

Mustangs hosting Heart softball tournament

Written by Jim Ecker

Wednesday, 01 May 2019 05:05 -



The Mount Mercy Mustangs have defeated every team in the Heart of America Conference softball tournament that's being conducted this week at least once this season.

On the flip side, the Mustangs have lost at least one game to nearly every team in the field (everyone except Benedictine).

Mount Mercy is hosting the league championships at Busse Field this Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday. As luck would have it, the Mustangs (30-20) will be playing Culver-Stockton (30-19) in the very first game of the tournament Wednesday morning at 9:30.

"Honestly, it's wide open," Mount Mercy Coach Larry Yoder said Tuesday. "Anybody can win it."

Baker University (41-7) is the No. 1 seed after winning the regular-season title. Grand View (41-8) is the No. 2 seed, putting them at the head of the class.

"Baker would be the favorite because they have the All-American pitcher, and she's awfully tough," said Yoder. "And they have a good offensive team, too."

"But they've been beaten five times this year (in conference games," he said. "We actually beat them by the eight-run rule, but the All-American did not pitch that game. And she's going to pitch every game of this tournament."

The All-American pitcher for Baker is Olivia Brees, who is nearly unhittable. She carries a 29-2 record and 0.81 ERA into the tournament, with 380 strikeouts in 189 2/3 innings.

Baker plays its first game Wednesday at noon. If Baker and Mount Mercy both win their

Mustangs hosting Heart softball tournament

Written by Jim Ecker

Wednesday, 01 May 2019 05:05 -

openers, they'll meet in the winners bracket semifinals on Thursday.

This is a double-elimination tournament, so all eight teams will play at least two games in Cedar Rapids.

Baker has already earned a spot in the NAIA national tournament as the Heart of America Conference regular-season champions. The conference has been allocated two spots in the national tournament, so somebody else besides Baker will be advancing.

If Baker wins the league tournament, Grand View will punch a ticket to nationals since they are the No. 2 seed in the tournament, even if they do not fare well here. If Baker does not win the league tournament, the team that does win the title will earn a spot at nationals.

Yoder thinks it could be the Mustangs, but concedes it won't be easy. His team compiled a 10-10 record against the teams that are competing in the tournament, including victories over Baker and Grand View.

"We know there's no opponent we can't beat," he said. "It's just going to be a matter of who gets hot and does the right things."

Yoder is impressed with all the teams in the field. "Everybody competes," he remarked. "There are no freebies in the entire tournament. It's all going to be earned."

The Mustangs do not have any superstars, but Yoder has a well-balanced team that has gotten contributions from top to bottom. The Mustangs hit a rough two-week stretch during the season, but rebounded to finish 20-14 in the league and 30-20 overall.

"I'm pleased," he said. "I feel like we let a few games get away from us, but every coach thinks that, right? I think we're in a good position."

Mustangs hosting Heart softball tournament

Written by Jim Ecker

Wednesday, 01 May 2019 05:05 -

“We went through a stretch in the middle – it was about an eight-day stretch – where we played 10 or 12 games. And we were sick. We had kids in the dugout throwing up.

“It was a real hard time for us,” he said. “We ended up losing like nine out of 10 during that stretch, and instead of just laying down and giving up, we regrouped and we won eight in a row and 10 out of 12, mostly on the road down the stretch and finished strong.

“I like where they’re at,” he said. “I think they’re in good shape. They’re excited.”

Mount Mercy has three productive pitchers with Tawny Menster (12-4, 2.94 ERA), Madelyn Irwin (7-5, 2.98) and Jayna Witzany (11-7, 3.33). The offense is led by Jess Heick (.382 batting average), Jolona Shield (.365), Payton Bruner (.341), Menster (.335), Michelle Mack (.325), Jessica Miller (.293), Sydney Robertson (.284), Emily Oler (.282), Morgan Braughton (.272) and Anna Stenberg (.258).

Oler has belted eight home runs and Menster has seven. Menster has collected 49 RBIs, Shield has 46 and Heick 38.

“We’re getting contributions all the way through the lineup,” said Yoder. “It’s always different people at different times.”

Yoder said Mount Mercy is thrilled to be hosting the conference tournament. And with rain in the forecast in the midwest this week, Mount Mercy is well-equipped to survive the elements with its field turf.

“This is probably the only place where the tournament would go off this week,” he said. “I think the conference is happy it’s going to be here on the turf.”

Mustangs hosting Heart softball tournament

Written by Jim Ecker

Wednesday, 01 May 2019 05:05 -

HEART OF AMERICA TOURNAMENT

Opening Round Wednesday

9:30 a.m. – No. 5 Mount Mercy (30-20) vs No. 4 Culver-Stockton (30-19)

Noon – No. 8 William Penn (24-31) vs No. 1 Baker (41-7)

2:30 – No. 7 MidAmerica Nazarene (19-24) vs No. 2 Grand View (41-8)

5 p.m. – No. 6 Benedictine (26-24) vs No. 3 Central Methodist (30-16)