

Fateful fifth dashes Hawks' softball hopes

Written by STEVE OSTERMANN
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Nicolet's five-run rally throws Grafton girls for tough road loss in North Shore Conference play

One bad inning cost the Grafton softball team a shot at a North Shore Conference win Monday.

After building a 3-1 lead in the top of the fifth, the Black Hawks saw host Nicolet score five runs in the bottom of the inning on the way to a 6-5 victory in a makeup game.

Grafton rallied to score twice in the seventh but couldn't push the tying run across.

The Hawks outhit Nicolet, 10-9, led by 2-for-3 performances from Kaitlyn Brandenburg, Casey Assmann, Lizzie Brady and Skye Murray. Brandenburg and Brady each had a double, and Brandenburg scored three runs.

Lanoira Duhart and Carli deFelice each went 2-for-3 for the Knights.

The loss dropped Grafton's season record to 10-8, including a third-place 7-4 mark in conference play. Nicolet improved to 5-5 in the league and 6-10 overall.

Hawks go 1-1 at home invite

After losing a hard-fought opener to Brookfield East, host Grafton bounced back for a 13-3 win over Milwaukee Hamilton in the consolation final of the annual Black Hawk Invitational on Saturday.

Hamilton, which was no-hit by Aly Bartel in the five-inning game, grabbed a 3-0 lead in the top of the first with the help of four Grafton errors.

However, the Hawks answered with two runs in their half of the first, moved ahead to stay with a two-run third and broke the game open by scoring eight times in the fourth.

"We didn't play well defensively early," said Grafton coach Stu Hannam, who substituted freely in the game. "But after that, we settled down and did all right."

The Hawks pounded out 14 hits, including three apiece by Amber Tanski, Brandenburg and Assmann. Tanski scored four runs, and Brandenburg had two doubles.

In addition to throwing the first no-hitter of her career, Bartel allowed no earned runs, struck out two and walked two.

In their tournament opener, Grafton fell to East, 6-3.

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The Hawks hung close to the highly regarded Spartans early, rallying from a 2-0 deficit with two runs in the second inning. However, East pulled away with a two-run third and added single runs in the fourth and fifth.

Grafton had plenty of scoring opportunities but came up short despite loading the bases in four innings. The Hawks drew 10 walks off a pair of East pitchers.

Brandenburg pitched a complete game, allowing nine hits. She struck out one and walked one.

"Kaitlyn did a nice job. We just didn't give her a lot of run support," Hannam said.

Sarah Fischer and Assmann each had two hits for the Hawks, who finished the weekend with a 10-7 season record.

East lost to Kettle Moraine, 7-5, in the tournament championship game.

Grafton 10, Whitefish Bay 8

The Hawks prevailed in a slugfest last Friday, hanging on for a North Shore Conference win at home.

After trailing, 3-0, in the first, Grafton rallied to build a 9-3 lead after four innings. However, the Blue Dukes — who outhit the Hawks, 15-10 — made things close by scoring three runs in the sixth and two in the seventh.

Bartel pitched the first 5 innings and, after giving way to reliever Ali Trombley in the sixth, came back to work the final 1-2/3 innings.

Brandenburg had a huge offensive game, going 3-for-4 with two homers, four RBI and three runs scored. Both of her homers cleared the outfield fence.

"Kaitlyn is just so tough," said Hannam, who noted that the senior raised her batting average in NSC games to .500, with 12 walks.

Grafton's hits also included a double apiece by Assmann and Lizzie Brady.

The Hawks were scheduled to continue conference play this week, facing Milwaukee Lutheran on Tuesday and playing a 7 p.m. game Thursday at Germantown. They will host 4:15 p.m. games against Port Washington on May 24 and Sheboygan Falls on May 25.

Pirates fall twice in quad

The Port Washington softball team had a tough time Saturday, losing both of its games in a West Bend quadrangular.

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The Pirates opened with a 9-0 loss to West Bend West and fell to West Bend East, 17-6.

"We hadn't played a game in a week and got out of sync a little bit," said Port coach Steve Schmidt, whose team fell to 4-10. "We had trouble adjusting at the plate."

The Pirates, who had their three previous games rained out, managed just one hit off pitcher Stephanie Huettel, a single by Jill VandeBoom in the fifth inning.

West, which scored four runs in the first inning, collected six hits off Ali Bichler, who pitched a complete game. She walked three and struck out one.

Against East, Port regrouped offensively, had a six-run fifth and finished with seven hits. However, the Pirates had big problems defensively and committed 10 errors.

The Suns finished with 16 hits and scored in every inning but the first.

Port's top hitter was Erica Verhagen, who went 2-for-4 with three RBI.

This week, the Pirates were scheduled to resume North Shore Conference play against Cedarburg on Tuesday and host Nicolet on Wednesday and Homestead on Thursday. They will then play at Grafton on May 25.

All games start at 4:15 p.m.