

Van Gennip makes transition to U.S.

Junior brings work ethic, comical nature to softball team

BY JOE BELL
Staff Reporter

Richelle van Gennip stood in the pitcher's circle during the first inning of the Bulldog's game against Northwest Missouri State University on April 17. Van Gennip had just induced a weak pop-out for the first out of the inning. She threw a pitch to the second batter who laced a hit down the left-field foul line. Van Gennip waited for the umpire to call the ball foul, but the umpire never did and the runner reached third base.

"The girls all said that [the ball] was foul," head coach Erin Brown said. "And then the umpire we had, which was horrible, ... said it was fair. [Van Gennip] was on the mound and she said, 'Dat ball was dis far foul!' So, when she gets fired up and yells, her accent shows through just a little bit more. All the girls were laughing."

Van Gennip, a native of the Netherlands, said she still vividly remembered that at-bat.

"I mean, [the ball] was so far foul," van Gennip said. "That's all I can say. The ump did not call it. ... After that, [the runner] didn't end up scoring, so it wasn't a big deal, but I was just so pissed."

Van Gennip brings an element of humor to the softball team, but make no mistake, softball is a serious game to her. During her first year at Truman, van Gennip led the Bulldogs in ERA (3.44), innings pitched (114.0), strikeouts (87), and she had the sixth best strikeouts-per-game ratio in the conference (5.34).

But getting from the Netherlands to the top of the Bulldog rotation was a long and winding road for van Gennip.

Van Gennip grew up in Oldenzaal, Netherlands, near the western border of Germany. She took the first steps on the road to playing at Truman when she was eight years old. A girl in van Gennip's neighborhood played softball, and one day she invited van Gennip to come with her to practice. Van Gennip thoroughly enjoyed the practice and stuck with softball.

The sports landscape of the Netherlands is significantly different than in the United States. Softball does not have the popularity it does in the United States, being eclipsed by more popular sports like soccer, tennis and volleyball. The high schools in the Netherlands also do not have varsity athletic teams, so most sports are clubs.

Van Gennip played on one of these club teams throughout her high school career and was selected to pitch for the

Netherlands Junior National team in the 2007 Junior Women's World Championship. In the tournament, van Gennip led the team in innings pitched (12.1), strikeouts (11) and had the second best ERA of the staff (1.70). But more importantly, van Gennip and the rest of the Dutch team captured seventh place in the tournament, the first time in more than a decade that the Netherlands had placed in the top eight in the tournament.

"[The tournament] was in the Netherlands itself," van Gennip said. "It was 15 minutes away from my home-

town. So, every time we played, we had a really, really big crowd. It was packed every single game. ... It was sad because we lost, but at the end, everyone was really proud of us, too. We got flowers and ... [stuffed] animals from the parents, and they were like, 'We're really proud of you.'"

As van Gennip approached her 18th birthday, she soon had to decide what she was going to do about college. Her parents were friends with Brad Horky, head softball coach at Pittsburg State University, who went over to the Netherlands to play in International Week in van Gennip's hometown. Horky asked if van Gennip had any interest in pitching for him at Pitt State. Van Gennip said she had no intention of taking either the SAT or the ACT to get admitted into Pitt State. Horky then contacted Crowder College, a junior college in Neosho, Mo., and she joined the softball team there.

It was at Crowder where Brown first noticed van Gennip. In fall 2007, the Bulldogs traveled to University of Central Missouri to play in a tournament where they faced some junior colleges, Crowder being one of them. Van Gennip shut Truman down as Crowder won the game, 1-0.

Brown said she was very

impressed by van Gennip during the game and continued to follow her career at Crowder. Brown had van Gennip come to Truman for a visit, and Brown thought that she would make a great addition to the Bulldogs. Van Gennip began her career at Truman this spring.

But the transition from Crowder to Truman was a bit of a rough one for van Gennip. Because van Gennip did not start at Truman until the beginning of this semester, she had to adjust on the fly to Truman life and classes and take care of difficulties

that arose with credit transfers and other inconveniences. On top of that, she had to jump right into her first season of pitching in Div. II.

Van Gennip had a 30.48 ERA through her first three starts of the season and pitched primarily in relief until she resumed starting as conference play began. Brown began to notice that van Gennip was having more success keeping opposing hitters off-balance and consistently pitching better. What Brown noticed was no fluke, as van Gennip posted an ERA of 2.60 in conference play.

"[She] has improved significantly since she first got here, honestly, simply just by [good] work ethic," junior catcher Erica LaCombe said. "Just by her wanting to get better and her wanting to succeed in this conference. ... Basically that's Richelle. She knew what pitches she needed to work on and she knew what pitches were her go-to pitches, and we really worked with them. She really improved."

