way a full scholarship. And with the start of school just one month away, the California native was forced to make a quick decision. "I was extremely close to my family," she said. "It was not an easy decision to leave home, but it was an offer I could not pass up." Designated to play a utility role for the Blue Raiders, Way played in 20 games in 1999, collecting nine hits and six RBIs at the plate. But it was her defensive skills that made her stand out as she recorded 118 putouts and 14 assists at first base without committing a single error during her freshman campaign. "I was extremely flexible while I



was growing up," she said. "I started playing first base my sophomore year in high school. Since that point, I never doubted my ability to play first base." The season would not come without cost, however, as Way was hit with a serious knee injury. "One of my teammates ran into me from behind while at practice one day," she said. "I tore every ligament in my knee." Originally expected to miss 14 months following the season, the defensive standout ended up returning to the field just eight months later. Still recovering from her injury, she played in 10 games and hit .412 with two home runs and three RBIs for the 2000 squad that won the Ohio Valley Conference and advanced to the NCAA Tournament. "We were very good in 2000," she said. "We left a legacy of winning the conference championship in our last season in the OVC. We went to the NCAA Regionals in Arizona. We left with no wins, but it was an amazing experience and we gained a new found respect for our sport. We went the furthest of any team in school history." After playing with a button in her knee as a sophomore, Way continued to play through pain as a junior. Despite struggling at the plate, she was still able to contribute at first base defensively. She did, however, produce one very memorable moment at the plate. "In a game against East Carolina at the Georgia Tech Buzz Classic, I was sent up to bat when we were down by one run at the end of the game," said Way. "I fouled off about five pitches and then hit a home run to win the game. It was an absolutely crazy moment." Unfortunately, Way's knee continued to give her problems as the injury never completely healed. While it would have been easy for her to give the game up, she persisted through the remainder of her time in Murfreesboro. "I actually played with a torn meniscus during my last two seasons," she said. "It was very painful but I was determined to help the team as much as I could." Way concluded her career in 2002 by playing in 49 games mostly as a defensive specialist. She posted a .976 fielding percentage on a team that struggled under first-year head coach Cindy Connelley. In all, Way wound up having three surgeries during her four years at Middle Tennessee. Even with all adversity she was forced to deal with, however, she has no regrets. "I am thankful to Coach Karen Green for taking a chance on me and awarding me a scholarship which allowed me to be able to leave school debt-free," she said. "During my time at Middle Tennessee, I learned many great lessons including responsibility, discipline and how to align your priorities." Way graduated from Middle Tennessee with a degree in interdisciplinary studies. After teaching for a short time, she now works for a telecommunications company while living in the Murfreesboro area. Through it all, though, Way has yet to let go of her one true love of softball as she currently plays in slow-pitch leagues and travels with a Tennessee women's slow pitch travel team. "I cannot give up playing softball," she said. "It is in my blood."

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