

# SWINGING FOR THE FENCES

## LOCAL WOMAN HIRED AS JAYS MINOR LEAGUE HITTING COACH

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Jamie Vieira says there is nothing more difficult in sports than hitting a baseball.

In what she calls a game of failure, where even the best succeed only three out of 10 times, the pitcher has all the advantages—knowing what pitch will be thrown, at what speed and its location. The batter has less than a second to react, adjust, swing and make solid contact.

Vieira's new job? Simple. Help some of the best do it better.

The Georgetown native became the first woman to hold a coaching position in the Toronto Blue Jays' organization when she was hired as a minor league hitting coach in January.

As a kid playing softball for the Halton Hills Hawks, Vieira took part in a skills clinic on the Rogers Centre field. But it didn't spark visions of being part of a major league team. Vieira

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— Jamie Vieira

knew how it was — boys played baseball, girls played softball. And there were far fewer options there.

"Maybe you play in college," said Vieira, who played for the Humber Hawks, "but that was the end of the line."

It easily could have been. But Vieira never gave up on being involved in the game. Even when surgery on her spine sidelined her when she was 16, she took on a coaching role with her team.

Her surgery sparked an interest in how the body works, leading Vieira to study kinesiology at the University of Guelph-Humber. She then earned a Master of Science from York University where her thesis focused on the mechanics of a swing.

Vieira continued to coach at Humber after her playing days, but still thought her interests



Jamie Vieira photo

Jamie Vieira is the first ever female coach in the Blue Jays' organization.

would never be more than a sideline until she saw a job posting for the Jays Care Foundation. She got the job and worked with the Girls At-Bat program and set up programs for disadvantaged youth and children with disabilities.

Vieira said it was a great place to work.

"Everyone in the organization was so willing to learn about what you were doing," she said.

Vieira was equally will-

ing to learn. She attended Major League's Baseball's Take the Field event, which helped women find jobs in the sport. She also met with members of the Jays' baseball operations, finding out more about the organization as well as sharing her background.

Last year she gave up the security of a full-time job for an internship in baseball operations, which gave her the opportunity to work with minor league

staff and players. As it came to an end, Vieira began looking for other opportunities, but the Jays, impressed with her contributions, offered her a position.

"I have a passion for making every athlete the best they can be," Vieira said. "I was blown away how welcoming the hitting coaches and players were. They respected my background and I never felt like I was the only woman on

the field."

Fortunately, Vieira said biomechanics hasn't created the same old school/new school divide as analytics.

"I think the way baseball is evolving, everyone is a little more receptive to the technical aspects," she said. "It is being used as a way to make players better, not as a predictor of success, so I think players are leaning into tech with a more open mind."

Vieira is proud to join a growing group of women in baseball that includes Kim Ng (Miami Marlins, the first female general manager in any of the four major sports), Alyssa Nakken (San Francisco Giants, the first female coach on a major league team), Rachel Balkovec (New York Yankees, first female minor league manager), and Sara Goodrum (Milwaukee Brewers, minor league hitting co-ordinator).

Vieira wants young girls to know that opportunities exist that didn't when she was growing up.

"I take a lot of pride in being a good role model. I like to talk to youth softball teams and schools," she said, "just to let them know there can be a future in sports, as an athlete, a coach, a trainer."

There is one other thing Vieira — born a year after the Jays won their last World Series — would like to see in her lifetime.

"I want to help develop the next generation of World Series champions," she said.

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