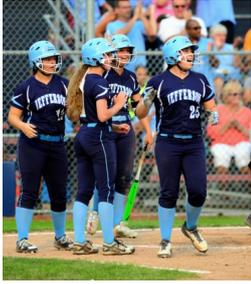


J-Hawks sweep No. 1 Iowa City West

Written by Jim Ecker

Tuesday, 30 June 2015 22:11 - Last Updated Wednesday, 01 July 2015 12:47



It's rarely a good idea to spot the No. 1 team in the state a fat early lead, but Erin Kuba and the Jefferson J-Hawks have learned to spit at adversity.

The fifth-ranked J-Hawks rallied for a pair of impressive victories over top-ranked Iowa City West, 7-4 and 8-4, in a key Mississippi Valley Conference doubleheader Tuesday at Larry Niemeyer Field.

Iowa City West arrived in town with a spotless 18-0 record in the MVC, but Jefferson dropped the Women of Troy to 18-2 and raised their own mark to 17-3, climbing within one game of Iowa City West in the Valley Division standings with six games left.

The J-Hawks trailed 4-0 in the first game and 3-0 in the nightcap, but came roaring back both times.

"It would have been easy to get our daubers down and just say, 'Oh well, they're the No. 1 team in the state, they should beat us.' But they didn't," said Jefferson Coach Brian Erbe.

"We got down twice and we didn't waver. The kids, I'm just so proud of them."

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They were heroes all over the place for Jefferson, perhaps none bigger than Erbe, the gutsy junior third baseman who has overcome thyroid cancer, shoulder surgery for a torn labrum and three concussions during her sports career.

The most recent concussion happened four weeks ago when she ran head-first into a fence trying to catch a foul ball against Xavier.

Give up? Not this kid.

Kuba went 4-for-4 in the second game with two singles, a double, a triple, two RBIs and two runs scored. All told, she went 5-for-6 in the twinbill with a walk, a sacrifice bunt, three RBIs, three runs and her normally sparkling defense at third base.

"We always say, 'Never give up until the game is over,'" Kuba remarked. "You've got to keep going."

She lives that motto to the fullest.

"I felt good. It's nice," she said modestly after her big night, "but I'm not doing it all by myself."

Kuba had lots of help, but helped set the tone.

"I don't want to jinx her, but she's finally healthy and feels good. I think it shows," said Erbe.

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"She's so tough defensively. She's quick, she's got a great first step to her left. She's a student of the game," he said. "She just goes so hard. She doesn't know any different."

Kennedy "Big Cat" Dighton belted a three-run double for Jefferson in the first game to tie the score, 4-4, in the third inning. Taylor Holub followed with an RBI single for a 5-4 lead and the J-Hawks kept going from there for the 7-4 verdict.

Jefferson trailed 4-3 heading into the bottom of the sixth inning of the nightcap before exploding for five runs and the 8-4 victory. Olivia Erickson began the rally with a single, then Lindsey Culver ripped a double after twice failing to bunt.

Erickson scored the tying on a throwing error, making it 4-4, then Tori Brandon belted a double for a 5-4 lead after failing to put down a bunt herself. Maddie Hansen made it 6-4 with an RBI single, then Kuba doubled to put runners at second and third with one out.

Dighton hit a sacrifice fly to make it 7-4, then Hannah Towns collected an RBI single to make it 8-4.

Jefferson pitchers Alyssa Olson and Alissa Good had some rough patches in the circle -- Olson in Game 1 and Good in Game 2 -- but both of them buckled down and pitched complete games.

"Good for Olson and good for Alissa Good," said Erbe. "We got them some runs and then they

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just shut them down."

The J-Hawks posed for pictures with a big broom after sweeping Iowa City West. It was a feel-good moment after two big wins, but most of all the sweep gave Jefferson an extra boost of confidence with the postseason tournament on the horizon.

The ultimate goal is making the Class 5A state tournament in Fort Dodge and doing well once they get there.

"I think this game really proves we can hang," said Kuba. "We can beat them. We can get there."

Jefferson raised its overall record to 25-6 and Iowa City West fell to 24-4.

GAME 1

Iowa City West 103 000 0 - 4 9 3

Jefferson 005 200 x - 7 8 1

W - Olson. L - Harder.

GAME 2

Iowa City West 301 000 0 - 4 7 2

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Jefferson 102 005 x - 8 13 1

W - Good. L - Whitehead.