

PROFILES IN DETERMINATION

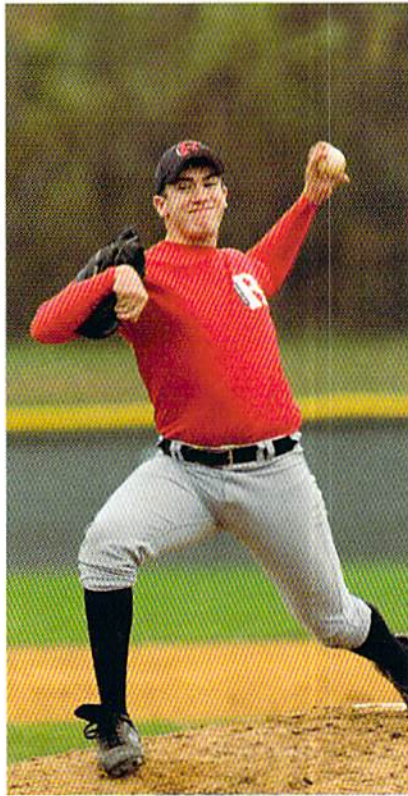
PITCH PERFECT

Bryan Sullivan, a pitcher at Rutgers–Newark, excels despite having the use of only one arm.

Other kids teased him. One coach cut him. Another doubted he would ever pitch for the varsity. Bryan Sullivan, a freshman southpaw for the baseball team at Rutgers–Newark, was born with cerebral palsy, which affects his right arm. At age 6, he asked his father, “Can

I learn to play baseball?” The more he practiced, the better Sullivan became at transferring the glove from his left hand to his right armpit—the technique perfected by former Yankees one-handed pitcher Jim Abbott. Sullivan pitched and played first base in Little League but was cut from his ninth grade prep school team. He transferred to Paramus High School and, for four years, arose every weekday at 4:30 a.m. to work out. In his senior year, he threw a one-hitter, then a no-hitter, and pitched a gem in the league championship title game, finishing the season with a 5–1 record.

Sullivan impressed Scarlet Raiders head coach Mark Rizzi LC’86, who saw him pitch in a summer league game and offered him a spot on the team. Sullivan’s story also caught the attention of the New York Yankees, who introduced him to Abbott and later invited Sullivan, his dad, his uncle, and Rizzi to Old-Timer’s Day at the new Yankee Stadium in July where he met his idol, fellow left-hander Andy Pettitte. A month later, Sullivan returned to the stadium to receive an award for teaching a 7-year-old boy with a similar disability how to catch and throw with one arm—something that’s never stopped him from chasing his dreams.



Bryan Sullivan, a freshman at Rutgers–Newark.

KNEES-WORK REACTION

Even though she’s been hit with serious knee injuries, Jessica Ramirez, a soccer player at Rutgers–Camden, refuses to quit.

Jessica Ramirez occasionally glances knowingly at the trophy she received in high school from the Optimist Club of New Jersey. A talented striker and the captain of her soccer team at Union High School, she won the trophy for remaining upbeat



Jessica Ramirez, a senior at Rutgers–Camden.

after two torn ligaments in her right knee abruptly ended her high school career. Although she was back playing softball that spring and was determined to play soccer in college, several New Jersey Athletic Conference soccer coaches backed off after taking one look at her clunky knee brace. Tom Greenwald, the women’s soccer coach at Rutgers–Camden at the time, never did. But in her first game as a Scarlet Raptor in 2006, she tore up her left knee and faced more months of grueling rehab.

She came back strong in 2007, playing all 23 games, scoring five goals, and scoring in the first postseason win in program history. But in the 2008 preseason, she tore up her left knee again and, despite battling a strained meniscus in her right knee last fall, scored five goals. “My doctors, advisers, friends, parents—you name it—have all had the ‘maybe you should give it up’ conversation with me,” says Ramirez, a senior marketing major. “But I still have something to prove and I’m not quitting.” With one year of soccer eligibility left, Ramirez is considering extending her career by attending Rutgers School of Business–Camden. With enough ice and determination, she has already proved that anything is possible. — Bill Glavin