

Olson, Ryan are foes now, teammates later

Written by Jim Ecker

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Alyssa Olson of Jefferson and Maddy Ryan of Linn-Mar will be teammates at Coe when they begin their college softball careers later this summer, but first they have some unfinished business to settle as high school players.

Olson and Ryan will pitch against each other Monday afternoon when Jefferson (35-7) faces Linn-Mar (25-17) in the opening round of the Class 5A state tournament in Fort Dodge.

First pitch is scheduled for 3:30 p.m.

Ryan and the Lions nipped Olson and the J-Hawks, 3-2, when they pitched against each other in the first game of a Mississippi Valley Conference doubleheader at Linn-Mar on June 9.

Jefferson won the second game of that doubleheader, 14-4, and now the two Metro rivals will meet 150 miles away in Fort Dodge to settle the score for this season.

Coe softball coach Diane Meyer will be the big winner when it's over because she'll have both star players on her club in just a few weeks.

Olson has compiled an 18-4 record and 1.32 ERA this season, with 161 strikeouts in 153.2 innings. Ryan has a 19-10 mark and 2.26 ERA, with 72 strikeouts in 170.1 innings.

Ryan is also an accomplished center fielder with a .366 batting average and she'll hit for herself Monday against Olson, but Olson is strictly a pitcher for Jefferson and will yield her spot in the batting order to a designated player.

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On paper, Ryan has a stiffer assignment than Olson in the state tournament. Jefferson leads the state with 45 home runs, whereas Linn-Mar has hit only four homers as a team all year, partly because it plays half its games in a spacious park at Oak Ridge Middle School.

Jefferson is hitting .384 as a team and Linn-Mar is hitting .319, mostly against the same opponents in the MVC.

The J-Hawks feature a lineup of power hitters led by Maddie Hansen, who has slugged 11 home runs. Hannah Towns has eight homers, Kennedy Dighton has seven, Avery Guy six and Lindsey Culver six. By contrast, Ellison Ollinger leads Linn-Mar with two home runs, and both of those were inside-the-park jobs at the Oak Ridge field.

Jefferson can also play "small ball," however, and there's a good chance that Linn-Mar Coach John Begley will take the bat out of Hansen's hands when the J-Hawks are hitting. The Lions walked Hansen six times in their doubleheader in seven at-bats, with most of them intentional walks.

Hansen, who is batting .504, hit a double in her other at-bat against Linn-Mar.

Guy sets the table for the J-Hawks in the leadoff spot in the order. She's hitting .478 and has an on-base percentage of .547 with 66 hits, 13 walks and eight hit-by-pitches in 42 games. She can turn singles into doubles with her speed and has home-run power.

"She has pop in her bat, she has very good speed," said Jefferson Coach Brian Erbe, who has led the J-Hawks to the state tournament in all three of his years as head coach. "She's an ideal leadoff hitter.

"She's just a catalyst for us. When she gets going, we get going."

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Jefferson is making its 22nd appearance in the state tournament. The J-Hawks won state titles in 1983, 1997 and 1998.

This is Linn-Mar's seventh trip to the state tournament and first since 2008.

Monday's winner will face Johnston (33-4) or Bettendorf (22-13) in the semifinals Thursday at 5 p.m. Monday's loser will play Johnston or Bettendorf in the consolation bracket Wednesday at 10 a.m.

The championship game is scheduled for Friday at 4:45 p.m.

The Class 5A tournament begins Monday at 11:30 a.m. with West Des Moines Valley (35-6) against Ankeny (21-21), followed by Waukee (33-8) against Urbandale (25-17) at 1:30 p.m. Jefferson and Linn-Mar play at 3:30, followed by Johnston and Bettendorf at 5:30.