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Eagles softball shows it belongs after 13-win season

by Jason Olson jason.olson@ecm-inc.com Jun 4, 2019

Kennedy reaches first section final since 1987

After going eight innings in a 1-0 loss to Edina, Kennedy had an opportunity to get revenge in the Section 6AAAA final on May 28 as the two meets met to decide whom would represent the section at state.

To get to that point, the Eagles eliminated Hopkins with a second loss in five days by a 5-2 score earlier on May 28 to set up the championship pairing.



Kennedy senior second baseman Alana Miller digs out a ground ball during the Eagles first win over Hopkins on May 23. She went 3-for-4 during a 5-2 win over Hopkins on May 28 to advance to the Section 6AAAA final.

(Sun Newspapers staff photo by Jason Olson)

The goal going into Tuesday's games at Pamela Park in Edina was to limit junior pitcher Courtney Kopischke's workload against Hopkins to keep her as close to 100 percent to have another shot at the Hornets, the 2018 section champion.

The May 28 final was the first appearance by a Kennedy softball team in that game since 1987.

Kopischke limited the Royals to two runs on four hits while going the distance. She continued to show good control, striking out 11 batters while issuing one walk.

But, the junior pitcher took a pitch to her throwing hand while at bat in the sixth inning.

"She bruised two fingers," Kennedy coach Jim Leicht said which affected her on the rubber against Edina.

Senior second baseman Alana Miller would've gone 3-for-3 at the plate but she was hit by a pitch in the fourth inning. She led off the second inning with a double and came around to give the Eagles a 1-0 lead on a sac fly from Taylor David. Miller was also part of a four-run fifth inning that helped break the game open for Kennedy. She connected for the fourth single in a row to score Brinna Kopischke to make it 5-2.

Kennedy had to defeat Edina twice to earn its first state trip.

The Hornets pounced on the Eagles with a pair of runs in the first inning, made it 3-0 in the third inning before rallying for five runs in the fourth inning to build an insurmountable 8-0 lead.

"We decided to pull [Courtney Kopischke] going into the fourth inning down 3-0," Leicht said. "Edina knew we had to pitch Brinna [Kopischke] for a couple of innings – at least to give Courtney a break – and we had to rely more on our defense."

Edina sophomore pitcher Genevieve Ovsak, a Syracuse recruit, kept the Kennedy bats in check, scattering four hits with five strike outs and no walks on 69 pitches for the complete game win.

Miller hit a single to start the second inning strong and moved up to third base with two outs but couldn't cross home plate.

“The goal for us against her was to put the ball in play and make them make plays in the field,” Leicht said. “We didn’t have a lot of power so we couldn’t rely on the home run so we had to rely on everyone doing their job to get on base and then rely on the person behind you to move you up. We talked about productive outs and they did that all season.”

Three consecutive 1-2-3 innings for the Edina pitcher gave way to another threatening inning for Kennedy in the top of the sixth. Courtney Kopischke reached on a one-out line drive hit to the left fielder who had trouble making the catch. Brinna Kopischke switched spots with her older sister in a fielder’s choice and Bella Fierro moved Brinna up to second base on another well-struck single to center field. Sammy Ohm’s pop out to shortstop ended hopes of a rally in the sixth inning.

Down to their final half-inning, freshman Ellie Baker pounded a hard ground ball into center field but couldn’t come around before the Hornets picked up the final two outs of the game to end the promising season for Kennedy.

“I know we had some graduating seniors play some big roles but our team is still young and we are moving in the right direction and the expectations are going to grow again for next season,” Leicht said. The Eagles went 13-9 on the season and 8-4 in the Metro West Conference. “We had our chances against Edina in the nine-inning 1-0 loss, four double plays, thrown out on a close play at home. There’s a slim difference between a win and loss, one bobble here or a bloop-hit there but we’re going in the right direction.

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