

No.2 Ottumwa trims J-Hawks in classic

Written by Tom Fruehling
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Except for the gunny sack-sized bag of ice covering her right shoulder, Jefferson softball pitcher Alyssa Olson looked fresh as could be after throwing strikes for more three hours Friday night against the No.2 team in the state.

“Really, I’m not tired at all,” said the wispy sophomore with a wicked whip of an arm. “I tried to stay strong and dig down deep.”

For 13 innings, Olson mowed down almost everyone in the lineup from Ottumwa (23-4) that came into the game with a team batting average of .402 and an on-base percentage of .470.

The one Bulldog she couldn’t muzzle ended up beating her, 4-2, in a classic battle between state powers.

Ottumwa senior slugger Katie Sammons (.455) hit two home runs over left-center and had another blast that bounced off the top of the fence for a double. She was walked on purpose when she came up to bat in the top of the 13th inning with the game tied, 2-2, but she scored from second on a bases-loaded single up the middle by Beth Overturf.

And that was the narrow difference in an extremely even and well-played matchup of ranked teams.

“She’s just a real good hitter,” Olson said admiringly of her nemesis through a mouthful of braces. “She’s smart, too. She really works the count. And she’s a strong girl.”

Sammons smacked her first homer with two outs in the first inning. Olson, in her first year on the Jefferson varsity, didn’t allow a run for the next nine innings. In the meantime, she struck

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out 11 batters and walked just two.

Stifled all night by Bulldog senior stopper Mandi Moore (who ended up with 12 strikeouts with her 65 mph fastball), the No.9 J-Hawks finally scored in the bottom of the seventh inning and almost won it with some aggressive base running.

Maddie Koolbeck started off with a double to right. Rebecca Early (who came into the game in the second inning when starter Erin Kuba was hit on the hand with a hard pitch) moved pinch-runner Savannah Fowler along with a bunt.

Katelyn Holub reached base on a grounder when Fowler successfully escaped a rundown, and then Fowler came home on a suicide squeeze by Hannah Towns. Hoping to score the winning run, Holub was tagged out at home after another rundown.

The stalemate continued for three more scoreless innings until Sammons' second blast put the Bulldogs up 2-1 in the 11th. Still, Jefferson refused to give up.

Quiet all night, leading hitter Maddie Hansen (.547 average with five home runs and 51 RBIs) uncorked a triple to right with one out. Koolbeck fanned after trying for another squeeze.

Early then stroked a slow roller in the infield that looked to be the game-ending out, but the ball dribbled through the legs of second baseman Olivia Roark as Hansen waltzed home.

"We battled back twice," said Jefferson Coach Brian Erbe. "It was a great game in a tournament-type atmosphere. Both pitchers pitched great, and both teams had an outstanding effort."

In the end though, he said, Sammons was too good.

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For her part, Olson didn't seem at all fazed after throwing 187 pitches. "That's like throwing a doubleheader, which I've never done," she said matter-of-factly.

"I worked all winter, though, to get in shape. I wanted to get physically tough and mentally tough. So I'm feeling pretty good."

The petite right-hander started the year as the J-Hawks' second-in-line hurler, but has now fashioned a sparkling 15-2 record with 170 strikeouts in 109 innings.

Opposing batters are hitting just .147 off her, and her earned run average is around 1.00. With a rise ball that starts low and sails into the strike zone, she's been baffling hitters all season.

"The ball just does what it does," she explained. "It kind of has a mind of its own."

Jefferson (26-8) defeated Class 3A No.13 Center Point-Urbana, 6-1, in its second game Friday,. Brooke Stauffer (10-5) was the winning pitcher and fanned six batters. Hansen was 3-for-4 with three RBIs and Kaitlin Davidson was 3-for-3.