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Kennedy softball walks off winner

By Jason Olson May 23, 2016



The pitcher-catcher connection is there for eighth-grade pitcher Courtney Kopischke, left, and senior catcher Morgan Garbrecht (Sun Current staff photo by Jason Olson)

Clutch hit by Garbrecht plates Miller

Prince's Let's Go Crazy blared from the speakers outside the dugouts at Kelly Play fields Tuesday after Bloomington Kennedy walked-off Chaska 6-5.

Senior catcher Morgan Garbrecht sent a screaming base hit to left field with two outs. Alexa Miller got under the tag at third base. Once the Hawks threw to second base to tag Garbrecht out, Miller immediately broke for home for the decisive run.

Kennedy coach Ashley Saaranen, who is also the third base coach, said Miller took off no matter what the coach said.

“If there’s anything they’re good at it is base running,” Saaranen said as she emphasizes generating runs any way possible. “We work hard on manufacturing those runs and are proud of that. Other teams it doesn’t click with them yet but for this team, they get it.”

Garbrecht, a senior catcher, admitted she was nervous coming to the plate in that situation.

“I was a little nervous, took a breath, relax, tried to make contact and whatever happens, happens,” Garbrecht explained as she laced an inside pitch down the left field line for a base hit, her fourth of the day. “I just hoped to make contact.”

Kennedy pitcher Courtney Kopischke, an eighth-grader, got the job done and then some. She threw 15 first-pitch strikes leading to seven strike outs and the eventual win.

The pitcher-catcher bond between Kopischke and Garbrecht is strong.

Before the season began, Garbrecht explained to the younger pitcher to trust her. “If you can trust me and be confident in me, I’ll do my best to get you those outs,” Garbrecht said. “Basically, I won’t let you down.”

Kopischke’s only shook off a call on a pitch once or twice and Garbrecht understood why.

Kennedy coach Ashley Saaranen described Garbrecht as a true leader. “She’s the spark behind our team, I think,” Saaranen said. “They both work off each other really well. Having an eighth-grader throw to someone who knows exactly what to call has helped tremendously with everything.

“Our catcher has been really important to our team and to have someone able to call pitches is a blessing.”

Back-and-fourth

Chaska scored twice in the first inning but Garbrecht ended the inning by throwing out the Chaska runner at second base. The Eagles senior catcher led off the second inning with a double to right field before a ground out by Rocky Taylor plated Garbrecht. A passed ball allowed Anika Barland to score from third base to tie the game at 2-2.

Kennedy built a 4-2 lead in the bottom of the third inning as sophomore Ayania Leicht drove in two runs with a single to right field.

Freshman Samantha Ohm was stranded at second base after a two-out double split between the outfielders in the fourth inning.

Chaska pitcher Kenzie Bachmann smashed a home run over the fence in straight-away centerfield to spark a three-run, fifth-inning rally and give the Hawks a 5-4 lead.

Kennedy tied the game up at 5-5 as Leicht took advantage of a passed ball to score from third base. She reached on an infield hit and moved to third base after Garbrecht sent a base hit down the right field line.

Pressing for the go-ahead run in the top of the sixth inning, Chaska forced Kennedy to make some key defensive plays. Garbrecht threw out a base runner trying to swipe second base. Kennedy got out of the inning as the right fielder made a perfect throw to third baseman Rocky Taylor in time to tag out the Hawks base runner.

The Eagles opened the season with a 10-3 win over Minneapolis Southwest before hitting a six-game skid to drop the confidence level.

"This is the most competitive game we've pulled out," Garbrecht said.

"Just making sure they played with their head in the game was really important today," Saaranen said as they've lost focus after letting leads slip away.

Since a three game winning streak, Kennedy was 3-5 and after Wednesday's 10-1 loss to Cooper, the Eagles closed out the regular season with a, 8-12 record overall, 4-10 in Metro West Conference games.

In most of the losses, Saaranen said the mental errors compounded the problems.

Section 3AAA play began May 23 and continues through the June 2 championship game, set to be played at Richfield Middle School.

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