

Watson looks to shine following disruptions

Jake Mossing

It'd be difficult to find someone who has undergone more change in their athletic career over the last two years than Florida State softball pitcher Danielle Watson. During that length of time, the redshirt-junior transferred to FSU from the University of Louisville, sat out last season due to ACC eligibility rules and watched as the pandemic canceled the majority of the 2020 softball season.

In high school, after leading her team to a state-runner up finish in 2016 with several no-hitters in playoff games, Watson decided to continue her softball career at Louisville. During her freshman year with the Cardinals, Watson put her athletic ability on full display, as she made 36 appearances, finished with a 3.13 Earned Run Average (ERA) and recorded 105 strikeouts.

Just a year later, Watson continued producing. She led the entire Louisville pitching staff with 88 strikeouts and even tossed a complete game in the Cardinals' NCAA regional win over Northwestern.

Nonetheless, Watson decided after the season that it was time to find a better fit, so she entered the transfer portal. But, instead of waiting for coaches from other universities to reach out to her, she decided to take the first step and wrote a letter to the Florida State coaching staff.

Not long after that letter was read by head coach Lonni Alameda, Watson committed to the Seminoles. Over the past year-and-a-half, the redshirt-junior has remained confident in her decision to attend FSU largely thanks to her teammates and the coaching staff.

"The coaches are so involved in our lives not only personally, but also on the field," Watson said. "That makes you feel really cared about as a person. Everyone genuinely cares about you and your future, which is super refreshing and is a really nice thing to be a part of."

Coming into a new athletic program as a transfer can be extremely intimidating. From the way the team practices to how the coaching staff expects the culture to be, there are so many changes that a transfer athlete has to manage. Regardless of this, Watson seems to have quickly found her niche within the team.

"I think the biggest growth of Danielle is her comfort to speak up," Alameda said. "She speaks up a lot more now and she shares more insight from her experiences, which only makes us better."

With ACC eligibility rules barring her from playing in the 2020 season, Watson knew that her time away from the field would be ideal for perfecting her game. However, shortly after the season started, it ended abruptly following COVID-19 shutdowns.

Watson will not be forced to sit on the bench for any more time, so in an odd twist of fate, she only missed out on a few more games compared to her teammates because of COVID-19. After a brief time away from practicing because of the abrupt changes, Watson has had plenty of time to work on the weak spots in her game.

"My mental game has been something that I really needed to work on," Watson said. "I was letting my thoughts and my feelings really affect my pitching. I think that if I could have separated the two my pitching would have been definitely better, so I've been working really hard to improve in that area."

Although there have been many changes and abnormalities that have been thrown her way in the recent past, Watson stays focused on the looming 2021 season. With so much uncertainty because of the pandemic, a schedule for the Seminoles has not been finalized yet, but will likely come out soon as the season typically starts in early February.

Watson's coaches and teammates believe in her ability to perform. After all, during the 2019 season, they watched as she handed them a 2-0 loss while she was still pitching for Louisville.

"I think she's gonna have an incredible season," Alameda said. "She's a highly skilled pitcher but she's also very competitive and has just been a wonderful teammate."