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Hornets make it to state softball tourney again

by John Sherman john.sherman@ecm-inc.com Jun 5, 2019



Sophomore pitcher Genevieve Ovsak of the Edina girls softball team shut out Bloomington Kennedy twice, 1-0 and 8-0, in the Section 6AAAA Tournament.

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Head coach Keith "K.J." Johnson has changed the course of history for the Edina High girls softball program.

Before he came to town, Edina had not been to state in almost 40 years, but that changed last year when the Hornets won their way to state at Caswell Park in North Mankato.

This week they'll make a return trip after winning four straight games in Section 6AAAA at Pamela Park.

While all would agree that Johnson's coaching has brought the Hornets to a new level of accomplishment, it should also be noted that they are currently led by two of the top five players in program history, sophomore pitcher Genevieve Ovsak and senior pitcher and shortstop Molly McHugh. With the experience they gained in last year's championship season, they have come back determined to do even more this spring.

The intersection of these players, as well as a strong supporting cast, launches Edina into the state tourney.

"It feels great to go back," Johnson said. "We know that nothing is going to be given to us in North Mankato. We have to do all the little things that have made us successful. Our attitude for state is: Why not us?"

That sounds good to Ovsak and McHugh.

Ovsak is pitching the best ball of her high school career, and in the section tournament she shut out the runner-up team from Bloomington Kennedy twice, 1-0 in nine innings and 8-0 in the championship game.

In other section games the Hornets defeated Minneapolis Washburn 10-0 and Wayzata 13-7.

"We're doing well and hitting as a team," McHugh said.

McHugh led the way in the win over Wayzata, going four-for-five at the plate with a home run. She also had the game-winning hit with a bases-loaded single in the 1-0 victory over Kennedy.

Kennedy's left-handed pitcher Courtney Kopischke gave Edina trouble in the first matchup with the Eagles, but the second time the Hornets jumped on her for a 2-0 lead in the first inning, and that was all the cushion Ovsak needed.

"She's a really good pitcher," Ovsak said when asked about Kopischke.

Until she delivered the game-winning hit against Kopischke, McHugh had struggled and even had a rare strikeout against the dynamic lefty.

"She had success jamming me inside," McHugh said. "But later, I backed off the plate and gave myself room to hit the inside pitch."

Defense has been the emphasis for Edina all season.

"I have confidence in everyone," Ovsak said.

When the tall sophomore pitches, her defense usually includes Maddie Johnson at catcher, Katie Simon at first base, Abby Jones at second, McHugh at shortstop, Hannah Sundem at third and three of four outfielders - Katie Erickson, Katy Olive Anna Schaidler and Alison May. When McHugh pitches, Olive comes to the infield and takes over at shortstop. Emerson Evans plays some first base and is often the Hornets' designated player.

In her second year as a starter, Olive is one of the team's top hitters. She had a four-hit game and a three-hit game in the section tournament.

"Both Genevieve and Molly are well versed in pressure situations," coach Johnson noted. "When we played Kennedy in the championship game, I told the girls we needed to score early and stay ahead. That's just what they did. The first game [against Kopischke], we struck out 16 times. We knew we had to do a better job of putting the ball in play."

Johnson praised Ovsak for her outstanding pitching.

"Genevieve was lights-out," he said. "Throughout the season, we have had good pitching, good defense and timely hitting."

The Hornets enter state play with an overall record of 16-7. They will meet second-seeded Maple Grove in the first round of the state tourney at 9 a.m. Thursday, June 6, at Caswell Park.

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