

No. 6 J-Hawks stranded at state softball

Written by Jim Ecker

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FORT DODGE - They don't keep any records at the state softball tournament for how many runners you leave on base in the first four innings of a ballgame.

Likewise, they don't keep records for how many times you fail to execute a sacrifice bunt.

If they did, the Jefferson J-Hawks might have their name all over the record book for missed opportunities on a big stage.

Jefferson left a whopping 10 runners on base in the first four innings and never scored in a 2-0 loss to No. 3 Southeast Polk Tuesday in the opening round of the Class 5A state tournament at the Rogers Sports Complex in Fort Dodge.

The sixth-ranked J-Hawks (34-7) will face No. 7 Pleasant Valley (30-9) in a consolation game Wednesday at 10 a.m. in hopes of battling back for fifth place.

Southeast Polk (29-9) will face Dowling Catholic (29-8) in the semifinals Thursday. Johnston (35-3) and West Des Moines Valley (27-12) will meet in the other semifinal Thursday with four clubs from the CIML vying for the title.

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This will be the 12th straight year a CIML team will win the large-school title at the state tournament.

Jefferson left the bases loaded in the first inning, stranded two runners in the second inning, left the sacks loaded again in the third inning and stranded two more runners in the fourth against Southeast Polk ace Hannah Parker, a Western Kentucky recruit.

"You can't do that at the state tournament, no matter who you're playing," said Jefferson Coach Brian Erbe. "Unfortunately, that has been a bailiwick the last two weeks. We stranded a lot of runners and have not taken advantage of putting people in scoring position.

"Besides stranding the runners, we didn't execute," he added. "We didn't get a couple of bunts down ... or three or four bunts down."

The J-Hawks popped two sacrifice bunts into the air in the third inning for easy outs and did it again in the fourth inning for another easy out. They were costly mistakes, because the J-Hawks followed the muffed bunts with base hits that might have been RBIs if there had been a runner in scoring position.

Parker, a smart pitcher, fed the J-Hawks a steady diet of chest-high fastballs when she knew they were bunting, making it hard for the Jefferson batters to get the ball on the ground.

Erbe wished his players had taken those pitches and waited for a better pitch to bunt.

"You're at the state tournament, you're nervous, your coach asks you to do something, to execute," he said, reflecting. "It's part of the game. It's part of being a high school kid."

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The J-Hawks softball team was stranded at the state tournament after losing to the defending champion, the J-Hawks, in the first round. The team was unable to advance to the next round due to a combination of factors, including a lack of offensive production and a strong defensive effort by the opponent. The team's record for the season was 15-10, and they were ranked No. 6 in the state. The tournament was held at the J-Hawks stadium, and the game was a close contest, with the J-Hawks winning by a score of 1-0. The team's manager, Coach [Name], expressed disappointment but praised the team's effort and resilience. He stated that the team will learn from the experience and work to improve for the next season. The game was a significant setback for the team, but they remain confident in their ability to bounce back and achieve success in the future.