

## J-Hawks stunned in regional final

Written by Mike Koolbeck  
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There were tears.

And more tears.

And tears after that.

Five years of hard work, of sweat, of putting callouses on hands swinging bats and lifting weights went slithering down the tubes in seven innings Tuesday night for the Jefferson softball team in a 2-1 loss to Davenport West in a Class 5A regional final at Jefferson.

It was a cruel finish for a J-Hawk team that came into the game ranked No. 4 in the state, loaded with six seniors that had made it their goal not just to reach the state tournament, but to win the darn thing.

And they took it hard.

"You put in so much work, so much training, and to have it end like this ... it sucks," said senior all-state outfielder Rachel Sedlacek.

Star pitcher Hannah Petersen said she couldn't put into words the emotions and disappointment she felt after hurling the J-Hawks to the state tournament as an eighth-grader and freshman. Tuesday marked the third straight year the J-Hawks (36-6) were eliminated in the regional finals.

"We had a great season," junior second baseman Kaitlyn Davidson said. "Our goal was to get back to state for the seniors. We played great. Hannah pitched great."

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Petersen struck out 13 batters and allowed only four hits. But three of those hits proved crucial. West's Samie Belz lined a solo home run in the second inning that gave the Falcons a 1-0 lead and Lexi Quandt laced a one-out triple in the fourth. Mallory Moore followed with an RBI single that broke a 1-1 tie.

Jefferson had scored an unearned run in the third when Kailey Drake singled, stole second and advanced home on Maddie Hansen's single.

The J-Hawks had other opportunities, too. They stranded eight runners on base, three at third base. The most crucial missed chance came in the fifth when Drake drove a one-out double, advanced to third on a wild pitch and Hansen walked.

West Coach Steve Saladino removed his daughter Shyanne as pitcher and brought in Belz from left field to pitch to cleanup batter Kenna Fry.

Belz threw one pitch and got out of the jam when Fry hit a one-hopper to West second baseman Maddy Zemba, who had just moved to that position from center field during the pitching change. Zemba tagged out courtesy runner Savannah Fowler and easily tossed to first to retire Fry in an inning-ending double play.

"That was the biggest play," Jefferson Coach Larry Niemeyer said.

Saladino and Belz combined on a four-hitter with five strikeouts.

"We've had trouble hitting good pitchers all season," Niemeyer said. "This is a team that was taught to take a lot of pitches when they were younger. They take too many pitches."

Niemeyer had been critical of his team's efforts in its regular season-ending doubleheader sweep of Dubuque Wahlert and in its regional semifinal win over Cedar Falls. He said he was proud of the effort his team gave Tuesday.

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"It's very tough to see this team get beat," he said. "Those kids wanted (a return to state) so much, probably too much.

"My kids played very well. I just feel sad for them."

Despite health problems that forced him to miss 12 games, Niemeyer said he planned to be back on the J-Hawk bench next season.

"I've been doing this for 52, 53 seasons. I missed 12 games this year, but I've only missed one or two in all those other years," he said.

But the J-Hawks will be minus graduated seniors Petersen, Sedlacek, Fry, Drake, Carson Burgart and Hannah McInerney.

"I don't know how to put it into words how much I'm going to miss our seniors," Davidson said. "We've been playing together forever. This just makes me hurt all over."

West (31-10) will play Des Moines East in the first round of the state tournament July 17 at Fort Dodge.

### DAVENPORT WEST (2)

Alex Finn, 3b, 3 0 0 0, Maddy Zemba, cf-2b, 3 0 0 0, Shyanne Saladino, p-1b, 2 0 0 0, Lexi Quandt, c, 3 1 2 0, Mallory Moore, 1b, 2 0 1 1, Chelsea Notton, lf, 1 0 0 0, Samie Belz, lf-p, 3 1 1 1, Sydney Schneider, dp-rf, 3 0 0 0, Elle Cannavo, 2b, 0 0 0 0, Brooke Garnica, ss, 3 0 0 0, Sara Dorton, rf-cf, 2 0 0 0. Totals 25 2 4 2.

### JEFFERSON (1)

Rachel Sedlacek, rf, 4 0 1 0, Kailey Drake, cf, 3 1 1 0, Maddie Hansen, c, 3 0 1 1, Savannah

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Fowler, cr, 0 0 0 0, Kenna Fry, 1b, 1 0 0 0, Hannah McInerney, dp, 3 0 1 0, Maddy Blietz, 3b, 0 0 0 0, Katelyn Holub, pr, 0 0 0 0, Hannah Petersen, p, 3 0 0 0, Dani Stromert, cr, 0 0 0 0, Carson Burgart, ss, 3 0 0 0, Amber Grimm, lf, 3 0 0 0, Kaitlyn Davidson, 2b, 1 0 0 0, Maddie Koolbeck, ph, 1 0 0 0. Totals 25 1 4 1.

Davenport West 010 100 0 -- 2 4 3

Jefferson 001 000 0 -- 1 4 0

Saladino, Belz (5) and Quandt. Petersen and Hansen. W - Saladino (17-3). L - Petersen (18-4). Sv - Belz (5). 2B - Drake. 3B - Quandt. HR - Belz (5). SB - Sedlacek 2 (16), Drake (24).