

Smith's homer lifts KCC at nationals

Written by Christopher Lay
Thursday, 16 May 2013 19:57 -

CLINTON, Miss. - The Kirkwood Community College Eagles earned a hard-fought 3-2 victory over the Illinois Central Cougars in the NJCAA Division II national softball tournament Thursday on the strength of a two-run home run by Lauren Smith.

With the win, the third-ranked Eagles (57-3) remained undefeated and moved into the third round of the winners' bracket and are now one of only four teams that remain undefeated in the double-elimination tournament.

Kirkwood, riding a 50-game winning streak, will face No.2 Phoenix College Friday at noon in the winners bracket semifinals.

The game was significantly closer than the Eagles' first-round game, when they defeated CCBC-Catonsville, 10-1. While they were able to get on the board in the first inning Thursday, scoring did not come easy for the rest of the contest.

Although the Eagles had numerous chances to open up the game and pull ahead of the Cougars, they could not seem to get hits when they needed them most. The Eagles left eight runners in scoring position, including two innings in which they left the bases loaded.

"We've lived and died by the home run this year, and when we got those runners on early, we just kept trying to hit it out of the park and break the game open," said Coach Joe Yegge.

"But towards the end of the season, we've had a lot of close games that we had to battle to win. We learned from those and it helped us today."

The Eagles once again relied on their outstanding freshman pitcher Amber Logemann to keep them in the game. Logemann came into the game leading the nation in strikeouts and did not waste any time adding to her total.

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She recorded three strikeouts in the first inning, although she sandwiched two walks in between the outs.

Logemann struggled a bit in the third, giving up a two-run homer to Dani Smith as Illinois Central took a 2-1 lead. Logemann hit the next batter before settling down and mowing through the remaining Cougars.

By the end of the game, she had recorded 14 strikeouts while giving up five hits and four walks on her way to a complete game.

"Honestly, she struggled a bit early," said Yegge. "But it was great to see her bounce back like that and she really got stronger the last three innings. It's a testament to Amber that she can turn it on when she has to."

When asked about her performance, Logemann said "It felt really good to get those strikeouts against such a great team. Being against competition like this, you have to stay strong."

On the offensive side, Kirkwood third baseman Haylee Krack started the scoring in the first inning when she sent a scorching ground ball down the third base line.

"It was a first-pitch changeup and I kind of pulled it a lot, but it worked," said Krack. "Coach put it on me to get something started and it was so good to get that first run in."

The hit drove in shortstop Leah Duffe, who had reached base after being hit by a pitch by Lori Maloney.

The game remained 1-0 until the third inning, when Dani Smith put Illinois Central on the board with her two-run shot.

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The Cougars kept the lead until the fifth inning, when Kirkwood DH Lauren Smith hit a two-run blast into the parking lot behind the fence in right-center.

"We needed runs and somebody needed to step up," reflected Smith. "I wasn't trying to hit a home run. I just got a good pitch to hit."

Smith's homer saved the day for Kirkwood. "It was great to get some clutch hitting when we needed it," said Yegge.

From there, the Eagles were able to rely on Logemann, who recorded six of her strikeouts in the final three innings. When asked what it was like to play with Logemann, Krack said that "You just get used to those amazing performances.

"If you get anything less than that, you worry that something might be wrong. She's just an incredible player."

When the Eagles take the field on Friday, Yegge will once again send Logemann to the mound.

"We're going with the arm that got us here. As long as she's feeling good, she'll go," he said.

When asked if she would be ready for the next game, Logemann stated that "I'm just going to go up there and hit all my spots and try to not give up any free bases. If our team can keep hitting like we've been, we can beat anybody. We've just got to keep playing together."

NJCAA DII SOFTBALL TOURNAMENT
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(Double-elimination)

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Winners Bracket

Quarterfinals

Kirkwood 3, Illinois Central 2

LSU-Eunice 19, Mercyhurst NE, Pa. 1

Jones County, Miss. 3, Cowley County, Kan. 2

Phoenix, Ariz. 8, Highland, Kan. 6

Losers Bracket

First Round

Kankakee, Ill. 9, Murray St., Okla. 6 (Murray St. eliminated)

Lincoln Land, Ill. 11, Cuyahoga, Ohio 2 (Cuyahoga eliminated)

Kalamazoo Valley, Mich. 10, CCBC-Catonsville, Md. 0 (CCBC-Catonsville eliminated)

Sauk Valley, Ill. 12, Burlington County, NJ 4 (Burlington County eliminated)

Second Round

Illinois Central 5, Lincoln Land 4 (Lincoln Land eliminated)

Highland 14, Kankakee 7 (Kankakee eliminated)

Cowley County 12, Kalamazoo Valley 1 (Kalamazoo Valley eliminated)

Sauk Valley 7, Mercyhurst NE 3 (Mercyhurst NE eliminated)

Friday

Winners Bracket

Semifinals

Kirkwood (57-3) vs. Phoenix, Ariz. (46-15), 12 p.m.

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LSU-Eunice (59-5) vs. Jones County, Miss. (44-8), 12 p.m.

Finals

Kirkwood/Phoenix winner vs. LSU-Eunice/Jones County winner, 4 p.m.

Losers Bracket

Third Round

Highland, Kan. (39-9) vs. Illinois Central (29-14), 12 p.m.

Cowley County, Kan. (52-7) vs. Sauk Valley, Ill. (36-14), 12 p.m.

Quarterfinals

LSU-Eunice/Jones County loser vs. Highland/Illinois Central winner, 2 p.m.

Kirkwood/Phoenix loser vs. Cowley County/Sauk Valley winner, 2 p.m.

Semifinals

Quarterfinal winners, 6 p.m.

Saturday

Losers Bracket Final, 11:30 a.m.

Championship Game 1, 1:30 p.m.

Championship Game 2, 3:30 p.m. (if necessary)