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Eagles hold their own in new softball section

by Jason Olson jason.olson@ecm-inc.com Jun 4, 2018

Kennedy rallies past Wayzata in opener

Kennedy received the No. 5 seed in Section 6AAAA and came into the tournament riding a wave of confidence from three straight emotional wins.



Kennedy sophomore pitcher Courtney Kopischke struck out 14 Wayzata batters in the Eagles 4-2 Section 6AAAA opener. (Sun Current staff photo by John Sherman)

The section is a step up from Class AAA, where the Eagles previously competed against smaller schools, to this spring where the first round opponent was Wayzata followed by top-seeded Hopkins.

“We knew the competition was going to be much tougher,” Eagles coach Jim Leicht said about the move up to the big-school class. “We felt good going into it, not really knowing what to expect from the bigger teams.”

Looking at the opponents, Leicht said the records didn’t mean as much, given the level of competition the entire section plays against during the regular season.

The Eagles opened section play with a 4-2 upset of No. 4 seed Wayzata on Monday, May 21 using a four-run rally in the sixth inning for the comeback win.

Comebacks or big innings isn’t anything new this spring for the Eagles. Leicht explained that the success stems from consistent improvement.

“A lot of it is that our girls are getting better at making corrections at the plate. Instead of changing something for the next at-bat, they make the adjustment for the next pitch,” he said. “They’re getting better at realizing what they are trying to do to us and making those adjustments.

“We talk between innings about how to make those adjustments, too.”

Being a relatively young team, that growth that comes in all aspects of the game, simply by experiencing what it takes to succeed at the varsity level will reward the program in the coming years. Kennedy’s section roster included four eighth-graders and a seventh-grader. “Plus one eighth-grader and one seventh-grader that were hurt and couldn’t play,” Leicht said.



Kennedy right fielder Brinna Kopischke, right, gathers a ground ball during the section opener win over Wayzata.

(Sun Current staff photo by John Sherman)

Sophomore standout pitcher Courtney Kopischke struck out 14 Trojans, allowing four hits and no walks in the complete game.

The big inning opened with a lead-off double from Sammie Ohm who moved up to third base on a sac bunt by Ellie Baker before Megan Fobbe's game-tying single into center field. Two fielding errors and a strikeout brought senior Ayania Leicht to the plate with the bases loaded.

Leicht dropped a base hit into left field to score two runs and gave the Eagles a 3-1 lead followed by a double from Bella Fiero to drive home one more run in the 4-2 win to advance into the winner's bracket.

"Coming in, we didn't completely know the teams we were going against other than they all played really good competition and so the records didn't reflect that," the coach said.

The reward for the win was a meeting against top-seeded Hopkins which held true to form in an 8-1 win over the Eagles on their home field at Hopkins High School on Wednesday, May 23.

The Royals scored three times in the first and again in the second inning to lead 6-1 after two innings. That score stood until late when the home team tacked on two runs late.

Courtney Kopischke was in the lead-off spot in the order and reached on a ground ball into left field and went 3-for-3 on the day. Her sister, Cassie Kopischke, drove in the Eagles pinch runner for the lone run of the game with a double to right field with two outs.

In the circle, Courtney Kopischke gave up seven earned runs on nine hits with five walks and 11 strike outs. Of the 152 pitches she threw over seven innings, 102 were for strikes and she threw first-pitch strikes 22-of-38 times.

Kennedy looked to stay alive in the tournament against Robbinsdale Armstrong, scoring seven times in the final at-bat but came up short 10-8 in the elimination game played Friday afternoon in Hopkins.

The Falcons built a 5-0 lead through four innings and added five more runs to lead 10-1 heading into Kennedy's final half-inning.

Nine different Eagles picked up a hit in the game and began the seventh inning with walks by Brinna Kopischke and eighth-grader Carissa Wheeler who was pinch hitting for Meredith Hanson. Courtney Kopischke not only moved the runners up on a successful bunt single but also reached safely to lead the bases.

A single, error and fielder's choice brought Baker up to the plate with two outs and the bases loaded. She drove in two runs with a line drive single to right field to make it 10-5. RBI singles from Cordelia Ruch and Wheeler continued the rally to make it 10-8 before Hopkins extinguished the hopes of completing the comeback.

When the new section alignments were released, Leicht said few gave Kennedy an opportunity to compete against bigger schools and he turned that into a positive, no pressure situation for his team. "There's no pressure because everybody told us you've got no chance," he said. "And getting here was success enough."

In the end, Leicht said a lack of pitching depth hurt the team, given how many doubleheaders and few days of rest they all experienced in the cramped spring schedule.

Road to sections

Kennedy came into the Section 6AAAA softball tournament riding a three game winning streak that included two wins over crosstown rival Jefferson on May 14 and 15.

The Eagles began the final week of the regular season with a 5-2 win over Jefferson at Kelly Field. Bella Fierro and Cassie Kopischke each had two hits as Sammie Ohm and Fierro drove in two runs each in support of pitcher Courtney Kopischke who struck out eight Jaguars, giving up two unearned runs on two hits and three walks in seven innings. Senior Ayania Leicht had a hit and walk and scored twice as the Eagles jumped to a 3-0 lead in the first inning. Fierro drove in sophomore Cordelia Rush who was running for pitcher Courtney Kopischke who led off with a base hit to left field. Cassie Kopischke made it three singles and a walk to start the game before Jefferson turned a double play only to have Ohm drive in Leicht and Fierro to make it 3-0.

Jefferson answered with a pair of runs in the third inning to make it a 3-2 game Kennedy pushed the lead back to three with a two-out double off Leicht's bat followed by RBI base hits from Fierro and Cassie Kopischke to bring the score up to 5-2.

Courtney Kopischke kept the pressure on the Jaguars batters the next day, throwing a 15-strikeout, one-hit complete game shutout as the Eagles walked off the Dred Scott Field with a 5-0 win.

Ohm, Cassie Kopischke and Leicht each had two hits as Ellie Baker and Cassie Kopischke drove in a pair of RBIs each.

Kennedy spread the offense around a bit more, as Ohm connected on a one-out double to take a 1-0 lead in the top of the second inning. The next inning it was Cassie Kopischke with a two-run single with two outs to build a 3-0 lead. Eighth grader Ellie Baker drove in Leicht and Fierro with a double in the fifth inning to add insurance runs.

Kennedy kept it rolling for a third consecutive day, this time by a 10-2 score over Robbinsdale Cooper in the Metro West Conference finale on May 16.

Courtney Kopischke gave up one run on three hits with 10 strike outs and one walk over five innings. Brinna Kopischke worked the final two innings of relief.

Leicht led the Eagles at the plate going 3-for-5, to highlight Kennedy's offense that generated 14 hits and scored all 10 runs in a monster third inning. Kennedy had 10 hits (two doubles) and four walks, sending 16 batters up to the plate.

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