Van Gennip will live in the Netherlands for the summer. There, she will play with many of the same women that she has played with since she was eight-years-old. The Bulldogs await her return and more outbursts from the mound, as she will be a mainstay in the rotation next season.

The van Gennip files

ERA-3.44

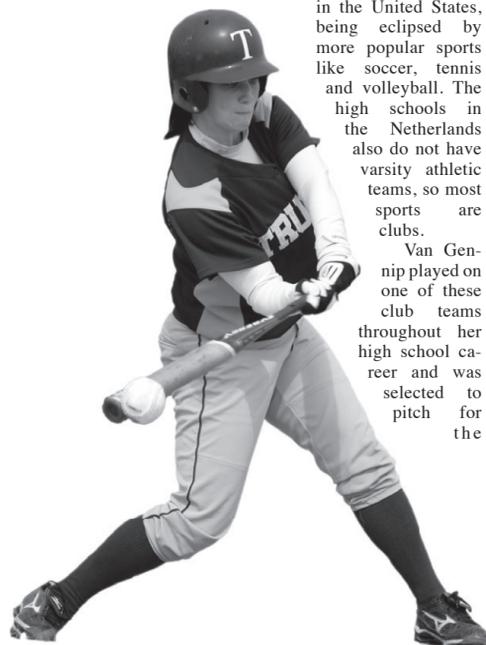
Innings pitched-114.0

Strikeouts-87

all team highs for 2009 season



Brian O'Shaughnessy/Index
Junior Richelle van Gennip stands near the mound during a game this season. Van Gennip led the Bulldogs in earned run average and innings pitched.



Softball ends season with two losses to MSSU

BY JOE BELL
Staff Reporter

The Truman softball team ended its disappointing season with a cancellation.

The Bulldogs were scheduled to play a make-up doubleheader against Lincoln University on Tuesday, but the rain and the Bulldogs' recent losses made playing the games unnecessary. The Bulldogs already had their Senior Day last Friday, and their record kept Truman out of the MIAA conference tournament. The 'Dogs played their final home stand last Friday and Saturday against Pittsburg State University and Missouri Southern State University and were swept in both series.

The 'Dogs finished this season in last place in the conference with the worst MIAA record (3-17) and the

worst overall record (11-34). This is the second time in Erin Brown's three seasons as head coach that the softball team has failed to post a winning record and this year was the worst record any of her teams have posted. This year was the team's worst winning percentage in the 36 year history of the program, and the first time since the 1993 season that the team has failed to win at least four conference games.

"I think that it was a really disappointing season in the sense that we are so much better than our record shows," junior catcher Erica LaCombe said. "We had a lot of talent. It's always a disappointment not to go to a conference tournament. I mean, that's your goal at the beginning of the year. So I don't view this season as a success in any way."

Last Friday, the Bulldogs squared

off against Pitt State in a doubleheader. They lost the first game 9-1 and the second game 2-1. During the first game Truman left 13 runners on base. While the 'Dogs managed to get eight hits in the game, none were for extra bases, and only two came with runners in scoring position.

The next game was a much tighter affair. Freshman pitcher Ashley Rotkovich scattered 10 hits and two runs across 6.2 innings. The Bulldogs again only had two hits with runners in scoring position.

The softball team played two closer games against Missouri Southern State University on Saturday. The Bulldogs lost the first game 4-0 and the second game 2-1. Senior Stephanie Johnson pitched a complete game in the first game, giving up only two earned runs. The Truman offense was unable to pick up Johnson as

they were kept to three hits for the game. Senior Dani Mayer reached third base in the first inning, but that was the closest the Bulldogs came to scoring.

In the second game of the MSSU doubleheader, Rotkovich and junior Richelle van Gennip combined to keep MSSU at six hits and two runs in seven innings, but the offense again was unable to produce enough to reward the pitching. The offense cranked out four hits, but seven strikeouts was enough to keep the Bulldogs from overcoming the small MSSU lead.

These games and the season overall helped reveal to Brown how important luck is to a team.

"[It is] nice to have luck on your side, and I felt like there were some times we had it and a lot of times we didn't have it," Brown said. "But I

feel like the team came every day and fought and had a good attitude and worked hard. There are some returners for next year who got some experience on the field. We [also] have a big class coming in next year."

Brown expects nine freshmen and two possible transfers to join the team next year. Also returning will be the only two juniors on the team, LaCombe and van Gennip. Brown said she expects great leadership from them, plus improvements on both the mound and at the plate for van Gennip.

"I was talking to the girls, and I was like, 'I just really want to push myself,'" van Gennip said. "And I want to focus on my pitches that they are consistently sharp and not just one day they're good and one day they're off. I just really want to work on all my pitches."

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