

## Hawks sweep Cougars with 'small ball'

Written by Tom Fruehling

Monday, 23 June 2014 22:29 - Last Updated Tuesday, 24 June 2014 09:56

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Prairie second baseman Amanda Stecklein is such an old-school ballplayer that she's the only one on her team who bats bare-handed without hitting gloves.

And the way the Hawks swept Kennedy 8-1 and 6-1 Monday night suited her style of play to a T.

They won by playing "small ball" that would have made Ty Cobb proud. Even with all those runs, they hardly hit anything out of the infield.

Instead, they capitalized on Cougar errors, aggressive baserunning, bunts, walks and a whole bunch of grounders they beat out for infield hits.

"That's not the way we usually win," said Stecklein, who scored four times and knocked in two runs on a pair of ground balls. "But we still made it work. Coach (Joe) Yegge always tells us that if we get the bat on the ball and put it in play, good things will happen."

In the opener on Prairie's home diamond, Stecklein put her team up 2-1 in the fourth by beating out a dribbler to second with two outs and bringing home Taylor Moenk. She then stole second and scored herself after infield hits by Amanda "Pip" Pipolo and Halle Lueck.

"We have a lot of speed," Stecklein pointed out. "We're able to dig out a lot of grounders for hits. And we're always looking to take another base."

The Class 5A 10th-ranked Hawks (18-7, 13-3 MVC) put the first game out of reach in the fifth inning by scoring five runs after two outs. They batted around in the inning, and all their runs were scored on the only two hits into the outfield by Lueck and Mallory Jones.

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It was more of the same in the nightcap.

The Hawks scored once in the first inning when Gabi Carter reached base on an error and then came home on a wild pitch. Stecklein and Lueck knocked in two more in the second with infield hits, and each of them scored in the sixth when Prairie broke the game open with three more runs without a hit on three Kennedy errors.

Stecklein started the rally by reaching first on a passed ball after striking out. She eventually came home on an error.

It was that kind of night.

Even Carter, the junior slugger who leads Prairie with seven home runs and 37 RBIs with a .507 batting average, joined the "small ball" attack by bunting her way on base in the fifth inning.

The Hawks also benefitted from strong pitching performances by freshman Natalie Halvorson (now 9-4) and eighth grader Shelby Frederick (9-3).

"They're very young," the veteran Stecklein pointed out, "but they've really matured as the season has gone on."

With the doubleheader loss, Kennedy falls to 14-10 and 7-8 MVC.

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