

Young Cougars sweep young Warriors

Written by Tom Fruehling

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The rosters of the Washington and Kennedy softball teams tell a tale.

The Warriors have just two seniors and one junior that play, the Cougars one senior and two juniors.

Both lineups instead are packed with sophomores and freshmen. And with young first-year coaches, their future is bright.

The fact that a University of Northern Iowa assistant coach showed up at Kennedy Tuesday night to watch them play each other shows there's talent aplenty on both sides.

Kennedy swept the doubleheader, 7-3 and 7-4, but what the college scout saw were two pretty well-pitched games with some timely hitting.

The Cougars scored their runs in bunches, which proved to be the difference in both contests.

In the opener, they scored three in the first inning with only one bloop infield hit off losing pitcher Payton Bruner. The scores came on a walk, an error and a sacrifice fly.

"We put ourselves in a difficult position by getting down early," said Washington Coach Erin Jones. "With a young team it makes it hard to come back."

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The Cougars tacked on three more in the sixth, sparked by a two-run double to right-center by ninth grader Sydney Kinney.

“She’s really playing a great game, both in the field at first base and at the plate,” said Kennedy Coach Dan Gratz. “She’s putting the ball in play with hard hits.”

Washington did rally for two unearned runs in the fifth off winning pitcher Jenna Schwartzhoff, a sparkling ninth grader, but it wasn’t enough.

“I didn’t have my best game tonight,” said Warrior sophomore hurler Bruner, who allowed only six hits in the loss. “I didn’t mix my pitches up enough.”

Cougar junior pitcher Andrea McEachran coasted in the nightcap by giving up six hits and got all the scoring she needed with five runs in the second inning.

Sophomore Peyton Baskerville started the onslaught with a double to left-center and freshman Ashley Hamilton finished it with a bases-loaded single that brought in the last two runs.

Hamilton, a sweet fielding shortstop, later had a triple to go along with two doubles in the first game.

“She should do that,” said Gratz. “She’s our best hitter.

“But Peyton (Baskerville), I thought, had a very efficient night, both catching the first game and playing third the next. And she hit the ball, too.”

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The Cougars are 23-11 for the season (14-8 MVC) after having had a losing season a year ago.

"I think we're gelling at just the right time," said Gratz. "Every aspect of our game is coming together.

"We've got a lot of fresh faces out there, but each kid is helping the other out. They're picking each other up."

At 19-14 (11-11 MVC), the Warriors are also improving on last year's losing record.

"I'm very proud of this team," said Jones. "We're young, and we're still learning. But they're working hard. We'll get there."